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SPACE IN EURIPIDES  
BY  
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*Setting*

All Euripides' surviving plays are set in one place, which is identified in the prologue speech. Andromache thus describes the setting of *Andromache*:

I live now in these lands that border on Phthia and the city of Pharsalus, lands where the sea goddess Thetis, far from the haunts of men and fleeing their company, lived as wife with Peleus. The people of Thessaly call the place Thetideion in honour of the goddess' marriage ... I in fear have come and taken my seat at this shrine of Thetis near the house in the hope that it may save me from death  
(*Andr.* 16-20, 42-44).<sup>1</sup>

Andromache identifies the part of Greece in which the play is set, the house of Neoptolemus in front of which the action takes place, and the shrine of Thetis at which she sits as a suppliant. Euripides sometimes specifies the precise location immediately, e.g. 'House of Admetus' (*Alc.* 1). More often, he identifies the country or city in which the action is set early in the prologue, and then specifies the actual building represented by the *skênê* later, e.g. 'this land of the Chersonese' (*Hec.* 33), followed by 'the tent of Agamemnon' (*Hec.* 53-54), and 'this land of Delphi' (*Ion* 5), followed by 'this prophetic shrine of Apollo' (*Ion* 66).

Oliver Taplin contrasts this treatment of place with that in Shakespeare: 'an entry is an arrival, a positive journey to the place where the play is set, and an exit is a positive departure from that place. This contrasts with Shakespearean tragedy where frequent changes of scene and vague scene settings ... often make entries and exits a matter of simply joining in and withdrawing from the action'.<sup>2</sup> This stability of setting [end of page 341] is one of the most distinctive features of the treatment of scenic space in classical and neoclassical tragedy,<sup>3</sup> and contrasts with its labile nature in Aristophanes (→). The only surviving play by Euripides in which there is a hint of

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<sup>1</sup> Passages from Euripides are cited, sometimes with slight adaptations, from the Loeb translation by David Kovacs.

<sup>2</sup> Taplin 1977: 103.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. McAuley 1999: 98.

uncertainty in the setting is *Heraclidae*, where there is an indeterminacy of location which allows Marathon and Athens to merge together.<sup>4</sup>

Euripides does not usually go to great lengths to describe the location of a play in any detail at the beginning. His scene-setting is remarkably sparse even in plays with exotic locations (*Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Helen*).<sup>5</sup> *Ion* is exceptional in its evocation of Delphi in the first two hundred lines.<sup>6</sup> Hermes' prologue speech offers relatively little descriptive detail, but Ion's monody (82-183) gives a strong impression of the sanctuary, e.g. 'The trackless peaks of Parnassus gleam with light and receive for mortals the sun's chariot wheels. The smoke of dry incense rises up to Phoebus' rafters. Upon her holy tripod sits the Delphian priestess, who cries aloud to the Greeks whatever Apollo utters' (86-93).<sup>7</sup> Ion's focalization of the sanctuary also has a characterizing function, expressing his unworldly devotion to Apollo. The impressionable chorus of Creusa's Athenian maidservants then offers a vivid *ekphrasis* of the temple sculptures in the parodos (184-217).<sup>8</sup> There is a strong emphasis on the impact made by the sculptures on the members of the chorus as they move round, with many words for seeing, e.g. ' — But see here the man upon the winged horse: he is slaying the fire-breathing three-bodied monster. — My eyes dart in all directions. Look at the rout of the Giants carved on the stonework! — I see them, my friends! — Do you see her, shaking over Enceladus her fierce-visaged shield ... — I see Pallas, my goddess' (201-211). Euripides is not so much enabling the spectator to construct the topography of Delphi as arousing wonder at this famous and holy place with its rich mythical and religious significance. Zeitlin (1994) associates [end of page 342] the parodos of *Ion* with passages of *ekphrasis* near the beginnings of *Iphigenia in Aulis* (164-302) and *Phoenissae* (88-201), which are also focalized by naïve female spectators. Contrast the focalization by male heroes when Orestes draws Pylades' attention to the temple of Artemis at the beginning of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, e.g. 'You

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Zuntz 1955: 97-104; Wilkins 1993: xxvii, 32 n.; Allan 2001: 159, note on lines 340-343; Mendelsohn 2002: 63.

<sup>5</sup> Wright 2005: 176 observes: 'these locations are drawn neither precisely nor coherently, and there is an almost total absence of distinctive local detail'.

<sup>6</sup> See Kuntz 1993: 38-58 on 'the significance of setting for the thematic development of the play' (38) in *Ion*.

<sup>7</sup> Parnassus is also mentioned at lines 155, 714, 550, 1126-1127, 1267; cf. Lee 1997: 169, note on line 86; Hourmouziades 1965: 110-115.

<sup>8</sup> On the various issues concerning these sculptures, see Lee 1997: 177-179, note on lines 184-236.

see that the walls on all sides are high. Shall we climb up on ladders? ... Or shall we pry the bronze doors open with crowbars and thus enter the temple?' (*IT* 96-100). The temple here poses a practical challenge, and the earlier description of the blood-stained altar (72-75) shows the price of failure.

