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Euripidean Stagecraft

Introduction

In Bertolt Brecht's *Der Messingkauf* we are confronted with both a theoretical work and a performance text of dialogue and speeches in which five characters discuss the very nature and function of theatre: Actor, Actress, Electrician (representing the audience), Philosopher (filled with new ideas for theatre) and Dramaturg, who acts as a negotiator between all parties.[1] This idealised Dramaturg is represented by Brecht as a necessary and mediating figure in the creation of contemporary drama, who must combine knowledge of the craft of performance drama, awareness of the restrictions of her/his performance medium together with a creativity that strives to push those restrictions and dramatic conventions in new directions for the benefit of its audiences. This dynamic of craft, creativity and collaboration is something which the three extant Attic tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides would all have required in their role as διδάσκαλος (producer/instructor) for the plays which they composed. In this chapter it is Euripides' artistic creativity combined with his skill and knowledge of the performance medium of Greek tragedy that we shall explore in order to gain an understanding of Euripidean stagecraft. First we shall discuss a number of views on Euripidean stagecraft, ancient and modern, before analysing examples from Euripides' plays that display some of the key features of Euripidean stagecraft. This includes a closer analysis of scenes from Euripides' *Electra, Helen, Bacchae* and *Heracles.* We shall explore Euripides' use of props and costume, the openings of his tragedies and his prologues, the element of surprise and misdirected entrances, and the use of the *mechane* (crane) and *eccyclema* (wheeled platform). It is a combination of these elements which works to create the full power of Euripidean tragedy intended for performance.

In the study of stagecraft one acknowledges that words are not the only means of conveying emotion and meaning, or of providing emphasis and creating visual/acoustic effects in a dramatic work. Euripides created a singing and dancing musical extravaganza mixed with powerful speeches, debates and fast-paced dialogue (using stichomythia and antilabe[2]), horrifying extensive narratives of unseen (offstage) action, moments of silence and pauses of great power, sudden revelations, surprise resolutions, all contained within the theatrical space of the orchestra and in front of the wooden *skene* building. The *skene* building provided a door offstage and supported the *mechane*

[1] Luckhurst (2006) provides a recent summary discussion of *der Messingkauf*; Willett (1965) remains the key English translation.

[2] Stichomythia sees changes of speaker with each metrical line; antilabe involves changes of speaker within a metrical line.

and *eccyclema*. Characters come and go from the audience's view with purpose and power in their performance, and this action is punctuated with regular episodes of choral lyrics. Signification of a tragic character's action or inaction speaks to an audience without recourse to words. A prop has the power to change its meaning before our eyes without altering its form. This is the power of stagecraft and it lies at the heart of the workings of all Greek tragedy.

Part of a playwright's fame in his own lifetime was due to his stagecraft, which produced a united performance of action, speech, song and dance: this is the full expression of the written words in a dramatic text. The introduction of a prize for actors c. 449 BC is evidence enough that the performance of the drama was highly valued in 5th c. BC Athens, as are the subsequent revivals of 5th c. tragedy including Euripidean drama from the 4th c. BC onward.[3] Therefore, to understand the success of Euripides the tragic dramatist we have to analyse his powers of stagecraft. Exploring Euripidean stagecraft aids interpretation of Euripidean tragedy in its performance contexts, but this work is not unproblematic, and it also allows us to explore the limitations and problems with interpreting tragic drama when text is our main source of evidence for the individual Euripidean tragedies.

It is indeed vital to acknowledge the huge gaps in our evidence for discussing the phonic, visual, action-based, spatial and musical elements of tragedy. We do not have direct evidence for the costumes, stage-design, props, masks which Euripides would have used in his first performances during the 5th c. BC.[4] For example, there is discussion about the deployment of the three actors.[5] There is an endless debate about the form and look of the theatre of Dionysus: was the orchestra circular or rectilinear? Was there a stage at all in the 5th c. BC? How many doors were in the *skene* building?[6] The texts of Greek tragedy are not autographs, nor do they contain stage directions,[7] rather the texts have received interpolations, additional notations and excessive interpretation from the Hellenistic period down to our own. In the last two decades, a host of publications has added to our understanding of tragedy in performance,[8] which can be used alongside older studies of stagecraft.

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3 Nervegna (2007, 14-42) provides a recent discussion of reperforming 5th c. drama in antiquity.

4 Ley (2007, 268-85) provides a recent comprehensive survey of stage effects in Greek drama.

5 Liapis, Panayotakis and Harrison (2013, 6-8) survey scholarship on the use of role doubling in tragedy.

6 E.g. Wiles (1997, 51-2) favours a circular orchestra; Csapo (2007) a rectilinear orchestra; Wiles (1997, 63-6) rejects the use of a stage in 5th c. BC performances; Hourmouziades (1965) discusses the use of stage, *skene* building and stage doors in Euripides; Csapo & Slater (1994) provide an excellent collection of the relevant ancient sources in translation.

7 Taplin (1977b) examines the evidence for ancient stage directions.

8 E.g. Rehm (2002) on spatial dimensions; Wiles (2007) on masks as sacred objects transforming the actor into the role; Wyles (2011) on tragic costuming; Chaston (2010) on props; Pöhlmann – West (2001) on the papyrus fragments of Greek music; Battezzato (2013) on the relationship of tragedy and dithyramb; Swift (2010) for the significance of the choral lyrics within Greek tragedy.

