

# Madness on the Comic Stage: Aristophanes' *Wasps* and Euripides' *Heracles*

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**A**RISTOPHANES' *Wasps* ends in a highly unusual way. So far as we know, the final scene is a *unicum* in Greek comic production: one of the main characters of the play, the old juror Philocleon, is portrayed as completely crazy and out of control.<sup>1</sup> Philocleon's folly has something in common with the madness that blinds Heracles in the famous Euripidean tragedy; moreover, the juror's insanity is a theme that runs through the whole comedy. May we suspect then that there is a connection between Aristophanes' *Wasps* and Euripides' *Heracles*? The aim of this paper is to underscore the similarities between the two plays and—with due caution—to put forward a hypothesis that could explain this resemblance.

<sup>1</sup> The ending has often been considered a puzzle ever since Wilamowitz: "Ueber die Wespen des Aristophanes," *SBBerl* 4 (1911) 460–491, 504–535 (*Kl. Schr.* I 284–346). D. Konstan, "The Politics of Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 115 (1985) 27–46 (cf. *Greek Comedy and Ideology* [New York/Oxford 1995]), and S. Douglas Olson, "Politics and Poetry in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 126 (1996) 129–150, underline the strong political content of the play; Guido Paduano, *Il giudice giudicato: le funzioni del comico nelle Vespe di Aristofane* (Bologna 1974), employs psychoanalysis; A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanes. Myth, Ritual and Comedy* (Cambridge 1993), emphasizes the patterns of *ephebeia* in reverse; J. Vaio, "Aristophanes' *Wasps*: the Relevance of the Final Scenes," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 335–351, K. J. Reckford, "Catharsis and Dream-Interpretation in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 107 (1977) 283–312 (cf. *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy* [Chapel Hill 1987]), and K. Sidwell, "Was Philocleon Cured? The ΝΟΣΟΣ Theme in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *ClMed* 41 (1990) 9–31, focus on Philocleon's character and his "sickness."

### 1. Madness as theme of the comedy

If compared with Trygaios in *Peace*, who feeds a dung-beetle with the purpose of using it as a horse and flying up to Mt Olympus, or Peisetairos in *Birds*, who intends to build a town midway between gods and men, the main character of the *Wasps* seems pretty sensible: he simply likes serving on juries every day. And yet, for the whole play, Aristophanes portrays him as a real madman—quite surreptitiously, at least at the beginning of the play, but much more clearly in the exodus.

So from the start: one of the two slaves asks his fellow if he knows what kind of “monster” they are guarding (4, ἄρ’ οἴσθ’ ἄ γ’ οἶον κνώδαλον φυλάττομεν;). κνώδαλον usually means “beast”; used of persons, it has a derogatory nuance. MacDowell comments that “it is applied metaphorically to persons who behave in a strange or inhuman way”—and an animal is a living creature devoid of intellect.<sup>2</sup>

But intellect is also something that mad people usually do not have (or at least do not show). The first example of a metaphorical use of this word is in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, where κνώδαλον is applied to the Furies themselves: Apollo blames them for being παντομισῆ κνώδαλα, στύγη θεῶν (644), and such a strong insult directed toward these divine beings—whose name meant “Wraths” and whose connection with mental blindness (ἄτη) was already known to Homer (*Il.* 19.87–88, *Od.* 15.233–236)—implies that the word κνώδαλον was associated with the idea of madness.<sup>3</sup>

But if the use of such a word at the beginning of *Wasps*, despite its ties with a kind of irrational behaviour, cannot be

<sup>2</sup> D. M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes, Wasps* (Oxford 1971: hereafter MACDOWELL, whose Greek text is used here). Applied to women at *Ar. Lys.* 476–477; for another metaphorical use of the word see Cratinus fr.251 K.-A.

<sup>3</sup> On both passages see A. H. Sommerstein’s commentaries (*Aristophanes, Wasps* [Warminster 1983]; *Aeschylus Eumenides* [Cambridge 1989]). On the etymology of Ἐρινύες see Pausanias 8.25.6, who connects their name with an Arcadian usage ἐρινύω “to be angry,” τὸ θυμῷ χρῆσθαι.

considered an explicit reference to insanity, madness is clearly involved in what the second slave then says, when he asks his mate if he is “out of his senses or in a Corybantic frenzy” (8, ἀλλ’ ἢ παραφρονεῖς ἐτεὸν ἢ κορυβαντιᾶς;). The Corybantes were divinities associated with Cybele; MacDowell *ad loc.*: “the most notorious feature of their ritual was ecstatic dancing to the music of flutes and drums, which was thought to provide a cure for mental disorder or distress ... In short, they were ‘mad’, in the sense that they did not behave in a normal rational manner.” Since the question is directed to one of the slaves, it does not concern Philocleon; it simply introduces—but now without roundabout expressions—the madness theme. The old juror is then brought up specifically, when the second slave says that Philocleon suffers a very strange illness (71, νόσον ... ἀλλόκοτον ... νοσεῖ), an excessive love of tribunals.

His son Bdelycleon has tried everything to heal the old man (118–120): he has attempted to purify him by a religious ritual (κάκῳθαιρ’), but has failed; he has “tried to make him celebrate the rites of the Corybantes” (μετὰ τοῦτ’ ἐκορυβάντιζ’), but the old man “has stolen the drum and has rushed into the New Court” (ὁ δ’ αὐτῷ τυμπάνῳ ἄξιας ἐδίκαζεν εἰς τὸ Καινὸν ἐμπεσών). The earlier indirect allusion to the Corybantic ritual is here made more than explicit: Bdelycleon had tried a kind of homoeopathic cure for his father, by attempting to heal his real madness through an induced one, but the outcome has been totally negative.