Euripides sometimes relates the location of a play systematically to a number of offstage places. *Electra* is a good example of this. It is set in front of the Farmer's cottage, a humble dwelling in the countryside (168, 207, 252, 306-307), close to the Argive border (96). The Farmer's fields and the stream from which Electra gets water are nearby (77-79). A little further away is Aegisthus' country estate, described as 'near to these fields' (623); it is close enough for Aegisthus' death-cry to be audible (751-754), and is therefore 'extrascenic' rather than 'distanced' space. The messenger refers to the wagon track by which Orestes and Pylades made their way there (775; cf. 103). The countrywomen of the chorus live nearby (167-174, 298-299). Distanced places are systematically related to these extrascenic places. The cottage is contrasted with the royal palace in Argos, from which Orestes and Electra have been exiled (314-322). A festive procession from Argos to the Heraion is also mentioned (173-174). Agamemnon's tomb is another offstage place, neglected by the usurpers (323-331) but honoured by those still loyal to him (508-523). The Old Man, Agamemnon's tutor, lives in a different part of the Argive borderland, by the R. Tanaos in the south (409-412). He comes via Agamemnon's tomb (509), and will go to the city via Aegisthus' estate (664-666). Clytemnestra visits Electra's cottage on her way to Aegisthus' estate (1133-1135). The innovative plot requires topographical clarity.<sup>9</sup> Mastronarde observes that Euripides, in comparison to Sophocles, 'aims for a stronger impression of particularity and verisimilitude' in his topography, and this contributes to establishing the realistic tone of *Electra*.<sup>10</sup> [end of page 343]

### *Scenic Space*

The scenic space in Euripides is always located in front of a building represented by the *skênê*. This space is never treated as private, as a room inside the house might have been. Euripides sometimes brings characters onto the stage when they might

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Barrett 1964: 15, 32-34 on *Hippolytus*.

<sup>10</sup> Mastronarde 1994: 647; cf. Lowe 1987: 134-135, on Menander's *Dyskolos*.

more naturally have remained indoors, but the result is that they are now in a position to interact with strangers. In *Alcestis*, for example, Alcestis comes out of the palace to die. This is explained in terms of her wish to see the sun for one last time (205-207), but it is not merely a matter of being in the open air, as she would have been in an inner courtyard. The door is the *auleios thura* (S. *Ant.* 18; E. *Hel.* 438) opening onto the street,<sup>11</sup> and her entrance serves to satisfy the sympathetic interest of the chorus which has built up since their entrance. There is a similar sequence of events in *Hippolytus*, where the chorus speculates about Phaedra's malady in the parodos (121-169; cf. 267-287). Her appearance is explained in terms of a desire for light and air (176-190), but she is now in some sense in public (213) and the chorus is shocked that she has 'exposed evils to the daylight' (368). In *Orestes*, the sick Orestes is outside from the start (35-36), and there is a protracted scene of sympathetic interest from chorus while he sleeps.

We should not, however, exaggerate the degree to which events outside the *skênê* are to be regarded as public. John Gould writes: 'Greek tragic drama is a theatre of public events, played both in reality and in imagination in the open air and depicting the words and actions of the public world. The chorus... is the constant visible symbol of this public world'.<sup>12</sup> P.E. Easterling queries this statement, arguing in particular that female choruses help to create a 'shared women's world' in which there is no sense that female protagonists are 'outside' in any transgressive sense.<sup>13</sup> She thus denies that the stage in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is a civic space: '[t]he public life of the *polis* is firmly off-stage ... and quite marginal'.<sup>14</sup> She is undoubtedly correct that the stage space is not 'public' in that sense. Both *Andromache* and *Electra* are set in remote places, far from the world of politics. There is clearly nothing transgressive about Electra going to the stream or talking to the female chorus, although the Farmer is shocked to find her talking to male strangers (*El.* 341-344).

**[end of page 344]**

The scenic space in Euripides is an intermediate zone between the privacy of the interior of the *skênê* and the world of public affairs. He often has a nearby offstage place at which decisions are made in perhaps unpredictable ways about the characters

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Dale 1969: 126-127; Lowe 2000: 169-170.

<sup>12</sup> Gould 1978: 49 = 2001: 89.

<sup>13</sup> Easterling 1987: 24 n. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Easterling 1987: 19.

onstage, and this displacement of political power from the scene of the action is a distinctive feature of his plays. A good example is *Orestes*, which may be set in front of the royal palace but where political power resides with the Argive assembly. *Orestes* cannot escape (427-447, 759-762), he depends on the vote of the city (48-49, 756-758), and the assembly itself is described at length by the messenger (866-956).<sup>15</sup> The assembly of the Greek army has a similar impact on the characters in *Hecuba*, *Troades*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Both *Medea* and *Heracles* are set in front of private houses in cities, and the dramatic importance of the offstage royal palace is particularly notable in *Medea*. The royal palace of Thebes, in front of which the action of *Bacchae* is set, is displaced as the centre of power by events on the mountain. Sophocles (→), by contrast, sets three of his seven surviving plays in front of the royal palace, and in *Oedipus at Colonus* the presence of Theseus makes Colonus temporarily the political centre of Athens. Only *Ajax* resembles Euripides' practice in constructing the scenic space through sharp contrasts both with the domestic interior of the *skênê* and with a nearby political assembly.