This earlier scholarly focus on stagecraft in Greek tragedy has revolved around identifying conventions of Greek drama and then exploring the variations and exceptions. Taplin's work has been key in developing the study of stagecraft in all Greek tragedy, particularly through his 1977 monograph *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*. The significance of Taplin's method was to rely on the text as the primary indicator of stage-action: '…my claim is that all, or at least most, stage actions of significance can be worked out from what we have.'; '… the significant stage instructions are implicit in the words … the words accompany and clarify the action.'; 'the plays themselves are the paramount evidence for their own staging'.[9] This sparked debate about the problems of analysing stagecraft, with Goldhill warning against circularity (text used as evidence for stagecraft and stagecraft used to interpret text) and Wiles arguing against both Goldhill and Taplin's text-based focus.[10] However, Taplin's approach has provided huge benefits for our understanding of the formal elements of tragedy, for example: '... the placing of exits and entrances in relation to the songs marks the articulation of the structure and is an integral element in the division of the basic parts'.[11] In addition, the work of Mastronarde, contemporary with Taplin, revealed the conventions of speech and action while sharing Taplin's view that all significant action is marked in the text. Mastronarde's more recent discussion of the chorus in Euripides also uses this approach to clarify its role as part of the dramatic unity in Euripidean tragedy, a contentious issue of past scholarship, particularly where Euripides is concerned.[12]

In the study of Euripidean stagecraft Halleran (1985; 2001) remains the fullest treatment on the model of Taplin (cf. Seale 1982 on Sophoclean stagecraft). Halleran explored the numerous ways that the entrances of characters are prepared for by other characters, some entrances are built up, others are complete surprises. Entrances after strophic songs are not announced unless they are part of a 'moving tableau', e.g. Andromache's arrival in *Troades* on a chariot. [13] The variety of ways that characters make their way on and off stage is a credit to the dramatic skill of Euripides. Both Taplin and Halleran were indebted to the earlier work of Hourmouziades (1965) who had analysed the function of the *skene* building and the uses of the central door with a focus on reading Euripidean drama alongside evidence for the problematic physical evidence for Theatre of Dionysus.

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9 Taplin (1977a, 2, 28, 434).

10 Goldhill on circularity (1986, 280ff.; 1989, 176-80); Goldhill (1989) was a direct response to Wiles (1987); Wiles' later work (1997, 5-14) critiques Taplin, but does less in responding to Goldhill.

11 Taplin (1977a, 59).

12 Mastronarde (1979, 3; 2010, 88-152).

13 Halleran (1985, 5-32).

Scholars have often remarked on a self-conscious 'staginess' which they detect in Euripides' dramas, e.g. Michelini: 'The multiform volatility of the Euripidean theater undermines even the dramatic illusion of reality; the plays are "stagey," commenting metatheatrically on their own status as artefacts'; or Seale: '… the staginess of Euripides is well attested in scenes which range from the sordidly realistic to those of ceremonial splendour'.[14] Euripides has received plenty of criticism for perceived weaknesses in his stagecraft,[15] connected to his use of the *mechane* and his use of surprise entrances, and these views owe a debt partly to Aristotle's *Poetics*, as we shall see shortly. However, Halleran's work in analysing Euripidean stagecraft has helped to explain their dramatic function, just as the work of Spira (1960) had long ago argued that the appearance of gods on the *mechane* was an integral part of Euripidean and Sophoclean drama.

Aristophanes, Menander and Aristotle

Extant Euripidean drama covers a period of nearly forty years in the history of performance of Attic tragedy, during which the role of the chorus in both Sophoclean and Euripidean drama is seen to reduce. Therefore, it is also important to consider developments observable from Euripides' early to late tragedies. In this we are helped by contemporary Greek comedy, which engages and responds to Euripidean performance on the comic stage. Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (425 BC) already observes the power of Euripidean costumes when Euripides appears on-stage in charge of his costumes and props, while Dicaeopolis rifles through these in search of a suitably pitiful role (he settles on Telephus).[16] By *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 BC), Aristophanes can deconstruct Euripidean plot structures which involve rescue (μηχανὴ σωτηρίας *Thesm.* 209), such as *Andromeda* and *Helen*, in order for Euripides' relative to be rescued, and Aristophanes chooses yet again to incorporate scenes from *Telephus* (438 BC) involving the use of disguise. Even in the distorted world of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BC) the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides is concerned with all aspects of a tragic performance: Euripides comes under comic attack for using formulaic prologue speeches, the style and content of his lyrics and monodies, his ability to connect with his audience by presenting slaves, women and the everyday in tragedy. *Peace* (421 BC) draws our attention to Euripides' use of the *mechane* as Trygaeus flies to the gods on a dung beetle in a parody which deconstructs Bellerophon's journey via Pegasus in Euripides' *Bellerophon*. Strattis' *Phoenissae fr.* 46 (early 4th c. BC) again focuses on the *mechane* and it contains the god Dionysus suspended

[14] Michelini (2002, 52); Seale (1982, 12).
[15] See e.g. Mastronarde's recent summary of Euripidean criticism (2010, 1-25).
[16] Macleod (1983, 47-8) provides the insightful suggestion that the costumes were stored and presented as papyrus rolls.

precariously on the *mechane* reciting the opening lines of Euripides' *Hypsipyle*.[17] Euripides' association with the *mechane* is certainly one of which comic poets recognised. In addition, Platon could make reference to a water-carrying Euripidean female character in his comedy *Skeuai* (*Props*) *fr*. 142, to which we shall return later in our discussion of *Electra.*

