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CHAPTER EIGHT

Women in Ancient Epic

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In the first lines of the *Aeneid*, Virgil brings his Greek models, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, together by defining the parameters of heroic epic as *arma virumque cano*, "I sing of arms and the man." If the real subject of heroic epic is "kings and battles" (Virg., *Ecl.* 6.3) and more generally how to face life and death as a man and member of a community (army, band of heroes, city-state, republic, or empire) defined and dominated by men, where do women fit in? Roman poetry often creates an explicit contradiction between women and epic by insisting on the masculinity of epic as a genre in contrast to the focus on erotic and feminine matters in elegy, and then including these very erotic topics (especially women in love and male conflicts over women) in epic itself.

Yet ancient epics in fact contain a much broader range of important female figures, even if they must often act and speak from the margins of the male community. Women are both the passive and, in the case of Roman epic, increasingly the active cause of wars as well as its carefully delineated, sometimes explicitly sacrificial victims. Women play a critical role as objects of exchange between men for the purpose of procreation, pleasure, and alliance; at the same time, a woman imported from another household or country can prove unfaithful or untrustworthy. As keepers of men's households who can make decisions in their absence, wives in particular wield a dangerous power over men if they do not serve their husbands' interests or if they step out of designated female roles. Mothers, on the other hand, are often powerful supporters of their sons, serving as prophets, mediators, and sources of wisdom. As prominent mourners of the dead, women can mark the losses that men's heroic actions inflict on the community and provide a form of closure; indeed, although women tend to speak back to heroic values above all in this particular role as mourners, epic can endow them with other sorts of resisting or supporting voices as well. When a hero travels into the wider world beyond his community on a journey or quest, female figures play a major role as dangerous sexual predators and blockers, but also as necessary helpers, prophets, workers of magic, and forces of civilization. Goddesses are ubiquitous in similar roles within the male community as well. Unusual women warriors such as the barbarian Amazons actually make brilliant if short-lived forays into the battlefield itself. Occasionally women serve as significant leaders or even epic narrators.

This essay will select from a limited number of epics in order to delineate briefly some of the major roles of women in heroic epic and how they evolved over time, including

Gilgamesh, the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Apollonius Rhodius' Hellenistic *Argonautica*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and its successors under the Roman empire, Lucan's *On the Civil War*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Statius' *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*, and Silius Italicus' *Punica*. These Greek and Roman epics, whether myth- or history-based, represent a continuous tradition focusing on the feats of kings and heroes. Given limits of space, I omit a large body of works in hexameter verse that the ancients would regard as epic poetry, such as the "Homeric" and other Hymns, the didactic and cosmological poems of Hesiod or Lucretius, or Ovid's mixed-genre *Metamorphoses*.

Blockers and Helpers

Ancient epics are full of goddesses, lesser divinities, and mortal females who facilitate heroic action, impede it, or both. The Gilgamesh epic is the first to establish the full range of female roles in this category (see Chapter 15, by Noegel). In *Gilgamesh*, the gods create a wild hairy man, Enkidu, as a companion to distract the unruly king Gilgamesh, who is abusing his citizens. The prostitute Shamhat is sent to seduce Enkidu, initiate him into the ways of sexuality and civilization, and lead him to the city. Although the dying Enkidu later turns angrily on Shamhat for separating him from nature and his life in the wilderness and for initiating him into mortality and complexity, the poem appears to present the kindly, maternal prostitute in positive terms, even if she cannot offer an entry into the higher levels of civilized life. Gilgamesh's mother, the goddess Ninsun, interprets her son's dreams and assists his quests. Later in the poem, other female figures play a facilitating role on Gilgamesh's journey to find the secret of immortality. The wise tavernkeeper Siduri helps Gilgamesh on his journey but advises him to accept mortality, give up his quest, and be content with wife and child and domestic life; the wife of the Scorpion man apparently persuades her husband to admit Gilgamesh to critical mountain passes; the immortal Utnapishtim's wife urges her husband to make sure that Gilgamesh does not depart empty-handed from the world beyond. These figures indirectly help Gilgamesh accept his mortality. After his return from the underworld, he resigns himself to mortal achievements: progeny and city-building.

Traditionally the goddess Ishtar, who mixed the erotic powers of Greek Aphrodite with the warrior skills of Greek Athena, became a symbolic bride to early Babylonian kings and offered them blessings, prosperity, and a link to the divine. Ishtar approaches Gilgamesh after his first heroic endeavor with Enkidu and offers to make him her consort. In contrast with earlier tradition, Gilgamesh rudely rejects her offer, citing her untrustworthy, uncivilized behavior, and her promiscuity with earlier consorts. The poem's perspective on Ishtar, who can indeed be a destructive goddess (she sends the Bull of Heaven to threaten the heroes), seems to reflect a shift from using her to support dynastic claims to divinity to an historically later view of the king as paradigm of humanity. Some scholars perceive a devaluing of the authority of goddesses and royal women in this narrative shift (Frymer-Kensky 1992: 77–9), as well as in the foregrounding of the partially eroticized male bonds between Gilgamesh and Enkidu over those between goddess and consort (Foster 1987). This episode anticipates the prominent role in Greek and Roman epic of complex and often ambivalent goddesses, lesser female divinities, and mortal women in alternatively seducing, threatening, or delaying heroes, and or in making their heroic success possible.

In the *Iliad* (see Chapter 21, by Edwards), the assertive alignment of the goddesses Hera and Athena with the Achaeans develops to the point that Hera even seduces her husband Zeus in order to distract him temporarily from the battlefield (14.188–223), while the warrior goddess Athena frequently fights at the side of her favorites. Athena plays a similar role in the *Odyssey* (see Chapter 22, by Slatkin), where she not only backs Odysseus in his battle against the suitors, but makes clear that her favorite's distinguishing

characteristics – tricky intelligence, civilized diplomacy, even craftsmanship (exercised on his special bed) – are her own and thus explain her special support for him. Aphrodite (Roman Venus), goddess of erotic love, anticipates her later support of her Trojan son Aeneas in the *Aeneid* (see Chapter 33, by Putnam) by rescuing various Trojans, including Aeneas and Paris (whom she rewards because he pronounced her victorious in the beauty contest with Hera and Athena) on the *Iliad*'s field of battle. She forces Helen, who incarnates her erotic powers on earth, to return to Paris' bed in *Iliad* 3. Similarly, the powerful sea goddess Thetis actively intervenes at Troy to enhance the honor and glory of her all-too-mortal son Achilles. In epics about the voyage of the "Argo," all three Olympian goddesses offer active support to Jason and his companions in their quest for the golden fleece.

In the *Iliad*, Hera, motivated above all by the judgment of Paris against her, expresses the most relentless divine rage against the Trojans: she has the capacity to eat her enemies raw (4.31–6); she fiercely opposes the burial of Hektor; she is even willing to subject her favorite cities to future punishment from Zeus in order to defeat Troy (4.51–61). In Apollonius Rhodius (see Chapter 25, by Nelis), her desire to avenge herself on Jason's uncle and enemy Pelias motivates her persistent support of Jason (3.1134–6, 4.241–3). Juno (the Roman Hera) develops an even more insistent link with place and peoples – Carthage and native Italians (*Aeneid*), Argos (*Thebaid*) – and with the forces of terrifying and ultimately fruitless irrationality and historical resistance that threaten the building of the Roman empire. Hera's constant tensions with the king of the gods Zeus (often over his adultery with other females) may arise in Homer because of a loss of the prehistoric powers that once made her the central deity in various locations in Greece (O'Brien 1993); similarly, Juno was a goddess initially linked more heavily with Etruscans and native Italians than Romans (Feeney 1991: 149–51). In Valerius Flaccus (see Chapter 36, by Zissos), however, Juno is less vengeful (since she is ignorant of the future, she has no grand designs, 7.192), and her concern for Jason is more altruistic than in Apollonius. In Statius (see Chapter 37, by Dominik), she displays no malevolence and even actively helps the female relatives of the dead after the war between the Theban brothers Eteocles and Polynices in their quest to bury sons or husbands. Why these last two imperial epics domesticate Juno remains as yet an open question.

Lesser divine figures also play major roles, especially in Greek epic. During his journey home from Troy to Ithaca, Odysseus encounters numerous female figures: the Sirens who tempt him by offering all the knowledge embedded in epic poetry; the whirlpool Charybdis, who sucks boats into her vortex; the monstrous Scylla, who snatches sailors from ships to devour; the sea nymph Leucothea, who rescues Odysseus from drowning with a magic veil in *Odyssey* 5; and above all the nymphs Circe and Calypso, who hold Odysseus on their remote islands, locked in obscurity, through seductive care and sexuality, but in the end facilitate his journey. The more human of these figures, such as Circe and Calypso, possess a combination of physical allure and knowledge already embodied in a more powerful form in Ishtar. With the help of the god Hermes Odysseus can counter Circe's magic and her threat to unman him, but requires divine intervention to escape from Calypso's promise of immortal anonymity (her name means "the concealer"). Their islands embody the allure of a female world outside history and replete with physical pleasure that subordinates the eventually unwilling male to the female (Calypso) and threatens to reduce him to bestiality, as Circe does to all visitors to her island but Odysseus. For an epic hero to be excluded from history and poetic fame is a form of symbolic death.

Many of these figures reappear in later epics based on related Greek myths; Circe and her magic play a prominent role in both *Argonauticas* as a powerful and still dangerous aunt to her similar but more vulnerable niece Medea; in Apollonius she purifies Jason and Medea after their killing of Medea's brother at the offended Zeus's behest, but refuses further help and will not approve Medea's actions. Jason's men drown out the Sirens with

the male poet Orpheus' music, whereas in the *Aeneid* Aeneas' men pass by both Circe and the Sirens, and thus the temptations and threats experienced by Odysseus, before arriving in Italy. Later epics include various other female threats such as the Harpies, winged females who continually pollute the banquets of Phineus on Thynea and are defeated by the Argonauts; forces of rage and vengeance often linked to the underworld such as the fury Allecto, who stirs up the native Italians against the Trojans at Juno's behest in *Aeneid* 7; and the furies Tisiphone and her sister in Statius, who rouse both sides in the war between the Theban brothers until they are outdone in ferocity by Polynices and Eteocles themselves (*Theb.* 11.537–8). These Roman furies are forces of pure disorder, unlike their Greek counterparts, who avenge crimes and the overstepping of human limits as part of a normative order.

At the same time, not all female figures on epic journeys, whether mortal or immortal, are as threatening or ambivalent. Odysseus' encounter with Phaeacian women literally reintroduces him to civilization. Princess Nausikaa accepts the naked and shipwrecked hero as a suppliant on the beach, reclothes him, and sends him off to a second suppliancy of her mother, queen Arete. After questioning the hero and apparently accepting that he is no threat to her daughter, Arete plays a role in insuring that Odysseus returns home with gifts. In Apollonius, both the Nereids and the nymphs of Libya rescue the "Argo" from disaster. In Virgil, the nymph Kymodokea (formerly a Trojan ship) warns Aeneas of attacks on his first camp in Italy (*Aen.* 10.219–48). Female figures also serve epic heroes as interpreters of the future. In addition to the goddesses Ninsun and Thetis, examples include: various Delphic priestesses from Homer to Lucan; the Roman matron in Lucan who under Apollo's influence envisions the future, replete with Pompey's headless corpse lying on the sands of Egypt, in Bacchic mode (*BC* 1.673–95); and a woman made prophetic by the god Bacchus and the Greek seer Tiresias' daughter Manto in Statius (*Theb.* 4.377–405, 463, 518–73).

Finally, many critical male–female encounters during epic journeys have mixed results. In the *Odyssey*, an encounter at the court of Sparta with the beautiful and intelligent Helen sends Odysseus' son Telemachus home with fears that his mother might be about to remarry; at the same time, he receives gifts and recognition, as well as gaining experience from this visit. In both *Argonauticas*, Medea and her magic are critical to Jason's winning of the fleece, but her help comes at a price. In Apollonius' version the helpless hero, whose skills run more to verbal persuasion than physical prowess, depends on Medea to give him the power to harness fire-breathing bulls with whom he must plow the soil and to sow the dragon's teeth that spring up as armed men. Medea enables Jason to turn the warriors' violence against each other and then tames the dragon that guards the fleece so that he can acquire it. In Valerius Flaccus' version Jason relies more on his own eagerness and physical prowess (he initially proves himself on the battlefield fighting in a civil war for Aeetes and takes a more active role in his trials), but remains beholden to Medea's magic and craft. Later Apollonius' Medea devises a stratagem to escape the pursuing Colchians (notably by killing her brother by trickery) and to rescue the Argonauts from the bronze Cretan monster Talos. As both epics hint, Medea's combined magical capacity and intelligence and her untamed barbarian character thwart all Jason's attempts to escape his unfortunate destiny both within the epics and in the future. Some of the Argonauts are reluctant in principle to accept a woman's help (Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.556–63) and even before the voyage began Jason rejected the company of the famed huntress and warrior Atalanta for fear that her female presence would be disruptive (1.773). Yet the opening of Apollonius 4 (1–5) asks the Muse to interpret Medea's ambivalent labor, wiles, and motives, not Jason's, as the central heroic theme. In this final book of the epic, Medea ominously begins to take on language associated with both male warriors and immoral women (Hunter 1987: 136). Although hints of gender inversion (Jason is compared to a young girl at 4.167–71) and

the use of deception during Jason's feats to win the fleece can be interpreted as a part of heroic initiation in myth (Hunter 1987: 448–52), his audience's knowledge of his unfortunate future continues to raise questions about every aspect of the gender relations explored in this story.

Female magic in Roman epic can provoke even more perversions of the norm. The witch Erichtho in Lucan, Book 6 (413–830) undertakes necromancy for Pompey's son Sextus by resuscitating a corpse, who indicates that civil war has even invaded the underworld. Sextus' desire to be assured that he will not die at Pharsalia seems to be yet another indication of the degree to which civil war has driven the entire universe into a state of ghastly imbalance. In short, women in ancient epic increasingly retain a link with the supernatural and an ability to mediate among worlds that can be used for good or ill. Goddesses, on the other hand, prove ferocious and persistent as patrons of heroes and historical causes or places important to them.

