CHAPTER 26

The Theater of Euripides

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Discussions of “theater” range among the kinds of things said by characters to the shape of the orchestra. Despite the polyvalence of the term, there is nonetheless a tendency to undervalue material aspects of dramatic performance before live audiences. Thus the study of Euripides’ “theater of ideas” (Arrowsmith (1963); see also Winnington-Ingram (1969), Michelini (1987)) may attend to fragmentation in literary characterization and signs of cultural crisis. More explicit attention to tragic production and performance (e.g., Hourmouziades (1965), Halloran (1985), Taplin (2003)) unveiled previously unexplored aspects of the theater. These days an understanding of stagecraft and performance has become increasingly recognized as necessary for the study of ancient drama. Nonetheless, critique of the social and ideological conditions of theatrical performance can contribute much to these discussions and perhaps suggest different narratives about Euripides’ theater.

Dramatic performance was defined through the fundamental relationship between audience and performers. Transformations in what was heard and seen on stage were driven in part by spectators’ interests, emerging professionals eager to display competitively their innovative techniques, poets’ receptivity to these developments, and the institutional organization of the theater. Whereas broader aspects of daily life including the role of citizenship, democracy, and empire have played a major role in interpretations of Euripides, this essay aims to deepen our understanding of these aspects and to explore how our knowledge of performance conditions, changes in musical and acting styles, and the use of technology can open up new perspectives on Euripidean drama.
1 Theater Industry and Audiences

The big news in the Classical theater was the increase in the number of theatrical spaces and dramatic festivals. In addition to the festivals in the city, by 400 BC there is direct evidence for theatrical performances in at least fourteen Attic demes; by 340 BC there were performances in at least twenty-three demes (Casparo (2010) 103)—in both cases, although available evidence is presently lacking, the actual number is certain to be much higher. Theatrical performances also spread throughout the Greek mainland, Sicily and S. Italy, the Aegean islands, Asia Minor, the Black Sea region, and North Africa: 116 sites outside Attica by 300 BC (Casparo and Wilson (2015)). Some fifth-century theaters (e.g., Thorikos) had stone seating, but like the Theater of Dionysus in Athens most consisted of little more than a staging area and an available slope for spectators (Goette (2007); Papastamati-von Mook (2015)). A wooden stage-building (skene) provided a backdrop for the plays and a space for performers and stage-hands (Aristotle Poetics 1449a19–20; see Roux et al. (1989) 65–127). The Chorus performed in the space framed by a low wooden stage and rows of marble blocks of front-seating (proedria) (cf. Aristophanes Wasps 1342–44); the single representation of an actor performing before an audience depicts a stage in front of which sit two seated figures (Attic red-figure chous, circa 420 BC, Painter of the Perseus Dance (Athens ΕΣ 518); see Hughes (2006)). In the primary viewing area (theatron), spectators typically sat on wooden benches constructed by entrepreneurs who leased the space from the state (Casparo (2007)).

Theater-leasing explains in part the rather extraordinary step taken in Athens to charge spectators (including citizens) an entrance fee to sit in the theatron. In this arrangement, the state farmed out repair work on theater buildings and the construction of seating to lessees who stood to make significant profits.

Viewing practices were closely connected with finance, but not everyone had to pay for seating. The state awarded foreign benefactors, civic, and religious officials with the honor of free seating. Additionally, the city made distributions of public funds (theorika) to citizens for attendance at the dramatic festivals on an ad hoc basis starting most likely around the middle of the fifth century (Roselli (2011) 87–117; Wilson (2011) 38–43; cf. Rhodes (1993) 514). Additionally, the location of theaters on the slopes of hills provided space for additional spectators beyond the limited capacity of the theatron. These unofficial viewing spaces were free and available to everyone. In a fifth-century comedy Cratinus refers to such a space in the Theater of Dionysus as the “view from the poplar” (fr. 372 K-A). Judging from the archaeological evidence for deme theaters, similar arrangements were common throughout Attica (Roselli (2011) 63–75).

Such viewing spaces facilitated the participation of perhaps thousands of poor and non-citizen theatrogoers. While some impoverished citizens doubtless used their theorika for other purposes and watched from the poplar, free and unregulated viewing spaces were available to metics, slaves, and even women. The social and political elite were prominent in the theater—from civic officials to foreign benefactors and wealthy choral sponsors (khorígoi)—but the poor, metics, foreigners, slaves, and women perhaps constituted the majority of the audience (Roselli (2011); see also
Schnurr-Redford (1995); cf. Sommerstein (1997)). Given the varied interests, values, and experiences of this motley group, framing drama in Athens exclusively in terms of citizenship or democratic culture and politics may be too narrow a focus (see e.g., McClure (1999); Goldhill (2000); Wilson (2009); cf. Griffith (1995); Rhodes (2003); Carter (2011)).

Changes in the financial organization of the theater made drama more consumer-directed (Csapo (2004) 210–212; Wilson (2008)). Private elite patronage was increasingly diluted by funding from the state without displacing traditional patrons. Higher amounts of pay and the increasing number of festival jobs enabled performers to become professionals; an important result was the gradual diminution of “amateur” actors and musicians drawn from elite families with longstanding ties to the theater (Csapo (2004) 209–210, (2010) 85–89; Wilson (2008) 106–108). Tensions emerged between amateur and professional (paid) performers: at stake was control over public performance. The ability of performers to live off their theatrical profession challenged traditional arrangements in dramatic production and contributed to increased attention to performers’ techniques, especially in the context of the competition among performers at dramatic festivals. The institution of actors’ contests in 449 BCE at City Dionysia and around 432 BCE at the Lenaea was symptomatic of the emerging status of actors: these performers were officially recognized as a component separate from poets and Chorus. Actors could win first prize for performances in unsuccessful productions, thus demonstrating a certain autonomy for performers. Such incidents suggest a certain applicability in the fifth century of Aristotle’s later observation that actors could have more sway than poets (Aristotle, Rhetoric 1403b31–35; see further Hall (2007)). At any rate, in the early fourth century actors were already organizing troupes and managing performances themselves (IG II² 2318.201–203; Csapo (2010) 106–107; see further Nerwegna (2014)). Of particular importance for the study of Euripidean drama is its openness to the rising popularity of new styles of performance.