Aristophanes was a contemporary of Euripides, but moreover he was himself a dramatist, and therefore amid the comic distortion and exaggeration it is worth taking seriously Aristophanes' eagle eye, when it comes to conventions of Euripidean stagecraft. Aristophanes and other comic poets draw attention to Euripides' use of costume and props, costume as a means of disguise, his monodies, his use of the *mechane*.[18] Comedy provides a source of evidence which was reacting to those very first performances of Euripidean drama (and at times blowing stage raspberries at it). Therefore, comic drama, despite its exaggerated and ebullient style, is an important source on Euripidean stagecraft in order to reconstruct how the text which we now study would have been presented in performance. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge the continuing success of some dramatic conventions associated with Euripides when they re-emerge in the comedies of Menander in the late 4th c. BC, e.g. the use of divine prologue speeches, the plot patterns of recognition, rescue and reunion.[19] In the following section we will explore further connections between Euripides' *Electra,* Platon and Menander and between *Bacchae* and Aristophanes.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is another important source on Euripidean stagecraft, but only if used with care, because Aristotle grew up amid post-Euripidean and post-Sophoclean tragedy, and so his introduction to tragedy would have been via revivals of this Old tragedy (i.e. new productions not under the control of the original tragedian). Aristotle would have had access to new productions of the rising stars of 4th c. BC tragedy: Astydamas II, Carcinus II, Chaeremon and Theodectes, whose work Aristotle cites.[20] Therefore, Aristotle's view of tragedy had been shaped by later dramatists and more recent productions. Aristotle's *Poetics* has received criticism for its focus on the text of performance, and for playing down the visual element (*opsis*), something which Taplin observed had influenced scholarship and damaged the study of Aeschylean stagecraft, and we can add Euripides to the casualty list.[21] Aristotle (*Poetics,* 1461b19-21) does criticise the sudden entrance of Aegeus in *Medea* and the unpleasant characterisation of Menelaus in *Orestes,* but these are balanced by earlier praise of Euripides' *IT* and *Cresphontes* for its use of recognition scenes (*Poetics* 1454a2-

[17] Miles (2009, 182-9).
[18] Miles (2009, 110-1; 117-25; 182-98).
[19] Gutzwiller (2000) provides a general treatment; Omitowoju (2010) discusses links between *Samia* and *Hippolytus*; Petrides (2014, 124-9) surveys connections between *Dyscolus* and *Electra*.
[20] Hanink (2014, 197-211) discusses Aristotle's references to 4th c. BC tragedians.
[21] Taplin (1977a, 24-5; Appendix F, p. 478).

9). Most famously, Aristotle declares Euripides to be τραγικώτατος in response to critics of Euripidean plots.[22] Aristotle argues that these plots which end in misfortune for the protagonists are a sign of their strength, and it is then that he declares: σημεῖον δὲ μέγιστον· ἐπὶ γὰρ τῶν σκηνῶν καὶ τῶν ἀγώνων τραγικώταται αἱ τοιαῦται φαίνονται, ἂν κατορθωθῶσιν, καὶ ὁ Εὐριπίδης, εἰ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα μὴ εὖ οἰκονομεῖ, ἀλλὰ τραγικώτατός γε τῶν ποιητῶν φαίνεται. 'There is a very good indication of this; for on the *skene* and in competitions such plays appear the most tragic, if they succeed, and Euripides, even if he does not manage other matters well, nonetheless he is seen as the most tragic of poets' (Arist. *Poetics,* 1453a26-30). Most notably, Aristotle's explanation for labelling Euripides τραγικώτατος is couched in terms of explaining the power of his plays *in performance* (as long as they were well-staged). Aristotle too recognised the power of Euripidean stagecraft.

Moreover, at *Poetics,* 1455a22-23 Aristotle provides further acknowledgement of the importance of stagecraft: δεῖ δὲ τοὺς μύθους συνιστάναι καὶ τῇ λέξει συναπεργάζεσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα πρὸ ὀμμάτων τιθέμενον 'It is necessary to construct plots and to work in the speech by placing them right before one's eyes.' Aristotle explains this statement using the example of Carcinus' character Amphiaraus (from an unknown play). Aristotle notes that this character made the audience angry, and Aristotle faults Carcinus for staging a scene which the tragedian had not visualised first as performance, and which, therefore, confused his audience. The *Poetics* shows a clear understanding of the significance of stagecraft in creating successful tragedies in performance.

Visual tricks: Props, Costume and Metadrama

The texts of Euripidean tragedies frequently give prominence to props and costume, and we will start by analysing some Euripidean props, before exploring props and costume in Eur. *Electra*, and then turning to other uses of Euripidean costume, including a closer look a scene from *Bacchae*. Overall, props and costume are a means for the dramatist to command the audience's visual attention, and thereby add meaning to the words involving the prop or costume so that both word and image act as a way of focusing audience attention. Whereas in film media a director can edit her/his work to force the viewer's gaze, a dramatist must use a combination of visual and verbal cues to achieve this effect.[23]

[22] Heath (2013, 92) discusses the apparent contradictions in Arist. *Poet.* 1453a-54a.

[23] Pudovkin (1976, 86) argued that editing is what makes film art; Kubrick in interview expanded on this (Philips 2001, 199): 'acting comes from the theater, and cinematography comes from photography. Editing is unique to film. You can see something from different points of view almost simultaneously, and it creates a new experience.'

One of the most startling Euripidean props appears at the end of *Bacchae*: the head of Pentheus, wielded by Agave on the tip of a Dionysiac *thyrsus.* In this scene the prop of Pentheus' mask provides the focus of attention. Agave's character undergoes an incredible emotional shift from delusional pride at holding a lion's head to the realisation that it is the head of her son Pentheus that stares back at her. This is the most gruesome of recognition scenes in Greek tragedy, and a typical Euripidean perversion of a technique he commonly used in other plays to reunite characters (e.g. *Ion*, *Electra*, *IT*). By comparison, the unexpected discovery of a letter hanging from Phaedra's dead hand mid-way through *Hippolytus* is less horrific in appearance than Pentheus' head in *Bacchae*, but its repercussions are just as destructive. This letter is not something Aphrodite's prologue predicted, but it marks the moment of Theseus' curse and therefore Hippolytus' doom. As well as dramatic power, props can carry the weight of characterisation, as seen in *Ion* where Ion's broom introduces us to the son of Apollo (technically a demi-god) as a temple-sweeper clearing out bird excrement from Apollo's temple at Delphi. This prop is also an ironic marker, a sign that speaks louder than any words about the problematic relationship between human and divine, a theme which will be developed in the drama. The limited power of props as recognition tokens is explored towards the end of *Ion* where they provide only a partial resolution and reunion for Creusa and Ion, mother and son. Ion demands more than tokens to prove his parentage, and it takes the surprise entrance of Athena to confirm Apollo as his father. It is notable that the failure of the recognition props to resolve the action leads to Athena's involvement, which draws our attention back to the troubled relationship of mortal and divine at the very close of *Ion*. Lastly, it is worth noting the role of Heracles' bow in *Heracles* for the way that it symbolises the journey of the protagonist through the play: Heracles first enters holding the bow as hero, he uses it for vengeance to save his family and then as a madman to destroy them, he awakens to find his bow and arrows scattered on the floor, and finally he reclaims the bow in the closing scene with Theseus. Halleran notes that once Heracles accepts his sorry fate he agrees to continue carrying his bow (*Her.* 1378-85).[24] However, we first met the bow in the debate between Lycus and Amphitryon, in which Lycus characterises it as a weapon of cowardice. In this play the prop too gains its own characterisation base on the range of attitudes towards it. As was the case with Pentheus' mask in *Bacchae*, the bow in *Heracles* takes on ever-shifting meaning even as its visual form remains unchanged.[25] All these pivotal props work in conjunction with the text for an impressive variety of effects: to characterise, to create and release dramatic tension, to enable plot progression, as well as emphasising wider issues of the play.