This is what we know by the end of the prologue. But then, surprisingly, the goal that Bdelycleon could not achieve by such medical remedies is reached by the effectiveness of his eloquence: in the debate he succeeds in persuading his father that, in Athens, the real power does not belong to the jurors, but “to the politicians who play upon the jurors in order to revenge themselves upon their own enemies and in the meantime fill

their own pockets with impunity."<sup>4</sup> The chorus, old men who share Philocleon's passion for jury service, is convinced by Bdelycleon's words; the chorus-leader says that "the old Philocleon has been scolding himself about the activities which he was mad on before" (743–744, *νενουθέτηκεν αὐτὸν ἐς τὰ πράγμαθ', οἷς τότε' ἐπεμαίνειτ'*). MacDowell takes *ἐπεμαίνειτ'* as a simple metaphor (equivalent to "being terribly fond of something"), but I suggest that the verb is another clear reference to Philocleon's madness.

The rest of the comedy focuses on other, different ways of calming down the old man: Bdelycleon sets up a domestic imitation of a lawcourt and arranges for his father to play the juror at home; then, after the parabasis, he brings his father out to a dinner-party. It is a disaster: Philocleon even kidnaps a slave-girl. Bdelycleon takes the old man inside to keep him out of trouble, but this is not enough: after a song by the chorus, the first slave bursts out of the house and makes known all the terrible things that have happened inside.

This brings us to the exodus of the comedy. The words of the slave tell beforehand what the audience should expect at this point of the play: "By Dionysus, these are impossible goings-on that some god has wheeled into our house. The old man, having drunk after a long day-off and heard the sound of the flute (*ἤκουσέ τ' αὐλοῦ*), is so exhilarated by the whole thing that all night he hasn't stopped dancing (*ὀρχούμενος*) those old-fashioned dances which Thespis used to perform in the contests."<sup>5</sup> MacDowell comments that this sentence "shows that the music of an *αὐλός* was not generally heard except on festive occasions," and of the verb *ὀρχούμενος*, that dancing is "the

<sup>4</sup> K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1972) 122.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of these lines (1474–1479) is taken from Sommerstein's edition.

natural result of intoxication for a Greek.”<sup>6</sup> This is true, of course, but there is more here: since music was a very important feature of the Corybantic treatment, the mention of a flute is not only a sign of a “festive occasion.” E. R. Dodds observed that “flutes and tympana” were to the Greeks “the ‘orgiastic’ instruments *par excellence*: they were used in all the great dancing cults, those of the Asiatic Cybele and the Cretan Rhea as well as that of Dionysus. They could cause madness, and in homoeopathic doses they could also cure it.”<sup>7</sup> We have a flute here, exactly as we had a tympanon in 119.

What has happened here? Philocleon has heard the notes of a flute, and has experienced again the inner feelings he had felt during his first “cure.” His immediate reaction is a natural consequence of the music he has heard: he starts to dance, like a Corybant. The cause of his dancing is not simply the wine he has drunk at the symposium.

This tight correspondence between dance and madness is underlined by another passage (1484–1486): when Philocleon says καὶ δὴ γὰρ σχήματος ἀρχή (“and this is the beginning of my dance”), the slave remarks μᾶλλον δὲ γ’ ἴσως μανίας ἀρχή (“I’d rather say that this is the beginning of your madness”). But the old man goes on: in a passage with a clear paratragic flavour, he seems to compare himself to a bellowing bull (1488, οἶον μυκτῆρ μυκᾶται). Then the slave urges him to drink hellebore (1489, πῖθ’ ἐλλέβορον), the plant used to cure madness. In this light, the exhortation of the slave means “you are so mad that you need to be cured.”

Since Philocleon does not care and goes on dancing, the slave gives him another warning: “You’ll soon be pelted” (1491, τάχα βαλλήσῃ). We know that it was customary to throw stones at

<sup>6</sup> MacDowell *ad loc.*, quoting Starkie’s note as to dancing and intoxication (*Aristophanes, Wasps*, ed. W. J. M. Starkie [London 1897]).

<sup>7</sup> E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1951) 273; see also 97 n.95.

madmen;<sup>8</sup> this phrase is therefore another reference to Philocleon's crazy actions. The same can be said of the final remark of the slave, that Philocleon's is "the behaviour of a madman" (1496, *μανικὰ πράγματα*).

This is the last direct allusion to madness in the play. When Philocleon issues a dancing challenge, three dancers, the sons of Carcinus, enter in response to his call; when the four of them lead the chorus out, the comedy ends. "Dance" is the key-word of this exodus: the chorus joins the actors and claims that "this is something that nobody has ever seen before, a comic chorus going out of the stage while dancing" (1536–1537).

## 2. Links between *Wasps* and *Heracles*

Some of the features of madness we have noted in the final scenes of *Wasps* are paralleled by passages of Euripides' *Heracles*. At the beginning of the fourth episode, the two goddesses Iris and Lyssa appear on the *theologeion*. Iris tells Lyssa: "But come now, maiden daughter of black Night, pull together your implacable heart and send upon this man madness (*μανία*) and child-killing derangement of mind (*παιδοκτόνους φρενῶν παραγμούς*), cause his feet to dance (*ποδῶν σκιρτήματα*), go against him in deadly full sail" (833–837). Here madness is explicitly mentioned, and dance is represented as an evident result of madness.<sup>9</sup>

Lyssa describes what she is going to do (867–871): "See! He has left the starting gate. He shakes his head about, saying not a word but rolling his fierce eyes out of their sockets; his breathing is disquieted, like a bull about to charge (*ἀμπνοὰς δ' οὐ σωφρονίζει, τᾶνρος ὥς ἐξ ἐμβολήν*), and he bellows frightfully (*δεινὰ μυκᾶται*), calling forth the dead spirits from Tartarus. Soon I

<sup>8</sup> For a similar joke see *Av.* 524–525.