Mothers and Sons

Gilgamesh's goddess mother Ninsun, Achilles' mother Thetis, and Aeneas' mother Aphrodite/Venus powerfully support their half-divine sons through their knowledge of and access to the divine world and the future. Enkidu dies for Gilgamesh, who survives with his mother's help to become a great king. Thetis wins honor for her son from Zeus by insuring that the Greek army will be devastated by the angry Achilles' withdrawal from battle in *Iliad* 1; when he returns to battle she provides him with divine armor. Yet Thetis' knowledge of her son's future – his choice between a long peaceful life and a short glorious one – spurs Achilles to question the mores of heroic life before he chooses to return to battle knowing that he will die. Statius' *Achilleid* depicts the equally hopeless attempt of Thetis to hide the young Achilles on Scyros in female disguise so that he will not go on to die in Troy. Thetis' painful brush with mortality is an example of a situation more frequent in epics for female than for male deities (other examples include the goddess Demeter in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, the Latin prince Turnus' immortal sister Juturna in the *Aeneid*). Neither Thetis nor Demeter can immortalize young males whom they bore or nursed, whereas Zeus can do so with the beautiful Trojan youth Ganymede. Thetis serves as a divine example of a female sacrificed to dynastic concerns in being forced to submit to a mortal husband, Peleus, lest Zeus sire on her a son destined to replace him. In the *Aeneid*, Venus also burdens her son with a difficult historical mission, a painful abandoned love affair with the Carthaginian Dido, and a divine shield with a depiction of the Roman future that awes Aeneas, although he cannot comprehend it. Nevertheless, her erotic and persuasive powers that seemed so irrelevant on the battlefield of the *Iliad* (she is even wounded by the mortal Diomedes in *Iliad* 5) ultimately prove successful in defending her son's and grandson's glorious destiny in Italy.

In the *Odyssey* Penelope feels forced to remarry in order to protect the status and life of her only son from the increasingly angry suitors; the poem develops Telemachus' adolescent tensions with his mother as he grows into an adult role as his father's son. In Statius the Lemnian princess Hypsipyle is finally rescued from slavery by the sons that she was forced to leave behind in Lemnos. Maternal lamentation for dead sons will be discussed below. Heroic epic generally both privileges and celebrates relations between mothers and sons, even if the mothers tend to resist their sons' entry into battle and danger. The mother–daughter relationship, such as that of Arete and Nausikaa in Phaeacia or the Latin Amata and Lavinia in the *Aeneid*, generally remains at the margins of the predominantly public world of epic. Exceptions include the goddess Demeter's devotion to rescuing her daughter Persephone from the underworld in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the

relations between the Theban Jocasta and her loyal daughters Antigone and Ismene in Statius.

Women and War

The world of heroic epic is predicated on the exchange of women and gifts among men. When women such as the famous Helen of Troy or Medea (with the golden fleece) are abducted, the act disrupts fundamental bonds between men and justifies violent action. The opening of Homer's *Iliad* reprises the disastrous quarrel over Helen within the Greek community itself, when Agamemnon takes Briseis, the war prize of his best warrior Achilles, because he has had to surrender his own captive woman Chryseis to her father. His act disrupts the hierarchies of the Greek camp and opens questions about status, leadership, and service among his followers. Similarly, in Virgil's *Aeneid* war erupts between the native Latins and the Trojan newcomers to Italy over the marriage of Lavinia, daughter of King Latinus. Her mother and her native suitor Turnus do not accept the Latin king's decision to establish through Lavinia's marriage to Aeneas peaceful dynastic bonds with the powerful and sophisticated future founders of Rome and its empire. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope's suitors disrupt the hero's household and the Ithacan community in their effort to woo the absent king's wife, and Odysseus must reject the opportunity to marry the Phaeacian princess Nausikaa in order to return home and win back his kingdom.

While both Helen and Penelope are capable of manipulating their role to a limited extent, archaic Greek epic largely treats exchanged women as passive. Later epic, on the other hand, recreates from myth women who are increasingly active and dangerous players in the game of marriage and war. In his *Argonautica*, the Hellenistic poet Apollonius' Medea essentially initiates her own increasingly disastrous marriage when she chooses – under overwhelming pressure from the goddesses Hera and Aphrodite – to help Jason win the golden fleece. Medea's betrayal of her father Aeetes for Jason leads to a dangerous return journey, the killing of her brother Apsyrtus, and ultimately, even if this conclusion is only hinted at, to her killing of her children because of Jason's marital betrayal. In Virgil the active and hysterical interference of Lavinia's mother Amata initiates war in Italy, while the curse of the Carthaginian queen Dido, after her desertion by Aeneas, results in Rome's Punic Wars with Carthage, a point that resurfaces in Silicus Italicus' later epic about Hannibal, *Punica* (e.g. 1.99–119; see Chapter 38, by Marks). Both Lavinia and Dido are associated with the founding of cities (Lavinium and Carthage respectively), and Virgil develops a link between land claims and the exchange of women that becomes pervasive in Roman epic (Keith 2000).

In Lucan's *Bellum civile* about Republican Rome's civil wars (see Chapter 35, by Bartsch), the struggle between Pompey and Caesar features active and often explicitly disastrous roles for Marcia, the wife of Cato, the two wives of Pompey (Julius Caesar's daughter Julia, who remains active in the poem as a ghost, and Pompey's current wife Cornelia), as well as the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Lucan's women clearly reflect the role taken in political matters by Roman wives, for both good and bad, during this unsettled period, whereas Apollonius explores the transgression of proper female (and male) roles in a more hypothetical mode through Medea, an exotic, barbarian foreigner endowed with magical powers. Statius' first century CE *Thebaid* develops the character of Polynices' wife Argia, who persuades her reluctant father to favor the unfortunate war between the Theban brothers after they could not share their kingdom (3.687–710) and gives away the fatal necklace of Harmonia, which leads to the death of innocent seer Amphiareus (4.187–213). Once again, the role of influential imperial women in the Julio-Claudian dynasty may lurk behind the poet's inventions.

At the same time, however, women also star as epic's quintessential victims of war. The *Iliad*'s Trojan women are in the process of losing husbands, sons, and fathers on their way

to becoming, if they survive, slaves without a homeland, like Briseis and Chryseis and the female captives of the Greek camp. Hektor's wife Andromache, who has lost her entire family of origin to war and death, defines him as a replacement for every close relative (*Il.* 6.429–30), even as she also knows that she will soon mourn for his death and fears for her son. Hektor's mother Hecuba exposes her maternal breast as she pleads with her son to return within the city just before his final duel with Achilles (*Il.* 22.79–89). The sacrifices of the innocent virgins Iphigeneia or Polyxena frame the Trojan conflict in the lost post-Homeric Epic Cycle poems *Cypria* and *Iliou Persis* (see Chapter 24, by Burgess). Penelope has struggled for twenty years to preserve a kingdom for the long-delayed Odysseus and is on the verge of being forced to marry against her will.

Wives

War and adventure repeatedly call epic warriors from home, thus leaving the survival of a man's household in the hands of the aged, the young, or the hero's wife. As Hektor makes clear to his beloved wife Andromache, the Homeric warrior's chaste wife is to stay at home weaving, caring for the goods of the household, and producing and nurturing children. His reminder comes at the moment when Andromache has taken the liberty of giving advice on masculine matters; she wants Hektor to take a defensive role in the war in order to insure the survival of himself and Troy (*Il.* 6.431–8). Hektor's adviser Polydamas later gives him similar advice (18.273–9), and the hero dies because he has foolishly taken an overly aggressive stance in battle. But Hektor's role as masculine warrior prevents him from taking his wife's suggestion seriously and silences Andromache's resisting female voice except in her later role as mourner.

The *Odyssey*'s women, and above all the extraordinary faithful wife Penelope, are given a chance to play their traditional spousal roles more actively. Here the ideal wife has the same mind and capacity for virtue as her husband, even if she cannot exercise her talents as fully (H. Foley 1995: 95). Penelope wins *kleos* or fame, the goal of every Homeric warrior, for devising her trick of constantly unweaving her web to delay her suitors and for remembering Odysseus and everything he stood for (*Od.* 2.125, 24.196–7). We see her struggle to make the virtuous choice about her marriage, despite pressures from her suitors, her son's endangered situation, and her own uncertainty about Odysseus' survival. Her like-minded intelligence emerges in her final test of Odysseus concerning the secret of their immovable bed and in her exclusive sharing of stories with her husband after their reunion in Book 23. Like the Phaeacian queen Arete, whose husband trusts her to enact a public role in adjudicating quarrels among men (7.73–4), we expect Penelope to take on a public role in the court of her returned husband; after all, even Helen, whose questionable past is still a bone of contention with her husband Menelaos, actively does so. As wife, Penelope has an assertive role and voice in the *Odyssey* that the poem celebrates, however cautiously, given the behavior of the adulterous wives Clytemnestra and Helen.

Such paradigms of wifely virtue play a smaller role in later Greek or Latin epic, however. Exogamous liaisons and marriages create partnerships between strangers and so may endanger masculine goals. In order to achieve his mission, Apollonius' Jason must abandon his liaison with the Lemnian queen Hypsipyle to continue on his journey to win the golden fleece; to protect the "Argo" and its men he later threatens to abandon his promises to marry and defend a Medea who has sacrificed everything for him. Without the intervention of the Phaeacian wife Arete with her husband Alkinouos in Book 4, Medea would have been given up to her pursuing countrymen for punishment. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas loses his loyal wife Creusa in Troy and goes on, after her ghost restores his courage and the urge for survival in Book 2, to desert Dido in Carthage (Book 4) and nearly all of the Trojan women who voyaged with him in Sicily (Book 5). He is destined instead to

make a dynastic marriage in Italy with the virginal Lavinia, who may or may not be in love with her former suitor Turnus (Lyne 1983). Indeed, whereas the *Odyssey* makes home and Penelope a goal for which the hero gives up immortality with the nymph Calypso, the *Aeneid* entails a process of abandoning beloved wives or women for the masculine goal of empire and heroic self-control.

In *Bellum civile* Lucan depicts Pompey's wife Cornelia as a passionately devoted spouse, who suffers visibly over every separation from and failure of her husband and blames herself (or is blamed by others) for his misfortunes (2.348–9, 3.21–2, 8.88–105, and 639–50). Cato's wife Marcia promises to devote herself to her husband's cause in the civil wars (2.347–9), but their remarriage immediately after the death of her second husband (to whom she had been married at the stoic Cato's behest) is represented as an abnormal ritual that will establish a union in name only. The angry dead Julia, once a mediating link between Caesar and Pompey who helped defer conflict (1.111–20), harasses her husband in his dreams as a ghost (3.10–34). In Silius Italicus' *Punica*, Hannibal's devoted wife Imilce expresses both fear for her spouse and an equal willingness to follow her husband into battle; she stays to care for their son, who is soon under threat of being sacrificed by Hannibal's rival Hanno (3.97–157 and 4.770–807); their situation echoes the pathos of the *Iliad*'s Hektor and Andromache. Only Argia in Statius' *Thebaid* 12 rivals Penelope's wifely devotion in that she travels from Argos to Thebes in order to bury Polynices' body, where she is later joined by other mourning wives and mothers. The *Odyssey*'s climactic celebration of family and private life often gives way in later epic to an Iliadic concern with more public goals, to which wives are less relevant and more dangerous, even when they attempt to serve their husbands' interests, because of their pointedly less rational and weaker natures or their divided allegiances.

Mourners

All ancient epics endow women with an important role as mourners of the dead, but this role becomes increasingly ambivalent over time. The *Iliad* gives Achilles' captive consort Briseis a supportive role in the hero's own extravagant mourning for his dead companion Patroklos; Andromache mourns Hektor with her women even while he is still alive (6.500–2); and the poem closes by putting three female mourners of Hektor, Andromache, his mother Hecuba, and his sister-in-law Helen, on center stage to lament the dead hero. In this final scene, Andromache anticipates the death of her child, the destruction of Troy, and the enslavement of its women; Hecuba mourns all her lost sons; and Helen laments her own fate and the loss of Hektor's unique kindness to herself. Since the *Iliad* repeatedly confronts the price paid by heroes for engaging in war and other dangerous enterprises, these mourning women help to ritualize its major themes. Similarly, the continual mourning of the *Odyssey*'s Penelope for the absent Odysseus is a sign of her chastity and of her role as a bearer of civilized cultural memory.

In later epic, however, mourning women can become much more ambivalent figures, especially when not engaged in the formal mourning of public figures or destroyed communities or in enhancing the glory of heroic achievement with their fearful anticipation and regrets. This may well reflect historical reality, in that as early as the sixth century BCE legislation began to be passed in Greece that restricted female mourning, either by privatizing it or by giving it a carefully defined and limited role in public funerals (Alexiou 1974; on epic and history generally, see Chapter 5, by Raaflaub). Women mourners were thought prone to foment vendetta, to consolidate aristocratic political rivalries, or to undermine public rhetoric promoting war and other service to the state. Lament foments vendetta in Roman epic in instances where the social order is breaking down under the stress of civil war or familial disaster, as in the angry call for vengeance in Statius' *Thebaid*

against Hypsipyle by the mourning mother of the baby Opheltes, whose accidental death occurred under Hypsipyle's care (6.135–83). The women mourning the hero Anchises in *Aeneid* 5 end up setting fire to the Trojan ships to prevent a continued journey. In *Aeneid* 9 (473–502) the mother of the young Trojan Euryalus, who had insisted on continuing the voyage to Italy, is abruptly silenced when her wild mourning for her dead son drains courage from the Trojans whom Aeneas has left to guard his first encampment. Women's mourning becomes a sign of their less controlled and less rational nature in contrast to epic men of military age, who increasingly resist despair and lament even if they can give way to them (older men such as Evander in *Aeneid* 11 give way to grief more extensively).

