Introduction

Γέρασε ἀνάμεσα στὴ φωτιά τῆς Τροίας καὶ στὰ λατομεῖα τῆς Σικελίας. ‘He grew old between the fires of Troy and the quarries of Sicily’ (G. Seferis: Εὐριπίδης, Ἀθηναῖος)

In this dissertation, I investigate the ways in which the Athenian tragedian Euripides handles certain ideas concerning language and language use. These include, among many others, the claim that ‘honourable speech is a medicine for man’s fear’;\(^1\) or the observation that ‘no one can judge a case... before having learned both sides’ story’;\(^2\) or – featuring in a play variously labelled as a “comedy” or “tragedy of ideas” – the notion that ‘a name may be in many places, but not a body’;\(^3\) It is among the commonplace of modern Euripidean scholarship that such ideas straddle the chronological gap that separates the remote mythical era in which the dramas take place from the high classical period in which they were produced.\(^4\) As Euripides’ characters speak with sophistication about δίσσοι λόγοι, or about ὄνομα and πράγματα, they reinforce the image, familiar to us from the ancient biographies, of Euripides as a writer who is less inhibited by tradition than his principal colleagues, and who is more ready than they to confront his audience directly with novel concepts and ideas. The presence of ideas associated with contemporary thinkers arguably gives this poet’s plays a more ‘modern’ feel than those of Aeschylus or Sophocles – a fact that the comic poet Aristophanes was quick to see and exploit, for example in his Frogs, where Euripides is lampooned as a quasi- or crypto-sophist.

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\(^1\) E. fr. 1065.2: λόγος γὰρ ἐσθλὸς φάρµακον φόβου βροτοῖς.
\(^2\) Held. 179-80: τίς ἂν δίκην κρίνειεν... πρὶν ἂν παρ’ ἁµοῖν, ἀµφότερον ἕκµαθη σαφῶς;
\(^3\) Hel. 588: τῶνοµα γένοιτʼ ἐν πολλαχοῖ, τὸ σῶµα δ’ οὐ. “Comedy of ideas”: cf. Burnett, ‘Comedy’, with the critical discussion of Wright, Escape Tragedies 228-33 (who substitutes, as does Allan on Hel. p. 46-66, “tragedy” for “comedy”).

\(^4\) In her classic discussion of contemporary reference in tragedy, P.E. Easterling takes her cue from B.M.W. Knox’s observation that “in Attic tragedy... anachronism is not the exception but the rule” (Oedipus 61), and argues that the plays’ insistent references and allusions to contemporary events, persons and ideas are “devices [that] remind the audience of the clash between the time of the story and their own present time, suggesting... that they should look closely at the disturbing implications of the heroic tales and not allow themselves to be anaesthetised by their glamour or by their familiarity on the Attic stage” (‘Anachronism’ 9  – contra e.g. Taplin, ‘Synkrisis’ 67, who doubts that tragic anachronisms would be experienced as such at all). The scholarship on anachronism in Euripides is summarised by Neumann, Gegenwart 16-21.
In this dissertation, I complicate that general image, by showing how, at different points in time, Euripides uses his characters’ reflections about language to engage, as the occasion demanded, more or less critically with the thought of his intellectual contemporaries, the ‘sophists’, and with the embedding of that thought in Athenian socio-political practice. On my account, Euripides’ tragedies are no mere repositories of modern notions and ideas: the poet’s works do not just reflect the intellectual and socio-political environment in which they were created and performed, but also, and more fundamentally, reflect upon that environment. From my discussion, Euripides emerges as a thinker without obvious allegiances; a writer whose dramas accommodate world-views associated with contemporary intellectuals, not to disseminate these world-views among a mass audience but, first and foremost, to explore the limits of their explanatory and/or rhetorical potential.

This account of Euripides as a thinker who stands with one foot on either side of a divide – a Euripides who is both a modernist and a traditionalist – will be familiar from recent scholarly literature. All the same, my detailed examination of the poet’s handling of ideas about language will result in some new interpretations of individual dramas that are still often conceived of, more or less by default, as pageants for the “new thought”. In this Introduction, I shall try to lay the groundwork for these interpretations, by saying something about the current state of scholarship on Euripides’ relationship with his contemporaries (1); about the extent to which the tragedian’s authorial voice may be recovered from his polyphonic dramas (2); and finally, about the individual case studies of which my argument is comprised, and how they add up (3).

1. Euripides and the ‘sophists’
Comprising seventeen (or, counting Rhesus, eighteen) completely preserved plays and well over a thousand fragments, and spanning the early 430s to the close of the century, Euripides’ surviving oeuvre is one of the most voluminous bodies of text that have come down to us from later-5th-cent. Athens; and over the years, this corpus has been eagerly exploited by those who would gain a better understanding of the thought and mentalité that prevailed in this eventful period. Together with the other substantial witnesses – the plays of Sophocles and Aristophanes, the Histories of Thucydides and the remains of the sophists’ thought and teaching – Euripidean drama testifies to a society, profoundly affected by the ongoing war with Sparta, that is torn between nostalgia for a bygone era and an “extreme intellectual curiosity in all directions”.