<sup>9</sup> The translations of this and of the following passages are taken from D. Kovacs, *Euripides, Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1998). I use the Greek text of G. W. Bond, *Euripides, Heracles* (Oxford 1981: hereafter BOND).

shall make you dance still more (τάχα σ' ἐγὼ μᾶλλον χορεύσω) and charm your ears with the pipe of panic (καταυλήσω φόβῳ)!" Particularly noteworthy are Heracles bellowing like a bull and Lyssa promising to herself that she will quickly make him dance faster and will make his ears resound of a terrifying flute. This last sentence combines two of the features of madness, the dreaded music of a flute and the pang of dancing faster and faster.<sup>10</sup>

The chorus of old Thebans expresses pity for Heracles' destiny: "Desolate are you, Hellas, your great benefactor you shall let slip, shall lose, who with the shrill pipe of madness in his ears is made to dance (877–879, μανιάσιν λύσσαις χορευθέντ' ἐναύλοις)<sup>11</sup> ... the dance begins, a dance without the drums (χορεύματ' ἄτερ τυπάνων) that add pleasure to the thyrsus of Dionysus (889–890) ... this is a murderous, murderous song that is piped" (ἐπαυλεῖται: 894–895).

There is still another parallel between the two scenes. The warning "you'll soon be pelted" of *Wasps* 1491 may recall the supernatural ending of Heracles' folly as well. After killing Megara and his children, the hero starts to pursue his father Amphitryon. But Athena now enters. "She hurled a stone (πέτρον) at the chest of Heracles, which checked him from his mad labour and cast him into a sleep" (1004–1006). This stone, which was still exhibited in Pausanias' days at the Heracleion of Thebes, was called λίθος σωφρονιστήρ; the Aristophanic slave's mention of stones with a similar function might recall that famed rock.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bond *ad loc.*: "it is natural for a madman to bellow," citing another Aristophanic passage (*Ran.* 562–563) together with Philocleon's dance.

<sup>11</sup> The text of L at 878–879 is μανιάσιν λύσσαις | χορευθέντ' ἐναύλοις ("dancing at the crazy sound of Lyssa's flutes"); Diggle follows Hermann's suggestion (μανιάσιν λύσσαις).

<sup>12</sup> This "stone" was likely a typically Euripidean invention, for Pausanias explicitly says that the intervention of the goddess was not narrated by any other poet (9.11.2).



So far the resemblances. But there is a noteworthy difference between the two plays: we see “Philocleon *mainomenos*” on the stage, but we do not see Heracles. In keeping with the usual conventions that governed Greek drama, in this Euripidean tragedy the terrible murders committed by the hero are not shown on stage: Heracles’ folly is anticipated by Lyssa’s words, is seen and imagined in the chorus’ words, and finally is narrated by the herald.<sup>13</sup> We do not see the raging Heracles on the stage, with his bow and his club; we have a thorough description of his madness instead, and some important details (the sound of a flute, the swift movement of his feet, the bellowing that makes him like a dying bull) tally with the comic madness of Philocleon. I return to this problem below.

### 3. Other similarities

Analysis of these two “madness scenes” shows that the plays might be connected; but there are other interesting similarities between Aristophanes’ comedy and Euripides’ tragedy.

#### 3.1 Heracles’ wrath

In the parabasis of *Wasps* Aristophanes scolds the audience for not having liked his *Clouds*, staged the year before. The chorus-leader praises both the cleverness and the courage of the poet: “When he began to put his plays on the stage signing them with his own name, he did not attack ordinary people, but he threw himself against the most powerful human beings, showing the spirit of Heracles” (1029–1030). “Spirit,” together with “courage,” is the word MacDowell uses to gloss the expression used by Aristophanes (Ἡρακλέους ὀργὴν τιν’ ἔχων).<sup>14</sup> “Spirit” is in fact the appropriate translation of the word in the context

<sup>13</sup> Usually murders were not shown on the stage: see Arist. *Poet.* 1453b and Hor. *Ars P.* 179ff, with the commentary of C. O. Brink (Cambridge 1971).

<sup>14</sup> The scholiast speaks of a γενναῖον φρόνημα: *Scholia in Aristophanem* II.1, ed. W. J. W. Koster (Groningen 1978) 164. In his commentary (Halle 1893), Blydes uses the Latin equivalent “animum.”

of the parabasis; but since ὀργή means also “anger,” “wrath,” “fury,” the simple mention of a Ἡρακλέους ὀργή necessarily calls to mind the tragic story of the most famous Greek hero. Moreover, ὀργή and its synonym θυμός are well attested in Euripides’ tragedy, and they appear to be a kind of *Leitmotiv* in Aristophanes’ comedy.<sup>15</sup>

After the terrible massacre, Amphitryon kneels before Heracles and says: “My son, check the wild lion’s proud spirit in your breast (κατάσχεθε λέοντος ἀγρίου θυμόν), the spirit by which you are carried on a course of bloodshed and impiety, wishing to add new griefs to old” (1210–1213). Here “spirit” is nothing else than the wrath of a furious lion. Later on, when Heracles speaks of suicide, Theseus asks the hero where will his wrath try to carry him (1246, ποῖ φέρη θυμούμενος;).

Even the words Megara had uttered in the first episode of the drama appear a perfect example of tragic irony: she had told the chorus that “it is good that friends should make a just display of anger (ὀργὰς δικαίας) on behalf of their friends” (275–276), without knowing that she was going to be killed by a thoroughly unjust ὀργή of her husband.

### 3.2 Lycus’ weapons

A “Lycus” appears in both texts, as a living character in Euripides and as a statue in Aristophanes; but in both cases this presence is not without problems.

In the Euripidean tragedy Lycus is Heracles’ rival, the man who tries to usurp his throne and is killed by the hero; he is not mentioned in any independent source, and every other reference to him depends on Euripides.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Anger is one of the most characteristic features of the chorus of old jurors; it is designated by both θυμός (567, 649) and ὀργή (243, 560, 574, 646, 727, 883).

<sup>16</sup> Wilamowitz, *Herakles* 2 (Berlin 1895) I 360, already suspected that Lycus was a Euripidean invention; see Bond’s note on 31. In the prologue Amphitryon connects this Lycus with an older one, who had a real place in the Theban legend (26–34).

