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# WOMEN'S SPEECH IN GREEK TRAGEDY: THE CASE OF ELECTRA AND CLYTEMNESTRA IN EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*[1]

The perception that women use different speech from men, and employ it differently, is much older than the science of linguistics. When Euripides' relative in *Women at the Thesmophoria* disguises himself as a woman, he does so linguistically as well as physically, and in the end it is a matter of terminology as much as anything else that betrays him. On a different level, Hesiod describes Hermes giving Pandora 'lies and crooked words', as opposed to the straight speech of good men: women's words are associated with sexual persuasion as being their most dangerous characteristic.[2]

In this essay I would like to leave on one side the Hesiodic type of approach to women's speech as a genre, and concentrate on a more basic series of questions: did the Greek tragedians try to make their women sound like women? If they did, why did they, what methods did they use, and what effect does their attempt have on their plays?[3] The details of how women's and men's speech differ from each other vary greatly from language to language and from culture to culture, and the interpretation of these differences is endlessly fought over by linguists, so though these questions may seem limited, they are very hard to answer. Here I will only suggest some short and dogmatic answers and then discuss one example. I believe that the Greek tragedians did try to make their female characters sound, not like real women, but at least like tragic women, as opposed to tragic men; that they did this because individuality is vital for tragedy and for Greeks gender would have been a vital part of a character's individuality; that they used a wide range of methods which included the adaptation of tragic language and rhetoric; and that the effect on their plays varied, because characterization can be put to so many different purposes, but usually, in one way or another, made them considerably more complex and challenging. I do not think that the fact that the plays were written by men, and acted by men for an audience composed (largely or wholly) of men necessarily invalidates any of these answers: it is a factor that has to be taken into account, along with the conventions of tragic language and tragic performance, the peculiar characteristics of Greek, the discourse structure of the dramatic mode, and the whole range of extrinsic factors that always have to be taken into account when interpreting Greek drama, which sketch for us a tentative reconstruction of how what is in the text might match up to the expectations and preconceptions of the audience.[4]

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[1] This paper was originally delivered as part of a panel on 'Audience and Community' at a conference on 'Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century', convened by Martin Cropp and Kevin Lee, and held at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, in May 1999. I am most grateful to Laura McClure for allowing me to see the manuscript of her important book before publication; to Edith Hall, for inviting me on to the panel; and to Christopher Collard, Martin Cropp, Helene Foley, Jasper Griffin, Rachel Hoare, Michael Lloyd, Christopher Pelling, and the other participants at the conference for helpful suggestions and discussion.

[2] Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*: the relative swears by Apollo, a masculine oath, at 269 before he leaves Euripides, then by Artemis, a woman's oath, at 517. He is betrayed partly because he implies another woman wanted to urinate in a ἀμίς, which would present extreme logistical difficulties. See L. McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton, 1999), 218–28. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 77–82 and 373–5: see P. Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry* (Baltimore, 1977), 99–101 and 105–15 for Pandora as the beginning of rhetoric and Hesiod on women and *logos*. O. Jesperson, *Language, Its Nature, Development and Origin* (London, 1922), 237–54 begins the modern debate (the bibliography is huge, every inch of the territory savagely disputed); pioneering is R. Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York, 1975); useful introduction and bibliography in S. Romaine, *Language in Society* (Oxford, 1994), 99–133; good critical surveys of the literature on two big areas, amount of talk and interruption, in D. Tannen (ed.), *Gender and Conversational Interaction* (Oxford, 1993), 231–312. These techniques are applied to fiction by D. Tannen and R. Lakoff: 'Conversational strategy and metastrategy in a pragmatic theory: the example of *Scenes from a Marriage*', in D. Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (Oxford, 1996), 137–73.

[3] McClure (n. 2) has most usefully opened up the debate on many fronts and makes intelligent and fruitful use of sociolinguistic theory. My conclusions are not fundamentally different from hers, but are reached by a somewhat different route: this paper will concentrate less on the identification of 'verbal genres associated with men and women in the ancient Greek literary tradition' (3) and will focus more on how specific arguments and rhetorical strategies, even those more associated with men than with women, are deployed to create a series of individualized female characters. In a forthcoming book I hope to apply similar methodology to a greater number of plays than McClure was able to consider. It should be reassuring that both a 'verbal genres' approach and a rhetorical analysis confirm the complex nature of the role of female characters in tragedy.

