UGLY PRODUCTIONS

AN AESTHETICS OF GREEK DRAMA

A. C. DUNCAN

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University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

Published in the United States of America by the
University of Michigan Press
First published February 2025

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Duncan, A. C. (Alexander C.), author. | Michigan Publishing (University of Michigan), publisher.
Title: Ugly productions : an aesthetics of Greek drama / A.C. Duncan.
Description: Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 2025. | Includes bibliographical references (pages 247–272) and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2024044671 (print) | LCCN 2024044672 (ebook) | ISBN 9780472133598 (hardcover ; acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780472904853 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Ugliness in the theater. | Theater—Greece—History—To 500. | Costume—Greece—History—To 500. | Greek drama—History and criticism.
Classification: LCC PA3203 .D75 2025 (print) | LCC PA3203 (ebook) | DDC 882/.010935—dc23/eng/20241107
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024044671
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024044672

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12823887

The University of Michigan Press's open access publishing program is made possible thanks to additional funding from the University of Michigan Office of the Provost and the generous support of contributing libraries.

In memoriam: Sharon L. James, doctae carissimaeque amicae

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Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform via the following citable URL: https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12823887

Acknowledgments

Writing a book, especially a first book, is not a one-man show. Like the aesthetics of Greek drama it sets out to trace, the present volume is a product of countless personal, intellectual, and material influences. It is also the product of innumerable kindnesses, both small and substantial. It is with heartfelt gratitude that I recognize some, although inevitably not all, of these contributions here.

The seeds of this project were planted at the Farmington Festival Theatre where, under the direction of Leanne Young, I learned the ropes of the stage. Undergraduate days at the University of Michigan were no less formative. Like countless other Wolverines, I had H. D. Cameron to thank for introducing me to the classics during my first year. I count myself particularly fortunate to have had Ruth Scodel as a thesis advisor during my senior year. Teachers and mentors in the Classics Department (among them Ben Acosta-Hughes, Sara Ahbel-Rappe, Sue Alcock, Netta Berlin, Basil Dufallo, Ben Fortson, Jeremy Hartnett, Richard Janko, Donka Markus, Jay Reed, Gina Soter) were inspirational and kindly received my first forays into classical theater production. Providing theatrical space and financial support, the Residential College and Basement Arts theater programs hosted performances of *Acharnians* and *Bacchae*, both under the characteristically sharp and humane direction of Andrew Martin. Fond memories of time spent in Ann Arbor, and the impeccable support I have received from the production team, make me proud to publish this book with University of Michigan Press. Go Blue!

Upon foundations set in Michigan, the structure of *Ugly Productions* first arose in California. Special thanks are due to the members of my graduate cohort at Stanford: Nicholas Boterf, Elizabeth Jones, Matt Simonton, Rob Stephan, each of whom provided more laughs and friendly rivalry than

one could rightfully expect from six halcyon years spent in the Bay Area. Fellow Classics students, at earlier and later points in their graduate career, were no less motivating. Corby Kelly and James H. Collins, whom I got to know through their remarkable project Philosophical Stages, transformed my understanding of theater as art and pedagogy. They (and their students) provided impetus for Stanford Classics in Theater (SCIT), whose members (including cofounders Jason Aftosmis, Foivos Karachalios, James Kierstead, and Matt Simonton, as well as countless talented translators, performers, and producers since) reanimated and reoriented my own interest in ancient theater. It is with a smile that I recognize the impact of the following Bay-Area friends and collaborators on this book: Katie Aftosmis, Jackie Arthur-Montagne, Melissa Bailey, Will and Kelly Beals, Artemis Brod, Federica Carugati, Luis Cheng-Guajardo and Julia Grace, Megan Daniels, Thea de Armond, Juan Sebastian de Vivo, David Driscoll, Mary-Kay Gamel, Bill Gladhill, Tom and Julia Nelson Hawkins, David Jacobson, Sarah Janda, Kate Kreindler, Matthew Loar, Carolyn MacDonald, Katie McDonough, Sarah C. Murray, Micah and Sara Myers, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Mark Pyzyk, Brett Schneider, Alan Sheppard, Ava Shirazi, Stephen Sansom, Vince Tomasso, Darian Totten, Eirene Visvardi, Donni Wang, Hans Wietzke, Fletcher Wilson, and Peter Woodford.

Beyond the debt I owe generally to the Stanford Classics faculty and its many distinguished visitors, I thank Marsh McCall for encouraging me to think more about music and staging at a crucial juncture, Susan Stephens, for providing sage advice on several momentous occasions, and Grant Parker, who introduced me to so much over the years. It was Oliver Taplin who, upon learning about this project during a visit, first directed me to the vase painting that graces the cover of this book. Above all, my profound gratitude goes out to Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, who first saw the intellectual potential of this project and who, together with the rest of my committee, Richard Martin, Andrea Nightingale, and Rush Rehm, gave me inspiration and expertise in equal measure.

Early in this project I was fortunate to exchange a Northern California winter for a South African summer in 2009–2010. Time spent in Durban was made even sunnier by the kindness of the students, faculty, and staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus, including Susan Haskins, John Hilton, Jeffrey Murray, Szerdi Nagy, Suzanne Sharland, and Elke Steinmeyer, who provided first-rate hospitality and feedback on work still very much in progress. I am also grateful to Constance Dlamini, who unlocked new worlds during the stay.

A semiotic dissertation began its metamorphosis into a materially-oriented book at the University of Utah. Fellow classicists Alexis Christensen, Erin O'Connell, Margaret Toscano, Randy Stewart, and Jim Svendsen pushed me in productive and performance oriented directions. I was enriched, personally and professionally, by conversations with Karin Baumgartner, Beth Clement, Thérèse de Raedt, Nels Elde, Steven Farber, Katharina Gerstenberger, Amy Hawkins, Christine Jones, Jessen Kelly, Deanna Kepka, Anne Kirchoff, Naina Leary, Joe Metz, Nitin Phadnis, Lisa Purcell, Jeremy Rosen, Muriel Schmidt, Mike Traum, Martijn van Exel, Brian Whaley, Michelle Wolfe, and many other colleagues and friends in Salt Lake City who know who they are.

I am now fortunate to have called the University of North Carolina home for the better part of a decade. My brilliant colleagues in Classics and friends from other departments across campus have supported and inspired me in so many ways, as have L.E. Alexander, Kim Miles, Elissa Philips, and Cinnamon Weaver in Murphey Hall. I am grateful to writing-group friends Ben, Sheila, and Gillian Oxford, for focus (and distraction), especially during the pandemic, not to mention the socially-distanced companionship of Ronald Williams II, Corry Arnold, Sharon James, and Louise McReynolds during lockdown. In healthier times, living in Chapel Hill has put me in touch with a number of performance-minded collaborators, and I am grateful to Claire Catenaccio, Amy R. Cohen, T. H. M. Gellar-Goad, John Given, Lauren Donovan Ginsberg, Kari Lindquist, Michael Vazquez, and Erika Weiberg for building and sustaining interest in ancient drama in this American Southeast. I have benefited from conversations with scholars passing through North Carolina, including National Humanities Center fellow Melissa Mueller, as well as those who retired in the Research Triangle, including Peter Burian, Bob Connor, Cynthia Dessen, Bill Race, and George W. Houston, who is lately and sorely missed.

When academic work is not produced in the office, it is performed on the road. I appreciate the camaraderie and thought-provoking questions received at panels hosted by the Society for Classical Studies, the Classical Association of the Midwest and South, and Amy Cohen's Ancient Drama in Performance, which have invariably sharpened my thinking. Working alongside fellow performance-minded scholars and friends through the SCS Committee on Ancient and Modern Performance continues to inspire my work. Additionally, thematic conferences and workshops first put me on the scent of many tracks followed up in this book, including an Aesthetics Roundtable co-organized by Nancy Worman and Victoria Wohl at Colum-

bia University; Minds on Stage, jointly put on in Leiden by Ineke Sluiter and Felix Budelmann; a humor workshop convened by Pierre Destrée, Ralph Rosen, and Arnaud Zucker at Louvain-la-Neuve; and an ongoing workshop series in Lyon dedicated to thorny issues of theatrical spectatorship spearheaded by Anne-Sophie Noel.

I am fortunate to be able to thank several institutions as well. Progress on my research was generously supported by a 2011–2012 Geballe Fellowship from the Stanford Humanities Center, where shared space and time with many inspiring artists and scholars. Research leaves from the University of Utah and the University of North Carolina allowed me to make the kind of headway that would be difficult, if not impossible, while teaching a full course load. A grant from the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at UNC Chapel Hill has supported the indexing of this book.

Although time dedicated to research was invaluable, conversations with students were no less essential. I am especially grateful to the students who enrolled in my graduate seminars on ugliness in Salt Lake City (Molly Barnewitz, Darby Fanning, Keri González, Aubrey Hawks, Olga Savenkova, Sheena Mugavin Steckle, Jane Stringham) and Chapel Hill (Kelly McArdle, Lindsey McCoy, Ian McLean, Brian McPhee, and India Watkins Nattermann). My thinking has also been sharpened from conversations about phenomenology and theater history with Elizabeth Needham and Nick Bolig, the latter of whom assisted in preparing this book's bibliography. To all my students, past, present, and future: you are my best audience.

In closing, I have the pleasure of naming the three individuals most responsible for bringing this project into publication. Michelle Dionne Thompson helped me sort out what was important when I felt most lost; Patricia Rosenmeyer, with extraordinary generosity, led me to rediscover (and others to see) the potential in work once put aside; and, finally, Ellen Bauerle deftly navigated this book through various obstacles over a compressed timeline. My gratitude to Ellen naturally extends to the anonymous readers for the University of Michigan Press, who received this manuscript generously and critically and whose feedback improved it in countless ways. The production team in Ann Arbor, too, has been first class. All errors that remain are entirely my own.