Statius' *Thebaid*, however, offers a complex representation of female mourners that pervades the whole poem and dominates the ending. Lament marks the death of the Thebans killed in their treacherous ambush of Tydeus, the death of Creon's son Menoeceus, and numerous other casualties. As in earlier versions of the myth, Creon, who has replaced Eteocles as king of Thebes after the death of the warring brothers, forbids the burial of Polynices and of the remaining warriors who supported the Argive attack on Thebes. The female relatives and wives of these warriors gather to seek burial for them; most go to ask for the help of Athens and its king Theseus. In Book 12 Polynices' wife Argia sets off on a solo night and day pilgrimage to bury her much-loved lord herself. She meets his sister Antigone on the battlefield and the two prepare the corpse for burial and put it on the glowing embers of the pyre of another warrior. The smoldering pyre belonged to Eteocles, and the flames divide, expressing fraternal hostility even in death. This recurring hostility of the brothers now begins to infect the two women with a loss of proper *reverentia* (12.461). After Argia and Antigone are arrested and brought before Creon, each is depicted as so in love with death that they compete to accept responsibility for their action.

Their punishment is interrupted by the arrival of Theseus and his army. After Theseus kills Creon, the Thebans welcome him into the city. The poem threatens to end with an echo of the concluding lament for Hektor in the *Iliad*, when the female relatives of the warriors, like Thyads maddened by Bacchus, take pleasure in lamenting their dead. Yet the poet declares himself incapable of recounting the mourning fully, and abruptly concludes the poem with a brief mention of Evadne's suicide, the laments of Tydeus' wife, Deipyle, Argia's story, and Atalanta's sorrow for her boyish son Parthenopaius.

How do we evaluate the *Thebaid*'s unusual representation of women and mourning? The poem links the heroism of the devoted Argia and Antigone, which first unites representatives of the two warring sides, with *fides*, *pietas*, and *virtus* (fidelity, pious devotion, and masculine courage) as well as *clementia* (mercy); despite their heroic devotion, Argia, Antigone, and her sister Ismene are at their introduction all models of chastity and virginal modesty. Moreover, as mediator figures, Antigone and her mother Jocasta have earlier in the epic attempted several times, and failed, to resolve the brothers' quarrel and defer the war (7.470–534, 11.315–82). Here the poet notes that the lesser sex has remarkably become the better one (7.479). Elsewhere, Atalanta is also viewed as a peacemaker (4.249–50), and even the suicidal Evadne eloquently persuades Theseus to respect the women's cause at Athens (12.545–86). At the same time, the burial of Polynices has brought not resolution but further dissension; early in the poem the lamentation of Ide, the mother of Theban twins killed by Tydeus, is compared to the behavior of a Thessalian witch (3.140); Jocasta is compared to the most ancient of the Eumenides (7.477, perhaps a more legitimate fury than Tisiphone).

On the one hand, Statius may be imitating Euripides' play on the battle of the heroes, *Phoenissae*, in representing women and those not of military age as sources of sanity in a fruitless war (12.442). Indeed, Elaine Fantham (1999: 232) argues that in this poem the female mourning of the victims serves to represent the lack of glory and of closure

inherent in civil war. On the other hand, Statius certainly flirts with offering a positive role to uncharacteristically assertive female behavior in this complex and overdetermined conclusion. Perhaps the poet acknowledges the unusually central role he gives women when in the final lines he characterizes his own poem as following from afar and venerating Virgil's *Aeneid* (12.816–17). The image suggests Virgil's devoted Creusa following her husband at a distance as they leave Troy, yet failing to adhere to Aeneas' path.

Warriors and Leaders

From their earliest mention, women warriors provoke a variety of irresolvable questions in epic. Amazon warriors, especially those who came to the aid of the Trojans, are mentioned in Homer, but since their most important incursion in the war occurs after the *Iliad*'s conclusion, their brief moment of glory (*aristeia*) is reserved for a later (lost) Epic Cycle poem, the *Aethiopis*. Only the first book of Quintus of Smyrna's third-century CE *Post-homerica* preserves the *aristeia* of the Amazon Penthesileia, who in this poem foolishly believes that she will rival Hektor, kill Achilles, and set fire to the Greek ships (on this poem see Chapter 26, by James). Her *aristeia* is distinct from those of other overconfident young warriors in its repeated emphasis on her beauty, which stirs Achilles to an erotic response as he views her dead body. This moment was popular in early Greek art, which sometimes depicts a compelling glance between Achilles and the dying Amazon. In archaic Greek epic Amazons are viewed as inevitably to be defeated by Greek warriors, but compellingly attractive and admirable for their prowess. Over time, the monstrosity of the armed female begins to dominate her representation more heavily. Amazons and their monuments naturally lurk menacingly at the margins of the voyage of the "Argo" to the Black Sea; both Apollonius' and Valerius Flaccus' Argonauts come close to encountering them. Penthesileia's *aristeia* significantly appears in a mural on Dido's temple to Juno in Carthage (*Aen.* 1.490–3). Statius' *Thebaid* makes a point of establishing the Attic hero Theseus' credentials as a creator of order by noting his recent return from a successful expedition against the Amazons; his new consort, the Amazon Hippolyte, cannot join the battle at Thebes, despite her eagerness to do so, because she is pregnant. For both post-Homeric Greeks and for Romans, the defeat of the Amazons plays a role in envisioning their relation to, and conquest of, barbarians outside epic and colors their portrait within it.

Camilla, Virgil's native Italian warrior, is, like her Amazon predecessors (to whom she is compared at *Aen.* 11.648), beautiful and skilled on the battlefield. But the text emphasizes the unnaturalness of a female presence there, and this heroine is as vulnerable to wealth and beauty as she is herself beautiful. She dies in pursuit of extravagantly attractive armor, feminized by a wound in her exposed breast (11.803). As in Quintus, the female warrior has a disturbing effect on ordinary matrons, who are temporarily inspired to step out of their traditional roles and take to action on the city walls (*Aen.* 11.891–5) or even to begin to arm themselves (Quint. Smyn. 1.403–76). At the same time, Camilla's story evokes sympathy and becomes part of the poem's stress on the loss of talented youths caused by the Trojan incursion into the rural innocence of Italy. Silius Italicus' nomadic horsewoman Asbyte, who is modeled on Penthesileia and Camilla, falls a heroic victim to a Cretan priest of Hercules, and is avenged by Hannibal (*Pun.* 2.56–269) without the stress on her femininity found in Virgil and Quintus; the focus on Carthage and its exotic allies perhaps explains this difference.

Women's political leadership or professional roles provoke even stronger doubts. Medea, priestess of Hecate, has already symbolically stepped beyond virginal modesty in Apollonius because the path she has chosen habitually takes her outside the confines of her palace (*Arg.*3.250–2). The *Aeneid* evokes admiration for Dido's courage in founding

Carthage, building a city, and dispensing law and justice. But once in love, Dido neglects her duties, betrays her first husband by entering into a liaison with Aeneas, incurs the wrath of native African suitors, and ends by fomenting future enmity between Carthage and Rome with her curse. The ancient commentator Servius insists that the curt opening description of Dido's leadership, *dux femina facti* (the leader of the expedition was a woman, 1.364), should evoke astonishment in the hearer. Lurking behind Virgil's queen is the historical figure of Cleopatra, who in the Roman view feminized and orientalized the Roman general Anthony even if she ended with a courageous suicide. The monstrous Cleopatra appears in the battle of Actium represented on Aeneas' shield in *Aeneid* 8 and reappears in Lucan's *Civil War* as seducer of Julius Caesar. The only woman mentioned in the vision that Anchises presents to Aeneas of the public future of Rome in the underworld of *Aeneid* 6 is Ilia. She was the mother of Romulus and Remus who was raped by the god Mars and sent to her death (the fragmentary early Roman epic Ennius' *Annales* preserves bits of her story; see Chapter 31, by Goldberg). The *Aeneid*'s women generally remain more oriented than its men to the past. As noted above, the aggressive wives of Cato and Pompey in Lucan's poem may reflect the active participation of aristocratic women in politics and even on the battlefield after Julius Caesar's death. Anthony's first wife Fulvia, for example, was pilloried for involving herself directly in battles.

Both *Argonauticas* and Statius' *Thebaid* feature the story of the Amazon-like (Statius 5.144) Lemnian women, who kill their husbands and male children because they have been sexually neglected by their spouses; they establish their own government, and then mate with the Argonauts to repopulate their island. Hypsipyle, the daughter of the former King Thoas, is established as a just leader of this all-female society; unlike the other women, she maintained reason and piety and rescued her father from death. Yet without the advantage of deceit the Lemnian women are no match for men and readily give way to the erotic attractions of the Argonauts (Statius' Hypsipyle, however, is raped by Jason), thus confirming that an all-female society is both given to monstrous and irrational behavior and inevitably short-lived, like that of the Amazons.

Women in Love

Early Greek poetry is less self-conscious about the proper content of heroic epic than is the case in Rome. Yet as the tension develops between poetry that addresses erotic themes and the higher realms of epic, which ideally addresses public themes and martial deeds, romance begins to play an increasingly larger role in the poems themselves. Erotic dalliance with Circe and Calypso takes on an important role in the *Odyssey*, and Calypso in particular is deeply regretful over Odysseus' departure. The attractive virginal Nausikaa becomes the prototype of later epic virgins who fall in love like Apollonius' Medea. Although the encounter with Odysseus stirs the imagination of the marriage-minded princess, his tacit rejection of her father Alkinoos' matchmaking soon leaves this possibility behind. Nausikaa is left with a brief farewell to her potential suitor, but the poem does not develop her response to Odysseus. Under the influence of early Greek love poetry (especially Sappho) and tragedy (especially Euripidean tragedy), female victims of desire begin to play an increasing role in epics based on Greek myth if not, as in Lucan or Silius Italicus, in epics based on history (see Chapter 28, by Garner). Virgil's underworld in the *Aeneid* even provides a separate space, the Mourning Fields, for mythic women who died for love, including his own Dido.

From Apollonius on, Medea and to a lesser extent Hypsipyle play a central role in or become the models for erotic heroines in Roman epic. As noted earlier, Medea is compelled to fall in love with Jason by Hera and Aphrodite in order to facilitate his quest to Colchis for the Golden Fleece. While Homer lets us briefly into the mind of Nausikaa, as a

divinely-sent dream urges her to wash the family linens as a prelude to marriage, Apollonius describes in detail Medea's hopeless struggles to resist betraying her family for Jason. He records every shiver of passion, every move from paralysis to action, her fear and panic once she has helped Jason yoke the bulls and sow the dragon's teeth with her magic. Valerius Flaccus expands on his predecessor's portrait, redoubling Medea's resistance to betraying her family. Juno's first attempt to make her give way to love fails, and the goddess is forced to turn to Venus for help. The love goddess herself then disguises herself as Medea's aunt Circe, whose authority proves to be overpowering – more so than that of Medea's merely mortal sister Chalciope, who in Apollonius' version asks Medea for help in protecting her sons.

Medea and the divided and doomed heroes and heroines of tragedy then serve as the model for Virgil's Dido. Once again, the heroine is the victim of the goddesses Juno and Venus, who want a favorable reception for Aeneas at Carthage. Yet the poem is far more ambivalent about Dido's fall into a typically female and dangerous irrationality than in Apollonius' treatment of Medea. Apollonius certainly relies on and hints at Medea's future crimes and highlights her betrayal of her father and her complicity in the killing of her brother, but Valerius Flaccus' heavier emphasis on the dark future of the couple makes clear how delicate the treatment of Medea's terrifying aspects are in the Hellenistic epic, especially since Jason's willingness to deceive and betray the heroine is already playing an active part in the narrative. In Apollonius, Jason raises suspicions about his fidelity from the start, when he reminds Medea of the example of the Cretan Ariadne, who was left behind by Theseus after she helped him kill the Minotaur and escaped with him (*Arg.* 3.997–1007). The more mature Dido is propelled in betraying her dead husband by divinely-inspired feelings and dynastic incentives. She deceives herself into treating her liaison with Aeneas, begun without witnesses in a cave, as marriage, and her shift to destructive anger against the departing Aeneas is rapid. In Apollonius, the wedding of Jason and Medea also takes place in a cave, rather than, as they would have preferred, in Greece. In this case, the marriage is genuine despite the unusual setting, as are Jason's sworn oaths to the heroine, and hence Medea's anger at Jason for toying with abandoning her is pointedly justified. By contrast, Aeneas' bonds with Dido can and must be more easily broken, and his resistance to the heroine in favor of the Trojan destiny in Rome is also the result of explicit divine command. Both heroines in love rescue their lovers, but Dido is from the beginning also blocking Aeneas' fated path, whereas Medea's destiny becomes inextricable from Jason's.

Hypsipyle serves as a prototype of a female leader for whom erotic attachment plays a critical role. However, in contrast to Dido, Hypsipyle does not surrender to the murderous passion that sweeps over her fellow Lemnian women; she allies her women to the Argonauts to produce children, accepts Jason's destined departure on his quest, and, unlike Dido, she does produce male children by her lover who, in Statius' *Thebaid*, eventually seek out their enslaved mother and are re-united with her. The Hypsipyle episode in both *Argonauticas* prefigures and contrasts with the far more complex and ambivalent Medea episode, although as a whole it stands as a kind of paradigm for the dangers for men of erotically rejecting women. Statius' portrait of the beautiful Deidamia on Skyros in his *Achilleid*, for whose sake the young Achilles temporarily accepts female disguise, seems inspired by Hypsipyle as well; she too reluctantly accepts Achilles' departure for the Trojan War, in part because of the noble male child he has given her, Neoptolemus.

Overall, later epic portraits of lovesick women confirm the famous Virgilian remark about Dido that *varium et mutabile semper / femina* (a fickle and ever-changing thing is woman, *Aen.* 4.569–70); at the same time these women often facilitate the heroic achievements of men who are themselves also capable of passion, fear, deceit, betrayal,

and despair. From the beginning, heroic epics about journeys tend to address all humanity and its place in the cosmos. Hence they include even the most irrational or exotic women in the human race and evoke sympathy for their difficulties.