So what features of tragic speech, especially trimeter speech as opposed to lyrics (to take the hardest case, since ancient critics suggest that the rhetoric employed in tragic rhesis is an intrinsically male science),[5] might we be able to identify as making a character sound like a woman? Many of the features that have been identified as female in other ancient genres, or which linguists working on other subject matter and other languages use, will not work for Greek tragedy, because of its greater degree of stylization. For example, despite Plato's statement that women prefer archaic language[6] (for 'archaic' read 'standard' and this statement could have been made of the English language by a modern sociolinguist), women in tragedy often innovate linguistically because of the elevated nature of tragic poetry. Still, it seems to me that the following possibilities at least remain worth pursuing: the subject matter of female characters' speeches (this often overlaps with McClure's concept of 'verbal genres', though not always), the type of argument they use, and the ordering of those arguments. Others, which I am not going to try to follow up in this essay, might be the ordering of clauses, irregular syntax, or, as Denniston suggested, the use of particles.[7] However, in addition to all the factors I have already mentioned two other caveats need to be entered. First, it is a phenomenon recognized by sociolinguists (although again, the details are much debated) that women in mixed groups speak differently from women in single-sex groups, and this will be important for my discussion of *Electra*.[8] Secondly, as Silk has argued,[9] very convincingly, there comes a point in many tragedies where the carefully created individual whose individual language has expressed his unique experience is reduced by the weight of catastrophe to utterances that are not very individualized: everyone sounds the same when crying out in agony. So it may be that there are parts of every tragedy where we might expect more obviously gendered speech than others.

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[4] What real Greek women sounded like has been studied by M. Gilleland, 'Female speech in Greek and Latin', *AJP* 101 (1980), 180–3; D. Bain, 'Female speech in Menander', *Antichthon* 18 (1984), 24–42 (and see J. N. Adams, 'Female speech in Latin comedy', *Antichthon* 18 [1984], 43–77); A. Sommerstein, 'The language of Athenian women', in F. de Martino and A Sommerstein (edd.), *Lo spettacolo delle voci* (Bari, 1995); E. Dickey, 'Forms of address and conversational language in Aristophanes and Menander', *Mnemosyne* 48 (1995), 257–71 and *Greek Forms of Address from Herodotus to Lucian* (Oxford, 1996). See also now on the related question of dialects S. Colvin, *Dialect in Aristophanes: The Politics of Language in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1999), esp. 1–89.

Individuals are vital to tragedy, both as moral agents and as the focus of pity and fear: see Aristotle, *Poetics* 6 and 13 and S. Halliwell (ed.), *The Poetics of Aristotle* (London, 1987), ad loc.; J. M. Mossman, *Wild Justice: A Study of Euripides' Hecuba* (Oxford, 1995), 94–103 and 138–41; and C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1996), 99–107. For gender and individuality in this connection, see Aristotle, *Poetics* 15 with Halliwell; some of the problems of this passage are well illuminated by H. P. Foley, 'Antigone as moral agent' in M. S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford, 1996), 49–73.

Fundamental studies of the portrayal of women in and out of Greek tragedy include: J. P. Gould, 'Law, custom and myth: aspects of the social position of women in classical Athens', *JHS* 100 (1980), 35–59; H. P. Foley, 'The conception of women in classical Athens' in id. (ed.) *Representations of Women in Antiquity* (New York, 1981), 127–68; F. I. Zeitlin, 'Playing the other: theater, theatricality and the feminine in Greek drama', in J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (edd.), *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (Princeton, 1990), 63–96; B. Seidensticker, 'Women on the tragic stage', in B. Goff (ed.), *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues on Athenian Drama* (Austin, 1995), 151–73; and now C. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London 2000), 189–245. Most of these understandably concentrate more on their dramatic function and (often) its sociological implications than on the rhetorical and linguistic methods employed to delineate them.

[5] Rhetoric as more appropriate to male speech: see perhaps Plato, *Ion* 540b and Aristotle's complaint about Melanippe in *Poetics* 15. But in practice the picture is quite different in tragedy: see esp. R. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho* (Cambridge, 1982).

Bearing all this in mind, let us turn to the Euripidean *Electra*, and specifically to the portion of the play between the arrival of the body of the dead Aegisthus and the exit of Clytemnestra into the house to be killed. There has been a great deal of discussion of the characterization of Electra in this play, but it tends to revolve around the question of her heroic status (or lack of it). I am sympathetic to those who argue against an anti-heroic view of Electra and Orestes, but am inclined to think that the term 'anti-heroic' is itself something of a red herring.[10] Euripides has created a more even division of interest between Electra and Orestes than Aeschylus or Sophocles, has made the siblings closer in age (541ff.), and instead of choosing to emphasize the command of the god or the paralysing and self-destroying quality of Electra's hatred has instead used grinding domestic detail to reveal the corrupt state of the entire family. What is wrong with Electra and Orestes is not that they are not heroic, but that their heroism is horribly misdirected: an idea that Euripides later carried further in *Orestes*. The issues central to the agonistic speeches in this part of the play are to my mind not so much to do with heroism as with a self-destructive *oikos*, and it will be my contention that the characterization of Electra and Clytemnestra, as well as being interesting for our view of the characterization of women in drama, is also appropriate for its immediate context, as indeed one might have expected.[11]

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[6] Plato, *Cratylus* 418c. See also McClure (n. 2), 32–69, esp. 33–40.

