

Women vs Women. The denunciation of female sex by female characters in drama¹

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Abstract: Depreciative views of women expressed by men are often found both in tragedies and comedies. However, there are cases where women speak ill of their own sex. The examination of this issue reveals that such cases occur within plays in which admonition with regard to gender segregation and gender roles is of importance.

Keywords: domestic roles; gender roles; social and political stability.

The principle methodological problem faced by nearly every researcher of ancient Greek drama is eloquently summarized by P. Cartledge: no matter how “aggressively female” appears the speech of a female character of Athenian tragedy, we must not forget that these words were composed by a male dramatist and that this female character came to life in front of an audience consisting at great parts or wholly of men. In a society where sex segregation and division is dominant, up to what extent can a man experience and re-enact convincingly the life of women, especially when the recipients of this process are also men?³ To put it simply, the voice of woman is male voice. At best, it is no more than an inspired male view of female voice.⁴ However, it is also a fact that dramatic convention allows theatrical women more freedom than

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³ P. Cartledge (2003) 101.

⁴ In a metatheatrical view of the robbing scene of Euripides’s relative in *Thesmophoriazousae*, precise directions are given to the man who got dressed up as a woman: on top of his apparel, he should try to make his words sound feminine (Ar. *Thesm.* 266-28). According to McLure, these directions concern not only the tone of his voice, but especially the way that a woman supposedly talks. McLure (1999) 227, 242.

what women enjoy in reality.⁵ Despite the famous comment of Medea in Euripides' homonymous play, that women are deprived of poetic voice, it seems that female characters often have the chance to oppose counter-arguments against all that men charge them with and even blame men for their misfortunes.⁶ More interesting, however, are the cases where women appear to express negative opinions about women themselves. Views of the past, suggesting that women "would not have used such language unless they were actually inclined to put a low estimate on their own sex", seem hardly adequate.⁷ The phenomenon appears equally in tragedies and comedies and the context in which it appears suggests that there is in it something more than theatrical convention and servicing to the plot of the specific plays. I will attempt to demonstrate that the phenomenon of female depreciation of their sex is not only theatrically functional, but also constructively didactic on both dramatic and social level.

TRAGEDY

Euripides' *Andromache* has received attention by many critics, who consider it either a masterpiece or a somewhat non-meaningful play, with regards to the playwright's intentions.⁸ I will opt to side with Garyza, "who found the central theme of the

⁵ E.g. Swift (2009) 60-62, describes that Sophocles' Antigone, against all established norms with regards to physical containment on women, is in position to freely exit the palace and to wander about unescorted, contrary to the Antigone in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, who exhibits a somewhat more conventional version of the physically and spatially confined woman.

⁶ Murnaghan (2005) 249: "Athenians gave to women visibility and powerful voice". Cf. the famous monologue of Medea (Eur. *Med.* 230-65), that is almost identical in meaning with the monologue of Procne from Sophocles' lost *Tereus* (see fr. 583 Radt).

⁷ Haley (1890) 160, who adds that "a certain degree of verisimilitude is necessary to comic effect".

⁸ Storey (1989) 16 for a summary of older interpretations.

play to be love and the relationship between women".⁹ No matter what one concludes about the intentions of Euripides or the effect of the play on his audience, there is no denying that the relation — even more the animosity between Hermione and Andromache sets the play in motion and informs its meaning. Deeper social and familial issues are brought to the frontline, such as the position and status of slave women and suppository children.¹⁰ These are issues where women play a crucial role, no matter whether it is their intention. One might rightfully ask whether women have an actual say in all this, since they do not choose to become slaves, or they do not choose to welcome a concubine in the house.¹¹ But it is more than a relationship between a mistress and a slave that is at stake in this play of Euripides. The confrontation of the two female

⁹ Garyza 1963, cited in Storey (1989) 16.