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5 I retain the traditional appellation ‘sophists’ (with or without inverted commas) to refer collectively to such diverse later-5th-cent. thinkers as Protagoras, Antiphon and Gorgias, without thereby wishing to imply that these thinkers adhered to a common programme: indeed, the diversity among the late-5th-cent. intellectual avant-garde is an important part of my thesis – cf. below, section 1.

6 The phrase is taken from Allan, ‘Euripides & the Sophists’ 147. Cf. e.g. Knox, ‘Euripides’ 67: “Euripidean drama gives us the clearest reflection of the intellectual ferment of fifth-century Athens”.

From very early on, there has been a tendency to reckon Euripides among the curious, rather than the nostalgic. In the comedies that his younger contemporary Aristophanes produced from the 420s onwards, the tragedian is consistently associated with the period’s more radical thinkers;\(^7\) a year after his death, he is made to pray to such new-fangled deities as ‘Air’, ‘Intelligence’ and ‘Tongue’s Hinge’;\(^8\) and he is regarded as having a detrimental influence upon traditional public morals and morale.\(^9\) Breathing new life into this line of reception early in the 20th cent.,\(^10\) Wilhelm Nestle juxtaposed Euripides’ “message of enlightenment” about the real state of things with the “traditional beliefs” blindly accepted by the masses;\(^11\) but whereas Nestle saw Euripides as something between an apologist and an apostle for his intellectual contemporaries, more recent scholarship emphasises the independence and originality of the tragedian’s contribution to the prevailing intellectual climate – while still situating the tragedian among the avant-garde.\(^12\) Thus, William Allan emphasises Euripides’ “individual, creative response to some central problems of his society”, and observes that what links the poet and the sophists most closely is the “capacity to shock and to provoke reflection about basic issues..., while their shared capacity to pose questions is what gives both their philosophical character and importance”.\(^13\)


\(^8\) Ar. Ran. 892-4, cited and discussed below in ch. IV.1 (p. 146).

\(^9\) E.g. Ar. Ran. 1069-72 (‘Aeschylus’: Euripides ‘emptied the παλαίστραι’ and made the marines stand up against their officers); Thesmo. 450-1 (Euripides undermined the Athenians’ belief in the gods); &c.

\(^10\) For the persistence of Aristophanes’ jibes in the biographical tradition of Euripides, cf. e.g. Satyrus, Life §37-9 (Euripides as the supporter of Anaxagoras and Socrates); Suda s.v. Εὐριπίδης (Euripides and Anaxagoras); and the anonymous Life §4-5 (Euripides studied with Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Prodicus, Socrates and Archelaus; also Aulus Gellius, NA 15.20; DL 2.45, 9.54 &c.).

\(^11\) Nestle, Euripides 50; for the impact and reception of Nestle’s Euripidean studies, see the critical discussion of Egli, Zeitgenössische Strömungen 12-15; and for their basis in Nietzsche’s uncritical adoption of the Aristophanic view of the poet, cf. Henrichs, ‘Last of the Detractors’; Wright, Escape Tragedies 243-6.

\(^12\) Guthrie, Sophists 56 is still happy to refer to the tragedian in passing as “another spokesman of the new thought” (cf. also ibid. 127-8); cautionary notes are struck by e.g. Kerferd, Sophistic Movement 169-70; Conacher, Euripides & the Sophists 16; Assael, Philosophe et poète 1-11.

\(^13\) Allan, ‘Euripides & the Sophists’ 147 and 155.
Recent surveys of ‘sophistic’ themes in Euripidean tragedy by Desmond Conacher, Jacqueline Assael and Franziska Egli have emphasised the breadth of concerns and ideas that Euripidean drama has in common with such quintessential 5th-cent. thinkers as Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Gorgias and Prodicus. They have shown how these concerns inform such various aspects of the poet’s art as the disposition and articulation of his dialogues and ῥήσεις, his selection and treatment of mythical material, his geography and anthropology, and his provocative take on politics, warfare or the gods; but while such compendious treatments help to corroborate general assessments such as the ones sampled above, they also obscure the fact that some of the “questions” posed by Euripides’ plays concern, precisely, the cherished tenets or teachings that our sources associate with the ‘sophists’ themselves. In his programmatic study of the tragedian’s incorporation of sophistic political theory in Euripides’ Children of Heracles and Suppliant Women, already cited twice in the preceding paragraphs, Allan speaks of the poet’s “readiness even to challenge the new thinking”; and in a recent monograph, Gary Meltzer has forcefully emphasised Euripides’ consistent affirmation of conservative values over his alleged capacity to shock. It may still be true that Euripides was out there among the most advanced or progressive thinkers of his age; but it should not be assumed on the mere basis of their shared discourse alone that within this purported avant-garde, every nose pointed in the same direction, all the time.

