attention. Its inclusive meaning, extending to women and slaves, is unpa
alleled in Athenian discourse; the 'people' (*dēmos*) who exercised pow
(*kratos*) is elsewhere always exclusively defined as the collective ma
citizenry of the polis. But the context of the inclusive use is of course
discussion of *tragedy*. Despite the genre's prevalent authorisation of t
social status quo, it does give voice to those debarred by their gender
class from what *we* would call their 'democratic right' to free speech,
grants them temporarily in imagination the 'equality in the right to pub
speaking' (*isēgoria*) and the freedom to express opinion (*parrhēsia*) in reali
enjoyed solely by citizen males.

Athenian tragedy's claim to having been a truly democratic art-form
therefore, paradoxically, far greater than the claim to democracy of t
Athenian state itself. The tension, even contradiction, between tragedy
egalitarian form and the dominantly hierarchical world-view of its conte
is the basis of its transhistorical vitality: it is certainly an important reaso
why it is proving so susceptible to constant political reinterpretation in t
theatres of the modern world (see Ch. 11 below).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

For the Athenian and Athenocentric aspects of tragedy see Loraux (1993); Goldhil
(1986) ch. 3; Hall (1989a) chs. 2–4; M. Whitlock-Blundell, 'The ideal of Athens i
Oedipus at Colonus', in Sommerstein et al. (1993) 287–306.

The more important contributions to the study of gender issues in tragedy include
Foley (1981) 127–68; Zeitlin (1984) 149–84, and (1990) 63–96. See also de
Bouvrie (1990); Just (1989); Rehm (1994).

On issues of social class in tragedy generally there are important insights in di
Benedetto (1971), Citti (1978), and Rose (1992) chs. 4–5. Slavery in tragedy has no
prompted much work, except on Euripides, for whom see Synodinou (1977), and
Kuch (1974).

6

SIMON GOLDHILL

The language of tragedy: rhetoric and communication

Plato's *Republic*, when Socrates is describing the imperviousness to fear
the Guardians of his new Republic, he catches himself using rather grand
taphorical terms, and he immediately rebukes himself for speaking
agikōs, 'tragically', 'like a tragic character' (413b4). Demosthenes, the
eat orator, dismisses the rhetoric of Aeschines, his opponent, as bombast
th the verb *tragōidein*, 'to play in a tragedy' (which is also a dig at his
rmer career as an actor) (18.13; 19.189). The comic playwright Aristo-
anes, who repeatedly parodies the language of tragedy, has a character in
s play *Peace* wonder why the hero didn't fly on Pegasus rather than a
ung-beetle, and thus appear *tragikōteros*, 'more tragic', 'more like a tragic
ero' (136). Already, in the classical polis, 'the tragic' has become synony-
ous with a certain grandeur of expression, high-flown periphrasis and
ven heroic posturing. Tragedy is – and was perceived to be – made up of a
articular register of language: there is a style and vocabulary proper to the
enre. So how is the language of tragedy to be characterised? There are
everal types of answer that can be given to this question, that take us far
eyond generalisations about the grand and the heroic. What is more, the
agic texts themselves are deeply concerned with how language is (to be)
sed. This chapter will explore the questions of tragic language.

The first type of answer that can be developed is a formal one. One basic
rticulation of tragedy is the difference between scenes and choral odes. The
enes are conventionally divided into *rhēseis* and stichomythia. A *rhēsis*
plural *rhēseis*) is a set speech of varying length (rarely more than a hundred
nes) in which a figure offers an exposition of his or her position, or a
escription of an event, or a reflection on events. Stichomythia is the rapid
xchange of mostly single lines between two or more characters. Often the
rmal exchange of *rhēseis* breaks down into violent argument in sticho-
ythia, and such a scene is known as an *agōn* (plural *agōnes*), 'contest'.
oth *rhēsis* and stichomythia are almost invariably written in the iambic
etre, which Aristotle calls the 'closest to human speech'; and in Attic

dialect, that is, in the tongue of its audience, although, as we will see, with much heightening of expression. The choral odes, generally termed *stasima* (singular: *stasimon*), are strikingly different. First, they are sung by a group, not spoken by an individual, and they are accompanied by music and dancing. There is a large variety of metres, which can be associated with particular strong feelings or particular actions. (So, for example, the chorus' first entrance singing what is known as a *parodos*, or 'entrance song', is repeatedly written in 'marching anapaests', a rhythm fitted to the formal action of the chorus' entrance.) A *stasimon* is usually made up of one or more pairs of stanzas which have the same metrical form, and presumably would have had similarly corresponding music and dance. These are known as *strophē* and *antistrophē* (literally 'turn' and 'counterturn', dancing terms). The patterning of pairs of *strophē* and *antistrophē* may be preceded by an introduction and followed by an epode, a free-standing stanza. The language of the choral odes is not merely dense, heightened lyric poetry, but also is largely in a version – far from thorough-going – of Doric dialect. Doric is traditionally used for choral lyric throughout Greece (even in Attic-speaking regions like Athens). But it remains hard to judge exactly what the effect of such elements of Doric dialect would have been on an Athenian audience. In comedy, characters with strange accents and dialects are mocked; but the convention of choral lyric being composed in Doric is deeply institutionalised. Perhaps the Doric tones add to a Panhellenic grandeur of tragedy. Perhaps the special authority of the chorus in drama is reinforced by this dialectal shift which, along with other elements, distinguishes the choral odes from the utterances of the characters on stage.

The articulation of scene and choral ode and the resultant interplay of collective, sung lyric and individual, spoken exposition are basic to tragedy and its narrative technique, but there are many variations of form and interaction. For example, individual figures may perform solo lyrics, the chorus leader often contributes to spoken scenes, lyric exchanges take place between chorus and characters (cf. Ch. 7, pp. 157–61). It is always worth remembering that particularly in translation the fundamental shifts of dialect, verse rhythm, and speech and song, and collective and individual voices, are often very hard to appreciate – and to represent in English.

There is a second type of formal description of tragic language that can be developed, however. For the language of tragedy also incorporates many elements of the language of the city, as in its performance before the city it itself becomes a recognisable and key strand of public discourse. The language of tragedy is public, democratic, male talk (but cf. Ch. 5, pp. 118–24): that is, the language of tragedy is in all senses of the term *political*.

I want to trace here four elements that make particularly important

contributions to the verbal texture of tragedy. The first is the tradition of literary language, and pre-eminently Homer. Homer holds a privileged place in Athenian cultural life. His epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, played an integral role in the education, institutions and ideology of the polis. They were the main teaching texts in schools, and, like the bible in Victorian Britain, provided a resource of normative images of the world and ways to relate to the world that informed all aspects of Athenian culture. Homer's poetry was recited by bards or rhapsodes, and by less professional performers, not only at a host of social events – a figure in a Xenophon dialogue (*Symposium* 3.6) says he listens to a Homer recital every day – but also at grand civic occasions such as the festival of the Panathenaea, where the epics were recited in full before an audience of the polis by bards who were competing for prizes for their skills in recital.[1] Many of the stories of Greek tragedy are taken from Homer and the epic cycle (other epic poems often circulating under the name of Homer but already, in the fifth century, thought not to be by the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*). Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, for example, tells the story of Orestes' regaining of his property and proper place, a story which is rehearsed some dozen times in the *Odyssey*, and it would be hard indeed to appreciate the *Oresteia*'s narrative without seeing how it relates to and rewrites Homer's account.[2] The language of Homer is a particular literary construct that developed over many years of poetic performance, but seems to have been largely fixed by the seventh century BC – no one ever *spoke* 'Homeric Greek'. Its depiction of a heroic society, with its elaborate forms of address, intricate rituals, and extensive interactions with the divine, provides a privileged – and grand – vocabulary for key areas of tragic action. Homeric language also includes words, as well as grammatical and syntactical forms, that were already archaic and obscure to fifth-century audiences (a fragment of Aristophanes' earliest comedy displays a school-room with boys learning their Homeric vocabulary![3]). The willing adoption and adaptation of the epic timbre of Homer is central to the force of tragic language.