Women as Narrators

Many epic women speak at length on their own behalf, but rarely (despite the example of female Muses) narrate their own stories. Statius' Hypsipyle, however, becomes, like Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, the perhaps unreliable narrator at length of her own story (*Theb.* 5.48–498), even if this tale remains dominated by relations between fathers and sons (Nugent 1996). Helen in *Iliad* 3 (125–8) also weaves the stories of the battle fought for her into her web and is highly conscious of her future role in epic poetry (6.357–8). In *Odyssey* 4 she tells the story of Odysseus' foray into Troy in disguise as a beggar and her own role in bathing, recognizing, and keeping silent about his presence; Menelaos' subsequent story indirectly questions her claims for devotion to the Greek cause, however. As daughter of Zeus and a future goddess, Helen can adopt a role that places her both mentally and physically beyond ordinary human consequences. By contrast, we do not hear the story that the virtuous Penelope tells to her returned spouse in bed or learn of the subject that she weaves on the web that she constantly unravels in order to delay her marriage to the suitors, even if we do hear her speak of her difficult dilemma. Homeric women seem to acquire more potency as members of an audience, preferring certain themes (Penelope does not want to hear the story of the returning warriors from Troy at *Od.* 1.325–44) and rewarding storytellers, as the Phaeacian Arete does at *Od.* 11.335–41. Arete appears immediately charmed by Odysseus' dwelling on the mothers of famous heroes that he encountered in the underworld. Both Dido and Valerius Flaccus' Hypsipyle fall in love hearing Aeneas and Jason tell their stories. Statius, however, makes a point of having Argia and Antigone narrate their own experiences to each other and Argia's story is mentioned once again as she tells it to her sister in the closing lamentations by the women discussed earlier. Although Statius does not include their full stories in the text, his epic seems particularly sensitive to the power and importance of a female voice and perspective in a context where transgressive male violence is proliferating. Argia, for example, tells Antigone that Polynices wanted to return to Thebes above all to see his sister (12.392–7). The poem had earlier offered standard heroic motives for the war.

Conclusion

Ancient epic, especially by Homer and Virgil, was important in educating the young. Homeric epic, for example, deliberately avoided many myths concerning intrafamilial crime and conflict favored by later epic and drama, and gave a central role to a heroically faithful wife such as Penelope, who represents the ideal partner for a long-suffering hero. Although over time the influence of tragedy and elegy, and historical shifts in the role of women, broadened the scope and tone of epic's representation of women, it remained in many respects a genre more restrained and self-conscious about its role and tradition than other literary genres. In epics primarily devoted to "kings and battles," women, the rare female warrior excepted, largely serve as causes and victims of conflict, occasional mediators among warring men, and sometimes heroic mourners of the dead. In contrast to Homer, Virgil's women more actively impede heroic destiny and foment conflict among men more inclined to make peace. Imperial Roman epic, despite its obvious debt to Virgil, seems to complicate its representation of the female to include mediators for peace like Jocasta and Antigone powerful enough to be a threat to the fury Tisiphone herself (*Theb.* 11.102–5), fanatically devoted wives, and defenders of children (Imilce) or the dead

(*Thebaid*). Even the traditionally ferocious goddess Hera/Juno becomes a more benign and effective historical force in Silius Italicus and Statius.

Epics depicting heroic journeys are less constrained by historical realities and more experimental in their treatment of gender roles. Medea's or Circe's magical powers or the Lemnian women's revenge for their erotic rejection offer examples of the female capacity to enslave men to their appetites or condemn them to an unheroic destiny or disaster. When these epics focus on domestic life, they occasionally include significant roles for non-aristocratic women such as the *Odyssey*'s unfaithful servant Melantho and the devoted slave and nurse Eurykleia. Although all ancient epics can play on standard cultural clichés about female irrationality, infidelity, uncontrolled passion, vengefulness, and incapacity for public life, women and female divinities in these epics can play the role of helper and civilizer, especially in brutal foreign or exotic environments.

FURTHER READING

women, goddesses, and gender in Gilgamesh: Foster 1987; Harris 1990; Frymer-Kensky 1992; Abusch 1999; Cooper 2002.
women in Homer: H. Foley 1978 and 1995; Arthur 1981; Katz 1991; Felson-Rubin 1993; Cohen 1995; Doherty 1995; Holmberg 1995; Louden 1999.
goddesses in Homer: Slatkin 1991; O'Brien 1993.
women and gender in Apollonius: Hunter 1987 and 1993b, with further bibliography.
women and gender in Virgil: Perkell 1981; Lyne 1983; Muecke 1983; Rabel 1985; Starr 1991; Nugent 1992; Oliensis 1999.
women and gender in Lucan: introduction to Braund 1999.
women and gender in Statius: Vessey 1973; Dominik 1994a; Braund 1996; Nugent 1996; Lovatt 1999; Pagán 2000.
women and gender in Valerius Flaccus: Hershkowitz 1998b.
women in Roman epic: Keith 2000.
female lament in Roman epic: Fantham 1999.
goddesses in post-classical epic: Feeney 1991.
gender and genre in Roman epic: Hinds 2000.

18

Finding Asylum for Virginia Woolf's Classical Visions

Emily Pillinger

A stranger has come
To share my room in the house not right in the head,
A girl mad as birds

Bolting the night of the door with her arm her plume.
Dylan Thomas, "Love in the Asylum"

The language and figure of the prophet are the same from age to age and nation to nation. The clarity of his vision and the burden of his knowledge are too great a load for human senses, and the disbelief and mockery of his hearers tip the balance so that what might have been merely a strange urgency comes close to madness; the apocalyptic vision is expressed in magnificent but unconnected images which to the workaday mind of the hearer seem only to confirm the suspicion that the prophet is deranged.
Bernard Knox, *Word and Action* (1979, 46)

In his own splendidly portentous language, Knox (above) identifies a set of continuities that can be found in all representations of the visionary prophet. The prophet is blessed with knowledge that is a curse: his is a privileged understanding that spills beyond normal linguistic and cerebral capacities and destabilizes him, particularly in the eyes and ears of a skeptical audience. A figure whose mental state is challenged by divinely inspired visions, and whose difficulty in sharing those visions serves to detach him from the very community that should value the knowledge most, the prophet either pitches towards insanity or projects the appearance of insanity. The masculine possessive pronouns in the quotation are misleading, however, for Knox is responding to a specific character: to Cassandra in Aeschylus'

A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology, First Edition.
Edited by Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle.

Agamemnon, the prophet cursed by Apollo to speak the truth but never be understood. It is the characteristics peculiar to Cassandra's role as prophetess – her sexual vulnerability as a woman, her tortured but inspired speech, her undervalued knowledge, her identification with certain myths of metamorphosis, and her existence on the precipice of insanity ("mad as birds") – that quietly haunt Virginia Woolf, one of the most important writers on the self in the early twentieth century.

Woolf had an ambivalent relationship with the classical world. As a reader, essayist, and creative writer of catholic tastes, she could not be untouched by the literature of Rome and, to an even greater extent, Greece. She writes in her famous essay "On Not Knowing Greek": "it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age" (Woolf 1984, 38). At the same time, as a woman, excluded from many of the educational institutions that fostered a sense of ease and familiarity with the Classics, she was painfully alert to the elitism of classical scholarship. The patriarchal classical canon had been reinforced by generations of male scholarship, and women were still not fully accepted within the realms of either the scholars or the creative artists inspired by those ancient texts. As Woolf notes in "A Room of One's Own," "women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves" (Woolf 2008, 141).

Nonetheless, while Woolf was often anxious about her piecemeal understanding of ancient languages and literature, in "On Not Knowing Greek" she also hints at the peculiar insight that comes from having avoided conventional indoctrination, from remaining conscious of the unknowability of ancient Greece (Evangelista 2009, 2). She alludes to this when she opens the essay with the sly comment that schoolboy Greek surely sounds nothing like the language spoken in ancient Greece. Woolf balances her more general sense of educational disadvantage with an awareness of her distinctive capacities in the introduction to the first volume of *The Common Reader*, in which "On Not Knowing Greek" was published. There she defines herself as the figure behind the book's title:

> The common reader, as Dr Johnson implies, differs from the critic and the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole – a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing. (Woolf 1984, 1)

According to this model (another generalization with recourse to provocatively masculine pronouns), the technique of selectively and instinctively drawing on canonical culture contributes to an original perspective; Woolf makes a proud virtue of necessity. Woolf presents herself as the "common reader" with respect to the Classics perhaps more than she does with any other branch of literature. Indeed, her defiant amateurism not only allows her to find new paths of meaning

in ancient texts where others slip into scholarly ruts, but it even permeates her lived experience: "Greek, for all my ignorance, has worked its way into me" (quoted in Fowler 1983, 347). Responding to the always-alien language and literature of ancient Greece helped Woolf to develop her own idiosyncratic style of writing, one designed to expose the strange self that she inhabited, as well as to compose the many selves found in both her fiction and her non-fiction.

The most intense interplay between ancient Greek culture and Woolf's writing on the self occurred during the author's renewed Greek studies in the 1920s. Early in the decade Woolf read Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, producing her own crib and notes on the text, and the experience of getting to grips with Aeschylus' language informed and inspired "On Not Knowing Greek." As Prins and Dalgarno have shown, in that essay Cassandra becomes a figure for Woolf's Benjaminian understanding of Greek and the process of translation: Woolf finds that in Aeschylus' play "meaning is just on the far side of language" (Woolf 1984, 31; with Prins 2006 and Dalgarno 2001 and 2012). Working outwards from Woolf's quotation of Cassandra's first *ototoi* in the *Agamemnon*, dubbed by Woolf a "naked cry" of sound detached from semantic sense, Prins shows how Woolf treasures the character whose linguistic richness defies any facile communication of meaning, either on the page or on stage, in the distant past or in contemporary readings. Woolf also had a personal interest in Cassandra's voice. The production of non-sense, as Knox explained, is a marker of Cassandra's prophetic authority, but it is also associated with real or perceived madness. Woolf, seriously troubled by mental ill health, was driven to present her condition through her own articulation of Greek-inspired "naked cries." In turn, the freedom of Cassandra's voice, unbounded by the normal constraints of time or language, offered Woolf a model for a form of writing therapy (Peters 2009, 39). This therapy involved Woolf allowing her own voice to range with similar freedom across the cultural canon, reformulating mental trauma and dislocated authority as inspired creativity that could be valued in the present moment.

In her essays Woolf shows how silences, sounds, and words can create a language of mental and physical illness. For example, Woolf's use of ellipse becomes a reference to the enigmatic internal self: in "A Room of One's Own" its frequency has been interpreted as reflecting repression, unconscious desire, and self-conscious questioning (Allen 2010), and in her letters it bears sexual connotations (Cramer 2010). When it comes to portraying the most inaccessible forms of inspiration and delusion, Woolf turns to foreign literature, that which the non-native reader perceives as "the far side of language." In "On Being Ill," an essay that insists on the connection between mental and bodily suffering, Woolf writes of what it feels like to read when ill:

> In illness words seem to possess a mystic quality. We grasp what is beyond their surface meaning … In health meaning has encroached upon sound. Our intelligence domineers over our senses. But in illness, with the police off duty, we creep beneath some obscure poem by Mallarmé or Donne, some phrase in Latin or Greek, and the words give out their scent and distil their flavour. (Woolf 2012, 21)

In other words, Woolf grants her readers permission to identify her various pathologies as a true melding of *pathos* and *logos*: a medical phenomenon that always retains an intellectual and aesthetic dimension. Lee, sensitively warning against the danger of biographers dispossessing Woolf of her own illness, notes that Woolf herself "transforms illness into a language of power and inspiration" (Lee 1997, 194).

One much-analyzed story epitomizes the impossibly interwoven nature of Woolf's analytical, creative, and hallucinatory experiences in the context of Greek language and myth. According to Woolf, during her second mental breakdown in 1904 she lay in bed "thinking that the birds were singing Greek choruses and that King Edward was using the foulest possible language among Ozzie Dickinson's azaleas" (Woolf 2002, 45). The story was repeated by Woolf's family members and biographers, from her husband Leonard (who also applies it to a later breakdown) to her nephew Quentin Bell, who concludes his account with, "All that summer she was mad" (Bell 1972, 89–90). Dalgarno interprets these auditory hallucinations according to Woolf's ideas on the strained language of illness:

> in her biography Greek stands for the most distant horizon of intelligibility, the point beyond which the sane mind does not reach. Birdsong is communication in a language that the listener does not know, and to acknowledge it as language albeit unknown compromises the listener's social identity in a way that invites being labelled insane. (Dalgarno 2001, 33)

For Poole (1995), the vision exposes Woolf's sense of her limited knowledge of the Classics, a mortification compounded by the humiliation induced by the sexual advances she suffered from her half-brother George Duckworth, which she described in the context of a Greek lesson, and by her difficult sexual relations with her husband Leonard, another accomplished classicist. Poole's interpretation links Woolf's impression that the birds were singing Greek to her discussions of birds from specific myths elsewhere in her work. In "On Not Knowing Greek" Woolf talks of Sophocles' tragedies: "Here we listen to the nightingale whose song echoes through English literature singing in her own Greek tongue" (Woolf 1984, 28). From her references to the words of Sophocles' Electra on the grief of the nightingale Poole connects Woolf's hallucinations of Greek-singing birds to the myth of the sisters Procne and Philomela, the tale of literally unspeakable sexual and domestic violence. Philomela, raped and with her tongue cut out by her sister's husband Tereus, tells her sister what has happened by weaving the tale into a tapestry. In vengeance Procne and Philomela slaughter Itys, the child of Procne and Tereus, and feed him to his father, before in a mass metamorphosis all protagonists are transformed into birds. Tereus becomes a hoopoe, while Procne and Philomela become a nightingale and a swallow respectively (in most versions):

Procne laments the loss of her son in her beautiful song, while Philomela chitters incomprehensibly as the swallow.