It is against the background of this ongoing discussion that I propose to examine the ways in which Euripides handles certain ideas concerning language. Thinking about language and language use was, by all accounts, an essential and integral feature of 5th-cent. thought: essential, in the sense that in our sources, original ideas about language are attributed to most of the key thinkers of the period, as well as to some minor figures; and integral, in the sense that such ideas are both germane and fundamental to a wide range of these thinkers’ multifarious preoccupations. While

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14 Cf. Conacher, Euripides & the Sophists; Assael, Philosophe et poète passim; and Egli, Zeitgenössische Strömungen (especially the valuable catalogue on pp. 37-214).
15 Allan, ‘Euripides & the Sophists’ 155.
16 Meltzer, Poetics of Nostalgia (esp. pp. 51-4, where Meltzer juxtaposes the sophists’ various contributions with Euripides’ purported nostalgia for “the single authoritative voice of truth”).
17 For a survey of the major sophists’ linguistic preoccupations, see e.g. Guthrie, Sophists 176-225; Classen, ‘Study of Language’; Kerferd, Sophistic Movement 59-82. Minor figures: e.g., the late-5th-cent. Hippocratic treatise Περὶ τέχνης comprises a discussion about language that, for all its affiliations with the thought of Protagoras and Gorgias (cf. Jori, Medicina e medici 335-57), is quite distinctive: see the discussions of Jouanna, ‘Rhétorique et médecine’ and Rademaker, ‘Defending the Art’.
18 While Classen, ‘Study of Language’ 246-7 claims that “the linguistic studies of the sophists were carried out not for philosophical reasons, not to examine the means by which a statement can be made, but for rhetorical purposes”, more recent treatments eschew the anachronistic distinction between ‘philosophy’ and ‘rhetoric’, and emphasise the philosophical integrity of sophistic thought in general: cf. e.g. Striker, ‘Methods of Sophistry’; Woodruff, ‘Rhetoric & Relativism’. For an account of how the
our more hostile testimonies present some of the sophists’ linguistic inquiries and contentions as arcane or trivial, it is clear that the results of their studies contributed significantly to the formation of a socio-political and judicial discourse that, by the end of the 5th cent., had become the mainstream. Well before ‘rhetoric’ became a well-defined discipline, such techniques as arguing in utramque partem, πρὸς τοὔνοµα or from likelihood, and oppositions between νόµος and φύσις or λόγος and ἔργον, had gained a strong foothold in Athenian public life; and we encounter ‘sophistically’ informed discourses in a wide range of classical-period texts, from the historiography of Thucydides and Aristophanic comedy, to the late-5th- and 4th-cent. law-court speeches and political pamphlets like the Athenaion Politeia transmitted among the works of Xenophon.

Recent discussions of Euripides’ speeches and debates, of the different speech genres featured in his dramas, and of such key themes as ‘persuasion’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘performance’, have emphasised that the poet’s own language is no less thoroughly immersed in the socio-political and intellectual discourses that prevailed in late-5th-cent. Athens: going by his practice, Euripides was an exemplary product of his age. By looking at the meta-discursive remarks of which Euripides’ characters avail themselves in the course of the verbal dramas in which they are implicated, and on the ideas that lie behind their discursive moves, I hope to add a sense of how the poet used his dramas to reflect critically upon the very speech of which his own art is wrought.

2. The author’s voice on stage
Reflection on ‘sophistic’ ideas about speech and language is not, of course, a mere matter of express rejection or endorsement of any given idea by one Euripidean character or another. When, for instance, Helen claims that ‘a name may be in many places, but not a body’, it does not simply follow that Euripides embraces this striking thought. Although in Euripidean tragedy, some of the dramatis personae appear to speak with more authority than others – gods, for instance, dispatching prologue speeches or appearing e machina; or seers and µάντεις; or human characters invested with information that is withheld from others – none of them can be presumed to speak ‘philosophical’ and the ‘rhetorical’ preoccupations of Protagoras can be seen to complement each other, cf. Rademaker, ‘Correct Account’.

19 Recent monographs on single dramas standardly contain thematic chapters on such topics as ‘language’ or ‘rhetoric’ (e.g. Allan, Andromache 114-48; Croally, Euripidean Polemic 120-63; Porter, Studies 99-172); literature on Euripides’s so-called ‘agon’ scenes is cited in the notes to ch.11.0.