*Phoenissae* is unusual for Euripides in being set at the political centre of the polis, where the main episodes of political decision and deliberation take place, e.g. the debate between Eteocles and Polynices, Eteocles' consultation with Creon, and Creon's discussion with Tiresias about how to save the city (858-864, 891-893, 898-900, 912, 918-919, 997, 1015-1018). Antigone's presence outside the *skênê* is treated as transgressive (88-98, 193-201). On the other hand, Eteocles discusses private matters with Creon (692), and Tiresias' advice is treated by Creon as something not to be made public (925, 970). In *Ion*, the space in front of temple of Apollo at Delphi is presented in quite domestic terms, although in reality it was one of the most public areas in the entire Greek world. The chorus of Creusa's serving women 'bring to Delphi the support which [she] would normally find at home'.<sup>16</sup> Xuthus swears the chorus to secrecy (666-667) without the slightest concern that anyone else is within earshot. The 'whole city' (1225) looks for Creusa, but it is [end of page 345] unclear how many of the Delphians enter at line 1258. The playing space is constructed in more political terms in *Heraclidae* and *Supplikes*, and the presence of women in it

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lloyd 1992: 126-128; Easterling 1997: 29-33. On the topography of Argos in tragedy, see Saïd 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Lee 1997: 177, note on lines 184-236.

becomes correspondingly more problematic (*Heraccl.* 474-483; *Supp.* 40-41, 297-300).<sup>17</sup>

One of the most important issues relating to Euripides' use of scenic space is the relationship between the actors and the chorus. It has usually been supposed that as a general rule the chorus danced and sang in the *orkhêstra*, while the actors stayed close to the front of the *skênê*.<sup>18</sup> This spatial distinction would reflect the differences in their modes of performance and in the nature of their engagement with the action. On the other hand, there is regular interaction between chorus and actors, and if there was a raised stage (a controversial issue) then it would not have been very high. Six of Euripides' extant plays (*Heracclidae*, *Andromache*, *Heracles*, *Supplices*, *Ion*, and *Helen*) have an altar or tomb at which characters take refuge. Rush Rehm has challenged the traditional view that this structure was located near the *skênê*, and argued convincingly that it was in the centre of the *orkhêstra*. He points in particular to the opening tableau of *Supplices*.<sup>19</sup> This has Aethra standing at the altar of Demeter surrounded by the chorus of fifteen suppliant women, and near the *skênê* door Adrastus and the secondary chorus of sons of the fallen warriors (at least six and more probably fifteen to match the chorus of mothers). Rehm reasonably points out that it would have been intolerably congested to have as many as 32 performers in the narrow space in front of the *skênê*. The dramatic articulation would be much clearer if the women were in the centre of the *orkhêstra*, emphasizing the distinction between male and female groups. This would also exploit the dramatic strength of the centre of the *orkhêstra* and of the line between it and the *skênê* door.<sup>20</sup> Rehm's staging brings out the conflict in these plays between different 'zones of power'.<sup>21</sup> In *Andromache*, for example, the shrine of Thetis, revered by the Aeacids (45-46), is distinct from the house, which is controlled in the play by Hermione and Menelaus. It is a refuge from a house under hostile control, like the tomb of Proteus (*Helen*), the altar of Zeus (*Heracles*), and the tomb of Agamemnon (Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*). [end of page 346]

The vertical axis is a significant aspect of the topography of several plays, e.g. the *aether* in *Helen*, and the Underworld in *Heracles* (22-24, 37, 45-46, 145, 297, 516,

<sup>17</sup> See generally Mendelsohn 2002: 36-49.

<sup>18</sup> E. g. Hourmouziades 1965: 58-74; Taplin 1977: 441-442.

<sup>19</sup> Rehm 1988: 274-276, 283-290.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Wiles 1997: 63-86; Storey 2008: 107-111.

<sup>21</sup> The phrase used by Lowe 2000: 173, distinguishing the altar both from the inside of the *skênê* and from offstage political authority.

607-608).<sup>22</sup> In terms of performance, it is expressed in Euripides' theatre by actors appearing on the roof of the *skênê*. Mastronarde argues that there was only one roof level, although some scholars accept the evidence of Pollux 4.127 that there was additionally a *theologeion* on which gods could appear at an even higher level.<sup>23</sup> It is not known whether the roof was accessed by a trapdoor in the *skênê* roof or by a ladder or staircase behind the *skênê*. Actors could also alight on the roof from the *mêkhanê* (crane). Gods probably or certainly appear on the roof of the *skênê* in the final scene of several of Euripides' plays (the '*deus ex machina*'): *Hippolytus* (Artemis), *Andromache* (Thetis; cf. 1226-1230), *Supplices* (Athena), *Electra* (the Dioscuri), *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Athena), *Ion* (Athena), *Helen* (the Dioscuri), and *Bacchae* (Dionysus, who does however walk on the ground earlier in the play in human disguise). Iris and Lyssa also appear on the roof in the middle of *Heracles* (cf. 815-821). This position signifies the gods' superiority to, and detachment from, the human characters.<sup>24</sup> Medea's appearance on high at the end of *Medea* exploits the associations of gods appearing in this way, and suggests that the significance of the *mêkhanê* was established at least as early as 431 B.C. Scholars are more divided in their views of where gods appear in prologues. Some think that they always appear at ground level, while Mastronarde argues for an appearance on high for gods in *Hippolytus* (Aphrodite) and *Troades* (Poseidon and Athena) and for the ghost of Polydorus in *Hecuba*.

