

FOUR SILENCES IN SOPHOCLES' *TRACHINIAE*

NAOMI ROOD

In the culture of fifth-century Athens, centered as it was around public spaces—the agora, the gymnasium, the assembly, and the theater—Athenian citizens liked to see and be seen, to talk and hear others talk. In this intensely gregarious atmosphere, silence could be an effective tool of communication; it could arouse curiosity, focus attention, imply ideas, or punctuate meaning. In other words, pausing from speech could contribute to speech. Greek literature reflects the efficacy of silence. Some of its more famous silences include those of Ajax in the underworld (*Od.* 11.563), Cassandra in response to Clytaemnestra (Aesch. *Ag.* 1035–68), Jocasta in her self-recognition before her final exit (Soph. *OT* 1073–75), and Phaedra concerning the cause of her ill humor (Eur. *Hipp.* 297–304). Tragedy contains so many remarkable silences not only because tragedy features speech, but also because it questions speech's powers and pitfalls (Goldhill 1986.1–32, Vernant 1990.42–43). Tragedy also features spectacle; the silences in a play draw attention to how tragedy communicates through both sight and sound—and to the relationship between the two.

Perhaps less famously than other tragedies, Sophocles' *Trachiniae* effectively and significantly uses silences. Calls for silence accompany the notable entrances and exits of characters in the first (178–79), second (596–97), and third episodes (731–33, 813–14), the fourth stasimon (967–70), and the exodos (971–82, 1260–63). Furthermore, the play contains one of extant tragedy's important, non-speaking characters, Iole, who plays a major part in the action but never breaks her silence. Like Heracles, she comes on stage accompanied by a silent retinue; the play thus features silent spectacles near the beginning, with the entrance of Iole, and near the end, with the entrance of Heracles. Why is silence so abundant in this play? While some of the conspicuous silences—particularly Deianeira's when

she exits toward suicide—have received attention, its many silences have not been sufficiently considered.¹ This paper aims to discover the meanings and functions of some of the silences in *Trachiniae* in order to understand their prominence in this play.

While there are different types of silence, I examine the silences of four characters in *Trachiniae* that share the feature of being *named* as silences. A silence is named when another speaker in the play talks about it and so draws attention to it (Montiglio 2000.188–92)—which suggests that its existence is worthy of note.² The play names the silences of four characters: Iole (307–34), Deianeira (especially 813–14), Aphrodite (860–61), and Heracles (1260–63). I will discuss the silence of Aphrodite first, since it indicates a problem critical to this play about the relationship between gods and men: aside from oracles, the gods are silent in *Trachiniae* and so hard to comprehend. They manifest themselves through the unfolding of events in which men must participate without a full understanding of causes and consequences. Divine silence thus presents a problem for men in terms of action: how is a man, with his limited knowledge, to choose how to act in mortal time? And in terms of reaction: how is a man to make sense of the divine beings who often seem not to care about human suffering?

In *Trachiniae*, the three mortal actors who assume silences play out Aphrodite's drama of a love triangle. Aphrodite's will and silence circumscribe them; they express in both their actions and their silences aspects of, and attitudes toward, the goddess whose will they are enacting. While the goddess remains veiled in her silence, she becomes visible through the mortals whom she affects. This paper will show how the silences of Heracles, Deianeira, and Iole variously reflect, and respond to, the silence of Aphrodite. I will argue that Heracles approaches the divine through the holy silence of εὐφημία; that Deianeira in her manipulation of silence emulates but fails to achieve the agency of the goddess; and that Iole, in her unbroken silence, indicates the possibility of a kind of mortal freedom. The different silences of the mortals bring them closer to or further from the divine. In *Trachiniae*, which rigorously constrains the experience of

1 Garrison 1991a promises a consideration of the play's motif of silence, but focuses on the silence of Deianeira. Segal 1981.96–98 gives an overview of the play's silences as part of a discussion of the ambiguity of language in the play.

In the paper that follows, all translations are my own.

2 Compare the rhetorical device of *praeteritio*, wherein a speaker names what he is going to keep silent about, thereby drawing attention to it.

men to the world of men (Segal 1981.107–08), it is significant that it is, in part, through silence that men express their imperfect connection to the gods (cf. Vernant 1990.46–47).

THE DIVINE SILENCE OF APHRODITE

The gods are frustratingly present in *Trachiniae*: oracles, and their interpretation, overarch the play (e.g., 82–85, 169–77, 821–30, 1143–50) and contain the only divine voices in it. While oracles might seem to offer the speech of the divine and so a path for communicating with the gods, they are instead, like Plato's conception of writing, essentially silent. Plato compares writing to paintings: writing appears to have something to say, but if one tries to interact with it, it always signifies the same thing (Bushnell 1988.15, who cites *Phaedrus* 275d). So an oracle, too, no matter how much one contemplates it, only repeats the same words. Thus oracles constitute a speech filled with "ominous silences: what the hero fears in the god's words and what he often cannot hear" (Bushnell 1988.15). Rather than divine will, oracles communicate divine silence.

