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Did the nightingale torture the ear,
 Pack the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear
 Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
 Is it a philosopher's honeymoon, one finds
 On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
 Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur *aptest eve*:
 Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
 The day to pieces and cry *stanza my stone*?
 Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the.

– Wallace Stevens, “The Man on the Dump”

The urgency of poetry, drama, and sacred literature can be sometimes whittled down to furious commands and desperate questions – demands of the universe or demands of ourselves. At times, poets have asked that attention be paid to the voice behind their language by throwing roadblocks in the way of meaning or injecting “the blatter of grackles,” as Wallace Stevens writes in the poem quoted above. The use of nonsense slows the reader; the use of nonsense that sounds almost like words pushes the reader into considering, inquiring, hearing.¹ Many scholarly interpretations of literature or drama are framed to give readers access to the context of certain events,

¹ It is also Stevens (1951) 32 who urgently asserts that “Those of us who may have been thinking of the path of poetry ... must be conscious of this: that, above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds.” Nagel (2011) 238 notes Christianity’s use of untranslated Hebrew words (Hallelujah, Osannah, and Amen) “at moments of powerful exultation” and cites Augustine, who asks, in essence, how a person can worship without gibberish: “How can we celebrate this ineffable being, since we cannot be silent, or find anything in our transports which can express them, unless unarticulated sounds?” The official term for divinely directed nonsense is “glossolalia” and is discussed by Jakobson (1988) 214–18. On meaning beyond meaning, cf. Dolar (2006) 32: “Obviously all the non-voices, from coughing and hiccups to babbling, screaming, laughing, and singing, are not linguistic voices; they are not phonemes, yet they are not simply outside the linguistic structure: it is as if, by their very absence of articulation (or surplus-articulation in the case of singing), they were particularly apt to embody the structure as such, the structure at its minimal; or meaning as such, beyond the discernible meaning.”

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words, characterizations, or other such details, but the admirable pursuit of such signifying aspects can lead readers further from the work at hand, further from the *thingness* of the thing that is art, experience, or what Stevens calls “the the.” This book aims to hear the the in Aeschylean drama, which, I argue, is crammed full of voices that demand to be received as material emissions of bodies and as markers of presence in the world, even as they were once received by audiences in the theater.²

Voice is to be understood in its most literal and physical form, as well as through the many metaphorical connotations that spring from it. Voice, a nexus of meanings and presence, is shown here to be the prevailing configuration through which Aeschylus’ dramas can be heard – a bottomless metaphor but also a performative agent of action.³ In the very first plays to grace the stage of Western culture, or at least the first still preserved, it is notable to find utterance broken into insistently demanding scraps: even here at the origin of staged drama, the prevalence of language over the body-in-utterance was urgently resisted through screams, song, and persistent patterns of sound.⁴ Attention was called to the body in its presence and the voice with its fleeting hold.

It is important to state clearly that “voice” will not be used here in the sense that has become common: as a (dead) metaphor for identity.⁵ To take just one example, Simon Goldhill’s book, *The Poet’s Voice*, looks at the “figure of the poet” and “authority in language,” which is to say that the use of “voice” in that text is metonymical: the voice means identity, language, and representation of the poet (or “poet”), not the vocal instrument, the utterance, or the sound that emerges from the poet’s throat, be it screechy, deep, or raspy – like the singing voice that Roland Barthes so admires in his famous essay “Le grain de la voix.”⁶ My own book on Sophoclean

² The material as an aesthetic category is making strides in classical studies, notably in Porter (2010), Butler (2011), and Butler and Purves (2013). This kind of reading is also based on what Merleau-Ponty (2012) has dubbed “phenomenology of perception” or, more specifically, on what Ihde (2007) 15 labels a “*phenomenology of auditory experience*” (his italics). This approach takes seriously the experience of being in the theater from the perspective of the audience.

³ I borrow the term “nexus” from Harkness (2013) 12, who elaborates on the idea of voice as an “intersection” here: “I treat the voice as an ongoing intersection between the phonic production, shaping, and organization of sound, on the one hand, and the sonic uptake and categorization of sound in the world, on the other. I give this practical, processual intersection the name *phonosonic nexus* ... the voice concerns both sound and body.”

⁴ Cf. Cavarero (2005) *passim* and below on the politics of *logos* versus *phônê*. Butler (2015) 17 usefully isolates the voice as that which is “distinguished both from language and from (mere) sound.”

⁵ Cf. Silk (1974) 27 on the phrase “dead metaphor” as both “if this word, used thus, had been used *x* years ago, there would have been a metaphor” and “this word, used thus, feels and therefore is normal usage.”

⁶ Goldhill (1991) ix and Barthes (1972).

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tragedy also purports to offer analysis of voice, posing the question: “How is voice identified and how does it confer identity in turn?”⁷ But there I too mean voice more as language, focusing on linguistic structures rather than aural presence. These uses of the term “voice” are perfectly valid and a reader will find plenty of this casual and metonymical usage in these chapters too: voice as identity is a nearly unavoidable, if inert, metaphor in our language. I do not mean to undercut it here, but rather to awaken it from its long sleep. To quote Porter,

Matter never leaves meaning untouched. The ethical value of materialism in art lies in the recalibration of one’s sense of meaning that the experience of the senses necessarily requires.⁸

The term “recalibration” implies a return to the material, or sensuous, nature of things. Perhaps something so rooted in experience should not require a return either in scholarship or life – isn’t the material always present? – but I will argue at the end of the first chapter that it is precisely a sense of loss that is registered in the material sensation of voice: something heard is gone already, and perhaps lost long ago, left behind in the particularly embodied vocality of childhood. It is not kept, or even grasped, so much as remembered and desired. Theater, particularly theater that is intrinsically metrical and musical, can use the presence of actors’ voices to highlight the inevitable approaching absence of any voice; this dynamic is in constant tension in Aeschylus’ plays and, more generally, in tension with the claims of Greek poetry to offer its subjects permanent life through glory (*kleos*). Allowing the physical and ephemeral elements of voice back into our understanding of “voice” is a way of reviving the experience and meanings of the voices in Aeschylean tragedy.

We lack records from ancient Greece on what sort of vocal performance and range was expected of actors, except for tantalizing hints like a note on Sophocles’ weak voice.⁹ Yet we have a fair amount of discussion on voice in oratorical contexts that suggest that rhetorical performance inevitably bled into, or was kept furiously clear of, the performance of actors and singers. As P. E. Easterling has shown, Demosthenes and Aeschines work with expectations of voice to shape their parries and positions, with

⁷ Nooter (2012) 1.

⁸ Porter (2010) 11. As will be clear, these paragraphs on critical thought about voice and sound are heavily indebted to Porter’s important and innovative work.

⁹ *Vita Sophoclis* 21–2. Cf. Halliwell (1990) for an excellent discussion of how Old Comedy may have played with the sounds of voices, implying that vocal skill in nuance and variation was a necessity for comic actors.

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Demosthenes including strikes against Aeschines' vocal background whenever possible, including attacks on Aeschines' alleged background as a "trigantist,"¹⁰ and Aeschines accordingly repelling an (apparent) assault from Demosthenes on the Siren-like allure of his vocal timbre.¹¹ Actors had to have a considerable range to play the more vocally adventurous of staged roles, like Aeschylus' Cassandra.¹² Their expertise in singing became ever more central to theatrical performance as the fifth and fourth centuries progressed. Similarly, concern for the correct comportment and care of the (male) voice and body become ever more pronounced, particularly during the time of the Roman Republic and among the intellectuals of the Second Sophistic.¹³

The importance of voice, its embodied existence, and its relation to identity are all clearly marked in the ancient world and recognized in modern scholarship. But that Aeschylean theater is one of the earliest instances of preoccupation with the voice should be more fully acknowledged. As Kostas Valakas notes, "the transformation of poetry into theatre necessarily involved the use of the body by performers as [a] kinetic and sounding instrument."¹⁴ It is unsurprising in this light that our earliest extant tragedian should exploit the "kinetic and sounding instrument" of his actors to the utmost and, at the same time, conceptualize this relatively new potential of bodies to activate the materiality of voice.¹⁵ Though Aeschylus was not in fact the earliest tragedian in Athens, it is useful to inquire into the features of his tragedies that granted him the widespread title of "father of tragedy." I will suggest that it is the quality of vocality, both trenchantly embodied and abstracting into language, that gives rise to the idea of a

¹⁰ I.e., the actor who played the third roles in each scene. Cf. Demosthenes 19.246.

¹¹ Aeschines 3.228.

¹² It is tempting to understand Helen as Western literature's first virtuosic actor, as portrayed in the *Odyssey* encircling the wooden horse and mimicking the voices of the wives of the Greek soliders hidden within (*Od.* 4.278–9).

¹³ Cf. Easterling (1999) on the dueling of Demosthenes and Aeschines, with a particular emphasis on Aeschines 3, and Pavlovskis (1977) on how playwrights would have used the recognizable quality of voices to their advantage. Cf. also Hall (2002) on the ever-increasing expertise demanded of Greek actors with the passing of time, and Gleason (1995), especially 82–130, for a close reading of the cultural history of concern for the voice as a sign and construct of embodied masculinity during the Second Sophistic and in Rome more generally. Cf. also Goldhill (1999) 107–8 on "the somatics of social exchange" as regards the voice in Plutarch's *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, wherein the ability to mime a "personal voice" is revealed as dangerous. Cf. also chapter 3, pp. 124–7.

¹⁴ Valakas (2002) 72.

¹⁵ It is possible that the actor's mask also brought attention to the corporeality of voice, as discussed in chapter 3. Cf. Alström (2004) 134 on how masking actors "reveal[s] tensions in breath, voice and body." Cf. Wiles (2007) 102–79 on how the masks in Greek theater (and in performances today) relate to the physicality and resonance of the actors onstage.

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primordial and elemental Aeschylus: he seems rooted to the beginning of both theater and language.¹⁶

A study of voice exists in a balance with attention to language, particularly when it is scripts of the language that are extant rather than its vocalization. In poetic drama, both elements are heartily present, with the occurrence of spoken language implying the underlying voice and the palpable significance of voice locked in an embrace with the words it utters. Aeschylus' language calls out for attention on its own terms, and it has received probing and careful ministrations. There is hardly a commentary, article, or book on the playwright's work that fails to mention the complexity and depth, not to say difficulty, of his language.¹⁷ Much of this work has focused on Aeschylus' use of imagery: a singular example is Bernard Knox's article on the parable of a lion cub in the third stasimon of *Agamemnon*, published in 1952, an interpretation that exhibits the seemingly boundless reference for every image or word of the play.¹⁸ Though not the first, and far from the last, example of close reading of Aeschylus' words, it seemed to usher in a phase of hermeneutical grappling with the specific terms of Aeschylus' work, as opposed to, for example, the ideology, religion, politics, dramatic consistency, or staging in his plays. Froma Zeitlin's article "The motif of corrupt sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*" followed in 1965 with the claim that the trilogy's "elaborate network of image and metaphor" is not only its most "compelling" feature but also the "medium through which the dramatic action finds its expression."¹⁹ Zeitlin's article

¹⁶ He apparently acquired the reputation of being the earliest tragedian even in the fifth century, as Aristophanes' *Frogs* indicates. There the character Dionysus addresses Aeschylus in this way: "but, O first of the Greeks to have raised august phrases to a towering height and to have added order to tragic nonsense, send forth your spring" (ἀλλ' ὦ πρῶτος τῶν Ἑλλήνων πυργώσας ῥήματα σεμνά | καὶ κοσμήσας τραγικὸν λῆρον, θαρρῶν τὸν κρουνὸν ἀφίει [1004–5]). The second line quoted here is rife with opacities, owing largely to the interpretative difficulty caused by the phrase "to have added order to tragic nonsense" (κοσμήσας τραγικὸν λῆρον). Either Dionysus is asserting that Aeschylus fixed tragedy and saved it from being "nonsense" (λῆρον) or he is denigrating the genre as nonsense notwithstanding its "august phrases" (ῥήματα σεμνά). *Frogs* is a comedy, so it would not be surprising to see praise mixed so thoroughly with denigration. It is rather more surprising to find Aeschylus called the "first" to raise tragedy to its great height, and to have this designation stand as uncontroversial (i.e., it is not challenged by Euripides), despite the (then) recent history of tragedians preceding Aeschylus. Dover (1997) 188 comments merely that, "Clearly the predecessors of Aeschylus were not taken very seriously at the time of *Frogs*." Murray (1940) 1–9 mounts a defense of the idea of Aeschylus as the creator of tragedy as we know it.

¹⁷ For example, "To read the *Oresteia* is to be sentenced to hard labour in the prison house of language," Golden (1994) 378. The commentary of Fraenkel (1950) on *Agamemnon* stands out for its sensitive and evocative readings of Aeschylus' language, and is referred to frequently in the third chapter of this book.

¹⁸ Knox (1952). Cf. also Stanford (1942), Owen (1952), Goheen (1955), Peradotto (1964) and (1969), Haldane (1965), Scott (1966), Taplin (1972), and Betensky (1978).

¹⁹ Zeitlin (1965) 463.

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was soon joined by Anne Lebeck's book *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure*, which pointed to a "system of kindred imagery" that is "intricately interwoven" and critically significant to the thematic meanings in the *Oresteia*.²⁰ Images play a part in this present work as well, since the aural is often expressed in synaesthetic terms that draw on the sights and (occasionally) the smells and tastes of the world too, but hearing the ways these images are performed – through whose mouth, through what sounds – is more central to my analysis than examining the metaphors themselves, let alone looking through them.

While the *Oresteia* has tended to attract most of the work on Aeschylean language, Froma Zeitlin's book *Under the Sign of the Shield: Semiotics and Aeschylus' Seven against Thebes* (1982)²¹ brought critical notice to verbal performances in a somewhat less well-known Aeschylean play and essentially introduced semiotics to the study of classical literature. This generation of work on Aeschylus' language reached a kind of culmination in 1984 with the appearance of Simon Goldhill's then electrifying and now magisterial *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia*, a deconstructionist reading of the trilogy, heavily influenced by works of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes.²² As Goldhill notes, many works on the *Oresteia* discuss the language of the plays with the goal of "extracting 'ideas.'" ²³ Though Goldhill can hardly resist extracting a few ideas himself, his book aims instead to confront the complexity of Aeschylus' language as intrinsic to the plays, suggesting that Aeschylus himself makes the hermeneutics of reading (or perceiving, we might say) central to the action of his trilogy by way of "etymologies, questions about what language to use, the expressed need for interpreters, etc."²⁴ The process of communication through language and its absence is at issue in this book as well. However, where Goldhill emphasizes a final indeterminacy of meaning in the *Oresteia*, I argue that the plays construct voice as an answer to the evasions, gaps, and failings of language by offering the possibility of something utterly concrete and undeceiving. Here is where it becomes critical to pay attention to the materiality and mythologies of voice: its existence precedes and exceeds language and can appear to be (if not actually be) a solution to the challenges introduced by language.

²⁰ Lebeck (1971) 1, based on her dissertation, published in 1963.

²¹ Zeitlin (1982).

²² Many other works have appeared since then on Aeschylus' language, particularly in the *Oresteia*, including Thalmann (1985a) and (1985b), Conacher (1987), Sevieri (1991), Ferrari (1997), McClure (1996–7), Heath (1999), and Fletcher (1999).

²³ Goldhill (1984a) 2.

²⁴ Goldhill (1984a) 6.

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It is accessed by Aeschylean characters, no less than by his audiences, as a medium of truth, though one that presents its own burden and complications, which are also explored in the following chapters.

In the period since this work on Aeschylean tragedy, performance (and performance culture) has become a touchstone for classical studies.²⁵ More recently, materiality as an aesthetic concept has been reinvigorated in Greek literature and criticism, finding its most fulsome representation in James Porter's work on "the phenomenal experience of art as registered through the body," as an aesthetic valued in antiquity but overshadowed in Western culture by the influence of Plato's immaterial ideas and Aristotle's formalism.²⁶ In just the past couple of years, Shane Butler and Sean Gurd have published rich and wide-ranging books that include readings of tragedy in larger sweeps of the role of voice (Butler) and sound (Gurd) in Greek and Latin literature, and in our reception of it, with Butler intriguingly suggesting "that it is possible to imagine tragedy as a *consequence* of the voice, even at the level of plot."²⁷ The aural experience of tragedy also figures centrally in several recent articles that engage the plays of Aeschylus by way of sound and other sensual forms of engagement.²⁸

This book examines both staging and materiality, inasmuch as considering the actual voiced performance of Aeschylus' words is critical in appreciating their impact, and even if we cannot understand everything (or very much) about the nature of this performance. Thus, for example, the third chapter addresses the question of who is singing in *Agamemnon* when the chorus of old men ventriloquize the voice of Calchas or Agamemnon. Is vocal mimicry involved? Do the chorus's masks establish fixed vocal identities or, on the contrary, make it easier for the chorus to assume other voices? Posing such questions allows access to insights within and outside of the text, even when definite answers remain elusive. In addition, the material of the voice as both its own aural presence and as a signifier of the body producing it is also significant, as we see in the *Choephoroi* when

²⁵ Vast is the bibliography. Important works and compilations (with more bibliography listed) include Goldhill and Osborne (1999).

