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978-0-521-76839-9 - The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context

Donald J. Mastronarde

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## THE ART OF EURIPIDES

In this book, Professor Mastronarde draws on the seventeen surviving tragedies of Euripides, as well as the fragmentary remains of his lost plays, to explore key topics in the interpretation of the plays. It investigates their relation to the Greek poetic tradition and to the social and political structures of their original setting, aiming both to be attentive to the great variety of the corpus and to identify commonalities across it. In examining such topics as genre, structural strategies, the chorus, the gods, rhetoric, and the portrayal of women and men, this study highlights the ways in which audience responses are manipulated through the use of plot structures and the multiplicity of viewpoints expressed. It argues that the dramas of Euripides, through their dramatic technique, pose a strong challenge to simple formulations of norms, to the reading of a consistent human character, and to the quest for certainty and closure.

DONALD J. MASTRONARDE is Melpomene Distinguished Professor of Classics at the University of California, Berkeley. He has published extensively on Greek tragedy and Euripides in particular, including *Euripides: Medea* (Cambridge, 2002) and *Euripides: Phoenissae* (Cambridge, 1994).

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# THE ART OF EURIPIDES

*Dramatic Technique and Social Context*

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## *Preface*

It is over twenty-five years since I first contemplated writing (eventually) a general book on Euripides (at the time I had in mind the somewhat perverse title *The Unity of Euripides*). It is over ten years since I began trying to write this book, for which I had by then tentatively adopted the title *The Art of Euripides*, in tribute to the example of my senior colleague Tom Rosenmeyer's *The Art of Aeschylus*. I wanted to write a book that dealt with topics that span most or all of the extant plays rather than one with a chapter on each play; and I hoped to find a middle ground between the formalist studies that I have admired and the social and political approaches that have been so successful and influential in the past thirty years. As things turned out, Tom Rosenmeyer died not many months before I was finally far enough along in my work to seek the reactions of some readers (had he lived, he would have been one), and I began to doubt whether I should keep the allusive title, being all too aware that I could not match the breadth of his reading in the history of drama and dramatic theory or the elegance of his writing. In the end, I kept the title but added a subtitle, "dramatic technique and social context," to declare the two types of concerns that I have attempted to combine (with what success or utility it is left to each reader to decide). The Greek tragedians, like other Greek poets, were consummate craftsmen, innovating and experimenting with the formal elements of their art and reinterpreting the myths and personalities of the traditional heroes with an inextricable mixture of seriousness and playfulness. At the same time, their activity was clearly embedded in the social and political culture in which they operated, and their works reacted to and commented on issues and conflicts present in a broad archaic and classical Greek tradition and in the specifically Athenian tradition of the imperial democracy.

In the chapters that follow, I have approached the corpus from a number of directions, choosing topics that strike me as important and challenging. I did not aim to write a definitive book, and there are surely interesting

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topics that I have omitted. Even in the topics I have chosen, I have been more interested in exploration and in recognition of variety and even contradiction than in reaching conclusions that can be neatly summarized. I believe that much of what is best in Euripides (and in the Greek tragedians generally) is exploratory and aporetic, and I approach the work in the same spirit. But I am not unaware that what I see and emphasize in analyzing Euripides is unavoidably a product of my own personal and scholarly profile: attending high school and college in the US in the 1960s and reading Greats at Oxford; being receptive to German scholarship of the fifties and sixties (Reinhardt, Ludwig, Strohm, Matthiessen) and American scholarship of the sixties and seventies (Knox, Wolff, the early works of Charles Segal); owing my earliest technical interests to Fraenkel's commentary on *Agamemnon* and Barrett's on *Hippolytus*; and pursuing my career at the University of California, Berkeley.