[7] Syntax: B. L. Gildersleeve, in a review of M. Bréal, *Pour mieux connaître Homère* (*AJP* 28 [1907], 209) described certain disruptions of Homeric syntax as 'feminine syntax', because a disproportionate amount of such incomplete or disrupted syntax occurs in the speech of distressed or agitated women. Particles: J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 2nd edn, rev. K. J. Dover (Oxford, 1954), lxxiii.

[8] The perception that same-sex groups interact differently from mixed-sex groups is now fundamental to much research, which tends now to be carried on in single-sex peer groups: e.g. M. H. Goodwin, 'Tactical uses of stories: participation frameworks within girls' and boys' disputes', in D. Tannen (ed.), *Gender and Conversational Interaction* (Oxford, 1993), 110–43; the principle was established by (among others): C. Kramer, 'Women's speech: separate but unequal?' in B. Thorne and N. Henley (edd.), *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* (Rowley, MA, 1975), 43–56, esp. 49, and see the paper abstracts by L. Hirschman on 248–9; C. West, 'Against our will: male interruptions of females in cross-sex conversation', in J. Orasanu, M. K. Slater, and L. L. Adler (edd.), *Language, Sex and Gender: Does La Différence make a Difference?* (New York, 1979), 81–97; more recently see J. Coates, *Women Talk* (Oxford, 1996), esp. 58–67, though this is hardly unbiased. On different styles of public rhetorical performance by men and women, see F. L. Smith, 'The pulpit and woman's place: gender and the framing of the 'exegetical self' in sermon performances', in D. Tannen (ed.), *Framing in Discourse* (Oxford, 1993), 146–75. See also McClure (n. 2), 260.

[9] M. Silk, 'Tragic language: the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare', in Silk (n. 4), 458–96. A similar erosion of difference takes place at critical moments in Thucydides: see esp. 7.69.2.

[10] Commentaries: J. D. Denniston (ed.), *Euripides: Electra* (Oxford, 1939); M. J. Cropp (ed.), *Euripides: Electra* (Warminster, 1988). Anti-heroic views include: G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London, 1941), 297–314; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto, 1967), 199–212; B. M. W. Knox, 'Euripidean comedy', in *Word and Action* (Baltimore, 1979), 250–74, esp. 250–4; and see P. Burian in P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1997), 180. Against this view see, among others: F. I. Zeitlin, 'The Argive festival of

Orestes, Pylades, and some slaves bearing Aegisthus' body enter at 879. Electra addresses Orestes very much in terms of male activities (fighting, athletics), and compares his victory over Aegisthus with Agamemnon's at Troy; she crowns both him and his 'comrade in arms' Pylades. In response to Orestes' speech offering to inflict all sorts of punishments on the dead Aegisthus at her behest, she has to be coaxed to say what she wants to do (900ff.), and that turns out to be reviling rather than impaling him. On the one hand this makes an ironic contrast with Orestes' claim at 893 that he has killed Aegisthus in deeds not words, and on the other it completes that process by killing Aegisthus in words as he has already been killed in deed. Her fear of public opinion here is notable, and this is something she has in common with Clytemnestra, who was said by the farmer in the prologue (30) to have prevented Electra's death because of her fear of public opinion, and who begins her own speech in the *agon* by referring to gossip. There are a number of such passages in tragedy, and most are either made by female characters or relate to them.[12]

The formal speech that follows has a rather nasty resemblance to half of an *agon*, and should certainly be compared with Electra's speech to Clytemnestra.[13] When one does so, something interesting emerges: of the fifty lines of this speech, twenty and a half lines are general reflection (twenty-two if one counts 947–8, which have some generalizing force: 41 or 44 per cent). In Electra's thirty-seven-line speech to Clytemnestra (deleting 1097–9 with Hartung), there are only five and one-third (14.4 per cent). Why is one speech so much more sententious than the other?[14] Interestingly

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Hera and Euripides' *Electra*', *TAPA* 101 (1970), 645–69; M. Lloyd, 'Realism and character in Euripides' *Electra*', *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 1–19; A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Wisconsin, 1987), 181–230; Cropp (above), xxxiii–xxxviii; see more generally on the play, S. D. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1986), 162–4, 245–59; on the *agon*, see M. Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford, 1992), 55–70.