20 Cf. esp. the studies of gendered speech genres by Boedeker, ‘Vanity of λόγοι’; McClure, ‘Praise & Blame’ and Like a Woman 102-224; Murnaghan, ‘Survivors’ Song’; Mossman, ‘Women’s Speech’; and Chong-Gossard, Gender & Communication passim.

in loco auctoris. Indeed, as modern scholarship on Greek tragedy (and general drama theory) teaches us, a play comprises “multiple voices” that “all claim their own truth”, and lacks “the single, authoritative voice” of the author.\(^\text{22}\)

That does not mean, however, that the tragedian has no means of communicating, albeit indirectly, with his audience: for as the literary theorist Seymour Chatman says of the “implied author” of the novel, so the tragedian instructs us silently, through the design of the whole.\(^\text{23}\)

The model of literary communication that Chatman here summarises (and that most mainstream literary theorists would regard as valid)\(^\text{24}\) can be seen to apply equally to dramatic (i.e. “unmediated”) as well as to narrative (“mediated”) texts, and may, for present purposes, be schematically depicted as follows:\(^\text{25}\)

\[\text{historical author} \rightarrow \text{implied author} \rightarrow \text{narrator(s) / characters} \rightarrow \text{narratee(s) / characters} \rightarrow \text{implied reader / audience} \rightarrow \text{historical reader / audience}\]

This model – which leaves the “historical” author and audience out of consideration – distinguishes rigourously between all such communication as goes on within the dramatic or narrative fiction on the one hand, and the communication that takes place by way of the fiction on the other hand. This distinction may conveniently be illustrated by means of an often-cited example.\(^\text{26}\) In Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Remains of the Day*, the English butler Mr Stevens tells his narratees a story of how he has managed to cultivate and maintain his professional dignity throughout his life; but without ever

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\(^\text{22}\) I quote from Burian, ‘Myth into *muthos*’ 191; for a general statement of this principle, cf. e.g. Pfister, *Theory & Analysis* 2-6.

\(^\text{23}\) Chatman, *Story & Discourse* 148: “The implied author can tell us nothing. He, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn”.


\(^\text{25}\) For the fundamental convergence between ‘mediated’ and ‘unmediated’ or ‘nonnarrated representation’, cf. Chatman, *Story & Discourse* 166-9; the diagram presented below is a much simplified version of the complex diagram that Chatman prints *ibid.* p.267.

\(^\text{26}\) See e.g. Rabel, *Plot & Point of View* 7, who uses it to make substantially (but more controversially) the same point about Homeric epic as I would make here about Euripidean drama: viz., that what is said in the text itself is continuously qualified by the overarching communication between the (implied) author and the (implied) audience of the text.
intruding directly upon his narrator’s account, the author at the same time tells a rather different story: the story of an unhappy man whose devotion to his job costs him the chance of finding lasting personal happiness. In the novel, these two stories coexist; and such distancing reserve as Ishiguro applies to Mr Stevens’s story can, as Linda Hutcheon observes in a different context,

be interpreted as a means to a new perspective from which things can be shown and thus seen differently.²⁷

It is with these “new perspectives” that I shall be concerned in this dissertation, as it is from such perspectives, created by Euripides – or, if you will, by ‘Euripides’, the implied author of the surviving Euripidean dramas – that the audiences of his tragedies are given the opportunity to reflect critically upon what the *dramatis personae* say and do.

To be sure, the reader or spectator is always at a liberty to discount such a new perspective: since in *Remains of the Day* the implied author never imposes himself directly, it is possible to read the narrative of *Remains of the Day* as its protagonist Mr Stevens, rather than ‘Ishiguro’, would have intended it to be read. Yet to read a narrative – any narrative – as naively as that is not at all an easy thing to do. As Chatman observes elsewhere, even in the absence of explicit markers of irony, a literary text always comprises, in addition to the various rival perspectives of the fictional characters, the voiceless perspective of the (implied) author; and the informed reader or spectator ignores this perspective at the risk of missing out on an important aspect of the literary performance.²⁸

The conventions of Greek tragedy in particular make it quite difficult for an audience to simply watch a given narrative unfold on the terms dictated by its main characters: for one thing, some characters, as we have already observed – gods, seers &c. – speak with a more self-evident authority than others; and for another, most spectators will be aware of different versions of the same story, or of similar stories, narrated or dramatised on previous occasions. The interplay of these various considerations makes for a complicated communicative structure, in which on-stage communication is continuously qualified by the overarching communication between (implied) author and (implied) audience. To give but one notorious example: in the course of Euripides’ *Hercules*, Heracles observes that ‘a god, if s/he is truly a god, has no needs’.²⁹ In the play, Heracles uses this idea (whose pedigree can be traced back to Xenophanes, and which chimes with contemporary ‘sophistic’ speculation about the status and origins of the Olympian gods) to express a *de facto* denial of the ‘true’ divinity of his opponent Hera: a ‘goddess’ who behaves in such a way as Hera