¹⁰ The issue of suppository children will be addressed also in comedy. Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae* will deal with this matter on more than one occasion: *Thesm.* 339-40, 407-9, 502-16, 564-5. On the comic stage, this is presented as a matter of laughing-stock, since women appear to deceive their husbands often. In the serious environment of Tragedy, the matter gains a potentially political dimension. In his article, Storey (1989, 25) concludes "I see Euripides in this play as a playwright in transition from a more domestically oriented to a more politically focused tragedy". Jasper Griffin (1998, 61) cites a speech *Against Alcibiades* 4. (22-3 Loeb) attributed to the orator Andocides, who is blamed for having a child with one of the slave women of Melos. Griffin concludes that: "That suggests that the audience saw tragedy more in the way suggested here, as rich in terrible situations and towering personalities, than as a show-case either of democratic values or of their breach. There is of course nothing specific to the democracy, or indeed to the fifth century, about this motif, in literature or in life. We can compare the position of Andromache in her name play: the slave mother of the son of her conqueror".

¹¹ The Homeric background of the play will stir the memory of the audience with other stories about women who had to accept concubines in their house, e.g. Clytemnestra and Cassandra (Aeschylus' *Oresteia*), or even other mythological traditions, e.g. Deianeira and Iole (Sophocles, *Trachiniae*). Stories like that always end in catastrophe and death. The audience might have expected something catastrophic to occur after the arrival of Andromache.

leading characters of the play allows for the playwright to explore the relation of women in general and to present them eager to pass judgment about each other and about their sex as a whole.

It is not long after the beginning of the play that Andromache, indignant and surprised after the daring confessions of Hermione, exclaims:

Ἀνδρομάχη

πέποιθα. δεινὸν δ' ἔρπετῶν μὲν ἀγρίων
ἄκη βροτοῖσι θεῶν καταστήσαι τινα: 270

ὁ δ' ἔστ' ἐχίδνης καὶ πυρὸς περαιτέρω
οὐδεὶς γυναικὸς φάρμακ' ἐξηύρηκέ πω
[κακῆς: τοσοῦτόν ἐσμεν ἀνθρώποις κακόν].¹²

Andromache

Yes, in him I trust. It is monstrous that while some god has given us a cure [270] for the bites of the snakes of the wild, no one has yet found the specific against a woman [a bad one: such a bane we are to mankind].

This denunciation of her sex seems unfamiliar to a character who only 47 verses earlier (l. 222-225) was taking pride for all that she had offered in the life of Hector, as a woman, even reaching the point of breastfeeding his illegitimate children, and thus “won her husband over with her goodness (Eur. *Andr.* 226). It seems that Andromache not only acknowledges the inherent characteristics of the Female (motherhood, submission to man), but she also takes pride in them.¹³ Here Andromache definitely is a loudspeaker of

¹² Text and translation Euripides, with an English translation by David Kovacs. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. Forthcoming (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0090>)

¹³ The comment of Medea in the homonymous play of Euripides, “I’d rather stand three times in battle, than give birth once” (Eur. *Med.* 250-1) surely classifies Medea in the sphere of the unnatural, since she rejects the most celebrated characteristic of female nature, motherhood.

male stereotypes about family and marriage.¹⁴ A woman who reprobates her own sex — a motive that was probably introduced by Euripides with Phaedra in *Hippolytus* — might appear more reliable.¹⁵ And Andromache seems to rank herself in the first category, distinguishing her contact from the reprehensible behavior of the rest of the women. This is corroborated by Hermione, when she asks Andromache: “Why do you take this high and lofty tone and enter into a contest of words with me, maintaining that you are chaste while I am not?” (Eur. *Andr.* 235-6).

It is not the only instance where Andromache blames the weaknesses of her own sex, within the boundaries of the homonymous play. In lines 218-221 she refers to ἀπληστίαν λέχους, insatiability of sex by women.

[215] If you had had as husband a king in snowy Thrace, where one husband divides his bed in turn among many women, would you have killed them? If so you would have clearly branded all women with the charge of sexual insatiability. [220] This is a shameful thing. And yet though we women suffer worse from this disease than men do, at least let us veil it decently from sight.