While Poole has Woolf allude to the myth to express her feelings of shame and cultural inadequacy, others identify more optimism in the references. Dalgarno (2001) focuses on the power of the nightingale's voice, tracing the myth of Procne and Philomela through texts Woolf had mastered, including Aristophanes' *Birds* (which Woolf saw performed as the Cambridge Greek Play in 1903 and read in 1924); Prins (2006) explores Woolf's enthusiasm for the deliberate evasions of both birds. In fact it is the confusion between the two birds' voices that links the myth of Procne and Philomela to the prophet Cassandra in Aeschylus' drama, and Woolf picks up on this flexibility of association. In the *Agamemnon* Cassandra's inability to communicate is mapped onto the myth: initially Clytemnestra suggests that the prophet may speak a foreign language sounding like a swallow's song (1050–1051). Just a few lines later the chorus responds to Cassandra's voice with the suggestion that she is like the nightingale Procne:

> you cry forth about yourself
> a song that is no song, like a vibrant-throated bird
> wailing insatiably, alas, with a heart fond of grieving,
> the nightingale lamenting "Itys, Itys!" for a death
> in which both parents did evil. (Sommerstein 2008, 1140–1145)

Cassandra responds with the despairing wish that she were indeed Procne:

> Ió ió, the life of the clear-voiced nightingale!
> The gods have clothed her with a feathered form
> and given her a pleasant life with no cause to grieve. (Sommerstein 2008, 1146–1148)

Cassandra does not see herself as "clear-voiced," knowing as she does that her voice is defined by what Prins calls the "Cassandra effect": "something untranslatable in Greek, a foreign element within any language that sounds like the twittering of a swallow" (Prins 2006, 183).

The communicative difficulties and identity problems of Procne and Philomela reflect the multiple dimensions of Cassandra's vocal (dis)ability, a state to which Woolf responds as both a patient and a writer. To her listeners, Cassandra's language is strange and fragmentary, and at times beautiful. Her identification as either the swallow or the nightingale is not absolute, but something that occurs to her audience in the process of responding to her voice. When Cassandra intervenes to dismiss any comparison of herself with the nightingale, she effectively joins the audience in detached observation of her own dubious double. Woolf constructs a similarly fluid relationship with her avian counterparts, not only when she identifies (with) the language of the birds outside her window, but also when she uses the notion of Greek-speaking

birds to describe the chorus in Greek drama as the refracted and externalized versions of an authorial mind. They are:

> the old men or women who take no active part in the drama, the undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind; who can comment, or sum up, or allow the poet to speak himself or supply, by contrast, another side to his conception. (Woolf 1984, 29)

In her fiction Woolf develops the idea of birdsong as a marker of troubled creativity. While Woolf was writing the essays of the first *Common Reader*, she was also writing the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In *Mrs Dalloway* a devastating subplot concerns the veteran, Septimus, who is portrayed as gradually succumbing to the horrors of a breakdown following shellshock suffered in the Great War. Meanwhile his anxious Italian wife Rezia and his blusteringly incompetent doctors look on uncomprehendingly, moving further and further from any kind of communication with Septimus. Septimus sees visual and aural patterns where others see everyday life, responding to a very English bird: "The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern […] Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds" (Woolf 1996, 21). Septimus also suffers from the impression that birds are speaking Greek, just as Woolf had done during her illness. The sparrows have replaced the swallow's lament "Itys, Itys" with a new lament for Septimus:

> He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (Woolf 1996, 23)

As with Woolf's hallucinations, it would be reductive to gloss Septimus' mental trauma as simply a literary function, but there is no doubt that Woolf wanted to connect Septimus' suffering with a particular way of experiencing words, texts, literary traditions. Septimus' illness involves a shift in his sensory perceptions that approaches a kind of poetic sensibility: "He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom" (Woolf 1996, 96). This takes the man into a space where he feels capable of making unique sense of the cultural productions of the Western canon:

> He, Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilization – Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself – was to be given whole to… "To whom?" he asked aloud" (Woolf 1996, 67; the ellipse is Woolf's)

Septimus becomes a medium for speech from the past, relaying it to his wife:

> His friend who was killed, Evans, had come, he said. He was singing behind the screen. She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing his mind; wanting to add something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up. But she heard nothing. (Woolf 1996, 142)

A song heard only by the traumatized becomes, in the process of translation, a jumble of nonsense and poetry, voice and writing, quotation and supplementation. As Septimus spirals deeper into suicidal mania he finally sees Aeschylean swallows, but appearing as the pattern on the screen that had previously hidden Evans, they represent a frightening invasion of reality and expose the very frailty of his hallucinations.

> There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen. (Woolf 1996, 147)

Mrs Dalloway picks up on elements of Woolf's experience of psychological trauma to describe Septimus' mental disintegration. The less the patient is understood by family and acquaintances, the more this inspires a kind of trans-historical cultural awareness, an awareness that is marked by birds(ong) fluttering out of Cassandra's distant story of visions and obscured communications. The myth of Procne and Philomela that underpins this birdsong is certainly one of terrible violence. Yet it is also a myth of metamorphosis-as-therapy. After rape and revenge, the protagonists are whirled out of their incestuous world and transformed into birds, to sing their Greek song to the few listeners whose minds are uniquely tuned to their frequency: the prophet Cassandra, and now the veteran Septimus, and the writer Virginia Woolf. The characters who "hear" the Greek birds in their madness are strangely sensitive to the ebb and flow of literary tradition: they know, or show, how trauma is transformed into art. Herein lies the therapeutic potential of the myth. For Woolf, metamorphosis is not just about modernist tropes, or ancient mythography, but personal renewal, and this belief underpins two of her other novels of the 1920s: *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*.

To the Lighthouse is a novel primarily about family and social class, and about the passage of time as it is measured by Woolf's memories of her own family at the turn of the century. It is an *Odyssey* of sorts, with the past configured as an Underworld. In *To the Lighthouse* a story of visual creativity punctuates the verbal fireworks of the narrative: Lily Briscoe paints in the face of the arrogant scholarship of Mr Ramsey, Mr Bankes, and Mr Charles Tansley, returning obsessively to Tansley's awkward remark that "women can't paint, women can't write." Early in the novel Lily's mental language swirls around her defiant efforts to paint in an abstract style that baffles Mr Bankes. She is tackling a scene that will be brought

together by the correct placement of a tree. Free-associating words and surreal images combine in a mind on the verge of inspiration: "to follow her thought was like following a voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil" (Woolf 2000, 29). As Lily's ideas race on, birds appear in a sudden climax provoked by a young character's exploits with a shotgun:

> her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand, and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive, tumultuous, a flock of starlings. (Woolf 2000, 29–30)

Lily's experience of the birds has them appear at points when she is most determined to assert her power as an individual and as an artist. In two episodes Lily replays in her head scenes of Mrs Ramsey pressuring her to marry, and in both she notices that birds are singing outside the window. The second time around the chant "Septimus, Septimus" is rephrased as Mrs. Ramsay insisting "'Marry, marry!' (sitting very upright early in the morning with the birds beginning to cheep in the garden outside)" (Woolf 2000, 190). By now, though, a decade has passed and Lily has mastered the uneasy memory; with this comes a transformation in Lily's creative work and in Woolf's novel. Lily's development of her artwork out of past trauma stretching into classical antiquity mirrors Woolf's: "as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past"; meanwhile the "winy smell" of the sea that surrounds the narrative brings the colors of Homeric Greek into Lily's painterly mind and into Woolf's writing, translated through a sense-perception that is neither visual nor verbal (Woolf 2000, 187, 191). Both artworks draw to a close in the final lines, where Lily places the final touch on her painting. There she draws the single line in the center of her canvas that represents the correctly-placed tree, and with that, her comment on the image concludes Woolf's novel: "I have had my vision" (Woolf 2000, 226).

In its negotiation of family history as both stimulus and obstacle to artistic creativity, *To the Lighthouse* offered a real form of therapy for Woolf, who claimed that after writing it she stopped thinking of her parents on a daily basis: "writing *The Lighthouse*, laid them in my mind" (Woolf 1977–1984, *Diary* III: 1925–1930, 208). In her next novel, *Orlando: A Biography*, myth-inspired metamorphosis as therapy for the creative artist becomes the conceit that drives the entire narrative, through the metamorphosis of the main character and through literary, rather than family, history. The novel is a self-referential piece of writing. The novel is dedicated to Vita Sackville-West, with whom Woolf was passionately involved in the 1920s. However, while the trappings of the book's narrative are modelled on the house and heritage of Sackville-West, in its central preoccupations the book is as autobiographical as it is biographical (Raitt 1993).

This chapter began with a clutch of misleading masculine pronouns. *Orlando* begins with one of the most loaded pronouns in English literature: "He – for there could be no doubt of his sex." The "biography" of Orlando is structured by two

fantastic impossibilities: Orlando's Tiresias-like (though effortless and unmotivated) shift from a male to a female existence, and the fact that this existence lasts for multiple centuries. The life of Orlando as an author sits at the center of the novel, mapping out a literary history that embraces both male and female experiences of writing (De Gay 2006; Gualtieri 2000). Woolf's "common reader" had reached into the past to create a personal but coherent narrative of the canon: "some kind of whole." The writer Orlando, by contrast, experiences literary history as his/her fragmented present – "she had a great variety of selves to call upon" (Woolf 1992, 314) – and reaches forward to a time, place, sex, and literary mode in which to flourish as an individual, whole and complete. It is only once Orlando attains this that his/her writing, which has been undergoing its own metamorphoses in tandem with the writer, can meet its potential.

Over the course of the biography Orlando's writings keep transforming, shifting to suit the age in which they are written. Orlando's early years see his uncontrolled emotions inspiring florid poetry; he declares his love for the Russian princess Sasha through the narrator's mocking alliteration: "the words coming on the pants of his breath with the passion of a poet whose poetry is half pressed out of him by pain" (Woolf 1992, 47). The narrator also teases Orlando for his derivative efforts, referring to a cabinet full of his Elizabethan writings on the subjects of Greek myth:

> One was inscribed "The Death of Ajax." Another "The Birth of Pyramus," another "Iphigenia in Aulis," another "The Death of Hippolytus" another "Meleager," another "The Return of Odysseus," – in fact there was scarcely a single drawer that lacked the name of some mythological personage at a crisis of his career. (Woolf 1992, 76)

Yet there is one artwork that evolves alongside Orlando and, as with Lily Briscoe's painting, it all hinges on the representation of a tree. At the beginning of the novel Orlando sits as a boy under an oak tree that, like Odysseus' olive, marks the place that is his home. He returns to it regularly while its sprouting and falling leaves measure the passing of years, and stands under it as a woman at the end. "The Oak Tree" is also a poem on which Orlando works for several centuries. The natural feature and the poem together form a kind of identity for Orlando, who *is* a tree to his admirers: for Queen Elizabeth he is "the oak tree on which she leant her degradation," while for Sasha he is like "a million-candled Christmas tree" (Woolf 1992, 26, 54). Indeed, Orlando's relationship with the tree as both art and lived experience recalls the tale of Apollo and Daphne, the first erotic myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree (and thence into poetry) as she flees Apollo (Brown 1999, 206-207). This association is reinforced by the presence of a tapestry in Orlando's house that portrays the myth, to which Orlando also repeatedly turns as a source of reassurance: "rising and falling on the eternal faint breeze which never failed to move it. Still the hunter rode; still Daphne flew" (Woolf 1992, 317).

The tapestry as a symbol of the overlaps between Greek myth, art, and life, offers a faint echo of Philomela, who wove her autobiography into a tapestry. Orlando's creativity concerning her own life is associated with another kind of needlework. Orlando's memory is "a seamstress," who "runs her needle in and out," and by the time of the nineteenth century the narrator tells readers that the manuscript of "The Oak Tree," in a charmingly mundane twist on the theme, "looked like a piece of darning most conscientiously carried out" (Woolf 1992, 78, 236). Nor is this the only appearance of Procne and Philomela. *Orlando* sees a return of the imagery of birds that represented the sisters' escape through metamorphosis, and, as in *To the Lighthouse*, the appearance or singing of birds now marks the artist's development into a healthy whole: "a single self, a real self" (Woolf 1992, 314).

In the middle of *Orlando* the discombobulated protagonist ponders her version of hearing the birds sing Greek, in a typical combination of lofty philosophizing and bathos:

> "What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables. At one moment we deplore our birth and state and aspire to an ascetic exaltation; the next we are overcome by the smell of some old garden path and weep to hear the thrushes sing." And so bewildered as usual by the multitude of things which call for explanation and imprint their message without leaving any hint as to their meaning upon the mind, she threw her cheroot out of the window and went to bed. (Woolf 1992, 176)

Later, the birds become more tightly linked to Orlando's creative spirit through the feather as writing implement. Here, as for Lily Briscoe, the connection is made at a point where the artist is resisting the pressure to marry; as Orlando's ring finger tingles the pen starts to produce sentimental doggerel against Orlando's will, displaying a mind of its own in what Orlando identifies as "some infirmity of the quill" (Woolf 1992, 238).

Unlike Lily, though, Orlando ultimately finds a healthy resolution in marriage, partly because she and her husband Shelmerdine consistently challenge each other in their gender roles: "'You're a woman, Shel!' she cried. 'You're a man, Orlando!' he cried" (Woolf 1992, 252). So the birds start to align in a mark of good omen with this new partnership. Orlando's first meeting with Shelmerdine is prefaced by a mysterious walk punctuated by falling birds' feathers, after which:

> some strange ecstasy came over her. Some wild notion she had of following the birds to the rim of the world and flinging herself on the spongy turf and there drinking forgetfulness, while the rooks' hoarse laughter sounded over her. (Woolf 1992, 248).

After their marriage Orlando speaks to her husband in an affectionate voice that transforms Woolf's traumatic hallucinations of birds singing Greek in the azalea shrubbery outside her window: readers are told to imagine of Orlando's voice that "a nightingale might be singing even so among the azaleas"

(Woolf 1992, 257). Soon the very sounding of their names further exorcises the memory. After a jay shrieks "Shelmerdine," husband and wife call out to each other, and just as they always grasp each other's meaningful nonsense (such as "Rattigan Glumphoboo," found in Orlando's telegram to Shelmerdine), so the fragmentation of language that the birds represent becomes a positive force. The chapter concludes:

> the words went dashing and circling like wild hawks together among the belfries and higher and higher, further and further, faster and faster, they circled, till they crashed and fell in a shower of fragments to the ground; and she went in. (Woolf 1992, 262)

In the next and final chapter, Orlando will complete the triumph that is "The Oak Tree," and the birds will mark the very ordinariness and sanity of the world in which she now lives.