If I have reserved thanking my family until now, it is only because their support has been across location and era. My parents, Sue and Russ Duncan, have seen me through all of life's moments, dark and bright. My mothers-in-law, Kaye de Kruif and the late Dawn Jarvis, made Chapel Hill and North Carolina feel like home long before I moved, as did the entire

Jarvis clan. My sons, Alex and Dash, are daily reminders of the beauty in the world and potent antidotes for ugly feelings. (This book could not have been finished without my sons' fantastic teachers and day-care professionals or the Pesonen family, who provided a neighborly second home during the Covid-19 lockdown.) Last but not least, Lauren Jarvis has been my closest companion and confidant through it all, an unflagging source of inspiration, consolation, and direction — from the coast to the high desert, from North Carolina to South Africa, and across no less diverse geographies of moods and ideas.

I look forward to paying back (and forward) the generosity that made this work possible. One debt of gratitude, however, cannot be repaid. Sharon L. James, my colleague, mentor, and friend in Chapel Hill, was (as everyone who ever met her knows) a fiery conversationalist, a champion of the underappreciated, and a tireless advocate on behalf of students and junior colleagues. Sharon's unexpected passing was a shock from which few of us have fully recovered. Sharon and I talked about this project many times; I wish she were here to receive it now, *modo pumice expolitum*. Those conversations we did have remain beautiful memories, and it is to Sharon's memory that I dedicate this ugly little book.

Introduction

Ugliness and Greek Drama

To challenge traditional discussions of Greek dramatic aesthetic by placing ugliness not at the margins of the stage, but front and center, one might as well begin at tragedy's end.[1] Under a bright Athenian sun in the spring of 401 BCE, two backlit figures hobble as one into the playing space of the Theater of Dionysus. The identities of the young woman and elderly man whom she supports, if ever they were in doubt, are not hidden from theatergoers for long. The man speaks first (Soph. *OC* 1–4)[2]:

1. A note on terms: Although "drama" and "theater" are popularly used interchangeably, in this book I adopt and adapt the distinction between "theater" and "drama" widely used in performance studies (see Worthen 2000, 1–10, and Balme 2008, 4–5). The technical use of these terms associates "theater" primarily with the architectural play space and the performances that occur there and "drama" with the more verbal aspects of the play. This distinction, developed for modern theater studies and performance studies, can in some cases be awkward when applied to ancient Mediterranean contexts. Outside of architectural and material studies, we moderns necessarily approach the ancient theater primarily *through* dramatic texts. In this book, I use "theater" to refer to the building as well as the historical, ephemeral, performance event, which may be reconstructed, whether imaginatively in readers' minds or theoretically in scholarly argument. Drama, on the other hand, should be understood as a super-category that includes not only this (reconstructed) sense of theater, but also the independent existence of the dramatic work in memory, text, reperformance, and other iterative or permanent modes of existence. "Dramatic aesthetics" thus serves as an umbrella term that seeks points of commonality between staging and reading. Drama is defined capaciously because I understand fifth-century *plays* (a switch-hitting term I use to refer to individually titled works, whether on the stage or the page) to have a complex nature.

2. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. Abbreviations in notes follow the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed.

τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνη, τίνας
χώρους ἀφίγμεθ' ἢ τίνων ἀνδρῶν πόλιν;
τίς τὸν πλανήτην Οἰδίπουν καθ' ἡμέραν
τὴν νῦν σπανιστοῖς δέξεται δωρήμασιν;

Child of a blind old man, Antigone, to what
land have we come, to the city of what men?
Who will receive the wandering Oedipus
on this day, with meager gifts?

These words open the posthumous performance of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, the final work of a man regarded as the last of the great Greek tragedians. The production is a highly anticipated event on the Athenian civic calendar; excitement is fed, in no small part, by Sophocles' earlier engagement with Theban myth. His *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, tragedies that premiered decades before, and left a substantial mark upon the city's cultural memory, played with such grisly ideas as kin-murder, suicide, pollution, and the mutilation of bodies both living and dead.[3] The audience is prepared to receive the production as a work of retrospection, fulfillment, and transcendence, not only in terms of its mythic narrative, but also with respect to its place in the history of Athenian drama. Might *Oedipus at Colonus*, whose title promises to bring the cursed king to Attica, continue in this gruesome vein?

Onstage, again and at last, stands the archetypal abomination of Greek tragic myth: Oedipus. Cursed in birth and life, marked by his horrible deeds no less than his appearance, Oedipus seeks to confer religious blessings, "meager gifts," upon the land and people that receive his extraordi-

3. All dates in reference to the ancient Greek world are BCE unless otherwise noted. That Sophocles was by 401 already canonized as part of the "big three" fifth-century tragedians is assured by Aristophanes' *Frogs* (cf. Ar. *Ran*. 76–77 and 786–94), first produced at the Athenian Lenaea festival in 405. Plays by others, including the *Iphigenia at Aulis* of Euripides, had already posthumously premiered. The premier of *Oedipus at Colonus*, revised and produced by Sophocles' grandson (also named Sophocles), may have been received as an act of familial piety that resonated with the play's themes. Dawe 2006 suggests that *OC* may have been part of a restaged "Theban trilogy," premiering amidst reprisals of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, but this is speculative. The apocryphal story that Sophocles proffered his manuscript of *OC* as evidence against a charge of senility is not historically credible (see Lefkowitz 1981, 84–85), but nevertheless suggests that the titles, topics, or even texts of in-progress could be anticipated well ahead of production.

nary corpse.[4] True value, *Oedipus at Colonus* insists, is not always to be found where, or as, it is expected. With plodding movements and deliberate speech, Oedipus commands the audience's attention from the moment he enters the stage. Through an irony worthy of Sophocles' complex engagement with vision across his plays, the violent act with which Oedipus took away his own eyesight in the climactic finale of *Oedipus the King*, when he at last recognized himself as his father's killer and his mother's second husband, now renders him the object of others' morbidly curious gaze.[5] The eponymous hero of *Oedipus the King* exited the stage declaring himself unable to look upon a world so befouled by his incestuous and lethal acts and wished to be hidden under land or sea so that he might no longer be seen by others. Oedipus now returns, covered in the dust and grime of his wanderings, a veritable icon of abjection in the *theatron*, the Greek "seeing place" par excellence.[6]

And seen Oedipus is. From his hobbling entrance to his miraculous exit that sets up the end of the play, Oedipus is a constant presence and visual focus in the tragedy that bears his name. Oedipus' opening words signal that his advanced age and disability will be salient features of his stage presence; these are familiar aspects of theatrical identity that were conventionally represented through certain masks and costumes as well as the actors' movement and, one presumes, voice. While there are many ways to signal a tragic character's age and ableness, it is Oedipus' gouged-out eyes that mark the hero most distinctively within the mythic and dramatic imaginary. Various stories of Oedipus' blinding would have been familiar to ancient audiences, some more disturbing than others. As encounters with other characters over the course of the play reveal, however, knowledge of Oedipus' past only partially prepares one for being in the man's singular

4. Athenian tragedy may have been particularly concerned with Thebes (see esp. Zeitlin 1990), but the story of Oedipus' incestuous marriage was part of the panhellenic epic cycle (cf. Hom. *Il.* 23.677–80; *Od.* 11.271–80). For a contemporary (and humorous) perspective on Oedipus' cursed fate, see Ar. *Ran.* 1182–1196. On *OC* and hero cult, see Burian 1974, Edmunds 1981, Easterling 2006, and Currie 2012, 337–43. On the dramatic aesthetics of bodies, see part III.

5. On the (often ironic) connections between vision and insight in Sophocles, see especially Seale 1982 and Thumiger 2013, and cf. esp. Soph. *OC* 74–75; on sound and its relationship to sight in the play, see Haselswerdt 2019. The finale of *OT* is remarkable in many respects, including its length and visual focus, on which see Budelmann 2006. On connections between the finale of *OT* and many of the questions raised by *OC*, see Holmes 2013, and cf. *OT* 1371–1389 and 1409–1412.

6. On Oedipus' vulnerability as virtue in this scene, see McCoy 2013, xi.

presence.[7] As the Athenian king Theseus remarks upon first meeting Oedipus (Soph. *OC* 551–56):

> πολλῶν ἀκούων ἔν τε τῷ πάρος χρόνῳ
> τὰς αἱματηρὰς ὀμμάτων διαφθορὰς
> ἔγνωκά σ', ὦ παῖ Λαΐου, τανῦν θ' ὁδοῖς
> ἐν ταῖσδε λεύσσων μᾶλλον ἐξεπίσταμαι.
> σκευή τε γάρ σε καὶ τὸ δύστηνον κάρα
> δηλοῦτον ἡμῖν ὅνθ' ὃς εἶ . . .
>
> Through hearing much in times past about the
> bloody destruction of your eyes,
> I recognize you, child of Laius; now, too,
> looking upon you, on this journey, I understand you better.
> For both your clothing and your wretched head
> make clear to me who you are . . .

This meeting of two kings is momentous, an inflection point not only within the dramatic plot but for the aesthetics of the production as well. Although Theseus recognizes the stranger (*egnōka s'*, 553) based in part upon prior verbal reports, it is Oedipus' visual presence (note the demonstrative adjective *taisde*, 554) that, in the current moment (*tanun*, 553), grants the king "better" (*mallon*, 554) insight into his identity.[8] In addition to Oedipus'

7. On issues of "audience competency" with respect to classical-era Athenian drama, see Revermann 2006b. Euripides also wrote an *Oedipus* play, fragments and testimonia of which are collected and discussed by Collard, Crop, and Lee 1995, 115–132. Euripides' version treated roughly the same part of Theban myth as Sophocles, but with some significant differences: Oedipus, although also blinded, does not inflict his own wounds, but is instead (cf. Eur. fr. 541) attacked by servants of Laius (compare the vengeful blinding of Polymestor by Hecuba and her servants at Eur. *Hec.* 1035). Metrical evidence suggests a date for Euripides' Oedipus between 419 and 406: far more recent than S. *OT*, which is often dated to around 430. Which of these dramatic versions of the myth (potentially among others) would be most on theatergoers' minds must have depended upon many factors, but the self-blinding narrative had become an infamous part of his myth: cf. Ar. *Ran*. 1195.

