

Some Words about Cassandra's Falsehood-infused Words (Lyc. *Alex.* 1454-58):

Veracity, Medicine, and Genre

While terminating her frenzied speech in Lycophron's *Alexandra*, the prophetess Cassandra laments the futility of her words, citing Apollo as the cause (1454-58). Deprived of his sexual fulfillment (1457), Apollo "anointed" (ἐγγρίσας, 1455) Cassandra's words (ἔπη, 1455) and prophetic wisdom (φρόνιν, 1465) with ψευδηγόροις φήμαισιν ("false-speaking rumors," 1455), thus removing her credibility (πίστιν, 1454). With this language, specifically ἐγγρίσας in 1455, Lycophron implies some kind of physical process. Although it is possible to downplay this image as another metaphor in a notoriously cryptic poem (*Suda* λ 827), the centrality of this passage in defining Cassandra's complex poetic voice invites further interrogation. That is, what are the exact mechanisms of this interaction between Apollo's rumors and Cassandra's words?

To elucidate this process, in this paper I will address three separate but related aspects present in this passage. Most overt is the juxtaposition between truth and falsehood in divinely-inspired utterance. Despite the infusion of these false-speaking rumors, Cassandra's words will nevertheless become true (ἀληθῆ, 1458). This situation, I demonstrate, inverts the boast of the Muses in Hesiod's *Theogony* (27-28). While the Muses' falsehoods can be like truth, Cassandra's true words have assumed the semblance to falsehood.

Along with this issue of truth and falsehood, I also argue that this passage contains medical undertones. Specifically, Apollo achieves this curse by poisoning Cassandra's speech with the toxic rumors. Her words consequently undergo the process of decay. Aside from the god's obvious medical associations, dissection of the language in the passage supports this medicinal dimension. For instance, the epithet employed for Apollo here (Λεψιεύς, 1454)

appears earlier in the poem in a series of epithets that indicate the god's medical role: Ἴατροῦ ("Doctor God") and Τερμινθέως ("Terminthian") in 1207. At the same time, ἐγγρίσας exudes a medical sense. The uncompounded verb χρίω can refer to the application of poisons (Soph. *Trach.* 675), and the adjective ἐγγριστος means "applied as an ointment" (Theoc. *Id.* 11.2).

Accompanying this argument, moreover, is a hypothesis pertaining to poetic genre. By reading ἔπη in 1455 as a reference to dactylic hexameter (the meter of epic), I contend that Apollo's rumors transform her speech from this meter into iambic trimeters. While the use of iambic trimeters works within the poem's consistent engagement with Attic tragedy (e.g., Cusset 2002/3; Sistakou 2016), such a meter does not boast the same authority as dactylic hexameter. It is in this way that Cassandra loses her credibility. Rather, her ἔπη become twisted and obscure, as the messenger indicates in his assessment of Cassandra's speech (14; 1466). To corroborate this hypothesis about genre, I cite for comparison Callimachus *Aetia* fr.7 Pf., a passage that also deals with anointing utterances, specifically Callimachus' elegies. Since Lycophron elsewhere adapts Callimachus (Durbec 2006; McNelis and Sens 2016), I posit a similar generic charge for the Lycophron passage. However, whereas Callimachus implores the Graces to preserve his elegies with their anointed hands (fr. 7.13-14 Pf.), Apollo's rumors result in the decay of Cassandra's speech.

By tying these three strands of inquiry together, I propose the following reconstruction of this process. Not only does Apollo's application of the false-speaking rumors inject the appearance of error in Cassandra's speech, a transformation in genre occurs, from epic to tragedy. In this way, Apollo fulfills his multiple roles of the god of truth, medicine, and poetry, albeit to the detriment of Cassandra, whose prophetic power is now poisoned.

Bibliography

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