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²⁷ Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 49.
²⁸ See Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 83-7, where it is argued that irony is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for discerning the presence of a perspective that transcends the point of view of the narrator.
²⁹ *Her*. 1346–47: δεῖται γάρ ὁ θεὸς εἰπὲρ ἐστ’ ὁ ὥσπερ θεὸς | ὁδενός.
does cannot lay a claim on human reverence and/or worship.\textsuperscript{30} In principle, a spectator would be free to accept Heracles’ negative definition of ‘true’ divinity, even to the extent of beginning to question the necessity of worshipping, in his/her day-to-day existence, such gods as Hera: for there is no authoritative voice within the drama to tell him/her otherwise.\textsuperscript{31} On the other hand, if there is no such authoritative voice within the drama, there is something else that tells against a naive acceptance of Heracles’ dictum as gospel truth; and that something else is, in Chatman’s words, “the design of the whole”, which includes such counterbalancing factors as the mythical Heracles’ traditionally fraught relationship with his divine peers, and the unseen but indubitable presence of Hera herself throughout the drama. An audience viewing Euripides’ Hercules do so with an awareness of previous tellings of the story, many of which thematise the hero’s maverick status; and they do so with an awareness that tragic dramas tend to be dominated by divine forces generally misunderstood by the human characters. In view of these considerations, the avant-garde theology espoused by Heracles disqualifies itself – on balance, if not (as is sometimes thought) immediately – as a reliable guiding thought for the interpretation of the drama in which this hero is enmeshed: by organising his Hercules in the way that he has, Euripides can be seen to distance himself from the idea expressed by his character, rather than to embrace it.\textsuperscript{32}

3. Ideas about language in Euripides

The ideas about language investigated in this dissertation are chosen so as to cover a diverse range of ‘ sophistic’ thought. They are the following:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{a.} the idea that the spoken word (λόγος or μῦθος) is a powerful and potentially beneficent commodity, on a par with a doctor’s ‘medicine’ (φάρµακον);
  \item \textbf{b.} the idea that a name (ὄνοµα) does not have a privileged relationship with the object (πρᾶγµα, σῶµα) or objects that it refers to; and
  \item \textbf{c.} the idea that socio-political deliberation preferably takes the form of a ‘contest’ (ἀγών) of the two opposing λόγοι that arise from every πρᾶγµα.
\end{itemize}

Although each of these ideas is well-embedded in archaic and classical-period Greek

\textsuperscript{30} For this reading of Heracles’ words, cf. e.g. Bond on Her. 1341-6 (p.399-400); Halleran, ‘Rhetoric & Irony’ 178-80.

\textsuperscript{31} For a forcefully argued interpretation of Her. along these lines, see Lawrence, ‘ Truly God’.

\textsuperscript{32} For this line of interpretation, cf. e.g. Stinton, ‘ Credere dignum’ 83-4; Schlesier, ‘ Critique des dieux’ 25-6; and the literature cited above, n.30. For Euripides’ ancient reputation for godlessness and its basis in naive or malign readings of his dramas, cf. esp. Lefkowitz, ‘Atheist’.
literature and thought, particular formulations are ascribed by our sources to individual thinkers commonly reckoned among the ‘sophists’. They operate at different levels of thought: (a) is associated primarily with the sophist’s general advertisement of his own skills, while (b) is closely bound up with a specific mode of juristic argument; and (c) could be seen as the foundation of commonly accepted deliberative practice. As it will turn out, these ideas interested Euripides in different ways, and with various intensity at different stages of his attested career. What holds them together is that they appear to issue from a distinctive analytical world-view that, throughout the period covered here, remained controversial enough to be critically scrutinised, not only in Aristophanic comedy but also in Euripidean tragedy. To recover this controversy is the main aim of the present investigation; and in the following paragraphs, I give a brief summary of each of the individual studies of which my dissertation is comprised.

The idea that speech is a powerful commodity (a) extends back to the Homeric poems, which constantly and prominently emphasise the dual importance of speech and action. In Athens, however, this notion was re-invented around the middle of the 5th cent., as reforms in the political and the legal spheres encouraged the professionalisation of public speaking; and with the advent of teachers of persuasive speech, there seems to have arisen a more or less popular conception of speech as a ‘medicine’. Thus, our sources credit Protagoras with the idea that the sophist’s λόγοι can be compared with the doctor’s φάρµακα; Protagoras’ Athenian contemporary and colleague Antiphon is said to have offered his clientèle a quasi-medical ‘τέχνη ἄλυπίας’; and numerous proverbs designate λόγος as an ἰατρός, a ‘healer’ (see ch. I.1). In my opening chapter, I examine various literary responses to this programmatical conception of speech as a ‘healer’ or ‘medicine’: the Aeschylean tragedy Prometheus Bound, which dramatises the philanthropic hero’s temporary inability to remedy the cosmic situation through the application of speech; Gorgias’ ‘sophistic’ oration Encomium of Helen, which launches a complex anatomy of the spoken word’s quasi-medicinal properties; and, finally, two Euripidean plays, Medea and Hippolytus, that juxtapose the idea of healing with devastating demonstrations of the destructive power of speech. Each of these texts takes the complementary notions of ‘healing’ and ‘disease’ beyond the relatively straightforward purpose of advertising what the sophists had in store, and creates a perspective from which (quasi-)naive accounts of the spoken word’s beneficent potential can be called into question. The two Euripidean plays will be seen to take up a moderately critical position, situated between the qualified optimism of the Aeschylean play and the deeply unsettling, subversive account of Gorgias.