Lycus enters the scene at 140, soon after the short parodos. Since his mind is set on killing all Heracles' relatives, he asks Amphitryon and Megara how long they are planning to prolong their life; after telling them there is no reason to believe in the return of the hero, he begins to discredit Heracles' bravery and his famous deeds (157–164): "Heracles, though worthless, has acquired a reputation for courage by fighting with beasts, though in other things he is not brave at all. He has never strapped a shield on his left arm, never faced the spear point. He had a bow, basest of weapons (τόξ' ἔχων, κάκιστον ὄπλον), in his hand and was ready to run away! A bow does not show a man's courage: that is done by standing your ground, looking straight at the swift swathe cut by enemy spears, and holding ranks." Amphitryon takes the part of his son and of "that cleverest of inventions, the bow" (188, τὸ πάνσοφον δ' εὔρημα, τοξήρη σαγήν), going on with his defense until 203. "The debate about archery is too long and not particularly appropriate": Bond's comment on this part of the play is convincing, for this discussion has little to do with the story.<sup>17</sup>

Consider now Aristophanes and his Lycus. In a scene before the agon, Philocleon, summoned by his fellow-jurors, tries to escape from his house. The old man first says a little prayer to "his master Lycus," the hero who is living near him (389, ὦ Λύκε δέσποτα, γείτων ἥρωος). Who is this Lycus? According to the scholia, a hero whose shrine was located near the tribunals;<sup>18</sup> for MacDowell, an Athenian hero chosen by Philocleon for his prayer because next to the principal shrine of Lykos in

<sup>17</sup> Bond xxxii and 109. Some scholars however have tried to justify its presence; see R. Hamilton, "Slings and Arrows: The Debate with Lycus in the *Heracles*," *TAPA* 115 (1985) 19–25, with bibliography.

<sup>18</sup> 66 Koster: πρὸς τοῖς δικαστηρίοις Λύκος ἥρωος Ἰδρυτο· ἔθουον δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ ἀπένεμον δικαστικὸν μισθόν.

Athens was a law-court called “the court of Lykos.”<sup>19</sup>

The Aristophanic passage is the first mention of this hero. Boegehold is quite sceptical about late evidence regarding Lycus and the court near his shrine, “a concoction of later commentators, a result of their efforts to explain allusions in comedy.”<sup>20</sup> But is this all?

The hero recurs at 819–823, when Bdelycleon eventually persuades his father to build a private court at home and try some members of the household. Among the features of the real law-courts that he would like to have in his home-tribunal, Philocleon mentions the shrine of Lycus (819, θῆρῶν ... τὸ τοῦ Λύκου). What happens next is not wholly clear (821–823). Bdelycleon: “But here it is, the hero in person” (πάρεστι τουτί, καὐτὸς ἀναξ οὔτοσί); Philocleon: “You master hero, how hard it was to see you” (ὦ δέσποθ’ ἥρωσ, ὡς χαλεπὸν ἄρ’ ἦν σ’ ἰδεῖν). When Bdelycleon states that the hero looks like Cleonymus, his father remarks that, although he is the hero, he has no weapons (οὐκουν ἔχει γ’ οὐδ’ αὐτὸς ἥρωσ ὦν ὄπλα).

The scholiast gives the following explanation: Bdelycleon brings forth a picture (εἰκόνα or πινάκιον) that depicts Lycus in such a bad way that he looks like Cleonymus, the famed deserter, notorious for having thrown away the shield; this is why “he has no weapons,” while heroes were fully armed.<sup>21</sup>

MacDowell’s hypothesis is more acute and detailed: Bdelycleon points to the altar that stands in front of the house, beckons to one of the slaves who have been arranging the equipment, and makes him sit on the altar; when Philocleon falls in reverence before the altar, Bdelycleon compares the slave (“who is presumably very fat, that is grotesquely padded”) to

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. L. Boegehold, *The Athenian Agora XXVIII The Lawcourts at Athens* (Princeton 1995) 95, 188–191.

<sup>20</sup> Boegehold (*supra* n.19) 188, and “Philokleon’s Court,” *Hesperia* 36 (1967) 111–120.

<sup>21</sup> 130–131 Koster. On Cleonymus’ ῥιψασπία, see I. C. Storey, “The ‘Blameless Shield’ of Kleonymus,” *RhM* 132 (1989) 247–261.

Cleonymus.<sup>22</sup> He proposes then a different explanation of the

<sup>22</sup> Starkie thinks of a real statue instead and, following the scholia, explains the fact that the statue does not carry arms as an "inevitable joke on Cleonymus's shield." Sommerstein follows MacDowell but thinks that "the slave may have stood *beside* the altar rather than sat *on* it."

sentence οὐκ οὐκ ἔχει ... ὄπλα. At 27 there had been another joke on Cleonymus: the slave Xanthias had said that “a man who had thrown away his weapons” was something terrible (δεινόν), where MacDowell sees a sexual pun, as ὄπλα means both “armour” and “genitals.”<sup>23</sup> At 823 the joke is repeated: by “Cleonymus is without shield” Philocleon means that “the slave is wearing no phallos.”

Thus in Euripides we have a Lycus and some ὄπλα (the bow), in Aristophanes a Lycus and a joke on some ὄπλα. The Lycus of Euripides is nowhere else attested before his tragedy, and every other allusion to him comes from *Heracles*; the Lycus of Aristophanes is nowhere else attested before his comedy, and it is probable that every other allusion to this Attic hero takes its start from *Wasps*. Since the debate on ὄπλα was a remarkable (and ample) moment of the plot of Euripides’ tragedy, Aristophanes had not failed to notice it.

There might be another allusion in 823, a reference to the ὄπλα that had been the topic of debate between Lycus and Amphitryon. The “thing” indicated by Bdelycleon at 820, be it a picture, a statue, or a dressed-up slave, which looked so like Cleonymus, had of course no kind of weapon (in the case, no shield): this is not surprising if we think of Cleonymus, famous for throwing away the shield. But if we think of the Euripidean Lycus, who had made such a fuss about weapons and blamed Heracles for lacking a shield, his being without arms—namely the weapon that, together with the spear, was so typical of the hoplite—might well explain Philocleon’s surprise.