Euripides uses the *skênê* roof for human characters on three occasions, apart from the quasi-divine Medea (discussed above). The least problematic is *Phoenissae* 88-201, where Antigone and the Servant look out on the invading army. In terms of space, this is less interesting for its use of the vertical axis than for its incorporation of extrascenic space and is thus discussed in that context below. Evadne's spectacular appearance at *Supplices* 980-1071 raises difficult questions about the relationship between the spaces occupied by her and later by Athena. She leaps onto the pyre of her husband Capaneus, echoing his fiery descent from the [end of page 347] walls of Thebes (497-498, 729-730).<sup>25</sup> There are three human characters on the roof at the end

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<sup>22</sup> See Wiles 1997: 175-186; Burian 2007: 27-28 (on *Helen*); Saïd 1989: 113-114 (on *Heracles*).

<sup>23</sup> Mastronarde 1990: 255-259.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Lowe 2000: 171.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Wiles 1997: 184-186; Storey 2008: 116-120.



of *Orestes* (Orestes, Pylades, Hermione), raising similar problems to those in *Supplices* about their spatial relationship to the *deus ex machina* Apollo.

### *Extrascenic Space*

In Euripides' extant plays, the *skênê* can represent a royal palace (*Alcestis*, *Hippolytus*, *Helen*, *Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*), a private dwelling (*Cyclops*, *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Electra*, *Heracles*), a tent in a military camp (*Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Rhesus*), or a temple (*Heraclidae*, *Supplices*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Ion*). The interior of this building plays a crucial part in many of Euripides' plays, as it does also in Sophocles (→) and in Aeschylus' (→) *Oresteia*. This near but unseen space is a fundamental feature of the post-*skênê* Greek theatre, with the *skênê* door as the focal point of transition. There is no other way in or out: 'as in all Greek houses, there is no back door' (Taplin 1983: 158). Froma Zeitlin writes: 'The ordinary business of entrances and exits, of comings and goings through the door of the house, maintains a symbolic dialectic between public and private, seen and unseen, open and secret, even known and unknown' (1996: 353). The symbolic function of interiors is prominent in many genres and authors, many of them influenced by the construction of space in Attic drama, e.g. Chariton (→).

The interior of the *skênê* is a space where things are concealed before being brought out into the open. Xuthus in *Ion* emerges from the temple with an oracle, and later the Priestess comes out with tokens (1320). The plot of *Iphigenia in Tauris* revolves around the need to bring out the statue of Artemis. Eteocles and Polynices confine Oedipus within the palace in *Phoenissae* (63-68, 872-877), and there is a *coup de théâtre* when he finally emerges (1539). Characters bring out their dreams (*Hec.* 68-97, *IT* 42-66) or worries (*Med.* 56-58). In *Hippolytus*, Phaedra initially conceals her malady (279, 394), but it will eventually be revealed (as Aphrodite predicts, 42). This process of revelation is associated with her emergence from the palace. The chorus speculates about Phaedra's behaviour inside the house (121-169), but the explanation is not immediately clear after she comes out (170) and the truth is only revealed at line 352. Hippolytus' anger is similarly brought out into the open, after the remarkable scene [end of page 348] in which his shouting is heard within (565-600).

The opening sequence of *Medea* suggests a contrast between Medea's grief and rage inside the house (1-213) and her controlled behaviour once she has come out.<sup>26</sup>

In *Alcestis*, the chorus tries to interpret what is happening inside the palace (77-111), before the Maidservant gives a detailed account of the intensely private events within (152-198). This speech, and the later speech by the Manservant (747-772), describe the internal articulation of the house in considerable detail.<sup>27</sup> Admetus promises to stop festivity in the house (343-356), describes the separate guest quarters (546-550), and asks Heracles where in the house the unknown woman could stay (1049-1059). The dominant spatial imagery in *Alcestis* is of death as a journey. This is especially clear in Alcestis' simultaneous lyric narrative of her death with its vision of Charon and Hades (252-271; cf. 435-444, 902).<sup>28</sup> 'She has gone' (392, 394), and will live in the house of Hades (436-437, 626-627). She will go down into the Underworld (25-26, 47, 73, 107, 163, 237, 379, 618-619); Admetus would go down to rescue or accompany her (360, 382), as would the chorus (455-459; cf. 985-986) and Heracles (850-854, 1072-1074). Death is conceptualized in spatial terms. The cognitive scientist Mark Turner writes, with reference to *Alcestis*: 'the spatial action-story of departure is projected onto the nonspatial event-story of death'.<sup>29</sup> There is also a literal journey outwards. Alcestis' *ekphora* (422, 716) is described as her last journey (610). Heracles follows this journey outwards to the grave (843-849), but does not in the event need to follow her down to Hades (850-854). There is a reverse journey back into the house when he brings her back ('receive her inside the house', 1097, 1110, 1114, 1147), repeating her arrival there as a bride. The door is a boundary marker both for death and marriage.<sup>30</sup>