My second chapter investigates the notion that ὄνοµατα can be usefully or
meaningfully considered in isolation from the ‘things’ they refer to (b), as it features in Euripidean plays from the late 410s, as well as in the poet’s posthumous *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Like the conception of speech as a φάµρακον, this idea is well-embedded in Greek traditions of thought. An early example of ‘ὄνοµα-ἔργαµα talk’ features in a well-known fragment of Heraclitus, which observes that ‘the name of the bow spells life, but its business is death’ (*fr. 22B48*: τῶι τόξωι ὄνοµα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος). This fragment, which plays on the approximate homonymy of the words βίος ‘bow’ and βίος ‘life’, has often been probed for philosophical content; but its primary point seems to be methodological rather than doctrinaire: Heraclitus wants his reader to grasp that, at some level of thinking about the world, it becomes useful for the inquirer to differentiate between ὄνοµατα and the ἔργα that they refer to – for what then emerges may just radically change his/her outlook on reality.

The ὄνοµα-ἔργαµα distinction features prominently in the concerns of other 6th- and 5th-cent. thinkers, including the ‘sophists’: Protagoras, for one, is credited with a number of arguments that play out the significance of a given ὄνοµα against the nature of its referent, as in his claim that the Homeric nouns µῆνις ‘anger’ and πήληξ ‘helmet’ ought to be masculine, not feminine. Although Plato ascribed to Protagoras a concern with ‘a correctness of words’ (ὀρθοέπειά γε τις), the sage himself probably advanced such arguments in the context of his overarching concern with the construction of sound λόγοι, rather than as an independent contribution to language reform or grammatical theory: if the aspiring politician is to do his job properly and attain a standard of ‘good judgment’, then he must be able to see beyond the obvious. By the later 5th

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35 For the most popular lines of philosophical interpretation, cf. Snell, ‘Sprache’ 368-9 (“der Name hebt nur eine Erscheinung gesondert heraus und zerstört darum das Wesentliche”); Kirk, *Comic Fragments* 118-20 (names provide a partial and incomplete insight into reality); and e.g. Hölscher, ‘Logos’ 81; Kraus, *Name u. Sache* 108-10; Hussey, ‘Epistemology & Meaning’ 54 (ὅνοµα and ἔργον reveal the true essence of the matter through a dialogical process). Kahn, *Art & Thought* 202 would derive from *fr. 48* intimations about “some deeper connection between life and death”, only to conclude that the fragment “hints at some larger meaning that we cannot... make out”.

36 For this line of interpretation, cf. Dilcher, *Studies* 131-3 (“fragment 48 is... a riddle and a play... on the reader, on his intellectual inflexibility and desire to make sense”).

37 Arist. *Soph. el.* 173b17ff. (= Protagoras *fr.* 80B28), where Protagoras is said to have claimed that a speaker who uses such words in their traditional grammatical gender ‘commits a solecism while seeming not to do so’, while someone who uses the “correct” gender ‘does not commit a solecism while seeming to do so’. The riddle still stands: thus Lougovoya & Ast, ‘Menis & Pelex’ suggest that Protagoras (for argument’s sake) may have regarded Μῆνις as a masculine proper name and Πήληξ as a demotic: thus, indeed, the speaker who would treat these ὄνοµατα as masculine would not commit a solecism.

38 Pl. *Phaedr.* 267b-c, where Protagoras’ preoccupations are associated with the linguistic studies of the otherwise obscure Polus and Licynnius (on whom, cf. Pfeiffer, *History* 338-9).

39 For ὀρθοέπεια as an aspect of Protagoras’ teaching about the ὀρθότατος λόγος, see e.g. Fehling, ‘Protagoras u.d. ὀρθοέπεια’; Guthrie, *Sophists* 219-22; Classen, ‘Study of Language’ 225-6; Rade-
cent., ‘arguing πρὸς τούνομα’ evidently was part and parcel of a rhetorical practice that later sources still associate with Protagoras; it was ridiculed as such in the later 420s in Aristophanes’ Clouds, and features as a respectable discursive strategy in 4th-cent. forensic oratory.

