

Silence: A Versatile Tool

In this paper, the usages of silence in Classical Greek tragedy are discussed, using dramas by Sophocles and Euripides as supporting evidence for its claims, as well as considering papers by J. H. Kim On Chong-Gossard and Silvia Montiglio, and an essay by Carolyn Dewald and Rachel Kitzinger. The argument is made that silence was a method of making plays more interactive for their audiences, and that Sophocles made use of dramatic irony for this effect, whereas Euripides relied more on the audience putting themselves in the shoes of the chorus; that silence was a way to express that which simply could not be expressed, whether because it was socially taboo or else because it was beyond the ability of words to convey; and, finally, that silence was used as subtle social critique.

Regarding the first point, excerpts from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* are used in conjunction with Dewald and Kitzinger's "Speaking Silences in Herodotus and Sophocles" to argue that silence made the play more interactive for the audience. An excerpt from Euripides' *Hippolytus* is also discussed to show that this is an effect not limited to just Sophoclean tragedy, but rather a convention used by other Greek playwrights of the time, even if not to quite the same extent or mastery.

Next, excerpts from Montiglio's paper *Silence in the Land of Logos* and other excerpts from the essay by Dewald and Kitzinger and the play *Hippolytus* are considered. Assumptions about the universality of human nature in a cross-cultural context are made to show that silence was also employed as a method to express the inexpressible. To further this point, Euripides' *Medea* is cited as an example of a context in which something seemingly inexpressible (contemplation of filicide) is said aloud, and the ramifications this has on the audience's interpretation of the events that follow are discussed. After the essay by Dewald and Kitzinger,

Sophocles' *Antigone* is cited as a counter-example to show how Eurydices' silence is much more effective at gaining the audience's empathy than if she had spoken her intentions aloud as Medea does.

To support the third point that silence was also used as a subtle social critique, excerpts from Montiglio, Chong-Gossard's *Gender and Communication in Euripides' Plays: Between Song and Silence*, Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*, and Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, are introduced. It is argued that Sophocles uses silence to subtly enforce the belief that women should be silent, part of the Athenian *mores* at the time, and that the lack of silence of his female characters is often directly relevant to the ensuing tragedy. Euripides, on the other hand, used silence to subtly push back against that *status quo*, as his female choruses could have often prevented tragedy had they not kept silent.

In conclusion, this paper makes use of multiple academic sources and examples from Sophoclean and Euripidean plays to demonstrate just how versatile a tool silence was to the Ancient Greek playwright.

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