Divine will in this play of divine silence becomes known only through the unfolding of an action over time. Periodically, then, at moments of a partial completion of the action, the question of divine agency arises. In this play, often described as a diptych in structure (see Kane 1988.198 n. 1), the end of the third stasimon—after Deianeira has made her final exit and before Heracles enters—constitutes a central transition. At just this point, the Chorus recognize Aphrodite as the silent agent of the action (ἅ δ' ἀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἄναδος φανερά / τῶνδ' ἐφάνη πράκτωρ, 860–61).

The Chorus' statement about Aphrodite has significance in regard to both form and content. It is the last line of the ode, which, in terms of form, adds emphasis to it and, in terms of content, suggests that the question of divine agency constitutes an ultimate question for men to answer. In the same way, the whole play ends with a similar concern about the role of the gods in the action: Hyllus closes the play with a reflection on Zeus's seeming indifference—in words so strong that they border on blasphemy (1264–74).

Hyllus is not the first to point to Zeus (1278) as the god behind the action. In the play's first statement of divine agency, Lichas attributes Heracles' actions to Zeus (Ζεὺς οὗτο πράκτωρ φανῆ, 251). Later, the Chorus, in their moment of understanding cited above, use the same language as Lichas, but now ascribe the action to Aphrodite (ἐφάνη πράκτωρ, 861). In

the Chorus' vision, Aphrodite not only parallels Zeus as the answer to the question of the divine agent behind the difficult actions of the play, but also, significantly, replaces him. The Chorus, unlike Hyllus, who is baffled by the events around him, and unlike Lichas, who is prevaricating, see more clearly than earlier in the play. Their statement about Aphrodite's agency constitutes a recognition that is the culmination of a series of recognitions. In each strophe of their stasimon, the Chorus recognize a seminal fact: in the first, that the oracle given twelve years ago is being fulfilled (821–30); in the second, that Heracles is doomed (831–40); in the third, that Deianeira is the instrument of fate (841–51); and in the fourth, that all this is the work of silent Aphrodite. After witnessing much of the play's action, the Chorus arrive at the goddess of eros as the agent manifest in the shared fates of Heracles and Deianeira.

The Chorus recognize not only Aphrodite's agency, but also her silence. They call her silent in the middle between two other attributes: being a handmaiden and manifest (ἀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἄναυδος φανερά). Their adjective for her silence, ἄναυδος, paratactically follows along with the epithet before it, ἀμφίπολος. Like ἀμφίπολος, ἄναυδος is a way to characterize the goddess. They thus acknowledge Aphrodite's silence matter-of-factly; it is as familiar as her role of handmaiden. Next, in describing her as manifest, the Chorus juxtapose Aphrodite's voicelessness with her visibility (ἄναυδος φανερά, 860). This juxtaposition, as we shall see, recurs in the play's frequent preference for spectacle over speech. The Chorus accept the divine as silent and privilege sight: their song sets its theme with its first word (Easterling 1982.174, 182), "See!" (ἴδ', 821), and ends with the silent but visible divine. The sight of the divine constitutes their culminating achievement. For the Chorus, spectacle is understanding and communicates knowledge. In a world of divine silence, sight equals insight.

The Chorus, over time, come to see Aphrodite as the action's silent agent. It is suggestive that the three mortal characters whose silences are named constitute the players in a love triangle. These characters make manifest the love goddess's design and so express her will and her ways: Heracles, Deianeira, and Iole reflect Aphrodite in their actions and, I suggest, their silences. This is not to say that the characters self-consciously elect to become silent in reaction to Aphrodite's silence. Rather, just as they unwittingly act out Aphrodite's drama so that an audience-like Chorus can come to see the goddess, so they also use silence in a way that lets the spectators see their various connections to the goddess. Aphrodite becomes knowable through her actions and the agents who carry out her actions.

Their silences signify, in part, their association with the goddess. We turn next to the different qualities of those associations.

THE SILENCE OF HERACLES

Heracles enters (962–82) and exits (1259–63) the play in silence. The play prolongs, and so underscores, Heracles' silent entry both to draw attention to this climactic moment and to contrast him, over the course of the exodos, with his son, Hyllus. Unlike Hyllus, who presents a wholly mortal experience of separation from the divine (see, especially, 1264–74; Segal 1981.108), the semi-divine Heracles approaches the divine in his silence. Heracles' silence upon his exit constitutes *εὐφημία*, religious silence. Together, Heracles' silent entry and exit differentiate him from the wholly mortal realm and draw him closer to the divine silence of Aphrodite.

An unusual doubling of structuring silences—at the end of the fourth stasimon (967–70) and at the start of the following exodos (971–82)—focuses attention on the spectacle of Heracles' entrance. Frightened at the thought of seeing (*εἰσιδοῦσ'*, 958) Heracles, and baffled by the signification of his silent approach (968–70), language fails the Chorus. They foresee him in their mind's eye as “an unspeakable wonder to behold” (*ἄσπετόν τι θαῦμα*, 961), a phrase somewhat reminiscent of the Chorus' vision of Aphrodite (*Κύπρις ἄναδος φανερά*) that juxtaposes (their own) speechlessness with the silent spectacle. The Chorus thus introduce Heracles in a way similar to Aphrodite: as a silent sight, worthy of awe and contemplation.