The archaic grandeur of Homeric language resounds throughout Greek tragedy. At one level, it can be heard in a very general sense: so, the opening line of *Philoctetes* is 'This is the shore of sea-girt Lemnos ...' 'Sea-girt', *perirrutos*, applied to Crete in Homer (*Od.* 19.173), is a compound adjective of a type very common in Homer and thus too in tragedy, as tragedy establishes its affiliations with the heroic world, and articulates its

[1] Plato, *Hipp.* 228b; Diogenes Laertius 1.57. On the Panathenaea's competitions, see Shapiro (1992) and Kyle (1992).
[2] See Goldhill (1986) 147–55.
[3] Fr. 222 K. For pictures of such study, see Beck (1975) esp. 14–15.

new representation of that heroic world. So, here at the beginning of the *Philoctetes*, where the topography of the play is being established in relation to a Homeric geography (as the play itself will traverse a space between Homeric and fifth-century obligations and duties), 'sea-girt' sets up a significant Homeric resonance. Unlike the Lemnos of Homer (and Aeschylus and Euripides) Sophocles' Lemnos is a desert island, and the opening adjective thus establishes a frame of expectation against and with which Sophocles works. At a more specific level, a Homeric inheritance can be heard in the epic associations of particular marked words. So, when Orestes at the beginning of Sophocles' grimmest masterpiece, the *Electra*, hopes he will win *kleos*, 'glory', by killing his mother, his comment inevitably recalls not only the commonly proclaimed purpose of epic heroes to win *kleos*, 'glory', but also the specific associations of Orestes in the *Odyssey*, where he is held up repeatedly to Telemachus, Odysseus' son, as an example of a young prince who has indeed won glory for himself. At a further level, there are precise and often extended literary allusions to the Homeric epics. So Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax* tells Ajax that if he dies and she becomes a slave, 'someone of my masters will say "See the bedfellow of Ajax who was the mightiest of the host; see what menial tasks are hers, who once had such happiness." So someone will say ...' (500–4). This clearly echoes Hector's famous anticipation of his own death in *Iliad* 6, when he imagines his wife as a slave doing menial tasks for her new Greek masters: 'Someone may say ... "This is the wife of Hector who was the best at fighting of the horse-taming Trojans who fought around Troy." So someone will say' (459–62). The linguistic echoes between the representations of the two warriors and their women help reinforce the parallels between the encounter on stage and the epic scene – and stress the complex ways in which Sophocles develops his representation of Ajax through Homeric models of action and ideology.[4] Tragedy re-presents the tales of the Homeric, heroic past for the polis of the present: the way in which epic language constantly informs tragic language is integral to this process of rewriting, and this backward glance is a key element in the grandeur and heroic distance of tragic language.

A second area that provides a major influence on the language of tragedy is ritual and the world of religion. Tragedy is performed as part of a festival of Dionysus, and there has been extensive discussion about to what degree the Dionysiac frame affects the tragedies themselves.[5] But there is no doubt that many aspects of the religious life of the city are reflected on stage.

[4] See Knox (1961), criticised by Winnington-Ingram (1980) esp. 304–29, and Goldhill (1986) 155–61.

[5] See e.g. Henrichs (1984); Connor (1989); Winkler and Zeitlin (1990); Seaford (1994); Sourvinou-Inwood (1994); Ch. 2 above.

When Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia* describes how she killed Agamemnon, she says: 'I struck him twice, and with two groans his limbs went slack. I add a third blow as he falls, an offering to chthonian Zeus, the Saviour of corpses' (*Ag.* 1384–6). This moment is horrific because she is representing her three blows and spurts of blood as if they were the three libations that started every symposium or drinking-party at Athens. The libations in that domestic and celebratory ritual are to the Olympian gods, the chthonian gods, and, thirdly, to Zeus the Saviour. Clytemnestra with violently ironic blasphemy has made her third blow a libation to Zeus the Saviour ... of corpses – as she celebrates the spilling of blood rather than wine in the household. The perversion of norms that is this murder of husband and king is expressed as the perversion of the language of religious ritual. Indeed, the language of the rite of sacrifice in particular occurs throughout the *Oresteia* (and other Greek tragedy) to invest killing and other acts of violence with a sense of sacramental transgression.[6]

There are many other rituals which lend both vocabulary and a structure of action to the narrative of tragedy. So, the lengthy opening section of the *Libation-Bearers* is dominated first by Electra's pouring of libations at the tomb of her father, where she wonders what language of prayer to use, and secondly by the *kommos*, a ritual invocation of the dead Agamemnon that combines elements of a mourning song with a conjuration or raising of the spirit of the dead. As the language of sacrifice, ritual pouring and mourning recurs throughout the trilogy, so the action is here stated as ritual – in the progression towards the establishment of cult and the grand ritual procession with which the trilogy ends. The imbuing of the *Oresteia* with the language and performance of ritual is fundamental to its expressions of order and transgression in the polis. So, too, the *Bacchae*'s representation of the death of Pentheus is laced with the imagery both of a ritual initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries, and of other elements of Dionysiac religion: the collective dance of the *thiasos*, the ritual killing and dismemberment of an animal, the consumption of raw flesh.[7] The problem of recognising Dionysus in this drama – its central motif – is articulated in and by overlapping and distorted ritual models of worship of the god. So, the final scene of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, which stages the death of Oedipus and his transformation from blind exile to superhuman hero, a figure honoured with offerings by the Athenians at Colonus, mobilises the powerful religious feelings of hero cult.[8] The language and form of the religious institution are fundamental to the scene's sacral power and mystery.

[6] See e.g. Zeitlin (1965); Foley (1985); Seaford (1994).

[7] See e.g. Foley (1980); Seaford (1981); Segal (1982); Henrichs (1984).

[8] See e.g. Easterling (1967); Burian (1974); Segal (1981) 362–408.

A third major influence on the language of tragedy is the world of the democratic lawcourt and Assembly. In the democratic polis, the lawcourt and Assembly are analogous institutions to the theatre, and these three great public spaces for the performance of *logoi* – speeches, arguments, language as display – strikingly interrelate (cf. Ch. 1). Although there is an evident influence of tragedy and theatre in general on the lawcourt and Assembly, an influence that is beginning to be discussed by critics,[9] I will focus here on the legal and political language that runs through tragedy. The use of legal proceedings and a vote as a means of articulating the key matrix of conflict and choice finds its paradigmatic representation in the trial scene of the *Eumenides*. The *Eumenides*, the only extant tragedy to be set in the centre of Athens, is also the only extant tragedy to stage a courtroom scene (though other tragedies, such as Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* and Euripides' *Orestes*, report trial or assembly votes, and Aristophanes' comedies, with their carnivalised versions of the institutions of the polis, offer both mock assemblies, such as in the *Acharnians* or *Women in Assembly*, and mock courts such as in the *Wasps*). None the less, the *Eumenides* has a profound influence on later tragedy, not least for the way that its staging of a trial is the final instantiation of a pattern of legal language that runs throughout the trilogy. The first mention of Menelaus as a military leader against Troy calls him an *antidikos*, 'adversary in law', and when Agamemnon returns in triumph, he announces that 'The Gods have heard the parties' pleas though not by spoken word, and in no uncertain fashion have they cast their votes in the urn of blood for the death of men and the destruction of Troy.'[10] The conflict and violent crises of tragedy are seen through the lawcourt's contest. So, Orestes, appearing over the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, calls on 'the Sun to bear witness on the day of judgement that justly did I pursue this killing of my mother – Aegisthus' death I count for nothing; he has suffered the adulterer's just penalty, as is the law' (*Cho.* 987–90).[11] The *Oresteia* indeed explores how the role of law in the polis may be a means of resolving conflict, and Athena's establishment of the first court in the *Eumenides* and Orestes' trial – his 'day of judgement' – is prepared for by the constant use of the language of law to express the claims of the violent perpetrators of intrafamilial conflict.