2 Social Change and Innovation in Euripides

Foreign professionals, “working-class” or banausic according to ancient critics (e.g., Aristotle Politeia 1341b14), helped popularize new kinds of music in the fifth century. The so-called New Music was defined in relation to traditional kinds of music and “characterized by innovation, variety, versatility, and a highly ‘theatrical’ performance style” (Csapo (2004) 212; see also Wilson (1999), (2002); D’Angour (2006), and in this volume; LeVeen (2014)). As a result of its receptivity to New Music, Euripidean song became more complex, polyrhythmic, and astrophic; words were increasingly subordinated to musical arrangement. Actors’ song and technical skill (tekhnē) came to rival, if not overshadow, traditional amateur choral performances (cf. Aristotle, [Problems] 918b). Music in later Euripidean tragedy was performed by actors who sang self-contained New Musical monodies—mixing together different genres (e.g., dithyrambs, nomes)—and danced mimetically (Csapo (1999–2000), (2003), (2008), (2009)). The “hushed” entrance of the Chorus in Orestes (136–139) and the ensuing song, in which Electra sings the lion’s share (140–207), embodies the
shift in emphasis from choral to actor’s song. Ancient critics complained that these kinds of changes reflected the “corruption” of performers by (allegedly democratic) mass audiences (Aristotle, Poetics 1453a30–33; Politics 1341b15–20; Plato, Republic 492b–c; Laws 698b–701d). Such criticism, while succinctly capturing a certain aspect of the changes and revealing a degree of alienation from contemporaneous cultural production, obscures the active construction of drama to suit the performative demands of new techniques and styles in theater music popular with mass audiences.

In Euripides’ Hipsipyle (fr. 752 f–h) the New Musical performance of the enslaved Lennian princess playing the castanets and moving in circular fashion with the Chorus (perhaps also with the aulos-player) was highly mimetic (Csapo (1999–2000) 419–422; see further Aristotle, Poetics 1461b30; Csapo (2004) 213–214). When the Chorus in Electra sings of dolphins “(wh)-whirling” alongside ships (+37), it was likely dancing in circular motion; the melism highlighted the imagistic mimeticism while subordinating words to musical performance. Such devices as alliteration, polyptoton, and anaphora (e.g., Or. 1381–92, Phoen. 678–681) contributed to the mimetic intensity of performances and evoked cultic songs, thus assimilating tragedy to “choral ritual” (Kowalzig (2007)). Critics, however, assailed New Music for its excessive emotionalism and barbarism, its rule-breaking and genre-mixing musical forms that through the Dionysiac imagery of liberation were seen as symbolically in step with radical democracy. The Phrygian cunuch’s monody in Orestes (1368–1502) exhibits many of these elements and thus “violates” traditional laws (nomai) of music. While usurping the typically elite privilege of singing arias, the barbarian cunuch offers a taunting riposte to such traditional musical patterns (nomai: Or. 1426, 1430). Such bold experimentation provides one context to assess the charge in Aristophanes’ Frogs that Euripides subordinated insurrection among the Athenian citizen sailors (1069–1073), known for their democratic leanings during the oligarchic putsch in 411 BCE (Thucydides 8.72–76). Despite or perhaps because of such critical views, new performance styles became more common in late Euripidean drama.

New acting styles emerged in the fifth century. The star actor Kallippides was censured for his gestural realism, and similar mimetic performance styles in Euripides’ Hipsipyle were playfully mocked by Aristophanes (Frogs 1305–28). Technical skill in diction was required for more demanding verbal constructions in New Musical song: with words in thrall to musical expression the actor’s delivery had to be more attuned to the rapid shifts in music. A new emphasis was placed on an actor’s subtlety and modulation, the ability to “vary the manner of delivery” (Aristotle, Rhetoric 1403b26–33, cf. 1413b14–28; Plutarch, Ten Orators 848b; Csapo and Slater (1995) 265–268; Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 167–171). In contrast, traditional actors were ridiculed for their “deep-groaning” and “roaring” performances (Timotheus, PHG 791.218–220; Demosthenes 18.262, Pollux 4.114; see further Halé (2006) 296–304).

Performance techniques and new tragic roles opened up a space for the articulation of class difference. By imitating the gestures of lower-class women, Kallippides introduced social difference through acting style (Csapo (2010) 133–134). In his
role as temple slave, Ion describes his labor of sweeping and cleaning Apollo’s temple (e.g., 120–122) while singing a New Musical monody; in the encounter with birds defecating on the offerings (107, 177), the actor was enabled, if not encouraged (given new acting techniques and styles), to perform with animated movements and mimetic gestures (cf. Demetrius On Style 195). Euripides’ enslaved yet outspoken Iono was notably performed with groveling gestures (Iono fr. 413; cf. Aristophanes, Wasps 1413–14). Effective use of mimicry and tone could also be used to differentiate social status among elite and humble characters (e.g., IT 260–339); the star actor Theodorus was praised for his skill in maintaining the “voice” of the speaker in question (Aristotle, Rhetoric 1404b20–23). Claims about intermixing genres in Euripides (e.g., “tragicomedies”) may reflect attempts to develop competitively the tragic genre. But mixing the comic with the tragic also enabled, if not required, actors to perform in different registers, while embodying distinct social categories and class values associated with different genres.

