

Euphêmia and Gender in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Seven Against Thebes*

In Aeschylus' plays, *euphêmia*, or ritually correct speech, is closely associated with both the paeon and the ritual cry of the *ololugê* (*Persians* 388–95, *Agamemnon* 26–30, 594–97, *Eumenides* 1035–47). The paeon was a traditionally male genre, either performed as a cry or as a choral song (Rutherford 2001). The *ololugê* was considered the female counterpart to the paeon-cry, allowing women to join in with this male genre (Pulleyn 1997). Both of these prayer genres were seen as expressions of *euphêmia*. Among the useful discussions of *euphêmia*, paeon, and the *ololugê* in tragedy (e.g., Rutherford 2001, Stehle 2004, and Swift 2010), there is further opportunity for exploration of gender and ritually correct speech. Often in Aeschylus' plays, male characters urge female characters to engage in the *ololugê* cry, the paeon, or *euphêmia* (*Seven Against Thebes* 268, *Suppliants* 512, *Agamemnon* 1247, *Choephoroi* 581-82). In this paper, I argue that the male paeon is often presented in opposition to dysphemic, female speech that, rather than adhering to ordered, euphemic utterance, draws upon the potentially threatening genres of prophecy, lament, and curse. This type of female speech is framed as dangerous to both the *oikos* and *polis* in Aeschylus' plays (*Seven Against Thebes* 190, *Agamemnon* 237). It is for this reason that male figures attempt to guide female speech towards *euphêmia*.

I will focus on two scenes from two separate plays, arguing that both exemplify the tension between euphemic, male speech and dysphemic, female speech. First is the exchange between Cassandra and the chorus-leader in *Agamemnon* (1072–1330). Both prophecy and lament explicitly inform Cassandra's speech in this passage, as she and the chorus-leader acknowledge (1074–75, 1078–79, 1132–35, 1322–23). I argue that it is Cassandra's engagement with both of these genres that disturbs the chorus and leads to the framing of her speech as

dysphemic. It is precisely when she predicts the death of Agamemnon that she is cautioned to observe *euphêmia* (1246–47), and her lamentation likewise is labeled as *dysphêmia* (1078–79).

The second scene is the exchange between Eteocles and the female chorus in *Seven Against Thebes*. Here Eteocles is displeased by the way the women pray to the gods, accusing them of demoralizing the people of Thebes with their expressions of fear. The conflict between the chorus and the king has caused scholarly debate as to the ritual correctness of the chorus. Eva Stehle (2005) argues that the chorus does in fact achieve *euphêmia*, while Manuela Giordano-Zecharya (2006) points out the chorus's over-reliance upon supplication and lament. Although the chorus does not possess the prophetic gift that Cassandra does, I argue that its emotionally heightened prayers evoke both lament and prophecy just as Cassandra's words do in *Agamemnon*. For the connection between lament and prophecy, especially as female speech genres, I draw upon the work of Lisa Maurizio (2017), who also discusses the potential danger of the predictions that come out of these genres. The predictive potential of the chorus's words threatens the outcome of the siege, in Eteocles' eyes. When the chorus mentions the reality of a city under siege and the possibility of defeat (257), these words hold the power to bring about these events. Eteocles accuses the chorus of inauspicious speech (258) and urges them instead to perform the *ololugê* (267), a safer, more euphemic alternative. Eteocles does his best to guide the chorus towards the male, paeanic paradigm of *euphêmia* and away from female predictions that may even become curses.

Bibliography

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