Materiali e discussioni
per l'analisi dei testi classici

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A cura di Luigi Battezzato e Giovan Battista D'Alessio

Filippomaria Pontani

Mothers with Child: on Eur. Med. 1271*

Mᴇᴅᴇᴀ's behind-the-scene murder of her children is perhaps one of the most frequently evoked scenes in the whole of Attic drama. This is the text of Eur. *Med.* 1270a-1278 in van Looy's edn.:

1270a	<ΠΑΙΣ>	(ἔσωθεν) ἰώ μοι
1273	ΧΟ.	ἀκούεις βοὰν ἀκούεις τέκνων;
1274		ἰὼ τλᾶμον, ὦ κακοτυχὲς γύναι.
1271	ΠΑ.α	οἴμοι, τί δράσω; ποῖ φύγω μητρὸς χέρας;
1272	ΠΑ.β	οὐκ οἶδ', ἀδελφὲ φίλτατ'· ὀλλύμεσθα γάρ.
1275	ΧΟ.	παρέλθω δόμους; ἀρῆξαι φόνον
1276		δοκεῖ μοι τέκνοις.
1277	ΠΑ.α	ναί, πρὸς θεῶν, ἀρήξατ'· ἐν δέοντι γάρ.
1278	ΠΑ.β	ὡς ἐγγὺς ἤδη γ' ἐσμὲν ἀρκύων ξίφους.

Seidler's transposition of ll. 1271-1272 after 1273-1274 and the presence of an exclamation before 1273 (to which the chorus' ἀκούεις βοάν clearly refers) have been confirmed by the Ptolemaic anthology *P.Stras.* WG 304-307, beautifully re-edited by Marco Fassino in 1999.[1] The other textual problems of these lines are mostly trivial and need not detain us here; however, two central issues have been hotly debated by scholars: the overall metrical structure, and the distribution of the couplets 1271-1272 and 1277-1278 among the two children. The latter problem can be deemed solved by now, for the first couplet is clearly divided among the two *paides* both in the majority of manuscripts and in the Strasburg papyrus (which however omits 1277-1278): few scholars have subscribed to Nauck's perplexity about the possibility of a dialogue behind the scenes between two otherwise κωφὰ πρόσωπα – an idea that pushed Nauck himself, Wecklein and others to either suspect or delete l. 1272, and, e.g., Diehl to ascribe ll. 1271-1272 to both voices together.[2]

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* My thanks to the editors and to Andrea Rodighiero for their advice.

[1] Fassino 1999 (see esp. pp. 12, 20 and 23-24). It should be noted that the papyrus repeats ll. 1273-1274 (the first time with omission of ἀκούεις τέκνων) both before and after ll. 1271-1272, thus pointing to an early corruption in our text of the *Medea*.

[2] See van Looy 1992, p. 131; Diehl 1911, ad loc.; Weil eliminated the question mark

As for the metre, the fifth stasimon of the *Medea*, and particularly the second strophic couple starting on l. 1273, is characteristically made of dochmiacs, a metre occurring frequently before an off-stage killing.[1] In and of itself, the presence of iambic trimeters such as 1271-1272 and 1277-1278 in a dochmiac context is far from uncommon, particularly in scenes of high emotional tension;[2] however, the delivery of these lines remains uncertain: were they intended to be spoken or sung?[3] Given the relative paucity of full iambic trimeters in Euripidean choruses, the answer is far from obvious:[4] the absence of resolutions,[5] the general tone of the lines and the fact that they are neither Doricised (μητρός not ματρός) nor uttered by an otherwise singing character,[6] would rather conjure up a spoken delivery,[7] and invite a comparison, e.g., with Eur. *El.* 1165 and 1168, both occurring in an iambic-dochmiac structure and containing the cry of Clytemnestra and the chorus' reaction – both of which may be hard to imagine in a sung form. It would perhaps be tempting to assume, with Judith Mossman, that the corresponding trimeters ll. 1284-1285 (and 1288-1289), uttered by the chorus in the antistrophe as part of their uninterrupted, appalling account of Ino's mythical *exemplum*, could be in fact sung rather than spoken:[8] this would create in the performance a dissymme-

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at the end of l. 1271, whereas Hense followed the more difficult and unlikely path of entering the voice of the second child at ποῖ. Arnott 1982, p. 39 note 13 suspects (with Schadewaldt and Murray, and against Page) that the ἰώ μοι in l. 1270a might actually be spoken by both children.

[1] See, e.g., Soph. *El.* 1384-1397; Eur. *HF* 735-746; *El.* 1147-1164, with Finglass 2007, p. 502, and Mossman 2011, p. 349.