The example of Euripides' *Electra* provides a way for us to explore in more detail the use of props

[24] Halleran (2002, 92).

[25] It is worth noting that the bow of Heracles in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is also a prominent prop in the play, but it has received far more scholarly attention than Euripides.

by Euripides, as well as observing how Euripidean props can work as metadramatic signals across plays. This tragedy is visually distinctive from the outset: the prologue speaker reveals the setting is rural countryside before identifying himself as a lowly farmer, but most shocking is his revelation that he is married to Electra, daughter of Agamemnon, former ruler of Mycenae. Following the *parodos* there is a constant stage presence of a chorus of country women, all of which gives a visual distinctiveness to Euripides' *Electra*.[26] This is in contrast to Sophocles' *Electra* which is set before Agamemnon's palace and Aeschylus' *Choephori* which is set at Agamemnon's tomb and then the palace. However, Euripides' character of Electra is represented straightaway as a poor, countryside dweller. This reduction in her standing is emphatically represented by her shorn head, dirty costume and her use of a water-jar, all of which are on display from the moment that she steps before the audience, but it is the water-jar that receives particular attention. Electra's entrance occurs just after the revelation of the prologue speech that she is married to the farmer, and her opening words are:

ὦ νὺξ μέλαινα, χρυσέων ἄστρων τροφέ,
ἐν ᾗ τόδ᾽ ἄγγος τῷδ᾽ ἐφεδρεῦον κάρᾳ
φέρουσα πηγὰς ποταμίας μετέρχομαι

Night, black night, nurse of golden stars,
night in which I carry this pitcher on my head
as I go to fetch the waters of the river's streams (Eur. *El*. 55-6)[27]

The first visual image of Electra with water-jar is reinforced by her words, so that both speech and action draw attention to her misfortune. It is this opening image of Electra that could become fixed in the minds of the audience, and, it appears, in the mind of the speaker of Platon's *Skeuai* (*Props*) *fr*. 142 who makes mention of a Euripidean water-carrying character, which most probably refers to this Electra.[28] When Orestes first lays eyes on Electra he too draws attention to the water-jar prop by which he even mistakes Electra for a slave (Eur. *El*. 107-10). The prominence of this prop is seen as Electra then launches into her first monody, and at the start of the second strophe she again draws attention to her prop:

θὲς τόδε τεῦχος ἐμῆς ἀπὸ κρατὸς ἑ-
λοῦσ᾽, ἵνα πατρὶ γόους νυχίους
ἐπορθοβοάσω.

[26] Barlow (1971, 17-42) discusses the role of the chorus in setting the scene in Euripidean tragedy.
[27] All translations of *Electra* are from Morwood (1997).
[28] Miles (2013, 183-200).

Let me take this pitcher from my head
and put it down so that I can cry out to my father
in the early morning laments which I pour forth all night. (Eur. *El*. 140)

Euripides purposefully incorporates the water-jar into her monody and as part of the choreography for her song! The prop is as much a part of her characterisation as her costume. Additionally, the water-jar acts as a metadramatic tool, a way of referring beyond the Euripidean drama to other artistic works. This is seen in the entrance of Electra (*El*. 55) making reference to her prop, which alludes to Electra's entrance in Aeschylus' C*hoephori* 84-7 where Electra speaks of the liquid libations that she is carrying to Agamemnon's tomb (τάσδε κηδείους χοάς), as noted by Cropp.[29] Euripides' *Electra* is recognised as making purposeful links to Aeschylus' C*hoephori*, which narrated the same episode of the Orestes myth.[30] The water-jar prop acts as one of the early indicators of Euripides' conscious debt to Aeschylus' *Choephori.* The most well-known example of this is Euripides' reshaping of the recognition scene between Orestes and Electra, which rejects the tokens that Aeschylus' characters used to identify one another only for the validity of Aeschylus' tokens to be confirmed by the recognition that does take place (cf. Eur. *El*. 515-84 and Aesch. *Choeph*. 164-234). Euripides both situates himself in the company of his mighty predecessor, Aeschylus, and then differentiates his dramatic technique by means of offering a more convincing recognition token, Orestes' scar. Again, we see that Euripides brings about the allusion to another drama through the use of props and costume, using visual dramatic cues in addition to textual allusion. It is clear that the water-jar of Electra forms a key tool for characterisation and dramatic effect in all three tragedians, as seen from the ironic use of the jar prop at Sophocles' *Electra* 1113-42 where Orestes pretends to carry his own ashes in an urn and a whole scene develops around Electra's lament over this urn. The prop here takes centre-stage for a brief moment and misdirects Electra's attention away from the real Orestes.[31] Unfortunately there is no secure dating for either Sophoces' or Euripides' *Electra* so that the connection between these texts must remain hypothetical. However, it is clear that each tragedian leaves a memorable image of Electra and her stage-prop, and it is notable that Euripides lingers over her poverty-filled existence and the allusions to the past tragedy of Aeschylus as ways to create a truly Euripidean Electra. Furthermore, this Euripidean water-jar finds an afterlife in Menander's *Dyscolus,*[32] and it provides an example of Menander drawing on Euripidean drama and stagecraft, which we noted earlier.