She admits that sexual insatiability is something that women are more prone at, compared to men. The only thing they should do is to “veil it decently from sight”. It is something that might sound more appropriate to be found in a comedy, where female promiscuity is often raised.¹⁶ She also indirectly accuses Hermione of a terrible vice, pride. “A woman, even if given in marriage to a lowly husband, must respect him and not engage in a contest of pride” (Eur. *Andr.* 213-14). Only after she has expressed the

¹⁴ McLure (1999) 181.

¹⁵ McLure (1999) 183.

¹⁶ Of course female promiscuity is not unknown in tragedy. “Phaedra in Euripides’ *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos* probably solicited her stepson; Medea’s erotic attachment to Jason is viewed as extreme and unsuitable for a married woman. Eratosthenes (Lysias 1. 6) ceased worrying over his wife’s chastity only when she produced a child, and Xenophon’s Ischomachus waits to begin training his wife until she is “tamed” (*Oec.* 7. 10)”. Foley (1989) 20.

obviously male opinion that “It is not beauty but good qualities that give joy to husbands” (Eur. *Andr.* 206). And these are not the only faults admitted by women in Euripidean plays, in general. The chorus leader in *Andromache* (l. 181-2), as well as Medea in the homonymous play concede to the fact that jealousy — something that women have in them by nature (Eur. *Phoen. Wom.* 201), comes to a peak when they lose their husband because of another woman (Eur. *Med.* 265-6: ὅταν δ’ ἐς εὐνήν ἡδίκημένη κυρῇ / οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρὴν μαιφονωτέρα). The culmination of this clash within the boundaries of the same sex is found probably in the comments of the women of the Chorus, in the first stasimon (Eur. *Andr.* 274-308), when the women recall that the beginning of all these evils is the judgment of Paris, when he was asked to decide about the most beautiful goddess over Aphrodite, Hera and Athena. The rivalry between three female figures — even if they are of divine origin — was catastrophic.¹⁷

One interesting case of female depreciation of the characteristics associated with their gender is the admittance of women’s fondness of gossip. In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra adheres that

τὸ μὲν γυναῖκα πρῶτον ἄρσενος δίχα
ἦσθαι δόμοις ἔρημον ἔκπαγλον κακόν,
πολλὰς κλύουσιν κληδόνας παλιγκότους·
καὶ τὸν μὲν ἦκειν, τὸν δ’ ἐπεσφέρειν κακοῦ 865
κάκιον ἄλλο πῆμα, λάσκοντας δόμοις.
καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτύγχανεν
ἀνὴρ ὅδ’, ὥς πρὸς οἶκον ὠχετεύετο
φάτις, τέτρηται δικτύου πλέον λέγειν

First and foremost, it is a terrible evil for a wife to sit forlorn at home, severed from her husband, always hearing many malignant rumors, and for one messenger after another [865] to come bearing tidings of disaster, each worse than the last, and cry

¹⁷ One more catastrophic rivalry between women seems to be implied by the reference to Hecuba, who did not believe the prophecy of Cassandra and did not kill calamitous Paris (Eur. *Andr.* 274-308).

them to the household. And as for wounds, had my husband received so many as rumor kept pouring into the house, no net would have been pierced so full of holes as he.

Clytemnestra describes herself as a typical housewife, who sits without much to do at home and is prone to gossip — something that seems to be a stereotypical opinion of men for women.¹⁸ In Euripides' *Andromache*, Hermione says:

ἀλλ' οὐποτ' οὐποτ' (οὐ γὰρ εἰσάπαξ ἐρῶ) 943
 χρη' τούς γε νοῦν ἔχοντας, οἷς ἔστιν γυνή,
 πρὸς τὴν ἐν οἴκοις ἄλοχον ἐσφοιτᾶν ἔαν
 γυναῖκας: αὐταὶ γὰρ διδάσκαλοι κακῶν:
 ἢ μὲν τι κερδαίνουσα συμφθείρει λέχος,
 ἢ δ' ἀμπλακοῦσα συννοσεῖν αὐτῇ θέλει,
 πολλὰ δὲ μαργότητι. κἀντεῦθεν δόμοι
 νοσοῦσιν ἀνδρῶν. πρὸς τὰδ' εὖ φυλάσσετε
 κλήθροισι καὶ μοχλοῖσι δωμάτων πύλας:
 ὕγιες γὰρ οὐδὲν αἱ θύραθεν εἰσοδοὶ
 δρῶσιν γυναικῶν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ καὶ κακά. 953