Tragedy, as critics from Aristotle onwards have noted, is a genre fundamentally engaged with the complexities of responsibility, choice, causation and reasoning. The Greek word *aitios* which means 'responsible', 'cause of', also means 'guilty', and the verbal form *aitiasthai* means both 'to find

[9] See Eden (1986); Wilson (1991); Hall (1996); Ch. 1 above.
[10] *Ag.* 41; 810–17, analysed in Goldhill (1986) 41–2.
[11] For analysis, see below pp. 138–9.

responsible' and 'to prosecute' or 'charge'. There is in tragedy an integral association at the verbal level between the practice of law and the tragic world of conflicting responsibilities and decision-making. What is more, the political setting of many tragedies often requires its figures to engage in practical, political reasoning. So Creon in his first speech in the *Antigone* outlines an ideological position on duty and obligation in the polis. This position may be unravelled by the course of the drama, but it is also essential for the way it sets the political agenda of the play within a fifth-century framework: when Creon argues that 'no one who is hostile to the state can be treated as a friend of his' and that 'whoever shows good will to the state will be honoured' (187–91, 209–10), his argument finds many echoes in contemporary political rhetoric, where the Thucydidean Pericles famously could declare that 'We give our obedience to those we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves' (2.37) and that Athenians 'should fix their eyes on Athens ... and fall in love with her' (2.43). If the Homeric texts turn tragedy towards the heroic past, the constant use of the language of contemporary institutions sites tragedy integrally within the polis.

The fourth element, closely related to the third, is one which is more and more influential throughout the fifth century in all aspects of Athenian life, namely, the new interest in the formal training and analysis of speech-making – the art of rhetoric. While persuasive speech and scenes of formal argument are an essential part of the Homeric epics, where an ideal of heroism is to be not only a 'doer of deeds' but also a 'speaker of speeches' (as Phoenix puts it),[12] the democratic polis provides a quite different frame for the performance of winning words. The lawcourts and Assembly offer the citizen routes to political power, and both forums depend on verbal display. A citizen's authority and status are forged in the agonistic institutions of speech-making. Throughout the fifth century there is an increasing professionalisation of training in this process, and central figures in this development are the new intellectuals often, if misleadingly, known collectively as 'the Sophists'.[13] These new intellectuals studied and offered teaching in a vast variety of areas, and engaged in many areas of public life, but in the Athenian popular imagination – and in later Platonic propaganda – it was particularly as teachers of manipulative arguments that the Sophists featured. Protagoras, and by extension all sophists, were notoriously associated with the claim 'to make the weaker argument the stronger'. This outrageous claim is more than a strong or polemical version of the Sophists' well-known delight in paradox and arguments of reversal: it threatens the

[12] *Iliad* 9.443. See Martin (1989).
[13] See Kerferd (1981); Classen (1976); Goldhill (1986) 222–43; and the exemplary discussion of Rose (1992) 226–330.

very basis of the city's institutions of power, where the correct evaluation of the strength of competing arguments is the foundation of the democratic legal and political process. The arts of rhetoric were thus an integral but dangerous, even scandalous, element of the city's functioning, and as such were constantly set before the public gaze. Paradigmatically, in Aristophanes' comedy *Clouds*, not only does the hero send his son to a sophist (Socrates) in order to learn the arguments necessary to escape debts, but also the play stages an *agōn* between two figures called – with a strong nod towards Protagoras – 'Stronger Argument' and 'Weaker Argument'. The conclusion inevitably is a comically brilliant triumph for 'Weaker Argument'. The public *awareness* of the changing importance of verbal skills and changing methods of public speech-making establishes the *technē* of rhetoric as a focus of attention in the fifth-century polis.

The language of tragedy reflects this awareness, and, particularly in Euripides' plays, the influence of the formal training in rhetoric is strongly marked. It can be seen at several different levels. There is, first, an explicit vocabulary drawn from the speech-writers' handbook: the point-by-point articulation of argument ('first', 'second', 'my prologue', 'my summation'); the postulation of imaginary counter-cases ('Suppose', 'What if ...'); the declaration of proof and evidence ('I will demonstrate ...', 'It is clear that ...'). Second, there is the adoption of tropes and phraseology from the formal business of public argumentation ('Grant the opportunity of reply ...', 'Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking ...'). Third, and most importantly, *rhēseis* develop structures of argumentation that follow the lines of the new rhetoric. I have already mentioned, for example, the sophistic interest in arguments of paradoxical reversal: this is manipulated with extraordinary *élan* by Euripides. So, to mention a single exemplary case, Cassandra in the *Trojan Women* claims 'I will demonstrate that this my city is more blessed than the Greeks' (365–6). In the prisoner-of-war camp the defeated and raped princess sets out to perform a set piece of display oratory (her verb *deixō* connotes both 'demonstration' as a form of proof and a stylish public performance on a set theme, so-called epideictic rhetoric). And her speech consists precisely in taking a weaker argument and making it seem the stronger, namely, to demonstrate how the besieged and defeated Trojans are better off than the victorious Greeks. She offers an elaborate series of polarities ('The Greeks on the one hand ... The Trojans on the other ...') and paradoxes ('Hector would not have been a famous hero but for the war ...'), typical of the rhetorical style promoted by Gorgias, the leading rhetorician of the latter part of the fifth century.[14]

[14] See Croally (1994).

Cassandra is a prophetess who always tells the truth but is never believed, and this scenario is stretched and manipulated by Euripides when he gives Cassandra such a piece of self-conscious rhetorical posturing, such an argument of sophistic reversal. The rhetorical aim – and audience's suspicion – of persuasiveness is given a dizzying twist by this overlap of sophistic argumentation and the specific dynamics of truth and believability associated with Cassandra's prophecies.

The full integration of formal rhetorical argumentation into tragic language is especially evident in the *agōn*, and many examples could be chosen from Sophocles and Euripides in particular. I will look again and in more detail at the *Trojan Women* and its use of technical rhetorical forms at the end of this chapter. For the present, however, it is worth stating (against a commonplace of earlier criticism) that such a turn to the technique of rhetorical training on the tragic stage is not to be viewed as a piece of up-to-date posturing by the playwright seeking to please an audience used to the lawcourts, nor is it a regrettable fall from the purity and passion of a putative Aeschylean *Gesamtkunstwerk* (it is Aeschylus, after all, who stages the first trial). Indeed, the judgement 'mere rhetoric' is always a critical laziness. Rather, tragedians and sophists, who share the title of *sophos*, 'one publicly invested with authority for a special knowledge', share an intellectual environment. It is an environment in which changing attitudes – to the city, to justice, to responsibility, to rationalism itself – are being actively debated, and in which language itself – how to use it, how it functions, its dangers – is a central topic of discussion. Tragic drama and sophistic writing repeatedly turn to similar concerns and vocabulary: the relation of men and gods, of men and men in the city, of norm, transgression, punishment. That some sophists wrote tragedies and that tragedians manipulate sophistic rhetoric is not a casual overlap of interest. It testifies to the active, public debate about man, language and the polis in democratic Athens. Tragedy's use – and often critical exploration – of rhetoric in action is an integral part of its engagement with the public life of the contemporary city.