[2] Dale 1968, pp. 207-208, with special reference to Eur. *HF* 875-921 and 1016-1085.

[3] Dale 1968, pp. 81-86, while declaring that «the occurrence of acatalectic trimeters in lyrics gives rise to unanswered speculation about their delivery» (see also Gentili, Lomiento 2003, p. 137), thinks for this category of verses (including, e.g., Soph. *OT* 1312-1330 and Eur. *Hipp.* 817-851) about the possibility of a 'mixed delivery'.

[4] Korzeniewski 1968, pp. 102-103 and n. 59 gives a list and envisages the possibility of «eingestreute Sprechverse oder in παρακαταλογὴ rezitierte Verse».

[5] Denniston 1936, pp. 127-129.

[6] See Lourenço 2011, esp. pp. 123-124. I am indebted to Luigi Battezzato for help in this matter.

[7] I leave here aside the controversial possibility of *parakataloge*, on which form of delivery see recently Moore 2008. By contrast, Pippin Burnett 1998, p. 220 n. 110 believes this to be the only case in which «the cries of vengeance victims are incorporated into a strophic structure (and so given a musical accompaniment)».

[8] Mossman 2011, p. 349. See, however, Popp 1971, pp. 265-266, evaluating the two cries of the children as «innere Epirrhemata» of the stasimon (therefore spoken), matched by corresponding *Sprechverse* in the antistrophe. See esp. Segal 1997, pp. 173-

try matching the other oddity consisting in a change of speaker between corresponding lines in strophe and antistrophe – a change obviously imposed by the intervening death of the former speaker by the time the antistrophe has begun.[1]

However, if we assume, on firmer ground, a spoken delivery, ll. 1271-1272 (and 1277-1278) may become the first and virtually the only lines spoken by children in the whole of extant Greek tragedy. It is a well-known fact that children appear quite often on the Attic stage, particularly in Euripides,[2] and rarely come to the word:[3] when they do, it is assumed that for reasons of control and audibility adult actors lend them their voice,[4] usually singing lyric amoebeans with other characters, or else full-fledged choral laments or monodies. One might recall Molossos' lyric dialogue with his mother in the *Andromache* (501-514 and 523-536),[5] the children chorus in *Suppl.* 1123-1164, and the lament of Alcestis' son upon the death of his mother in *Alc.* 393-415[6] (the earliest known instance of a child speaking on stage); «cantum solum tragici, non verba pronuntianda pueris imposuerunt»,[7] which is why the *pueri* can even listen to cruel or inconvenient dramatic exchanges without being expected to react.[8]

This intertwining of probably spoken lines into the choral ode has been rightly regarded as a «bold stroke» on the part of Euripides, achieving a «most powerful climax of violence».[9] Eccentricity (and expressive connotation) grows if we consider this peculiar arrangement against the broader typology of the so-called «off-stage cries» in Attic tragedy:[10] the children's screams in the *Medea* are not

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175 on the oddity and the surprise effect produced by the responsion of the trimeters in the antistrophe.

[1] Page 1937; Finglass 2007, p. 509; Segal 1996, p. 22.

[2] See, e.g., Menu 1992; Kassel 1951 (1991).

[3] Allan 2002, p. 115 note 65 believes this a characteristic feature of Euripidean plays, intended to «intensify the scene's emotional register».

[4] Devrient 1904, p. 8, arguing that this was necessary in order to make the words audible by all spectators; Battezzato 1991. But see, *contra*, Haym 1897, arguing (esp. pp. 275 and 280-289) that children were actually using their own voice in the earlier part of Euripides' career: however, he makes an exception (pp. 224-225) precisely for our lines of the *Medea*, which he also attributes to older actors.

[5] See in particular, in view of our argument to be developed below, the exclamation of despair in l. 513 ὤμοι μοι τί πάθω.

[6] Devrient 1904, pp. 4-6; Sifakis 1979. More instances in Haym 1897, pp. 280-283.

[7] Haym 1897, p. 276.   [8] Battezzato 1991.

[9] Segal 1997, p. 170; Mossman 2011, p. 351.