[11] I remain convinced that Euripides does 'use characterization to fuel and inform his plot, even to make a plot hinge on the sort of person at the centre of the action' (Mossman [n. 4], 94–103, esp. 96).

[12] On gossip, see McClure (n. 2), 56–62; V. Hunter, *Policing Athens: Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits 420–320 B.C.* (Princeton, 1994), 111–16 and e.g. Semonides fr. 7, 15, and 20; Euripides, *Hipp.* 384, *Pho.* 198–201. On the reading in Euripides, *El.* 1013–17, see J. Diggle, *Euripidea* (Oxford, 1994), 163–5; see Cropp (n. 10), ad loc. for a succinct statement of the opposing view, which seems preferable.

[13] The resemblance is not a formal one, but lies mostly in the stage presence of the dead adversary, who might have answered back but cannot; it fades as the speech progresses. But the formal opening is perhaps reminiscent of openings of agon speeches like *Med.* 465–75. Technically it is an epideictic speech, but its position means that it demands comparison with the same speaker's later denunciation of Aegisthus' partner in crime.

[14] On general reflections, see H. Friis Johansen, *General Reflection in Tragic Rhesis: A Study of Form* (Copenhagen, 1959). Epideictic speeches are not by nature necessarily more sententious

enough, the general subject matter is not that different: both speeches revolve around sexual misconduct and its consequences. Textual corruption of 907ff. has been widely suspected, at least partly because of this sententiousness;[15] but I would prefer to make sense of the speech as it stands. I suggest that in this first rhesis Electra is couching her speech in particularly careful terms because she is in a mixed group, and so finds it desirable to underline her conformity with generally accepted moral thinking by using platitudes; whereas in the second speech she is in an all-female group (comprising her mother, the Trojan slaves, and the female chorus), and so can speak more trenchantly in the absence of men. This alone characterizes her as female, since Greek tragic males have no need to change their discourse in a mixed group.[16]

At first Electra uses her general reflections in her speech against Aegisthus in a very specific way: as a form of strengthening for the various accusations she makes against him, and as a means of progressing from one to another. So after the direct summation of Aegisthus' crimes at 914–20, she generalizes for four lines in a way which implies that Aegisthus was forced to marry Clytemnestra, an insinuation which proceeds from, but also adds to, the substance of her previous charges. This then leads to her damning comment on their married life from 925–31. Again the following general reflection builds on the direct charge and adds to it: 934–5 bring in the idea of the effect on a household's children of being better known for their mother than their father. Aegisthus' attempt to substitute a family of his own for that of Agamemnon has been sketched earlier, for example at 62–3, so as well as being a general statement, this is a spiteful remark about Aegisthus' and Clytemnestra's children.[17] From here on the speech becomes overwhelmingly sententious: there are two lines of accusation (938–9) followed by five lines of generalization on the folly of trusting in wealth. This can be seen as a more pointed and accusatory version of Orestes' ideas at 367–72: she packs a great many commonplace ideas into a very small space and finishes with a splendidly mixed metaphor in 944 ('wealth that associates unjustly with fools blossoms briefly and then flies out of the house'). This is not the same kind of progressive use of general reflection as earlier in the speech: she is about to change tack and return to sexual matters. The compression of the arguments, and perhaps too the number of end-stopped lines here, gives the impression of a surge of resentment (the possessions

than *agon* speeches: Andromache's speech to Hecuba at *Tro.* 634–83 is an interesting example. If one deletes 634–5 with Dindorf, the speech as we have it is forty-eight lines long, though there is probably a lacuna before 638. Of the existing forty-eight lines, eleven-and-a-half are general reflection (23.9 per cent, including the second half of 683). This is a lower proportion than in Clytemnestra's reply to Electra in the *agon* of our play (see below). It is perhaps significant that the only male present is the child Astyanax and, perhaps, some silent attendants for the wagon, though these are not mentioned. I am most grateful to Michael Lloyd for stimulating discussion on this point.

[15] Hartung deleted 921–4 and 936–7; Wecklein suspected 932–7; Bruhn deleted 941–4; and Vitelli 942–4. Kovacs (D. Kovacs [ed. and trans.], *Euripides: Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles* [Cambridge, MA, 1998]) casts doubt on 916–20, follows Hartung on 921–4, suspects 930–7, but makes up for the lines lost with an eight-line supplement after 914, where he perceives a lacuna. Denniston (n. 10), ad loc. thought the suspect passages 'somewhat weak, or at least undramatic', but was surely right to say 'excision cannot get rid of all these passages'. I shall argue that they do serve an important and legitimate dramatic purpose in characterizing Electra.