Tragic language, then, combines contemporary tropes and vocabulary of the public institutions of the city with elements of heroic grandeur which stem both from the epic poetry of the past and the sacral splendour of religious rite. Since tragedy is so concerned with retelling the stories of the past for the contemporary city, this pull between different registers is a highly significant dynamic of the genre. The different registers of tragic language mark the moment of tragedy's production as one of rapid cultural change, a sign and symptom of the fifth-century enlightenment's strongly felt awareness both of extreme social progressiveness and of an ancestral inheritance touched with glory. That tragedy critically explores the public

languages it mobilises leads us, however, away from the formal approaches I have been pursuing so far. Indeed, the exploration of the political and mythic discourses of the city is one of the fundamental recurrent thematic focuses of tragedy, and it is with the thematic interest in how language is used that I will be concerned for the rest of this chapter.

I will begin with a well-known and highly influential general argument about the specificity of tragedy's view of language, developed most influentially by the French classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant. I will follow it with three case studies that show that for all the usefulness of the general model it requires considerable care and refinement if each individual play is to be adequately appreciated. Vernant begins from the different registers of language that I have been tracing: 'in the language of the tragic writers there is a multiplicity of different levels more or less distant from one another'.[15] But he adds the important qualification that the same term can 'belong to a number of different semantic fields depending on whether it is part of religious, legal, political or common vocabulary or of a particular sector of one of these'.[16] In the dialogues and debates that make up drama, words can take on opposed or different meanings according to who utters them and how they are deployed. The ambiguity or polysemy of central terms of the city's language is brought out by the way terms are used by different characters in such different and competing ways. Thus, 'the function of words used on stage is not so much to establish communication between the various characters as to indicate the blockage and barriers between them ... to locate the points of conflict'.[17] Indeed, it is an essential function of tragedy to display to its audience the polyvalence of words and the often destructive misunderstandings produced between the figures of the drama: 'the tragic message, when understood, is precisely that there are zones of opacity and incommunicability in the words that men exchange'.[18] One of Vernant's key examples is the word *kratos* (usually translated 'power' or 'force') as it occurs in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*:

> The idea of *kratos* can be seen to oscillate between two contrary accepted meanings, unable to settle for the one rather than the other. On the lips of King Pelasgus, *kratos*, associated with *kurios* ['figure of authority'], refers to legitimate authority, the control rightfully exercised by the guardian over whoever is legally dependent upon his power. On the lips of the Danaids [the Suppliant Maidens of the title] the same word, drawn into the semantic field of *bia* ['violence'], refers to brute force, constraint imposed by violence, in its aspect that is most opposed to justice and right.[19]

[15] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1988) 42.
[16] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1988) 42.
[17] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1988) 42.
[18] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1988) 43.
[19] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1988) 39.

The uncovering of this tension or ambiguity within a central term of political order constitutes a crucial factor in the play's thematic exploration of the nature of authority, its basis in consent, power and/or force (a question of immediate relevance to the emergent democracy). The fissure within the language of political control 'makes it possible to express as an enigma the problematic character of the bases of power exercised over others'.[20] For the audience therefore – the polis as a political entity – the nature of political and social power is opened to consideration through the narrative's articulation of the different and competing significances of the vocabulary, as well as the structures, of authority.

This view of a necessary and integral ambiguity and tension within tragic language has proved extremely stimulating for literary critics working on tragedy, not least because in paying due attention to the difficulties of tragic language it also tries to link such difficulties to the specificities of the fifth-century culture in which (almost all extant) tragedy is produced. (Textual play and cultural impact are not (to be) dissociated.) I want here, however, to investigate how three particular works engage with the 'ambiguities and tensions of language'. These three works (that span almost the whole period of our extant tragedies), Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and Euripides' *Trojan Women*, show how varied and how complex this engagement with what Euripides calls the 'strife of warring words' can be.

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* had more influence on other Greek writers than any other tragic work, and its treatment of language as a theme is significantly echoed by both Sophocles and Euripides. No adequate chapter on tragic language could ignore its importance. I want to focus on two particular ways this most intricate and involved of trilogies treats the use of language as a theme. First of all, its deployment of political language, as has been long recognised, is infused with a sense of the competing and contending comprehension of words. This is nowhere more striking than with one of the play's most evident thematic nexuses – the notion of *dikē*. *Dikē* is a central term of the public language of the fifth-century polis. Its range of sense runs from abstract ideas of 'justice' or 'right' through 'retribution', 'punishment', to the particular legal senses of 'lawcourt', and 'law case'. It is a fundamental term for the expression of social order in that it both indicates the proper organisation of society as a whole and delineates right action for individuals and the institutions through which order is to be maintained. It is a principle – and a practice – constantly appealed to in fifth-century discourse.

The word *dikē* and its derivatives are used obsessively in the *Oresteia*,

[20] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1988) 39.

where the plotting of revenge leads towards a resolution through the new institution of the lawcourt.[21] This has led to what is still a standard reading of the trilogy, namely, that the *Oresteia* traces a transformation from *dikē* as revenge to *dikē* as legal justice – a move from the bloody repetition of vendetta to the ordered world of the polis and its institutional resolution of conflict through the words of the court.[22] On this view, the *Oresteia* offers a sort of 'charter myth' for the institution of law, which is central to the development of democracy and to democracy's image of itself. The fissure within the term *dikē* – 'punishment' and/or 'revenge' and /or 'justice' and/or 'legal process' – with its competing senses of how transgression, violence and disagreement are to be negotiated in the household and the city, becomes thus part of a teleological progression towards the social order – the *dikē* – of the city of Athens. The trilogy's final symbolic procession represents the city of Athens to the city of Athens as the embodiment of social order: 'justice' triumphs over the uncontrollable violence of 'revenge'.

Although the teleology of this account has been extensively and rightly challenged and redefined,[23] the intricate opacity and contestation of the sense of the term *dikē* certainly demonstrates the refraction of the language of power that Vernant emphasises. I will give a single example here from lines I have already quoted, an example which is paradigmatic of this Aeschylean semantic violence. When Orestes appears over the bodies of his mother and her lover, Aegisthus, he calls upon the Sun to be his 'witness on the day of judgement (*dik-*) that justly (*-dik-*) I pursued this killing of my mother. Aegisthus' death I count for nothing: he suffered the adulterer's just penalty (*dik-*) as is the law'.[24] At this most paradoxical juncture of the trilogy where, in the pursuit of his rightful place, Orestes has committed the horrific act of matricide, and is here trying to justify it, the triple repetition of the language of *dikē* reveals the tension and ambiguity in the act of justification. He calls on the Sun to bear witness *en dikēi*, 'on the day of judgement', 'at my trial', 'in court'. Orestes will indeed appear before the court of the Areopagus in the *Eumenides*, and the use of the word 'witness' emphasises the technical legal aspect of Orestes' phraseology (although the audience – or Orestes – do not necessarily know of the coming trial). His claim, however, that he killed *endikōs*, 'justly', 'with right on my side', is an

[21] See for bibliography and discussion, Goldhill (1986) 33–56.
[22] For a strong version of this argument see Kitto (1961).
[23] For feminist, Marxist and other critiques, see Goldhill (1986) 33–56.
[24] *Cho.* 987–90:

ὡς ἂν παρῆι μοι μάρτυς ἐν δίκηι ποτὲ
ὡς τόνδ' ἐγὼ μετῆλθον ἐνδίκως φόνον
τὸν μητρός · Αἰγίσθου γὰρ οὐ λέγω μόρον·
ἔχει γὰρ αἰσχυντῆρος, ὡς νόμος, δίκην.

appeal to a generalised principle of justice, a moral right. But the case of Clytemnestra's death is immediately distinguished from that of Aegisthus, who has suffered the *dikēn*, 'penalty', of an adulterer. Here, the sense of 'revenge' and the sense of 'punishment' come to the fore. How, then, is Orestes' violence to be understood? Is it to be seen as violent revenge or as justice? What is the difference between such descriptions? How does his violent action relate to social order and the institutions of law? The questions raised by the matricide are articulated in the polyvalency of the terminology of its description. Orestes' justification – saying how it is just – is informed and exposed by the conflicts within his language of justice.