Because of the pressures of other responsibilities and projects, my work on this book has taken longer than I would have wished. Various chapters were drafted and redrafted over a period of a dozen years. I have worked intensively in the summers of 2007 and 2008 to bring it to completion and I have not always been able to take account of work published in the past few years, since I felt I needed to set a final limit for myself and finish the book before I got any farther past my prime, and the choice was between revising my drafts or almost interminably postponing completion in order to read new publications. I am conscious of the book's shortcomings and difficulties. It is not an introductory book, nor easy to read, since it draws on so many plays, and I do not take up time and paper summarizing plot details (except for some brief summaries at the end of Chapter 1), and I cite a very large number of passages without including the text, requiring the reader to have at hand an edition or translation (with appropriate line numbers) in order to verify my claims or to flesh out concise statements. Nevertheless, I have tried in various ways to make it as accessible as possible to the serious reader who may come to it with knowledge of only a few plays or even may not read Greek. On the other hand, despite the advanced nature of the book in some regards, I may disappoint more expert readers by not engaging more frequently and specifically with the specialized scholarship on Euripides. Since my early formation as a scholar, I have of course learned greatly from the works of important critics like Zeitlin, Foley, and Goldhill, and my ideas have been sharpened and refined by the significant books on individual plays (here I would single out those of Mossman, Allan, and Mendelsohn for special praise). But I was trying from the beginning to come to terms with the chosen topics from a personal perspective based on a

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long period of reading and teaching and not to write in detail about the trends of scholarship; to do more with the bibliography would have extended the book (and the date of its completion) even more (as it is, I am grateful to Michael Sharp and Cambridge University Press for tolerating the current length).

It is a pleasure to record here my gratitude for the help I have received from many friends. Mark Griffith has been a wonderful colleague for thirty-five years, and I have learned much from his bold and original readings. He read the penultimate draft and, as usual, provided copious brief remarks that guided me toward many improvements. Martin Cropp (whose friendship goes back even further, to our time at Toronto) not only read that same draft and gave helpful suggestions of both a particular and a general nature, but allowed me to see the page proofs of the second volume of the Loeb edition of the fragments (Collard and Cropp 2008b) and a version of its index. Marco Fantuzzi spontaneously offered to read my work, gave suggestions on all but one chapter (the one I revised too late to share with him), and cheered me up when I was suffering self-doubt. Three readers for Cambridge University Press also helped me in important ways to decide on the final shape of the book. My ideas on particular topics have also benefitted from interactions with my students, of whom I want to mention here Luigi Battezzato, Melissa Mueller, and Johanna Hanink. David Jacobson provided another set of eyes to proofread the revised chapters, pointed out passages that could be made clearer, and checked a near-final version of the compiled bibliography. I must emphasize, of course, that these readers should not be assumed to agree with all my views (or my decisions about the final form of the book), and that any errors, omissions, or perversities present in the book are my own responsibility. Versions of various parts of the book were presented as lectures in Berkeley, Pisa, Urbino, Rome, Calgary, and Boulder, and at Amherst, Columbia, Harvard, and a Greek drama conference at Sydney, and students in seminars at Berkeley and Harvard have also heard parts of this study: I thank all my audiences for their kind reception and helpful questions.

Editors and presses have generously given me permission to reuse here material that I have published previously. The versions in this book are sometimes abbreviated, sometimes expanded, sometimes appear in English for the first time, and most have received some degree of revision in wording. Chapter 2 is derived from “Euripidean tragedy and genre: the terminology and its problems,” in *Illinois Classical Studies* 24–25 (1999–2000) 23–39. Parts of Chapter 4 appeared in “Il coro euripideo: autorità e integrazione,” *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 60 (1998) 55–80 and in “Knowledge and authority



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in the choral voice of Euripidean tragedy,” *Syllecta Classica* 10 (1999) 87–104. Parts of Chapter 5 appeared in “The optimistic rationalist in Euripides: Theseus, Jocasta, Teiresias,” in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays presented to Desmond Conacher*, eds. M. Cropp, E. Fantham, S. Scully (Calgary 1986) 201–11, in “Euripidean tragedy and theology,” *Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca* 5 (2002) 17–49, and in “The Gods,” in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. J. Gregory (Blackwell: Oxford 2005) 321–32. I am grateful to Banca Intesa, Milan, for providing a high-quality digital image of the volute crater with what is plausibly regarded as an illustration of *Andromache* (Milan, Collezione H.A. (Banca Intesa Collection) 239, attributed to the Ilioupersis Painter) and for giving permission for its use on the cover (and thanks to Oliver Taplin for his help with this). I refer to this image in n. 25 of Chapter 3, and I consider it a good choice for this book for several reasons: it is a fine work that has not been frequently illustrated in the past; it is part of the evidence for Euripides’ popularity after his death; it features one of the extant plays that is less often studied; it shows the divine agent in a higher frame above the humans and expresses the close association of Apollo with Orestes in the ambush; and it catches the underhandedness of Orestes’ role and the underlying opposition between him and Neoptolemus.