Events within the *skênê* are sometimes audible (e.g. *Hipp.* 565-600; *HF* 886-909), or made visible by the *ekklêma*.<sup>31</sup> This is a device which displays to the audience and characters onstage a tableau supposed to [end of page 349] be inside the

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<sup>26</sup> Padel 1990: 358 suggests that the *skênê* is 'an image of the unseen interior of a human being'.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hourmouziades 1965: 85-88; Padel 1990: 343-344; Luschnig 1992: 19-34. Other plays in which the interior is articulated in particular detail are *Heracles*, *Orestes*, and *Bacchae*.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *SAGN* 2: 303.

<sup>29</sup> Turner 1996: 31.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Buxton 2003: 173-179. On some ambiguities in Euripides presentation of death in *Alcestis*, see Dale 1954: 54, 71-2, 115, notes on lines 24-26, 252 ff., 871.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Taplin 1977: 442-443; Wiles 1997: 162-165.

*skênê*. When Theseus is greeted by the news that Phaedra has hanged herself, he commands the servants to open the doors so that he might see the bitter sight of his wife's corpse (*Hipp.* 808-810). A.M. Dale observes: 'our texts vacillate with a curious ambiguity between the imagined scene and the actual mechanism visibly used to present it'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, a real person in Theseus' position would enter the house rather than calling for the body to be displayed. The tableau on the *ekklêma* tends to change in the course of the scene from something inside which is by convention visible to the audience to something which is actually outside. The bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus thus appear on the *ekklêma* in *Electra* (1178), but are apparently outside when Electra and Orestes cover them (1227-1232). Heracles sees the sunlight when he recovers consciousness (*HF* 1090), and interacts with characters onstage. This to some extent blurs the usually clear distinction between inside and outside.

The interior of the *skênê* is often regarded as a predominantly female space. Electra, playing the part of the good wife, contrasts her husband's work outside with her own within (*El.* 73-74). Hippolytus denounces women contriving evils within the house which their servants bring out (*Hipp.* 649-650; the text is corrupt, but the general sense is clear). In *Heraclidae*, the interior of a temple is constructed as a female space, and the Maiden feels the need to justify her exit from it (*Heracl.* 474-83). In *Hecuba*, the *skênê* may represent the tent of Agamemnon (53-54; cf. *Tr.* 139), but he never goes into it and always enters from 'public' area of Greek camp. Hecuba seems to be based in the tent: she enters from it (59), goes in and out in the middle of the play (628, 665-666), and treats it as her space for the purposes of her plot against Polymestor (1014-1018).<sup>33</sup> In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the *skênê* is quite a substantial building, treated as 'home' by Clytemnestra and Iphigenia and a refuge from the threatening male world outside (678-679, 825-826, 913-915, 996, 1029-1031).<sup>34</sup> Contrast *Troades*, where nothing happens inside the *skênê*, and there is no significant interior female space.<sup>35</sup> The *skênê* door is used much more frequently by female than male characters. Euripides also seems to avoid having male characters, especially powerful ones, make their first [end of page 350] entrance from the *skênê*. The main

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<sup>32</sup> Dale 1969: 121.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Croally 1994: 185: 'the interior spaces of the tents (the *skênê*) are still, as in a city, associated with women'.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Michelakis 2006: 87-89.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Croally 1994: 200-201.

exceptions are Admetus (*Alcestis*) and the Farmer (*Electra*), both dramatically subordinate to their wives, the youthful Ion (*Ion*), and the blind and aged Oedipus (*Phoenissae*). There is a contrast here with Sophocles, where Ajax (*Aj.* 91), Creon (*Ant.* 162), and Oedipus (*OT* 1) all make their first entrance from the *skênê*.

