
The study under consideration aims at investigating patterns of communication, which Euripides developed in his tragic work. Gender difference being a notable feature of these patterns J.H. Kim On Chong-Gossard (Ch.-G.) maintains that Euripides had a special interest in gender. The result is a useful overview of some expressive modes of communication employed by tragic characters, which, according to the author, provided the audience with a clue to interpret the dramatic scene. In the Introduction Ch.-G. presents his theoretical stance and methodology. The main focus is on the question how gender is construed in dramatic communication, but also on how the dramatic world interacts with the social conventions of contemporary Athens, the underlying assumption being that tragic theatre reflects social life.

A number of significant scenes are selected in order to demonstrate the patterns found in Euripides’ tragic drama and the conclusions that emerge are generally convincing.

Ch.-G. departs from earlier inquiries into the topic of gendered communication, such as those offered by Froma Zeitlin and Mary Kuntz, who have studied the tragic characters’ relationship to dramatic space unfolding in public (male) and domestic (female) realms, as well as the textual representations of space. Ch.-G. develops this line of inquiry into a more abstract direction. Founding his study on theoretical bases developed in the fields of linguistics (Nancy Henley and Cheris Kramarae) and sociology (Daphne Spain), the author applies the concepts found within these disciplines to serve his aim of analysing communication in tragic drama.

From the linguistic field Ch.-G. adopts the idea that «misunderstanding» is pervasive in male-female communication, its deeper cause being a systematic difference in «social power» between women and men. From the social sciences he introduces the concept of «gendered space», understood as the sum of textual representations creating an imagined male or female «settings». Erving Goffman’s ‘frame analysis’ comes to mind.

An important premise is that, in addition to spatial dichotomies, «language and communication can be regarded as a determinant of gendered space in Greek tragedy», while intimacy between characters of one sex excluding the other create a gendered tragic space (8f).

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While each gender creates its own gendered space, the result is not a symmetrical communication. Female characters when intruding into male space often apologize for their presence, while male intruders entering female space do not. The author’s interest is to see «whether or not men in tragedy are represented as having the same social power as real life Athenian men, or indeed, modern day Western men» (10).

The tragic development then creates successive male and female spaces through situations of inclusion – intimate conversation and solidarity – or exclusion – disregard and apology. «Space» is in this way defined as communication. The dramatist seems to have a special interest in women sharing «women’s knowledge», in particular knowledge of their own bodies, to which men have no access. Ch.-G.’s aim with focusing on this aspect of Euripides’ tragic drama is to «provide (...) a new lens for looking at Euripides’ plays, which will encourage readers to bring new insights into favourite scenes and recognize thematic connections which were not noticed before» (23). So far the present study manifests a special interest in the mimetic nature of the tragic genre.

In the chapters that follow Ch.-G.’s methodology is to study the distribution of song vs speech (Ch. 2, 3), and that of silence vs speech (Ch. 4, 5) along gender distinctions. The book is rounded off with a chapter on tragic «women out of place» (Ch. 6), and final Conclusions (Ch. 7).

The second chapter focuses on the distribution of song and speech in recognition duets, the eppirhematic amoibaia. These scenes offer the most consistent communication pattern, in which women express themselves in song while men answer in speech – the opposite is not found in tragedy (36). Ch.-G. objects to the conventional interpretation that females in Euripides are represented as simply by nature emotional, and males as rational (34). Analysing concrete scenes he finds that specific conditions motivate the female characters to sing maintaining that in recognition duets song may invert power relations between women and men.

Song can be used in order to communicate what is invisible or intangible and the message can so become authoritative, examples being memories, personal secrets, fantasies, or supernatural events (29). The singer can exert persuasive force over men and so influence a stage audience to be sympathetic to her words. This is a useful hypothesis, which can be verified in the dramatic context. Ch.-G.’s claim that the same may have been the case with the theatre audience is more difficult to prove (30).

In the following analyses of Euripides’ Iphigeneia in Tauris, Helen, Ion and Hypsipyle Ch.-G. demonstrates the pattern of female characters communicating personal experiences that are important for the male character to know.

