

## SLINGS AND ARROWS: THE DEBATE WITH LYCUS IN THE *HERACLES*

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The debate in the first episode of the *Heracles* has few admirers, and critics disagree about its form and extent.<sup>1</sup> It is generally supposed that Euripides is reflecting a current argument about the relative merits of bow and spear, skirmishers and hoplites, and therefore has expanded Amphitryon's speech far beyond its proper length. So, most recently, Bond:<sup>2</sup>

There is no other instance of one speech being more than twice the size of the other in a single *ἀγών*. . . . The purpose of Lycus' speech is, as Wilamowitz saw, to provide an opportunity for Amphitryon's splendid reply. . . . Euripides here sacrificed drama to rhetoric, says Wilamowitz; but one may wonder if the rhetoric too would not have been better if the *ἀγών* had been more equal.

On the contrary, the debate is a complex, well-balanced unity involving, as Strohm realized, Megara as well as Lycus and Amphitryon.<sup>3</sup> Its

<sup>1</sup> The debate is not even mentioned by C. Collard, "Formal Debates in Euripides' Drama," *G&R* 22 (1975) 58–71, and J. Duchemin, *L' ΑΓΩΝ dans la tragédie grecque* (Paris 1945) 75, includes only the first part, between Lycus and Amphitryon, while H. H. O. Chalk, "APETH and BIA in Euripides' *Herakles*," *JHS* 82 (1962) 9, finds not one but three debates in the first part of the play. A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford 1971) 160, calls the dispute between Amphitryon and Megara the *agôn* while A. Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen* (Göttingen 1972<sup>3</sup>) 372, thinks Megara is "über das Gezänk."

<sup>2</sup> G. W. Bond, *Euripides Heracles* (Oxford 1981) 101–2. The defense of the bow is judged "singularly inept and wordy" by A. W. Verrall, *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge 1905) 149; "ein Fremdkörper" by E. Kroeker, *Der Herakles des Euripides* (Giessen 1938) 24; "topical" by H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1961<sup>3</sup>) 239. See also L. Parmentier, *Euripide* vol. 3 (Paris 1923) 12; W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* I.3 (Munich 1940) 439; Lesky (above, note 1) 372; A. Rivier, *Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide* (Paris 1975<sup>2</sup>) 107. Most of this goes back to U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Euripides Herakles* (Berlin 1894 = Darmstadt 1959) 2.139f. H. Rodich, *Die Euripideische Tragödie* (Heidelberg 1968) 80f., on the other hand, finds merit in the debate and notes the thematic importance of the bow as symbol of independence, although his interest in the scene is limited to the "sophistic" doctrine there adumbrated.

<sup>3</sup> H. Strohm, *Euripides* (Munich 1957) 25: "der eine Agon (Amph.-Lyk.) in den anderen (Amph.-Meg.) eingelegt ist."

themes and images are echoed later in the play and provide the terms in which each of the play's three crises is set.

### I. Balance

Lycus begins by addressing both Amphitryon and Megara and asks (a) how long they insist on living and what hope they see of avoiding death; (b) whether they think Heracles will return from death (143–46). Their exaggerated sense of self-worth, Lycus continues, is based on false assumptions, first (c) that Amphitryon did share his bed with Zeus and (d) that Megara is the wife of the best of men (146–50). At this point Lycus launches into an attack on Heracles, arguing (e) that killing a marsh snake or the Nemean beast is no proud feat, especially when done with nooses (*βρόχοις*) not muscles (*βραχίωνος*),<sup>4</sup> and (f) that fighting with a bow is cowardly; real courage means “standing in battle line looking opposite the spear’s swift furrow” (151–64). He concludes by arguing (g) that killing the children is prudent (165–69).