### 3.3 Paratragic passages

In his study of tragic parody, Peter Rau saw a connection between a passage of *Heracles* and one of *Wasps*.<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of the tragedy, after Amphitryon’s monologue, Megara asks her

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1991) 123 and n.83.

<sup>24</sup> P. Rau, *Paratragodia: Untersuchungen zu einer komischen Form des Aristophanes* (Munich 1967) 192.

old father-in-law what hope or what means of survival he is able to provide in this terrible situation (80–81, νῦν οὖν τίν' ἐλπίδ' ἢ πόρον σωτηρίας ἐξευμαρίζῃ, πρέσβυ;).<sup>25</sup> Rau held that this passage is parodied by Aristophanes. In the parodos, the son of the chorus-leader asks his father if he has some good hope or just “the holy strait of Helle” (306–308, ἔχεις ἐλπίδα χρηστήν τινα νῶν ἢ πόρον Ἑλλάς ἱερόν;). The sentence has the appearance of a quotation, and the scholiast says it comes from Pindar (fr.189 Sn.-M., πανδείμαντοι μὲν ὑπὲρ πόντιον Ἑλλάς πόρον ἱερόν); Aristophanes is playing upon the two meanings of πόρον, “strait” of water and “provision” of money. According to Rau it is a “Kontamination zweier Floskeln”: the Pindaric passage is both quoted and misinterpreted, as the scholiast says; and from Euripides Aristophanes takes the link between ἐλπίς and πόρος.<sup>26</sup>

Again, because both choruses, Athenian jurors and Theban dignitaries, are portrayed as old men whose walk is extremely slow and difficult, Edouard Delebecque saw in the parodos of *Wasps* a parody of that of *Heracles*.<sup>27</sup> The chorus-leader of *Wasps* exhorts his friend Comias to go forward with vigour and blames him for being slow (230, χάρει, πρόβαιν' ἐρρωμένως. ὦ Κωμία, βραδύνεις), and he urges on his companions (240, ἀλλ' ἐγκονῶμεν; 244–245, ἀλλὰ σπεύσωμεν) and warns them to watch the ground so as not to hit a stone (246–247, χωρῶμεν, ἅμα τε τῷ λύχνῳ πάντη διασκοπῶμεν, μή που λίθος τις ἐμποδῶν ἡμᾶς κακόν τι δράσῃ). The chorus-leader of *Heracles* urges his com-

<sup>25</sup> L has πέδον σωτηρίας, printed by Murray; most editors prefer Musgrave's emendation πόρον σωτηρίας.

<sup>26</sup> The connection had been noticed by Blaydes as well (“Una cum ἐλπίς occurrit [sc. πόρος] Herc. fur. 80”), but he guessed that the quotation might come from another Euripidean tragedy, the lost *Theseus*, to which the scholiast attributes 312–313 (fr.385 N.2).

<sup>27</sup> E. Delebecque, *Euripide et la guerre du Péloponnèse* (Paris 1951) 131: “Il y a peut-être dans les Guêpes (230–48) une parodie de l'antistrophe d'un chœur d'Héraclès (119–29).”

panions not to let their feet and legs grow weary like a burdened horse (119–123, †μὴ προκάμητε πόδα† βαρὺ τε κῶλον ὅστε πρὸς πετραῖον λέπας †ζυγηφόρον πῶλον ἀνέντες ὡς βάρος φέρον τροχηλάτοιο πῶλου†) and complains of the “feeble trace of his foot” (125, ποδὸς ἀμαυρὸν ἵχνος).

#### 4. The date of *Heracles*

Such are the plausible similarities between the two plays. At this point, the logical inference would be that with his *Wasps* Aristophanes has parodied Euripides’ *Heracles*. But we know that the comedy was produced in 422 B.C., whereas the tragedy is thought to have been composed around 415. This invites a new inquiry about the date of *Heracles*.

##### 4.1. The metrical evidence

The most reliable guide is the metrical evidence. According to the study of Zielinski as revised by Ceadel, the proportion of resolved trimeters of iambic dialogue for *Heracles* is 21.5 %, a figure which is very close to the 21.2 % of *Troades*. This is why Bond indicates 416 and 414 as “both possible.”<sup>28</sup>

Is it possible to assign the tragedy an earlier date? If these metrical features point to a late period of Euripides’ career, other kinds of evidence, based on historical events, may point earlier; moreover, we have a Ptolemaic papyrus which may imply another edition of the tragedy, probably older than the one we have.

##### 4.2 The historical evidence

Wilamowitz devoted a good number of pages to the analysis of the “Anspielungen auf zeitgenössische Zustände und Ereignisse” and concluded that the tragedy was composed between

<sup>28</sup> Surveyed by Bond xxx–xxxi. He mentions two other metrical features, the use of trochaic tetrameters and “enoplian” dochmiacs, both characteristic of Euripides’ latest plays; but dochmiacs are found in the *Andromache* as well, which is considered one of the earliest Euripidean plays (T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* [London 1967] 118, dates it “after 428 and before 424”).

the *Suppliants* and the *Trojan Women*.<sup>29</sup> Bond briefly discusses these allusions and finds them “unconvincing”—with good reason: the so-called “serious theme,” the Dorian side of the hero, the connection between the debate on archery and the victory at Sphacteria, the references to the swans and the cult of Apollo at Delos, all these alleged contemporary references are admittedly weak, although they might at least suggest that the plot of the tragedy was planned during the first part of the Peloponnesian war.<sup>30</sup>

There is still another historical reference, not mentioned by Bond. Léon Parmentier pointed to another event that might help date the play soon after 426 B.C. Euripides does not mention the death of the hero on the Mt Oeta, and Parmentier connected this silence to the foundation of the new Spartan city of Heraclia near the old Trachis: the tragic poet ignores the legend of Oeta because he vindicates for Athens the hero who had just given his name to the Doric town.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Wilamowitz (*supra* n.16) II 135 and 139.