To distinguish between a ‘name’ and its referent is a discursive strategy of which a number of Euripides’ characters avail themselves: and many Euripidean scholars would argue that this disjunction between ὄνομα and πρᾶγμα is an integral feature of the dramatic world that the poet projects in his dramas – most notably, but not exclusively, in Helen of 412, where ὄνομα-πρᾶγμα talk is especially prominent. Helen is a dramatisation of the willfully untraditional story according to which the Trojan War was fought, not over a real woman, but over a beautiful ἐἴδωλον, fashioned by the gods in the likeness of Helen. Accordingly, in this fanciful play, the name ‘Helen’ refers to two distinct entities: the real Helen, and the deceptive ἐἴδωλον that is actually accountable for all the mischief that the poets traditionally blame upon ‘Helen’. Clearly, this construction owes something to a world-view according to which there is – to quote the play’s most recent commentator – a “gap between language and reality”; but as I will argue at length in ch.II.2 below, much of the play’s dramatic action is taken up with showing that its human characters’ sophisticated awareness of this gap actually gets them nowhere: the appealing idea that Helen is only ‘nominally’ accountable for the war fails to exculpate the heroine even in her own eyes; and in the quasi-comical parallel action centering on Menelaus’ efforts to regain his wife, the notion that the ὄνομα ‘Helen’ is not Helen’s privileged possession engenders misunderstanding upon misunderstanding. Similar arguments will be presented about the poet’s Ion and Iphigenia in Tauris, and about Iphigenia in Aulis; and it will be concluded that in all these dramas, the poet creates perspectives from which

maker, ‘Correct Account’. For the centrality of εὐβουλία (‘good judgment’) in all aspects of Protagorean thought, cf. Woodruff, ‘Euboulia’.

40 For this association, cf. DL 9.52 = fr. 80A1: καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφεὶς πρὸς τούνομα διελέχθη, καὶ τὸ νῦν ἐπιπόλαιον γένος τῶν ἐριστικῶν ἐγέννησεν· ἵνα καὶ Τίμων φησι περὶ αὐτοῦ· ‘Πρωταγόρας τ’ ἐπίμεικτος ἐριζέµεναι εὖ εἰδώς’ (‘And ignoring the διάνοια he conversed with a focus on the ὄνομα: he gave birth to the now-common breed of ἐριστικοί, which is why Timon says about him: “Sociable Protagoras was an expert quarreler”).

41 See esp. Ar. Nub. 847-51 (Strepsiades to Pheidippides), 1178-1200 (Pheidippides demonstrating his new skills) and 1248-58 (Strepsiades to the Creditor); the joke is prepared at Nub. 658-93 (= Protagoras fr. 80C3), where ‘Socrates’ instructs Strepsiades in the intricacies of grammatical gender: cf. O’Regan, Violence of Language 80-1 with references.

42 Cf. the κακηγορία case documented in Lys. 10 with the discussion of Hillgruber, Zehnte Rede 11-21 and 105-20, who argues against the once common view that the speaker’s prominent use of πρὸς τούνομα argumentation was a novelty at the time this speech was delivered (so still e.g. Ussher, Oration 103). Note also the routine instances of juristic argument in e.g. Isaeus 2.18-20 and 11.1-3.

43 See the literature cited in ch. II n.55 below.

44 Allan on Hel. p.48.
Introduction

It becomes clear that the ὀνομα-πράγμα disjunction is not for humans to handle.

In my third chapter, I extend this conclusion to another idea that dominated late-5th-cent. Athenian discursive practice: the idea that socio-political deliberation should preferably (or even naturally) take the form of a ‘contest’ (ἀγών) between the two opposing ‘accounts’ (λόγοι) that arise from any given issue (ε). While the scope of this idea ranges beyond the particular concerns of one particular thinker and transcends the confines of the ancient world, extending into our own age, its classic formulation is attributed in our sources to Euripides’ older contemporary Protagoras. Observing that Euripides seems more happy than his principal colleagues to refer to, and format, his on-stage verbal interaction by means of agonistic metaphors, modern scholarship on the ‘agon’ in Euripides generally assumes that the poet seamlessly integrated into his dramas a phenomenon that he took over from Athens’ contemporary law-court and Assembly procedures. On occasion, however, the poet can be seen to use agonistic terminology as a vehicle for reflecting critically upon the feasibility of conducting socio-political deliberation along the lines of a ‘contest’.

No such overt criticism is to be found in Children of Heracles, a play, datable to the late 430s, in which Euripides presents his audience with a political ἀγών, situated in Athens and explicitly marked as such, that results unproblematically in the ratification of a sound decision (III.2); but in Suppliant Women, a Theban emissary questions mythical Athens’ reliance on ‘agonistic’ decision-making, while Hecuba offers an outsider’s perspective upon this pre-eminently Greek phenomenon: both these plays draw attention to the corruptibility of a discursive system that may, however, yet produce sound policy (III.3-4). Not so in Phoenician Women, where the poet gives us a debate in which both the ἄγωνισταί expressly reject the idea of the ἄγων λόγον altogether, and the ἄγων itself consequently breaks down (III.5). In all these plays, Euripides employs standard features of his hallmark ‘agon’ scenes to create a perspective from which his audience can look critically upon the idea of the ἄγων, as it was theorised by Protagoras and advocated (if we can rely in this matter on Thucydides’ History) by Protagoras’ alleged associate Pericles (III.1.2); and the outcome of this critical exercise differs notably from play to play. The ‘agon’ format, it appears, was a flexible device, not just technically but also in respect of what Euripides chose to do with it on a meta-discursive level.