This fragmentation of the language of *dikē* reverberates throughout the trilogy and sets before the audience the complexities of the expressions of order within the polis. What is more, the work moves towards the establishment of the first Athenian lawcourt and Orestes' trial in it – the very constitution of legal process. As the trilogy ends with the assimilation of the Furies within the polis, and the final procession that represents the whole city and its celebration, the sense of *dikē* as social order seems to be strikingly embodied, enacted, envisioned, on stage. The play's search for an end to violence between the generations and between the genders has become the question of how *dikē* is to be defined – where and how right or justice or punishment or order are to be located, realised, determined. The exploration of the public language of the city is – inevitably? – part of an intense engagement with politics and gender.

The second particular way that language becomes a thematic focus of the trilogy is in the repeated dramatisation and investigation of the dangers and powers of words in action. The manipulation and failure of the process of communication is central to the plotting of the *Agamemnon*. The play opens with a watchman waiting for a beacon (which arrives), and the first scene consists of a discussion between the queen and the chorus about the beacon's message: Clytemnestra delivers two long speeches, the first of which explains how the beacon came from Troy, the second, what message it signifies. The second scene consists in the arrival of a human messenger from Agamemnon, with good and bad news, and the return of this messenger to the king with a false message, constructed and sent by the queen to lure her unsuspecting husband. The arrival of Agamemnon is thus prepared by two scenes that consist in, and discuss, different ways of sending and interpreting messages (with the queen central to both). This is significant, since the great dramatic moment of Agamemnon's return is the so-called Carpet Scene, in which Agamemnon is persuaded by Clytemnestra to enter his house along a path of tapestries. What is staged is not only an embodiment of Agamemnon's transgression, but also the queen's power of

persuasion and deception. Her tricky language leads him to his death, and this is what she boasts of after his murder: 'I have said many things before to suit the occasion; now I will not be ashamed to say the opposite' (*Ag.* 1372–3): the queen is as shameless in her language as in her sexual behaviour. Between Clytemnestra's persuasion of her husband and this triumphing in – and of – her rhetoric comes the Cassandra scene. This scene is an extended dramatisation of the failure of communication, since the prophetess's gift from Apollo is always to tell the truth and never to be believed; and indeed the chorus fail to understand her repeated announcements of the danger to Agamemnon, even – especially – when they ironically claim to have understood her (1213). This lengthy exchange thus establishes a characteristically bold Aeschylean dramatic juxtaposition: between the woman who lies and persuades everyone, and the woman who tells the truth and persuades no one. As the fragmentation of the language of *dikē* led towards the dynamics of gender (and) politics, so too the thematic focus on language use – the failure of communication, the dangers of messages, the trickiness and deception of persuasiveness – leads towards a specific connection of language and gender. The *Agamemnon*, in other words, stages the powers and dangers of the exchange of words as a central thematic device in its plotting of conflict between king and queen.

Orestes is told by the Delphic oracle to take revenge in the same manner as Agamemnon was killed. Thus he arrives deceitfully dressed as a messenger, with a lying but persuasive tale of his own death. Aegisthus too is summoned with a message, carried by the Nurse, that is altered on stage by the chorus – the only time in extant tragedy when a chorus interferes in the action in quite so direct a manner. Tellingly, as he enters the palace the chorus pray for the assistance of *peithō dolia*, 'guileful persuasion' (726). For Orestes, like his mother before him, manipulating words is integral to his violence. Persuasion is also central to the *Eumenides*, not just in the trial scene itself, with its staging of rhetoric in action, but also as the heralded means by which Athena mollifies the Furies and brings them into her city. 'Persuasion', sings the goddess, 'I revere the eyes of Persuasion, because she oversees my mouth and tongue ...' (970–1). From the violent persuasion of Clytemnestra to the mollifying persuasion of Athena, from the deceptive woman at the centre of the house to the institution of the legal *agōn* at the centre of the city, the *Oresteia* charts the social function of language in the polis.

Both of these aspects of the *Oresteia*'s engagement with the public language of the city have an extended influence on tragedy.[25] I want here to

[25] For an overview of 'persuasion' in tragedy, see Buxton (1982).

look at two further plays which develop in particularly important ways the thematic concern with persuasion in action, persuasion as action, and which show the increasing effects of the formal training in rhetoric and the public discussion of rhetoric on tragic language and narrative.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is the only extant tragedy without a female character and is one of only very few plays not to be set within the physical frame of the polis itself. The island of Lemnos is, for this drama at least, deserted, and the play revolves around the attempt of Odysseus and Neoptolemus to persuade Philoctetes, who has been abandoned, sick and alone, in this wild space, to rejoin the Greek army, and to bring with him the bow of Heracles, which has enabled him to survive. Once again, the plot of the play depends on the staging of persuasion.[26] First, Odysseus persuades Neoptolemus to join in the enterprise; then Neoptolemus sets about deceitfully misleading Philoctetes. He spins a persuasive tale of how he has been deceived by Odysseus and has fled the Greeks. The one 'messenger scene' is the so-called False Merchant scene, where a sailor, disguised as a merchant, brings a false tale of the Greeks' pursuit of Neoptolemus in order to help convince Philoctetes of Neoptolemus' good faith (cf. Ch. 7, pp. 169–70). (Merchants, like messengers, have a patron in Hermes, who also presides over false communication: exchange and its corruptions are that god's sphere.) Neoptolemus, for all his persuasiveness, finds himself increasingly persuaded by the suffering and powerful feelings of Philoctetes. He breaks down and tells Philoctetes of the plot against him; but will not return the bow he has been given. Finally, he returns the bow – but cannot persuade Philoctetes to come to Troy. It is only the appearance of Heracles, a *deus ex machina*, that persuades Philoctetes to go to where mythic tradition requires he go. Deception, persuasion, and the morality of how language is to be used are constant subjects of discussion in the play: it is a key sign of how men interrelate. Significantly, Philoctetes' first delight in meeting Neoptolemus after many years of solitude is 'to hear a Greek voice again' (225): that this voice should be a lure in a deceptive plot is typical of the ironies, powers and deceptions of language in this play.

The status of language in the *Philoctetes* is closely bound up with a view of civilisation.[27] The contrast between the wild landscape of Lemnos, with its lack of any cultural institutions, and the hierarchical world of the Greek army, besieging Troy in the name of preserving the norms of society, is played out in a fascinating way at the level of communication. Odysseus, as we will see, is committed to an instrumental view of language, where

[26] See Podlecki (1966a); Segal (1981) 328–61; Rose (1992) 226–330.
[27] See Segal (1981) 292–327.

winning one's case is the only adequate criterion for speech-making. Neoptolemus, like his father Achilles, professes a strong distaste for verbal deceit, and wishes to maintain an upright, honest, straightforward rectitude in his dealings. Philoctetes is passionately committed to his moral stance: he will not listen to or be persuaded by the argument of an enemy, and insists on complete agreement and consistency from his friends (*philoi*).[28] Yet, Philoctetes is reduced by his illness to inarticulate cries of pain (which affect Neoptolemus as much as any argument). Between the civilised – trained – and amoral use of language to win a case, and the inarticulate cry of the anguished human on the margin of cultural life, a complex mapping of the politics and ethics of language as a sign and symptom of civilised life is developed.