But never, never (for I will say it more than once) ought sensible men who have wives [945] to allow women to come to visit their wives in the house. They are the ones who teach evil. One corrupts her marriage with an eye to gain, while another who has slipped from virtue wishes for company in her vice, while others act from mere lewdness. That is the source of the disease [950] in the houses of men. In view of this guard well with bolt and bar the gates of your houses. For visits of women from outside are the cause of nothing that is sound but of much trouble.

Even if one is temporarily surprised by Hermione's readiness to turn against her own sex attributing to it meanness, lack of solidarity and gullibility, as far as gossip is concerned, the answer of the Chorus leader is even more startling:

ἄγαν ἐφῆκας γλῶσσαν εἰς τὸ σύμφυτον.
 συγγνωστὰ μὲν νυν σοὶ τὰδ', ἀλλ' ὅμως χρεῶν 955
 κοσμεῖν γυναῖκας τὰς γυναικείας νόσους.

¹⁸ McLure (1999) 56-92.

You have hurled your tongue too violently at your own sex. [955] To be sure, this is understandable, but still it is right for women to cover over women's maladies.

The Chorus leader not only does not disagree with Hermione's utterings, not only she does not turn to a dramatically natural counter-argument in defense of women against the accusations of another woman, but she agrees and argues the issue further more. She confirms the opinion just expressed by Hermione by simply advising her that women should not speak so openly about their faults, but they should prettify them deviously.

But why is the encounter of women and the influence of one upon another a dangerous or potentially subversive matter?

Spacks claimed that "gossip, just like sexual intercourse belongs to a secret life"¹⁹, explaining that the exchange of secret information, just like sexual contact, represent a very close encounter, something that surely alarms men, who consider the cases of close encounters of women potentially subversive (at least this is something implied by the examples of dangerous female groups in the *Bacchae* of Euripides and in the *Suppliant Women* of Aeschylus).²⁰ The ability of women to interact with one another presupposes a certain degree of freedom. "Women of all classes seem to have been permitted to associate quite freely with persons of their own sex. Scenes like Lys. 5 seqq., where Lysistrata and her neighbor Calonice come out and converse, cannot have been uncommon. ... Passages like Lys. 13 and 1007, though they relate to an imaginary occurrence, nevertheless imply considerable

¹⁹ Spacks (1985) 40. Cf. Cohen (1989) 6: "The house is the domain of secrecy, of intimate life, and honour requires that its sanctity be protected. Any violation of the house is an attack on the honour of its men and the chastity of its women, even if the intruder be only a thief. The separation of women from men and the man's public sphere within this protected domain is the chief means by which sexual purity is both guarded and demonstrated to the community".

²⁰ For the subversive potential of collective femininity see Syropoulos (2003) 23-67, 45-55. Cf. Zeitlin (1992) 203-252.

freedom of communication among the women of Greece; otherwise they would be absurd and meaningless".²¹ There are many occasions where women have the opportunity to be with one another without the supervision of men (they invite their female friends to a lunch [Arist. *Eccl.* 348-9], even without their husbands' permission, or go out to assist women in child-bed [Arist. *Eccl.* 528ff], something that definitely excludes male presence). "While it is undeniable that women did not operate in the public and political spheres in the way that men did, it does not necessarily follow that they did not have public, social, and economic spheres of their own."²² This freedom is perceived as a kind of domestic interaction that often transgresses the space of one's *oikos*. And anything that goes further than the *oikos* is potentially *of the polis*.²³

However, there is another dimension more domestic, within the boundaries of the *oikos*. Hermione's worry makes this evident, when she exclaims "That is the source of the disease in the houses of men" (Eur. *Andr.* 950-1). A woman is capable of endangering the stability and continuity of the *oikos* not only by transgressing the boundaries of her socially set behavior,²⁴ but she constitutes a potentially subversive factor of *oikos*' stability, even when she behaves according to the specifications of her gender roles.