[16] Many sources refer to the desirability of the control of women's speech but, by contrast, *parrhesia*, outspokenness or freedom of speech, is the mark of the Athenian male citizen: see e.g. Euripides, *Hipp.* 422, and *Ion* 670–5. In both passages, paradoxically, male freedom of speech is seen as guaranteed by the status of a man's mother. See also McClure (n. 2), 9–10, 19–24.

[17] The theme of gossip is also very prominent in 930–1 and 936–7: note the emphatic position of *logos* at the end of 937.

of which she speaks were presumably Agamemnon's and should have been Orestes'—and her own dowry—so this section has affected her more personally than what she has been saying since 917).

After the section on wealth she returns to sexual misconduct, this time Aegisthus' rather than Clytemnestra's, which she dealt with at 918ff. The self-reference at 945–6 ('As to your dealings with women, I shall be silent, since it is not proper for a maiden to talk about, but I shall make an easy riddle [ = riddle intelligibly] about it') is interesting for a number of reasons. There is a good cutting *praeteritio* here, and if, as Denniston suggests, *γνωρίμως* ('intelligibly') is rather a prosy word, that might intensify the tartness. But her categorization of herself as female and, specifically, as a virgin, not only marks this as the speech of a woman, but also sketches a movement in the character. At the start of the play Electra has had to define herself as the wife of the farmer, even though the marriage has not been consummated: hence her water-carrying and her refusal to go to the festival with the chorus who are 'proper' unmarried virgins (761). A good deal is made of her awkward marginal status in the first part of the play, but since the recognition it has been tacitly assumed that the farmer is fading out of the picture: at the end of the play she will be given to another husband, Pylades (1249 and 1284).[18] This and the next portion of the speech, which is a general reflection with a personal twist, have therefore a double function: they not only attack Aegisthus, they reinvent Electra. As a rhetorical technique, this cannot be pinned down as gendered, but the subject matter is very appropriate to a Greek tragic female speaking to a male stage audience, and indeed to this character in this situation: she has been married to the farmer because he is no threat, and so that she will breed weak children (267): her ideal husband would give her strong, brave children; someone like Aegisthus could only breed pretty ones. In that context her final metaphor, again from athletics, is appropriate. This last general reflection is also much longer than the specific point made against Aegisthus (that he never knew what hit him): three-and-a-half lines to one-and-a-half. It does amplify the direct comment, but closes the argument rather than leading it on. The subject matter of the metaphor elegantly mirrors the fact that this is the end of the speech, and also contrasts with the metaphor she uses of Orestes at the beginning of the scene (883–4).

So this is a multiply self-conscious speech appropriate to a woman speaking in front of men. What difference is there when the only male audience present is the one in the theatre? The transition between the two scenes is interestingly written. Electra's speech is followed by a choral comment and Electra's command that the body be removed into the house. The next part of the scene emphasizes Orestes' reluctance to kill his mother. Electra is both more vindictive and more alarmist than he (963, 965), and it is Electra who comments here for the first time on her mother's splendid turnout (967): all these remarks might be seen as linked to Electra's gender.[19] Orestes exits reluctantly into the house and leaves the stage to Electra. From the first the murders were assigned along gender lines, with Orestes responsible for the killing of Aegisthus and Electra undertaking at least to set up her mother's death (646, given extra prominence by being a disruption of a stichomythia sequence): so this all-female scene has been carefully prepared.

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[18] Electra's marginal status is particularly emphasized in her dealings with the chorus at 167–212, sensitively interpreted by Zeitlin (n. 10), 645–51.

[19] See also Electra's advice to her mother to take care not to soil her dress on the sooty walls at 1139–40; she thus marks Clytemnestra's entrance and exit by commenting on her mother's clothes, as she marked Orestes' entrance with the dead Aegisthus and the close of her denunciation of the corpse with metaphors from athletics.