A look at one brief dialogue will show how intricate this mapping is. Odysseus in the opening scene of the play has to persuade Neoptolemus to help deceive Philoctetes. Neoptolemus has stated his desire to fail in a proper way rather than succeed by immoral means, and Odysseus begins the process of persuasion with (96–9):

> Son of a noble father, when I myself was a young man
> I had a slow tongue and a hand ready for action.
> But as things are, from trial and proof, I see that for man
> The tongue, and not deeds, controls all.

Odysseus at once notes Neoptolemus' significant parentage. His father, the famously direct Achilles, passionately dismisses Odysseus in the *Iliad* with the famous declaration (9.312–13): 'I hate like the gates of Hell a man who says one thing and conceals another in his mind.' (The hero Philoctetes will describe Odysseus' plot as (1142) 'the concealed words of a guileful mind'.) It is this noble directness in Neoptolemus that Odysseus has to deflect (and to which Philoctetes appeals). The opposition of word and deed, however, is one of the central recurring polarities of fifth-century discourse: Odysseus, for his part, declares the absolute primacy of language, the tongue – it 'controls all', like a successful orator in the Assembly – and defends this position as something learnt by 'trial and proof': not just an appeal to experience but to experience formulated as a scientific or legal investigation, the keynote of enlightenment intellectualism. The scene of persuasion begins (as so often) with a comment on the role and power of language.

Words and how to use them remain the focus of the following stichomythia (100–22). Neoptolemus replies: 'What are you ordering me to do

[28] See Knox (1964) 117–42; Whitlock-Blundell (1989) 184–225.

except to tell lies?' The sign of his noble nature is to reject the manipulation of language as a willing adoption of the shameful practice of telling lies. For him, there is no economising with the truth. Odysseus, however, retorts with 'I am telling you to take Philoctetes by guile.' 'Guile', *dolos*, is a term closely associated with Odysseus as the hero of the *Odyssey*. He is offering – with guile – a positive gloss on his proposal. Not the corruption of lies but the flexibility of guile. 'But', asks Neoptolemus, 'why must it be by guile and not by persuasion?' 'Persuasion', *peithō*, so often opposed to 'force', *bia*, formulates *dolos*, 'guile', as the corruption of its own openness. It reglosses in a negative guise Odysseus' own gloss. 'He will never be persuaded', predicts Odysseus (with some justification). After Odysseus explains why force is also not an option (the arrows of the bow of Heracles are ineluctable and lethal), Neoptolemus returns to the status of deception: 'Do you really not think it is disgraceful to tell lies?' 'No', replies Odysseus, 'if safety is what the lie brings.' Odysseus, faced by the direct question of whether it is morally acceptable to lie, tries to set lying under the heading of self-preservation (as so often in the *Odyssey* he needs his verbal wits to survive). But Neoptolemus presses on: 'How could one have the face to speak these things?' 'When you do something for profit', replies Odysseus, 'it is unfitting to shrink back.' Lying for self-preservation has here tellingly become an expression of a sophistic agenda. First, it is 'profit' rather than self-preservation which is now the express motive – a different economics of truth-telling. Self-advancement at any cost, as well as taking payment – profit – from anyone for teaching, are common charges thrown at sophists. 'Profit' is a charged word in fifth-century debates about ethics and politics that, as here, focuses the discussion on the boundaries of proper action. Second, the neat sophistic twist of Odysseus' argument should not be missed. With knowing paradox, he dismisses Neoptolemus' ethical scruple with the assertion that, when lies bring profit, it is actually *improper* to shrink back (and fear is as commonly deprecated as lying for the upright man). The impropriety of lying is turned to the impropriety of fearful hesitation in the face of the enemy (or the sight of profit). Odysseus will indeed increasingly emphasise the moral duty of Neoptolemus to obey his military commanders and to act according to the army's requirements rather than his personal feelings. For Odysseus, the ends undoubtedly justify the means.

This opening discussion of how to evaluate – talk about – verbal deception is programmatic for the play as a whole. The figure of Odysseus draws both on his Homeric representation as heroic trickster and on models of sophistic verbal pragmatism. Neoptolemus echoes his father's epic stance, but also plays the role of a young man faced by an older, wily teacher of

how to use language (like a pupil of Socrates). Indeed, as Neoptolemus is deceiving Philoctetes, he comments in generalising mode (387–8): 'Disorderly people in human society are made bad by the words of their teachers.' Neoptolemus, faced by Philoctetes and Odysseus, undergoes a painful lesson in the complexities of evaluating the words of those who wish to teach him – about duty to the collective authority of the army, duty to *philoi*, duty to a sense of personal integrity or nobility.

Indeed, when he decides to return the bow to Philoctetes, the boy is offered a harsh rebuttal which mirrors in reverse the opening scene of Odysseus' persuasiveness. 'Hear what words I bring', pleads Neoptolemus (1267). 'I am afraid', replies Philoctetes (1268–9); 'I fared ill before from your fair words, when I was persuaded by your words' (the triple repetition of *logoi*, 'words', is emphatic here). 'Is it not possible also to change one's mind?', asks Neoptolemus (1270), which Philoctetes rejects out of hand with (1271–2): 'You were like this too in your words when you stole my bow: "trustworthy" – but secretly ruinous.' Once trust has been removed by false speech, what can be *said* to reconstitute faith in language? How can words put back together the contract shattered by the deceptiveness of language? Philoctetes dismisses the boy's attempt to rediscover sincere expression, its persuasiveness, and Neoptolemus can only comment (1278–80): 'I would have wanted you to be persuaded by my words. But if I cannot say anything to hit the mark, I have done.' Language, he recognises, is failing him. Philoctetes expresses the problem succinctly (1280–1): 'You will say everything in vain. For you will never win my mind over to good will.' After deception, good will (*eunoia*) is lost; and with the loss of good will, the possibility of trust and persuasion is destroyed. But in response to this, Neoptolemus demands the right hand of Philoctetes (both the sign of strength and of the agreed contract) and gives him back his bow: 'There will be', he declares, 'a clear deed.' And this deed binds the men together. Where Odysseus had said the tongue and not the hand controls all, for Philoctetes it is a 'clear deed' – the action precisely of hands – which persuades, obligates, ties; which escapes the impasse of language's deceptions. And yet – with a typical Sophoclean extra twist of the plot towards the distortions of extreme commitment – for all the continuing and emphatic protestations of 'good will' (*eunoia*) between the two (e.g. 1322, cf. 1351), Philoctetes cannot let himself be persuaded by his newly trusted friend. His hatred of the Atreids and Odysseus, and his commitment to the principle of doing harm to his enemies, outweigh all else. 'Good will' can be only one of a set of criteria dominating and informing the process of communication and persuasion.

The *Philoctetes* thus displays to the audience the action of rhetoric in all

its intricacy, irony and violence. Odysseus' sophistic pragmatism is one element in this exploration of language as process, an element that ties the play in a dialectic with the Homeric past and the city of the present. It is, however, also typical of the provocation of Sophoclean irony that for all that the play does not endorse Odysseus, by the end he does get exactly what he wants, namely, Philoctetes and the bow willingly travelling to Troy. His ends are – at whatever cost – achieved. Indeed, the anatomising of persuasiveness staged in the drama does not lead to a neat comprehensive conclusion, but leaves the audience thus with a problem of articulating its collective and several response to the play of language. In his 'profound reflection on the nature of man as a civilized being, on the bonds, needs and obligations that hold men together',[29] Sophocles gives a central place to the problem of communication between men, of words in action, words as action.