In his reply Amphitryon says he will leave argument *c* to Zeus but himself will refute Lycus’ *ἀμαθία* (170–73). He begins with Heracles’ supposed cowardice (e): the gods provide witness to Heracles’ bravery, for, riding in Zeus’ chariot with the lightning bolt, he fought with his bow against the Giants and then celebrated his victory (*καλλίνικον*) with the gods (174–80). In addition the Centaurs bear witness to Heracles’ bravery as opposed to Lycus’ obscurity (181–87). Amphitryon then defends the *πάνσοφον* bow against Lycus’ (f), in the longest segment of his speech (188–203), by saying that fighting in a hoplite line is foolish since one is slave to a single weapon and endangered by the cowardice of one’s fellow-fighters. With a bow, on the other hand, one has innumerable weapons, does not risk his life, and is not anchored to *τύχη*. Amphitryon ends the first section of his speech remarking that these words give the counter-argument to Lycus “concerning what has been established” (204–5).<sup>5</sup>

At this point Amphitryon’s speech almost balances Lycus’ (36 lines to 30) although he has addressed only Lycus’ attack on Heracles, not his reasons for killing the children (g). Having thus defended Heracles’ bravery, Amphitryon argues (206–9) that it is Lycus’ cowardice that will cause the children’s death, implicitly and sarcastically contrasting this one sign of *σοφία* (207) with the *πανσοφία* of Heracles’ bow

<sup>4</sup> For the pun see Bond (above, note 2) 107. There may be a similar pun underlying *ἀγχόναισιν*; cf. *ἀγκών* and *ἄγκουνα*.

<sup>5</sup> A difficult phrase. Although I think Wilamowitz was right to expect a reference to “the terms laid down,” I would not wish to emend the text or exclude the sense “traditional views” (of bow and spear) since that is what the debate addresses. The summarizing function of 204f. is remarked by Kroeker (above, note 2) 25.

(188).<sup>6</sup> He adds several points: (*h*) if Zeus were just, Lycus would be punished (209–12); (*i*) they should be allowed to go into exile (213–16). Finally, (*j*) he turns to the Thebans and makes an impassioned plea for help (217–35). This full response to Lycus' five-line defense of his actions (*g*) expands Amphytrion's speech to over twice the length of Lycus' (66 lines to 30).

When Lycus, not at all moved by these words, begins preparations for immolating the group, the chorus echoes Amphytrion's call to action and threatens the tyrant. The debate seems to have ended, and the fact that Lycus challenged Megara as well as Amphytrion seems to have been forgotten. This new action, however, is abandoned as the chorus in its formally unique long speech argues itself into passivity, ending with the realization that it is too weak to do anything (252–74).<sup>7</sup> Then Megara speaks, first thanking the chorus for its good intentions but telling it to desist (275–78), and thereby effectively cancelling Amphytrion's plea (*j*). She then turns, not to Lycus as one might guess from his opening address to her, but to Amphytrion, and responds to virtually every point he has made, as well as reiterating the points in Lycus' speech which he left out. As Lycus had asked (*a*), Megara argues they must now face death. Amphytrion must live up to his reputation and his *δόκησις* *εὐκλεῆς* *δορός* must not be tainted with cowardice (278–89), an implicit echo of the bow/spear controversy (*f*). Contrary to what Amphytrion argued (*e*), his *εὐκλεῆς* son Heracles needs no witness to his greatness (*ἀμαρτύρητος* 290; cf. *μάρτυσιν* 176) and will expect *his* sons to act honorably. Megara will show, in answer to Lycus' question (*d*), that she is worthy to be the wife of the greatest man (290–94). Like Lycus, she first imputes hope of Heracles' return to Amphytrion, although he had not mentioned this in his speech (*a*; *ἐλπίδ'* 295 = 144) and then says (*b*) that Heracles will not return (295–97). Furthermore, they should avoid their enemy since he is not one of the *σοφοί* (295–301), contrary to what Amphytrion had said (207, in answer to *g*). As for exile (*i*), that would be wretched, so they must accept the *τύχαι* of the gods (302–11), implying that Zeus is not just and will not help (*h*). Thus Megara discusses all the points raised by both speakers except *c*, which Amphytrion had previously excluded from the debate.

In her defense of Heracles, then, Megara paradoxically reaffirms the position of her enemy Lycus by refuting Amphytrion's rebuttal point by

<sup>6</sup> The contrast is noted by Chalk (above, note 1) 10 and, before him, G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 248. Actually, as S. Douglas Olson points out to me, the connection between the bow's *πανσοφία* and Lycus' *σοφία* is uncomfortably close and the latter implicitly undermines the former.