The third chapter continues along the same lines analysing the semantics of other eppirhematic amoibaia and paradoi. Two tables are offered mapping the occurrence of these lyrical/dialogic passages, which indicate the parts played by females and males (66f). Ch.-G. identifies three semantic categories, women when singing offer resistance, they find themselves in a situation of plot transition or they are interrogating men (68).

According to the author women in tragedy may resist attempts to give advice or comfort in situations of misfortune, thus «claiming an ownership of grief» and
refusing the sympathy of others (68). This, surprisingly, gives them «a strange kind of control», in a situation where women in principle are «least able to give orders» (70).

In between, however, a more abstract interpretation is given, in the view that women’s song functions as «the aural focalizer» (92), or creates a «crescendo of tension» (100).

While the majority of lyric parts are sung by women there are songs delivered by men. In Euripides, as opposed to Aischylos and Sophokles, these remain short (104,107). Their semantic function is to express «pain, grief, indecision, or immaturity» (112). A common feature in Euripidean men is that these men «lose the power and authority which define masculinity in any given dramatic context» (107).

In the following chapters (Ch. 4, 5) the author scrutinizes the semantics of silence and the gender aspects of these scenes, its dramatic significance being signalled by references in the text. Among a range of silence scenes, according to Ch.-G., a number are exclusively for women, other for men, a distinction contributing to the construction of gender (114ff).

Women are hiding personal secrets or deliberately withholding information, while men employ ‘partial muteness’ (117), keeping silent until they at the right moment engage in persuasive speech.

The second chapter (Ch. 5) on silence moves towards the keeping of the secrets of others, with solidarity and complicity motivating the female choruses (as opposed to male, 135f). The chapter offers a straightforward analysis of the most prominent cases in which the chorus swear silence with a protagonist.

Chapter 6 is perhaps the most controversial one, dealing with «women out of place». Here Ch.-G. returns to the initial question of representation. Iphigeneia in Iphigeneia in Aulis and Evadne in Suppliants both enter a male space and exercise authority (206). The entrance of Évadne in Suppliants is considered «both shocking and transgressive», apparently «a woman out of control».

These incongruous scenes lead to the conclusion that «By allowing women to speak so authoritatively and then killing them off, Euripides sends an ambiguous message to his theater audience. In some sense, Évadne and Iphigeneia and Macaria are punished for taking on their assertive roles» (239f).

The Conclusions sum up the results from the previous chapters, the way women and men deploy song or silence. Euripides created «every woman as a complicated character», and in doing so the dramatist «forces his spectator to identify with what he is not – a woman – and simultaneously distrust and sometimes loath the other sex» (246).

This penultimate sentence of the volume signals the author’s basic assumption, that the dramatist is facing the single spectator. It is characteristic of the study’s profoundly individualistic approach.

Ch.-G.’s conclusions on these women out of place seem to avoid fundamental questions about the way the contemporary Attic community created this collective theatre performance. His solution to the «women out of place» scenes is a way out of an impasse due to the basic assumption that tragedy is fundamentally representative.
Without doubt the dramatic development demands an amount of *mimesis*, but this does not mean that «representation of gender» (2) is the primary scope of the genre. Kreousa’s crisis in the *Ion* is not an individual’s personal impulse, due to the fear that «Ion would usurp her position in the household once Xuthus proclaimed him as his heir» (1). The crisis erupts when Kreousa learns that her husband has a son, while the chorus announces that she will never give birth. In my view it is the social order that is disrupted, the underlying value being the ‘continuation of the oikos descent line.’ This value is violated but in the end restored, leading to excessive joy. This abstract current running through the drama I would identify as the ‘tragic workings’ of the genre. The concrete dramatic events are subordinated to this tragic process.

The author’s focus on individual destinies leads him in some cases to see real human beings behind the tragic characters. In Aithra’s reluctance «might…be a deliberate teasing of Theseus’ attention» (211, my emphasis). «Clytemnestra appears to be a woman earnestly concerned about what is proper and fitting» (231, my emphasis).

