

The Other Woman: Persuasion and the Role of Cassandra in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*

Agamemnon is a play about female misbehavior. Clytemnestra is a famously transgressive woman whose actions lead to her own demise and, as I will argue, so is Cassandra; the common factor that aligns the two women is their ability to persuade. Persuasion is a unifying tool in the male political sphere, but a destructive force of seduction and subversion when used by women. It has been well established that persuasive speech is the primary weapon of Clytemnestra, who “counsels like a man” (*ἀνδρόβουλον*, 11), but skillfully assumes feminine speech patterns when needed to manipulate the chorus (Buxton 1982, McClure 1999). Cassandra fills multiple feminine roles to contrast with the androgynous Clytemnestra: she accompanies Agamemnon in death as a metaphorical faithful wife and her probable virginal status positions her as a sacrificial victim to facilitate the fulfillment of justice (Doyle 2008, Debnar 2010).

Yet as antithetical as she is to Clytemnestra, Cassandra shares her skills in persuasion and deception. While Cassandra is an object of pity, she is nonetheless guilty of offending a god, Apollo, whom she rejected sexually. She alludes to her wrongdoing with the euphemistic *ἔψευσάμην* (1207), not specifying how exactly she tricked the god, only that she refused his advances using guile. Her offense against Apollo was, of course, sexual, but her language implies that her real crime was her use of deception. Apollo appropriately punishes Cassandra's transgression by removing her ability to persuade, thus robbing her of her feminine power. Once enslaved and brought to Clytemnestra's door, Cassandra is reduced to total powerlessness, in polar opposition to the imperious Argive queen, underscoring her excessive dominance and at the same time presaging the ruin Clytemnestra will come to in consequence for her transgressions. I evaluate Cassandra as the counterpart and mirror image of Clytemnestra,

focusing in particular on persuasion and the reactions and responses of the chorus to Cassandra's words. Cassandra's verbal patterns mirror Clytemnestra's, in that she inspires doubt and dread in the chorus but assuages their anxiety when she shifts to normative feminine genres of speech. I argue that the themes of persuasion prevalent in the speech of both Cassandra and Clytemnestra—how the former lost it and the latter wields it—frame both women as guilty of transgressing the lawful bounds of their sex and foreshadows the inevitable downfall of Clytemnestra.

Bibliography

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