<sup>7</sup> Critics continue to wish away this anomaly, most recently M. L. West, "Tragica V," *BICS* 28 (1981) 61. Unlike the passage in the *Agamemnon* (1348ff.) to which it is often compared, the choral speech here is one long rhesis—the chorus speaks with one voice.

point and echoing Lycus' other arguments. It is significant that her 37 line speech when added to Lycus' 30 lines is almost precisely the length of Amphitryon's (66) and so the balance, desiderated by critics, is in fact present. Two other "late" debates, in the *Phoenissae* and the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, also have a three-part structure, and the former even balances lines: Polyneices speaks 28 lines, Eteocles 27 and then Jocasta answers both with 58 (*Pho.* 469–585).

## II. Image and Theme

Amphitryon's defense has two striking echoes later in the play. When Lyssa appears and drives Heracles mad, both her action and its effect are described in images that specifically recall the details of Amphitryon's rebuttal and at the same time reverse them. There Heracles was mounted on a chariot (τέθριππά τε / ἐν οἷς βεβηκώς 177f.); here Lyssa has mounted her chariot (βέβακεν ἐν δίφροισιν 880) and goads her horses.<sup>8</sup> The goddesses join in fighting against him (στρατεύομεν 825) as he was earlier joined with them against the Giants (180). Earlier he was on the side of the thunderbolt (κεραυνόν 177); now the attack of his enemy is worse than the thunderbolt (κεραυνοῦ τ' οἰστρος 862).<sup>9</sup> These are the only two references to the thunderbolt in the play. Before, Heracles was fighting against the earth-born Giants (178f.); now Athena opposes him as she opposed the Giant Enceladus (907). Earlier Heracles celebrated a victory komos (τὸν καλλίνικον . . . ἐκώμασεν 180); so here Lyssa says she will make him dance as she accompanies him on the pipe of fear (χορεύσω καὶ κατανλήσω φόβῳ 871). As a result there is a dance inside (χορεύματ' 889) and a deadly song is piped (δαίον μέλος ἐπανλειτουργᾷται 895). The same set of images returns again when the messenger describes what happened inside: the children stood around like a chorus (χορός 925);<sup>10</sup> Heracles thought he was riding a chariot (947)<sup>11</sup> and

<sup>8</sup> Bond (above, note 2) 300, on the other hand, thinks the image is "inspired by the common image of the yoke of madness." S. A. Barlow, "Structure and Dramatic Realism in Euripides' *Heracles*," *G&R* 29 (1982) 121, mentions the echo of "earlier images of chariot and race course" but overlooks this crucial connection.

<sup>9</sup> The thunderbolt "breathes labor-pains," and ὠδίνας (862) associated with the thunderbolt must bring to mind the birth of Dionysus (*pace* Bond). Indeed, striking bacchic imagery appears in the following scene (889–95).

<sup>10</sup> Choral celebration, which until now has been such a positive force in the play (see Burnett [above, note 1] 168, note 16 for a list of instances), disappears after 925 except for the afterimage of Hera's imagined revel (1303). The congruence between choral imagery first predicting then describing the action is realized by the intervening choral song which presents the action, *qua* song, on stage. The only parallel that comes to mind for such fusion of stage action with action behind the scene is the beginning of the *Ajax*.

<sup>11</sup> He is also said to "ride to his father's murder" (1001); the echo in Plautus' *Menaechni* (862–71) suggests that Heracles is here the rider or charioteer, not the horse (*pace* Wilamowitz [above, note 2] 3.216).

proclaimed himself *καλλίνικος* (961), and finally Athena pelted him with a rock (1004). This and a parallel reference to Heracles as *καλλίνικον κάρα* (1046) are the last references to this key term: as he said, if he cannot save his children he is not truly *καλλίνικος* (582).<sup>12</sup> Thus the terms in which Amphytrion defended Heracles have become the terms in which Heracles destroys his children; the gods now have borne witness *against* Heracles. His bow has become tainted, and now he is opposed by the arrows of the sun (1090) which reveal his sins. He himself concludes that the killing of his children is simply an extension of his natural violence (1258–62), the last of his labors (1279).

