

Chapter 7.3: Euripides

LIFE AND CAREER

- wrote something around 90 plays
 - i.e. 20+ entries at the Dionysia
- younger than Sophocles by ca. 10 years
 - and died a few months before him
 - thus, they must have competed against each other on several occasions
 - but the specific years when they produced at the same time are not known

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LIFE AND CAREER

- won his first victory in 441 BCE but went on to claim only three more victories during his lifetime
 - and one more posthumously (*Bacchae*)
- but 19 of Euripides' plays have survived
 - vs. 7 for Sophocles/Aeschylus each (14 total)
- why so many more for Euripides?
 - his drama was far more popular in later ages!

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LIFE AND CAREER

- **select vs. alphabetic plays**
 - 10 select plays: *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Bacchae*, *Hecuba*, *Hippolytus*, *Medea*, *Orestes*, *Phoenician Women*, *Rhesus* and *Trojan Women*
 - 9 alphabetic plays: *Electra*, *Helen*, *Heracles*, *Heracles' Children*, *Hiketes (Suppliants)*, *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Kyklops (Cyclops)*
 - from Volume 2(?) of a complete Euripides

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LIFE AND CAREER

- the alphabetic plays show a wider range of drama than the rest of classical tragedies
 - especially melodramas and **rescue plays**
 - with happy endings and comic scenes
 - and many “**red herrings**”
 - cf. ***Helen***
 - **Helen** never went to Troy, but Egypt instead
 - was rescued by her husband **Menelaus**
 - n.b. comic scene with Menelaus and old woman
 - fantastical “rescue” vs. the disaster in Sicily

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LIFE AND CAREER

- what do we know about Euripides himself?
 - reasonably well-off
 - but his mother was a “green-grocer”
 - was “**surly and unconvivial**”?
 - deeply involved and interested in the new philosophical thinking of the day (sophists)
 - brilliant at agons
 - cf. **Pasiphae**’s speech in ***The Cretans*** as she holds the baby **Minotaur** and defends herself against the charges brought on her by **Minos**

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LIFE AND CAREER

- 411 BCE: the oligarchic revolution
 - Athens erupts into civil war and begins purging “bad influences”
- 408 BCE: Euripides produces ***Orestes***
 - and then goes into exile in Macedonia
- 406 BCE: Euripides dies leaving ***The Bacchae*** among his papers (papyri?)

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THE LEGACY OF CLASSICAL TRAGEDY

- Euripides turns Greek drama toward “melodrama”
 - sudden twists in the plot
 - high emotional states, often in passages that are sung (not spoken)
 - focus on highlighting the actors’ skills
- in the post-Classical Age, actors eclipsed playwrights
 - thus fewer and fewer new tragedies written

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SELECT PLAYS

Alcestis (438 BCE)

- Admetus' wife Alcestis agrees to die for her husband but she is rescued from death by Heracles (Hercules)
- a recollection of an archaic “suttee” ritual?
- requires only TWO actors!
 - plus a child actor who sings a dirge?
- best scene: Alcestis' long, slow death scene

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SELECT PLAYS

Medea (431 BCE)

- one of Euripides' best known plays
- the witch Medea murders her own sons when her husband Jason abandons her
- best scenes:
 - Medea curses Jason, then “apologizes”
 - messenger speech reporting the death of Jason's fiancée and her father

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SELECT PLAYS

Hippolytus (428 BCE)

- one of Euripides' few Dionysia victories
- Phaedra falls in love with her own stepson Hippolytus; both die
- a revision of an earlier, racier version of the same myth
(<http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/1320AncLit/chapters/09eur.htm>)
- best scene: nothing but good scenes!

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SELECT PLAYS

Trojan Women (415 BCE)

- last in a “connected” trilogy about the Trojan War
 - *Alexander*: Paris is reunited with his family
 - *Palamedes*: political in-fighting among Greeks
- prediction of disaster in Sicily?
- best scene: Hecuba and Helen deliberate Helen’s behavior/morality in front of Menelaus

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SELECT PLAYS

Rhesus

- drawn directly from a passage in *The Iliad*
- probably not by Euripides
 - by some fourth-century tragedian
 - confused with one of Euripides' play because they were both called *Rhesus*
- best scene: Athena pretends to be Aphrodite in order to distract Paris

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SELECT PLAYS

Plays We've Already Covered

- ***Orestes*** (408 BCE): **ORESTES, ELECTRA, PYLADES, APOLLO, FURIES, THE TROJAN SLAVE**
- ***Bacchae*** (406 BCE)

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SELECT PLAYS

Other Plays

- ***Andromache*** (ca. 426 BCE)
 - set in aftermath of the Trojan War
- ***Hecuba*** (ca. 424 BCE)
 - Hecuba seeks revenge for Polydorus' death
- ***Phoenissae*** (“*Phoenician Women*”), (ca. 411-409 BCE)
 - an un-Sophoclean version of the Oedipus myth

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Electra (ca. 416 BCE)

- another version of the Orestes myth
- Clytemnestra has sent Electra away to live in the country with a farmer
- Electra detests Clytemnestra and is especially jealous of her mother's clothes
- best scene: Electra “deconstructs” the recognition scene in Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers (Choephoroi)*

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Helen (412 BCE)

- a rescue melodrama, as discussed in Chapter 7

(<http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/073gktrageur.htm#helen>)

- best scene: Menelaus finds the real Helen in Egypt

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Heracles (ca. 414 BCE)

- an odd two-part play:
 - Heracles saves his family in the nick of time
 - but then he kills them and repents
- best scene: in the middle of the play, the goddess Lyssa (Madness) descends onto the roof of the *skene* via the *mechane* and goes down into the palace to drive Heracles (Hercules) insane

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Iphigenia Among the Taurians

(ca. 413/412 BCE)

- Iphigenia *didn't* die when Agamemnon sacrificed her at Aulis!
- instead, Artemis spirited her away to serve as her priestess in Tauris
- best scene: Iphigenia gives Pylades a letter for Orestes who is in disguise and standing right beside them both on stage

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Iphigenia in Aulis (406 BCE)

- Agamemnon tricks Clytemnestra into bringing Iphigenia to the Greek camp at Aulis on the pretext of marrying her off to Achilles but, instead, he sacrifices her
- best scene: at first frightened by the prospect of death, Iphigenia changes her mind and consents to being sacrificed “for the greater good of Greece”

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Ion (ca. 410 BCE)

- another melodrama and wonderful theatre!
- the plot is mostly Euripides' free invention
- best scenes:
 - Ion sings the *parodos* (opening choral song)
 - Creusa reveals in a monody (solo song) how Apollo raped and impregnated her
 - many exciting plot twists!

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ALPHABETIC PLAYS

Other Plays

- ***Heraclidae*** (“*The Children of Heracles*”), ca. 430 BCE
 - the tyrant Eurystheus attempts to kill the descendants of Heracles (Hercules) but is foiled
- ***Hiketes*** (“*The Suppliants*”), ca. 422 BCE
 - set in the aftermath of the Seven against Thebes, a political parable about Athenian relations with Argos