Much like the character of Ion, Euripides’ ragged heroes have often been framed in terms of the diminution of the heroic grandeur and dignity of traditional elite characters (e.g., Aristophanes, Frogs 937–991; Arrowsmith (1963) 37; Collard et al. (1995) 23). For example, the rag of Telephus (Teleph. fr. 697, 698; cf. 712a), Electra (El. 184–187; cf. 107), or Menelaus (Held. 416–424; cf. 554, 1204) show elite heroes in shabby garb associated with low social status and poverty. To judge from Aristophanes, these characters were contentious and popular (e.g., Acharnians 411–434) and involved such actors as Kallippides performing “upon the ground on the floor-sweepings” (Aristophanes, Women Seizing the Skwins, fr. 490; see Green (2002); Csapo (2010) 119–120). In addition to marking poverty and misfortune, especially of veterans, as political issues (Cecchet (2015)), such roles engage with issues of social identity and class difference, while exhibiting an interest in performance practices. Thus Telephus (Teleph. fr. 697, 698) exhibits an awareness of role-playing that succinctly captures the relationship between actor and character (Cf. Aristophanes, Acharnians 440–441; Lada-Richards (2002) 395–401). This new role was ideally suited to engage with norms of social cohesion and new performance techniques. (See section 5 below for additional discussion.)

While the modification of delivery, gestures, and costume enabled actors to elaborate social distinctions, Euripidean characters (from elite heroes to lowly slaves) tended uniformly to use colloquialisms and “ordinary” syntactical structures (Aristophanes, Frogs 939–942, 1058; Aristotle, Rhetoric 1404b24–25; Stevens (1976)). A corollary of this decreased emphasis on class difference through linguistic portrayal is the increased rate of the resolution of the iambic trimeter used in dialogue: the resultant speech patterns were perceived to be closer to common everyday speech (cf. Aristotle, Poetics 1449a24–27; see Cropp and Fick (1985)). These tendencies contrasted with those of Aeschylus and Sophocles, who used language to differentiate characters rather by class and ethnicity. However, it is worth noting that female characters in Euripides do exhibit some distinctive speech patterns and perhaps a gendered form of argumentation (Sommerstein (1995); McClure (1999); Mossmann (2001); Chong-Gossard (2006)). Class and social status, however, were more often characterized through performance style and techniques in Euripides.
Innovations in Euripidean drama in terms of music and acting to a certain extent responded to the interests of audiences and performers. Theater-workers became more popular. From vase-paintings to terracotta figurines, an emerging emphasis on dramatic performance (rather than the play’s mythological narrative) suggests an increased receptivity to the material conditions of production as part of the public’s enjoyment of the theater. Evidence from funerary relics and inscriptions celebrate the professional status of theater-workers and honor them publicly (Taplin (1993) 70–78; Wilson (2000) 214–215, (2007); Csapo (2010) 1–82; Taplin and Wyles (2010)). Although ancient critics denigrated the “working-class” music and the “wage-earning” status of actors and musicians (e.g., Aristotle, Politics 1341b13–14; cf. Pseudo-Plutarch, On Music 1135c), who hailed increasingly from non-elite and non-Athenian families, modern scholars have often misrecognized the changing material and economic forces that gave rise to such performers as signs of spiritual collapse (Arrowsmith (1963) 33–36; di Benedetto (1971) 268–269; Zimmermann (1989)). Conflicting ideas of performance and society reflect rather the flourishing of theatrical work. But innovation was not directed solely by the interests of performers and spectators: wealthy sponsors of choral performance were eager to publicly promote their Choruses (Csapo (2010) 12–23, 30)—the material embodiment of their largesse—and may have contributed to changes in the aesthetic form of tragedy.

3 Formal Matters

The formal articulation of structural elements in Euripides has often grounded critical charges of artificiality and the mishandling of dramatic technique. These assessments, derived by comparisons with other poets (typically Sophocles), can be traced back to Aristophanes and Aristotle (e.g., Aristophanes, Frugs 937–1363; Aristotle, Poetics 1456a25–32); such discussions were later expanded in the Enlightenment and have continued along diverse trajectories up to the present (Schlegel (1884) 358; Strohm (1957); Zeitlin (1980); Goldhill (1986) 244–286; Michellini (1987) 95–116; Mastronarde (2010) 14; Wohl (2015)). In discussions of formal elements, a preoccupation with unity and the limits of the tragic form has traditionally loomed large. Consideration of performance conditions, however, can significantly reshape this debate by viewing Euripides’ formalist tendency as connected with the conditions that gave rise to the importance of professional actors and musicians. While other essays in this volume focus on specific aspects of Euripides’ plays (Dubisch in this volume discusses the form and structure of Euripides’ plays in more detail), this section attempts to sketch out productive ways of connecting tragic form, performance, and social change.

Unity of plot is a common bone of contention. Dramatic form, especially in Euripides, has arguably more to do with the linkage between aesthetics and politics than perceptions of wholeness. Plays that appear to lack it can be viewed as complex dramatic structures, whose fragmentation opens up different ways of constructing meaning. The perception of disunity in Trojan Women or Heracles more readily reflects scholars’ engagement with plays as texts to be read rather than experienced
in performance; such allegations uncritically reproduce ancient criticism of Euripides in comparison with the “noble” standard of Sophocles (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1456a25–32; cf. 1453a29–30; see Elsperger 1906; Michelini 1987 52–69; Mastronarde 2010 63–87). Rather than lacking unity, such plays emerged as a vehicle for star performers: individual structural elements were modified and expanded better to suit the demands of performers and the changing interests of audiences (Hall 2006 54–59; cf. Arrowsmith 1963 39–40). The openness of dramatic structure, in terms of its material effects on the performance, was an important factor in Euripides’ rising popularity and contentiousness. Such openness shaped drama in terms of the sociology of performers and audiences, while also constructing a dramatic form through which to critique society and envision the world otherwise (Wohl 2015).