The hyperbolic choral greeting defines Clytemnestra as queen and with reference to her father and brothers but not, significantly, with regard to either of her husbands: this may confirm what Electra has said about Aegisthus' insignificance. It also mirrors the way in which Electra is now defining herself. Much has been said of the visual contrast between the gorgeous Clytemnestra and the shabby Electra, and this is important, as is the contrast between Helen and Hecuba in the *agon* of *Trojan Women.* Clytemnestra's appearance not only expresses her sexual shamelessness, but also her ill-gotten gains, reflecting the association of sexual misconduct and misappropriated wealth in Electra's speech against Aegisthus. The subject-matter of the *agon* very much revolves around the *oikos*, and is discussed in ways which do not look much beyond it. One might contrast this with the second *agon* of *Hippolytus*,[20] where Theseus, when confronted with (as one might think) very much an *oikos* matter, talks of the hypocrisy of mystery religions (952–7), and says that if he fails to punish Hippolytus his past personal achievements on his famous crimebusting journey to Athens will be undermined (976–80); and Hippolytus in his turn takes the trouble to refute at length an accusation of aiming at usurping his father's throne which has in fact not been made (1010–20): in other words both men instantly look beyond the *oikos* to the external world and to the state.

Not so Clytemnestra and Electra.[21] For Clytemnestra, her Trojan slaves are just compensation for her daughter, they have no political significance. The only force outside the *oikos* that she really recognizes is, once again, gossip. The only exception to this is at 1024, where she briefly hypothesizes that Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia might have been pardonable had he been averting the sack of the city: but the other two acceptable reasons she gives are firmly to do with the family. Her account of Agamemnon's deed and her explication of exactly why it was so wrong are interesting because they focus on a series of marriage alliances: Tyndareus' expectations when he gave her in marriage, the false hope of Iphigeneia's marriage to Achilles, and the dysfunctional marriage of Menelaus and Helen. These prepare for her analysis of what went wrong in her own. This is by no means the only, or, indeed, the obvious way of expounding the situation, and I suggest that this arrangement of the arguments achieves more than one effect: from the point of view of Clytemnestra's rhetoric it seeks to establish an air of reasonableness and to weaken the impact of her own adultery by stressing the abuses of marriage, culminating in actual adultery, which Agamemnon had already committed, and which she then claims provoked her own adultery. From the point of view of the characterization of Clytemnestra it does something more complicated. It makes her move from thinking in terms of vertical, cross-generation alliances (the mention of her father and the fiction that she would have Achilles as a son-in-law), which had the potential to benefit the *oikos* (though in fact Agamemnon negated that potential) to horizontal, matrimonial alliances, which are dysfunctional and damage the *oikos* (Menelaus and Helen's marriage and then Agamemnon's and her own adultery). This contrasts with the choral salutation at her entry and also contrasts her with Electra, who, as we have seen, after a confused period when she has been unable to define herself fully in either vertical or horizontal terms, has recently redefined herself in terms of her blood family. Paradoxically, it is Agamemnon's fatal ignoring of the superiority of vertical ties which Clytemnestra then points to in her revolutionary hypothetical gender role reversal at 1041–4 ('What if Menelaus had been secretly ravished away from home? Should I then have killed Orestes to save Menelaus, my brother-in-law? How would your father have borne with that?'):[22] but although this does clarify Agamemnon's crime, it does not lessen the fact that Clytemnestra has done the same thing. Electra will pick up on this in the speech which follows.

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[20] The *agon* between Theseus and Hippolytus is rightly compared closely with this one by Lloyd (n. 10), 55.

[21] On the rhetorical tactics of these two speeches, 1011–50 and 1060–96, see Cropp (n. 10), ad loc.

General reflections cluster in Clytemnestra's speech when she is at her most defensive: she uses one at the start of the speech and at 1035–40 to gloss over her adultery. (There are roughly ten and two-thirds lines of general reflection in a forty-line speech: 26.65 per cent, still a much smaller proportion than in Electra's speech against Aegisthus).

Again Electra is reluctant to speak in response; but interestingly this time her reluctance and the urging she receives to overcome it are very differently couched: at 900ff. the discourse was of shame and blame, and was recognizably associated with her gender; here Clytemnestra offers her, and she lays claim to, *parrhesia* (1049, 1056). This, as we have seen (n. 16) is the freedom of speech associated with a healthy (male) political system and specifically with democracy as opposed to tyranny. That difference in expression, then, not only defines the contrasting relationships she has with Clytemnestra, her mother, but also a powerful queen whom she has alienated, and with Orestes, her loving and beloved long-lost brother: it also suggests a different gender atmosphere. How could either woman speak of *parrhesia* in front of a man?