[10] Arnott 1982, p. 38; Hamilton 1987.

only more numerous than usual (this might be the earliest instance where more than two cries are executed),[1] not only do they represent the only case of a «shared cry»[2] and the only (if exceedingly short) dialogue taking place behind the scenes,[3] but they represent the only utterances of tragic victims that directly call the chorus into question, eliciting its immediate, active response and lending a sort of amoebean thrust to the entire *Iou-Szene*.[4] A comparable case, in terms of the size and the purport of the lyric exchange but also in terms of scenic organisation,[5] is represented by the trimeters of Clytemnestra in Sophocles' *Electra* (1404-1405, 1409, 1415-1416)[6] and in Euripides' *Electra* (1165, in a dochmiac-iambic context: ὦ τέκνα, πρὸς θεῶν, μὴ κτάνητε μητέρα).[7]

But only in the *Medea* do we encounter the outspoken use of one of those rare teasing challenges to dramatic conventions, whereby the chorus is explicitly summoned to move, is encouraged to intervene by the intended victim,[8] and ultimately refrains to take action.[9] In this context, the importance of the children's exclamation is paramount, for it is through this *aural* connection between on-stage characters and off-stage action[10] that the chorus becomes aware of the tragic deeds in the house, and elaborates its decision to intervene (or not to intervene),[11] and it is again through those

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[1] Arnott 1982, p. 40, and Finglass 2007, p. 513 compare the five cries allotted to Clytemnestra in Soph. *El.* 1404-1416.

[2] Arnott 1982, p. 39 believes this to be an Euripidean innovation.

[3] The case of the exchange between Electra, Hermione and Orestes in Eur. *Or.* 1347-1352 (evoked by Hamilton 1987, p. 592) is very controversial: see Medda 1999, pp. 56-65.

[4] Segal 1996, p. 23 n. 24; Hose 1991, p. 366 calls ll. 1273-1281 «ein Wechselgesang zwischen Chor und Schauspieler hinter der Bühne». One might also compare the cases of *Mord-Stichomythie* discussed by Seidensticker 1971, p. 194; see Blasina 2006-2007, p. 7 n. 5.

[5] Zeppezauer 2011, pp. 160-161 defines this typology as an «offene Iou-Szene».

[6] On this *kommos* and its metrical and literary implications see Mazzoldi 2008, esp. pp. 186-192.

[7] Cries from within also occur in an iambic-dochmiac context, e.g., in *Herc. Fur.* 734-762 and *Or.* 1296-1301.

[8] The oddity of this exchange prompted Pippin Burnett 1998, p. 220 n. 109 (after Verrall) to suspect ll. 1277-1278, which are missing from the Strasburg papyrus (see above, p. 123 n. 1).

[9] Zeppezauer 2011, pp. 161-163; Mastronarde 2002, ad loc.; Arnott 1982, p. 36; Arnott 1973, pp. 53-54.   [10] Markantonatos 2002, p. 12; Segal 1997, pp. 170-173.

[11] Hose 1990, pp. 259-262; Matthiessen 2004, p. 67; Easterling 1977, p. 178; Rodighiero 2003, pp. 120-121. A classic comparable case, to which G. B. D'Alessio kindly draws my attention, is of course Aesch. *Agam.* 1346-1371 (see, e.g., Fraenkel 1950, pp. 642-644).

lines that the public can cherish for a moment the illusion that the children may after all still be saved.[1]

All the functional peculiarities highlighted so far are matched in terms of content by other special features: l. 1271, the first cry of despair of the first child, is built around two short questions, in and of themselves rather typical of scenes of anguish and despair. The second one, ποῖ φύγω μητρὸς χέρας, vividly depicts the little child's desperate attempt to escape his mother's weapon: several parallels have been found for the use of ποῖ rather than πῇ or ποῦ,[2] and of course this usage may be reminiscent of Medea's own cry of despair in l. 502 νῦν ποῖ τράπωμαι; πότερα πρὸς πατρὸς δό-μους; But most important is the reference to the mother's 'hands', which iconically alludes to the particularly violent modality of the killing, but also brings to the extreme consequences the insisted repetition (32 occurrences!) of the word χείρ throughout this trag-edy – a symbol of violence, tenderness or loyalty,[3] and peculiarly frequent in Medea's monologue (1019-1080), where it stands for the special link of affection and intimacy between the protagonist and her sons (ll. 1055, 1070, 1071),[4] and later (just before our stasimon) in Medea's exhortation to her own hand to accomplish the deed irrespective of love or family ties (ll. 1244-1250 ἄγ᾽, ὦ τάλαινα χεὶρ ἐμή, λαβὲ ξίφος...).[5]

However, the adoption of the τί δράσω exclamation in this context has a partly unusual flavour to it. Robert Fowler's penetrating analysis of the rhetoric of the despair in Attic drama[6] has cleverly gathered in a long footnote all the relevant occurrences of the very common formula 'τί δράσω' (or the like), without of course dis-cussing each of them in detail. A closer look shows that these oc-currences fall by and large into two categories:[7] on the one hand,

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[1] Romilly 1961, p. 54.