Euripidean prologue-speeches became showcases for narrative delivery (Hamilton 1978; Michelini 1987 103–112). Unlike tragic openings with dialogue between characters (e.g., Soph. *Ant.*, *Aj.*, *OC*) or prologue speeches delivered to another character (e.g., Soph. *Ed.*, *Phil.*), Euripides’ prologues typically comprise a monologue delivered by a single character, thus formally marking the start of the performance (e.g., *Alec.*, *Tel.*, *Med.*, *Heec.*, *Tro.*, *Ion*, *Bacc.*); their self-detachment and predictable metrical pattern were parodied in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (1182–1250). Nonetheless, the extended focus on a single actor provided an opportunity for actors to display their theatrical prowess: the fourth-century star actor Theodorus did not allow even a “cheap” actor to appear on stage before him, since spectators were enamored of the first voice they heard (Aristotle *Politics* 1336b27–30). Prologue speeches occur in earlier tragedy; in Euripides they are more often extradiegetic and proleptically point to the play’s denouement. What was perhaps an archaizing tendency in Euripides nonetheless opened up additional possibilities to engage the spectators’ affective responses to uncertainties emerging from narrative contortions and thereby induced a certain “cognitive dissonance” among audiences (Wohl 2015 15, 20; Mastronarde 2010 107–110). The anapestic openings in *Andromeda*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the fourth-century *Rhesus* suggest alternatively a more animated and musical prologue. Prologue speeches were likely added to other plays by subsequent performers, thus explaining the double prologue in *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Hall 2006 51).

Another formalistic set-piece was the messenger speech. Whereas Aeschylus and (to a lesser extent) Sophocles typically employed a broad range of reporting roles played by characters involved in the dramatic action, Euripidean drama relied both on speeches delivered by socially marginal messenger figures defined by occupation, and on lyric—typically actor’s monody. Except for *Trojan Women*, which nonetheless has a number of reporting figures (Talthybius, Cassandra, Andromache), all Euripidean plays include one formal messenger speech. Strikingly, all extant plays after 415 BCE except *Ion* have two. Euripidean messenger speeches become increasingly longer in later plays, use more action verbs (Dickin 2009)), and provide more opportunities for messengers to report while impersonating the speech of other characters (at times, the very characters performed earlier by the same actor now performing as the messenger; Nünlist 2002 223). While the report’s vividness and authenticity was a concern, so too was the “busyness” of the action-packed delivery
that opened up possibilities for mimetic performance and verbal mimicry (de Jong (1991); Barrett (2002); verbal mimicry: Csapo (2010) 126–129). It is thus not surprising that the star actor Nikokrates could be praised for his verbal dexterity and enunciation in messenger speeches (Eubulus fr. 134 K-A). The show-stopping potential of Euripides’ messengers reaches its apotheosis with the report sung by the Phrygian servant in Orestes (Porter (1994) 173–213), which playfully frustrates the suggested revelation of the dead Helen on the ekkyklema (1357–59, 1366). Such trends suggest the rising popularity of these roles with audiences, as demonstrated in artistic representations of messengers in the fourth century (Green (1999)).

Debate scenes between characters became a standard feature of drama. Sets of paired speeches are found in Aeschylus and Sophocles, but in Euripides more attention is drawn to the making of speeches (e.g., Alexander fr. 62a, Held. 474–483, Supp. 295–310, Hipp. 986–991, Tru. 365–367). The beginning of formalized debate (agon) is often marked with a proem and its ending with the departure of the characters (e.g., Tru. 940–1032, Pho. 465–525). Recognizable rhetorical devices and allusions to contemporary debates foreground the agon’s historical constructedness (Lloyd (1992); Scodel (1999–2000); Barker (2009); Mastronarde (2010) 222–245). Given the variability of its form in Euripides, defining the agon became a concern for scholars (Strohm (1957) 3–49; Lloyd (1992), Dubischar (2001)), but the resultant critical assessment of the rhetorical flourish of Euripidean debate as artificial (Duchemin (1945); Collard (1975) 59; Lloyd (1992) 2) has been unduly influential. Whereas Athenian legal practices surely influenced tragic debate scenes, the frequent lack of resolution in Euripides points to the agon’s engagement through performance with the problematization of social and political issues. The agon between Medea and Jason in Medea or between Hecuba and Polyphemus in Hecuba highlights—not resolves—irremediable differences. In part, these speeches with their carefully calibrated antagonistic positions showcased rhetorical skills, but debate scenes also opened up spaces to explore the very issue of disagreement (Scodel (1999–2000); Barker (2009); Mastronarde (2010) 207–245).

The presence of an arbitrator on stage (e.g. Menelaus in Tru., Agamemnon in Hec., Demophon in Held.) made the structure of the agon similar to theatrical experiences of spectators at a performance (cf. Dionysus in Aristophanes Frags). Audience involvement was thus built into these scenes, but its complicity was intensified as a result of the handling of disagreements. The failure of the agon as a formal and institutional structure to resolve conflict on stage could serve to implicate the audience directly in the decision-making process. More attention was also placed on the individual agents in the agon and presumably on the actors’ performance of these roles. With the socially marginal in Euripides self-consciously using formal rhetorical devices and thereby underscoring the constructedness of their performance, these debate scenes drew attention to the rise of new agents in society and in drama.

The question of who speaks merits attention. Talkativeness among Euripidean “minor” characters was described by Aristophanes as a “democratic” act (Aristophanes, Frags 948–952; cf. 89–91). A further tendency is rhetorical self-consciousness among Euripides’ socially and politically marginal characters. The Nurse in Hippias offers one example of a servile character who speaks persuasively (cf. 482,
487–89, 503–505) and incites the noble Phaedra to act on her love for Hippolytus. While suggesting the threatening specter of clever-speaking women and slaves, the rhetorical prowess of the socially and politically marginal may have also represented (and perhaps managed) certain utopian desires among non-elite and non-citizen spectators (Hall (1997); cf. duBois (2010) 89). In Hippolytus, the Nurse’s pragmatism, sophistic argumentation, and disregard for elite conventions may not have alienated all spectators (cf. McClure (1999) 135–141). The influence of the sophists on these trends is undeniable: some of these foreign intellectuals espoused antitraditional relativism and delivered competing arguments on a single issue; some sophists also taught rhetoric for a fee. But money was not always seen as necessary for developing rhetorical skills (e.g., Aristophanes Eeci. 243–244; cf. Hec. 814–820).