²¹ Haley (1890) 175.

²² One of the best descriptions of women's public dimension is still that of Cohen (1989).

²³ Foley (1989) 20 argues that in comedy, namely in the *Ecclesiazusae*, women do, as they do so rarely in tragedy, continue to represent the *oikos* as they make their symbolic intrusion into the political sphere. I have argued elsewhere that there are many instances in tragedy, where women still represent the *oikos* but cause considerable political trouble. Plays like Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Alcestis*, prove exactly how politically subversive women can be, even when they doubt (*Suppliants*) or even excessively adhere to their domestic roles (*Alcestis*). See, respectively, Syropoulos (2001) 17 and Syropoulos (2003) 26-37.

²⁴ Syropoulos (2001) 5-18.

COMEDY

Undoubtedly, the comic stage does not function with the same mechanisms of informing civic ideology or of informing of views regarding the relations between the sexes. Taplin convincingly speaks of polarization, not mere differences, between the two genres.²⁵ However, the transcendence of comic characters resembles that of the tragic characters. Both genres present extreme or extra-ordinary situations with extreme or extra-ordinary action undertaken by their protagonists. Especially when Aristophanes, the greatest bitter admirer of Euripides, not only likes to make direct references to the man whom apparently loves to hate,²⁶ but also indirect (for example, by presenting onstage a group of women that is collectively subversive, just like the group of women in the *Bacchae*, the *Thesmophoriazusae* or the *Ecclesiazusae*).²⁷ Miller (1947) argued that “the Euripidean defense of women suggested to Aristophanes the subject of the parabasis in the *Thesmophoriazusae*”, and concluded that “it is hardly a coincidence that both defenses begin with the complaint that women are unjustly blamed by men”.²⁸ Participation of women in festivals such as the *Thesmophoria* presupposes and allows women enough freedom to organize their rituals. This kind of freedom and the public performance of the holy rituals give to women a dimension potentially political.²⁹ Despite the fact that the action is political and women play a leading role in it, nowhere is the

²⁵ Taplin (1986) 164f. Cf. also Fleming’s opinion about a distinction that should be made “between sympathy with emotions portrayed on the stage and the evocation of emotion as a result of the spectator’s judgment concerning the characters and actions represented” (Fleming, 1939, p. 547).

²⁶ For the relationship between Aristophanes and Euripides, see R. W. Wycherley (1946) 98, B. Seidensticker (1978) 304, R. Rosen (2005) 251-68, A. Reardon (1914) 30-60.

²⁷ See Miller (1946) for tragic influence on the *Thesmophoriazusae* of Aristophanes.

²⁸ Miller (1947) 180.

²⁹ Goff (2005) 50-55.

audience called to feel sympathy or admiration for the role of women.³⁰ This is the comedy with the greatest abundance of sexist jokes regarding the stereotypical roles of husbands — even more than those found in *Lysistrata* or the *Ecclesiazusae*.³¹ In the *Thesmophoriazusae* women admit in public all the faults of which men accuse them. And since what they say will not go any further (αὐταὶ γὰρ ἔσμεν, κοῦδεμί' ἔκφορος λόγος: we are alone and our words will not be repeated outside (Arist. *Thesm.* 471-2), they have no problem to account shamelessly their natural inclination to adultery, the deceit of their husbands (l. 475-515), wine-drinking (l.630-2), and they exclaim:

ταῦτ' οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὰ κακά; νῆ τὴν Ἀρτεμιν
ἡμεῖς γε. καὶ τ' Εὐριπίδῃ θυμούμεθα,
οὐδὲν παθοῦσαι μείζον ἢ δεδράκαμεν; 519

Are these not our everyday tricks? Why certainly, by Artemis, and we are angry with Euripides, who assuredly treats us no worse than we deserve!

It reminds us vividly of the answer of the Chorus Leader to Hermione, who, as we already saw, does not renounce the evils of women, but simply advises Hermione not to report them publicly. Amid other women, women seem to boast about their weaknesses and their passions. The *parabasis* of verses 785-845 in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is an audacious declaration of women, that, despite the defects list that the audience has just heard numbered by them, they are better than men.