[2] Blaydes 1901, p. 43; Elmsley 1822, pp. 295-296.

[3] Flory 1978; Menu 1992, pp. 249-250; Mastronarde 2002, pp. 28-31; Most 1999, p. 32 and n. 52.

[4] Serious doubts have been cast on the authenticity of ll. 1056-1080: see most re-cently Lucarini 2013, who deals with earlier bibliography, recapitulates the arguments for detaching the lines at issue from the rest of the play, and draws some consequenc-es from this.   [5] Segal 1997, pp. 169 and 178.

[6] Fowler 1987, esp. n. 56.

[7] Roughly corresponding to the aporetic/deliberative and to the rhetorical ques-tions classified by Mastronarde 1979, pp. 7-10. It would be interesting to analyse the oc-currences of the formula in Attic comedy, e.g. (as Andrea Rodighiero points to me) in such an evocative passage as Ar. *Ach.* 466, where Dicaeopolis' parodic question καίτοι τί δράσω; (prefiguring imminent death, see below) is addressed to Euripides himself.

a real hesitation between two courses of action, a moment in which the possibility of δεύτεραι φροντίδες is suddenly and concretely envisaged (e.g. Neoptolemus before betraying Philoctetes in Soph. *Phil.* 908 and 969; Heracles on the verge of suicide in Eur. *HF* 1157; Menelaus attempting to save Hermione in *Or.* 1610); on the other hand, a mere rhetorical expression of sorrow or despair, which does not contemplate a serious intervention to change the course of events (e.g., Tecmessa after Ajax's suicide in Soph. *Ai.* 920; Admetus to Alcestis in Eur. *Alc.* 380; Hecuba to Polyxena in *Hec.* 419, and to Agamemnon in *Hec.* 737; Creon contemplating his plight in *Phoen.* 1310).

Strictly speaking, neither of these categories applies to our passage of the *Medea*, where the children are literally on the verge of being killed, and thus can no longer prevent the evil (or seriously believe to be able to prevent the evil) – and yet they still seem to contemplate the possibility of the chorus intervening in their favour (whereby again the possibility of autonomous δρᾶσις on their part is anyway reduced to a minimum). While we do find τί δράσω exclamations on a rhetorical tone in distressing situations (especially in Euripides, with his characteristic «goût de la faiblesse, du doute, de l'inquiétude avant l'action»),[1] this is never the case – except for this passage – with victims in the very moment of their death.

It has been remarked that, in the economy of the play, the child's desperate question harks back to Medea's hesitation in her famous monologue (*Med.* 1042 αἰαῖ· τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται), at the end of which her original resolution (v. 1019 δράσω τάδ') will be finally put into practice. Whether l. 1042 was inspired by the similar monologue in Neophron's *Medea* (fr. 2 Radt εἶεν, τί δράσεις θυμέ) or – as it seems more likely – the reverse is the case (the issue of priority between Neophron and Euripides is still not settled),[2] it clearly marks a watershed in the play, for the faltering and much-debated monologue of Medea is ostensibly the last the children hear from her mother before being killed by her at l. 1278.[3]

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[1] Romilly 1961, p. 18. See also, in a similar vein, Soph. *Ai.* 457. Harder 1985, p. 83 points to particularly compelling parallels where the question is followed by a second one: *Hec.* 419 οἴμοι· τί δράσω; ποῖ τελευτήσω βίον;; *HF* 1157-1158 οἴμοι, τί δράσω; ποῖ κακῶν ἐρημίαν / εὕρω, πτερωτὸς ἢ κατὰ χθονὸς μολών; (see also paratragic τί δράσω, ποῖ φύγω in Men. *Sam.* 568).

[2] Melero 1996, pp. 64-66 (believing, with Michelini 1989, in Neophron's priority); Mastronarde 2002, pp. 57-64, and Diggle 2008, followed by Lucarini 2013, pp. 189-193 (assuming, for different reasons, Euripides' priority).　　　[3] Knox 1979, p. 240.