The handling of the Chorus in Euripides is noteworthy for how it was shaped to emphasize dramatic and ritual performance (see also Murnaghan in this volume). For some ancient critics the Chorus was a concerned attendant incapable of action; or it should function as one of the actors, a part of the whole, and participate in the play as in Sophocles but not as in Euripides (Pseudo-Aristotle Problems 19.48; Aristotle, Poetics 1456a25–27; see further Foley (2003)). In comparison with Sophocles (and Aeschylus), Euripidean Choruses may appear more detached and uninvolved with the action on stage (e.g., Σ Aristophanes, Acharnians 421; see Mastronarde (2010) 147–151; cf. Aristotle, Poetics 1456a29 for the different phenomenon of the incidental choral interlude (emblima)). The Chorus, traditionally understood, provides topical commentary to onstage action and meted out conventional knowledge, but increasingly throughout the fifth century Euripidean choral songs contain impressionistic narration with meandering details and refer to dancing, music, and to other kinds of cultic choral performances both traditional and invented (Csapo (1999-2000) 418–421).

The interests of khorēgoi, the financial sponsors of Choruses, may have led to such self-referential showcasing of choral song, thus connecting tragedy with the long-standing tradition of ritual Choruses and intensifying the sense of choral autonomy from the immediate action on stage. But choral references to performance do complicate the received notion of choral detachment.

References made by the dramatic Chorus to other Choruses—in another time, another space—and to choral singing and dancing constitute a type of choral self-referentiality. Through these mimetic references the Chorus projects itself elsewhere onto other cultic, often Dionysiac, performances (Henrichs (1994–1995), (1996); Kowalzig (2007); Csapo (2008); cf. Scullion (2002)). Although choral projection is also found in Sophocles, albeit to a lesser extent and with fewer references to musical performance, it was quite common in Euripidean drama (Csapo (1999–2000)). For example, reference to the fifty daughters of Nereus in Iphigenia in Aulis (1055–57) or the circling aulos-loving dolphins in Electra (435–436) evokes choral performances connected with Dionysian cult and signifies New Music. The emerging theater business, more consumer-directed and less bound to tradition, was the site of New Musical traditionalism both through religious revitalism and invention. Euripides’ increasing preference for (often foreign) female Choruses, at times detached from the dramatic narrative (e.g., Phoen., IA), may further represent New Musical influence (with its perceived emotional outpourings and volubility) on the

4 “Metatheater” and Stage Machinery: Theater in Construction

Euripidean formalism has the potential to raise audience awareness of the material and social conditions of performance. Characters’ comments about happenings in the world of the play could also be used to draw attention to dramatic structure. When Electra asks, after waiting expectantly for news, “Where are the messengers?” (El. 759), the Messenger arrives as if on cue. Such moments as Iphigenia’s questioning of the whereabouts of the Chorus right before the parodos (IT 64–66) or references to the conventional muteness of extras on stage (Or. 1592) draw attention to the construction of dramatic action. In Iphigenia at Tauris (902–908) Pylades signals the formal start of the intrigue, and in Phoenissae (751–752) Eteocles criticizes traditional forms of (tragic) battle narrative. Euripidean drama refers to performance conditions in circumscribed ways that nonetheless appear to have become conventional.

In discussions of dramatic self-reflection or “metatheater” the Bacchae has loomed large. Dressing up as a maenad in order to watch the “choral” spectacle in honor of Dionysus on the hillside, Pentheus the spectator (829) is instructed how to behave (or “act”) by the god of the theater, Dionysus, and rehearses his role (925–954; see further 964–965, 1043–47, 1050, 1277). This “play within a play” has been discussed in terms of Bacchae’s overall symbolic action and engagement with issues of identity and self-knowledge. These metatheatrical moments engender “self-conscious reflection … on the range and limits of truth that the dramatic fiction can convey” (Segal 1997) 216; see also Foley (1985): 205–258; Bierl (1991); Dobrov (2001); Barrett (2002) 102–131. Scholars have also detected comic elements in this scene (Seidensticker (1978), (1982); cf. Gregory (1999–2000)); the “play within a play” may reflect innovations in the tragic genre, while also opening up a space for actors to demonstrate their skills by enabling them to draw on different generic markers. Such scenes of explicit role-playing are key components in discussions of metatheater yet also relate directly to theatrical production.

The awareness of stagecraft and theatrical conventions was part of watching and presumably enjoying drama (Easterling (1991); Taplin (1996); Marshall (1999–2000); Rosenmeyer (2002); Hall (2006) 52–54, 105–111). Calling attention to traditional dramatic forms emphasized their conventionality, thus potentially defamiliarizing them, and highlighted the performers’ and the performance’s role in creating dramatic action. In Medea the role of the Colchean princess and the multiple identities she adopts throughout the play become not simply a Euripidean version of the unyielding Sophoclean “heroic temper” (Knox (1964)), an exploration of gendered roles (Foley (2001) 243–271), or a study in the conflict between reason and passion; this role also highlights the ability of the duplicitous character and the actor playing
it to “reinvent the received tradition” (Gellrich (2002) 326). In drawing attention
to the constructed nature of drama, metathetater could involve a certain critical
component. In Euripides’ *Electra* (487–584), the “re-enactment” of the recognition
scene from Aeschylus’ *Liberation Bearers* critiques the earlier performance and ques-
tions the ideological underpinnings of tragic form (Revermann (2006) 100–101;

Noteworthy is the intensification of internal role-playing, disguise, and plots of
mistaken identity in the later fifth century. In contrast to the earlier plays of Aeschylus,
subsequent drama makes these popular themes central to the onsetage action with a
notable increase found in Euripidean drama (Hall (2006) 53–54; Zeitlin (1980)).
These themes were also topical in late fifth-century comedy (e.g., Cratinus
*Dionysaleandroes*; Aristophanes *Acharnians*, *Women of the Thesmophoria, Assem-
blywomen*). With the emergence of professional performers, the spread of the theater
industry, and the rise of actors in the popular imagination, internal role-playing can
be viewed as a response, often playful, to the material conditions of performance
(Hall (2006) 118–121). This may shed additional light on *Bacchae*—a New Musical
showpiece (Csapo (1999–2000) 415). Given the self-conscious (re-)invention of
archaic aspects of Dionysiac and cultic performance in New Musical productions,
the revenge of Dionysus and his choral entourage on Thebes for slandering the
God’s lineage offers a withering allegorical response to critics of the popular
performance style. In this case, metathetater appears as a means to assert the Dionysiac
reverence of New Musical practitioners and enthusiasts against charges of decadence
and revolution.