[29] Cropp (1988, 103).
[30] E.g. Torrance (2013); Michelini (1987, 181-230).
[31] Chaston (2010, 131-78) provides a recent discussion.
[32] Petrides (2014, 124-9) provides a recent discussion.

As we turn our focus toward Euripides' use of costume, there is a distinctive feature which deserves a brief survey: the number of Euripidean characters who change their costume in the course of the play and/or use it as a means to deception and disguise within the dramatic action. This is something which both Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae* emphasised (discussed above). For example, in *Bacchae* (405 BC) Dionysus' prologue informs the audience that he has appeared in mortal disguise, and yet by the end of the play his final entrance is that of a god, most probably on the *mechane.* The explanation of a disguise at the start of the play for the audience's benefit is a trick Euripides also used in his *Telephus* (438 BC). *Bacchae* also sees Pentheus change from male to female attire in the play. In *Heracles* Megara and her three sons enter the palace to put on clothes in preparation for their death at Lycus' hands (*Her*. 327-35), and re-emerge in their new costumes awaiting their execution. However, these visual signals seek to mislead the audience; Heracles arrives unexpectedly and rescues them, while notably ordering the children to discard the funeral wreaths from their hair (*Her*. 562). However, they remain in their funeral robes. It is, in fact, the maddened Heracles who murders his wife and children in the house, the visual image of which is left ingrained in the mind of the audience when both killer and victims are then displayed on-stage (*Her*. 1028-34). This was most probably via the *eccyclema,* and the children would still be in their funerary robes, which now hold a very different resonance. In Euripides' *Helen* (412 BC) we have the astonishing scene of Helen, the most beautiful of women, cutting her hair, bloodying her face, wearing black instead of white (*Hel.* 1087-9) and thereby altering her costume in order to help fool Theoclymenus into allowing Helen and Menelaus to leave Egypt. In addition Menelaus must pretend to be a shipwrecked sailor and announce his death to Theoclymenus. However, Menelaus requires no costume change since the tattered rags in which Menelaus entered, originally the emblem of his strife and suffering, will now double for his new role as shipwrecked sailor, and thereby his costume too plays an important role in their escape (Eur. *Hel.* 1079-82). Even Theoclymenus comments on his pitiable appearance and offers him fresh clothing (Eur. *Hel.* 1281-4). Helen too then urges him to change his attire just before he leaves the stage (Eur. *Hel.* 1296-7). And sure enough, when Menelaus re-emerges on-stage he is now fitted out in full armour, with shield and spear in hand (Eur. *Hel.* 1376-7). Menelaus' status is returned to him via his costume change as the audience witness Theoclymenus being outwitted. It is ironic that Menelaus' new costume is no disguise, but makes his identity as a Homeric hero unmistakable to all (including the audience) with the notable exception of the Egyptian Theoclymenus, whose failure to recognise Menelaus is costly. The attention given to costume and costume-change in these scenes is exceptional, and the interplay between costume and identity is wholly Euripidean.

Bacchae has been noted for its metadramatic features by e.g. Segal, Foley and Seidensticker, and this is due in part to Euripides' use of costume as a means of disguise.[33] *Bacchae* contains both Dionysus disguised as mortal and Dionysus dressing Pentheus as a woman in order to spy on the Theban women. It is to this latter scene that we shall turn briefly in order to observe the metadramatic nature of its manipulation of costume in connection with Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae.* Seidensticker has noted the general associations of *Bacchae* with comedy, including the excessive use of stage directions which is reminiscent of the practice of Greek comedy. However, Seidensticker observes that the humour of *Bacchae* takes on a darker, sinister colour as the play progresses.[34] Meanwhile Foley has drawn out several connections between *Bacchae* and Aristophanic comedy through the figure of Dionysus: 'As to the god who presides over both comedy and tragedy in the dramatic festivals, he dissolves and transcends the boundaries between comic and tragic genres'.[35] Both Foley and Zeitlin have touched upon the scenic parallels between the dressing of Pentheus and the dressing scene in *Thesmophoriazuae* in which Euripides dresses his relative in order to infiltrate the women's Thesmophoria in secret.[36] There is a clear structural parallel between the Euripidean and Aristophanic scenes, but, as we shall shortly explore, the parallels between the two run much deeper, and suggest that Euripides *Bacchae* of 405 BC was purposefully engaging with Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* of 411 BC on a metadramatic level. We can compare our earlier discussion of Euripides' use of metadrama in his *Electra* in connection with Aeschylus.

The costume change occurs offstage in *Bacchae* and on-stage in *Thesmophoriazusae,* but there are a remarkable number of parallels between the two scenes: (1.) Both Pentheus and Euripides' relative don female disguise to enter a female-only ritual space secretly; (2.) when both men appear in their new female attire, their costume affects their behaviour, with the relative and Pentheus each concerned that their costume sits correctly (*Bacch*. 925-42; *Thesm*. 255-63); (3.) Pentheus and Euripides' relative are treated as sacrificial victims being led to the slaughter. Foley discusses this in *Bacchae,*[37] while in *Thesm.* the relative has a peg stuffed in his mouth like an animal for slaughter and he makes a sub-human noises (*Thesm.* 222; 231); (4.) Euripides' relative initially scoffs at the effeminate dress of Agathon, just as Pentheus originally mocks Dionysus' appearance (*Thesm*. 130-45; *Bacch.* 453-60); (5.) both characters will have their disguise revealed once it is announced that there is an intruder in the midst of the women (*Thesm*. 584-651; *Bacch.* 1079-113). These points of comparison draw out neatly how Dionysus' role in *Bacchae* has an affinity with that of the comic