The importance of *Med.* 1271-1272 has been indirectly confirmed by a recent papyrus find, which has changed dramatically our image of this play, if not of ancient tragedy *tout court*: I am referring to *P.Oxy.* 76, 5093 (1st century ce, 2nd half),[1] an obscure rhetorical text mentioning *inter alia* that Euripides 'corrected' (col. iv, l. 2 ἐ-πανορθωσάμενος) an earlier representation of the filicide on stage, by deleting the following lines, «quoted by some» (col. iv, ll. 3-4 τοὺς στίχους ἐκείνους ὧν μέμνηνταί τινες διαγράψας):

<p style="text-align:center">ποῖ δῆτα μητρὸς χεῖρα δεξιὰν στυγῶν
φεύγεις, ἀνάνδρου βήματος τιθεὶς ἴχνος;</p>

These lines, the only ones we know of the 'first *Medea*',[2] might be the fruit of a rhetor's fanciful invention, or the extrapolation by a *Schwindelautor* relying on no direct knowledge of drama but only on a peculiar, erratic couplet.[3] However, if we do take seriously the papyrus text,[4] the lines might give us several clues about the appearance of that earlier play, and suggest that it must have been quite different from the preserved one especially as far as the dramatic sequence of events in the final part is concerned – after all, the papyrus text itself (whatever its reliability in matters of detail) insists on this, see col. iv, ll. 6-10 καθόλου τε τὴν οἰκο-νομίαν ἀλλάξας ἔνδον ἀμφοτέρους κατέσφαξεν ὡς μετριοτέρας ἐσομένης τῆς τεκνοκτονίας εἰ μὴ ἐν φανερῷ πραχθείη.[5] In par-

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[1] Colomo 2011.

[2] Along, perhaps, with the controversial quotation ὦ θερμόβουλον σπλάγχνον (Eur. fr. 858 N.) attributed to Euripides' *Medea* by schol. vet. Ar. *Ach.* 119 but not attested in 'our' *Medea* (Wilson corrected ἐν Τημενίδαις; see Luppe 2013 and Magnani 2014, p. 98); see also the fr. 905 Kn. discussed by Lucarini 2013, p. 187.

[3] See Colomo 2011, pp. 112-116; see also Magnani 2014, pp. 91-95, esp. pp. 99-101 on the possibility of an autoschediastic origin. Luigi Battezzato believes the lines could even belong to a different play: he will come back on the issue in a special paper. G. B. D'Alessio rightly observes that in tragic diction the verb στυγέω expresses hate and disgust rather than fear (the situation is different, for example, in epic: see, e.g., *schol.* D *Il.* 7.112 and 20.65) – however, it is often used in contexts of family ties (Soph. *Ant.* 571; Eur. *Alc.* 338, *El.* 933 etc.), and I assume that Medea is seen here in a psychologically very unstable condition, so that the nuances of her words should not necessarily be taken *ad litteram*.

[4] Despite Colomo 2011b (and Magnani 2014, pp. 96-97), I start from the method-ological assumption that the information conveyed by the papyrus cannot be wholly fictional and unreliable: see Lucarini 2013, pp. 185-189.

[5] An attempt to reconstruct the *facies* of this *Medea* is made by Mehl 2011, pp. 275-279. Lucarini 2013, pp. 187-189 attempts to link Euripides' *Ur-Medea* to the play once allegedly containing *Med.* 1056-1080 (see above, p. 127 n. 4), but those lines are definitely irreconcilable with the murder on stage.

Filippomaria Pontani

ticular, we have here, as opposed to the lucid character we know from the extant play,[1] a raging mother madly running after her son and blaming his alleged cowardice,[2] patently falling victim of the φοινία λύσσα mentioned by Neophron's Medea when she speaks to her hands ready for murder (fr. 2.11-12). However, it is not easy to believe that these lines should come from Neophron's (or from anybody else's) play,[3] for the rhetorical text in the papyrus (col. iv, ll. 11-15) parallels Euripides' *diorthosis* with his similar, well-known intervention on the earlier version of the *Hippolytus*,[4] and thus it would be strange to learn that in the case of *Medea* Euripides «corrected» not his own play but someone else's; indeed, the papyrus seems to state that 'even so' (i.e., after mildering the παιδοφονία, presumably producing what is our extant *Medea*) Euripides was nonetheless once more defeated in the tragic contest (col. iv, ll. 10-11 καὶ τότε οὐδὲν ἧττον ἐνικήθη): and to my mind this way of expression univocally points to self-correction.[5]

Of course, the sudden discovery of a Euripidean *Ur-Medea*, whether or not confirmed by another papyrus (PIFAO inv. PSP 248) allegedly labelling 'our' *Medea* as Βʹ Μήδεια,[6] has raised all sorts of doubts, both on the relative chronology of the two plays (some now argue that 'our' *Medea* should be dated later than 431)[7] and on the possibility that the 'taboo' about the representation of violent acts on the tragic stage (famously spelled out, e.g., by Hor. *ars poet.* 185: «Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet»)[8] could in fact be violated or might even never have existed altogether.[9]

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[1] Segal 1997, pp. 175-176.