Euripides occasionally exploits a ‘contiguous offstage’ other than that inside the *skênê*.<sup>36</sup> Examples are the extended entrance announcement of Clytemnestra (*El.* 962-987), and Electra and the chorus keeping watch for possible arrivals by the *eisodoi* (*Or.* 1246-1310). The *teichoscopia* in *Phoenissae* describes Theban landmarks such as the rivers Ismenus and Dirce (101-102, 131), the tomb of Zethus (145), and the tomb of the Niobids (159-160).<sup>37</sup>

### *Distanced Space*

Scholars generally agree that there was no fixed conventional distinction between the two *eisodoi* in the fifth century, as there was in later theatre between one entrance from the country and harbour and the other from the city.<sup>38</sup> It is, however, unlikely that the *eisodoi* were used randomly, and some distinction between them was doubtless established for each play. It seems plausible that in plays set near the sea (*Cyclops*, *Troades*, *Helen*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*) the *eisodoi* should distinguish inland and shore, and that in plays set in cities (*Medea*, *Phoenissae*, *Heracles*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*) there should be a distinction between inside and outside the city, although in some cases this would mean one *eisodos* being used much more than the other. This is not merely a matter of topographical clarity. In suppliant plays such as *Heraclidae* and *Supplices*, for example, the distinction would have been thematic if one *eisodos* was associated with danger and the other with safety. In plays set near the sea, the sea is associated for some of the characters with escaping or returning home.<sup>39</sup> Matters become more complicated when there are more than two significant offstage places,

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. McAuley 1999: 31.

<sup>37</sup> Saïd 1989: 115-121 argues that the topography of Thebes is presented in more detail in *Phoenissae* than in *Heracles* and *Bacchae*.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Hourmouziades 1965: 128-136; Taplin 1977: 450-451; Wiles 1997: 133-160.

<sup>39</sup> On the importance of the sea in Euripides’ escape tragedies, see Wright 2005: 203-225.

e.g. in *Hecuba* (Greek camp, seashore, inland Thrace), and *Andromache* (Pharsalus, Phthia, Sparta, Delphi). [end of page 351]

Most of Euripides' plays are set in transitional locations to which offstage places are related as stages of a journey. In *Medea*, for example, Corinth is a temporary residence for Medea between Colchis, Iolcus, and an uncertain future which turns out to be Athens. Space has a clear thematic function here. Life as a journey is a prominent metaphor in the play (768-771, 920-921, 1245), and it is a journey which cannot be reversed (502-508).<sup>40</sup> *Iphigenia in Aulis* is set in the Greek camp as the army is about to sail to Troy; in *Hecuba* and *Troades*, the army and the captives are on the point of return. Troy and Greece loom large in all three plays. *Cyclops*, *Electra*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Ion*, and *Helen* end in return from prolonged exile. Theseus is displaced to Trozen (*Hippolytus*) and Amphitryon to Thebes (*Heracles*). Most characters in *Alcestis* enjoy stable lives, but they contrast with Heracles' travels, and his 'uphill' fate (479-506). The journey of the chorus in *Phoenissae* from Phoenicia to Thebes and then on to Delphi inspires elaborate contrasts between the three places. The *parodos* addresses Delphi in ecstatic terms, e.g. 'O holy cave of the serpent and mountain lookout of the goddesses, O sacred mount overspread with snow' (232-234). Delphi is evoked in lyrical and idealistic terms as a place of peace and harmony, in contrast to the violence in Thebes where the play is set.<sup>41</sup>

In *Ion*, the topography of the Athenian acropolis is evoked in more detail than that of Delphi where the play is actually set.<sup>42</sup> In particular, there are repeated references to the cave of Pan on the north side of the Acropolis where Creusa was raped by Apollo. Hermes mentions it in the relatively unemotional and descriptive style appropriate to a prologue speech as 'the place where under Pallas' acropolis stand Athens' northern cliffs, the Long Cliffs as the Athenians call them' (11-13).<sup>43</sup> The tone is different when Ion mentions this place (283), and Creusa responds 'I wish

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<sup>40</sup> On the widespread metaphor of life as a journey, see Turner 1996: 88-90; Budelmann 2010: 114-116. The concept of the 'conceptual metaphor' originated in Lakoff & Johnson 1980.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Arthur 1977: 165-169.

<sup>42</sup> 'The scene is Delphi, but in a sense it is Athens' (Owen 1939: xxii). Cf. Loraux 1993: 195-198.

<sup>43</sup> Lee (1997: 162, note on line 13) cites Wilamowitz' observation that this name is in fact only used in this play, but it is difficult to imagine what purpose would have been served by Euripides inventing it.

I had never seen it!’ (286) and ‘I know a disgraceful deed done in that cave’ (288), a deed later attributed to an anonymous friend (338-352). It is evoked in an exalted lyric mode by the chorus: ‘O resting [end of page 352] place of Pan and cliff that lies near the Long Rocks full of caverns! There they tread the measure, Aglauros’ daughters three, over the grassy sward before the temple of Pallas and sing to the shimmering sound of piping when in your cave shaded from the sun, O Pan, you play your pipes’ (492-502). Creusa recalls the rape in her monody: ‘into the cave that was your bed you took me, divine ravisher’ (892-895), and explains her anguish to the Old Man (936-941). The cave is recalled for the final time when Creusa recognizes Ion (1400). The play’s obsession with this place resembles the recurrent references in Sophocles’ (→) *Oedipus Tyrannus* to ‘the place where three roads meet’. The cave is distanced space in the context of the play, but is in reality close to where the first audience sat watching the play. This is the most striking of the many references to Athens in Euripides, relating a story set in another place in the mythical past to the audience’s own space. Another example is when Medea goes to Athens at the end of *Medea*. Euripides typically concludes his plays by relating the dramatic space to real locations accessible to his audience. He does this by means of aetiology, relating dramatic space to (e.g.) cults at Brauron and Halai Araphenides in Attica (*IT* 1446-1467), the sanctuary of Hera on Acrocorinth (*Med.* 1378-1383), the tomb of Eurystheus at Pallene (*Heracl.* 1030-1036), or the tomb of Neoptolemus at Delphi (*Andr.* 1239-1242). It may be stretching a point to relate this to the ‘reference to narrator’s own space’ motif, but there is certainly an oblique reference to the audience’s space.