<sup>30</sup> For the “serious theme,” see Wilamowitz (*supra* n.16) II 132ff; for “Heraclides the Dorian,” Schmid-Stählin I 437 (“Der Ansatz kurz vor oder nach 421 hat am meisten Wahrscheinlichkeit”); for the archery debate, G. H. Macurdy, *The Chronology of the Extant Plays of Euripides* (Lancaster 1905) 57–58 (“This very probable argument gives 424 B.C. as the earliest *terminus post quem* for the play”), and R. Goossens, *Euripide et Athènes* (Brussels 1962) 370 n.1 (“La date de 424 [peut-être avec *Hecuba*] peut donc être considérée comme à peu près certaine”); for the Delian maidens, see *Euripide, Héraclès, Les Suppliants, Ion*, edd. L. Parmentier and H. Grégoire (Paris 1959) 13 (“L’indice n’est pas sans valeur; on peut constater que le contexte n’appelle que d’une façon assez forcée la mention des chœurs déliens, et on conçoit mieux qu’Euripide l’ait recherchée s’il écrivait à un moment où la politique d’Athènes leur conférait une importance nouvelle”). As to this last theme, Bond himself admits that the references to the swans and the cult of Apollo “are probably connected with the events which followed the Athenian purification of Delos in 426/5 B.C.,” but as similar references can be found in late Euripidean tragedies, he concludes that “there is no reason why the events of that year should be fresh in the mind of Euripides or his audience.”

<sup>31</sup> Parmentier (*supra* n.30) 15: “Ces circonstances pourraient bien donner un motif d’actualité au soin que met Euripide à ignorer la légende de l’Oeta. Le héros qui vient de donner son nom à l’Héraclée doriennne, il le revendique hardiment pour Athènes; c’est là qu’il a trouvé son dernier asile et que sont érigés ses antiques sanctuaires, les véritables Héraclia.”



#### 4.3 A passage of *Clouds*

During the famous debate between the two Logoi, Wrong Logos asks his rival: “And tell me, of the children of Zeus, which one do you think to be the best in bravery (ἄνδρ’ ἄριστον)? Come on, which one has undertaken the most tiring labours?” (1048–1049). The correct answer is of course Heracles. Delebecque saw a relationship between this comic passage and a similar question posed by Amphitryon to the usurper Lycus: “Answer this question and tell me which man do you think the best?” (183, ἄνδρ’ ἄριστον).<sup>32</sup> If this is so, then we have another *terminus ante quem*, the date of *Clouds* in 423.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.4 The story of *P.Hibeh* 179

In 1976 Richard Kannicht considered a third century B.C. papyrus, published by E. G. Turner as a “poetical fragment.”<sup>34</sup> Kannicht saw that some fragments tallied with some lines of *Heracles*: fragments ii (col. i), iii, and iv of the papyrus correspond with 167–170, 146–160, and 137–143 of the *Laurentianus*. Moreover, fragment ii (col. ii) contains six fragmentary lines that do not coincide at all with the text preserved by L (2 θαυμαστ, 3 δράσειεν οὔτος, 4 κενὴν δὲ ἄμιλλαν, 5 τὴν τίθεσθαι μ, 6 εγημασο). Kannicht argued that this fragment was an alternative version of Amphitryon’s defence of the bow, not too different from 188–203: 2–3 could refer to the use of the bow or to the bow itself, as comparison with a fragment of Sophocles

<sup>32</sup> Delebecque (*supra* n.27) 131; “Euripide mit la dernière main à son oeuvre dans l’automne ou l’hiver 424/3 avec l’intention de la livrer au public pour le Lénéennes de 423” (146). See also Parmentier (*supra* n.30) 16: “Il y a en effet avec notre pièce, dans les *Nuées* d’Aristophane (423), une coïncidence qui peut difficilement être fortuite.” The similarity had been noticed by Blaydes in his edition of *Clouds* (Halle 1890): “apud Euripidem in Hercule furente de ipso Heracle loquens dicit Amphitruo v. 183.”

<sup>33</sup> But as the contest between the Logoi was composed for the partial revision of the comedy, which can be dated between spring 420 and winter 417 (see K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes, Clouds* [Oxford 1968] lxxx), the soundness of 423 as *terminus ante quem* is questionable.

<sup>34</sup> R. Kannicht, “Euripidea in P. Hibeh 2.179,” *ZPE* 21 (1976) 117–133.

might suggest (fr.960 Radt, θαυμαστά γὰρ τὸ τόξον ὡς ὀλισθάνει); 4–5 could be an allusion to hoplite warfare (an “empty warfare,” as Amphitryon would say). He considered the other fragments of the papyrus (i, v, vi, vii, and viii) to belong certainly to a different drama; fr. v (3 Κάδμου γα[ῖα, 4 Ἡρακλείους παρα) would be part of a tragedy “in dem die Familie des Herakles eine Rolle spielte.” He concluded that *P.Hibeh* 179 contained an “Ensemble” of passages gathered from tragedies which all dealt with the Heracles legend.<sup>35</sup>

In 1993 Wolfgang Luppe developed this further:<sup>36</sup> the papyrus contains fragments that belong to one and only one tragedy, Euripides’ *Heracles*. Fr. i, seemingly the entrance of a chorus of old men, is part of the parodos of our *Heracles*, whose chorus is composed of old Thebans; fr. ii col. i contains 167–170; fr. ii col. ii contains something that might be part of another *Heracles* and one line (6 εγῆμασο) that corresponds to 238 (σὺ μὲν λέγ’ ἡμᾶς οἷς πεπύργωσαι λόγοις); fr. iii contains 146–160; fr. iv contains 138–142; fr. v contains something that might be part of another *Heracles*, considerably different from that of L; fr. vi contains only a few readable letters (3 ραεριδ[; 4 τοεμ[); fr. vii contains 160–165; fr. viii contains only a couple of readable letters per line.