33 Segal (1985; 1997, 215-71) Foley (1985) and Seidensticker (1978; 1982).
34 Seidensticker (1982, 124-5).
35 Foley, (1985, 232).
36 Foley (1985, 225-8); Zeitlin (1996, 402).
37 Foley (1985, 208ff.).

character of Euripides of *Thesmophoriazusae* since both act as tragic dressers for their respective actors: Pentheus and Euripides' relative. This makes more poignant the end of *Bacchae* where the smiling Dionysus looks on as the head of Pentheus is held aloft for all to see. Euripides has the last laugh in this drama as we watch the dismembered Pentheus, with all his affinities to the comic character of the relative, paraded on the stage in a tragic distortion of the comic ending of celebration and rejuvenation.

Here Euripides plays Aristophanes at his own game: whereas Aristophanes had rendered comic elements from Euripidean drama in *Thesmophoriazusae* of 411 BC (e.g. the parodies of *Telephus*, *Helen*, *Andromeda*, and the use of quotations from e.g. *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus* out of context), Euripides in 405 BC reclaims as tragic and serious a scene of changing costume and cross-dressing which is commonly associated with comedy.

Tragic openings, shock tactics and stage mechanics:

Euripides pays great attention to the set-up for his dramatic action, as can be seen from his choice of openings for his tragedies. Supplication scenes mark the start of *Andromache, Heraclidae, Supplices Heracles* and *Helen*, which led Hourmouziades to remark that this is one of Euripides' favourite openings.[38] In these plays the stage-altar goes on to hold a pivotal role in the action, and so Euripides prepares for significant stage action from the very opening of the drama. Euripides also favours the use of prologue speeches to begin his dramas, whose formulaic openings are deconstructed in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. However, beneath the comic distortion of Aristophanes, Euripidean prologues reveal a great variety in their use, e.g. Helen's prologue turns into its own defence speech in *Helen*; *Electra's* prologue sees the humble farmer provide the shocking revelation that he is married to Electra (discussed above). Euripides also frequently uses a divine prologue which works to create a different level of knowledge between audience and mortal characters (both chorus and actors) throughout the majority of the drama.[39] This allows for dramatic irony to play a full role, e.g. in *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* since the audience are gifted with a higher level of understanding in the play compared to the mortal characters. It is notable that the point of resolution in the drama comes at the moment when the audience's level of understanding is brought into alignment with the mortal characters, thereby creating a symbiosis of audience and actor knowledge by the end of the tragedy. This is often triggered by a divine epiphany at the end of the drama,

[38] Hourmouziades (1965, 49).
[39] Euripides' *Alcestis, Hippolytus, Troades, Ion, Bacchae* and *Hecuba* (Polydorus' ghost).

which is a common device in Euripidean tragedy.[40] Euripides has crafted the dramatic action always with his audience in mind. Mortal impotence and immortal dominance is an aspect which Euripides chooses to illustrate in a number of his plays, and he chooses to do so via the stage action, the arrangement of the stage events and the placing of these events at moments of key dramatic moments in his plays.

This awareness of the audience is also visible from Euripides' repeated use of surprises and shocks in his dramas. Taplin notes that surprise entrances of characters is a common device used by Euripides, and one that he, and many other scholars finds questionable: 'We may find his use of it objectionable or unsuccessful, but we cannot deny that it is calculated and deliberate'.[41] The most famous example of this, which Taplin also cites, is Evadne's surprise entrance at the end of *Supplices* on rocks above the temple (*Suppl.* 980), and her sudden suicide by leaping onto the funeral pyre of her son as her father Iphis looks on in horror. The power of such a scene to shock, rather than just surprise an audience is evident from scholarly reactions, such as Taplin's. Its success as a scene relies on the live-action performance and communal response of the crowd, but it certainly should not be counted as a failure based on the text alone. In the following section, we shall discuss the power of another surprise entrance, this time of Lyssa and Iris in *Heracles.*

Halleran observes that Euripides can use misdirection to mark the sudden entrance of characters, which he calls 'surprises of location'.[42] This is where a character draws attention to one place on-stage, only for action to kick off elsewhere unexpectedly. This misdirection, is a classic trick of conjurors, and Euripides makes full use of its power to surprise and wrong-foot an audience, e.g. *Ion* 1545-52: Ion is about to enter Apollo's temple when Athena appears above it; *Medea* 1313-8: Jason orders the doors of the palace to be broken down only for Medea to appear in a chariot; *Orestes* 1561-72: Menelaus tries to open the gates as Orestes appears on the parapet above. Euripides' use of misdirection in these scenes relies on the use of the wooden *skene* building behind the orchestra and the attention of both audience and chorus is directed the central door only for a character to appear elsewhere. For an audience who had now been watching tragedies for several generations it is not perhaps surprising to find Euripides trying out new techniques to keep his audience on their toes. If tragedy became too much of a hostage to convention, then the art-form would die its own stage-death.

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40 Euripides' *Andromache* (Thetis), *Bacchae* (Dionysus), *Electra* (Castor), *Helen* (Dioscuri), *Hippolytus* (Artemis), *Ion* (Athena), *Orestes* (Apollo), *Supplices* (Athena), *IT* (Athena), *[Rhesus* (Musa)*]*.