The charges against women by other women are perhaps more annoying in the *Ecclesiazusae*, since it is the leader of women herself, Praxagora, who will make a libel against women, describing in detail the passions and weaknesses of her own sex. Even worse, in doing so, Praxagora assumes the stereotypical male

³⁰ Henderson (1996) 91.

³¹ Henderson (1996) 90.

role of orator, as she addresses the assembly of women.³² In her speech she tries to convince that women should be *epitropoi* (commissioners) and *tamiai* (treasurers) (l. 211), since they have the skills of management because of their experience in managing the *oikos*. Although in another context such an argument could bear philosophical as well as political interpretations and be considered very seriously, Praxagora herself trivializes her statement as she acknowledges that women

καθήμεναι φρύγουσιν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς φέρουσιν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
τὰ Θεσμοφόρι' ἄγουσιν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
πέττουσι τοὺς πλακοῦντας ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐπιτρίβουσιν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ 225
μοιχοὺς ἔχουσιν ἔνδον ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
αὐταῖς παροψωνοῦσιν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
οἶνον φιλοῦσ' εὐζωρον ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·
βινούμεναι χαίρουσιν ὥσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ·

Then the women sit down to cook, just as they always did; they carry things on their head just as they always did; they keep the Thesmophoria, just as they always did; they knead their cakes just as they always did; they make their husbands angry just as they always did; [225] they receive their lovers in their houses just as they always did; they buy dainties just as they always did; they love unmixed wine just as they always did; they delight in being loved just as they always did

The verb βινούμεναι used in the last verse is the vulgar form of the copulative verb and refers to male speech, since a woman would usually use similes, duplications or aliases.³³ No matter how hard Praxagora tries to convince that, despite their weaknesses women could become worthy administrators of the

³² McLure (1999) 244. There are many instances in comedy where women use coarse language: Arist. *Eccl.* 256-7; 884-937; *Lys.* 23-5; 59-60; 88-92; 107-10; 120ff; 158-9; 227-32; 362-3; 715; 771; 800; 825-8; 1112-21, to name a but a few.

³³ McLure (1999) 244.

public affairs of the *polis*, she does not convince the male audience. “Today we make comparable criticisms when we say that the managers of the public debt would learn something from the thrifty householder or that housewives should be allowed, because of their special knowledge of consumption, to impose consumer legislation on a greedy (male) world. Those who make such statements are not proposing that women should actually take over the bureau or the budget”.³⁴ Even the emotional statement, that because they are mothers, they will always find a way to save the soldiers — something that once more reminds the audience of the stereotypical roles of women, as we have seen emerging through the aforementioned tragedies — is not enough (Arist. *Eccl.* 244). In the next few verses, trying to convince that even on economic issues a woman would be better than a man, Praxagora admits that this is only because women are so much better in deceit (χρήματα πορίζειν εὐπορώτατον γυνή,/ ἄρχουσά τ’ οὐκ ἂν ἐξαπατηθεῖν ποτέ. / αὐταὶ γάρ εἰσιν ἐξαπατᾶν εἰθισμέναι. — Arist. *Eccl.* 236-8).

The political dimension of plays like the *Ecclesiazusae* or *Lysistrata* is as prominent as their domestic side. In plays like these, the potentially subversive tone lies within the fact that women assume political dimension, proving their value by making use of their domestic skills.³⁵ In the eyes of men, this might seem as an “intrusion”³⁶, although Foley convincingly suggests that role segregation is one thing, but at the end of the day men and women share similar interests with regards the continuity of the *oikos* and the *polis*.³⁷ The absurdity of the situation presented in comedies like these, i.e. women who take over the political scene, might be moderated by the convincing oratory of women. Their effecti-

³⁴ Foley (1989) 18.

³⁵ Foley (1982) 4, 7.

³⁶ The term was introduced by Shaw (1975) in an influential article which gave rise to further arguments.