The play continues to emphasize the silence of Heracles upon his much anticipated entrance onto the scene. As we have seen, the Chorus end the fourth stasimon with a description of the silent spectacle of Heracles' entrance (961); they then reiterate the silence of his approach (968). The following episode likewise begins by naming this silence, albeit indirectly, through calls for Hyllus to be silent in deference to Heracles' sleep. Since Hyllus keeps threatening to awaken his father, the audience anxiously focuses on the sleeping, silent Heracles. The repeated attempts to quiet Hyllus function as the spoken complement to Heracles' silence. Hyllus's uncontrollable speech at the sight of his father (991–92) creates a contrast between father and son.

This contrast between the voluble Hyllus and his silent father deepens and becomes intelligible at the end of the exodos, when Heracles assumes his final silence. Here Heracles encourages himself to keep silent in diction that recalls Hyllus's earlier inability to keep silent (1259–63):

ἄγε νυν, πρὶν τήνδ' ἀνακινήσαι
νόσον, ὃ ψυχὴ σκληρὰ, χάλυβος
λιθοκόλλητον στόμιον παρέχουσ',
ἀνάπαυε βοήν, ὥς ἐπίχαρτον
τελέουσ' ἀεκούσιον ἔργον.

Come now, before you stir up this sickness, O hard soul,
furnish steel set with stones for my mouth, cease to shout,
since a joyous unwilling deed you are accomplishing.

Like the demands for Hyllus to keep silent by biting his tongue (ἀλλ' ἔσχε δακῶν / στόμα σόν, 976–77), Heracles calls for a bit for his mouth (χάλυβος / λιθοκόλλητον στόμιον παρέχουσ', 1260–61). Son and father both do so for the same purpose of not stirring up Heracles' sickness (μὴ κινήσῃς / ἀγρίαν ὀδύνην, 974–75; πρὶν τήνδ' ἀνακινήσαι / νόσον, 1259–60). These likenesses ultimately point to the great difference between son and father: whereas Hyllus cannot keep quiet and justifies his failure to bite his tongue (991–92), Heracles' injunction to himself for silence constitutes his final words in the play.³ This contrast between Hyllus's failure to be silent and Heracles' success brings into focus the gulf between them: Heracles possesses a direct link to the divine, whereas Hyllus is an ordinary mortal.⁴ Heracles' capacity for silence draws him away from Hyllus and the mortal realm and, as we shall see, toward the divine.

Whether or not the play indicates Heracles' apotheosis, he nevertheless achieves a transcendent status through his final, self-imposed holy silence.⁵ Having come to recognize divine providence at work (1143–74, 1255–56), he conforms his behavior to that solemn sensibility of the unfolding of divine will. He thus endows his silence with a particularly religious meaning: in curbing his cries of pain, Heracles imposes εὐφημία—speaking

3 Apparently such silence takes some effort for Heracles, since earlier Hyllus seizes upon a break in Heracles' speech to speak about Deianeira (1114–15).

4 On Heracles occupying a register different from the fully mortal (often vis-à-vis Deianeira), see Bowra 1944.133–48, Kirkwood 1958.50–51, Sorum 1978.73, Winnington-Ingram 1980.86–87, and Segal 1981.107–08.

5 On the possibly implied apotheosis, see Bowra 1944.159–60, Whitman 1951.120, Kirkwood 1958.67–68, Gellie 1972.77, Reinhardt 1979.63, Easterling 1981, Segal 1981.99–102, Seale 1982.208, Scodel 1984.40, and Holt 1989. On Heracles enacting in this play and in *HF* a related pattern of sleep-awakening-rehabilitation, see Barlow 1996.169; see also Reinhardt 1979.56.

words of good omen and otherwise keeping silent—upon himself. Dying, he resolves to complete his imminent transition in holy silence.⁶ While εὐφημία opens the way towards the divine to anyone (e.g., Soph. *OC* 132), unlike other Sophoclean characters (*Aj.* 362, 591; *Elec.* 630, 1211), Heracles enjoins εὐφημία upon himself rather than upon another. His concluding silence thus expresses his own determination to orient himself toward the gods. Heracles recognizes and assumes a divine aspect.

Silence for Heracles becomes a token of transcendence that draws him closer to the gods. Allowed to see the fruition of divine will and comprehend its rightness, he can approach the divine on their terms: in his reverent and even joyful (ἐπίχαρτον, 1262) silence, Heracles becomes—as is appropriate for his eventual apotheosis—fit for the gods.

THE SILENCE OF DEIANEIRA

Four named requests for silence concern Deianeira. She is on stage for the first three episodes of the play. Each of these episodes begins with her alone with the Chorus. She addresses them or they converse together until Deianeira expresses her current anxiety: in the first episode, that Heracles is dead; in the second, that she may be acting precipitously in trying the robe; and in the third, that she has gone too far in that attempt. At each of these anxious moments, a new actor enters, upon which either the Chorus or Deianeira ask for silence regarding their previous private discussion. All of these requests for silence aim to suppress Deianeira's speech since it may harm her. In the first and third episodes, the Chorus ask Deianeira to be quiet in order to protect her. In the second, Deianeira asks the Chorus to keep silent so that she may maintain some control over the action. When Deianeira discovers that the action has not gone according to her plan, she exits the play in silence—her fourth occasion of silence. This final silence aims to control, if not the action itself, the interpretation of it. Thus in regard to Deianeira, silence involves concealment in order to control what others know—whether, when the Chorus ask for it, for the sake of protecting Deianeira or, when Deianeira asks, for the sake of manipulating events or the reading of them.⁷

6 On Pythagoras's statement that a dying man should avoid words of ill omen and speak only words of good omen, see Jebb 2004.181.