[2] On ἄνανδρος as «cowardly» rather than 'young', 'not adult' see now Magnani 2014, p. 99.

[3] A case for this is made by Colomo 2011, pp. 112-114 (cf. Magnani 2014, p. 93), who makes the most of the information about Euripides διασκευάσας Neophron's play (*hypoth. Eur. Med.* 25-27 Diggle = *TrGF* 15T2 = Dicaearch. fr. 63 Wehrli).

[4] For other cases in which Euripides wrote two redactions of the same play, see Luppe 1996.

[5] On the same line Magnani 2014, pp. 95-96 (who however denies the rhetor any reliability). A different view in Scattolin 2013, pp. 136-137, who inclines to attribute the two lines to Neophron.

[6] Luppe 2010 and 2011. *Contra*, Colomo 2011. See now a full discussion of the thorny issue in Magnani 2014, pp. 85-90 and 98.

[7] Luppe 2013 (but see Magnani 2014, pp. 94, 101).

[8] Colomo 2011, pp. 116-118 marshals the evidence, and Rodighiero 2000, pp. 77-80 examines the rationale of this convention.

[9] Arnott 1962, pp. 134-138, and Mehl 2011, pp. 279-287 (insisting also on Ajax's suicide in Sophocles' play) argue on different grounds against the very existence of this veto; Mehl, in particular, insists that by the middle of the 5th century playwrights had all

Whatever the truth about these thorny issues, it seems likely that by changing such a sensitive moment in the plot of his play, Euripides, no matter the ultimate goal of his intervention, was consciously acting a radical departure from his earlier expressive choice, implying a refashioning of his main character as well as of the *moment clou* of the action.[1] The two lines in the earlier version of the play, as quoted by *P.Oxy.* 5093, share with *Med.* 1271-1272 at least two important characteristics: the interrogative tone and the motif of escaping the killer's hand.[2] On the other hand, the almost military image of the 'footprint of the cowardly step', applied to the poor child's attempt to avoid his own mother's knife (possibly after the murder of his brother had already taken place, as is the case in at least three South Italian pots),[3] can only be explained – if the lines belong indeed to a *Medea* – as the fruit of the woman's obnubilated mind. What Euripides has effected in the lines of 'our' *Medea* is thus not only a shift from a crazy, child-hunting Medea to an off-stage killing evoked by 'cries from within' (and not even described by a messenger's report), but also a dramatic change of perspective: no longer a frenzied mother attacking her son in the open light and blaming him, but a desperate son vainly seeking help, a way to escape his mother's attack, «running in the dark, trapped in the space that leads nowhere».[4]

The pivotal role of the trimeters (1271-1272 and 1277-1278) in the fifth stasimon of Euripides' *Medea* should have become clear by now: unusual both in metrical and in dramatic terms, innovative both as spoken by children and as openly directed to the chorus, these lines envisage a totally new dramatic structure by substituting the cry of despair of the victims to a savage and furied on-stage killing. It may thus be worthwhile to look back at l. 1271 and to resume the point about the oddity of the τί δράσω motif in this line. The aforementioned contact with Medea's hesitation in l. 1042

the technical possibilities to hide violent acts from the spectators' gaze – so the showing of a killing ἐν φανερῷ was not the result of material constriction but rather of deliberate choice.

[1] This is in keeping with Euripides' general refrain from the exhibition of actual violence: see Romilly 1961, pp. 20-21 and 43.

[2] On the latter point see above and Colomo 2011, p. 118. The ποῖ should be taken as a further guarantee of the ποῖ, not πῇ, in l. 1271 (see above, pp. 123-124 n. 2).

[3] See Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, pp. 271-273; Colomo 2011, pp. 118-119.

[4] Luschnig 1992, p. 43, a perceptive study of the relationship between internal and external space in Euripides' play. See also Segal 1996, p. 23.

αἰαῖ τί δράσω, may represent a bridge to an intertext that contains
perhaps the most famous hesitation in Greek literature, namely
Aeschylus' *Cho.* 889 (Πυλάδη, τί δράσω; μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;)
spoken by Orestes to Pylades just before killing his mother Cly-
temnestra.[1] In the *Choephori*, of course, Orestes' wavering (and
thus his τί δράσω) is perfectly at home, because the speaker is ef-
fectively called on to decide between two very different courses of
action – to kill or not to kill his mother: indeed, this very alterna-
tive appears as a fundamental stroke in the definition of Orestes'
independent character,[2] not (as some interpreters have believed)
as an empty rhetorical question in an already written fate.[3] The
penetrating study by Lutz Käppel has shown that *Cho.* 899 is the
dramatic *akme* of the play precisely because it corresponds to the
first (and sudden) occasion in which Orestes becomes fully aware
of the real purport and dangers of his vengeance, and painfully
convinces himself (also through Pylades' support) of the need for
such a tremendous act as matricide, which had been certainly im-
plied in the previous scenes of the play (and spelled out in ll. 434-
438, where the noun μήτηρ however does not occur), but not yet
fully or consciously thematised.[4]