The material conditions of performance also extended to two mechanical devices
used onstage. Such stage-machinery foregrounded the role of technology and stage-
business in the construction of dramatic performance (Newiger (1989); Mastronarde
(1990); Hölscher (1994); Csapo and Slater (1995) 258, 268–272). The *ekkyklēma*
or “rolling out device” was a wooden platform on wheels that could be moved
through the *skênê-door*. Evidence for the *ekkyklēma* in Aeschylus and Sophocles
already suggests something more than its use as an “effective tableau” marking a
suspendable moment, but Euripidean drama took full advantage of the *ekkyklēma’s*
semiotic potential (Cf. Arnott (1962) 86–87).\(^1\)

In *Hippolytus*, Theseus sets in motion a new course of action after finding the
letter (856) on Phaedra’s corpse, displayed on the *ekkyklēma*, the spectacle of which
serves to remind spectators of her culpability and agency (but not to reveal the
spectacle of her death by hanging: 777–783, 802; cf. 786–789). In *Hercules* the
bodies of the hero’s family are arranged together (cf. 971–1000) and displayed on the
*ekkyklēma*, whose evocation of both interior (1038) and exterior (1070, 1089)
space underscores the calculated use of the device to show, unsettle, and potentially
re-categorize onstage action and dialogue (rather than simply to “reveal” interior
scenes). Much like adjudicated debate scenes, the *ekkyklēma* also created a mis-
cen-abyme with actors momentarily becoming spectators reacting to and engaging
with the *ekkyklēma* (e.g., *Hec*. 1049–53) in a way similar to the audience’s expe-
tience. The machinery was likely used to depict the shackled eponymous heroine of

Recognition of the machinery’s expanded usage in Euripides surfaces in Aristophanes’ representation of the tragic poet on the *ekkyklēma* in *Acharnians* (408–409). In a discussion of Euripides’ “sensational” lame and ragged heroes (e.g., *Philoctetes*, *Telephus*), Dicaioclis and a slave, internal spectators of the *ekkyklēma* scene, critically explore Euripidean tragic style. The tragic poet Agathon is similarly represented on the *ekkyklēma* so he can compose New Musical song outdoors (*Women of the Thesmophoria* 66–69). In both cases the machinery is connected with the questioning of aesthetic practices, specifically New Music and new styles of performance; the compositional styles of both tragic poets were also characterized in language drawn from the labor of craftsmen (e.g., *Frags* 819, 881; *Women of the Thesmophoria* 52–57). Euripides’ playful withholding of the *ekkyklēma* (*Or.*, 1561, 1574; cf. *Hipp.* 808) or its spectacular substitution with the “flying machine” (*melkhanē*) in *Medea* (1313–16) further points to the self-conscious and strategic use of the machinery.

The *melkhanē* was a crane used to lift, transport, or lower actors. The device was used sparingly (if at all) in *Aeschylus* and *Sophocles.* In contrast with these allegedly more traditional and “noble” poets, the frequent appearance of the machinery in Euripides gave rise to much criticism (Aristophanes, *Peace* 76–128; Strattis *Phoenician Women* fr. 46 K-A; Aristotle *Poetics* 1454a37–b6; Hourmouziades (1965) 154; Pickard-Cambridge (1946) 51, 127; cf. Mastronarde (1990) 271). The *melkhanē* was increasingly used for gods’ entrances at the end of Euripides’ plays (Mastronarde (2010) 181); the *theos apo melkhanēs* (i.e., *deus ex machina*) became proverbial as a questionable means to resolve a complicated plot in the later fifth and fourth century (Alexis fr. 131 K-A; Antiphanes fr. 189 K-A; cf. Dem. 40.59) and thus formally to conclude the dramatic action. But the *melkhanē* continued to be used for spectacular flying entrances (e.g., Perseus: *Andromeda* fr. 124), thus suggesting a continued interest in the possible uses of technology for innovative staging techniques. In the fragmentary *Stheneboea*, the device was most likely used to represent the flight of Pegasus ridden by Bellerophon, who meted out justice and death to Stheneboea in the manner of a *deus ex machina* (*Hyp.* to *Stheneboea* 12–17, cf. fr. 665a; see Collard *et al.* (1995) 82).

The frequent presence of stage-machinery in Euripidean drama was not merely a means to unsettle epistemological and philosophical beliefs, especially in the case of the *deus ex machina* (Mastronarde (2010) 181–195), or to show off spectacular effects (Hourmouziades (1965), Newiger (1989)). In addition to the focus placed on individual actors and technology, this machinery highlighted the role of stage-hands in constructing dramatic spectacle. Comic attention to the crane-operator suggests that the use of the *melkhanē* involved delicate stage business and the technical—not just physical—skill of professionals (e.g., Aristophanes, *Peace* 174, *Dædalus* fr. 192 K-A, Gerytades fr. 160; Strattis *Athalantis* fr. 4 K-A). The apparent use of mute characters (i.e., stage-hands) to roll out the *ekkyklēma* in tragedy, as elaborated by the speaking roles of slaves in comic scenes of tragic parody, made the
labor involved in dramatic production and its agents—stage-hands—visible. Through
their role in constructing dramatic spectacle, the ἐκκύλημα and μηχανέ function as
a sign and guarantor of theatrical work with machinery-operators as recognized
makers of spectacle; the recognized profession of the stage-property maker, σκευο-
poios, suggests an increased awareness of the role of these workers (Aristophanes
Knights 232; Aristotle Poetics 1450b16–20). The increasingly semiotic use of stage-
machinery and the emphasis on the constructed nature of drama were part of a com-
plex process involving the rise of theater professionals (performers and stage-hands)
and the interests of larger audiences, as the theater industry became more consumer-
directed and less shaped by sponsors. These developments were part of the emerging
self-awareness of workers in Athens (e.g., IGI 1361, II 8464; see Roselli (2013)).
Euripidean drama was crafted and performed with a sharper focus on those working
in the theater.