³⁷ Foley (1982) 5.

veness stands in their admitted skills and in their collective, totally political presence and solidarity. This last needs to be regulated by introducing the theme of division. By publicly admitting their faults and depreciating what might have sounded as convincing political qualities, female comic characters remind their audience that what they watch is potential admonition, only in reverse. Women are still to be considered domestic beings, perhaps not even of the *oikos*, but as Xenophon would put it, of the *oikia* (Xen. *Oec.* 1.5).

EPILOGUE

Froma Zeitlin had long ago pointed out that despite their dramatic presentation on stage women are unable to change their lives after the completion of the drama. Their dynamic presence usually operates either as a model to avoided, either as a secret model about the way men ought to behave.³⁸ Men teach other men even through the paradigms of the behavior and the *logos* of women. Subsequently, even when women express themselves negatively about their own sex, we should remind ourselves that their words are the opinions of men and they operate canonically and aphoristically, with regards to the mapping of gender characteristics, as drama explores how waterproof they are.

It is also necessary to point out a major theatrical convention. Views expressed by women or men in the works at hand, often are the opinions of the character the actors play and they should definitely not be considered in isolation from the rest of the action, otherwise they lead to erroneous conclusions. Thus, the view of Hippolytus in the homonymous play of Euripides, "I will never tire of hating women. It is true that I always talk about it. But there is no greater evil than women" (Eur. *Hippol.* 664-6), is

³⁸ Zeitlin (1990) 66. Cf. Syropoulos (2003) 73-79, about the way that the dynamic presentation of women in Tragedy plays a canonical role, with women who transgress the boundaries of their socially defined roles serving as negative paradigms of heroism.

only the view of a theatrical hero, who will be punished for his excessive attitude. Accordingly, the accusations of Hermione or Andromache against their sex should not be perceived as the views of playwright, but as the views of the angered female characters of the play, who have every reason, from their own point of view, to chafe at other women in the play, even if their comments dangerously generalize their opinions. As for the accusations uttered by Praxagora against women, we should remind ourselves that despite them the *strategis*, as she is called by the rest of the women (a male office adjusted grammatically in the female gender), demonstrates that women are perfectly capable of ruling the city. It is remarkable how much interest tragic and comic poets find in presenting onstage women who accuse other women.³⁹ Through their subjective masculine point of view, the readiness of women to blame their sex obtains a regulatory dimension as presented on the public theatrical stage⁴⁰ —

³⁹ Perhaps it is also true admitting that equally remarkable is the interest of dramatists (tragic and comic alike) in presenting *women* onstage in general. Seltman (1955) spoke of a *gynaecophilia* in ancient Athens" (p. 124); he is at least correct in the fact that for dramatists women provided some theatrically functional characters and ideologically challenging material, for many different subjects. As for comic poetry and the value of women for comic poets, L. O'Higgins (2003) studied the role of women in the production of joking speech and active participation in cultic joking, especially with reference to the cults of Demeter and Dionysus, arguing that women and the tradition of cultic joking acted as an important source of inspiration in the development of iambic poetry and Attic old comedy.

⁴⁰ Seltman (1955) 120: "Only adults could create and understand the characters of Clytemnestra and Electra, Antigone and Ismene, Deianeira, Iocasta, Alcestis, Medea and Phaedra, Iphigeneia, Creusa, Hecuba, Andromache and Helen, because they were living Athenian women of whom these characters were types". His statement not only presupposes the existence of women among the audience (Seltman [1955] 119-20), but also serves as a basis for views on the didactic power of drama. Cf. Syropoulos (2003) 78: tragedy teaches by presenting the departure from established gender roles as hazardous; Croally (1994) 16-40, 69, 254: tragedy teaches by examining ideology otherwise; Heath (1987) 38-44, collects evidence for the

especially if one accepts the proposal of scholars who believe that women were present among the ancient audience.⁴¹

