

Changing the Script: Misdirection and the Family in Euripides' *Heracles*

Euripides' *Heracles*, as many have noted, contains two separate, but related dramas, delineated by the appearance of Lyssa and Iris on the *mechane* (Halleran 1985, Dunn 1996, Karabela 2003). The suppliant drama, in which Heracles' family confronts death at the hands of a tyrant, introduces several themes as "misdirections" that prepare the audience for events that never happen or that take place differently than expected (de Jong 2014). In this paper I argue that two of these themes relate to the relationship between the *polis*, the soldier, and his family: (1) the ideal of *kalos thanatos* and (2) the aid owed by a city to the families of deceased soldiers. Both themes echo contemporary political rhetoric in *epitaphioi logoi* (Ziolkowski 1985, Loraux 1986, Prinz 1997). By introducing and abruptly dropping these themes, the play dramatizes the disjunction between the soldier's achievement of peace for the *polis* and his loss of peace for himself and his family. Heracles' madness radically changes the script.

Mothers of citizens in fifth-century Athens were expected to raise their sons to view death in battle for their city as the noblest form of death (Loraux). Megara's argument for facing death bravely rather than cowering at an altar echoes the rhetoric of *epitaphioi logoi*, which both praise and urge Athenian men to pursue a noble death in battle on behalf of their city. She appeals to the family's noble birth and glorious deeds (δόκησις εὐκλεής, 289; εὐκλεής πόσις, 290; οἱ εὐγενεῖς, 292; εὐγένεια, 308), and urges them – and herself – to imitate Heracles' own bravery in facing death (μίμημ' ἀνδρός, 294). Megara's appeals raise expectations for a *kalos thanatos* that she and her children never achieve: their deaths at Heracles' hands contrast sharply with the noble death Megara prepared for them. The misdirection, in this case, increases the *pathos* of their horrendous deaths by making their earlier situation seem preferable.

The suppliant drama also calls attention to the vulnerability of the families of soldiers who achieve a *kalos thanatos*, as his family and the Chorus believe Heracles did. Widows with young children were an especially vulnerable social group in fifth-century Athens (Isager 1981-1982, Hunter 1989, Cudjoe 2010). While war orphans were supported by the state, widows received no formal support unless pregnant (*Ath. Pol.* 56.7). Funeral orations, however, demonstrate that citizens recognized an informal duty to help the wives of the deceased in addition to their children (*Lys.* 2.75, *Plat. Men.* 248c). Amphytrion reproaches both Thebes and Greece by appealing to the help owed to the warrior's family for his war with the Minyans and his cleansing of land and sea (217-228). The Chorus also highlights this theme (264-267). Heracles, upon his return, indicates that he also expected reciprocity for his war against the Minyans in the form of care for his family (558-561). This emphasis on the Thebans' unfulfilled obligations raises expectations that Heracles will punish them, as he in fact threatens (568-573). His threat, however, is dropped after the arrival of Lyssa, whereas Theseus, who offers aid from Athens, arrives too late to answer the family's appeal for aid. The technique of misdirection raises expectations of a solution to the family's political problems, which Lyssa renders void. Heracles' berserk slaughter of his wife and children supersedes the themes of *kalos thanatos* and *polis* obligations to the family introduced in the first half of the play; Theseus, the representative of Athens, focuses instead on the recuperation of his friend through both personal and political support.

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