41 Taplin (1977a, 11).

42 Halleran (1985, 42)

All Euripidean tragedies employ the *skene* building and its door to represent an entrance to a part of the offstage world, unseen by the audience. Segal notes that in *Alcestis* Euripides plays around with the presentation of male and female space on and offstage through his presentation of Alcestis and Admetus.[43] A similar but more complex patterning is found in *Hippolytus*. The only occasions when the audience are given a glimpse of this offstage world is when the *eccyclema*, is used to reveal a scene to the audience. This is often accompanied by the announcement that the doors have been opened e.g. *Hipp.* 808; *Her.* 1028-34. Aristophanes (*Ach.* 407-8 and *Thesm.* 96, 265) describes wheeling in and out Euripides and Agathon, making its association with tragedians clear. The other piece of stage machinery of which Euripides made use is the *mechane* (stage crane). Our main evidence for this comes from comedy, where it is used in paratragic scenes, which we discussed earlier, and this helps us identify Bellerophon's flight on Pegasus in Euripides' *Bellerophon*. In *Heracles*, the chorus refer to the arrival of Lyssa and Iris 'over the house' (*Her.* 817), which indicates an elevated entrance, although how the two gods arrived simultaneously is not clear. However, Euripides' use of the crane is most associated with the divine epiphanies, which we have noted are so common at the end of his tragedies. Some scholars have been sceptical about its use,[44] but it is now common to accept that Euripides in the 5th c. BC employed the *mechane* for what later is known as θεὸς ἀπὸ μηχανῆς.[45] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454b1 criticises the sudden entrance of Medea at the end of *Medea* and he notes that she enters via the *mechane*. The more cynical idea that tragedians introduce a god on the crane when they are out of ideas is found both in Plato, *Cratylus* 425d and the 4th c. BC comic dramatist Antiphanes, *Poiesis fr.* 189, whereas Menander's *Theophoroumene fr.* 5 notably marks a character's sudden entrance with ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεὸς ἐπεφάνης 'You've turned up like a god upon a crane!'. This evidence for use of the *mechane* for divine epiphanies is from the 4th c. BC, but in combination with that from 5th c. BC comedy, it suggests that gods appeared on the *mechane* at the end of tragedies.

As well as stage machinery, the static scenery and *skene* building could also be used by Euripides in the action of the play. In *Heracles* and *Bacchae* the backdrop of the palace of Thebes fragments and is destroyed, thereby acting as a demonstration of divine power of the mortals in the dramas. In *Bacchae* the palace of Thebes is hit by an earthquake and crumbles reflecting Dionysus' escape from Pentheus (*Bacch.* 585-607). Goldhill discusses the debate in scholarship over whether the destruction of Pentheus' palace was actually staged, although this ignores the fact that different productions could stage the play in different ways; the potential for staging these scenes is clearly in

[43] Segal (1993, 84-5).
[44] E.g. Taplin (1977a, 444-5)
[45] Mastronarde (2010, 181). Halleran (2002) argues for the use of the *mechane* in *Hippolytus*, although he acknowledges that its use is unprovable.

the text.[46] In *Heracles* the physical collapse of the house follows Lyssa's exit into the house where she drives Heracles to madness (*Her.* 891-908). The significance of her movement inside is contrasted with that of Iris back to the gods. Here the collapse of the palace is a visual display of Heracles' mental collapse. In both tragedies the destruction of the palace of Thebes emphasises the transient power of even a royal palace once a divinity is present within. This symbolic role for the scenery is also at play in *Troades*, where Talthybius and some Greek soldiers appear at the end with torches in hand to complete the destruction of Troy. Hecuba and the chorus of Trojan women sing one final lament as they observe the city crumble and burn, and as they too lose their remaining identity in connection with their homeland of Troy at the play's close (*Tro*. 1256-332).

The power of stagecraft in *Heracles*: character motions and emotions

Heracles' final words to his children as they are ushered inside the house in Euripides' *Heracles* hold a deadly irony:

ἀλλ᾽ εἶ᾽, ὁμαρτεῖτ᾽, ὦ τέκν᾽, ἐς δόμους πατρί·
καλλίονές τἄρ᾽ εἴσοδοι τῶν ἐξόδων
πάρεισιν ὑμῖν.

Come now, children, accompany your father into the house.
Since entrances are more beautiful than exits for you. (*Her.* 622-4)

In this tragedy which tells of Heracles' return, madness and murder of his wife and three sons, entrances on-stage are certainly more blessed than exits for these three children. The children enter the house in joy at reunion with their father, but their final exit from the house will be as corpses, presumably via the *eccyclema,* with their delirious father tied to a fallen column. The use of the Greek words for 'entrances' and 'exits' lends a metadramatic quality to the lines, drawing attention to the significance of exits and entrances in this tragedy. Heracles ends his speech with a brief celebration of human's love for their children. The final phrase: πᾶν δὲ φιλότεκνον γένος. 'Every race is child-loving' (*Her*. 636) will come back shortly to haunt the audience as we will witness the fallout from Heracles' deranged actions when he slaughters his children. This is but one example of the intricate interplay of text and action in Euripides' *Heracles.* As Halleran rightly notes there is a pronounced connection in this tragedy between the stage actions of characters entering or leaving the stage and the progression of the plot: 'the three *peripeteiai* of this play are all marked by

[46] Goldhill (1986, 278-9; 1989, 178-9).

surprise entrances'[47]. These changes of fortune are firstly Heracles' joyous arrival which enables him to save his family from Lycus, secondly Lyssa and Iris' divine entrance which heralds disaster for the human characters, and lastly Theseus' unexpected appearance, who offers consolation and a form of rescue for Heracles, now a broken man. The staging of this play is, indeed, remarkable and this will be the final focus of this chapter since it provides examples of the aspects of stagecraft discussed above, which work together to display the impressive qualities of Euripidean stagecraft. We begin with a discussion of what have been perceived as problems with the play, followed by an analysis of how Euripides combines the changes in character motion and emotion to create a drama whose action lives and breathes the tragedy of its human characters.