Messenger speeches are an obvious place to look for detailed description of distanced space in Euripides. The narratological aspects of these speeches have been well studied by Irene de Jong (1991) and James Barrett (2002). De Jong detects subtleties of characterization and focalization which serve to locate the messenger as an individual inside the drama. James Barrett reaffirms the objectivity and self-effacement of the messenger, and stresses his appropriation of the authority of the epic narrator, whose utterances are characterized by transparency, completeness, and veracity. There is much truth in both views, and Euripides often moves subtly from one kind of narrative to the other, or obscures the difference between them. In terms of the presentation of space, the speeches offer examples of panoramic standpoint (relatively rare, but see e.g. the synoptic presentation of events across Delphi at *Andr.* 1088-1099), shifting scenic standpoint (the most common, e.g. in *Medea*), and fixed scenic standpoint (e.g. *Supp.* 651-2). [end of page 353]

In some speeches, there is a bare minimum of scenic description. For example, *Helen* (1527, 1539) has only ‘a rather nondescript shore’ (de Jong 1991: 156), *Hecuba* offers no more than ‘by the tomb’ (522) and ‘on top of the mound’ (524), while the ‘bridal house’ (1137) in *Medea* includes nothing more specific than ‘women’s chambers’ (1143) and ‘father’s chambers’ (1177-1178). Heracles’ palace has an altar of Zeus (*HF* 922, 974), men’s quarters (954), and a column (973), and some landmarks are mentioned in his imaginary journey (Megara, 954; ‘wooded plains of the Isthmus’, 958; Mycenae, 963). The messenger speech in *Heracidae* mentions a couple of landmarks (Pallene, 849-850; the Scironian rocks, 860),<sup>44</sup> but the battlefield itself is entirely featureless and has none of the detailed topography which appears in historians’ battle narratives. The same is true of *Phoenissae*, where there is mention of Teumessus (1100) and a temple of Athena (1372-1373) but otherwise nothing very specific.

Some messenger speeches begin with brief descriptions to set the scene, but with little detail thereafter. The messenger speech in *Supplices* mentions the Electran gate (651), Ismenus’ hill (655), Ares’ spring (660), and the tomb of Amphion (663), but none of them is significant for the actual battle. The messenger speech of *Electra* sketches a peaceful rural scene (777-778), which some scholars have believed to contrast significantly with the violence which follows.<sup>45</sup> The temple of Apollo at Delphi is a semantically charged space in *Andromache*, with an explicit contrast between the holiness of the location and the events which take place there (e.g. 1144). The messenger also contrasts the innocent sightseeing of Neoptolemus’ party with Orestes’ sinister plotting (*Andr.* 1085-1095). On the other hand, there is no description of what they actually looked at, and it is assumed throughout that the audience is familiar with Delphi. It is notable that Euripides’ messenger speeches contain a great deal of realistic description (e.g. the sacrifice in *Electra*, horsemanship in *Hippolytus*, fighting in *Phoenissae*), but that very little of it is topographical. The first messenger speech in *Iphigenia in Tauris* begins: ‘We were putting our forest-grazing oxen into the sea that flows out through the Symplegades. There is a hollow cave there, made by the [end of page 354] constant beating of the waves, a place where murex-fishers take shelter’ (*IT* 260-263). This is quite memorable, but there is

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<sup>44</sup> See *SAGN* 2: 294 for the chronological aspect of the movements of Eurystheus and his army; the Megarian border (278-279) and the plain of Marathon (389-397) were mentioned earlier in the play.

<sup>45</sup> The issues are well discussed by Cropp 1988: 154, note on lines 774-858.

little topographical description thereafter. Cropp (2000: 192-193, note on lines 260-264) remarks ‘content and phrasing are typical of epic scene-setting’, but it is striking that his parallels (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 22.147-157) go into considerably more detail.

The two messenger speeches in which description of the setting is developed in the most detail are those in *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*.<sup>46</sup> The messenger in *Hippolytus* begins by locating the action ‘by the shore’ (1173, 1179), which is already significant as the place where Hippolytus exercised his horses (228-231, 1126, 1131-1134), and then telling that they set out along ‘the road that makes straight for Argos and Epidaurus’ (1197).<sup>47</sup> The description which follows is unusually detailed: ‘When we struck deserted country, there is a headland beyond our territory, lying out towards what is at that point the Saronic gulf ... When we turned our eyes to the sea-beaten beach, we saw an unearthly wave, its peak fixed in the heavens, so great that my eye was robbed of the sight of Skiron’s coast, and the Isthmus and Asclepius’ cliff were hid from view’ (1198-1209). The scenic description is integral to the action, and the impact of the miraculous is enhanced by the mention of familiar landmarks.