Moreover, there are two fragments, quoted by Stobaeus and both attributed to Euripides’ *Heracles*, that may come from another *Heracles*. In his section Περὶ ἀνδρείας (3.7.8) Stobaeus quotes the following lines: τὸ μὲν σφαγῆναι δεινόν, εὐκλείαν δ’ ἔχει, | τὸ μὴ θανεῖν δ’ οὐ δεινόν, ἡδονὴ δ’ ἔνι (fr.854 N.<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>35</sup> Further comments by J. Diggle, “P. Hibeh 179 and the Heracles of Euripides,” *ZPE* 24 (1977) 291–294 (= *Euripidea. Collected Essays* [Oxford 1994] 171–175); W. Luppe, “Ein weiteres Indiz für eine ‘Zweitfassung’ des Euripideischen ‘Herakles’?” *ZPE* 26 (1977) 59–73; M. Cropp, “The Text of Euripides’ Herakles in P. Hibeh 179,” *ZPE* 48 (1982) 67–73; O. Musso, “Un nuovo papiro di Euripide e conseguenze critico-testuali,” *Prometeo* 9 (1983) 49–56.

<sup>36</sup> W. Luppe, “Zum ‘Herakles’-Papyrus P. Hibeh 179,” *ZPE* 95 (1993) 59–64.

Stobaeus' indication Εὐριπίδης Ἡρακλεῖ was corrected by Nauck to Εὐριπίδης Ἡρακλεί(δαις), an emendation praised by Wilamowitz, who thought the fragment very well fit for a discussion about Macaria's sacrifice; but Luppe is surely right that there is no need for such a correction, and so the fragment may attest another version of *Heracles*.<sup>37</sup>

Elsewhere Stobaeus quotes three lines and ascribes them to the Euripidean tragedy (4.44.13):

ταῖς συμφορὰς γὰρ ὅστις οὐκ ἐπίσταται  
 θνητὸς πεφυκῶς ὄν τρόπον χρεῶν φέρειν,  
 οὐδ' ἄνδρὸς ἂν δύναιθ' ὑποστῆναι βέλος.

The first is witnessed by the text of L as well, but in a different form (1349, ταῖς συμφοραῖς γὰρ ὅστις οὐχ ὑφίσταται); the second one is absent; the third is identical (1350).<sup>38</sup>

Luppe concluded that *P.Hibeh* 179 is a "Zweitfassung" of the Euripidean *Heracles*, a substantially different version of the whole play, perhaps "die Umarbeitung einer Tragödie durch denselben Dichter zum Zweck einer erneuten Aufführung." He admitted that it is not easy to say whether the version handed down to us by the mediaeval manuscripts was the first or the second one, but preferred the second hypothesis. The papyrus version would then be the first, original version, and the *Laurentianus* the second, corrected version, composed by the poet with a view to a second performance.

##### 5. Two versions of Euripides' tragedy

If Luppe's deduction is correct, the existence of two different *Heracles* may explain how there can be so many resemblances between Philocleon's madness and Heracles', and also why so

<sup>37</sup> This sentence would fit in the first episode (281ff) of Euripides' *Heracles*, as Luppe suggests.

<sup>38</sup> Bond (402) argues that "Stobaeus' verbose version probably originated with the error ἐπίσταται for ὑφίσταται," with a line "added to supply an object."

many passages in Aristophanes' comedy seem to be based on Euripides' tragedy. Aristophanes can have written his comedy after the first version of Euripides' *Heracles*, performed before 422 B.C. and different from the one we possess; the second version of *Heracles* can have been written some years afterwards, and this would explain why the metrical features of the *Laurentianus* version point to a later date.

We may ask then what reasons might have led Euripides to write a second version of his play. Let us turn to Philocleon and to the "madness scene" again. The final scene of *Wasps* shows a man in a fit of madness; before the eyes of a slave—and before the eyes of the Athenians who were sitting in the theatre—the man starts to behave insanely and begins to dance. In Euripides' tragedy, the dialogue between Iris and Lyssa describes the madness of Heracles; the chorus of old Thebans expresses their sorrow for the fate of the hero; the messenger tells all the details of Heracles' crazy behaviour—but no one sees him during his access of furious rage. What the audience sees in Aristophanes' comedy had not been seen in Euripides' tragedy—at least if the *Heracles* that had been performed before *Wasps* was the *Heracles* the mediaeval manuscripts have handed down to us.

But what if we suppose that a *Heracles* performed around 423 B.C. was different from the one we know? What if, in that *Heracles*, the madness of the hero was shown on the stage, and Heracles killed Megara and his sons before the very eyes of the audience?

#### 5.1 Seneca's *Hercules*

We do have an ancient drama in which Heracles' madness is not described *post eventum* by a messenger, Seneca's *Hercules* in Rome in the first century A.D. In the fourth act, "rather than having the mad-scene reported as in Euripides, Seneca brings it onstage as far as possible, though the murders themselves take

place offstage.”<sup>39</sup>

The relationship between Seneca’s tragedies and Euripides’

<sup>39</sup> J. G. Fitch, *Seneca, Hercules furens* (Ithaca/London 1987) 46.

originals is an old problem.<sup>40</sup> Most recently, concerning the sources of Seneca's *Hercules*, Fitch concluded that "internal evidence for Seneca's having used non-Euripidean dramatic source is small but convincing."<sup>41</sup> If Euripides wrote another version of his tragedy, a version in which Heracles' madness was actually brought onstage, this might well be the source of Seneca's scene.