As it happens, in *Med.* 1271 it is another son who exclaims τί
δράσω in front of his mother, being this time a victim, not a killer;
this time, his words do not appear as the mark of sudden hesita-
tion before a terrible deed (in fact, they had fulfilled this role on
Medea's lips in l. 1042), but rather as the theatrical signpost of the
coronation of the long and winding process of Medea's decision-
making, around which the entire play revolves. That this nice game
of mirrors[5] should arise by chance, especially in a play whose very
outcome in terms of responsibility and dramatic fault seems to

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[1] Romilly 1961, p. 18 (on Medea's exclamation in l. 1042: «Avec ses revirements
brusques, ses doutes, ses émois, il reprend, bien plus largement orchestré, le "que
faire?" d'Oreste»); Knox 1979, esp. p. 239; Mastronarde 2002, p. 10.

[2] Snell 1928, pp. 13 and 32-33.

[3] For the debate on this line see Garvie 1986, p. 293, ad loc.

[4] Käppel 1997, pp. 218-220, 225-229. See also Lebeck 1971, p. 123; Garvie 1986, pp.
161-162.

[5] One may wonder if this idea had crossed the mind of the anonymous Byzantine
author of the *Christus patiens*, who put no less than three lines drawn from *Med.*
1271-1272 (l. 474 οἴμοι τί δράσω πῶς λάθω λαῶν χέρας; and ll. 477-478 τί γοῦν, τί δράσω;
πῶς φύγω τόσους βρόχους; / οὐκ οἶδ' ἀδελφὴ φιλτάτη· δέδοικα γάρ) in the mouth of
a mother losing her son and dreading the attack of the Jewish crowd, namely the
Virgin Mary.

turn upside down the final of the *Oresteia*,[1] is to my mind implausible. By choosing the τί δράσω motif, Euripides was inserting a somewhat untypical element in this murder scene, but was also producing something more important than a mere intertextual dialogue: he was implicitly describing Medea's filicide under the same, abominable rubric as Orestes' matricide.

That l. 1271, as refashioned by Euripides after the dramatic change of perspective we know of thanks to *P.Oxy.* 5093, should represent an allusion precisely to Orestes' hesitation in the *Choephori*, is made even more likely by a body of circumstantial evidence, extending also to the subsequent lines in the stasimon:

- the occurrence of the syntagm μητρὸς χέρες in l. 1271, while announcing analogous misdemeanours in Euripides' later plays (Agave and Pentheus in *Bacch.* 858 and 969), or evoking *e contrario* the ideal comfort of family protection (see, e.g., *Hec.* 50, *Or.* 1340, *Iph. Taur.* 234), might also in my view cling back to the conspicuous (and highly emotive) occurrence of μήτηρ in *Cho.* 899, the first time Orestes uses this word for Clytemnestra in the play:[2] nowhere else is the word 'mother' associated with the τί δράσω motif in extant Greek tragedy;[3]

- the complex image of the «sword's nets» (ἄρκυες ξίφους) in the words of the second child (*Med.* 1278) might be explained as a hint to the repeated occurrence of the hunting imagery in the *Oresteia*,[4] and particularly to the use of nets in *Agam.* 1116 and *Cho.* 1000:[5] both Medea and Clytemnestra (see esp. *Cho.* 492 μέμνησο δ᾽ ἀμφίβληστρον ὡς ἐκαίνισας, in Electra's words) entrap their victims in the net of their machinations, and then slay them with a blade;[6]

- Medea's definition as an Erinys in ll. 1258-1260 has an obvious Aeschylean flavour, and evokes, e.g., the representation of Cly-

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[1] Segal 1996, pp. 40-41.   [2] See Goldhill 1984, pp. 179-180.

[3] One might even speculate that this τί δράσω is deliberately and ironically echoed by the poet at the end of Jason's first speech upon entering the house, when – still unaware of the tragic murder – he utters his concern for possible retorsions of Glauce's family against his children (ll. 1304-1305): μή μοί τι δράσωσ᾽ οἱ προσήκοντες γένει, / μητρῷον ἐκπράσσοντες ἀνόσιον φόνον (note μητρῷος as subjective genitive, whereas the same adjective occurs as objective genitive precisely for Orestes' matricide in Aesch. *Eum.* 230 αἷμα μητρῷον).