My reading of the late Phoenician Women as a play in which Euripides reduces the idea of an ἄγων λόγον ad absurdum (the contestants both negating the premises of the ἄγων, with violence ensuing) provides the starting point for my final chapter (IV), in which I discuss one of the last plays that Euripides produced during his lifetime: Orestes of 408. Like Phoenician Women, this play presents its audience with a dystopian vision of a community in which the spoken word is an ineffective medium for achieving socio-political action. The play’s dramatic action unrolls under the scope of the image, established programmatically in its opening lines, of the ‘un-

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45 See ch. III n.22.
46 Protagoras fr. 80B6a, cited and discussed below, ch. III.1.2 with n.23.
bridled tongue’ as an αἰσχίστη νόσος; and it is structured by means of a series of thematically significant, and explicitly marked, speeches and silences. Thus, during the first half of this action, the characters have to reckon with a prohibition for the hero and his sister to be spoken to; and in the second half, formerly reticent characters speak up in turn to initiate ever more violent plot developments. The fraught issue of the matricide, solved to common satisfaction by the Athenan Areopagus court in Aeschylus’ Eumenides, is first tackled in an inconclusive ‘agon’ scene between Orestes and Tyndareus, and then in a session of the Argive Assembly itself – but to no avail: a dramatically acceptable verdict is not attained. All this takes place in the notable absence of Orestes’ traditional ally Apollo, who only emerges to restore order once the play’s human action has run its disastrous course; and the drama as a whole can be seen to comment wryly on the inability of speech to do what it is supposed to do.

With the identification of ‘disease’ as a key image, and of speech versus silence as a significant structural pattern, my discussion of Orestes glances back to my opening chapter, where it was argued that Euripides’ Medea and Hippolytus reflect critically upon the idea that speech can be an ἱατρός or a φάρµακον, by showing that the proliferation of speech may lead to disaster rather than salvation. But while a notable continuity thus extends from the poet’s plays of ca. 430 to the late dramas, the latter are distinctive, or so I suggest, in their stark juxtaposition of two mutually incompatible impulses: on the one hand, an excessive reliance on the power of speech to achieve no matter what; and on the other, an exaggerated distrust of the spoken word. The form that this juxtaposition assumes in Orestes and Phoenician Women, and the extent to which the collision of contrary impulses affects the dramatic action, is remarkable; and in a brief (literary-)historical excursus (IV.5), I tentatively relate these plays’ distinctive handling of ideas about language to the unprecedented suspension of Athenian democracy that was part of the 411 oligarchic coup d’état.

I conclude that Euripides’ treatment of ‘sophistic’ ideas about language reveals both continuities and diversity. Some themes, apparently, interested the poet only intermittently – like the ὄνοµα-πρᾶγµα disjunction, which features principally in plays of the mid- to late 410s and again in the posthumously produced IA; while others, like the idea of an ‘ἀγών λόγων’ and the notion that speech can (or cannot) be a φάρµακον, were a constant preoccupation. The individual treatments of these ideas range widely, from the ostensibly straightforward opening scene of Children of Heracles to the intricate, multiple ironies of Trojan Women or Helen; from the qualified confidence in democratic ideology of Suppliant Women and Hecabe to the bleak depictions of polarised communities in Phoenician Women and Orestes; and from the light touch and affirmative finales of Helen, Ion and IT to the grim political realities of the post-411 dramas.

A constant feature in the scenes and dramas analysed in this dissertation, however, is Euripides’ tendency, not simply to accommodate, but to explore the limits of ideas and world-views associated with his leading intellectual contemporaries. Few, if any, Euripidean characters wholly get away with thinking of speech as a ‘medicine’;
with using ὀνόμα-πρᾶγμα talk to make sense of their situation; or with placing their faith in the ἄγων λόγων. Always, we discern a perspective, created through the poet’s “design of the whole”, from which such ideas can be seen by the spectators to fall short of explaining, or doing, what the plays’ human characters intend them to explain or do. What varies from play to play is the extent to which the audience are invited to reject or endorse a given thought; but what stands out throughout the poet’s career is his readiness to question prevailing intellectual trends and positions, and to measure them against a monolithic world-view according to which λόγοι are suspect, reference is straightforward and the ‘μῦθος of truth’ is singular. Accordingly, I hope that the detailed interpretations that follow may help to dispel the notion that Euripides was an unequivocal spokesman for the “new thought” – as Aristophanes made him out to be, as Wilhelm Nestle influentially believed he was, and as still tends to be the default assumption in scholarly literature on individual dramas.