> Orlando pushed away her chair, stretched her arms, dropped her pen, came to the window, and exclaimed, "Done!" She was almost felled to the ground by the extraordinary sight which now met her eyes. There was the garden and some birds. The world was going on as usual. (Woolf 1992, 271)

Orlando brings to a comforting resolution the myths of Daphne and Procne and Philomela. It also, albeit indirectly, rewrites the mythic story of Philomela's literary descendant, Cassandra. Cassandra suffered a terrible and personal penalty for the mental time-travel caused by her prophetic gift. External audiences of the ancient texts that tell her story understand that she looks forward into the future, but in failing to communicate to her immediate interlocutors the narrative that tells of those events, her own existence is doomed. Orlando positively reframes Cassandra's situation in several respects. "The Oak Tree" is ultimately understood and well-received by an internal audience, though the readers of *Orlando* are not privileged to read or hear the poem. However, those external readers of the biography do get to perceive the moment where lived experience finally produces a text that finds its perfect audience, in Shelmerdine's conjugal understanding, and in the "spirit of the Age," which enables Orlando both to write and to reach an appreciative readership. Meanwhile the external readers also get to appreciate the text of Woolf, the profoundly uncommon Common Writer, who has produced "a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing," all in perfect synchrony. In place of Cassandra's doomed voice crying out truthfully but incomprehensibly into the future, *Orlando* tells of two apparently contented and productive writers, Orlando and Woolf, both finding sanctuary in the age they inhabit and equipped with powerful responses to the mythic and literary past. Orlando's "biographer" hears birds singing not of loss, sexual shame, exclusion, or miscommunication. Rather, at least for a moment, "Life, Life, Life! cries the bird" (Woolf 1992, 269–270).

Guide to Further Reading

For the challenges faced by women seeking to study and write about classical antiquity at the turn of the twentieth century see Delgano (2001), Fiske (2008), Fowler (1983; 1999), Hurst (2008), Marcus (1987), Olverson (2008), Prins (1999), Richlin (1992), Stray (1998). Woolf's theories of translation and her identification of Greek as "the perfect language" are imaginatively explored by Dalgarno (2001; 2012) and Prins (2006). Koulouris (2011) addresses Woolf's adoption of Greek culture more broadly. On Woolf's feminist reinterpretations of the broader literary canon see De Gay (2006) and Gualtieri (2000). The ethical and scholarly difficulty in untangling the "fictions" and "realities" of Woolf's mental illness is sensitively addressed in the superb biography of Lee (1997), following earlier works by Caramagno (1992) and Trombley (1981).

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A Companion to Greek Tragedy
Edited by Justina Gregory

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Women's Voices

Judith Mossman

"It is in the exercise of language that a human being is constituted as a subject" (Benveniste 1966, 259). The importance of this idea to the study of women's speech in tragedy is evident. It is perennially startling that a culture that prescribed the invisibility and silence of women produced, and indeed promoted to the highest cultural status, a genre in which women are portrayed as supremely articulate. The parts they take in the traditional stories that form the basis of the tragedies do not necessarily require much elaboration. But because they are given such an extraordinary range of voices, endowed with remarkable power and (emotional) authenticity, the female characters of tragedy resist simple relegation, and constitute a provocatively vocal and persistently eloquent Other.[1] To investigate the nature of the female subject in tragedy, it becomes vital to study the language of female characters.[2]

This all-important female speech has been studied in a variety of ways, as McClure has summarized (2001, 6–11). The most promising are a sociolinguistic approach, which seeks to relate speech to social roles and conditions, suitably adapted in the light of what is known about ancient views of language and in view of the stylization of the tragic genre, and the approach (most favored by McClure in her 1999 book) through the study of verbal genres and their manipulation by the poets. The two are not incompatible and may profitably be combined. Of course there are methodological pitfalls: what, for example, is the relationship between the speech of ancient Athenian women and female characters in Attic tragedy, if any? There does seem to have been a relationship, if a complex one, between the speech of tragic male characters and that of Athenian men: at least, some modes of speech are convincingly identified as colloquial (because they occur frequently in comedy or Platonic dialogue, in texts which do seem to aim to reproduce a recognizable diction: see Stevens 1976, for example). The iambic trimeter, the meter of the spoken parts of tragedy, is identified by Aristotle as that closest to everyday speech (*Poetics* 1449a24–27, cf. 1459a12). But if the diction of tragedy occasionally "zooms" its hearers into everyday speech (for the concept of zooming see Sourvinou-Inwood, chapter 18 in this volume), its high style cannot be said to approximate it as a general rule. The same

must apply to female characters, only more so, since women's voices were intended to be rarely heard, at least outside (though see now Blok 2001, 95–116).

It is nonetheless reassuring that we have some evidence that female speech was perceived as having special linguistic characteristics of its own: for example, Plato identifies linguistic conservatism as a female tendency (*Cratylus* 418b–c), and Aristotle certainly regards some types of speech as appropriate or inappropriate to women (though this refers more to verbal genres than to linguistic features proper: see *Poetics* 1454a22–24 and 31, where he seems to be saying that Euripides' Melanippe makes inappropriate use of rhetoric). So a dramatist might have wanted in some sense to make a character sound female, even if a female tragic character did not sound much (or at all) like an Athenian woman. More importantly, there is ancient evidence for the view that language and subjectivity were linked in the minds of the Greeks: Gera, in her recent examination of ancient Greek views on the development and purpose of language, traces the important idea that "the possession of speech . . . is often thought to entail the capacity for rational thinking as well" (2003, 182). It may be possible to argue, based on this widespread ancient concept, that the articulate Greek women of tragedy, just by speaking, can be seen to lay claim to full subjectivity, even if that claim is often subsequently challenged or denied.

So although there is, clearly, a potential danger of anachronism and of cultural inappropriateness in applying some criteria to the female speech in the tragic texts, the approach still seems worth pursuing. It is very hard, and probably impossible, to identify any particular linguistic criterion that always and invariably seems to suggest a female character. One might be tempted to argue paradoxically that silence is the linguistic preserve of the tragic woman – that in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, for example, Jocasta leaves the stage without a word after her realization, whereas Oedipus cries out that all has become clear to him as he recognizes his fate – but there are always counterexamples. We do not know enough about Aeschylus' famous lost play *Myrmidons* to know the quality of Achilles' silence, but that he was silent for a long time was the most celebrated feature of that play and perhaps of *Phrygians* too (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 911–13, with Dover 1993a on 911–12; Taplin 1972; and now Michelakis 2002, 37–39). Sociolinguists working on modern languages, and particularly those who study "the linguistic means by which men dominate women in interaction" (Tannen 1994, 20–21), have also discovered that broad generalizations tend to fail, and have evolved methodological strategies to deal with this: as Tannen (1994, 21) has shown, "linguistic strategies are potentially ambiguous (they could 'mean' either power or solidarity) and polysemous (they could 'mean' both)." So silence (in fiction or in life) can be dominated or used as a means of control; interruption can betoken a lack of interest in what the interlocutor says, or a boundless enthusiasm for it. In an analogous way, I believe that when looking at tragedy it is necessary to take each play as a separate entity and accept that a technique used in one play to create a female character might not work in the same way in another play, with a different set of circumstances and a different linguistic atmosphere, a different word-world. This might seem rather convenient, but it is surely a necessary move: all characterization operates by placing the descriptors it uses to create a persona in a particular context and playing off the character created by those descriptors against his or her setting. The character is unintelligible out of context and the context is nothing without the character. It will be clear that while I agree with Griffith (2001,

136) that "no neatly defined portrait of 'woman' emerges (from this play [*Antigone*], or from any other – or from Greek tragedy overall)," I do believe that, despite the inevitable circularity of looking for difference in women's speech, the search can still be a fruitful exercise. But every play needs a different set of tests. There is no alternative to taking each drama individually on its own terms.

If this approach is taken, the question of whether one can discern differences in the treatment of female characters in different authors becomes more, not less, complex, especially given that so much tragedy has been lost, and that in two out of three cases the plays we have are a selection made for us by people with very different preferences and priorities from our own: Sophocles, in particular, looks a far more diverse author, and perhaps one more interested in women, when the fragments are taken into account than he does from the extant plays (one of which, *Philoctetes*, is the only extant tragedy without a female character). One could perhaps argue that in Sophocles and Euripides an ever greater desire for naturalism (a dignified and stylized naturalism, but significant and appreciable nonetheless) is in evidence where it is not in Aeschylus, and that this results in more and more subtle ways of rendering women's speech. But at this point in the argument, someone will mention Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, and the theory will collapse.

Christopher Pelling, in chapter 6 of this volume, discusses Clytemnestra's superb rhetoric, her inimitable way of misleading without ever really lying; Laura McClure (1999, 70–111) her manipulation of verbal genres; Simon Goldhill (1984, esp. 8–98) the transgressiveness of her language. I would like very briefly to discuss her short scene with Cassandra. As has often been pointed out, Cassandra is the only person not to fall under the spell of Clytemnestra's persuasion, and the only woman she encounters – hardly a coincidence, even if one does not agree entirely with McClure's characterization of Clytemnestra's persuasion as erotic (1999, 93; see also Goldhill's very interesting account of this scene [1984, 81–88], and Montiglio 2000, 213–16).

Clytemnestra tell Cassandra, "You too get yourself inside, you, Cassandra I mean; since Zeus without anger [*amênitôs*] has made you share with the house the lustral water, standing with many slaves by the household altar" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1035–38). The contrast between Clytemnestra's successful persuasion of all the other characters and Cassandra's imperviousness to her is all the more striking because Clytemnestra is at first very much in her usual flow, inserting multiple ironies into her every line: Cassandra will indeed stand by the altar for a sacrifice very soon indeed. The position of *amênitôs* ("without anger") between "Zeus" and "the house" leaves it ambiguous as to whether Clytemnestra is commenting on the impassivity of Zeus' plan or the lack of wrath in the house where she has ended up: but we know (from 155, where the chorus spoke of a "remembering, child-avenging Wrath") that a *Mênis* who shares many characteristics with Clytemnestra in fact inhabits the house. Fraenkel (1950 on 1036–38; see also Denniston and Page 1957 on 1035 ff.) comments on the inclusion of slaves in household sacrifices: "What Clytemnestra here makes appear as a special favour is in truth nothing more than the common practice of antiquity" – so the irony is the more vicious, especially as she then contrasts the kindness of masters who are *archaioploutoi* (of ancient wealth) with the unkindness of the *nouveaux riches*.

The address is "perhaps not very polite," "rather near to the limits of good manners" (Fraenkel 1950 on 1035), so there is a slightly impatient tone, but the

references to the wealth of the house recall her earlier speech to Agamemnon (958–74), and Clytemnestra's use of the consolatory example of Heracles as slave in 1040–41, a rhetorical commonplace (see, for example, Sophocles, *Antigone* 944–87), perhaps recalls the method she used on Agamemnon in the tapestry-scene, introducing Priam as a (specious) example on which to model himself (935). Heracles is also a specious example in relation to Cassandra: though he did undergo sexual humiliation during his servitude to Omphale (in some versions dressing as a woman), the whole experience was always temporary, and inflicted as a punishment for misconduct (see *OCD* s.v. Omphale, and Loraux 1995, 116–39); Cassandra is innocent, not merely humiliated but violated, and would be facing a lifetime of slavery if she were not about to be murdered by Clytemnestra. But the difference in Clytemnestra's opponent is becoming apparent: Cassandra does not respond to this or any other gambit. As Clytemnestra loses her temper, she also seems to lose her grasp of the realities of language: in fact, Cassandra panics her into a linguistic Colemanball,[3] underlining her frustration at her sudden inability to communicate. Cassandra's silence, therefore, is not the silence of helplessness, but the silence of power – the power which knowledge gives her. For all that both Clytemnestra and the chorus interpret her lack of speech as making her like a wild animal (on this tendency in Greek thought see Gera 2003, 182–212), it is she who stands, paradoxically, in the position of strength. Eventually she will do as Clytemnestra says and go into the house where the sacrifice is waiting (1056–57); but when she does it will be – uniquely – on her own terms, in full knowledge of what awaits her, undeceived by Clytemnestra's double meanings. So although (as others have pointed out: see, e.g., Wohl 1998, 113) she is figured in many ways very like Iphigenia (each, for example, is hauntingly compared to a picture: *Agamemnon* 242, 1328–29), there is a contrast between them too. Iphigenia, gagged and so deprived of speech, can only communicate silently, as a picture does; Cassandra, initially silent, becomes wonderfully eloquent, giving the house a voice, narrating story after story – until she exits and her picture is wiped out. She is never referred to after the end of the play, and her death is not mentioned as being avenged by Orestes. So Cassandra's silence, and her speech, both acquire meaning from the text which surrounds them.

A useful comparison may be made with another prisoner of war: Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Tecmessa comes out of Ajax's tent to describe the horror of Ajax's madness (significantly, she does so after asking, "how shall I tell the unspeakable tale?" – which sets the tone for the concentration on speech acts which will follow) and the "double sorrow" of his realization of it. As she relates the beginning of his insanity (284–87), her ready and detailed narration recalls the way in which Deianira in *Women of Trachis* inclines to narrative and story-telling (on which see Kraus 1991). Her description of Ajax's brusque and stereotypically masculine response (so Segal 1981, 109, 133–38; and see Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 507–20) when she queries his departure in the middle of the night is ironic in the light of her function in the play so far, which has been, and will continue to be, one of reporting and verbal interpretation, as well as those very female verbal genres, consolation and lamentation. His proverbial rebuke of her speech, enjoining silence onto her, applies only to the immediate context; indeed, by 312 he is threatening her if she does not speak to him and tell him what has happened. It is in fact primarily in terms of his speech acts that Tecmessa reports his madness and recovery from it, moving from his

crazed volubility in his madness (represented both directly in 91–117 and in Tecmessa's description at 301–6) to silence (311), to threats (312), to groaning, which he previously regarded as unworthy of a hero (instead of his usual inarticulate animal cries – 322), and back to quieter lamentation (325). Segal (1981, 133–38) has noted Ajax's progression from these reported generic expressions of grief and pain to the double-edged eloquence of the Deception Speech. From our point of view it is particularly interesting that Tecmessa concentrates so carefully on the noises Ajax makes: she, unlike Clytemnestra in the presence of Cassandra, really wants to be able to interpret Ajax, to understand and communicate with him, but is hampered in constructing interpretations of Ajax by the limited material he gives her.