5 Plum Roles in Euripidean Drama

One way to make sense of these broad changes in theater and society is to consider
the emergence of specific roles. As mentioned above, ragged heroes became increas-
ingly common in Euripides (cf. Aristophanes Frogs 842) and signified an increasing
this role self-consciously drew on performance and social conditions, with the “elite”
character appearing with the trappings of a destitute commoner, it was also able to
incorporate certain comic elements. Thus the ragged Menelaus’ rough and poten-
tially humorous treatment at the hands of the doorkeeper (Hel. 435–541; Allan
(2008) 198–199) evokes similar doorway scenes in comedy.16 Other examples of this
role and its reception reveal an even more strikingly political emphasis.

The virtue of some of these characters resides in knowing their place (e.g., Ion
579–606). But others defend their right to speak out and to participate equally in
the community, like the popular and often parodied eponymous hero of Telephus,
thus making these “pauperized” elite heroes defenders of certain democratic privi-
leges (e.g., Tel. fr. 703, 706 (cf. Aristophanes Acharnians 497–559, 593–619); Ino
fr. 412, 413 (cf. Plut. Mor. 3.290); Alexandros fr. 54, 62).17 At the same time, the
thematization of disguise in Euripides’ Telephus helped to turn the eponymous hero
into an icon of theatrical role-playing; in the ekkyklēma scene of Aristophanes’
Acharnians (407–479) Telephus is associated with stage-machinery and theatrical
work. These ragged heroes were also mocked for corrupting wealthy citizens, who
allegedly dressed up as such characters in pitiable rags and claimed they did not have
sufficient capital to serve as public benefactors (Aristophanes Frogs 1063–1066).
Star actor Kalippides’ apparent performance of a similar role (cf. Aristophanes fr.
490) suggests its appeal to a new generation of actors. This stylized role was well
suited to address the contested boundaries of the citizen body, as well as the tensions
between professional performers and elite “gentleman” actors and between the
vested interests of different classes.

Another figure that became popular particularly in Euripides is the elite sacrificial
victim. This character, most often female but occasionally male (e.g., Menoeceus in
The Theater of Euripides appears as part of a larger action unfolding on stage (e.g., Hexit., Hec., Ezech.) or as the agent of the central action (e.g., IA). In these plays, a social and political crisis is typically averted by the self-sacrifice of a member of an elite ruling family; similar to the Maiden in Children of Heracles, these victims serve as a semiotic vehicles for articulating Athens’ class ideology (Roselli 2007). Critics have also discussed the tensions (Foley 1985; McDonald 1990) and “irony” (Vellacott 1975) involved in these plays and the apparently unacceptable costs of sacrifice (Conacher 1967; Snell 1968; Rabinowitz 1993; Scodel 1996). But a consideration of performance requires us to rethink such assessments.

In Euripides, this role was increasingly allotted more song and thereby provided actors with opportunities for innovative, New Musical performance techniques. Whereas Alcestis sings of her death in a brief song, which has strophic responso and a rather tame metrical schema (Ale. 244–272; Parker 2007) 103–112, and the Maiden in Children of Heracles outlines her willingness to sacrifice in iambic trimeter (500–534), Polyxena (Hec. 197–215) sings an emotionally wrought song. Lyric anapests and dochmains, marked by such features as anadiplosis and polyptoton (e.g., 202–206), heighten the emotionalism of Polyxena’s singing. Iphigenia in Iphigenia in Aulis shows how the role could be expanded. She sings two arias (1279–1335, 1475–1509); both are strophic songs with imagistic sound and sense suited to New Musical compositions. Iphigenia refers to “whirling” breezes blown by Zeus (1324) and instructs the Chorus to “whirl” or dance in a circle (1480) around Artemis’ altar; the verb, “to whirl”, was a shibboleth of New Musical performance and suggests the actor’s mimetic movements (Capeo 1999–2000) 422). Despite the apparent self-detachment of Iphigenia’s arias, the New Musical elements and her self-referential call to the Chorus to dance and join her in song (1468, 1480, 1492) highlight the element of communal performance. Given its increasing popularity, the elite sacrificial victim appears to have become recognized as a suitable role for the emotional and mimetic displays of new performance styles. Such popularity is perhaps reflected in the large number of interpolations in Iphigenia in Aulis on account of a tradition of re-performances.

This role further received a new ethical and social emphasis. The discourse of generosity, munificence, and gift-giving became a leitmotif: the body of the self-sacrificing agent is willingly given to the community for its salvation (e.g., Held. 549–551, IA 1386–89). In return for her self-sacrifice, Polyxena receives a pyre and is showered with leaves; she is thus honored as an athletic victor (Σ Hec. 574; cf. Pind. Pyth. 9.123–124) and a noble warrior (Hec. 346–348). Gratitude (χάρις) was a defining part of this role (e.g., Held. 548, Ezech. fr. 360.1–3; cf. Ale. 299) and transformed the sacrifice from an obligation into a benefaction. Self-sacrifice became one’s willing “gift of death” (Phoen. 1013).

Euripides’ tragic discourse of benefaction was connected with contemporaneous appeals to public service in forensic rhetoric. Liturgies or “works for the people” ostensibly involved the wealthy using their personal resources to benefit the entire community; the extent to which liturgies actually benefited the poor is, however, disputed (Foxhall 2002) 219; cf. Ober 1989) 199–202). Starting at least in the late fifth century, speakers enumerated their liturgical service to amass esteem and
gratitude; they represented their liturgies as gifts bestowed liberally on the state (e.g., Lys. 25.12–13; Ant. 1.β.12; see Wilson (2000) 109–143). The notion of expenditure with one’s person and resources (e.g., Lys. 19.58) gave ideological support to the elite gift economy while also evoking the common citizen ideal of service to the state (e.g., Thuc. 2.43.3; Lys. 2.34–36 cf. Thuc. 8.65). Of particular interest for tragic production is the institution of the khórgía, a “work for the people” in which the wealthy funded and organized public choral performance (Wilson (2000)).