7 For a discussion of the associations of concealment, see Cairns 2002.76–81.

As it does for Heracles, εὐφημία informs the silences of Deianeira, but silence conveys different registers of meaning for the two characters. In the first silence mentioned in the play, the Chorus ask Deianeira to “keep εὐφημία” (178). In his extant works, Sophocles uses the term εὐφημία sparingly.⁸ So in *Trachiniae*, even in the clear instance of Heracles imposing this holy silence upon himself as discussed above, the word εὐφημία never occurs to designate Heracles’ silence as such. Instead, in the first named silence of the play, the Chorus ask Deianeira for εὐφημία, in part in response to her words of ill omen—her fear that she will be deprived of Heracles (177). As the first request for silence in a play of many silences, this uncommon term suggests the power of speech and silence; εὐφημία implies δυσφημία, the dangerously performative speech of words of ill omen (Stehle 2005.115) and so emphasizes the importance of restraint.

The Chorus’ request for Deianeira’s εὐφημία also coincides with the entrance of a new character. The Chorus thus ask Deianeira for εὐφημία both in response to her δυσφημία (177) and at the sight of a messenger approaching (178–79). That is, their call for εὐφημία does double duty both as a request for holy silence and as a means of shifting attention to the entrance of a new actor.⁹ There is practicality as well as piety in the Chorus’ command of εὐφημία. It mixes holy silence together with a structural silence and, it seems, with a wish to keep Deianeira’s words from the ears of the messenger. The εὐφημία asked of Deianeira thus differs from that which Heracles asks of himself: there is little transcendence in it, but rather the aim to avoid offending (most likely) not just divine ears but also mortal ones. Silence, in this first instance, thus conceals with one eye on the world of the divine and one on men. As we shall see, the other silences named in regard to Deianeira also aim to conceal, but with a focus more strictly on the world of men.

The Chorus ask Deianeira for silence once more in the third episode. This request for silence again anticipates the entry of a new character and aims at suppressing Deianeira’s speech. By the third episode, Deianeira has already sent Heracles the poisoned robe and now senses the catastrophe

8 In the extant works of Sophocles, forms of εὐφημία appear at *Aj.* 362, 591; *Elec.* 630, 1211; *OC* 132, and here, *Trach.* 178. Although Sophocles uses it sparingly, this word is common enough in tragedy. For instances of its use in Aeschylus and Euripides, see Montiglio 2000.16 n. 56.

9 Cf. *Soph. El.* 1210–11 for a similar call for εὐφημία, but one not coincident with an entrance. On silence focusing attention, coupled with εὐφημία, see Montiglio 2000.168–70.

she has wrought. At the sight of Hyllus approaching, the Chorus seek to stop Deianeira from voicing her apprehensions: "It would be fitting for you to silence further speech, unless you will say something to your son" (σιγᾶν ἂν ἀρμόζοι σε τὸν πλείω λόγον, / εἰ μή τι λέξεις παιδὶ τῷ σαντῆς, 731–32). What Deianeira might say to Hyllus, as the Chorus make more clear upon Deianeira's silent exit (813–14), is a speech of self-defense to mitigate her deed. The Chorus thus bid her to silence one kind of speech (τὸν πλείω λόγον, 731) in favor, if she will, of another (εἰ μή τι λέξεις, 732). As in their first request, the Chorus again wish for Deianeira's silence as a means of concealing her words and so of protecting her—here exclusively from the judgment of men.

Deianeira's appeal to the Chorus for silence follows suit: her request for a cover of silence culminates an episode (531–632) steeped in cunning and concealment.¹⁰ The episode begins with Deianeira's return to the stage "with stealth" (λάθρα, 533) and her language throughout it indicates μῆτις. She has come to tell in part what she contrived with her hands (χερσὶν ἀτεχνήσάμην, 534)—the device of the poisoned robe.¹¹ She describes the φάρμακον as a gift that she kept concealed in a bronze cauldron (λάβητι χαλκῷ κεκρυμμένον, 556), well enclosed in the house (δόμοις . . . / . . . ἐγκεκλιμένον καλῶς, 578–79). Finally, after obtaining the Chorus' approval of her trying the φάρμακον, Deianeira asks them for their complicit silence when she sees Lichas coming out from the house: "Only may my action be well covered over by you" (μόνον παρ' ὑμῶν εὖ στεγοίμεθ', 596). Thus in her request for silence, Deianeira not only, like the Chorus, associates silence with concealment, but also articulates this as its function.

Deianeira seeks the concealment of her words at the point when she has decided to do something about Heracles' diminished desire for her. As we have seen, her scheme of the poisoned robe involves cunning and secrecy, including the hiding of her words about it. The reason she desires silence to conceal her plan thus is, on the one hand, practical and thus self-evident. Yet in the cosmos of this play in which the silent gods affect the action, Deianeira's request for silence about her action assumes a sensibility beyond sheer logistics. Deianeira, in effect, endeavors to become, like Aphrodite, a silent agent of the action.