The second part of Amphytrion's rebuttal, the notorious defense of the bow, is echoed at the end of the play when Heracles decides not to commit suicide. After dismissing Theseus' argument against suicide, he goes on to say that he would not like to incur the charge of cowardice (*δειλία*)—the word occurs only here (1348) and in the debate (175, 192, 210, 235, 289)—but instead of speaking in terms that repeat those of his father, he reverses them and supports Lycus' position.<sup>13</sup> He thinks he must stand up under his misfortune just as one would stand up under the weapon of an enemy (*ὑποστῆναι βέλος* 1350), i.e., as a hoplite in the line of battle rather than a bowman (cf. Lycus' *μένων . . . δορὸς ταχείαν ἄλοκα* 163f.). He must be a slave (1357), whereas the bow prevented slavery (190);<sup>14</sup> and it is to *τύχη* that he must be a slave (1357), whereas the bow meant that one was not moored to *τύχη* (203).

The arguments put forth by Lycus, then, turn out to be unexpectedly relevant to Heracles: fighting in the hoplite line is true bravery—friendship outweighs independence—and Heracles lives by that code. This does not mean, however, that spear surpasses bow. We find that Heracles' fellow-fighters are his bow and arrows, and so the long-standing opposition of spear and bow is finally resolved.<sup>15</sup> Bow and

<sup>12</sup> The importance of this term is recognized by Barlow (above, note 8) 123, and J. Shelton, "Structural Unity and the Meaning of Euripides' *Herakles*," *Eranos* 77 (1979) 109–10, among others. Bond (above, note 2) 211 calls it "the most important of the titles applied to Heracles both in cult . . . and literature." In the play his title is originally defined by his help to the Minyans (49, 570), who betrayed him. Here he betrays those he has protected.

<sup>13</sup> *δειλία* occurs only 13 times in the extant corpus of Euripides. Also, Theseus had earlier labelled Heracles' suicidal plan *ἀμαθία* (1254), clearly echoing the debate where *σοφία* and *ἀμαθία* are so prevalent (188, 189, 202, 207, 300; 172, 283, 299, 310).

<sup>14</sup> The only other references to slavery occur when Lycus calls the chorus slaves, right after the debate (251, 270).

<sup>15</sup> Aside from the references to spear (160, 164, 193) and bow (160, 162, 188, 195, 196, 199) in the first debate and two gnomic references (65, 1176), reference to these two weapons mirrors the play's action. At first the spear dominates and, although good in the past (Heracles' spear 49; Amphytrion's 61, 288; the chorus's 128), it is now ineffectual

arrows (called, significantly, “winged spears”) fought at his side (*παρ-ασπίζοντ’* 1099) and protected him as he protected them. So too now, although their *κοινωνία* is bitter (1377) since it has replaced the *κοινωνία* of his family (1363), he recognizes that the weapons are necessary for his future safety (1382–84) as he is for theirs (1385). A human element is now added in Theseus, who was saved by Heracles in the past and who is asked to labor along with him and join with him in recovering Cerberus (1386f.). The importance of friendship and cooperation, the virtues of the hoplite line, is highlighted by a further reversal: now Heracles cannot be left alone by either Theseus (1388) or his weapons (1382), whereas before, isolation was a sign of his superiority (198, 220, 852). His new yoke with Theseus (1403) will replace his old family (1375; cf. 454).

