

The first choral ode of Euripides' *Medea* (410-445) defends the character of woman, attributing her bad reputation to an early Greek poetic tradition of misogynistic verse. The ode, coming just after Medea's own pronouncement of her devious plot for revenge, has struck some critics as ironic (Mastronarde, *ad loc.*). Page (x-xi) sees it as an implicit comment on the looming shadow of the Peloponnesian War and the dissolution of the Thirty Years Truce. Others (Knox; cf. Williamson, 30) understand the ode to be representative of Euripides' vindication of women, a vindication enacted in the very composition and staging of the tragedy. This paper argues that the ode is best understood as an expression of the playwright's concern with the arbitrary and unstable nature of poetic tradition. As such it enters current debates focused on Euripides' poetic self-consciousness and his ability as a playwright to redefine an epic *logos* as a tragic one (cf. Boedeker, 109-10, and Segal).

The poet foregrounds his challenge to the authority of traditional stories not merely through a gendered polarity, but also through deliberate epic coloring that harkens back to two of the earliest moments of poetic self-consciousness in the Greek literary tradition, both defined by attempts to silence a bard. Commentators have noted that the "divine song" (...*thespin aoidan*) that the chorus laments was never granted to women by Apollo (*Med.* 425) is reminiscent of Homer's description of the songs of Phemius and Demodocus in the *Odyssey* (1.328, 8.498; cf. 17.385). While scholars have identified the reference as one of many evocations of different poetic traditions, both the Homeric contexts of the reference and the relationship of Homer's *thespis aoidē* to the divine song mentioned in the ode have been largely overlooked. Garner (1990, 95) remarks that Euripides' reference to Demodocus of book eight would conjure thoughts of Penelope's faithfulness in contrast with the deceptive powers of Odysseus. He does not, however, comment on the metapoetic capacity of the allusion to Homer. Each Homeric passage in which the phrase is used offers an opposing perspective on the tales sung about the Trojan War and the Achaean homecoming. A tearful Penelope attempts to silence the song of Phemius, though Telemachus quickly rebukes his mother. He reminds her that innovation (*aoidē neōtatē*) among poets is held in high regard (*Od.* 1.351-52), and that the spoken word (*mūthos*, 1.358) should be the concern of men. In book eight, Odysseus encourages Demodocus to sing of his crafty deceit that hastens the siege of Troy, though the tale brings him also to tears, a reaction described in a poignant simile likening the great hero to a war widow (8.521-31). Alcinous recognizes Odysseus' grief and tactfully silences the singer.

It is the purpose of this paper to clarify the nature of Euripides' intertextual engagement with the *Odyssey*. I argue that the playwright uses Homer's critique of poetic performance to reflect upon his own role as tragic innovator and, in particular, to articulate his role in refashioning traditional stories in a way that elicits a sympathetic reaction for ostensibly unsympathetic behavior (Mastronarde, 44-64, for evidence regarding variants of the Medea myth; cf. Michellini). Close study of the exact nature of Euripides' reference to Homer's renowned poets will also shed further light on Euripides' as a playwright concerned (like so many of his Athenian contemporaries) with the abuses of language, and with the power of tragic discourse to underscore those abuses (cf. Boedeker and McClure, 3-19).