The staging of rhetoric in Euripides' *Trojan Women* is emblematic of the writing that led Nietzsche to blame Euripides for the 'death of tragedy'. Euripides' characters, drawn from the epics of Homer, do not merely show the signs of a sophistic training, but in the case of Helen in particular seem to have been reading the sophist Gorgias with especial care. I have already mentioned the prophetess Cassandra, and her argument that the Trojans fared better in defeat than the Greeks did in victory. That scene is one of three scenes around which the play is structured, each of which involves a debate between Hecuba, queen of defeated Troy, and one of her daughters or daughters-in-law – Cassandra, Andromache, Helen. In each case, the women debate a woman's role in a good marriage, what their suffering has been and means, and what part each has played and will play in the continuing saga of the families of Greece and Troy. In each scene, the signs of formal rhetorical training are strongly marked. In the space remaining I want to look briefly at the last of these *agōnes*. It will enable me to make some important points about the Euripidean staging of verbal contest.

The debate between Helen and Hecuba is set up in formal terms, with Menelaus as judge.[30] Helen's first words are (895–6) 'Menelaus, this is a *prologue* deserving of fear ...' and she asks (899–900): 'What *decision* have the Greeks and you arrived at ...?' When she hears of the death penalty, she begs for the right (903–4) 'to contend in argument that it would be an injustice to execute' her, and Hecuba agrees (907–10) that he should 'grant her the right of reply ... A full established debate will mean her inevitable

[29] Segal (1981) 361.
[30] For a good discussion of the *agōn*, see Croally (1994) 134–62.

death.' The argument is set up by this technical language as if it is a law-case.

Helen indeed shows at every level of her speech the deep influence of the professional training of the sophist. First, she articulates a precisely plotted and expressly signalled argument of defence: 'In relation to what your accusation will be if you enter into discussion with me, I will set my arguments point by point. First ... Second ... Listen to what followed next ... Consider the logical consequences which follow ... You will say I have not yet discussed one point in question ... At this point you may raise a specious objection ... I have witnesses ...' The stages of the argument are carefully articulated as such by the formal markers of trained argumentation. Second, Helen demonstrates the archetypal traits of fifth-century argumentation. On the one hand, she manipulates the paradoxical reversal so often associated with sophistic rhetoric: she claims, for example, that her adultery has benefited the Greeks since it enabled them to defeat the barbarians: 'but that which has given Greece happiness has ruined me. I was sold for my beauty and I am reviled by those who ought to have crowned my head.' The commonplace of the glorious triumph of the Greeks over the barbarian is by a neat twist made dependent on the transgression which started the war, as if her adultery was the source of Greek glory. On the other hand, she utilises one of the commonest tropes of fifth-century rhetoric, the appeal to plausibility, likelihood, probability with its dependence on a model of the natural. So, she argues for the overpowering influence of the gods on her action by asking a rhetorical question: 'What was I thinking of to follow the stranger from my home, and betray my home and country?' The question's implicit denial of a *plausible* reason for her action constitutes the argument for external compulsion for her behaviour.

Third, and perhaps most strikingly of all, Helen seems to follow the defence prepared for her by the sophist Gorgias in his famous work *The Encomium of Helen*. This short sophistic masterpiece is a speech which purports to exonerate the adulteress from any blame. He has four main, substantive arguments. First, that if Helen was raped – taken by force – she deserved pity not blame. Second, if the gods made her do it (as the standard accounts, utilised also by Helen, have it), then she cannot be blamed, since no one is stronger than a god. Third, if language made her do it, she cannot be blamed, since the power of words cannot be resisted. Fourth, if *erōs* made her do it, she cannot be blamed, since this external force has more than mortal power. This is not the place to discuss the intricacies of Gorgias' ideas of causality or the trickiness of his ideas about language. What is to be stressed is that Helen follows a very similar line of defence:

'Punish the goddess and become more powerful than Zeus', she scornfully declares, 'but I am to be forgiven' (949–50). And 'How would I die justly ... I whom Paris married by force ...? Wanting to get the better of the gods is an ignorant desire on your part' (961–5). That Helen should use the turns of the famous fifth-century rhetorician dramatises as starkly as possible the clash between the traditional heroic figures and the language and modes of the contemporary polis.

Hecuba's response (969–1032) shows an equal rhetorical polish and forcefulness. Hers too is a point-by-point response: 'You say ... but ... You declared ... but ... You said ... but ...' It too has the markers of professional argument: 'I will demonstrate that she is not speaking justly ... The conclusion of my speech is ...' Above all, she constructs an argument that repeatedly uses the principles of plausibility to attack Helen, and in particular Helen's argument about the divine and about her psychological motives. Why, she asks, would goddesses compete in beauty? 'Is it that Hera could possess a husband superior to Zeus?' Why would Aphrodite have come to Menelaus' palace? 'Could she not have transported you, and all of Amyclae too, to Troy, just remaining quiet in heaven?' Helen's psychological claims are similarly dismissed – with the typical sophistic delight in ludic etymology: Aphrodite is just a front for human transgression, claims Hecuba, 'rightly the name of the goddess [*Aphrodite*] begins with "folly" [*aphrosunē*]'. The barbarian queen even attacks Helen for wanting to luxuriate in barbarian wealth and have barbarians prostrate themselves to her. Hecuba's scorn is aimed at destroying Helen's claims to plausibility.

Menelaus as judge is clear that he has been persuaded by Hecuba's superior rationalistic argument, her more forceful use of the argument of plausibility in her attack on Helen's account of divine narrative. Yet it is typical of Euripides' ironic – sophistic – sense of reversal that this victory is undercut.[31] It is undercut first by the fact that for all Hecuba's rationalism about the improbability of the gods' direct intervention in human narratives of transgression, the opening scene of the play has shown us precisely such a *divina commedia* with Athena explaining to Poseidon, her brother, how she is now angry with the Greeks she previously supported and wants to destroy their fleet with a storm on their return home. Hecuba's treatment of divine narrative is framed by the play's own sense of the cause of things. Second, there is a strong literary tradition, headed by *Odyssey* 4, which asserts that Menelaus did not kill Helen, but returned and lived with her in Sparta. There is a story that when he approached her on board ship with a

[31] See Croally (1994) especially 157–62.

sword, she dropped her top, and at the sight of her breasts he was so taken by desire that all thoughts of punishment vanished from his mind. This, or similar tales, are strongly hinted at in the closing dialogue of the scene. Hecuba warns Menelaus not to let Helen on board his ship. He, with a wonderful lack of appreciation, replies (1050): 'Why? Has she put on so much weight?' 'No', replies Hecuba (1051); 'once a lover, always a lover.' Indeed, the desirability of Helen is made strikingly visible in this scene. Hecuba warns Menelaus as Helen enters not to look at her (891–4) 'in case you are seized with desire. For she captures the eyes of men, she ruins cities and she burns houses. Such is the power of her bewitching.' Helen, unlike the other women in the play, is dressed in all her finery and allure, as Hecuba points out at length (1022–8). So does it matter what Helen actually says? For what does persuade Menelaus? Or, more pointedly, since *peithō* is the normal Greek for 'seduction' (and as a personification is often accompanied by the figure of Eros in the artistic tradition[32]), what 'seduces' him? For all the superior rationalism of Hecuba, the literary tradition and the staging of the scene invite the audience to consider other factors than winning words in the scene of persuasion.