10 Garrison 1991a synthesizes well Deianeira's uses of silence and secrecy; see also Kirkwood 1958.232–33 and Loraux 1987.21–22.

11 On μῆτις and the feminine, see Scodel 1984.36, Loraux 1987.10–29, Holmberg 1997, and Wohl 1998.24–25. See also Cairns 2002.

One might say that anyone who takes action seeks to be an agent, but Deianeira does so with a striking self-consciousness. In her instructions to Lichas after she asks the Chorus to conceal her plan, Deianeira vividly stages, as it were, a spectacle of Heracles. While concealing her own part in the action, she wishes to reveal him in all his ambivalence. She instructs Lichas to keep the robe out of the light until Heracles puts it on for the gods: “For thus I vowed, if ever I should see or hear that he has come safely home, that all justly I would gird him in this robe and that I would bring to light to the gods a new sacrificer in a new robe” (610–13). Deianeira aims to present Heracles sacrificing as a display of both his glory and his profligate shedding of blood. Not unlike the way Clytaemnestra wants Agamemnon to put on show his past deeds and present self (and foreshadow his future death) by trampling the red carpets (*Ag.* 905–57; Lebeck 1971.75–77), so Deianeira wants Heracles’ deeds and self (and, as it turns out, his imminent dying) to be made known as he celebrates an ambiguous victory.¹² This is not to say that Deianeira, like Clytaemnestra, wants him to be punished, but that she wants him—in all his self-indulgent, bloody glory—to be public, known, revealed. That is, just as Clytaemnestra wants Agamemnon to do something that only makes clear what he has already done and who he already is, so Deianeira wants Heracles simply to act with his customary prominence, for better or worse. In this magnificent speech of fantasy and fabrication, Deianeira, like Clytaemnestra, aims to control the action of the play by making a spectacle—she imagines Heracles standing “visibly manifest” (φανερὸς ἐμφανῶς, 608)—of her husband. She claims this role of agency in her first-person verbs: “I would gird him, I would bring him to light” (610–12). Thus Deianeira expresses her fantasy of how her silence might work: to keep herself hidden while she directs the action from a distance—a silent agent along the lines of Aphrodite.

Deianeira’s final silence also works, as do the previous ones that involve her, to conceal. Further, like the previous silences, her last one helps structure the episode; each of the previous silences coincides with an entrance: of the Messenger (178–79), Lichas (596–97), and Hyllus (731–33). Her final silence now marks rather than an entrance, an exit—Deianeira’s own from the play and from life (813–20). In order to show why Deianeira exits in silence, it is necessary, first, to understand why she

12 On Deianeira and Clytaemnestra, see Bowra 1944.118–19, Garner 1990.101–09, Scodel 1984.31, and Wohl 1998.25.

decides to end her life.¹³ Two passages in the play suggest that she does so because of αἰδώς, a combination of shame, guilt, and honor (666–67, 719–22).¹⁴ Anxious about what others will see or hear about her, Deianeira turns to silence one last time for concealment, but this time not of her words but of her very self.

In both passages that help explain Deianeira's motivation to kill herself, she recognizes the dynamics of concealment and the concomitant problem of interpretation that Heracles' death poses for her: despite her hidden intentions, others will perceive only the surface of her action. Since the hidden cannot compete with the seen, Deianeira can only conceal the bad surface alongside the good depth. In the first of Deianeira's explanatory passages, she dreads how she will appear to have done something bad while she meant to do good: "I am afraid that I shall soon be shown to have achieved a great evil from a good hope [for its outcome]" (ἀθυμῶ δ', εἰ φανήσομαι τάχα / κακὸν μέγ' ἐκπράξας ἅπ' ἐλπίδος καλῆς, 666–67). A similar contrast between her hidden, good intent and its perceived bad outcome appears in the second passage in which she expresses part of her motivation to commit suicide. Once she has worked out that the φάρμακον is deadly, she resolves to die if Heracles dies (719–22):

Indeed it seems best if he falls that I die together with
this same impulse; for it is insufferable for a woman to
live being spoken of badly, whoever greatly wishes not
to be by nature bad.

καίτοι δέδοκται, κείνος εἰ σφαλήσεται,
ταὐτῇ σὺν ὀρμῇ κάμει συνθανεῖν ἄμα·
ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσιν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν,
ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι.

13 Deianeira's silent exit toward suicide has been variously interpreted as: self-condemnation (Garrison 1991b.29), nothing to say (Kamerbeek 1959.175), self-loathing (Whitman 1951.118), and love of Heracles (Bowra 1944.130, Kirkwood 1958.115, and Loraux 1987.23). It is also discussed along with other similar female exits in tragedy, especially those of Jocasta (*OT* 1073) and Eurydice (*Ant.* 1244); see Kamerbeek 1959.175, Reinhardt 1979.53, Segal 1981.79, Easterling 1982.173, Seale 1982.201–02, Aélion 1983.46, Loraux 1987.20–48, Davies 1991.194–95, and Ormand 1999.153–62. I do not dismiss any of these readings but focus instead on the aspect of her silent exit that binds it to her other involvements with silence.