[4] Vidal-Naquet 1976, pp. 121-144. On the imagery of the *Oresteia* and its aftermath see Rutherford 2012, pp. 128-137.

[5] The bold metaphor will also appear in HF 729-730 βρόχοισι δ᾽ἀρκύων γενήσεται / ξιφηφόροισι: see Wilamowitz 1895, II, pp. 163-165, and Bárberi Squarotti 1993, pp. 118-120.   [6] See Boedeker 1997, p. 138.

temnestra as an Alastor or Erinys in the *Oresteia* (e.g., *Agam.* 1497-1504);[1]

- the chorus' search for a comparable *exemplum* of a murderous woman in ll. 1282-1289 (controversially focusing on Ino) has its closest parallel in the catalogue provided by the chorus in *Cho.* 585-651, and including the mother of Meleager;[2]

- Clytemnestra's murder in the *Choephori* is one of the closest scenes we get to the «meurtre sur la skènè», an issue that *P.Oxy.* 5093 shows very important also for Euripides' (re)staging of the *Medea*;[3]

- Clytemnestra's appeal to her rearing of Orestes (*Cho.* 896-928), iconically displayed in the famous gesture of showing him her breast, corresponds to a pivotal theme in Euripides' *Medea*, namely the loss of children and the waste of the toil of rearing them, as underlined by Medea herself (250-251, 1021-1023, most notably 1028-1031) and by the chorus.[4]

- the murder scene of the *Choephori* was extremely popular in Attic theatre,[5] probably easy for the audience to recognise, and thus fairly often imitated, not least by Euripides himself in his own, later *Electra* (see l. 967 τί δῆτα δρῶμεν; μητέρ᾽ ἢ φονεύσομεν,[6] and 1206-1207 for the gesture);[7] it can be remarked that the very famous gesture of showing the breast to a son was traditionally used by mothers (e.g., Hecuba in *Il.* 22.80-82) not in order to save their own lives, but to beg their sons to save themselves[8] – an indirect reference to the context of the Aeschylean scene would thus add to the tragic irony of the *Medea* passage, all the more so if Euripides and his audience knew of a version in which Medea attempted to save her children from the danger of retaliation from the inhabitants of Corinth.[9]

Other parallelisms between the *Medea* and the three Electra-plays

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[1] Kovacs 1993, p. 63.   [2] Newton 1985, p. 497; Aélion 1983, p. 291.
[3] Deforge 1997, p. 132; Romilly 1961, p. 51; Rodighiero 2000, p. 78. On the general issue of the death on the retro-scenic space, see Di Benedetto, Medda 2002, pp. 285-294.
[4] See on this central theme Segal 1997, pp. 176-180.
[5] No less popular than Agamemnon's killing in *Agam.* 1343-1345, echoed, e.g., by Soph. *El.* 1414-1416 (Romilly 1961, p. 54).
[6] Romilly 1961, p. 17 stresses the metrical parallelism even with the metrical position of the word μήτηρ, but also the very different poetic function (Orestes' hesitation «s'étale à loisir en une longue scène de doute et de tourment). See also *Iph. Taur.* 95-96 Πυλάδη (σὺ γάρ μοι τοῦδε συλλήπτωρ πόνου) / τί δρῶμεν;.
[7] Sommerstein 1996, pp. 167-170, with yet more possible influences on other tragic passages, and Castellaneta 2013, pp. 61-79.
[8] Pippin Burnett 1998, p. 113; on the *Nachleben* and meanings of this gesture, see now Castellaneta 2013.   [9] See on this Lucarini 2013, pp. 175-182.

have been variously suggested here and elsewhere, and they concur particularly in framing a closer dialogue between the Colchian princess and Aeschylus' Clytemnestra:[1] according to Donald Mastronarde, «Medea can usefully be read as a revision or extension of the model of Clytemnestra»,[2] and this is particularly true as far as the controversial relationship of 'ownership' and conflict with the respective children is concerned.[3] That Euripides should choose to evoke this through an open, if subtle, intertextual reference to a famous line of the *Choephori*, therefore seems less than surprising.

Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia

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[1] See in particular Aélion 1983, pp. 286-296, 315; Webster 1967, pp. 13-15; Boedeker 1997, p. 138; Elliott 1969, p. 98.   [2] Mastronarde 2002, p. 8.
[3] Foley 2001, pp. 243-244.

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