This wonderful *agōn*, then, lets us see three particularly important ways in which Euripides' mobilisation of the tropes of contemporary rhetoric engages with the thematic nexuses of his work. First, Euripides' deployment of different versions of the tales of the Trojan war, and different accounts of causality and different accounts of responsibility, is closely connected with the widely articulated fifth-century concerns with such issues (leading towards Aristotle's formalisation of the principle of 'the four causes'). The *agōn* dramatises and enacts this fragmentation and contestation of the language of causality and responsibility. If, as Vernant has argued, the moment of tragedy is to be located in the disjunction between legal, political, and traditional mythic modes of narrative and explanation, Euripides uses the rhetorical *agōn* – and its framing by the narrative of the play – to display and explore that disjunction. The *agōn* enacts the contests of explanation. The intellectualising rhetoric of Helen and Hecuba, with its evident links with sophistic argument, sets the play's concerns with the responsibilities, consequences and violence of war within a wide network of fifth-century intellectual discussions.

Second, the wilful manipulation of the stories of the past (in a festival which constantly retells the stories of the past for the present) is a constitutive dynamic of Euripides' often questioning stance towards the city's inherited tales and their influence. Euripides, like Sophocles and

[32] See Buxton (1982).

Aeschylus, charts the way in which the self-aware modernity of the democratic polis is formulated in relation to Homeric and other narratives of the past. The sense that the traditional ethical stances are no longer sufficient for the life and attitudes of the polis is dramatised in a remarkable fashion by forcing the old characters and old stories into the modern form of a sophistic debate. The multiform relations between present and past are emphatically highlighted by the bold anachronism of the sophistic Helen and Hecuba.

Third, the question of what persuades Menelaus, which underlies the competing accounts of Helen's war, is to be linked to the more general question of how words relate to the world. The opposition of *logos* and *ergon* (word/deed, argument/reality, reason/fact) that I stressed with regard to Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is only one sign of the linguistic turn that the fifth century underwent. The way in which 'language is a sort of instructive instrument to organise reality'[33] is a shared fixation of the intellectual activity of the classical city; and, in the *Trojan Women*, Cassandra's prophecies, Andromache's mourning, and Hecuba's rationalism in different ways emphasise the insufficiency of words to deal with the violence and suffering of war, as much as the power of language to explain, define and control the narratives of war. Euripides' dramatisation of contemporary rhetoric in action is an integral aspect of his constant and profound exploration of the relation between words and the world, the (in)ability of contemporary public language to comprehend man's place in the city of words.

The contests of authoritative explanation, the relation between present and past, the relation between words and the world, are, then, three major concerns fascinatingly brought to the fore by Euripides' use of contemporary, professionalised, rhetoric here – and in the rest of his corpus. This strongly marked turn to the art of rhetoric, however, only makes more evident questions which are shared with the other playwrights, sophists, and intellectuals of the city. Tragedy as a genre, tragic language, is in this way a fundamental element of the fifth-century enlightenment – an exploration of the developing public language of the city, performed before the city. Staging the *agōn*, dramatising the corruption and failures of communication, displaying the conflicts of meaning within the public language of the city, provoke the audience of tragedy towards a recognition of language's powers and dangers, fissures and obligations. Democracy prided itself on putting matters *es meson*, 'into the public domain to be contested'. Tragedy

[33] Plato, *Cratylus* 388b13.

puts language itself *es meson*, on display and at risk in the glare of democratic scrutiny.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

There are many technical discussions of aspects of tragic language, though few are suitable for those reading tragedy in translation (see e.g. A. A. Long, *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (Cambridge 1968); H. Friis Johansen, *General Reflection in Tragic Rhesis* (Copenhagen 1959); M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of the 'Prometheus Bound'* (Cambridge 1977)). On the development of rhetoric in the polis, see G. A. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963): the standard treatment, now updated and abridged in G. A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton 1994); for a sense of what may be left out of the standard discussion, one may consult three different types of account of this history from a single year: J. Swearingen, *Rhetoric and Irony* (Oxford 1991); S. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale and Edwardsville 1991); T. Cole, *the Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore 1991). For sophistic rhetoric and tragedy, see for an overview Goldhill (1986) 222–42, and for exemplary treatments, Rose (1992) 265–330; Croally (1994). For language as a theme in tragedy, see the seminal Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988) 1–28; Buxton (1982); Knox (1979) 205–30; Goldhill (1984), (1986) 1–32; Goff (1990); Segal (1981) especially chs. 7 and 10.

7

P. E. EASTERLING

Form and performance

The story of Greek tragedy in the fifth century BC is an extraordinarily difficult one to tell. On the one side there are thirty-two well-known plays transmitted from antiquity through the medieval tradition, plays that have exerted a profound, even immeasurable, influence on Western culture, while on the other there are fragmentary scraps of evidence, often enough distorted by the preconceptions of later times, from which scholars try to reconstruct a whole history of an institution. How Dionysiac festivals were organised, what the earliest theatres, masks and costumes looked like, how the music sounded, what sort of performance-styles and dramatic conventions developed, how far the surviving plays are typical of the hundreds, or thousands, that must have been composed during the period, and what tragedy meant for the contemporary Athenian – and non-Athenian – audiences that watched it: these are the questions that need answers. What is lacking is systematic documentation, surviving from the fifth century itself, of this new and extremely successful artistic and civic phenomenon, and there is no prospect that anything of the kind will ever be recovered.

The best that modern research can hope for is new fragments of evidence – a vase-painting or an inscription, a papyrus text of part of a lost play or of a scholar's introduction (*hypothesis*) – which will fill some of the gaps in the story. The most striking example was the publication in 1952[1] of a small papyrus scrap of a *hypothesis* which proved that Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* was not the earliest surviving Greek tragedy but belonged to the 460s, and therefore to a late stage in the poet's career. This play, with its chorus of the daughters of Danaus (the myth said there were fifty of them), had previously been taken as a sample of the tragedy of the 490s and was thought to have a chorus of fifty like the dithyramb; it was read as a 'primitive' piece more akin to choral lyric poetry than to the true dialectic of drama. But once scholars recognised that the historical framework had to

[1] P.Oxy. 2256 fr. 3; for discussion see Garvie (1969) 1–28.

CAMBRIDGE COMPANIONS TO LITERATURE

The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature
edited by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge

The Cambridge Companion to Dante
edited by Rachel Jacoff

The Cambridge Chaucer Companion
edited by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann

The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre
edited by Richard Beadle

The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies
edited by Stanley Wells

The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama
edited by A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway

The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry, Donne to Marvell
edited by Thomas N. Corns

The Cambridge Companion to Milton
edited by Dennis Danielson

The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism
edited by Stuart Curran

The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce
edited by Derek Attridge

The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen
edited by James McFarlane

The Cambridge Companion to Brecht
edited by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks

The Cambridge Companion to Beckett
edited by John Pilling

The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot
edited by A. David Moody

The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism
edited by Jill Kraye

The Cambridge Companion to Conrad
edited by J. H. Stape

The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel
edited by John Richetti

The Cambridge Companion to Faulkner
edited by Philip M. Weinstein

The Cambridge Companion to Thoreau
edited by Joel Myerson

The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton
edited by Millicent Bell

The Cambridge Companion to Realism and Naturalism
edited by Donald Pizer

The Cambridge Companion to Twain
edited by Forrest G. Robinson

The Cambridge Companion to Whitman
edited by Ezra Greenspan

The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway
edited by Scott Donaldson

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO GREEK TRAGEDY

EDITED BY

P. E. EASTERLING
Regius Professor of Greek in the University of Cambridge

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS