































of self-presentation in the flesh and cultural assumptions about gender attach themselves to speakers prior to any speech and inform its reception, oral texts must be read as gendered speech.”<sup>47</sup> The same holds true for the written “voice” in later Greek texts, where the authorial voice staged and created figures for identity, thus enabling the poet, as a gendered body, to enact and perform themselves.<sup>48</sup> Authorship and gender in ancient Greek poetry are thus not only performative acts (to draw on Judith Butler’s theorization of the performativity of gender) in and of themselves.<sup>49</sup> Their performativity informs each other, where the voice of the poet and the construction of gender interplay in subtle and complex ways. Rather than attempting to recover an “authentic” or “original” Homer or Sappho, or suggesting a fixed continuity in notions of authorship, this book, then, takes the more nuanced position of assessing the construction of the gendered voice in and through the shifting, performed articulation of notions of authorship—as they meet in the performativity of the self through words.

### Sappho: Woman

The performance of the self in words naturally leads to a discussion of gender and language in ancient Greece. To a speaker of ancient Greek, the world was structured through gender.<sup>50</sup> A poet was male (*ho aoidos* or *ho poiētēs*); so was a lamp (*ho luchnos*) or a stone (*ho lithos*). A water-jar was female (*hē hudria*). A cloak was neuter (*to himation*). Indeed, our term for “gender” itself goes back to the Greek word *genos* (“kind,” via Latin *genus*).<sup>51</sup> The centrality of gender in structuring both the social world and the language of ancient Greek thought is

47. Stehle 1997: 11; cf. Murray and Rowland 2007: 211.

48. J. L. Austin introduced the theory of the “performative utterance” in 1962; on the performativity of authorship, see Railton 1991: 3–22.

49. Judith Butler’s understanding of gender as a continuous series of “constituting acts” (1988: 519–20) maps onto the performativity of authorship and gender in archaic oral poetry. See further Case 1990: 251–330, Parker and Sedgwick 1995: 5–6; for further discussion, see pp. 260–61.

50. For grammatical gender in language, see Corbett 1991; on the application of grammatical gender in ancient Greek, see Janse 2020, and in Latin, Corbeill 2015; see Fögen 2004: 237–74 for further bibliography. For introductions to the field of language and gender studies, see Hellinger and Bußmann 2001–2003, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013, Ehrlich, Meyerhoff, and Holmes 2017.

51. See Varro’s definition of *genus* as derived from *generare* because “genders alone give birth” (*genera tantum illa esse quae generant*, Varro fr. 245 Funaioli). On Latin grammar and gender see Corbeill 2015, also Vaahtera 2008.

revealed by the early distinction between the categories of names (*onomata*) by the philosopher Protagoras—the same one Socrates tried to find a name for—as “male, female and objects” (*arrena kai thēlea kai skeuē*, DK 80 A 27).<sup>52</sup> It is uncertain whether Protagoras was referring to general classification by sex, or the more specific classes of grammatical gender—but, either way, this is probably the first attempt in Greek literature to distinguish between the three major gender classes which became the foundations of the grammar of the language.<sup>53</sup> Not only that, but the order set up by Protagoras—masculine first, then feminine, then neuter—established the traditional hierarchical order of the genders. Of course, the placing of male before female in Protagoras was a reflection of a world view which set men above women in every respect, from citizenship to authorship. But it also, as I will argue throughout the chapters that follow, came to be used as a resource which could be manipulated both to reinforce and to challenge the norms of gender identity structured into language.<sup>54</sup>

Aristotle—who maintained Protagoras’s hierarchical order of the genders—also recorded another concern of Protagoras’s: the proper assignment of gender to words.<sup>55</sup> He gives the example of *mēnis* (wrath) and *pēlēx* (helmet) in Homer (as always, the prototypical poet). Protagoras argued that, in classifying *mēnis* and *pēlēx* as feminine, Homer committed a grammatical mistake: they should, in fact, be masculine.<sup>56</sup> But while *pēlēx* could be argued to fit a third-declension masculine paradigm (like *phulax*), *mēnis* looks morphologically feminine—and, as an abstract concept like justice (*themis*), seems much more likely to fit the feminine gender.<sup>57</sup> What is interesting is that Protagoras’s idea of “proper” gender assignment here does not seem to accord with noun declensions—but rather, with the semantic properties of the word. Stereotypically male qualities, like Achilles’s anger, or a battle helmet, are seen as requiring masculine gender, to fit with the “maleness” of their meaning. In other words, to the earliest theorist of grammatical gender in Greek, the grammatical gender of words was not simply arbitrary, assigned according to form:

52. Πρωταγόρας τὰ γένη τῶν ὀνομάτων διήρει, ἄρρενα καὶ θήλεα καὶ σκεύη, DK 80 A 27 = Arist. *Rh.* 1407b7–8.

53. Taylor 1995: 84, Janse 2020: 25–26. Corbeill 2015: 17 seems to take the passage as referring to grammatical gender; see, by contrast, Rademaker 2013: 89.

54. Corbeill 2015: 1 makes a similar argument for Latin grammar; cf. Janse 2020.

55. See Sluiter 1990: 7–8, also Ibrahim 1973: 15, Corbeill 2015: 17–18.

56. ὁ μῆνις καὶ ὁ πῆληξ ἄρρεν ἐστίν, Arist. *Soph. el.* 173b = DK 80 A 28.

57. Corbeill 2015: 18, following Wackernagel 1926–1928: 2.4–5.



it needed to have a semantic grounding, too.<sup>58</sup> It helps to give words their meaning, and it also aligns with that meaning, associating them with qualities that are stereotypically connected to “male” and “female” attributes. The fifth-century BCE comic playwright Aristophanes famously lampoons contemporary debates over grammatical gender in his satire of Socrates’s “Thinkery” in the *Clouds*, where Strepsiades goes to learn about the proper gender of nouns: “You still need to learn about names [*onomatōn*],” Aristophanes’s Socrates tells him, “which are male, and which ones are female” (*Clouds* 681–82).<sup>59</sup> Protagoras’s early association of gender qualities with grammatical gender is exploited in “Socrates’s” gender lesson to create juxtapositions, subversions, and fluidities between “masculine” and “feminine” categories: females, with common-gender nouns, that look the same as males (*Clouds* 661–64); newly coined feminine terms that generate a new vocabulary for females (666); males like Cleonymus with effeminate qualities that turn them into women (Cleonyme, 680); and men like Amynias whose masculine gender is undermined by the very grammar of their names (Amynia—a feminine-looking word—in the vocative, 689–92). Later, in the fourth century, Plato goes beyond Protagoras’s determination that the gendered semantic qualities of a word match its grammatical gender, to suggest that the etymologies of the words used for “male” and “female” themselves in fact describe and delineate gender roles. In the *Cratylus*, during a discussion of the origins of words—which makes it the first surviving attempt in Greek literature to construct a history of language—Socrates draws a direct parallel between the words for “man,” “woman,” “male,” and “female” and the semantic qualities of masculinity and femininity.<sup>60</sup> “Masculinity” (*to arren*) and “man” (*ho anēr*) are connected to *andreia*, “courage” (but also, through its etymology, “manliness”).<sup>61</sup>

58. On semantic gender assignment, see Corbett 1991: 7–32.

59. ἔτι δὴ γε περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων μαθεῖν σε δεῖ, / ἄττ’ ἄρρεν’ ἐστίν, ἅττα δ’ αὐτῶν θήλεια, Ar. *Nub.* 681–82. On this scene, see Wackernagel 1926–1928: 2.1, Fögen 2004: 226–28, and Willi 2003: 98–100 with further bibliography.

60. Ademollo 2011: 1–22 gives an excellent introduction to the dialogue; see also Denyer 1991: 68–82, Sedley 2003. There has long been a debate on whether we should take the etymological practice represented in the *Cratylus* seriously; for an argument toward a serious reading of the dialogue, see Sedley 2003, esp. pp. 147–73. On the *Cratylus* as the first study of etymology in Greek, see Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 16.20–24; see also Partee 1972. For further discussion, see pp. 124–25.

61. On the definition and concept of ἀνδρεία, see Rosen and Sluiter 2003, esp. Bassi 2003: 25–26, 32–56, and, on the concept of courage generally, Smoes 1995. See further, on Aristophanes and ἀνδρεία, chapter 4, n. 15; on Plato, p. 128 and chapter 5, n. 26.

“Woman” (*gunē*), on the other hand, and “femininity” (*to thēlu*) are assimilated to “birth” (*gonē*) and “nipple” (*thēlē*) respectively.<sup>62</sup> The term for “man,” then, connects men to the “masculine” quality of bravery, while women are deemed by the very fabric of the word that describes them to be associated only with birth and breastfeeding.

For us today, the binary between male and female, reflected in the masculine/feminine opposition in grammar and the enshrinement of stereotypical “masculine” and “feminine” qualities in words, is an uncomfortable one. So too is the uncompromising conflation of sex and gender: the idea that a biological male must also exhibit (and will only exhibit) socially and culturally defined “masculine” traits, and a biological female “feminine” ones, even in—among other things—the language they use.<sup>63</sup> This opposition between male and female, and the conflation of sex and gender, were assumptions which structured the ancient Greek world, thought, literature, and—as we have seen—even grammar.<sup>64</sup> And yet it is also not true to say that we do not see important moments where the boundaries of this structure are being challenged. We find depictions of women, like Helen and Andromache in the *Iliad*, Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, Sophocles’s *Antigone* or *Diotima* in Plato’s *Symposium*, who attempt to take on masculine roles and speech, challenge male hierarchies, or even subvert the biology of the male body (chapters 1 and 5). We find male poets sketching male characters (indeed, other male poets) that cross gender binaries in both their language and their dress, like Aristophanes’s *Agathon* in *Women at the Thesmophoria* (chapter 4). We see Euripides using the masculine word *aoidos*, “singer-man,” for women, to explore what a world would look like in which women could appropriate culturally masculine spheres of activity (chapter 6). And we come across

62. καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπὶ παραπλησίῳ τινὶ τοῦτω ἐστί, τῆ ἄνω ῥοῆ. γυνὴ δὲ γονή μοι φαίνεται βούλεσθαι εἶναι. τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ἀπὸ τῆς θηλῆς τι φαίνεται ἐπωνομάσθαι, Pl. *Cra.* 414a1–5; cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1454a22–4.

63. Note, on men and women speaking differently, Ar. fr. 706 K-A; cf. chapter 4, n. 34. Compare Pl. *Cra.* 392c–d (on men’s and women’s naming of Astyanax/Scamandrius) and 418b7–419b4, where women are envisioned as preserving an older form of language (see McDonald 2016: 166, Clackson 2015: 129, Fögen 2004: 221–22); cf. *Ion* 540b10–11. See also Arist. *De poet.* fr. 63 Janko, Arist. *Poet.* 1454a31. For an overview of gender-specific language in antiquity, see Fögen 2004; on women’s language in the ancient world, see Gilleland 1980, McClure 1999a, Willi 2003: 157–97, Kruschwitz 2012.

64. For an introduction to gender in the ancient world, see Holmes 2012: 1–13; see also Winkler 1990, Zeitlin 1996, Wyke 1998, McClure 2002.

women poets like Sappho, Eurydice, Corinna, and Nossis who, simply through the act of speaking, defy the cultural conventions of the “public” sphere as male, and, in their poetry, rewrite the tradition of male-authored literature (as we will see in chapters 8 and 9). These moments of gendered rupture are not outliers, I suggest: they are precisely the crucibles in which gender is both constructed and contested. In this sense, I am interested, not in gender as some kind of “fixed” or “essential” category, but in the resistances, breakages, and slippages in gendered language, where the so-called “fixed” categories that appear to structure Greek language, literature, and society are called into question.<sup>65</sup> This book, then, traces the constant tension between the construction of gender in language by men in ways that enforced (and reinforced) the gender opposition and binary—and the ways in which those gender norms were challenged, tested, broken down, and rewritten by women and (sometimes) men. Bonnie McElhinny asks of gender and language theorists, “When is gender relevant?”<sup>66</sup> The answer is that, when it comes to poetic authorship in the ancient world, gender is always relevant: because it is always implicated in the contexts of poetic production, in the performance of the gendered voice, and in the very word for “poet” itself.

### What’s in a Name?

Over the course of this book, I construct a history of the gendering of poets in Greek literature, from the beginnings of archaic poetry to the end of the Hellenistic period. Part I explores the earliest Greek term for poet, *aoidos*, as a “singer-man” who safeguarded poetic production as a male undertaking in counterpoint to the power of women’s voices. Opening with Homer, I explore in chapter 1 how the Homeric epics forged a new vocabulary for the male poet, which would have an immense and lasting impact on the gendering of authorship across ancient Greek literature. The role of the poet, and the words he uses, are defined in Homer as “a concern for men” alone, particularly in the *Odyssey*—yet, at the same time, women’s powerful voices (like that of Helen, who defines herself as *aoidimos*, “sung of”) pose a distinct, and challenging, provocation to the masculinity of the bard which remains in tension, particularly

65. See Kern 1961, Livia 2003: 142–48 against inherent male/female “styles,” in contrast to the influential discussion of *écriture féminine* in Cixous 1976; for a summary of the debate over the existence of “feminine” types of language, see Moi 1985, Lanser 1992: 3–24.

66. McElhinny 2003: 33.

in the triple female lament which closes the *Iliad*. Chapter 2 shows how Hesiod draws on this exploration of women's voices to develop the gendered relationship between the poet and the Muses, as a pathway to the appropriation of the female voice. The poet of the *Theogony*, as *Mousaōn therapōn* (servant of the Muses), is able both to take possession of the female creative power of the Muse and to exclude her from poetic production. Meanwhile, in the *Works and Days*, we encounter a metaphorical female voice in the fable of the hawk and the nightingale, *aēdōn* (cognate with *aeidein*, "to sing"), whose identity as a singing female and potential *aidos* culminates in her silencing by the male hawk. Moving to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* in chapter 3, Hermes's evisceration of the tortoise to create the first instrument of song, the lyre, is read as a prolonged rape analogy that powerfully demonstrates the male cooption of the feminine apparatus of song.

Part II continues the thread of male poetic self-definition, but moves to the new term for poet, *poiētēs*, which emerged in the fifth century BCE. This word, I suggest, demonstrates novel ways of demarcating the masculinity of the poet, that connects the poet's role as "maker" with the "making" of men in the state—creating a new, civic vision of a male *poiētēs*, from Aristophanes's exploration of the role of the "poet-man" (*anēr poiētēs*) in shaping the men of the Athenian state (chapter 4), to Plato's insistence on the erasure of female speech and prescription of the right kind of poet in the ideal republic (chapter 5). Yet there are hints of resistance to this vision—for example, with Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, the (ventriloquized) woman who appears to challenge the imagery of gendered poets to argue for a radical understanding of *poiētēs* as a uniquely female form of generativity and creativity.

The figure of Diotima, and her argument for a gendered interpretation of the *poiētēs*, provides the turning point to explore the possibility of a language to describe female poets. Part III charts the struggle for words as male poets attempted to come up with new terms to describe women who wrote, in a language that (as yet) had no words to do so. In chapter 6, I show how Euripides, who gives voice to a multiplicity of female experiences in his plays, explores different "othered" contexts in which the term *aidos* might be gendered feminine. And yet, as the chorus of the *Medea* tells us, this attempt to rewrite the tradition from a female perspective in the end simply reinforces male stereotypes regarding women's speech and characterization. A pivotal moment is Herodotus's treatment of Sappho (chapter 7), whom he calls a *mousopoios* (music-maker), despite using the term *poiētēs* several times of male poets. By creating a variation on a term from Sappho's poetry—*mousopolos*, or "one who

serves the Muses” (fr. 150 L-P)—Herodotus refuses to use Sappho’s own vocabulary for herself, undercuts the gendered and poetic power of the Sapphic term, and, instead, signals a form of gender segregation that subordinates her to the male poetic community. This approach paves the way for later depictions of Sappho (and other female poets) as first a woman, second a poet: while Antipater of Sidon calls Sappho an *oidos* (three hundred years after Herodotus), these two instances form the only moments where Sappho is termed “poet” in all extant male-authored Greek literature to the end of the Hellenistic period. But there is another side to the story: the chapter ends with inscriptional evidence for a historical *poiētria* (female poet), Aristodama of Smyrna, which indicates that women could, in certain contexts and genres, earn praise and public memorialization for their songs in their own right, to be acknowledged as a *poiētria*.

Part IV takes up the example of Aristodama to give voice to how women poets came up with a name of their own, through their knowing, intertextual engagement with canonical moments of male poets’ gendered self-definition. It reveals how women poets demonstrated their ability to generate new, supple terms to express their gendered identities in their own words, and suggests that they lay claim to a special association with the Muses through their gender, involving aspects of maternity, community, and authorial identity. In chapter 8, I explore the metaphor of mother and daughter as a figure for women’s poetic creation and intertextual relationships between women poets—from Sappho’s *mousopolos*, which suggests an involved relationship with the Muses as well as a participation in a close-knit community characterized by the mother-daughter bond, to an oracle on Homer’s mother and an epigram by Eurydice that rewrites motherhood into notions of authorship. Finally, chapter 9 looks back to the term *oidos* with which the book began, showing how women contest the masculinity of poet-terms which had become canonically male. I explore how women poets from Sappho to Corinna to the Delphic oracles reject male poet-terms, and instead critique and stage the systems through which women are compared to men—as well as, in an epigram of Nossis, coming up with a new, allusive vocabulary of the female nightingale (*aēdonis*) to lay claim to a powerful, yet subversively masked, connection between female gender and song.

It is a reflection both of the norms of male authorship in antiquity, and the amount of evidence we have, that there should be more chapters analyzing texts by male poets than female. This is an unfortunate, but unavoidable, limitation, due to the fact that women were far less likely than men to be writers

in the ancient world, and that what they wrote was far less likely to survive—and it reflects the systematic male-gendering of poetic authorship in ancient Greece, which makes up much of the story of this book. And yet, by looking at gendering across the board, and incorporating female-authored sources (some of them unusual and little known) alongside male, I hope not only to draw attention to the concerted strategies that led to norms of male authorship in Greece and beyond—but also to point us toward the resourceful, inventive women authors of the ancient world who wrote back against these strategies, to come up with new words for themselves. In balancing two parts of the book on men with two parts on women, then—even if only one of those is women writing in their own voices—I aim to do justice to the women poets of the ancient world, whose extradition from norms of male authorship and resultant rewriting of their gendered identity in words this book attempts to trace.

The power of the words we use for ourselves and each other—the power of names, in other words—is a central theme. As such, each part of the book has been given a single word which brings into play the powerful signifiers and metaphors which are often used by poets in their self-identity, signposting the power of the words we use not only for ourselves, but to describe the world around us. Part I, “Lyre,” draws on the image of the poet’s instrument—gendered feminine in Greek—to symbolize the gender struggles of the archaic bard, and the appropriation of the lyre to the male poet’s cause. In part II, “Tool” becomes a link between the advent of the new “maker,” *poiētēs*, and the vision of poetry as a means for educating men in the state. The “Wreath” of part III gestures to the symbolic appropriation of women poets by men; while part IV, “Bird,” calls on the figure of the nightingale as a reconceptualization of women’s voices and relationship to poetry.

This book, then, is not simply about reading individual poets, but addresses multiple themes in the performance of gender—the manifold ways in which each poet engages with gendering. The ultimate aim is an exploration of the gender strategies of Greek literature, not simply a new way of reading Homer, Plato, or Sappho—though it is my hope that looking at gender strategies will feed back into our understanding of these texts in new and interesting ways, and shed new light on familiar texts. In so doing, many themes recur throughout the book, crossing between the different linguistic and gender strategies of the poets analyzed. A particularly frequent topic is that of the Muses, and the way in which the gendered relationship between the (mostly male) poet and the female Muses frames the gender of the poet. Another is the conceptualization of mother/fatherhood as a gendered model of literary lineage—

either in the relationship between poet as mother/father and poem as child, or in the sequence of the literary tradition with previous poetic forebears modeled as “parents.” Other themes include the voice, agency (particularly in relation to women characters and poets), community, gender-bending, imitation, performance, and the body; cross-references are included throughout the text as much as possible, to facilitate interactions between the different genres, texts, and periods covered. This book can therefore be read in two ways—front-to-back, as a diachronic history of the gendering of Greek poets; or crossing between different themes to make connections and relationships between different texts and intertexts. My hope is that this enables the survey of Greek poets to be accessible to a reader who might not be familiar with the source material, while those who are can feel free to jump between the texts to take stock of the overarching thematic connections. It is, then—to borrow a metaphor from the economist Colin Camerer—a book for both snorkeling and diving: snorkeling for those who want to get an overview of the way gender and poetics interact in Greek literature without the need for an intimate knowledge of ancient philology, or those who might be interested in applying the same general methodologies to other areas, time periods, or texts; and diving for those who want to go deep into the text, and perhaps draw their own conclusions or take further the initial thoughts advanced here.<sup>67</sup>

In a project such as this, it is impossible to cover everything. Precedence has therefore been given to tracing the wider story of the gendering of the poet in Greek literature, rather than to a comprehensive account of every occurrence of each term in every genre and time period. In other words, this is a narrative, not a concordance. The focus here is on a new and interactive understanding, bridging across different texts and time periods, rather than encyclopedism. At the same time, by narrowing my scope to the terms for poetic authorship (rather than the many adjectives, verbal periphrases, metaphors, and mechanisms surrounding literary production) and instituting the chronological end point of 31 BCE, I have done my best to be able to include here the most important instances of gendered poet-terms in Greek literature up to the end of the Hellenistic period.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, the focus on gendered naming means that other aspects of poetry which are clearly relevant to the construction

67. Camerer 2003: xiv.

68. Although it should be noted that—though beyond the scope of this study—Greek literature of the imperial period has many interesting things to say on both gender and the figure of the poet; see Dihle 1994: 312, Whitmarsh 2004: 161–76.

of gender—such as the social function of poetry, its composition and performance contexts, trends in musical developments, and so on—have necessarily had to take a sideline, though I have done my best to incorporate them as and when I could, and to point the reader to the important work that is being done on gender in these different areas. In some sense, the need to impose boundaries shows just how rich this area is as a line of inquiry—the sheer volume of evidence for poet-terms, and the continuation of the topic as a central line of thought well beyond the periods and language covered here. This inevitably means I cannot say everything—and I see that as a good thing. I am not, nor do I claim to be, an expert on all the authors I treat; rather, I am taking a particular lens to these texts and using my interest in gender and poetic authorship as a way into interpreting them in what are hopefully new and thought-provoking ways.

This book has an ambitious goal. It proposes that we can read the story of Greek literature as a continuously negotiated contest of gender. At the same time, it asks us to think about the ways that we use language today, and the power of words to shore up, and bring down, gender hierarchies. If it succeeds in challenging its readers to see old texts in new ways, if it encourages them to come to the study of the past as a site of gender negotiation, and makes them reflect on the importance of thinking through how we use words to describe ourselves and others—then it will have achieved its aims.



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