Caviglia has underlined what, in the Senecan "madness scene" (the most notable and significant novelty in his tragedy), was taken from Euripides: the Roman poet has not introduced any totally unrelated element into his text, but has used some of the sentences and stage-directions that were already in the speech of the Euripidean herald.<sup>42</sup> The ῥῆσις of the Greek ἄγγελος is marked by a strong dialogic structure; within the speech it is possible to locate some shorter speeches which, taken together, make it possible to reassemble a precise dramatic nucleus. In Caviglia's analysis, Heracles utters thirteen lines (936–946, 982–983), Amphitryo two lines and a half (965–967), his second son two lines (988–989), Megara and the chorus one line each (975–976, 952). This is, of all Euripides' λόγοι ἀγγελικοί, one of the richest in "scenical movement."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See A. Windell, *Etudes sur les tragédies de Sénèque imitées d'Euripide* (Paris 1854); F. Leo, *Observationes criticae* I (Berlin 1879) 160–183; *Sénèque, Tragédies*, ed. L. Herrmann (Paris 1924–26) 259; L. Castiglioni, "La tragedia di Ercole in Euripide e in Seneca," *RivFil* 54 (1926) 176–197 and 336–362; J. A. Shelton, *Seneca's Hercules Furens. Theme, Structure and Style* (Göttingen 1978); R. J. Tarrant, "Senecan Drama and its Antecedents," *HSCP* 82 (1978) 213–263; *Seneca, Il furore di Ercole*, ed. F. Caviglia (Roma 1979) 13–83; T. Diaconescu and A. Mizau, *Euripide si Seneca* (Bucharest 1980); *Seneca, Teatro I*, ed. G. Viansino (Milan 1993) 87–125; *Seneca, Hercules Furens*, ed. M. Billerbeck (Leiden/Boston/Cologne 1999) 11–24.

<sup>41</sup> Fitch (*supra* n.39) 47. At 50 n.74 he lists the passages "where Seneca's writing comes particularly close to Euripides"; other passages are quoted by Leo (*supra* n.40: 161 n.3), Viansino (222–245), and Billerbeck (18–20). According to Fitch these sources would be either Hellenistic tragedies or Roman poets such as Ennius.

<sup>42</sup> See also Fitch (*supra* n.39) 350: "Basically, Act IV represents a translation into stage action of the Euripidean messenger speech describing Hercules' madness and the murder of his family."

<sup>43</sup> Caviglia (*supra* n.40) 52: "Fra i λόγοι ἀγγελικοί del teatro di Euripides a noi pervenuti è questo il più fitto di personaggi, di 'battute', di movimento

It seems then that Seneca has made explicit what Euripides had left implicit. But are we sure that the description of Heracles' madness in the first Euripidean tragedy was merely implicit?

#### 5.2 Philostratus' *Heracles mainomenos*

Consider next another text, probably of the second century A.D. One of the *Imagines* of Philostratus is the description of a painting whose subject was the madness of Heracles (23, Ἡρακλῆς μαινόμενος). But the description makes clear that the sophist had in mind not only a Hellenistic picture, but also the memory of a real performance of Euripides' tragedy.

This is made explicit by Philostratus himself: at the end of ch. 1, he admits he has heard Heracles' voice in the Euripidean play (ἐγὼ δὲ ἤκουσα αὐτοῦ παρ' Εὐριπίδῃ), while the hero "was driving a chariot and applying a goad to his steeds and threatening to destroy utterly the house of Eurystheus."<sup>44</sup> This has clearly nothing to do with a painting; it is a description of a scene Philostratus had seen in a theatre, during the performance of a Euripides' play.

It is only after this parenthesis, which corresponds to a part of the messenger's speech (947ff), that Philostratus turns to describing the painting. His rhetorical piece is in fact a well-balanced mixture between the painting and the tragic text: at ch. 3, for instance, the frenzied hero is surrounded by his servants as a raging bull is surrounded by herdsmen (οἶον βουκόλοι τάρῳ ὑβρίζοντι); at ch. 4, the Fury has taken her seat in Heracles and dances through his breast, leaping inside him and confounding his reason (εἰς αὐτὸν γὰρ εἰσφκίσατο τὸν Ἡρακλέα καὶ διὰ τοῦ στέρνου χορεύει μέσῳ αὐτῷ εἴσω σκιρτῶσα καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν θολοῦσα)—mixing together several Euripidean passages (835–837, 863, 871). So this *Imago* may be another

scenico." The text of the Greek play is full of real stage-directions (see Fitch [*supra* n.39] 351 and Billerbeck [*supra* n.40] 20).

<sup>44</sup> Transl. A. Fairbanks (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1931).

witness to the putative first version of Euripides' *Heracles*.

## 6. Conclusion

Here is the hypothesis I put forward—deeply aware of its being a simple hypothesis. In the years 425–423 Euripides stages a play based on the figure of Heracles. This tragedy is similar to the one we owe to the mediaeval manuscripts; the differences between the two plays are witnessed by the papyrus fragments and the two Stobaeus quotations. In this older tragedy was something that was felt to be very disturbing: not only was Heracles, one of the most famous and beloved Greek heroes, so maddened as to kill his wife and sons, but this terrible massacre was shown on the stage and seen by the audience.

The tragedy is shocking to the Athenians. In 422 Aristophanes produces his *Wasps*, a comedy where the protagonist is an old juror, a maniac for trials, portrayed at the end of the play as a madman who behaves in a way that evokes the *mainomenos* Heracles of Euripides. The comedy is filled with allusions to that tragedy: paratragic quotations, jokes on the freshly invented character of Lycus, and echoes throughout of Heracles' wrath and madness.

A few years after that first attempt, Euripides produces a second play on the same theme. This is not a novelty for him, for in 428 he had rewritten his *Hippolytus*: the first version, the "Veiled Hippolytus," had been accused of being unbecoming and reprehensible, and so the poet had changed and amended it; the second version, the "Crowned Hippolytus," had even been awarded first prize.

With this second *Heracles* Euripides perhaps hoped to repeat the success of his second *Hippolytus*. But this is unknown; on this play we do not have scholia or even a complete argument, only an incomplete summary of the events that preceded the beginning of the play. This second *Heracles* has been saved by the *Laurentianus*; the first *Heracles* was lost, apart from a few scraps of an Egyptian papyrus and a couple of questionable

quotations. But, before disappearing, it has left some traces in a comedy of Aristophanes (probably), in a tragedy of Seneca (possibly), in a bravura of Philostratus (possibly). Before falling into the oblivion that has swallowed most classical literature, this furious, tragic Heracles at least succeeded in giving birth to the manic, comic Philocleon.<sup>45</sup>

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