Electra goes straight back to the blood family, draws a stark contrast between Castor and his sisters, and spells out the disastrous nature of their marriages. Goldhill has well described part of this speech as '(recalling) Clytemnestra's own argumentation in fragments':[23] one might perhaps extend this to the speech as a whole, which carefully gives the impression of being not very structured; the comparative lack of general reflections also gives it a spontaneous and emotional feel. Clytemnestra has distanced herself from Helen (1027–9 and by extension 1041–4) Electra's opening attack on both Tyndarids (1060–8) tacitly rejects that distance; then 1080–5 reprise Electra's initial wish that Clytemnestra had a better mind and really were different from Helen. These two passages are separated by a refutation of Clytemnestra's carefully arranged claim that she only committed adultery under provocation (1069ff.). Here Electra reverts more to the style of argument she used against Aegisthus: an accusation strengthened and broadened by one of the few general reflections in the speech. But, interestingly enough, this section is introduced by a claim to inside knowledge rather than, as with Aegisthus, 'all the Argives' (1068 'They do not know you well, as I do', cf. 930 'You heard this from all the Argives'). Making Clytemnestra's preening in the mirror indicate her faithlessness is not just conventional: it takes us into the boudoir and seems to justify her claim to special knowledge, as does her account of Clytemnestra's reaction to news from Troy.

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[22] The form of the argument in 1041–4 is more complex than other hypothetical role reversal arguments in Euripides: *Hcld.* 1005–8, *And.* 668–70 (del. Hirzel), and Telephus frs. 708–11 are all straightforward 'if this had happened to you, you would have acted as I did' arguments, whereas this passage alone involves a sustained, and (in its picture of Menelaus being secretly snatched away and having to be rescued for Helen) perhaps slightly comic, gender role reversal. Also, of course, the whole angle of the argument is different: in the other instances the argument is designed to validate the speaker's own past actions; here the argument aims rather to illustrate the unreasonableness of Agamemnon's, and hence employs *reductio ad absurdum* rather than an appeal to universal behaviour patterns. I am most grateful to Michael Lloyd for drawing these references to my attention.

[23] S. Goldhill, 'The failure of exemplarity' in I. F. de Jong and J. P. Sullivan (edd.), *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature* (Leiden, 1994), 51–73, esp. 68.

But the most effective part of the speech is 1086–93, where Electra demolishes Clytemnestra's blurring of her stance on vertical relationships as against horizontal ones by insisting that the vertical relationships are the ones which matter, and that Clytemnestra has really been neglecting Orestes and herself for Aegisthus. The truth of this is borne out by the prologue and prompts Clytemnestra's admissions after Electra's speech. But Electra then, mid-line, changes tack quite radically. She moves straight from using a hypothesis to query Clytemnestra's account of her motives to using a 'be-done-by-as-you-did' argument, which, because it is couched in the form of a condition, implicitly raises the idea that the *lex talionis* leaves much to be desired: a disturbing move given that the audience knows Clytemnestra is already doomed to die. The fact that there is no real logical link between the first and second halves of 1093 makes the speech seem to end very abruptly, as though Electra were impelled to say this out of anger at the situation described in the previous lines. Electra's alarmingly simplistic final argument might be seen as a much less innovative and striking complement to Clytemnestra's role reversal hypothesis: but where Clytemnestra was being daring and avant garde, and trying, even if not wholly successfully, to use logic to strengthen and clarify her position, Electra is eliding logic under the weight of her resentment.

Clytemnestra's interesting response to Electra's speech continues the theme of 1086–93,[24] and the dialogue between mother and daughter bears out what Electra has said there, as Clytemnestra admits that, although she can see the force of vertical relationships, she is afraid of her son and loyal to her husband. Her initial softening towards her children and her admission of guilt are gradually modified as she refuses to help either Orestes or Electra.[25] It is significant (and, of course, highly ironic) that her last words on stage concern doing favour to her husband (1138, bitterly reprised by Electra at 1144–6). Ironically, after she is dead Orestes and Electra will realize that they too fatally ignored an important cross-generation relationship, and will accordingly be visited by far greater remorse than that expressed by Clytemnestra over Agamemnon.[26]

Electra's part in the lyric *amoibaion* in which they express their grief is surprisingly limited, and prompts some questions. We were prepared to see less gendered language at this most emotional point in the play.[27] But in fact there is some insistent gendering of the siblings' responses to the murder, particularly in 1190–1200, where Orestes envisages as his punishment expulsion from the male society of the city, Electra from the female society of choral activity and marriages, including her own wedding.[28]

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[24] Jasper Griffin has pointed out to me that Clytemnestra's cosy attempt to reduce Electra's principle of adherence to the blood family to mere preference is nonetheless made to seem grounded in real experience (1103–4); Electra's insistence on the principle is imbued with a disregard for actual human experience that she will regret at the end of the play.

