

Reciprocity in Hades: the appearance of Theseus on stage in Euripides' *Heracles*

In this paper, I explore how Theseus' initial behavior towards Heracles in Euripides' eponymous drama allows for the friendship bond between the two to be renewed, despite various pressures acting against it. When Theseus appears on stage with his army, he is ready to help Heracles against the tyrant Lycus and repay his friend for saving him from Hades. Instead, he finds Heracles surrounded by his dead wife and children, in a confused state and wanting to commit suicide. Not only are Theseus' expectations of fighting side by side with Heracles and cementing their friendship with military alliance not met; but also, his duties as *philos* do not require him to expose himself to a threat of pollution and physical harm, by approaching a maddened Heracles who just killed his family.

Many scholars have emphasized the theme of friendship as either central to the drama (Yoshitake, 1994; Johnson, 2002), or secondary to more prominent themes (Padilla, 1994; Holmes, 2008). Consequently, much has been written about the importance of the relationship between the two heroes or the role of their friendship throughout the play. However, research with a clear focus on how the friendship bond between the two heroes is renewed in the immediate aftermath of Theseus' entrance on stage has so far been lacking. I aim to explore the way in which this renewal is dramatized, despite Theseus' unmet expectation that he would be returning a favor by military form, and Heracles' polluted and dangerous state and his wish to commit suicide.

My analysis will unfold in two stages, following two main lines of argument about Theseus' behavior immediately after his appearance in the play. I will show how Theseus first turns to the familiar language and gestures of the gymnasium, almost as a way to process the

crimes committed by Heracles in a context that still allows for camaraderie, such as the one performed on a wrestling mat. He then evokes a familiar scenario where his friendship with Heracles originated, in Hades, and attempts to model his present bond on the past one that tied the two heroes: just as Heracles once helped Theseus in Hades, now Theseus will reciprocate by helping Heracles, in a scene that is reminiscent of Hades.

In the first stage of my analysis, I examine how Theseus goes from being horrified at Heracles' crimes to offering his aid to the Pan-Hellenic hero and renewing their bond of friendship. Theseus' reaction when faced with Heracles' actions is to describe the scene in agonistic terms: he came expecting a battle (πόλεμος 1168) but finds a contest (ἀγών 1189) instead. The shift from a military to an agonistic context is accompanied by a shift in Theseus' role. He came on stage as a σύμμαχος (1163ff.), ready to offer his military help, but, as he finds Heracles in need of something different, he proclaims himself συναλγῶν (1202), ready to "suffer together." Moreover, the introduction of an agonistic context provides a framework in which Theseus and Amphitryon can offer their initial help to the grieving hero. When at 1205 ff. Amphitryon approaches his son and persuades him to unveil, the language used in the scene is "unquestionably that of wrestling" (Bond, 1981); shortly after, Theseus will mimic Amphitryon's body language in his first interactions with Heracles at 1226-8.

In the second part of my paper, I explore how Theseus, through the verbal adjective ἀνοιστέον at 1221, transforms the space where Heracles' crimes took place into a second Hades, where Heracles once saved his friend. Theseus' effort to "carry back" the mind to that time is inserted into a monologue about the value of *philia*, suggesting that we read the scene as an appeal to figuratively go back in time (to the time when Heracles saved Theseus) and in place (to Hades). I argue that the creation of this fictional space, complete with dead bodies, casts the

stage as a re-enactment of Heracles' last labor in Hades and allows for Theseus' reciprocity. At the same time, projecting a second Hades on stage underscores Heracles' suicidal disposition as radically different from Theseus' when he found himself in the underworld. I will end my paper by briefly contextualizing the moment of Theseus' arrival as part of a larger process of the development of the friendship between the two heroes.

Bibliography

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