

## **Kim On CHONG-GOSSARD**

### **The Partial Muteness of Euripidean Men: Adrastus, Orestes, and Menoecus**

Euripides clearly reserves different modes of communication for his male and female characters, and silence is a telling example. Within the extant corpus, three characters observe a prolonged silence (over 100 lines) after their initial entrance, leading the audience to wonder whether they are "kōphā prosōpa," until they engage in conversation with other characters at a crucial moment. These characters are all male: Adrastus from *Suppliants*, Orestes from his name play, and Menoecus from *Phoenissae*. These situations are akin to the "Aeschylean silence" once critiqued by Taplin--that is, an actor is present on stage, immobile and silent, for a long time before actually speaking and joining the plot. These Euripidean examples of partial muteness have a common feature that one might call "selective timing." That is, these men wait their turn to speak.

Adrastus is silent until addressed by a man (Theseus). Menoecus does not speak until he is alone with his father. Orestes delivers no lines until he awakens. Unlike the silences of Euripidean women (Phaedra, Creusa), or the oaths of silence made by female choruses, these men are not hiding personal secrets or deliberately withholding vital information concerning an intrigue. They do have information to share, but it is best expressed at a proper "moment."

The archetypal partial muteness scene of extant Greek tragedy is a female one--the Cassandra scene from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Both Cassandra and Euripides' men reveal new information that is central to the narrative, but the men do so as a prelude to an act of persuasion that is only effective if they wait for the correct stage audience. Adrastus relates to Theseus his knowledge of the true events leading up to the Theban war--the real story, not rumors or assumptions about what happened. This information is vital to *Suppliants*, for without it, Theseus cannot properly judge whether to rescue the bodies of the Seven. Orestes wakes after Electra's failed attempt to disband the chorus, as if to persuade and assure the audience that the play will indeed proceed. As for Menoecus, he IS the vital new information of *Phoenissae*. He IS the new sacrifice which Teiresias revealed necessary to the victory of Thebes, and after some reverse psychology on his father, he takes his own life.

Why do no Euripidean women employ partial muteness? If these male silences are preludes to persuasive speeches that involve the revealing of new information, then Euripidean women persuade in other ways. Song is the mode used by women to share their private knowledge for the persuasion of a male audience, particularly in recognition scenes when that male audience is a kinsman who must rescue them. For Euripidean women, these moments of persuasion and revelation involve a kind of self-defense not necessary to men. Women's self-defense may have an emotional basis which is more appropriate to lyrics, whereas men's moments of persuasion are more dramatically effective when made at the right time with the right audience, after a period of silence.

