

Euripides, Orpheus, and the New Music: *Mousikē* in the Fragments of *Hypsipyle* and *Antiope*

Two late fragmentary plays by Euripides—*Hypsipyle* and *Antiope*—follow the narrative of a mother who is separated from her twin sons and forced into slavery. In these, as in several other tragedies that spotlight the mother-son relationship, danger is ultimately averted, and the drama concludes with a joyful reunion. Likely performed together, these “family reunion” plays reveal several parallels that invite them to be considered in terms of one another (Collard *et. al.* 2004; Karamanou 2011). Both unfold on the periphery with respect to Athens and Thebes (Zeitlin 1993). In both, one twin pursues music, while the other is more physically inclined. A parallel perhaps less obvious to modern readers is an innovative engagement with contemporary musical culture or *mousikē*. Although our glimpses into these fragmentary plays are tantalizingly brief, they point to a sustained interest in the mysterious musical culture of Orpheus, stylized in the developing “new music” of the late fifth century BCE (Csapo 2004).

Gathering the musical references from *Hypsipyle's* beginning into a priamel, I show how the title character’s mimetic performance directs the audience to Orphic *kitharoidia*, a musical aesthetic with ritual significance in Athens. In the play *Antiope*, this same Orphic mode of *mousikē* is presented in terms of the broader cultural and civic concerns it raises in the celebrated *agon* between the brothers Amphion and Zethus. Taken together—I argue—these plays refract the contemporary new music through a constellation of aesthetic and civic concerns surrounding Orpheus; the plays celebrate this positive Dionysiac energy, as they represent its profitable integration into the *polis*.

Euripides uses the sophisticated mimetic play in *Hypsipyle's* priamel to bring his audience at last to a vision of Orpheus sounding out the crew's instructions through his virtuosic *kitharoidia*. Once the primary catastrophe of the play is averted and *Hypsipyle* is reunited with

her sons, the play brings this Orphic *kitharoidia* to Athens, specifically into a Dionysiac ritual context (cf. Di Benedetto 2004). This trajectory unites the aesthetics of the new music with an *aition* of the presiding priest of *Dionysos Melponenos* himself—a trajectory that affirms Csapo's thesis that, far from representing some kind of *décadence*, the new music marks a revival in theater and mystery cult (Csapo 1999-2000).

In the *Antiope*, the title character's twin sons Amphion and Zethus foil the musical Euneus and martial Thoas. In an *agon* between the twin brothers, the physical and intellectual are polarized. Attributing to Amphion's music idleness, wine-loving, and neglectfulness of affairs (fr. 183), Zethus criticizes the poet for his effeminate form and martial ineptitude (fr. 185). In response, Amphion defends the mind's wisdom, sound judgment, and good counsel, praising the life of *hesuchia* (fr. 193-220). Regardless of whichever—if either—of these two emerged superior in the debate, their fraternal concord is highlighted at the play's end. Hermes appears *deus ex machina*, and he channels their respective strengths to build the city of Thebes (fr. 223N.86-95). The specific musical mode with Amphion is finally shown to be Orphic, drawing on recently published fragments (cf. Edmunds 2013).

Bibliography

C. Collard, M.J. Cropp, and J. Gibert. 2004. *Selected Fragmentary Plays: Volume II*. Oxford.

Csapo, E. 2004. "The Politics of the New Music," in P. Murray and P.J. Wilson, eds. *Music and the Muses: The Culture of Mousikē in the Classical Athenian City*. Oxford. 207-48.

_____. 1999-2000. "Later Euripidean Music," *Illinois Classical Studies* 24-5: 399-426.

Di Benedetto, V. 2004. *Euripide: Le Baccanti*. Milan.

Edmunds, R.G. 2013. *Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion*. Cambridge.

Karamanou, I. 2011. "Euripides' 'Family Reunion Plays' and Their Socio-Political Resonances,"
in B. Zimmerman and A. Markantonatos, eds. *Crisis on Stage: Tragedy and Comedy in
Late Fifth-Century Athens*. Berlin-New York. 239-50.

Zeitlin, F.I. 1993. "Staging Dionysus between Thebes and Athens," in T.H. Carpenter and C.
Faraone, eds. *Masks of Dionysus*. Ithaca-London. 147-82.