The sudden, shock double entrance of the goddesses Lyssa and Iris mid-drama has received criticism, largely due to its uniqueness in extant tragedy, but its dramatic power has also been accepted. As Wolff observes: 'This abrupt appearance of deities in the middle of the play is a very unusual structural feature, an enactment of disruption'.[48] Their entrance works as a second divine prologue, which initiates the subsequent course of dramatic action, and it bears little resemblance to the divine epiphanies at the end of the tragedies which focus instead on revelation of truth and closure. We can compare the surprise entrance of Menelaus in *Helen* which acts as a second prologue speech since Helen and the chorus have just vacated the stage. The positioning of this divine entrance may be unique to *Heracles*, but as Bond notes, the use of sudden reversals is 'an exciting feature of the later plays of Euripides',[49] and Bond cites Peleus in *Andromache*, Hermes in *Antiope*, Amphiaraus in *Hypsipyle*, the Old man in *Cresphontes* as further examples. However, the sudden reversals are also evident in earlier Euripidean dramas, e.g. the arrival of Heracles in *Alcestis*, or the appearance of the letter in Phaedra's hand which is an unexpected catalyst for the events in the latter half of *Hippolytus.*

In *Heracles* Euripides' experimentation with dramatic form is most clear to see from the way that he manipulates character movements *in combination with* the changing emotions of those characters. In this play entrances and exits appear to mean life and death for its characters, but the audience's expectations are always thwarted. Firstly, Megara and the children enter the house to put on clothes in preparation for their execution, and their change in costume would mark the sombre mood of the scene, but, as we noted earlier, the costume is a false signal because their entrance on-stage does not result in their immediate death. Instead we have the surprise appearance of Heracles, who instructs his children to discard the funeral wreaths before he enters the house and kills Lycus. However, the

47 Halleran (1985, 90).
48 Sleigh/Wolff (2001, 5-6).
49 Bond (1981, xvii).

subsequent arrival at the house of Lyssa and Iris foretells the death of the family at the hands of Heracles in the very place and at the very time when they should be safe at last. Heracles then exits the house on the *eccyclema* while tied to a pillar and surrounded by corpses, following his maddened acts of murder. Once Heracles' mind is restored, he is immediately intent on suicide, only to have this aim thwarted by the unexpected arrival of Theseus. The number of surprise entrances in this play is quite exceptional, and every entrance changes the course of the drama from one set of emotions to another: we start with the dread and fear of Heracles' family as suppliants, and then we experience their doom and futility as mother and sons exit the house in new attire in preparation for their death at the hands of Lycus. There even follows a choral ode in the style of a *threnos* sung of Heracles' exploits as if he were already dead. The next transition to joy and hope is caused by the arrival of Heracles and then the choral ode to youth, which Halleran sees as functioning like an encomium.[50] The chorus and Amphitryon then express triumph and satisfaction as Lycus receives his comeuppance and there are shrieks heard from offstage as Heracles kills Lycus.[51] However, the arrival of Lyssa and Iris over the house instils fear and awe in the chorus. This soon turns to horror and shock as Heracles murders his family, with the cries of Amphitryon are heard offstage – a staged echo of Lycus' murder earlier. The messenger even informs us of the surprise entrance of Athena within the house (*Her*. 906) heralded by an earthquake which destroys the house (*Her*. 905). Finally, in an incredible spectacle Heracles appears on the *eccyclema* tied to a pillar surrounded by their corpses brought from the house in his guilt, self-pity and sorrow, and as Heracles realises his actions his thoughts turn to suicide. However, the final emotional turn of this tragedy is towards an inkling of hope with the arrival of Theseus and his conversation with Heracles hero-to-hero.

These sudden, constant tonal shifts place a great weight on the actors to move between these extremes of emotion and to carry the audience with them. The part for the actor of Heracles in particular requires great flexibility. Euripides had created a gift of a part for an actor to display his skill in movement between such extreme emotional registers: from joy at reunion with his family at last, to shock at their situation, determination to avenge them, and then his return from madness to lucidity and the unending horror at his actions in murdering his family. Lastly, Heracles reaches acceptance of his situation through the wise words of a fellow hero, Theseus.

It is with the final exit in *Heracles* that we shall end, since it reflects the unity of Euripides' drama conceived in the text, but requiring performance to bring out its signification. As Theseus leads

50 Halleran (1985, 87).

51 Cf. the cries of the children in *Medea* which evokes a very different response from characters, chorus and audience.

away Heracles to Athens, Heracles calls himself 'a little boat in tow' ἐφολκίδες (*Her*. 1424),[52] just as when he led his children into the house (*Her.* 631-2) he called his children 'little boats in tow' τούσδ' ἐφολκίδας. Whereas before, Heracles did the leading now he is childlike in his reliance on Theseus for leadership and protection. As Bond notes: 'The combination of visual image, rare metaphor (see on 631), and conclusive reflection (see on 633-6) can hardly be coincidental'.[53] The use of the image at the end of *Heracles* recalls the earlier scene in which Heracles notes how his children cling to his clothes for safety and protection. At the very end of the drama Heracles recalls his last moments with his children, and places himself in their vulnerable position. Our mind may also recall the earlier stage-action of Heracles, a father shepherding his children offstage, and now contrast it with the shell of a hero who processes behind Theseus. The visual and verbal echoes work together to create a moment of profound dramatic power. Quite appropriately for the close of an Athenian drama Theseus is here seen symbolically to take the place of the mighty Heracles as the greatest hero of them all as he leads the hero offstage.

Euripides' stagecraft is inventive and creative within the conventions of Greek tragedy. He uses the powers of staging drama to communicate with audiences about the very nature of Greek tragedy, its relationship to the sibling genre of comedy and its heritage in the works of Aeschylus. Euripides presents a rich a complex picture of the dramatic functioning of Attic tragedy in the late 5th c. BC, and draws full use from his chorus, actors, stage space, props and costume to bring his work to life, and this is what makes Aristotle quite right in his claim that Euripides is a dramatist τραγικώτατος (most tragic).

[52] Halleran's translation (2002, 90).
[53] Bond (1981, 415).

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