The khórgía’s complex ideological effects and prominent role in instituting choral performance offer a different yet productive framework for discussing the sacrificial elite. Through her sacrifice Iphigenia presents herself as a public benefactor (IA 1446; cf. 1412), yet the common and even humble status of such characters is consistently stressed (IA 1121), thus opening a space for the role of the socially and politically marginal.19 In terms of choral dance, in Erechtheus Athena instructs the city to honor the self-sacrificing daughters with festivals and choral dances of maidens (fr. 370.77–80); choral projection involving aspects of Mystery cults, circular dances, and Dionysus further reflects New Music’s religious revival and its shaping of imagery in the play (Csapo (2008) 275–280). This relationship between the sacrificial role and (New Musical) performance is also found in Iphigenia in Aulis. In addition to Iphigenia’s own arias, her self-sacrifice leads to the organization of New Musical dance (1480) and song (1492; cf. 1467), and the performance of cult hymns (1522). Through its gift of sacrifice the ruling family and the marginal members of the household appear as benefactors both in terms of imperialism and elite choral sponsorship. Much like Euripidean ragged heroes, the sacrificial victim and the handling of the action on stage allegorized contemporary social and political antagonisms. The “costs” of sacrifice are thus recast in perhaps unfamiliar ways.

Consideration of New Musical to khôrgic performances provides important insight into the construction of Euripides’ sacrificial victims. This popular role emerged in tandem with the rise of a new class of performers, new acting and music styles, and an increased receptivity in Euripides to political and social discourses associated with the funding of choral performance (e.g., Aristophanes Peace 534, Fugs 775). Traditional assessments of Euripidean drama in terms of morality, irony, and the debasement of tragic grandeur should be revised in light of the interests and desires of professional performers, common workers, wealthy patrons, and diverse audiences in such roles.

6 Theater Beyond Euripides

In 1905 Lenin declared that “the freedom of the bourgeois writer is simply masked or hypocritically masked dependence on the money bag, on corruption, on prostitution” (Lenin (1965) 48). Euripides was no bourgeois, but Lenin’s comment suggests the pressing need to interrogate the notion of the independent (tragic) poet. In its discussion of the theater of Euripides, this essay has explored various mediations between the poet as “creator” and the performance in terms of a variety of agents and forces. Euripides’ increased openness to new performance
styles is the flipside of the agency of actors, musicians, stage-hands, public officials, entrepreneurs, khur'pou, and audiences with increasing confidence in their ability to express judgment about theatrical performance. To a certain degree, these agents were able to destabilize authorial agency in Euripidean drama. At the same time, these individual agents were themselves part of broader structural developments. The changing sociological make-up of performers, the increasing importance of actors as semi-autonomous “stars,” and the state’s organization of theatrical performance helped fuel changes in dramatic form and the rising popularity of new tragic roles. Euripidean drama emerges as a response to different cultural and political desires among historically constituted spectators and performers (see further Wohl (2015)). Ancient stories about Euripides’ collaborators (Cephlisophon: Aristophanes, *Frogs* 944, 1452–53; fr. 596)—some allegedly slaves (Σ Aristophanes *Frogs* 944; *Vita Eur.* 6.2), others radical musicians (Timotheus: Satyrus *Vita Eur.* fr. 39 col. 22)—not only preserve criticism of his tragic style, they may also embody the changing social conditions and point to the role of a new cast of social agents in the theater of Euripides (Roselli (2005), (2013)).

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25–36.

FURTHER READING

Much of the evidence for ancient theater production is collected and reviewed in the  
standard reference work, Pickard-Cambridge (1988); the more recent discussion  
(and translation) of most of this material in Csapo and Slater (1995) is essential. The  
forthcoming multi-volume work by Csapo and Wilson, Historical Documents for the  
Greek Theatre down to 300 BC, promises to provide a more comprehensive study.  
Csapo (2010) discusses the conditions that gave rise to the theater industry and the  
Stephanis (1988) provides a prosopography of theater workers (in modern Greek)  
necessary for any consideration of the sociology of performers. Roselli (2011)  
explores the historical constitution and role of ancient audiences in Athens. For  
discussion of the connections between politics and performance see Hall (2006);  
provide thoughtful discussions of aesthetics and dramatic form in Euripidean drama.

NOTES

1 Not all deme theaters (e.g., Th挑剔kos) followed this model: Wilson (2007).
2 E.g., Pratinas, TrGF 4 fr. 3; Ath. 617b–c. See Seford (2003, 2004, 2008) on monetiza-  
tion and drama; Csapo (2004) discusses the critical responses to New Music.
3 See e.g., the didaskaliai from 420–417 BCE (IG II 2 2319, col. ii); Csapo and Slater (1995)  
136; Mills and Olson (2012) 115.
10 The repeated phrase “lost/destroyed an oil-flask” in *Frogs* (e.g., 1226, 1238, 1241; cf. Dover (1993) 338–339) may refer to changes in actors’ style of delivery; cf. Pollux 4.114 on “oil-flasking” as a critical term.
11 Sophocles’ extant plays also employ a number of elite characters as messenger figures (e.g., Hyllus in *Trach.*; *Tecmessa* in *Aj.*; Neoptolemus in *Phil.*); see Taplin (1977) 80–85.
13 See von Möllendorf (forthcoming) for the semiotics of the *ekkykléma*.
15 Cf. Or. 1573–75: Orestes appears on the roof (and not on the *ekkykléma* 1561–62) as *deus ex machina* to his own drama: Mastronarde (1990) 262–263; Zeitlin (1980) 70.
18 Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 223–237 for the gruesome depiction of Iphigenia tied up, gagged, and held aloft by soldiers; see further Wohl (1998) 59–82.