The two messenger speeches in *Bacchae* similarly set miraculous events in the context of detailed description of landscape. The first begins with an *ekphrasis* of the behaviour of the maenads (680-713), in which the herdsman’s vision (e.g. ‘I see’, 680) is supplanted by more abstract and generalized focalization (‘a marvel of ordered calm to look at’, 693; ‘if you had been there and seen this’, 712-713; cf. 737, 740, 747).<sup>48</sup> The latter part of the speech adopts a more synoptic mode of description, which has raised questions about what the herdsman himself could actually have witnessed: ‘They rose like birds and moved rapidly over the spreading plains that near Asopus’ waters produce abundant grain for the Thebans and hurled themselves like enemy troops upon Hysiae and Erythrae, which stand in the hill country of Cithaeron, in its lower reaches’ **[end of page 355]** (748-752). The second messenger speech sets the scene: ‘First we halted in a grassy dale, keeping our footsteps and our tongues silent so that we might see without being seen. There was a mountain glen with steep sides, with a stream flowing through it and pine trees to shade it, and there the

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<sup>46</sup> These are also the two of Euripides’ plays which give most prominence to the wild countryside ‘out there’, which contrasts both with the *oikos* and the *polis*; see Carter 2006.

<sup>47</sup> A map is supplied by W.S. Barrett 1964: 383, note on lines 1198-1200. He suggests that Euripides’ ‘descriptions seem ... to be basically accurate’.

<sup>48</sup> See de Jong 1991: 20; J. Barrett 2002: 118-126.



maenads sat employing their hands in pleasant tasks' (1048-1053). The contrast between a peaceful rural scene and the violence which follows is a central theme of the play, and we also need this description in order to understand Dionysus' miracle.

Distanced space is evoked in a different way in choral odes.<sup>49</sup> Choruses are licensed to range freely in their imaginations across the whole world, present and past, without being confined to locations to which they might realistically expect to travel. This emphasizes the disjunction between the confined lives of (often female) choruses and the uninhibited freedom of their imaginations. This is especially striking in escape odes (e.g. *Hipp.* 732-775, *Hel.* 1451-1511), which also relate back to the themes of the play.<sup>50</sup> The chorus of *Bacchae* evokes locations more sympathetic than Thebes to Dionysiac cult, including Crete, Cyprus, and Pieria (120-134, 402-416, 556-575, 862-876). The exiled chorus of *Iphigenia in Tauris* longs for Delos and Delphi (1089-1105, 1234-1258). Famous stories from myth are narrated, with their associated spatial contexts: the labours of Heracles (*HF* 359-429), the judgement of Paris (*Andr.* 274-292, *IA* 573-589), the exploits of Peleus (*Andr.* 790-801), the sack of Troy (*Hec.* 905-951; *Tr.* 511-567; cf. *Andr.* 1010-1027; *Tr.* 1060-1080; *IA* 751-800), the golden lamb (*El.* 699-746), the search of the Mother for her daughter (*Hel.* 1301-1337), and the marriage of Peleus and Thetis (*IA* 1036-1079). Euripides' decorative and pictorial style of choral narration is also suitable to the *ekphrasis* of the armour of Achilles (*El.* 452-477). Some choral descriptions are of locations more accessible to the characters, although transformed by the high lyric style: Athens (*Med.* 824-845; *Tr.* 799-803; *Ion* 492-509, 1074-1089), Admetus' kingdom (*Alc.* 569-596), the journey of Orestes and Pylades (*IT* 392-455), possible destinations in Greece (*Hec.* 444-483; cf. *Tr.* 197-229), local washing-places (*Hipp.* 121-130; *Hel.* 179-183). [end of page 356]

### Conclusion

Space in Euripides is predominantly symbolic. His plays are dominated by contrasts between inside and outside, high and low, domestic and public, city and countryside, Greece and abroad. These categories are sometimes given a bare minimum of

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<sup>49</sup> Barlow (1986 [1971]: 18) comments on 'the landscapes and fantasy worlds' in Euripides' choral odes, contrasting the narrower pictorial range of Sophocles' odes.

<sup>50</sup> See Padel 1974, Swift 2009 (examining the sexual implications of *locus amoenus* imagery in three odes).

descriptive detail (e.g. the interior of the house in *Alcestis*, or the familiar landmarks of Thebes and Delphi), but it is much sparser than that in the non-dramatic authors discussed elsewhere in this volume. The most elaborate scene-setting is in *Electra* and *Ion*. Messenger speeches contain much detailed description, but with the partial exceptions of *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* it is rarely topographical. A distinctive feature of Euripides is that space is often thematic, with events treated as stages in a journey (e.g. in *Alcestis*, *Medea*, and *Hecuba*). His aetiologies connect the fictive space of the plays to the audience's own space. The only examples in Euripides of spatial descriptions exceeding their thematic function and being indulged to some extent for their own sake are the fantasy locations evoked in some of his choral odes.

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