

Becoming the Masculine Ideal: Women Acting as Hero in Greek Tragedy  
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While close research has been done on the portrayal of women in Greek tragedy, their appropriation of masculine speech and impersonations of the masculine ideal, as well as the speech that is made about them in their silence, has received limited attention in the critical literature. Karen Bassi has written extensively on the imitative and inventive nature of masculine ideals within Greek tragedy, while Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz has explored the implications of the performance of male actors as male and female characters being either misogynistic or subversive drag. My thesis responds to both Rabinowitz and Bassi, and closely aligns with Laura McClure's, which suggests that gendered speech is used to characterize women in the plays of Euripides and finds most tragedies to involve a common dynamic: beginning with the presentation of women's speech as operating outside the bounds of masculine control and concluding with its successful containment (McClure 29). This paper will examine the gendered nature of language within tragedy and its employment by female characters in the tragic works of Euripides and Sophocles: *Deianeira*, *Tecmessa*, *Polyxena*, *Alcestis*, and *Macaria*, underscoring the appropriation of heroic speech and its employment by women as not only a mode of impersonation, but a form linguistic drag which allows them to temporarily gain subjectivity through the terms of masculine heroics.

Using queer theory and feminist analysis, my paper examines the ways in which females adopting masculine speech fail to maintain subjectivity throughout the entire play. I assert that because female characters are using language that is not prescribed to their gender in order to gain power, rather than redefining heroism outside of masculinity. Euripides's *Alcestis* attains subjectivity by assuming the role of the masculine hero, while her husband takes on the scripted speech of the wife bereft. Deemed by the chorus as "fated to die with glory" (*Alcestis*, 150), Alcestis gains hero status through good reputation, in effect achieving subjectivity. As a result, her husband Admetus seems inferior: impotent, passive, helpless, emotional, and object. These inverted roles, however, are reconciled before the end of the play. Heroic language ceases, her voice is silenced, and Admetus regains masculinity. This paper seeks to ask where things went wrong for female characters like Alcestis. Reading tragedy in a way that considers linguistic markers and cues of female characters impersonating epic heroes will imply successful and unsuccessful ways they are able to gain subjectivity and *kleos* in their own right and not only through masculine ideals portrayed tragedy.

Bassi, Karen. 1999. *Acting Like Men*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

McClure, Laura. 1999. *Spoken Like A Woman*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 29.

Rabinowitz, Nancy Sorkin. „*How Is It Played? The Male Actor of Greek Tragedy: Evidence or Misogyny or Gender Bending?*” *Didaskalia*.