This contrasts with the opening scene and the first choral ode, where there is more concentration on what Ajax does than on what he says, and it is the voices of his enemies that are foregrounded: Odysseus addresses Athena as a voice (14); she tells him to proclaim Ajax's madness (67), and later warns him to control his speech (127–30). The chorus then concentrates on the malignant force of rumor (142, 148, 155–56, 166, 167–68) and calls upon Ajax to appear to inflict silence on his enemies (169–71). They address and personify the rumor at 173–74; beg Zeus and Apollo to avert it at 187; and return to it again at 188–92 and 198–99. Tecmessa's purpose in her explanatory narrative is ultimately to allow the chorus's words to do their utmost in helping him (330), but not even her own words will ultimately do much good. But her attempts at interpretation do not only characterize Ajax as inaccessible and delineate the violence of his moods, they also characterize her as a gentle mediator and as one who, despite everything, genuinely cares for Ajax and is affected by what will happen to him. One might dare to say that it also makes her sound very female as she continually struggles to find the best possible response to her focus of care, Ajax. At the same time, her interaction with the male chorus, a cooperative and mutually respectful relationship, must characterize Ajax as representing an extreme of masculinity.

In the following scene it is not only the text in which Ajax and Tecmessa operate that endows their speech with meaning, but also the Homeric text against which they are written. As Segal points out (1981, 134): "Homer's Hector and Andromache . . . can hear and move one another; Ajax and Tecmessa, like Heracles and Deianira, speak different languages." It is most important that in this version of the scene between Hector and Andromache in the *Iliad* (6.390–502) Tecmessa is forced into playing both characters: she echoes both the speech in which the loving Hector foreshadows Andromache's fate and Andromache's words in which she reminds Hector that he is all she has left (*Iliad* 6.447–65 and *Ajax* 496–505; *Iliad* 6.429–32 and *Ajax* 514–17; see Bers 1997, 50–51, and de Jong 1987). Tecmessa's performance at least provokes pity from the chorus, if not from Ajax, but when Ajax comes to play Hector in the scene with Eurysaces, it proves a travesty. The Homeric scene ends with premature lamentation for Hector: Ajax closes the Sophoclean version down by brusquely rejecting lamentation with another masculine generalization (580, cf. 586). But like his last such comment, this one fails in its effect, this time even in its immediate context. His final metaphor ("The wise physician does not chant incantations over a wound that calls for surgery," 581–82) is complicated, not least because it is so concisely expressed. On the surface it contrasts magical chanting (used to stop bleeding at *Odyssey* 19.457 and elsewhere) with surgery. But because the

word he uses for incantation is also commonly applied to erotic magic and hence to a particular type of (usually female) persuasion, and because the audience will inevitably see his reference to cutting as pointing to his suicide, it also contrasts Tecmessa's words with his own impulse to action. But his effort to have the last word is temporarily frustrated by the chorus's and Tecmessa's forcing him into stichomythia (one-line exchanges) and then into *antilabê* (part-line exchanges).

When Ajax reemerges and speaks the Deception Speech, he describes his new attitude by saying (in a literal translation), "I was made female in respect of my mouth at this woman's hands" (651–52). Zeitlin (1990a, 82, also 72–73) has said of this: "[Ajax] in his madness has not acted the part of the hero. . . . Thus the deceptive speech makes sense as a feminine strategy enlisted in the service of restoring an unequivocal manliness he can only achieve . . . by dying the manly death – heroically and publically onstage – yet in the woman's way." The phrasing suggests that it is *only* in words that Ajax has changed, that his mode of outward communication rather than his attitude is different. But it is the gentler tone of these lines rather than their deceptive aspect that Ajax might see as feminized: in *Ajax* deception is in fact most associated with Odysseus rather than with women. Some would also dispute Zeitlin's contention that suicide is a feminine death, and indeed one that Greek society condemned (see de Romilly 2003). The rhetoric of this speech is off-key in a number of ways, as Pelling has shown (see chapter 6 in this volume).

We might conversely ask whether there are any implications for Tecmessa in the fact that she is forced to adopt two Homeric roles, one male, one female. Tecmessa is not a transgressive female character like Clytemnestra, who adopts male language in order to get her way;[4] she may not keep quiet for very long despite Ajax's orders, but she does go inside when he tells her to, she laments for him and covers up his corpse, and in every respect her behavior is aimed at securing what is best for him. Rather, her adoption of a dual role in this scene is forced on her by (and of course simultaneously serves to delineate) the comparative unconcern of Ajax. This is underlined by the fact that when she plays Andromache and describes the ruin of her home and family at 515–17, it becomes clear that where Andromache speaks of Achilles killing her father and brothers, it was actually Ajax who ravaged Tecmessa's home (though her parents were killed in some other way, like Andromache's mother). It fits well that Tecmessa the interpreter of Ajax should also have to supply her own sympathy and interest. Tecmessa thus emerges as a strong focus of the important theme of language in this play, whose own language conveys a character defined by its relation to Ajax as distinctively female, and contributes a voice against which to judge Ajax's.

Yet more prisoners of war will help us make some further points. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, we find perhaps the greatest variety of female characters in any single play. *Trojan Women* is rarely treated as a problem play, and yet in many respects it is remarkably difficult to fit into many schemas that seek to formulate a definition for tragedy. So, for example, Rivier says of it (1944, 175): "There is nothing tragic about this play, even though it abounds in bloodshed and tears, since tragedy stems from reflections on the origin of misfortune, not on the mere perception of its physical effects." Its structure encourages the reader (or audience) to compare the succession of women with whom Hecuba interacts to one another; and as the action of the play happens mostly off-stage (or indeed before the play begins), the criteria for comparison are very largely conveyed by their contrasting modes of speech. The male

characters of the play, apart from Astyanax, are Greek, not Trojan, and this intensifies the feeling that the women exist in a rather separate world from men. Talthybius goes to and fro; Menelaus judges the *agôn*; but neither of them has much at stake, since neither is aware of the doom hanging over the Greeks which is determined in the prologue. It is hard indeed to feel that, compared with the onstage direct presentation of the women and their concerns, "the self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male" (Zeitlin 1990a, 68) – either the Greeks or even Astyanax, so much more important for his potential and for his symbolic value than for his present persona. The important things are said by women in this play, because they are felt by them. And Euripides is careful to make what they say appropriate to female characters and a female chorus, avoiding showing people in an extreme situation all sounding the same (a phenomenon discussed by Silk 1996b and Mossman 2001, 376). This play is about the death of a city, and the city is usually primarily a male concern; but in this play the city is shown through the minds of the Trojan women as the frame for the *oikos* (household), conceived of less as a state than as a collection of families (see 198–206, for example). Although Astyanax becomes almost symbolic of the future of the city, he is simultaneously (perhaps primarily) a vulnerable family member for Hecuba. Of course cities and *oikoi* have a common characteristic: when there are no men in them they are conceived of as empty (see Thucydides 7.77.7 and Lysias 7.41), and of course the women's feelings about the fall of the city overlap with what those of male non-combatants might be (had the Greeks left any of them alive). It is a question of emphasis, but the emphasis is on that which an Athenian audience might expect to be of most importance to women: the family.

How then does Euripides differentiate this multiplicity of female voices? It is not hard in *Ajax* to discern a contrast between the male voice of Ajax and the female voice of Tecmessa; but how are Cassandra and Andromache and Helen and Hecuba individualized? I think it is possible to see that each of the major female characters has her own peculiar voice; it is also possible to see each voice as connecting with and relating to the others and performing an intellectual function within the play. It has been rightly pointed out (e.g., by Croally 1994, 84–97, esp. 86–90; see also Scodel 1998, esp. 145–54) that each of the characters is profoundly concerned with marriage in one way or another: Cassandra sings a perverted marriage-hymn; Hecuba reflects bitterly on the marriages which should have been made for her daughters but which will never be; Andromache is troubled by the new "marriage" she must contract and what her conduct in it should be; Helen's ruptured marriage to Menelaus is to be resumed, and her perverted marriage to Paris has caused all the trouble. This is important, and obviously contributes to the female atmosphere of the play. As important for their individuality, though, is the way in which the characters express this concern.

Hecuba is the focus around which the action revolves; as one might expect of a character who bears the weight of the tragedy, it is she who is the great poet and orator of the play. This would surely be true of a male protagonist as well; but it might still be legitimate to look for ways in which her gender is expressed as part of her individuality. First, solo and antiphonal lamentation, the most obvious female speech genre (since it was, and is, perceived as a function of women in life as well as in fiction: see McClure 1999, 40–47; Alexiou 1974; and on this play, Gregory 1991, esp. 160–62 and 176–78), marks her as the non-combatant female survivor of the sack

of a city. But in her other utterances a distinctive view of what has happened to her emerges. For one thing, she is the character in the play who most consistently questions the gods and the accepted order of the universe: not surprisingly, this tends to make her the character who uses the most abstract language. She also, though, has the widest range of different tones and roles: mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, captive, queen, victim, accuser. Hecuba is the only character (apart from the chorus) to report conversations with others: she renders in direct speech conversations she had with Helen and recalls how Astyanax would chatter away to her (see Bers 1997, 100–101). More fundamentally, she has been described as inconsistent, especially with regard to advising Andromache to buckle down and carry on as a concubine and telling Helen she should have killed herself if her position was genuinely that of a captive bride (see Waterfield 1982). It could be argued that this multiplicity of voice is most characteristic of a female protagonist (changeability being a female characteristic from early Greek poetry on: see Semonides fr. 7.27–42 West, where he compares one of his female character types to the sea). Clytemnestra and Medea are obvious examples of sinister multivocal female protagonists. Although some female leads are not (or not in the same way: Deianira, for example), it is hard to think of a male protagonist who is: Ajax, for example, maintains his own voice even in the Deception Speech. Even Odysseus (in *Ajax* and other plays) is less changeable.

If Hecuba sounds slightly different in every scene, as I believe she does, that must be at least partly to do with the differing nature of her interlocutors. I have noted elsewhere (Mossman 2001) that women may argue differently in the presence of men from the way they do when in a single-sex group: in *Trojan Women*, however, this cannot be argued, as I did for *Electra*, by studying the numbers of general reflections, as there are remarkably few of those in the play as a whole, and there does not seem to be much, or indeed any, correlation between the presence of men and the predominance of sententiousness, as there was in *Electra*. This is an example of what I said above about every play constituting its own word-world. The general principle, however, does seem to me to hold good in the scene between Hecuba and Helen in the presence of Menelaus, in that both attempt to manipulate him; but the presence of Talthybius makes much less difference to them: he is the go-between with the male world of the Greeks and as such is accepted and does not modify their speech as Menelaus can be seen to do.

What of the female characters? It might have been expected that Cassandra, not Hecuba, should have been the one most given to abstract thought and expressions, but in fact the most disconcerting thing about Cassandra is her determination to take literally what most would see as metaphors and act out the logical consequences of them, to insist that her future liaison with Agamemnon is a marriage and to celebrate it accordingly; to take what she knows about the future and see herself as literally sacking Agamemnon's house in return (359), and to view the disaster which will befall the Greeks as a victory for the Trojans, which should therefore be celebrated. This is, of course, in stark contrast to the Aeschylean Cassandra, whose metaphors cluster densely, but whose conduct remains consonant with the nature of her situation and the world around her; and it has the effect of making her even more disconcerting to the other characters, and even to the audience, who might be taken aback by her extreme application of logic even though they know she is right. (Croally 1994, 230, has a different comparison with the Aeschylean Clytemnestra.)

The effect is heightened by minimizing the number of actually metaphorical expressions she uses: in all of 353–405 the only metaphors which could be described as "live" are *antiporthêsô* ("I shall sack [Agamemnon's house] in turn," 359), which she turns out to mean literally, and her use of *stephanos*, "crown," at 401, a term suggested by the comparison (almost a competition) she is drawing between the Greeks and Troy. In her response to Talthybius she introduces one figurative comparison which cannot be connected to her obsessions, marriage and victory, when she says that Odysseus will one day think the Trojans' troubles like gold when compared with his own (432). At 444 she calls her description of his wanderings "hurling words like javelins," which, again, does not connect with her literalized metaphors; but when in the next line she says her marriage to Agamemnon will take place in the house of Hades she may almost mean this literally (445). The same may be true when she calls herself one of the three Furies (457) and when she envisages herself victorious in Hades and claims again that she will sack the house of Atreus (460–61). For the audience these expressions both emphasize the strangeness of Cassandra (especially in the light of the intertextuality with Aeschylus) and simultaneously invest what she says with a very strong air of plain truth; for Hecuba and Talthybius they make her seem demented. It is important that Hecuba responds to Cassandra's marriage-hymn with a reproachful address to Hephaestus (343–45); this will contrast with Hecuba's later, less conventional addresses to the gods (see Croally 1994, 79–81).

When Cassandra has left the stage, Hecuba's speech highlights how little she has been able to inspire belief: the keynote of this speech is the contrast of present woe and future uncertainty with past happiness, underlined linguistically by Hecuba's persistent use of *polyptoton*, as she uses the same verb in different tenses and voices (see 468, 487–88, 499; she also uses different parts of the same adjective at 496). Intentionally simple though the diction of this great speech is, Hecuba is more inclined to "live" metaphors than Cassandra (cf. 469, 496–97, and 508–9). At 489 the imagery of the cornerstone metaphor seems especially appropriate since Hecuba is relating the troubles of her house.