[25] Clytemnestra's modes of address change interestingly during the scene: from the bald '*σύ*' at 1007, she begins to use the warmer vocatives *τέκνον* (1057, in response to *μῆτερ* at 1055, 1106, and 1123, as she changes the subject to ask why Electra has sent for her) and *ὦ παῖ* in response to Electra's speech at 1102. In her last speech she reverts to *σύ* and *σοί*, distancing herself from her daughter even as she prepares to oblige her. Her stressing that she will rejoin Aegisthus as soon as the sacrifice is over is of course ironic, but also gives an impression of detachment. I am most grateful to Jasper Griffin for drawing this point to my attention.

[26] Note particularly Electra's emphatic phrasing at 1183–4, which sets the tone for the whole passage.

[27] See above, p. 376.

[28] This was, of course, exactly her situation at the start of the play: see Cropp (n. 10), ad loc.

Orestes always utters first and Electra follows (just as in the *kommos* of *Choephoroi*), in each case more briefly than her brother. Given that lamentation is often seen as the province of women,[29] this is striking. It seems to represent a readjustment of their relationship: Orestes is no longer being dictated to by Electra's emotions, but is expressing his own. Electra's acceptance of responsibility for having egged her brother on is, as the audience knows, no more than the truth, and the chorus specifically blame her for what she has done to him (1205). She also actually had her hand on the sword for the fatal stroke (1224–6). The limiting of her song here is perhaps the most effective way of showing a chastened and subdued Electra—and, of course, an Electra once more on stage in the presence of her male relatives. She is also much more tentative in the presence of the Dioscouroi (e.g. 1295). This is not the same sort of reassertion of masculine power that we find in *Choephoroi*, in that neither Electra nor Clytemnestra has ever been characterized as masculine, but it does restore a balance between the characters which had been disturbed. The equality of responsibility between the siblings is well expressed in the veiling of the corpse: Orestes hands her his cloak (presumably the same one as he used to veil himself when performing the deed, 1221) and Electra shrouds her mother with it.[30] The Dioscouroi will also stress this joint responsibility at 1305–7, and the siblings' farewell scene also brings out that the focus is split very evenly between the two. That might explain why, in this instance, it seems to have suited Euripides to continue to stress the gender of the siblings rather than to elide it under the weight of emotion as he might have done.

All the speeches we have discussed fit in with and contribute to the development of the destruction of the *oikos* that Euripides has chosen to insist upon throughout his play. But the speeches of the *agon* also provide a distinctively female view of what has happened in the house, which the (male) audience is allowed, as it were, to overhear. The contrast between the rhetoric here and in other parts of the play when men as well as women are present on stage is a real one, and that there is a contrast is perhaps the most telling gendering of speech possible within so stylized a genre. That said, Electra and Clytemnestra are also individualized: Clytemnestra innovates in her arguments, Electra does so much less; Clytemnestra is easygoing, Electra dwells on everything (907–13 and 1121).[31]

Even if a convincing case has been made for the proposition that Electra and Clytemnestra are more than just 'men in drag', or male characters with paler masks, questions remain. Whether one can apply this approach to other tragic women, and whether there are other avenues of enquiry to pursue to nuance the picture further, must depend on the results of further research. I think it likely that one can. If so, it may still be that the only advance has been to describe more fully the elaborate representation of female characters—representation that Zeitlin has described as enabling them to 'serve as antimodels as well as hidden models for (the) masculine self'.[32] But representation is after all vitally important in tragedy, especially the representation of speech acts. If the female can be said to have a distinctive voice in tragedy, then it might prove not only to be the voice of the Other, but one in which the audience might sometimes discern 'the Self in the Other and the Other in the Self', as Greenblatt has put it,[33] and perhaps the polarity between male and female might not only be being reinforced but also, and simultaneously, challenged.

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[29] .See e.g. McClure (n. 2), 40–7, with more bibliography.

[30] This seems to look back to Electra's harping on her mother's dress in the previous scene (967, 1140).

[31] ζωπυρέω, 'rekindle', is found only here in Euripides, but cf. A. *Ag.* 1034.

[32] Zeitlin (n. 4), 69. Even so, the attempt at such elaborate representation is still remarkable, and worthy of study and comment. It is by no means self-evident that an author of one sex should attempt to delineate so carefully the private communication of members of the other. Jane Austen, a writer supreme in the representation and manipulation of language, particularly subtle in her use of direct and indirect speech, capable of naturalism to the point of 'Chinese fidelity',

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and of inspiring tremendous admiration in male readers such as Scott and Thackeray, never attempts to render a conversation between men of which no woman is an auditor.

[33] S. Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions* (Oxford, 1991), 127–8.