²⁶ Porter (2010) 10. Cavarero (2005) 33–41, and *passim*, makes much the same point about Plato, Aristotle, and voice (*phônê*).

²⁷ Butler (2015) 134, who adds to this, "To be clear, I do not so much mean that the voice expresses the ineffable as the opposite: namely that ineffability is a medium for the expression of the voice itself, as tragedy's central object of attention." Cf. also Gurd (2016).

²⁸ Cf. Porter (2013) 20 and Gurd (2013). Both of these essays examine sound as an aesthetic category and dramatic tool, whereas this book looks at (some) sound as an inverse phenomenon of voice. Gurd (2016) 62–89 expands on this discussion to consider sound in Aeschylean tragedy more generally with characteristically rich results. See more discussion on this topic below and in chapter 2.

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the bodies of women and the earth are imagined as powerful creators and receptors of voice.

In the first chapter, I look at some ways that voice is conceptualized in archaic and classical Greek literature, particularly the poetry of Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar, focusing on instances that show the tension between voice and language. I also examine the interplay of voice and sound in the works of Plato and Aristotle and the play of the vocal and semantic in comedy, satyr plays, and tragedy. I concentrate less on the actual performance of voicing – the main concern of the chapters that follow – than on the voice as imagined performance. I argue that the Greeks' conception of human voices is best understood in relation to their understanding of divine voice on one hand and their staging of the gibberish from animals and children on the other.²⁹ To perform the voice of another life form is to inhabit its perspective in a corporeal sense. As we will see, rarely are the gods thus embodied, though they are copiously loquacious: one does not voice the gods so much as hear and often cower from their speech (*logoi*). Conversely, to give voice to the patter of beasts and babies is to enter an embodied engagement with the ephemeral nature of our mortally bound existence – our least divine and glorified part.

In the second chapter, I discuss Aeschylus' voice as described and parodied in Aristophanes' *Frogs* and relate this sketch to how voice figures across a handful Aeschylean plays. I lay out rubrics for the overall presentation of the voice in the book and discuss common effects and characterizations that arise therefrom (mournful, polyphonic, female and dangerous, bestial or divine). The chapter uses categories of *voice described* (as vocal activity or sonic effect), *voice performed*, and *voice as plot* to look at *Persians*, *Suppliants*, *Seven against Thebes*, and *Prometheus Bound*, along with a number of fragments that remain from other Aeschylean dramas. It ends with a brief discussion of Aeschylus' *Proteus*, the satyr play that was performed right after the tragedies of the *Oresteia*, suggesting that an intimation of the mortal voice can be heard even in a short fragment from this play.

²⁹ Clément (2012) 7 argues that this relationship is inherent in voice itself: "La situation de l'humanité, entre animal et Dieu, entre ange et bête, est tout entière dans sa condition vocale." That early Greeks considered human life as vertically oriented between gods above and beasts below has shaped the contemporary view of mythological and tragic thought, as in Segal (1981) 3: "The Greeks view the human condition, as they view so much else, in terms of a set of spatial configurations, a structure whose spatial and moral coordinates coincide. Man is threatened by the beast world pushing up from below, but he is also illuminated by the radiance of the Olympian gods above."

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In the final three chapters of this book, I examine the progress of the three tragedies of the *Oresteia*,³⁰ bringing to bear the powers and paradoxes of voices that are heard and silenced in the trilogy. Throughout this analysis, I seek to understand how voice might have been heard on the stage as a medium that draws attention to itself and to the progress of the play, not merely as an instrument to be heard through. This theme, handled in the first chapter in aggregate, will be treated singularly and in greater depth in the chapters that follow: for example, origin myths of language are examined at the start of chapter 2; the breath of inspiration and the sounds of beasts are discussed in chapter 3 on *Agamemnon*; the babble of babies and the gendered embodiment of voice through the mother-child dyad is a lens for *Choephoroi* in chapter 4; voice as a locus of suffering and a site for suppression in *Eumenides* is handled in chapter 5. I begin here with the idea of the voice as a link between bodies, thoughts, and awareness of mortality in archaic and classical Greek poetry in order to give a sense of the stakes of vocality in the dramas of Aeschylus.

³⁰ Though the *Oresteia* ended with a fourth drama, the satyr play *Proteus*, I will nonetheless refer to it as a trilogy, since there is an implicit unity to the first three plays even within this greater tetralogic structure. See chapter 2, pp. 121–2, for comments on voice in *Proteus*.