14 On the complex meaning of αἰδώς, see Cairns 1993.1–47.

Here Deianeira laments the difference between what people will say she is (κακῶς κλύουσιν) and what she is (μὴ κακή). Just as her earlier fear contrasts her bad deed with “good hope,” Deianeira once again privileges what men see over what they cannot. Accordingly, she rejects the Chorus’ suggestion that those who err unwittingly arouse less anger (727–30). Only what is seen matters, not what is unseen.

This distinction between hidden intent and surface perception has informed Deianeira’s way of thinking all along: we have seen this in all the silences around her that aim to conceal and in her instructions to Lichas for delivering the poisoned robe that cover over the true aim of her gift (600–19). Furthermore, she readily understands Lichas’s rationale when he hides the hurtful truth from her out of good intentions (474–83): in her effort to persuade him to tell her the whole truth, she declares that even if he wishes to be good, by lying he will be seen as bad (ὅταν / θέλῃς γενέσθαι χρηστός, ὁφθήσῃ κακός, 451–52). This same gulf, which favors surface perception over hidden purpose, now puts her in Lichas’s predicament. Even though she wishes to be good, she will be seen as bad. In Deianeira’s view, what people see (ὁφθήσῃ, 452; φανήσομαι, 666) or say or hear (κλύουσιν, 721) about a person trumps what a person aims to be (θέλῃς γενέσθαι, 452; προτιμᾷ . . . πεφυκέναι, 722). What comes to light becomes what is; knowledge equals what is made known. The problem of her failed action thus becomes for her a problem of communication. It then becomes clear why Deianeira chooses silence as her solution. In this system in which only what comes to the surface matters and what cannot be seen or heard ceases to be of import, Deianeira wishes to make her whole self hidden and so inconsequential. She thus chooses silence to make herself invisible—as a way to not be seen (666), heard (721), or talked about. In order to solve the problem of how others will interpret her actions, Deianeira aims, through silence, to simply remove herself as an object for interpretation. “Silence works as the true concealer” (Montiglio 2000.189)—a concept Deianeira understands well.¹⁵

Deianeira expresses her fear of being brought to light with the word φαίνω (φανήσομαι, 666). This word, “I see” (φαίνω), has a suggestive

15 The Nurse’s description of Deianeira’s death reinforces the idea that Deianeira exits in silence as a means of hiding: inside the house, she “hid herself where no one might see” (κρύψας’ ἐαυτήν ἐνθα μὴ τις εἰσίδοι, 903). Cf. Heracles’ wish not to be seen in his agony (799–800).

etymological kinship with "I speak" (φῆμι). This relationship between seeing and speaking points toward an overlap between vision and words and, inversely, invisibility and silence (Montiglio 2000.181 n. 70). Deianeira uses forms of φαίνω with some frequency.¹⁶ For example, in her instructions to Lichas discussed above, she expresses her wish to reveal Heracles in terms of φαίνω (φανερὸς ἐμφανῶς, 608; φανεῖν θεοῖς, 612), and ends that speech with the same word as well, emphatic in its end position (φανῆ, 619). Suggestively, Deianeira uses φαίνω for the last time in its negative form. When she realizes that she has probably destroyed Heracles and that she must thus herself withdraw, she turns φαίνω's meaning of visibility and knowledge into its opposite. The tuft of wool she used to anoint the robe, she tells the Chorus, has disappeared, self-destroyed (ἡφάνισται . . . ἐδεστὸν ἐξ αὐτοῦ φθίνει, 676–77). Her language implies the antithesis that explains Deianeira's final silence: one can be seen and talked about or surrounded by silence and invisible. In the end, Deianeira's attempt to affect the action of the play demands from her that she, like the tuft of wool, disappear (ἡφάνισται, 676). Having failed to effect her desired outcome in regard to Heracles, Deianeira turns to silence to make herself invisible and so hidden from blame.¹⁷

Deianeira, in the silences relevant to her, stands in strong contrast to Aphrodite in her silence. Whereas the Chorus recognize Aphrodite as the silent agent at the end of a song of sight and insight, Deianeira's silences aim to keep her words and, ultimately, herself hidden—in the end an anti-spectacle, unseen and so unrecognized. What is more, Deianeira fails in her effort to affect the action from behind the scenes, in silence, emulous of the silent agent, Aphrodite. Yet, in the vein of other Sophoclean heroes who face the impossible, but nevertheless take it on, we may venture to say that Deianeira, too, in her attempt fails admirably.¹⁸

16 It is a common word in the play. Deianeira uses it 7 times, Heracles 5, Chorus 4, Messenger 3, Lichas 2, and Hyllus 2. It occurs more frequently in Sophocles only in his other play of late learning, *OT*. A rough count shows variations of φαίνω occur with the following frequency: *OT* = 32, *Trach.* = 25, *OC* = 17, *Aj.* = 16, *Ant.* = 16, *Elec.* = 14, and *Phil.* = 12.

17 Silence is often associated with invisibility. See, for example, Montiglio 2000.83–87, 106–07, 189–201, and Cairns 2002.78–79.

18 On heroic failure in Sophocles, see Knox 1964.1–27, especially 7, 27.

THE SILENCE OF IOLE

All of the silences discussed above contribute to both the meaning and the structure of the play; in regard to the latter, they all coincide with the entrance or exit of a character or with the transition from a choral song to an episode. Together they shape a play that moves and turns at crucial moments through silences. There is one named silence, however, that performs no structural function: the silence of Iole. Instead, her silence goes beyond the limits of any one part of the play to inform the whole of it.