It is important to note that the terms in which Heracles reverses Amphitryon also recall Megara’s arguments in the earlier debate and that the two debates are formally quite similar. Megara too rejected *δειλία* (289) and insisted on giving in to *τύχη* (309f.), but she said that courage and nobility required death in the face of evils rather than exile, which was pitiful penury (302–8). This is Heracles’ position in his first speech when, in response to Theseus’ taunt that he has spoken like an ordinary (*ἐπιτυχόντος*) man, he defends his decision to die (1247) and explains to Theseus that his background (not his nobility) demands it (1258–80). He then goes on to picture at length the difficulties of exile (1281–1300), expanding Megara’s earlier point. As Megara wished to imitate Heracles (*μίμημ’ ἀνδρός* 294), so Heracles says he will imitate Ixion (*ἐκμμήσομαι* 1298).<sup>16</sup>

Since Heracles defines his first speech as a debate (*ἀμλληθῶ λόγοις* 1255), it is no surprise that Theseus responds with a lengthy speech of his own, in which he argues that even the gods are subject to *τύχη*, and offers Heracles purification, a new home, and posthumous honors. As in the first debate, the speeches are not matched (Heracles’ speech = 56 lines, Theseus’ = 27);<sup>17</sup> here too there is a third speech and once again it is not what we expect. Heracles summarily dismisses Theseus’

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(Amphitryon’s 235, the chorus’s 224, 268, 436). The bow takes over (past greatness 366, 392, 422, 473; saving the family 571) but soon works evil (942, 970, 984, 991, 1063, 1098, 1135) and is opposed by the arrows of the sun (1090) until Theseus and his spear arrive to save Heracles (1165) and Heracles is again a spearman (1193). Finally bow and spear are merged into generic *όπλα* (1377).

<sup>16</sup> Ixion is described as a charioteer (1297) and so is a fitting model for the mad Heracles, but we should not forget that in Pindar *Pythian* 2 he attempts to rape Hera and (grand)fathers the Centaurs as a result.

<sup>17</sup> Although Heracles’ speech may be interpolated and Theseus’ is certainly truncated, the speeches are not likely to be equal, especially given the imbalance of the first two speeches in the earlier debate.

argument and offer (1340) and then proceeds to argue briefly against his own earlier position, saying that true valor requires standing up against death.<sup>18</sup> His whole speech is about the same length as the earlier one which it rebuts (54 lines vs. 56).

The second debate, then, echoes and reverses the first. There Megara surprisingly refuted Amphitryon's argument for life while here Heracles refutes his own earlier argument for death. Although he shares Megara's belief in the subordination of man to *τύχη*, the lack of hope and the insistence on noble courage, his position reverses hers: true courage means living.<sup>19</sup>

One might go a step further and argue that the general movement of the play follows the arguments presented in the first debate. Lycus argued that Heracles would not return from Hades, that he was not the son of Zeus, and that he only strangled beasts in nooses (*βρόχους* 153). Yet the first part of the play culminates in Heracles' return from Hades, proclaimed as son of Zeus (696) and likened to Zeus himself (521f.); and his killing of Lycus is described as entrapment in a noose (*βρόχοισι δ' ἀρκύνων* 729). Amphitryon countered Lycus' argument by invoking Heracles' contribution to the Gigantomachy but, as we have seen, these are the terms in which Heracles kills his children, the second reversal of the play. So fully is Amphitryon's argument for the bow refuted that his last reference to the Gigantomachy pictures Heracles as a spearman with shield (1191–94).<sup>20</sup> The third speaker in the debate was Megara and her position is refuted in the third reversal: Heracles accepts exile and insists on fighting against death. So not only is the debate a carefully balanced whole which establishes fundamental themes in the play, but it also helps shape the action that follows by introducing the terms in which the action evolves and by predicting its order.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Bond (above, note 2) 398 is surely correct that when Heracles says "these things are of secondary importance" (*πάρεργα* 1340), he cannot be referring exclusively "back some twenty lines to Theseus' arguments about the gods," but I see no reason to limit the statement, as does Bond, to Theseus' offer in 1324–29. I think that Theseus' whole speech, argument and offer, is being rejected.

<sup>19</sup> "Heracles annuls Megara's decision": Burnett (above, note 1) 163, note 9 (see also 173, 181), followed by J. Gregory, "Euripides' *Heracles*," *YCS* 25 (1977) 262.

<sup>20</sup> This is more than "a slight contradiction, which no audience would notice, of 179" (Bond, [above, note 2] 369).

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Kevin H. Lee, S. Douglas Olson, and the referees of *TAPA* for helpful criticism.