The scene with Andromache is particularly interesting in this context. For one thing, there is a surprising amount of tension between Hecuba and Andromache, which emerges after the antiphonal lament they share. Hecuba has been totally supportive and protective of her daughter, and there were some indications in Cassandra's madness of concern for Hecuba, notably her eagerness to show that Hecuba would not after all be a slave to Odysseus (427–30). But the dynamic is different with Andromache. She quite abruptly insists that Polyxena is better off dead, and specifically better off than herself, rejecting Hecuba's "while there's life, there's hope." A scholion on 634 is so wrong-headed it actually says something very interesting: "he is not aiming at the underlying characters. For now Andromache philosophizes along the same lines as Cassandra did before." But the two characters are in fact totally different. Cassandra, as we have seen, didn't really philosophize at all; Andromache's first speech, though, is full of moral reflection, albeit of a different type from Hecuba's.

Here, rather than in relation to the male characters, it may be interesting to consider the proportion of general reflection in the speeches of the three female characters we have encountered so far. Cassandra has 3 lines of general reflection in

353–405 (3/50, omitting 383–85, or 6 percent) and 2.5 lines in 424–61 as we have it, though there is a lacuna after 434 (2.5/38, or 6.57 percent; this includes the lines in trochaic tetrameters). Andromache in 634–83 gives by far the most sententious speech in this play: she has 11.5 lines out of 48 (deleting 634–35), or 23.9 percent. This is evidently because she is struggling to work out a moral position for herself in the midst of chaos: she speaks no generalizations at all in 740–79 in her response to Talthybius' announcement that the Greeks have decided to kill Astyanax. That would seem to hold the key to why using the same criteria for interpreting speech characteristics does not necessarily work in different plays: here the women are in such extreme circumstances that the kind of social constraints which dictate Electra's use of general reflections are no longer valid: why should Andromache now care what Talthybius thinks or modify her speech in any way? Ironically, as she describes her attitude to her first marriage (643–58), she does so insistently in terms of speech and speech acts (compare Tecmessa), and the control over her speech which she exerted is the essence of her virtue: "I aimed at *high repute*," she explains [*toxeusasa* in 643 is a common metaphor for speaking as well as aiming at something: see Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 446; Euripides, *Hecuba* 603]; "whether *blame* already attaches to women or not . . . I put aside my longing for the very thing that brings the most *scandal*, namely staying outside, and I stayed in the house. [Contrast Andromache in *Iliad* 6, who is, of course, not in the house at all, and see Croally 1994, 90 n. 43.] I didn't let into my house the *clever talk of women* but I was content with having in my own mind a sound teacher from my own resources. I kept before my husband *a quiet tongue* and a tranquil look. . . . *Report* of this reached the Greek camp" (trans. Barlow 1986; my italics). In keeping with this is her comparison of herself and Hector to yokemates who have been parted (669–72): if a dumb animal is unhappy in such circumstances, how much more so will be an articulate human being, who has taken so much care over her speech? (See Gera 2003, 182–212.) The total despair and frustration which makes her tell Talthybius to take Astyanax away and eat his flesh if he likes is very different from her earlier "philosophizing."

A similar point could be made about Hecuba's speeches (taking only the long speeches for reasons of space): Hecuba's first speech (for which no men are present) has a generalization ratio of 4.5/45, or 10 percent. At 686–708 (again, no men are present unless you count Astyanax) she speaks none as such (686–94 are an extended metaphor rather than a general reflection). Interestingly, in the *agôn*, where one often finds general reflections clustering and Menelaus is judging the contest, Helen (on the attack) speaks none, and Hecuba, attacking back, in all of 969–1032 speaks only 2 generalizing lines out of 64 (3.125 percent), though she has an impressive and ominous general remark at 1051. Burying Astyanax at 1156–1206, again, with no men present, she reverts to a similar proportion as in her first speech: 5.5/50, or 11 percent; but when she tries to rush toward the fire that is consuming Troy, generalization is obviously going to be lacking: her own specific suffering is naturally what she cries aloud, Talthybius or no Talthybius (1272–83).

Andromache is seeking the best line of conduct for herself in this new, chaotic universe; as such she speculates more than Cassandra, who is sure even of the new order and her place in it. Andromache indeed also uses more metaphors; but she does not query its nature, as Hecuba does. Andromache in cursing Helen makes use of abstractions, calling her the daughter not of Zeus, but of Avenging Curse, of Envy,

of Murder and Death (766–71); but Hecuba questions the nature of Zeus himself, in a famous and arresting passage before the *agôn* with Helen (884–88). Only Hecuba, the character who most consistently speculates about the gods (Croally 1994, 70–84), could meaningfully have said this (in this play), and only she could take on Helen directly and on her own terms. The *agôn* has been much studied (see, e.g., Lee 1976, Barlow 1986 ad loc, Lloyd 1984 and 1992, and Meridor 2000), and space will not permit a full analysis here; but a few brief points should be made.

This passage, as is characteristic of any *agôn*, is highly rhetorical, and in keeping with this Hecuba's speech takes on a new and different aspect, as has often been said. This is the voice she uses that stands out most clearly from the others, and that it does so must be partly due to Helen. It is interesting to contrast Helen, the wicked wife, with Andromache, the good one: where Andromache's speech acts were the essence of her virtue, Helen's are rhetorical markers in an oration. Indeed, even when she is just asking Menelaus why she has been brought outside she uses a word which is also a rhetorical technical term (*phroimion*, "beginning," 895).[5] Her speech of 49 lines (deleting 918, 959–60) has a four-line preamble followed by a formal tricolon ("first . . . second . . . then . . . "). There are two more rhetorical narration-dividers (931, 945), and two examples of *hypophora* (938 and 951; *hypophora* is the anticipation of one's opponents' objections). Helen thus lays tremendous stress on the act of argument and the present speech (as opposed to the control of speech in the past). Hecuba's speech is quite different in this regard (though of course nonetheless rhetorical for all that). In 64 lines we have a two-line preamble (969–70: "First of all I shall become an ally for the goddesses and show that this one does not speak justly"), whose phrasing actually points not to Hecuba's speech but to the falsity of Helen's, and then no formal rhetorical marker (that is, no reference to this speech *as* a speech) until 1029. Hecuba does use the retrospective equivalent of *hypophora* in that she constantly interrogates what Helen has said (and indeed what she has *not* said: see Lloyd 1984 and also Croally 1994, 120–62; Hecuba refers to Helen's speech at 981–83, 998, and 1010); but she does so with much more apparent naturalism. In general Hecuba's speech gives the impression of tumbling out of her in a tirade: note, for example, the way that Helen uses the interjection *eihen*, "well now," outside the meter, creating a very strong break between 944 and 945 as she moves from one argument to another; whereas Hecuba incorporates it into her line, making only a small pause, at 998. Not all of Hecuba's arguments are reasonable; but her anger is sincere, and shines through her rhetoric, whereas Helen's sterile logic, as ruthless as Cassandra's but self-serving where hers was not, is also conveyed through the conventions of language.

Why do all this? Why write a play where almost all the characters are women, indeed women in the process of suffering the most brutal type of objectifying exchange transaction possible (to borrow the type of terminology used by Wohl 1998, 59–117), being transformed from free women into slaves? Can there be any reason other than that the poet wished to demonstrate that subjectivity and identity can transcend even the most dire circumstances if it can still speak? True, the poet is male (as are the actors). But just as the male actor must wear a female mask and perhaps modify his voice to sound female (see Pickard-Cambridge 1988, 167–71), so the poet can be seen to modify his voice and allow his characters to sound, if not like women, at least like tragic women, and to sound like individuals at that. And if they sound like

individuals, it becomes much easier to see them as moral agents, as subjects, as thinking beings, much harder for the contemporary audience simply to dismiss, and much more rewarding for later audiences and readers. What would tragedy be if its women were as silent as the (unnamed, dumb) girl in Menander's *Dyskolos*? In one sense the action revolves around her; but only in the sense that the action of a Hitchcock film revolves around the MacGuffin, the indeterminate object that serves only to advance the plot or motivate the main characters; this might be tolerable in a comedy, but would make for very impoverished tragedy. The silent Iole in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* is the exception that proves the rule: it is, after all, Deianira's reaction to her that dictates the movement of the tragedy as much as Heracles'. But in any case, because her silence is characterized and conjectured about by others, just as Cassandra's is, it ceases to be dumb and takes on a communicative value, even if it is open to multiple interpretation. As Wohl puts it (1998, 56): "in the silent *parthenos* lies tragedy's preservation of a fantasied space . . . of a female other beyond the control of the male self."

As it is, the interrelation of male and female speech in tragedy, in all its diversity and poetic elaboration, so problematizes the male/female self/other polarity that women become, as Croally has said (1994, 97), "the other inside." In this problematization lies the greatness of the Athenian dramatists' achievement.

NOTES

1 Zeitlin 1990a coined the powerful phrase "playing the other" to describe women's role in Greek tragedy. Subsequent work has built on her important study and sought to describe the function of this "other" further, but most have broadly concluded that, as Foley succinctly puts it (2001, 12–13), "Greek tragedies . . . provide poetic justification for the subordination of women, foreigners, and slaves. The voices and freedom to act with which drama endows women may in fact . . . largely serve this same end despite appearances to the contrary." Female characters, in the end, are the tools of the male poets in reasserting masculine identity and supremacy. The overall thrust of this consensus must be right, since the alternative is to suppose that the Athenian dramatists were campaigners for women's rights (or indeed the abolition of slavery), which is obviously wrong. But the central premise of much of this work is highly, and perhaps anachronistically, political: it strongly implies that tragedy is all about the city and women's place in it. Important though tragedy may have been for the Athenian polis, and vice versa, tragedy is not only about Athenian political thought (or we would have stopped reading it long ago). Perhaps there should be more emphasis on the emotional response of audiences to these highly elaborate portrayals of women. After all, one can see the tendency to represent female perspectives in ways which differentiate, but do not devalue them, as early as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

2 Wohl 1998, xxix–xxx, is well aware of the importance of language to subjectivity: she quotes Lévi-Strauss: "[the woman] could never become just a sign and nothing more, since even in a man's world she is still a person, and since in so far as she is defined as a sign she must be recognised as a generator of signs" (1969, 496), but herself thinks, "On the one hand, the woman is not as obvious or secure a subject as the man; on the other, she is not a complete object," and argues that the female characters "try to define a subjectivity for themselves, in the process exposing the components and modalities of the tragic

subject.'' The attempt to define this subjectivity, like the fact of subjectivity itself, must be determined and shaped by language.

3 The text of 1052 is extremely problematic: *esô phrenôn legousa peithô nin logôi*, lit. ''speaking inside the/her mind I persuade her with my words.'' Is Clytemnestra proposing to use telepathy or can the phrase represent the Homeric phrase *tou (tôi) thumon eni stêthessin epeithen*, ''s(he) persuaded him in his mind''? In any case, Clytemnestra sets up a clash between Cassandra's supposed voice and her own, even though Cassandra is not saying anything in any language, and surely what we expect to be at stake is her understanding, not her utterance. The lines seem then to suggest that Clytemnestra will manage almost miraculously to persuade her as long as she utters (utters, *not* understands) Greek, as long as she can get her to participate in a verbal struggle such as she has just had with Agamemnon; but in this she fails.

''Colemanball'' is a term coined by the British satirical magazine *Private Eye* in honor of a particularly accident-prone sports commentator, David Coleman. The most famous example of the genre was part of a TV snooker commentary by Ted Lowe: ''Griffiths is snookered on the brown, which, for those of you watching in black and white, is the ball just behind the pink.'' Actually closer to Clytemnestra's remark is one of Coleman's own: ''and for those of you watching who haven't television sets, live commentary is on Radio 2.'' Attempts such as that of Denniston and Page 1957 to mitigate this (deliberate, important) absurdity are not a success.

4 See *Agamemnon* 351 and Goldhill 1984, 39, for one definition of what component of her speech is masculine – ''the power of conceptualisation in language.'' See also McClure 1999, 74, who takes both rationality and persuasiveness as masculine (though persuasion is very often associated with female speakers and I doubt whether it can really be gendered). Sociolinguistic studies often show modern women consciously adopting male language strategies in public: see, e.g., Tannen 1994, 195–221, which interestingly links this and other phenomena to do with conversation at work to Goffman's argument that the relationship between language and gender is a matter of display rather than identity (1979).

5 The scholiast thought Helen addressing Menelaus by name and not as ''husband'' indicated boldness. However that may be, Helen's naming of her husband certainly contrasts with Menelaus, who doesn't like saying Helen's name at 869–70, and relates to Helen's elaborate use of both Paris' names at 941–42 (perhaps with some resonance with the earlier part of the trilogy, but perhaps also distancing herself from him). Hecuba uses names in a sophisticated manner in the *agôn* scene: she plays a variation on a regular pun on Helen's name at 891 (see also *Agamemnon* 689–90) and on Aphrodite's at 989–90, thus creating a verbal link between them just as she is arguing that the Cypris who accompanied Paris was Helen's own mind. Compare the way that Sophocles' Ajax continues the persistent concentration on words and speaking shown in his lament with Tecmessa and the chorus (see 354, 362, 368, 386, 392–93, 410–11, 423–24, 428–29) into his speech at 430–80 by means of his pun on his name at 430–33.

FURTHER READING

The bibliography on the portrayal of women in Greek tragedy is vast and ever increasing, especially when contributions on individual plays are taken into account. Classic treatments of the subject in general include Foley 1981, des Bouvrie 1990, Zeitlin 1990a, and Seidensticker 1995. For a very useful survey of recent views and approaches see Foley 2001, 6–18. There is much less written specifically on the portrayal of their language, but see McClure

1995 and 1999, Griffith 2001, and Mossman 2001. On the speech of real Athenian women see most recently Sommerstein 1995, who mostly uses evidence from comedy. He identifies a number of differences from male speech and concludes: "Certain of these differences clearly reflect the subordinate status of women in society" (84). On silence in Athenian culture in general see Montiglio 2000. On female costumes and masks, supposedly invented by Phrynichus, an older contemporary of Aeschylus, see Pickard-Cambridge 1988, 190 and n. 4. On acting styles and the limited evidence for differentiation in voice and manner between male and female roles see now Easterling and Hall 2002, especially the essays by Edith Hall (2002; 3–38), Eric Csapo (2002; 127–47), and Ismene Lada-Richards (2002; 395–418).