A description of Iole might be mistaken for that of another tragic figure, Cassandra. Both characters have left behind their ruined home cities and accompanied the returning hero as his highly desired prize of war. Both are brought to a troubled house and come on stage to face the questioning of the queen. Both respond to the queen with silence (*Ag.* 1035–68, *Trach.* 227–496).¹⁹ Iole parallels Cassandra in such significant ways that one might expect her, like Cassandra, to break her silence at some point in the play. But here their similarities end. Cassandra possesses a divine gift of seeing and so can speak of the cycle of the house of Atreus and narrate its inner workings from the outside. She becomes, in a sense, the narrator of the action. Iole, on the other hand, possesses no such divine gift. She does not see, but is seen, all spectacle. Rather than narrate the action, Iole instigates much of it: she gives rise to the apology of Lichas, the dark action of Deianeira, the passion of Heracles. Iole is on stage for only part of the first episode (229–334), yet her problematic presence continues to generate the major actions of the drama long after her exit.²⁰

As the fulcrum of the play, Iole prefigures the vision of silent Aphrodite as the doer behind the action. Iole—magnetic and dreadful—makes visible early on that silent, erotic force that the Chorus only much later can name as Aphrodite.²¹ Furthermore, Iole's silence, like Aphrodite's, makes her hard to know even as she is manifestly visible. So, for example, while Deianeira sees her and pities her (312–13, 463–64), she fails in her effort to know her. Instead, she hears the speeches of the two messengers (335–489) and her own ruminations (536–53). Thus Iole's silence both

19 On Iole and Cassandra, see Bowra 1944.123–24, Seale 1982.195, Aélion 1983.46, Scodel 1984.31, Garner 1990.102, and Wohl 1998.110.

20 On the figure of a silent woman at the core of *Ag.* and *Trach.*, see Wohl 1998.151.

21 On Iole and Aphrodite, see Kamerbeek 1959.189, Burton 1980.73, and Seale 1982.202–03.

generates the overabundant words of others and, at the same time, protects her from them: the more speech, the more one moves away from Iole herself towards the concerns and interests of the speaker (Wohl 1998.39). She, like the silent Aphrodite, while revealed and acknowledged, remains essentially a mystery.

Deianeira sees Iole as a younger version of herself. She pities Iole on the same grounds that she pities herself: for both of them, she surmises, beauty has destroyed their lives (465, cf. 25) (Heiden 1989.65). Both follow in the wake of Heracles, the prize of his violence (Wohl 1998.17–18). Their likeness heightens Deianeira's sense of being replaced by Iole. The Chorus also develop the implicit parallel between the two, as well as implying the problem this doubling arouses: after Lichas reveals Heracles' erotic passion for and violent conquest of Iole (472–89), the Chorus sing the story of Heracles' battle not for her but for Deianeira (497–530). This song creates a single space for the two women and raises the question of which of the two will fill it. Deianeira, recognizing Iole's power and weakness, strives to seize the moment to triumph over Iole. Indeed, her decision to try the φάρμακον from Nessus changes the rules of the game: rather than men fighting for the prize of a girl, Deianeira initiates a competition between the two women for the prize of the man, Heracles (Scodel 1984.38 and Wohl 1998.23). Along with the φάρμακον, Deianeira strives with words: she persuades Lichas to divulge the whole truth to her and then instructs him with an elaborate speech. Iole, for her part, defends herself with silence. Lest one foreground the similarity rather than the rivalry between the two women, Iole's silence differentiates her from Deianeira, who speaks for much of the play.

The part of Iole's silence that keeps her from being known by others overlaps with Deianeira's upon her final exit, but the differences and tension between the two characters suggest that their silences ultimately point in opposite directions. Deianeira's final silence, as we have seen, aims to hide her from the eyes and judgments of others. Iole's, on the other hand, allows her to be seen and evaluated by all. Thus while the aim of Deianeira's silence is to close down speech, Iole's, as we have seen, generates speech and storytelling. As she will not speak for herself, others speak for her to the extent that her silence becomes the indeterminate source of the play's words and deeds. Iole's silence thus works against that of Deianeira, who from the outset sees her life story as moving through uniform gloom to a predictably bad end (1–5). Iole's silence offers a different relation to time and change. The openness of her silence, the sense that her story might

ramify depending on who is interpreting it, raises a profound question: what if, unlike Deianeira's premature imposition of judgment and unlike the overarching divine will that informs the heavy, oracle-laden trajectory of the tragedy, mortals nevertheless might experience life as open-ended—as the play's initial aphorism suggests?²²