While a study of the modes of communication in tragic drama may be fruitful, we should not lose from sight that tragic drama consists first and foremost of action. The dramatic events staging concrete individuals with their conflicts and solutions, attracted the attention of the audience. Below these individual fates, however, the social order may run like an undercurrent manifesting itself in upsetting (I will call ‘tragic’) moments when it is disrupted.

The «curious» fact that Menelaos is convinced of Helene’s chastity in the past, through her song, while he is not convinced by her chastity in Egypt (45), may be due to the ‘tragic workings’ of the drama, motivations being subordinate to these disruptions. Menelaos’ doubt creates such a ‘tragic’ upheaval, Helene’s evil reputation constituting a violation of the value of ‘the faithful wife,’ while it is finally restored in the quasi-nuptial duet the couple intones.

I do not share the author’s point of view that «All Greek tragedies explore the human response to misfortune» (68), the ‘exploration’ formula being an answer to the lack of coherent psychology and seamless motivation. The dramatic action in Greek tragedy is often not prepared for and, it is, I think, subordinated to the fundamental values that constitute the deep current of the drama. When these values are violated, they create the unexpected turns of events and communications.

For this reason I do not think female characters sing because they refuse to be comforted (69). Their action and song may be subordinate to the demands of the ‘tragic process,’ which adds fuel to the flames in disrupting the basic values at stake.

A number of the interpretations Ch.-G. offers are too specific and too dependent on our culture-bound reception. The suggestion that song provides an «aural focalizer that invites the theater audience to see through the singer’s eyes… a register of high feeling of intensity» (111) seems better suited to account for the

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2 Des Bouvrie op. cit., 289–313.
communication pattern, since it is held at a more abstract level. Likewise it is more useful to assume the function of song in bridging the parts of divided plays or creating a crescendo. This approach harmonizes better with the notion of the 'tragic' effects of the genre, the rousing of emotions (Aristotle’s 'eleos' and 'phobos'), going beyond mere representation.

Ch.-G.’s analysis of the *epirrhematic amoibaia* offers useful insights. In particular the suggestion that song may make the singer’s words more authoritative in connection with what is invisible or absent (29). However it is not entirely clear why women may gain power through singing, while men only lose power.

The chapters on silence are less inviting to disagreement, although here also the tendency to interpret silence in terms of motivation is dominant. The analysis of *Suppliants*, with its shifting speeches and silences is completely held in psychological terms. Instead of explaining «Adrastos’ silence [as] actually reinforcing his masculinity» (121) we should interpret his refusal to speak as part of the endless tug of war between the protagonists about respecting or rejecting the institutional duty to give proper funeral rites to the war fallen.¹

In the chapter on «women out of place» Ch.-G. once more assumes that these women (Evadne and Iphigeneia) are individuals rejecting conventional roles, stepping «deliberately out of place» (206). Here again Ch.-G. assumes the tragedy to offer a document of some extraordinary personalities, instead of examining whether their presence may create a ‘tragic’ violation of institutional roles and values. I think this is the case, and we should not therefore try to learn anything about human choice or experience.

If Evadne «has gone crazy», her appearance being «...startling» (214), we should not assume that «she appears to be motivated by love and grief» (226, my emphasis), but instead radically abandon the exclusively documentary approach. The Evadne character creates a tragic inversion of the honour of a fallen warrior, claiming as a woman the «kleos» of a male.²

Ch.-G. seems to lose confidence in his own approach, asking at the very last pages whether these women out of place sacrificing themselves «make sense», and concluding «Nor do people in the plays learn from these examples» (240). I am afraid it was not Euripides’ objective to make the audience learn either, they should become shocked and horrified at the disruption of the social order, in Aristotle’s ‘tragic’ *eleos* and *phobos*, and in this way be confirmed in their perception of the normal and indisputable world order.

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S. des Bouvrie, Kim On Chong-Gossard, Gender and Communication in E.s’ Plays


2 cf. note 1.