On a second level, we observe that on many instances when women seem to depreciate their sex, the effect is reversed by a retort that follows immediately, either in words or in action. For example, the “ingenious but somewhat whimsical defence” of women in Ar. *Thesm.* 785ff after having listened to the audacious speech of Mnesilochus (Ar. *Thesm.* 520ff);⁴² The tragic examples mentioned already fit in this category. In the *Phoenician Women*, the Pedagogus warns of the arrival of a band of women, who come ready to cause disorder with their speech. On the contrary, the female chorus of the homonymous play “far from looking for gossip or speaking ill of other women, sing in lofty phrases of their travels from the Phoenician to the Cadmean land and presciently lament the imminent bloodshed”.⁴³ Thus should be regarded the punishment of Hippolytus, mentioned already and the stance of Andromache as a woman who encapsulates all the feminine qualities of mother and wife, as they would have been appreciated by men. Women’s appreciation by men is after all the key methodological approach on this matter. Thus, the exodus from this brief treatment of the subject of female denunciation by women would be appropriately marked by the lines that prepare the entrance of the Chorus of women in the *Phoenician Women* of Euripides.

teaching mode of tragedy through paradigms, although he dismisses them in favor for an “emotional effect”.

⁴¹ For this view see Box (1964) 241-2; Haley (1890) 170-3, suggested that women were present at tragedies, not comedies. Modern scholarship is still divided. Much of the evidence is collected by Henderson, who argues for the attendance of women at dramatic festivals. Cf. Plato *Gorgias* 502 b-d and *Laws* 658 a-d, and Ar. *Peace* 962-7. Contrary evidence from Ar. *Thesm.* 383-97, *Peace* 50-3, *Birds* 793-6 and Menander *The Grouch* 965-7. Cf. also McLure (1999) 4, n. 10 and 6, n. 16.

⁴² Haley (1890) 160.

⁴³ Saxonhouse (2005) 481.

Ágora. Estudos Clássicos em Debate 14 (2012)

φιλόψογον δὲ χρῆμα θηλειῶν ἔφυ,
σμικρὰς τ' ἀφορμὰς ἣν λάβωσι τῶν λόγων, 200
πλείους ἐπεσφέρουσιν: ἡδονὴ δέ τις
γυναιξὶ μηδὲν ὕγιες ἀλλήλας λέγειν.

Now women by nature love to find fault; and if they get some slight handle for their talk [200] they exaggerate it, for women seem to have pleasure in saying nothing wholesome about each other.

As long as we remind ourselves that these words are not uttered by a female character, but by the *Pedagogus* — a man; and more — or less — than man, a slave.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Saxohouse (2005) 480: "Into the mouth of a slave Euripides has put a speech condemning the free speech of women". At least, the playwright compensates by giving his female characters the *parrhêsia* that male Athenian citizens enjoyed in real life. Cf. Saxohouse (2005) 480-1, who argues convincingly that "playwrights who put such speeches into the mouths of slaves undermine the truths of the conventions".

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Resumo: A visão depreciativa da mulher expressa pelo homem encontra-se frequentemente tanto na tragédia como na comédia. Há, contudo, casos em que as mulheres se referem negativamente ao seu próprio sexo. A análise desta questão revela que estas ocorrências se encontram em peças em que a censura dirigida à segregação sexual e aos papéis de género assume relevo.

Palavras-chave: papéis domésticos; papéis de género; estabilidade política e social.

Resumen: Tanto en las tragedias como en las comedias se encuentran a menudo visiones despectivas de las mujeres manifestadas por los hombres. Hay casos sin embargo en que las mujeres vilipendian su propio sexo. El análisis de esta situación muestra que dichos casos se encuentran en obras en que asume especial relevancia la denuncia sobre la segregación sexual y los roles de género.

Palabras clave: roles domésticos; roles de género; estabilidad política y social.

Résumé: La vision dépréciative de l'homme vis-à-vis de la femme est une constante dans la tragédie et la comédie. Toutefois, il existe des cas où se sont les femmes elles-mêmes qui parlent de façon négative de leur propre sexe. L'analyse effectuée révèle que ces dernières occurrences se trouvent dans des pièces où la censure dirigée contre la ségrégation sexuelle et les rôles du genre prend grande importance.

Mots-clé: rôles domestiques; rôles du genre; stabilité politique et sociale.