Iole's similarities to and differences from Deianeira, Aphrodite, and Cassandra bring to the fore a discrepancy in knowledge between man and god. From the divine point of view—that of Aphrodite, Cassandra, and what Deianeira assumes—events are predetermined, known in advance. But for mortals, unable to know how an event will turn out without seeing it through to its completion over time (592), time is open-ended—hence the play's sustained consideration of mutability in its opening aphorism and parodos.²³ Iole's silence suggests a productive response to the mortal problem of having to live in time without full knowledge of the past or future: rather than prematurely imposing an ending, as does Deianeira, in order to shape experience into a readable plot with a beginning and end, one might accept the limits of mortal knowledge.²⁴ The play itself, with Iole's silence at its center, challenges Deianeira's presumptive impulses. The controversial ending of the play—is Heracles' apotheosis implied or not?—suggests further that even when we arrive at the end of a life, it may not be the end (Kraus 1991.97). Thus Iole's silence resuscitates the age-old concept that Deianeira rejects: mortal life is ever open to change. The play adds the further challenge that one might never thoroughly know the life of another, since its end may not be the end of the story. It follows, then, that one might best remain subject to time rather than try to anticipate its end.²⁵ Or in other words, to live—without despair, even with some appreciation—as a mortal in time experienced as open.

In different ways, Iole reflects Cassandra, Deianeira, and Aphrodite, but in the end, she is not like her mortal peers in her silence and is

22 Seale 1982.182 sees the opening maxim as “both the germ and the lesson of the drama.”

23 On the relationship between the oracles and the uncertainty of human knowledge expressed in the opening aphorism, Whitman 1951.108 observes: “The wealth of oracular material only emphasizes the impossibility of knowing the future.”

24 Easterling 1968.68 concludes that the meaning of this play that contrasts divine knowledge and human ignorance is “an *acceptance* that life is like this because men are not gods, a statement, simply, of man's tragic condition” (*italics mine*). On Deianeira acting outside the large perspective of time and fashioning her own tragedy, see Seale 1982.209–10.

25 On Deianeira's discomfort with uncertainty, see Heiden 1989.27–28.

anything but divine. Indeed, it is precisely the limits of her human knowledge that allow for a kind of mortal freedom that contains genuine events, genuine actions of will.²⁶ It is, of course, likely that most readers pass over Iole's silence with the assumption that it approximates the impossibility of articulating the boundlessness of her despair and isolation (e.g., Bowra 1944.123). But such is not the case for her closest parallel, Cassandra. Iole, as we have seen, parallels Cassandra in most ways except for not possessing the mixed blessing of divine knowledge. Some might see in this Iole's utter devastation, but it is just as possible to see in this her liberation, her gift of being fully human: not to know creates possibility and possibility suggests life.²⁷ Unlike Cassandra, Iole does not proceed to a tragic end. Her plot, like her silence, remains open-ended, with the promise of new life in a new generation.²⁸

Each of the three mortal actors in *Trachiniae* who use silence, Heracles, Deianeira, and Iole, express different strategies for being human in a world informed by the divine that enacts its will in silence. Heracles, in his religious silence, draws near to Aphrodite; Deianeira, in her effort to affect the action, emulates Aphrodite—and predictably fails—and Iole does not attempt to approach the divine but finds a wholly mortal way. The most foreign and distanced character in the play, Iole nevertheless seems to

26 For a thorough consideration of the kinds of action and freedom possible in different chronotopes, see Morson 1994. On human time implying uncertainty and freedom, see Vidal-Naquet 1986.45. The image of freedom we see in Iole's silence is ironically a tragic approximation of freedom: mortals are most free in their ignorance. Along these lines, Seale 1982.209 concludes: "It is the play's great irony that knowledge is disastrous."

27 Wohl 1998.46 reads the hopefulness of "a radically pure and free female subject" in Iole's silence (see, further, Wohl 1998.46–56).

28 See Scodel 1984.41 on the audience's cognizance of the dynasty born from Hyllus and Iole, and Wender 1974.15 on the possible hope that Hyllus and Iole will build a better marriage in the next generation. Bowra 1944.142–43 and Sorum 1978.70 observe the emphasis placed on the command that Hyllus marry Iole; cf. Beer 2004.93–94. Hyllus in the exodos, now paired with Iole in marriage, has been read in terms of an ephebic initiation (Carawan 2000.220–29, Pozzi 1999, and Wohl 1998.11–16; see also Segal 1981.81–82). For Carawan (2000.221), the exodos exists primarily for the sake of Hyllus's tragic *anagnorisis*, with the implication that the subsequent fate of Hyllus and, by association, Iole is a central concern to the play. The ephebes, "citizens-in-training," are "the growth point, the bud and flower of the city" (Winkler 1990.58). Attached to Hyllus, Iole partakes of this sense of the future, about which Hyllus aptly concludes: "No one sees the future in advance" (τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ' οὐδεὶς ἐφορᾷ, 1270).

offer the best and most accessible reflection on—and perhaps even solution to—the problem of the silence of the divine.²⁹

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29 While there is much controversy over the identity of the maiden addressed in the final lines of the play (1275–78), the case has been made persuasively that she is Iole. For arguments in favor of her identity as Iole, see Burton 1980.81–82 and Wohl 1998.55–56; for arguments against, see Jebb 2004.182–83 and Easterling 1982.232–33. Segal 1981.107 argues mostly against the maiden's identity as Iole, but acknowledges a recollection. Were it the case that the maiden is Iole or recalls her, it would mean that while the speaking characters who turn on occasion to silence—Heracles and Deianeira—eventually render themselves invisible, Iole alone remains visible, and, in this way, a curious mortal reflection of Aphrodite at the end of the play.

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