Horror in the Messenger Speech of Euripides' *Heracles* 924-1015

Aristotle writes that the fear (φόβος) of an audience depends on the immediacy (ἐγγύς) of the threat (*Rhet.* 1382a20-32) and on how easily someone can relate to it (φόβος δ᾽ περ τ ν μοιον, *Poet.* 1453a5-6). This evaluation has largely been adopted by modern scholars of horror fiction, who note that an audience experiences horror – a mixture of fear and shock – when a sympathetic character is confronted by an immediate and identifiable threat (Carroll 1987, Cavallaro 2002). I will argue that Euripides generates just this kind of horror in the messenger speech of *Heracles* 924-1015 by including realistic details and perspectives from multiple victims, both of which make the murders more immediate and identifiable for the audience.

While scholars have commented on the horrific nature of the *Heracles*, most have located this horror in the confusion between divine and mortal in the nature of Heracles (Riley 2008, Silk 1985). The discussions of the realistic detail and multiple perspectives found in the messenger speech similarly have concentrated on the complex character of the hero and the peculiar nature of his madness (De Jong 1988, Barlow 1982). These scholars have not adequately discussed the horror that is generated by the particular attention Euripides pays to the suffering of the hero's family in the messenger speech, including detailed description of the domestic space and direct quotes from various members of the household. These features make the event more immediate and identifiable for the audience, and the speech illustrates the ultimate vulnerability of ordinary places and people.

The description of the space within the palace is detailed and realistic. Some striking images include Heracles chasing one son around the pillar (977-979), the same son sliding down the orthostates (979-980), another cowering by the crepice of an altar (984-985), and Heracles ripping out door-posts in order to attack his wife (998-1000). The vivid description of the house adds immediacy to the messenger's account by highlighting the futility of the family's attempts to find refuge in it. Moreover, the familiarity of this description makes this scene particularly horrific by demonstrating to the audience how easily the protective appearance of the home, the traditional safe space, can be dissolved.

The speech's inclusion of many different perspectives from those within the household also adds to the horror of this scene. The messenger quotes directly not only Heracles, but Amphitryon, Megara, one of the sons, and even a fellow slave. These quotations, like the spatial descriptions discussed above, illustrate Euripides' interest in presenting a realistic account. The other characters react to Heracles' fury with initial confusion (951-952), pathetic appeals (975-976), and attempts to correct his delusionary motives (988-989). The diversity of these voices and the plausibility of their reactions provide the audience with an ample supply of characters with whom they can identify and by whose fate they can thus be horrified.

The unique character of Heracles is not one to which an audience can easily relate, as Silk 1985 has noted, but Euripides' attention to the hero's family makes the situation more identifiable for the audience. The messenger speech shows the vulnerability of everyday places and characters, thereby challenging the familiar notion of home as a safe space. The realistic details and multiple perspectives in the speech illustrate that divine animosity presents a real threat to ordinary people, as well as to semi-divine heroes. The capricious and destructive nature of the gods is an issue that pervades the entire play (cf. Yunis 1988, Bond 1983), but the horror found in the messenger speech makes this a matter of immediate significance to the audience.

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