In my drawn-out work on this book, I have benefited from fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and my progress was also assisted by the fact that my Berkeley department colleagues honored me with appointment to the Melpomene Chair (for which I also want to thank the anonymous donor). Finally, I must acknowledge the patience of my wife Joan, who has had less enjoyment of summer vacations (and weekends) than she should have while I have been completing this book.

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## NAMES OF GREEK PLAYS

The names used in the text are an eclectic mix of Latinized versions of the Greek titles and a few English names. Some alternative names not used in this book are listed here. In the footnotes and in parentheses, abbreviated versions (as shown here) are used.

*Aeschylus**Persae* (= *Persians*), *Pe*.*Septem* (= *Septem contra Thebas, Seven against Thebes*), *Se*.*Supplices* (= *Suppliant Women*), *Su*.*Agamemnon*, *Agam*.*Choephoroi* (= *Libation Bearers*), *Choe*.*Eumenides*, *Eum*.*[Aeschylus]**Prometheus* (= *Prometheus Vincetus, Prometheus Bound*), *Prom*.*Sophocles**Ajax**Antigone*, *Ant*.*Trachiniae* (= *Trachinian Women*), *Trach*.*Oedipus Tyrannus* (= *Oedipus Rex, Oedipus the King*), *OT**Electra*, *El*.*Philoctetes*, *Phil*.*Oedipus Coloneus* (= *Oedipus at Colonus*), *OC*

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*Abbreviations and reference system**Euripides**Alcestis, Alc.**Medea, Med.**Heracleidae* (= *Children of Heracles*), *Hcl.**Hippolytus* (= *Hippolytos Stephanias*, the second *Hippolytus*), *Hipp.**Andromache, Andr.**Hecuba* (= *Hekabe*), *Hec.**Supplices* (= *Suppliant Women*), *Su.**Electra, El.**Heracles* (= *Herakles Mainomenos*, *Hercules Furens*), *Her.**Troades* (= *Trojan Women*), *Tro.**Iphigenia in Tauris* (= *Iphigenia Taurica*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*), *IT*  
*Ion**Helen* (= *Helena*), *Hel.**Phoenissae* (= *Phoenician Women*), *Phoen.**Orestes, Or.**Bacchae* (= *Bacchantes*), *Ba.**Iphigenia in Aulis* (= *Iphigenia in Aulide*, *Iphigenia Aulidensis*), *IA**Cyclops, Cycl.**Rhesus, Rhes.*

Fragmentary plays are generally referred to by their Latinized names (but English is used in a few names like *Melanippe the Wise* and *Melanippe the Captive*). References to fragments of Euripides follow the numbering in *TrGF*, which has also been adopted in other recent collections of tragic fragments.

## NAMES OF GODS AND CHARACTERS

Most proper names are in Latinized forms, but there are exceptions (e.g., *Helios*, *Thanatos*) when Latinization strikes me as too odd.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Dindorf W. Dindorf, ed., *Scholia graeca in Euripidis tragoedias ex codicibus aucta et emendata*. 4 vols. Oxford 1863.

D–K H. Diels and W. Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th edn. Zurich 1951–52.

K–A Rudolph Kassel and Colin Austin, eds., *Poetae Comici Graeci*. Berlin and New York 1983–.

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*LIMC* *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*. Zurich and Munich 1981–97.

L–P E. Lobel and D. Page, eds., *Poetarum Lesbiorum fragmenta*. Oxford 1955.

T Kannicht Testimonia pertaining to Euripides in *TrGF* vol. V.1, ed. R. Kannicht.

*TrGF* *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, ed. B. Snell, R. Kannicht, and S. Radt. 5 vols. in 6. Berlin 1971–2004.

W M. L. West, ed., *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, 2nd edn. Oxford 1989–92.

Abbreviations of journal titles generally conform to those used in *L'Année philologique*.

Translations are my own, except for two short extracts credited in the footnotes.