

Cassandra, Bestialized: Otherness and Intersectionality in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

Cassandra, ill-fated prophetess and war spoil of Agamemnon, is a character whose status in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is consistently being renegotiated and restructured. In her relatively brief appearance in the play, Cassandra is described in numerous ways: a gift, a beast, a slave, an animal, a sexual object, and a failed prophetess. Despite the constellation of attributions assigned to Cassandra, the identities that determine her construction in the narrative, however, are two of her core components: woman and foreigner. Aeschylus' characters use these two statuses to otherize her, to construct an intersectional Cassandra that is "doubly Other," as it is the combination of these two facets of her identity that are responsible for her construction as sub-human (Kennedy 2014, 28). In addition, Cassandra's interactions occur with characters who operate on one of the dominant axes of power responsible for her intersectional status: the chorus of Argive elders are male and Greek and Clytemnestra is Greek (and derisively described as masculine by various characters). Cassandra is therefore the only character in these interactions in *Agamemnon* lacking any hegemonic role, and her various statuses and identities combine to see her constructed by other characters in the play. Compounding her intersectional status is her inability to communicate, which intensifies her creation as a marginalized figure. While the audience would have known that Apollo's curse rendered her oracles unable to be understood by the characters in the play, the characters do not have access to this information; therefore, it is the intersection of her identities that causes her to be bestialized by the chorus of Argive elders and Clytemnestra. Her unintelligibility effectively signifies "the collapse of *logos*," which is displayed by both the chorus and Clytemnestra (Montiglio 2000, 255). Despite her ability to

physically speak, Cassandra's inability to communicate in a way that is perceived as rational results in Aeschylus' denial of a true voice and full human status.

Cassandra's status as an intersectional figure leads her to be written upon, refashioned as a sub-human other. Both the chorus and Clytemnestra focus on her servile status and the fact that she is a foreigner, thereby drawing on the elements of Cassandra's identity in which they have power and using these components of her identity as a justification for her bestialization. As Rabinowitz has recently noted in her work on intersectional identities in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, "it is a mistake to focus on one axis of power to the exclusion of others" (2025, 169). I will argue that it is critical to read and understand Cassandra as a character defined by two, intersecting identities that combine to intensify her otherization and narrative bestialization. Cassandra's multiplicity allows Aeschylus to highlight the complexity of female identity and to explore how the combination of various facets of her identity serve as justification for her fate in the play. Further, Aeschylus constructs Cassandra as a mutable space onto which the other characters in the play are able to project, and largely reify, the dominant, hegemonic ideologies of 5th century Athens. Aeschylus uses Cassandra's various identities to underscore the instability of immigrant women in Athens and to demonstrate how these facets of their identities can be used to justify their marginalization.

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