

Euripides' *Herakles* depicts the colossal downfall of Greece's greatest hero from the extreme highpoint of his career to the nadir of his sufferings: upon returning home from Hades in triumph at the completion of his Labors Herakles saves his family from a wicked tyrant's plot, only to be conquered by a divine madness which provokes him to murder those he has just saved. Even a cursory review of critical interpretations of the play reveals the general consensus that Euripides "humanizes" his hero by subjecting him to the vicissitudes of human fortune (e.g. Arrowsmith 1954: 16-17, Silk 1985: 12, Burzacchini 1999, Papadopoulou 2005: 80-81). In this paper I argue instead that these vicissitudes can be mapped spatially onto the world of the *Herakles*, and that Euripides' use of spatial metaphor in the play reveals a fundamental duality in the nature of Herakles: far from being merely humanized, the hero is in fact always simultaneously both humbled as a condition of his human weakness, and elevated, revealing his potential for immortality.

Herakles visualizes his own downfall at Hera's hands as the overturning of a house or statue from its foundations (βάθροις / ἄνω κάτω στρέψασα, 1307-8). This inversion of the hero's fortune in the second half of the play recalls movements both literal and metaphorical along the vertical axis earlier in the play. The *Herakles* begins with the hero's *katabasis* to Hades and subsequent return to the world above; the Chorus of old men wish in vain for a second youth utilizing the well-known metaphor for life as a *diaulos*, a race described by Plato as consisting of "upward" (ἀπὸ τῶν κάτω) and "downward" (ἀπὸ...τῶν ἄνω) legs (*Rep.* 613b9-12); and, in his confusion upon recovering from his homicidal madness, Herakles asks reluctantly whether he has ended up in Hades again after his first complete *diaulos* (οὐ που κατήλθον αὔθις εἰς Ἄιδου πάλιν, / Εὐρυσθέως διάυλον ἐξ Ἄιδου μολῶν; 1101-2).

Euripides organizes the action of the *Herakles* along the vertical axis, delineating the events in terms of the opposition between τὸ ἄνω and τὸ κάτω. τὸ ἄνω relates to Herakles' ascendancy as a semi-divine figure: as it represents the "upward" movement of the first half of the race of life, τὸ ἄνω corresponds to the Herakles who embodies youthful strength and athletic prowess (on his associations with youth in cult, see Woodford 1971: 214; in myth and art, see Brommer 1984: 79 and *LIMC* V 160-165). We also see evidence of Herakles' potential for reaching the heights of heaven when he returns to the upper world from Hades contrary to all human expectation (e.g., ll. 145-6, 297, 611, 744-6). τὸ κάτω, on the other hand, represents death literally as a going down to Hades and old age metaphorically as the "second leg" of the *diaulos*. It is this mortal, downward trajectory to which Herakles himself alludes when he claims Hera has turned him "upside-down": his previous success has been overturned by the will of the gods, making Herakles' moment of triumph into one of ruin.

Helene Foley (1985: esp. 193-4) argues that Herakles' status throughout the play is ambiguous; the use of spatial imagery, however, points not to ambiguity, but to a fundamental *duality*. Like the Herakles of earlier poetic tradition, Euripides' hero occupies a unique position in the afterlife as both dead and immortal (cf. *Od.* 11.601-4, *Hes. frag.* 25 MW). Herakles encompasses both τὸ ἄνω and τὸ κάτω simultaneously: he indeed reaches heaven, but it is "from below," through his disastrous downfall (ἄπτη κάτωθεν οὐρανοῦ δυσπραξία, 1240), and in choosing life over death despite his disaster, he imagines himself still in the underworld, as Ixion bound to the wheel (1295-8). The play concludes with Theseus' assurance that once Herakles has died and gone to Hades, the Athenians will raise him up in honor (ἀνάξει, 1331-3).

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