8. On the importance of recognition in Greek tragic plots, see Arist. *Poet*. 16.1454b19–1455a21. Despite the latter's etymological connection to sight, the verb γιγνώσκω may be distinguished from οἶδα for emphasizing "perception" over "reflection" (LSJ s. v. γιγνώσκω I.1). Theseus emphasizes the depth of his present experience through an added prefix on ἐξεπιστάμαι and the adverb μᾶλλον. On the negative associations of Oedipus' fame, see Van Nortwick 2012, 142–43, who observes its quasi-meta-literary character. The noun phrase ὁ πάρος χρόνος, when used elsewhere in tragedy (Soph. *El.* 1445–46, Eur. fr. 285.9) refers to earlier portions of an individual's life, not some mythical or cultural past.

telltale eyes, Theseus draws attention to superficial but significant aspects of the wanderer's appearance, including his soiled clothing (*skeuē*, 555, a term also used technically to refer to theatrical "costume") and his head (*kara*, 555).[9] It is thus to the composite presence of Oedipus, not merely his remarkable story and distinctive injury but his embodied presence as a whole, that Theseus holistically responds. This recognition scene, focalized through Theseus' words, reminds audiences that some things cannot be known simply through verbal report. They must also be *seen*; they must also be *felt*.[10]

Seeing, hearing, knowing, and feeling, as Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* will repeatedly insist, are not discrete experiences, but imbricate and interact with each other in complex ways. Through its presentation of Oedipus, this last surviving work of fifth-century tragedy not only prismatically refracts Athens' storied dramatic tradition, but also dramatizes the fundamental claim of this book: Words, materials, and the many other abstract and physical components of the Greek theater do not separately define dramatic aesthetics, but functioned together in the theater and so, in their analysis, demand an integrative account. Ugliness, this book suggests, is a profoundly negative and affective aesthetic state crucial to the social and psychological function of the theater, lurking in the interstices and gaps between words and materials, forms and moods, knowledge and perception.

Theseus' words call attention to a crucial aspect of experiencing dramatic art across time, culture, and media. Even when theatergoers or readers are, like Theseus, already familiar with a story or event, the phenomenal experience of its dramatic *re-presentation* can have novel, sometimes profound, psychological effects.[11] The horrible, the sublime, the uncanny,

9. Whether on account of tact or for the sake of theatrical convenience, Theseus "zooms out" from Oedipus' eyes, a legacy of his past, to the sordid materiality that defines his present. Greek κάρα, a poetic alternative for κεφαλή particularly favored by Sophocles, refers narrowly to Oedipus' eyes at Soph. *OC* 285, but can also stand metonymically for an entire person; cf. Soph. *Ant.* 1. At Soph. *OC* 1256–61, the arriving Polynices laments the sorry state of his father's clothing, corrupted by filth (πῖνος), as well as his unkempt hair (κόμη . . . ἀκτένιστος) and meager rations (θρεπτήρια), features Polynices considers related (ἀδελφὰ).

10. On the narratological term of "focalization" as applied to Homeric epic, see de Jong 2004. On the connections between epic "vision" and the way play-internal spectators shape vision in tragedy, see Slatkin 2007. Focalization, in a strict sense, occurs in drama only within embedded narrative (see de Jong 1991 and de Jong, Nünlist, and Bowie 2004: xvi–xvii) but some (cf. Scodel 2005, 194) question this distinction.

11. From this perspective Theseus' words counter the idea, expressed at Arist. *Poet.* 14.1453b3–6, that simply hearing the plot is sufficient to produce the essential emotional

the fantastic—these distinctive, powerful, and storied aesthetic states rarely result from plain-spoken description or reference to prior knowledge.[12] They require, instead, particular framing and often multisensory stimulation, precisely the conditions Theseus experiences and the dramatic arts support. It is through the complex and dynamic interactions and encounters between subjects and objects, materials and mental states, that emotions, knowledge, and ultimately aesthetics are not just represented, but phenomenally *produced* within the performative "becoming" of dramatic art.[13] Ugliness is not only a fundamental mode or practical means of Greek drama, but one of its most important products.

Although illustrative of the aesthetics of drama, Theseus' response to Oedipus is hardly the definitive account of the character's appearance within the play.[14] Audience members' sense of their own dramatic vision evolves over time, resisting association with any singular vantage point as characters enter and leave the stage. Theseus offers neither the first nor the last word on Oedipus' appearance: onlookers see the aged hero in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts.[15] For example, the Stranger from Colonus, whom Antigone and her father first encounter in the prologue, describes Oedipus as "noble, at least to one looking" (*gennaios, hōs idonti*, 76). This is a remarkable and possibly ironic initial description, given not only the character's well-known history but also the negative reactions to Oedipus' appearance that follow in the play. Oedipus repeatedly draws the gaze of others while remaining, as he himself recognizes,

effects of tragedy. On connections between plot and emotion in Aristotle, see esp. Belfiore 1992. On the aesthetic consequences of a purposeful lack of plot in modern literature, see Shin 2019.

12. Each of these aesthetic categories have substantial bibliographies; on horror, see esp. Carroll 1990; on the fantastic, see Todorov 1973 (1970). The sublime and uncanny are discussed further below.

13. States 1985 is the classic work on theatrical phenomenology; for a review of recent studies on performance and phenomenology, see Sofer 2022. For a phenomenological approach to ancient Greek tragedy, see Weiss 2023.

14. Jusino 2019 makes the case for splitting Theseus' role between two actors, a production choice that would add further complexity to the audience's sense of intersubjective vision and assessment within the play.

15. Ugliness presents a useful lens through which to view drama in part because, by applying an aesthetic label such as *ugly*, one makes claims not only about objects themselves but also their relationship to perceiving subjects. Complex networks of subjects and objects are, of course, the theater's specialty.

"hard to face" (*dysprosopton eisorōn*, 286).[16] When Ismene, Oedipus' other daughter, belatedly arrives at Colonus, she looks upon her father as either "unfortunate" or "disfigured" to behold (*dysmoir' / dysmorph' horan*, 327).[17] For others, to look upon Oedipus is compared to an arduous journey (cf. 324–26), to behold him a source of pain (*algō . . . horōn*, 744–45). Seeing him is a cause of terror (*deinos men horan*), as is hearing him speak (*deinos de kluein*, 141). These different facets of Oedipus' dramatic aesthetics, each revealing in its own way, defy any single description and blur simple distinctions between dramatic sight, sound, and circumstance. But they consistently mark Oedipus' presence as visually noteworthy and emotionally affecting; whatever else Oedipus may be, he is *not* a matter of aesthetic indifference.

Readers may have noticed a curious stylistic feature common to many of the descriptive phrases listed above, in which adjectives are presented alongside either a participle or infinitive expressing the act of seeing (or, in the final example, hearing).[18] These pairings do more than limit the relevance of a broadly descriptive term, anchoring *gennaios* (which, depending upon context, might be translated as "true to one's birth," "noble," "high-minded," "excellent"), to the specific sensory modality of sight. Such phrases also call simultaneous attention to the objective and subjective sides of vision, to the reflexive affective relationship between the perceived qualities of the viewed and the affective disposition of the viewer. It is disagreeable to face Oedipus' disagreeable face; to see his pain is itself a cause of pain.[19] Like-

16. Oedipus' curious apology calls both his marred face, theatrical mask (Greek πρόσωπον) to mind, potentially scrambling the mimetic boundaries of performance. On the ontological ambiguities of the dramatic mask and its affective power, see Duncan 2018.

17. The manuscripts transmit either δύσμορ' (which violates the meter) or the hapax δύσμοιρ', leading some modern editors (including Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990) to follow Büchler's emendation, δύσμορφ'. Although the textual ambiguity does not affect my argument, the ease of such scribal and conceptual slippage reveals that the negativity (δυσ-) of the adjective is essential. In this discussion and throughout, I follow the familial terms used the play (e.g., "father," "sister," etc.), while recognizing the genealogical irregularity of this situation: Oedipus is also a half-brother to his children, etc.

18. Circumstantial use of the participle is more common in Greek than in English, often qualifying the main verb temporally, conditionally, causally, etc., without clear distinction: see Smyth 1984, §2054–2056. For the "epexegetical" use of infinitives to define the meaning of adjectives, see Smyth 1984, §2001–2002.

19. Greek πρόσωπον, a word that signified both face and dramatic mask in the fifth century, shares this fundamental reflexivity. As David Wiles (2007, 1) notes, providing the English calque "before the gaze" for the Greek term, "the gaze in question might equally belong to me the seer or you the seen."

wise, the Stranger's claim that Oedipus looks "noble" may reflect the high-mindedness of this Colonean everyman, who first embodies the Attic values of liberality and hospitality the play later associated with Theseus.[20]

Such phrases are more than simply descriptive; in the context of the Athenian theater, they are *performative*, producing new aesthetic realities.[21] When uttered, these social-aesthetic claims forge emotionally mediated relationships between subject and object. Collectively, these networked assertions form a referential matrix that constitutes an emergent aesthetic reality, a set of "intra-active" meanings forged in the interstices between subjects and objects.[22] This stylistic peculiarity supports the pervasive thematic linking of senses and knowledge of emotions and insight in the play. Such networked references also gesture toward the fundamentally affective quality and aesthetic reflexivity of dramatic vision in general.[23] Seeing is awash in feeling, especially in the theater, where words frame and mediate sensory modes and affective moods. What is seen, what is said, and what is felt in the theater are all mutually constitutive.

Words, vision, and emotions are also entwined with dramatic space, a reminder that dramatic aesthetics are always firmly contextual. When the Chorus of elderly Colonean men enters in pursuit of the man reported to be violating the sacred grove of "dread-faced" (*deinōpes*, 84) goddesses, they exhort themselves repeatedly to "look" (*hora . . . prosderkou, leusse*, 118–121) toward a location from which they typically avert their eyes (*aderktōs*, 130). Upon first seeing and hearing Oedipus as he steps from his hiding place to put an end to their search, the Chorus collectively express their shock, exclaiming, "Oh, oh, he is terrible to see, terrible to hear" (*iō, iō, deinos men idein, deinos de kluein*, 141). The Chorus's initially inarticulate response leaves unclear whether it is chiefly to Oedipus' hideous face that they respond, or else his sudden and unexpected appearance or even his

20. Stewart 2019 considers similar dynamics between hereditary excellence and aesthetic limitation in Euripides' *Electra*.

21. The critical concept of performativity originates in the linguistic work of Austin 1965 and Searle 1969, but its application has been extended to many aspects of culture, perhaps most notably, gender (see esp. Butler 1988). On performativity and performance, see Parker and Sedgwick 1995; on performativity and affective engagement with objects, see Sedgwick 2003; on collective potential of performativity, see Butler 2015.

22. On the "intra-active" performativity that occurs between subject and object, see esp. Barad 2003 and 2007, discussed below.

23. Even basic realities, such as distance from a city, are framed with reference to sight; Antigone qualifies that the towers of Athens are not far off, "at least to the eyes" (ἀπ' ὀμμάτων, Soph. *OC* 15), a phrase that underlines her father's blindness by contrast.

position in the inviolable grove.[24] Also unclear are the reasons Oedipus is terrible to hear: it may be that the Chorus reacts to a peculiar quality of his speech (either the tone of his voice, the content of his words, or his violation of ritual silence). However, the Chorus's joint focus on seeing and hearing, in a parallel expression supported by correlative particles *men . . . de*, suggests a quasi-synaesthetic, cross-modal sensory response.[25] It is seeing *and* hearing Oedipus collectively, and in close proximity to his sacrilegious presence, that leave the Chorus nonplussed.

As the play anchors characters' reactions to their sensory experiences, it studiously avoids attributing specific qualities to Oedipus himself. In so doing, the tragedy draws upon an aesthetic tradition (or, one might also say, poetic strategy) familiar from the Homeric epic. As Edmund Burke observed in his influential *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, first published in 1757, Homer's depiction of Helen similarly forgoes details to great effect when presenting an aesthetic extreme:

> [N]ot one word said of the particulars of [Helen's] beauty; no thing which can in the least help us to any precise idea of her person; but yet we are much more touched by this manner of mentioning her than by these long and labored descriptions of Helen, whether handed down by tradition or formed by fancy, which are to be met in some authors. In reality poetry and rhetoric do not succeed in exact description so well as painting does; their business is *to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the*

24. Jebb (1885, 34) notes the suddenness of their perception: "[T]he Chorus merely utters their horror at first *seeing* and *hearing* the wretch who has dared so great an impiety;—they have not yet had time to scan the traces of misery which the blind man's form exhibits" (original emphasis). The continuous and collective presence of the Chorus often renders this body a natural visual authority within Greek drama, but the elders of *Oedipus at Colonus* have especially close ties to vision: Antigone calls them ἐπίσκοποι, "over-seers" (112), perhaps recalling the label of the Colonean stranger as a scout, σκόπος (35). In their collective purpose and zeal to find the man violating the grove, the Chorus lay particular claim to visual authority while dramatically anticipating the moment of their encounter. On the social and rhetorical authority of the Colonean chorus of elders, see Dhuga 2005 and Hawthorne 2009, 39–43.

25. The Chorus's response is also plausibly informed by the numinal presence of the Eumenides; such over-determination and stacking of sources of negative affect is characteristic of dramatic aesthetics. On Rudolf Otto's notion of a non-rational "numinous" aesthetics, see Sarbacker 2016.

> *mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves*. This is their most extensive province, and that in which they succeed the best.[26]

Burke's Enlightenment-era concerns anticipate many twenty-first-century trends in aesthetic thought, discussed further below. In particular, Burke's focus on affect, mental states, and the sympathetic experience of responding to the "effect of things" on others resonate with recent cognitive and materialist turns. Yet Burke's categorical distinction between poetry or rhetoric on the one hand and painting on the other (a division that would be espoused and elaborated upon less than a decade later by Burke's contemporary, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in his *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*) can only with difficulty be applied to dramatic aesthetics. In the theater, words and images, music and movement, entwine in ways difficult to disentangle. Oedipus' dramatic appearance is characterized not so much by an absence of description or reflection so much as dynamism and intersubjectivity in unfolding dramatic time before an audience. While the convergence of poetic strategy and artistic convention across genres and media profoundly influence dramatic aesthetics, the emergent dynamics of their interactions extend beyond the sum of their parts.

Oedipus, seemingly aware of both the affective power and plasticity of his presence, strategically invites emotionally charged spectatorship when establishing his identity, demanding pity, or seeking special allowances.[27] Aesthetics are fundamental to these endeavors. Immediately after the Chorus's emotional outburst at first seeing him, Oedipus asks, "Do not, I beg you, look upon me as a lawless man" (*mē m', hiketeuō, prosidēt' anomon*, 142). In its immediate dramatic context, Oedipus' words refer to his transgression of the sacred boundary of the grove, but they support an unfold-

26. Burke's *Inquiry* was revised and reprinted two years later, appearing in many subsequent editions. On Burke's "doubled aesthetics" that link beauty with the sublime, see Gasché 2012. This is one of many connections between aesthetic and other values in criticism across time and culture, extending from Plato to Scarry 1999 and beyond. On the aesthetic concept of the sublime and its connections to both beauty and ugliness in art, see Costelloe 2012. On the sublime in the ancient world, see esp. Porter 2016 and its de Jonge's (2020) review.

27. See, among other passages, Soph. *OC* 109–110. On the cognitive dimension of such "sight invitations" in Greek drama, see Duncan 2023b.

ing aesthetic interpretation as well.[28] Through the very grammar of this statement (which in Greek, as in English, reflects the cognitive metaphorical relationship between seeing and thinking), Oedipus frames vision not merely as sensory faculty capable of redirection, but as a cognitively mediated exchange between viewers and viewed.[29] What begins as a request for others to avert their gaze (i.e., "*Do not look* upon me . . .") ends as prescriptive guide to visual interpretation (". . . *as* a lawless man"), shaping spectators' conceptual, emotional, and ultimately moral response to Oedipus's presence. In the theater as in the courtroom, words shape not only if, but also what and how, we see and judge.

But how should *we* spectators and readers see Oedipus critically, and as what? How does this character, who attracts, invites, and manipulates the vision of others within the drama, look to those assessing *Oedipus at Colonus* as work of art from outside the mimetic frame? How, in the first instance, might Oedipus have appeared to those seated in the theater of Dionysus in 401, who received verbal evidence alongside visual cues in real time and in the company of other theatergoers? How might their experience compare to that of readers or listeners, across time, who imagine Oedipus solely with their "mind's eye"? As Burke reminds us, poetic texts are free to leave visual details indeterminate; in embodied performance, however, verbal descriptions are anchored to the persistent presence of an actor who, though the unsettled dynamics of the audience's aesthetic experience, may accrete or shed such descriptions over the course of the play depending upon their dramatic salience. The Greek theatrical body, covered from head to toe by a mask and costume, introduces a further layer of aesthetic complication, as theatrical garments assert their own status as materials while remaining open to semiotic inscription.[30] Presenting a former royal who has been reduced to rags, Oedipus' tattered costume simultaneously conceals as it reveals, scrambling temporal and ontological distinctions between past and present, reality and mimesis, clothing and costume.[31] What, under

28. The Colonean stranger informs Oedipus he violates holy ground at Soph. *OC* 37.

29. On the "knowing is seeing" metaphor, see Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 48.

30. On the semiotics and materiality of the Greek tragic costume, see esp. Wyles 2011.

31. From his opening words to his exit at 1555, the actor portraying Oedipus is always onstage. There is no opportunity for an offstage change of mask nor, apparently, is there any visible change of costume. Oedipus exits wearing the same mask and garments with which he enters the stage. When Theseus mentions Oedipus' "clothing" or "costume" (σκευή, Soph. *OC* 555), does he do so meta-theatrically?

such intricately layered circumstances, may be understood as real or metaphorical, material or symbolic? What can be formally delineated, and what must be affectively felt? To put the central question of these interrogations crudely but concisely: Is Oedipus *ugly*?

The Riddle of Oedipus: Taking Another Look at Dramatic Aesthetics

This question "Is Oedipus ugly?" elicits further, ramifying inquiries pertaining to the phenomenal experience of ugliness and its critical inclusion within dramatic aesthetics. For instance, should ugliness properly be considered an aesthetic category, or is it rather an extension of other (e.g., moral or social) systems of value? Is ugliness anchored in our embodied experience, or can it be purely circumstantial, as one might speak of an "ugly business" in English? Might it even be that ugliness, whether as a theoretical construct or phenomenal experience, fundamentally confounds such distinctions? The mimetic frame of drama further complicates these ugly questions. How, for instance, does one account for the "paradox" of ugliness in art, as articulated by philosophers from Aristotle to David Hume, namely, that we seem to take pleasure in the artistic representation of things which, outside of a mimetic frame, cause us pain or disgust? Are the repulsive qualities of ugliness somehow tempered, filtered, or transformed through mimetic representation? What does ugliness become in the theater, where a multiplicity of perspectives and the dynamic interactions between materials and words defy singular meaning?[32] Lastly, if ugliness is indeed realized in fundamentally different ways in different contexts and among different audiences, can it be meaningfully discussed across language, culture, time, and space?

Such questions are more easily and succinctly posed than answered. And yet, they must be broached when offering anything more than a narrow account of the aesthetics of Athenian drama. Drama, in general, has proven resistant to structuralist analysis along such dichotomies as text or performance, subject or object, material or symbol. Like ugliness, drama is too protean to stay neatly within fixed formal frameworks. For all its

32. To adopt terms Mikhail Bakhtin first applied to the novel, drama is an inherently "polyphonic" or "heteroglossic" art, expressing a variety of equally valid perspectives; see Bakhtin 1981(1935), 259–422.

conceptual messiness and indeterminacy, theater has an impressive track record as a culturally productive, emotionally affecting practice across eras and peoples. If a certain theoretical framework runs into obstacles as it approaches such concepts as "performance," "the tragic," or "ugliness," one should question the aptness of the theory no less than the phenomenal reality of the experiences thus labeled. Resisting rationalizing accounts of the art, Friedrich Nietzsche famously made such a move by locating the "birth of tragedy" in the "spirit of music," a chaotic, ecstatic, and irrational experience Nietzsche attributed to an essential "Dionysian" element in human nature.[33] Without following Nietzsche so far into metaphysical or essentializing domains, one may at least hold that Athenian drama was not developed to fulfill tidy theoretical categories but rather to stir and satisfy audiences through appealing simultaneously to their affective and rational capacities. Aesthetic tensions in the text reflect the multi-factor complexity of dramatic aesthetics, and although it is important to avoid circular reasoning and keep broader cultural contexts in mind, the playscripts of fifth-century Athenian drama may be considered to provide informed perspective own its genres' aesthetics. As passages from *Oedipus at Colonus* quoted above suggest, playscripts themselves offer complex evidence and nuanced perspectives on aesthetic questions, reflecting and interrogating the mechanisms of their realization in production and experience in performance.

Without offering a Gordian solution to the tangled knot of aesthetic questions listed above, this book presents an argument for why one should, indeed, call Oedipus (and many other tragic characters) *ugly*. To do so is not to delimit dramatic aesthetics, but rather to empower them to appeal to our affective sensibilities. Ugliness (it will become clear, if it is not so already) is deeply embroiled in systems of value and experience. To recognize the full extent of ugliness in drama, one must draw connections across ethical, social, religious, symbolic, and material spheres. Yet its embeddedness does not reduce ugliness to mere negativity or antivalue. In this introduction (and, more extensively, in the rest of this book) I will contend along several argumentative lines that ugliness should be recognized as a distinct, yet hardly detached, component of dramatic aesthetics. The book proposes a concept of ugliness constrained neither by lexical categories or constellations, on the one hand, nor, on the other, by abstract formalist definitions.

33. Nietzsche 1967 (1872); for discussion, see Porter 2000 and Daniels 2019; on the broader twentieth-century intellectual reception of Nietzsche's thoughts on tragedy, see Lecznar 2020.

Rather, it seeks to outline a specifically *dramatic* ugliness, an aesthetics anchored to embodied negative affective response. Dramatic ugliness is neither inherent to the figures represented by actors and objects of the stage, nor is it purely in the eye of the beholder. Rather, it is *produced* through the strategic interplay of words, ideas, materials, and memories.

The riddle of Oedipus' appearance is of no small thematic or theoretical consequence. Thematically, the peculiar representational modalities and ambiguities of drama prompt audiences to recognize and potentially reconsider their own aesthetic and moral preconceptions through engagement points of contact and discontinuities between the speech, action, music, and materials of the art. To ask if Oedipus is ugly is not only to ask what ugliness *is*, both within and outside art, but also what ugliness comprises and entails. In this way, the verbal framing of dramatic vision informs, as much as it caters to, the audience's aesthetic sensibility. *Oedipus at Colonus* provides a particularly good example of this thematic importance of aesthetics, prompting audiences to ruminate over the title character's appearance in modes closely parallel to those, within the narrative, by which Theseus and his fellow Athenians deliberate over the risks and rewards Oedipus brings with him to their city. Oedipus' ugliness may be contrasted with Helen's exceptional beauty, which similarly crystalizes and anchors the interconnected thematic concerns of persuasion, identity, and self-interest in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, *Helen*, and *Orestes*.[34] While many characters within these plays fall under the spell of Helen's bewitching beauty, theatrical audiences are inoculated against these charms by the "psychical" distance established by the dramatic form, through the materiality of theatrical production (i.e., representation by a masked male actor) and, more generally, the verbal framing of the script, which, as Burke noted of Homer, reflects beauty's effects on others.[35]

34. For fuller discussion of Helen's appearance in Eur. *Hel.* and its reflection in comedy, see chapter 4. On the Helen scene in Eur. *Tro.*, see esp. Luschnig 1971, 11, and Lloyd 1984; on the complicated aesthetic, generic, and historical relations between Eur. *Hel.*, *Or.*, and Ar. *Thesm.*, see Pucci 1997, Pucci 2012, Jendza 2015, and Jendza 2020. On Helen in general, see Blondell 2013. Of the three major tragedians, Euripides seems most frequently to have raised the issue of beauty, a major theme of his lost *Andromeda*, produced alongside *Helen* in 411. On that play, see Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995 and Pagano 2010: for the effects of Andromeda's erotic beauty, cf. esp frr. 125, 129, 136. On eros in Euripides, see Pucci 2016, 34–42.

35. On the concept of "psychical distance," see Bullough 1912 and Dickie 1961. On the affective power of the theatrical mask, see Duncan 2018. Mori 1970 offers the classic psychological study of the "uncanniness" of human-like figures; Mori's "uncanny valley

Even in plays with less obvious or profound concern, however, with the connections between appearances, knowledge, value, aesthetics are often *good to play with* in drama. The conventions of the Greek theater moderated and to some extent standardized the appearances of actors' bodies on stage, but the composite experience of dramatic performance nevertheless offered Athenians a laboratory for experimenting with aesthetic extremes, from the comedically exaggerated eroticized female bodies of flute-girls or such anthropomorphized concepts as Plenty or Peace, to the (quasi-)erotic lust of satyrs for wine and women.[36] But as much as Athenian drama may have played with beauty, it was far more concerned with shocking spectacles of negative aesthetic affect, examples of which form the evidentiary basis of this book. Ugliness, as we shall see, on account of its slippery semantics and its remarkable affective power, invites morbid and intellectual curiosity and generates new questions, while providing few answers of its own.

The complexity of dramatic aesthetics is itself productive, generating layers of interpretative meaning beyond what could be accomplished with words or images alone. In terms of theoretical reception, however, the theater's ambiguous aesthetics have sometimes proven more of a liability than an asset. Since personal aesthetics are often equivocal in drama, it has been possible for critics to ignore, repress, or otherwise rationalize away the contributions made by ugliness to Athenian drama, particularly within the genre of tragedy. In production, the other genres of fifth-century Athenian drama, Old Comedy and satyr play, wore ugliness literally "on their sleeve" (or, rather, in the case of mostly naked bodies of satyr play, shaggy loincloths). These enduring and iconic material aspects of the theater have, from antiquity to the present, been adduced to define and essentialize the aesthetics of their genre.

Perhaps the most influential of these materially assisted generic "definitions" is found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In a remarkable passage that ties together ethics and aesthetics, literary and visual form, materials and affective response, Aristotle takes the comedic mask as an object that concretely exemplifies the various qualities of the genre (Arist. *Poet.* 5.1449a32–37):[37]

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hypothesis" continues to be refined: see esp. Cheetham, Suter, and Jäncke 2011 and 2014. On the uncanny in literature and thought generally, especially since Freud 1919, see Royle 2003 and Masschelein 2012.

36. On the connection of such "beautiful girls" in comedy to fourth-century aesthetic discourse in Plato, see Gold 2021. On the social dynamics of presenting satyrs, see esp. Lissarrague 1990.

37. Following the text of Kassel 1965 and translation of Janko 1984, with modifications;

Ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν ὥσπερ εἴπομεν μίμησις φαυλοτέρων μέν, οὐ μέντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ ἐστι τὸ γελοῖον μόριον. τὸ γὰρ γελοῖόν ἐστιν ἁμάρτημά τι καὶ αἶσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, οἷον εὐθὺς τὸ γελοῖον πρόσωπον αἰσχρόν τι καὶ διεστραμμένον ἄνευ ὀδύνης.

Comedy is, as we said, a representation of people who are rather low (*phauloteros*), not, however, with respect to all/every kind of badness (*kakia*), but the laughable is a part of the ugly/shameful (*to aischron*). For the laughable is a sort of error and ugliness/mark of shame (*aischos*) that is not painful and destructive, just as, evidently, a laughable mask is something ugly/shameful (*aischros*) and distorted without pain.

Much ink has been spilled over this "partial definition" of comedy, not only for what it hints about the promised second book of the *Poetics* (now lost but apparently dedicated to comedy), but also what it might imply about tragic aesthetics through contradistinction. The passage is also remarkable, in a work that otherwise gives short shrift to theatrical objects, for incorporating materials into the consideration of dramatic form.[38] The essential issue for our present purpose is Aristotle's connection of antivalue across media and his use of various terms of negative evaluation (e.g., *phaulos*, "middling, slight, petty," *kakia*, "badness," and *aischros* "ugly, shameful" and *aischos*, "ugliness, mark of shame") to connect costume, character, genre, author, and audience.[39] For comparison, nowhere in the *Poetics* does Aristotle discuss the tragic mask or the generic symbolism it materially encodes, leaving modern scholars to look elsewhere for discussions of its aesthetics.[40] The omission of the tragic mask from *Poetics* may not be entirely accidental: in the academic hierarchies of value associated with Plato and

see also the more recent work of Tarán and Gutas 2012. The tenuously preserved text of the *Poetics* is highly uncertain: "a fascinating, yet nightmarish affair for editors" (Destrée 2015, 64).

38. On this passage, see discussions *ad loc.* in Janko 1987 and Halliwell 1987. On comedy's self-definition, see Silk 2000.

39. On this "low" genre's appeal to "low" individuals, Arist. *Poet.* 4.1448b24–26. On the classical-era connections made between dramatic genres and specific audiences and demographics, see my discussion in the epilogue.

40. On the aesthetics of the tragic mask, see Halliwell 1993, who emphasizes emotional passivity, and Marshall 1999, who emphasizes neutrality and flexibility. More recently, Peter Meineck (2011, 2018, and 2019) has explored the mask from a cognitive perspective.

Aristotle, materials routinely place below abstract form; in the *Poetics* in particular, theatrical production is considered less worthy of consideration than dramatic poetry.[41] Within a culture that routinely found it difficult to separate aesthetics from other systems of value, dramatic masks seem to have been prone to ugly associations, regardless of their generic affiliation.[42]

Although the tragic mask may not have provided such an "evident" example of its generic aesthetics as its comedic cousin, in its serene and unmarked expression, it may nevertheless have contributed to the forging of what Michael Silk has called a "pernicious" critical polarity established in *Poetics* between tragedy and comedy.[43] Dominant intellectual traditions since Aristotle have seized upon the materialities of production to associate ugliness exclusively with comedy, effectively suppressing the critical recognition of ugliness's crucial functions in tragedy. The inarguably exaggerated ugliness of the comic mask came to stand for the aesthetics of its genre, while the more subtle aesthetics of the tragic mask, open to inscription within the dramas themselves, were liable to ideological projections that might hold them as uniformly "beautiful" when, in dramatic practice, they often expressed a much wider aesthetic range.

Tragedy may have been intellectually cordoned off as the realm of the noble, good, and *beautiful* from an early era, but the aged, exiled, impoverished, maimed, and profoundly polluted Oedipus provides a compelling counterexample to any simple aesthetic distinction between the genres. How could such a figure be called "beautiful," whether by ancient Greek standards or by our own? And yet Oedipus' exceptional appearance is clearly significant: in a genre where personal appearances typically receive only passing mention, Oedipus stands as one the most aesthetically marked figures in all of ancient Greek drama. In the degree of his abjection and pollution, Oedipus may be exceptional, but he is hardly solitary. Critics since

41. On the place of theatrical production, or ὄψις (*opsis*), in *Poetics*, see Sifakis 2013 and Konstan 2013, who discuss the earlier, extensive scholarship on this topic across languages.

42. The reception of theatrical masks as ugly, frightful, or uncanny, regardless of genre, predates fourth-century philosophical analysis: cf. the use of μορμολυκεῖον "bogey-face" at Σ Ar. *Thesm.* 417, and Ar. frr. 31 and 130.; cf. Σ Ar. *Eq.* 693 and my discussion in Duncan 2018.

43. See Silk 2000, 55. Revermann (2006a, 147) notes of Old Comedy "its pervasive ugliness distinguishes the genre from tragedy and, less sharply, satyr play. . . . Deviations, i.e., beauty in comedy or ugliness in tragedy, seem to be very rare and significant, if they exist at all." On the ugly comedic body and its materiality in aesthetic and social contexts, see especially Stone 1984; Winkler 1990; Foley 2000; Varakis 2010; Compton-Engle 2015; and Piqueux 2022.

antiquity have recognized Greek theater's peculiar interest in impoverished, wounded, monstrous, and otherwise marginalized identities. Ugliness is a common thread and aesthetic throughline in fifth-century Athenian drama that merits its own theoretical moment in the sun.

To recognize ugliness as an intractable concept should be the beginning, rather than the end, of critical discussion. Still, having a firm grasp on a handful of basic points is essential before pursuing an ancient concept under a modern rubric. While it is not at all obvious which string to pull first when untangling this knotted concept, by considering dramatic ugliness from multiple angles and tugging gently but repeatedly at certain strategic points, a few promising threads start to emerge. What follows in this introduction is not a linear narrative of logical concatenation but rather a series of problems, impressions, and patterns. Surveying the language of ugliness and its place in the history of aesthetics, as well as certain interpretive issues pertaining to ugliness in the (performing) arts, these preliminaries set the stage for affect theory, a multifunctional theoretical toolkit well suited to first untangling, and then weaving together, the various strands of ugliness.

The Lexicon of Ugliness

Up to this point, I have used the word *ugly* without any explicit definition, relying upon the common understanding of the term to lay the essential groundwork for this study. But in both its lexicography and etymology, *ugliness* presents a peculiar and, in some respects, problematic rubric for a study of dramatic aesthetics. To justify its use here, an assessment of its advantages, disadvantages, and potential alternatives is needed.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, while noting the obsolete primary meaning of the *ugliness* as "horror, dread, loathing," defines the term as popularly used today as "the state of being ugly to look at; repulsiveness or marked inelegance of appearance."[44] The range of adjectival *ugly*, its verbal root, retains a wider semantic field than its derivative, denoting not only things "offensive or repulsive to the eye" and "[h]aving an appearance or aspect which causes dread or horror; frightful or horrible, esp. through deformity or squalor" but also those which are "suggestive of trouble or danger," "difficult," "angry," or even, in the substantive phrase, *the uglies*, "depression,

44. *OED*, *s.v.* "ugliness, *n.*" 1–2.

bad-temper."[45] Nominalized *ugliness*, then, has become associated with what might be considered a traditional aesthetic category, while *ugly* persists in establishing semantic connections across sensory, emotional, and circumstantial states.

The word's etymology, derived ultimately from the Old Norse word *ugga*, meaning "to fear, dread, apprehend," alongside its derivative forms which generally convey a sense of "loathing" and "disgust," helps to account for the way *ugly* refers not so much to a formal or qualitative attribute of the object as to the negative, repellent relationship between ugly object and perceiving subject. This visceral, personal urge to push away and dissociate from the "ugly" object, which lies at the core of the English term, brings "ugly" into close contact with a quality Julia Kristeva labeled "the abject," the curious power of certain experiences to dissolve distinctions between subject and object, self and other.[46] And yet the use of *ugly* to refer to social actions and experiences also locates the concept within anthropological or sociological frameworks. In its connections to religious taboo, *ugly* is also not far from Mary Douglas's concept of pollution as "dirt" or "matter out of place."[47] Beyond any single theoretical framework, the *ugly* seems to occupy nothing so much as negativity and antivalue as subjectively experienced by individuals and expressed in culture.

Words corresponding to English *ugliness* across languages exhibit a wide range of etymologies. French *laideur* (of Celtic origin, cognate with English "loathe" and Dutch *lelijk*), Italian *brutezza* (cf. Latin *brutus*, "heavy," "dull"), Spanish *fealdad* (from Latin *foedus*, "foul," cf. Portuguese *feo*,), and Romanian *urâțenie* (a nominalized form of *uri*, "hate," itself derived from Latin *horrere*) demonstrate remarkable lexical divergence within Romance languages from their common Latin stock. This is not surprising, as Latin itself has no single term equivalent to modern English aesthetic category. *Ugliness* corresponds roughly to the overlapping semantic range inhabited both by such conceptually positive terms as *foedus* (cf. the Iberian terms *fealdad* and *feo*, listed above) or *turpis*, "filthy," and negatively expressed vocabulary such as *deformis*, "deformed," *inhonestus* ("shameful, dishonorable"), etc. It is notable that Latin has a more unified lexicon of beauty, the

45. *OED*, *s.v.* "ugly, *adj.*, *adv.*, and *n.*"

46. See Kristeva 1982 (1980); for a lucid explication of Kristevan abjection, see Kołoszyc 2022.

47. Douglas 1966 offers the classic, structuralist discussion of pollution. On purity and pollution in Greek religion, see Petrovic and Petrovic 2016; on its aesthetic dimension in Greek drama, see discussions in part III.

adjective *pulcher* and noun *pulchritudo*, referring primarily to visual beauty, but also in extended use.[48] In many languages, we see ugliness signified by inherently negative terms that reflect the essential negativity of the affective response; notable, in this context, is Modern Greek ασχημία (*aschēmia*, literally "formlessness"), which likewise reflects a departure from norms and ideals.

This is merely a cross-cultural sampling of terms that leaves synonyms and lexical peculiarities to be explored elsewhere. Still, this selection is instructive: conceptually positive and negative, formal and affective, there is little unity in the lexicon of ugliness. This raises the important question of whether ugliness has sufficient conceptual clarity and coherence to support cross-cultural comparisons.

Considering the difficulties encountered when comparing the lexicon of ugliness across modern languages, there is appeal in taking a culturally internal, or "emic," approach to exploring an ancient Greek idea.[49] But basing a study upon ancient terms, while productive in some contexts, proves problematic when applied to negative aesthetics. To begin, were one to pick a leading classical-era Greek term approximating modern English "ugliness," one would likely settle first upon *aischos* and, for the descriptive term "ugly," the cognate adjective, *aischros*. As in English, one would observe a wide semantic range in adjectival *aischros* than nominal *aischos*, but, rather unlike the repulsive responses that characterize "ugly," with *aischros* one would find profound connections between moral and aesthetic senses.[50] In their *Greek Lexicon*, Liddel, Scott, and Jones define *aischros* primarily with such socially informed phrases as "causing shame," "dishonoring," "reproachful," noting that when used in its more limited aesthetic sense, which they gloss as "ugly," *aischros* is typically opposed to *kalos*.[51] As with the distinction between English *ugliness* (which is primarily visual and aesthetic) and *ugly* (with its wider semantic range), *aischros*, although a broad concept, has a pointedly aesthetic meaning in certain contexts.

The oppositional pairing of *aischros* and *kalos*, and the pointedly aesthetic meaning it generates, is crucial to this study. This pairing reveals not only that classical-era Greeks had a distinct aesthetic sense of what we

48. On the words, cf. *TLL* 10.2.2560–2576.

49. On emic and etic distinctions, which apply linguistic insight to anthropological concerns, see Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990.

50. An etymological link between αἶσχος and αἴδομαι, "to feel shame," is "plausible": see Beekes 2009 *s.v.* αἶσχος, *n.* On αἶδος, see Cairns 1993.

51. *LSJ s.v.* αἰσχρός.

might call "ugliness," but also that this sense was conceptually connected to notions of shame, dishonor, and reproach on the one hand, and on the other through lexical opposition to *kalos*. But *kalos*, of course, is another Greek term that is notoriously hard to define, not only in modern terms (e.g., "beautiful," "good," "fine," "noble," "honorable," "specious,"), but within fifth- and fourth-century conceptual frameworks as well. Several Platonic works notably grapple with the concept and leverage its ability to connect ethical, aesthetic, and utilitarian spheres.[52]

An entire Socratic dialogue, *Hippias Major*, is dedicated to the pursuit of a unitary definition of *to kalon* (roughly "the fine," with the definite article, the substantive, neuter form of *kalos*) in Greek that applies equally in all cases. Socrates and his eponymous interlocutor, however, soon run into counterexamples that vitiate even their most basic relational claims, and the discussion ends in exasperation. The aporetic ending of the dialogue, although cautionary in some respects, is encouraging in others: the *Hippias Major* makes clear that classical-era Athenians were not only aware of, but pointedly interested in, questions we would today call aesthetic (on this, see my discussion in the epilogue), which they recognized their vocabulary failed to precisely represent.

The *Hippias Major*'s failure to universally define *to kalon* suggests that similar difficulties would be encountered with attempting to delimit *aischron* as a concept. Analytic comparisons of paradigmatic *aischron* things for classical-era Greeks (objects, such as defecation; individuals, such as an old hag; moral failings, such allowing a loved one's corpse to be abused) and overlapping concepts such as shame (*aidos*) or dishonor (*atimia*) would eventually lead to some contradiction or absurdity in definition. And yet, such a failure to offer a unified definition of *to aischron* could hardly be taken as evidence that the ancients lacked an aesthetic concept.

Definitional issues naturally became acute in philosophical discussions, but Greek myth reveals a popular concern with semantic overlaps and gaps posed by language, as such paradoxical phrases as *kalon kakon*, "a beautiful evil," applied in Hesiod's *Theogony* to Pandora, reveals.[53] What it means to be beautiful or ugly was not only problematized from our very earliest Greek texts, it was also a question that served as a continuous engine for Greek mythic imagination. Indeed, as the work of James I. Porter, Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray, and many

52. The bibliography on this topic is substantial; see my discussion in the epilogue.

53. Hes. *Theog.* 585.

others have emphasized, through different means, "ancient aesthetics" were (and are) an active site of vibrant intellectual and cultural activity.[54]

Still, tracing a single word or lexical constellation can be a useful way to pin down an otherwise elusive topic. *Kalos*, and the related noun *kallos*, are the joint topic of David Konstan's *Beauty: The Fortunes of a Greek Idea*.[55] A primary goal of Konstan's study, as its subtitle conveys, is to trace the concept or "idea" of beauty across time, simultaneously documenting and theorizing beauty as it moves through Greek history and literature, across genres and media. Seeking commonality and continuity, Konstan reads widely across genres and periods, in seeking previously unobserved connections and patterns, he elides established generic differences, such as those between the beauty of tragic heroines like Helen or Iole and the bawdy spectacles of flute-girls in comedy. His diachronic approach justifies a tightly circumscribed focus on *kallos* and *kalos*, largely eschewing the burdens and complexities involved in mapping synchronic relations between the lexeme and proximate terms within its semantic field, such as *eumorphia*, *euprepia*, *hōra*, and their various forms. Furthermore, in part because *kallos* is so prototypical of the Greek concept and language of beauty, Konstan can give short shrift to any super-linguistic concept.[56] From his survey, Konstan concludes that the noun *kallos* is enduringly associated with sexual attraction (*erōs*) and that this erotic connection remains potent, albeit latent, within the more generalized forms of beauty denoted by the adjective *kalos*. Those familiar with Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium* will not find Konstan's connection between *eros* and *kalos* novel, but his work still advances discussion of Greek aesthetics by anchoring the terminology of aesthetic value prototypically to embodied affect, joining in the recent turn of those revisiting purely formalist ideas of Greek aesthetics. His study of the noun-adjective pair *kallos-kalos*, which partly determines the meaning of *aischos-aichros*, demonstrates how, even as the adjective expands its semantic range through transference and formalization, a fundamental connection to embodiment may persist.

Due to their remarkably high frequency in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, not only *aischros*, but the related term *kakos*, may appear particularly promising terms for tracing a distinctly *tragic* negativ-

54. For their major works, see especially Porter 2010 and 2016; Peponi 2012; Destrée and Murray 2015.

55. Konstan 2014.

56. In *hypernymity* of καλός and κακός, see Sluiter 2008. On prototype theory and its application to linguistic and cultural concepts, see Rosch 1973 and, with respect to language in particular, Lakoff 1987.

ity, perhaps even along methodological lines similar to Konstan's. And yet, as Ineke Sluiter has indicated, a term such as *kakos* is so capacious as to be a "hypernym" in the language, a word that subordinates other words while remaining itself so "radically underdescriptive and underdetermined" that its interpretation depends almost entirely upon situation and context.[57] *Aischros*, although its semantic range is narrower, being anchored to subjectivity and social assessment, tends to express negativity across ethical, social, religious, and aesthetic spheres. Terms with a narrower semantic range and application, such as *dyseidēs* or *amorphos*, or terms that refer to such shameful states as publicly enduring pain (*algos*) and pollution (*miasma*, etc.), face different challenges. Despite their respective subjective and formalist attractions, such words (of which there are perhaps a dozen core stems, with variations) are not only used too rarely within drama to support a systematic study, they also often appear in contexts where *kakos* or *aischros* establish a more resonant and profound sense of negativity.[58] As the title character of Sophocles' *Antigone* notes early in the prologue, pain, destruction, shame, and dishonor are conceptually and affectively connected (Soph. *Ant.* 4–6):

οὐδὲν γὰρ οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸν οὔτ' ἄτης γέμον
οὔτ' αἰσχρὸν οὔτ' ἄτιμόν ἐσθ' ὁποῖον οὐ
τῶν σῶν τε κἀμῶν οὐκ ὄπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν.

For there is nothing—no pain or destruction,
no shameful or dishonorable thing whatsoever of
the evils you and I share—that I have not seen.

Antigone claims to have "looked upon" (*opōp', 6*) her and Ismene's evils, a further reminder that visual perception in drama is often conflated with affective experience tout court. Once again, in the language of Greek tragedy we observe that aesthetics cannot be isolated or extricated from broader evaluative contexts. Antigone's anguish is inseparable from the visions of her suicidal mother, self-blinded father, and brothers whose dead bodies still warm the Theban plain; the dramatic audience participates in her grief and vision.

57. Sluiter 2008, 4.

58. Sluiter (2008, 7–8) calculates that Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus are three of the top four most frequent sources of *kakos*. To a similar but less marked extent, *aischros* is frequent among the tragedians, who are exceeded only by Plutarch and roughly matched by Xenophon and Aristotle.

In short, although the Greek vocabulary pertaining to ugliness is psychologically deep and varied, providing by means of its lexical associations and etymologies a rich data set through which to explore the negative aesthetics of the Athenian stage, it offers no simple or precise term that captures the phenomenal experiences with which this book is concerned. Simply put, I call this book *Ugly Productions* because there is no single word, probably in any language, that corresponds to the generative interaction of form and feeling resulting in negative aesthetic response. Calling the dramatic spectacles studied in the chapters that follow "negative" or "bad" fails to capture their sensuous and affective power, while labeling them with narrower terms such as "shameful," "appalling," "polluted," or "atrocious," although these are often apt descriptions, would in some cases fail to capture the extent of the interactions between the senses and concepts underpinning negative dramatic affect. Much as the juxtaposition of *kalos* and *aischros* in Greek renders salient the aesthetic meanings of each term, *ugliness*, as the most straightforward antonym for *beauty* in English, is the proper rubric for an aesthetic study. *Ugly* occupies a strategic middle ground, concerned with traditional aesthetic discourse, but open to the broader affective resonances of shame, pain, grief, etc., historically bracketed from such studies. Ultimately, this terminological friction presents not so much a problem as a justification for this study: an exploration of negative aesthetics in Greek drama not only helps situate these ancient works more firmly in their aesthetic and cultural milieux across time, it also stands to refine and critique our own modern aesthetic categories and assumptions. If imperfect, then, it is at least convenient (and, within the history of tragic aesthetics, provocative) to adopt the familiar English "ugly" in the title of this study.[59]

A lexical survey reveals the fundamentally dual nature of ugliness, anchored to embodied and emotional experiences such as hate, loathing, and fear but also informed by negative cultural concepts such as deformity and impropriety. This is not an accidental or superficial dichotomy manifest in language alone but rather, as the field of cognitive linguistics emphasizes, the tip (or rather, two tips) of a single iceberg. The language of ugliness indicates deeper conceptual connections lurking below the surface of verbal expression. Ugliness derives much of its conceptual and cultural value by bridging and blurring the boundaries between material and symbolic aspects of human experience.

59. As Sianne Ngai has done in her 2005 study of *Ugly Feelings*, discussed further below.

Wandering the *Via Negativa*: A Brief History of Ugly Aesthetics

Lexical surveys, like the one above, reveal a dichotomy that cuts to the conceptual core of ugliness and its kindred categories across languages and cultures.[60] The peculiar aesthetics of ugliness arise not only from embodied emotional responses such as fear, loathing, hate, etc., but also through formal opposition to positive cultural norms and ideals. This inherent complexity of ugliness as a dual concept has not always been accounted for within traditional academic discourses. On the contrary, for many aesthetic thinkers, from Plato through the Enlightenment and well into the twentieth century, bracketing embodied and emotional responses was an explicit goal of their analyses, as these "low" and "irrational" influences were compartmentalized and relegated to prevent their contamination an otherwise "pure," cerebral, aesthetic experience.[61] To deny the fully embodied aesthetic subject when considering beauty proved a significant complication as early as Plato, as may be observed in such argumentative moves as Diotima's "ladder of love" or the analogy of the charioteer in *Phaedrus*. A fundamentally disembodied subject proves especially problematic when addressing ugliness, an aesthetic category that (as we have seen) rests firmly, if partially, in corporeal response.[62] And yet the intellectual appeal of an aesthetic binary between the poles of ugliness and beauty, and its concomitant (occasionally, transcendental) privileging of beauty as a positive concept within this schema, has had the effect (intended or otherwise) of obscuring ugliness, suppressing it, or else fragmenting it beyond coherence. Accounting for this denial of ugliness within traditional formalist aesthetics exposes the limitations of these approaches, the paradoxes they create or amplify, and those aspects of dramatic ugliness that stand most in need of consideration.

Thinkers of the Enlightenment and Romantic periods turned to formalism to provide a unified theory for analyzing art across visual, verbal,

60. In this way, ugliness may be compared with Greek shame (αἰδώς) which, as noted above, has important connections to αἰσχρός and αἶσχος, the prototypical terms of negative aesthetics in Greek. Shame presents an emotion that, although profoundly embodied (cf. αἰδοῖα, "private parts," and bodily reactions such as blushing, nausea), is informed by abstract social frameworks rather than material stimuli. Behavioral neuroscientists have put forward that shame appropriates our evolutionary-biological cognitive architecture of disgust, applying it to social life. On disgust, generally, see Kelly and Wilson 2011 and McGinn2011. Nussbaum 2004 explores the dangers of using shame and disgust to police behavior and identity, at least in our modern, liberal age.

61. See esp. Porter 2010, 83–120.

62. Cf. Pl. *Symp.* 210a–212b; *Phdr.* 249d–257b.

and musical media, a collection of creative expressions categorized as "fine" arts."[63] Their efforts reflected a rationalist orientation toward issues of perception, imagination, and idealism, ideas that informed and energized the newly christened "aesthetic" scientific discourse around beauty in art and, eventually, in life as well.[64] The intellectual history of this development, crucial to the emergence of art history as a discipline, is well documented.[65] Here it need only be said that thinkers of the era, including the Anglophone Burke and Hume, whom we have already had chance to mention, as well as (and especially) German-speaking thinkers from Baumgarten and Winckelmann in the early eighteenth century to subsequent contributions from Kant, Lessing, Schiller, Hegel, Hölderlin, and beyond, repeatedly turned to visual and verbal artworks from Mediterranean antiquity to illustrate (and in the case of Lessing's *Laocoön*, even name) their conceptual work. In this way, age-old canons of art, first rediscovered and promulgated in the Renaissance, were enlisted by subsequent generations of Western European philhellenes to prop up ambitious, often radical and totalizing, theories of beauty. These ideas would, themselves, prove influential for centuries to come as touchstones in aesthetic discourse.

Just as one cannot ignore the influence of classical Greek and Roman artists and authors on Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers, it is practically impossible for modern scholars to escape the terms, debates, and assumptions of this era when approaching ancient ideas of art.[66] The Enlightenment influence on aesthetics is so pervasive that an occasional reminder must be made that a "philosophy of art" can be (and in most cultures and for most of human history, has been) considered apart from such Kantian watchwords as "disinterestedness," or "aesthetic autonomy."[67] Even today, as neoclassical ideals have mostly faded from modern aesthetic discussion and aesthetics have increasingly come to be seen from global, anthropological,

63. At least in its widespread use, the phrase originates in Charles Batteux's 1746 essay, *Les beaux-arts réduits à un même principe*. For an accessible modern translation, see Batteux 2015.

64. Baumgarten's 1735 Latin master's thesis, *Aesthetica*, first introduced the term. Guyer 2020 calls this an "adult baptism" of a field of study at least as old as Plato; on aesthetics before Plato, see esp. Ford 2002; Porter 2010; and Peponi 2012.

65. On the reception of Greek tragedy in Enlightenment Germany and its consequences for our modern understanding of the tragic, see Billings 2014.

66. On the origins of modern aesthetics, see esp. Guyer 2005.

67. Critiquing Kristeller 1951, Porter 2009 takes a shot across the bow before turning, in Porter 2010, to offer a rallying cry for moving past an aesthetics grounded in Platonic and Aristotelean theorizing. Similar calls are made by Destrée and Murray 2015.

religious, cognitive perspectives, the "adult baptism" of Greek and Roman cultural productions in the Enlightenment font of beauty has proven difficult to wash off.[68]

This enduring appeal of beauty in aesthetics is due, in part, to its privileged framing as a positive concept. Beauty, like the other "transcendental" qualities of goodness and truth, enjoys a definitional position that is inherently resistant to critical decomposition. By contrast, ugliness and similar negative concepts are defined not simply as the logical opposite of an ideal, as one might propose with an alternative but coextensive framework, but rather as any departure from a positive, pure form.[69] Within such formalist and idealist frameworks, negative values become like so many shadows cast by a solid object, each projecting outlines which depend upon the angle of light as well as the contours of the surface upon which light eventually falls.[70] It has occasionally even been doubted whether the aesthetic framework Kant sets out in his influential *Critique of the Power of Judgment* practically allows for ugliness at all.[71]

That ugliness was viewed by thinkers as a fundamentally negative concept is exemplified in a programmatic passage of Karl Rosenkranz's *Aesthetik des Häßlichen* (*The Aesthetics of Ugliness*), first published in 1853 and, for more than a century, the only book-length scholarly work dedicated to the topic. Rosenkranz's dialectical study is peculiar and problematic in many respects.[72] In its insistence of the negativity of ugliness, however, it speaks on behalf of its contemporary Hegelian aesthetic discourse and perhaps the

68. On the phrase, see Guyer 2020, cited above.

69. On negation in language and logic from Aristotle on, see esp. Horn 1989. Within English, this phenomenon is perhaps most evident in discussions of truthfulness. We are accustomed to consider a "half-truth" as an example of a lie rather than a form of the truth. In this case, as in studies of ugliness, the presence of negative value, to any degree, can vitiate any claim to the positive. This distinction is syntactically underscored in English by the varying use of the article: we speak of "the truth" as singular, definite, and transcendental, whereas "a lie" is one of countless species.

70. For this analogy and many essays on ugliness in the history of aesthetics, see the essays collected in Klemme, Pauen, and Pries 2006.

71. See, for instance, Shier 1998 and Cohen 2013. Zuckert 2005 discusses Kant's "boring" beauty. For Kant's engagement with ugliness generally, see Forsey and Aagaard-Morgenson 2019.

72. In their introduction (Rosenkranz 2015(1853), 6–11), Andrei Pop and Mechtild Widrich place the author's ideas historically in their cultural and intellectual context, noting it is unclear whether Rosenkranz personally subscribed to the idealism that characterizes the overall structure of his work.

broader cultural zeitgeist as well. Rosenkranz presents his definition in no uncertain terms:

> That ugliness is a concept that can only be understood relative to another concept is not difficult to understand. The other concept is that of beauty, since ugliness can only be insofar as beauty is, which constitutes its positive presupposition. If there were no beauty, then there certainly would be no ugliness, since the latter only exists as the negation of the former. Beauty is the godlike, original idea, and ugliness, being its negation, has as such only a secondary existence. It generates itself in and out of the beautiful. It is not as if beauty, while being beauty, could simultaneously be ugly, but rather in the sense that the same conditions that make up the causal necessity of beauty turn into its opposite.[73]

By defining ugliness dialectically as the negation of beauty, Rosenkranz denies any independent nature or quality to the concept. He adheres to this strict idealist framework (which includes both "formlessness" and "deformity" in its tripartite division of ugliness) even as his study traces the kaleidoscopic manifestations of ugliness across a full spectrum of culture, under such subheadings as "the mean," "the repulsive," and, ultimately, "the Satanic." To modern readers less steeped in Hegelian patterns of thought, these aesthetic categories are perhaps more naturally framed in terms of social distinction, sensory response, and theology than the mere negation of "beauty." Unlike Kant, whose aesthetics left little room for anything besides beauty, for Rosenkranz it could almost be said that everything that is not beautiful is ugly.[74] Rosenkranz, like the other aestheticians of his era, was caught in a formalist bind built around positive ideals. As a negative concept, ugliness either factored into aesthetics hardly at all, or was a concept so promiscuous that its interpretive significance was limited. If everything is ugly, then nothing is.

As Paul Guyer and others have noted, however, the philosophical discourse of aesthetics long predates the eighteenth century, extending back (at least in written prose) as far as Plato and Aristotle. The abiding Platonic interest in beauty (and its profound influence on later thought, including

73. Rosenkranz 2015(1853), 33.

74. On the potentially radical politics (and confused idealism) of Rosenkranz's work, see Bancaud 2009.

the reception of dramatic aesthetics) will be discussed in the epilogue. Here it is convenient to discuss perhaps the most important passage on ugliness in art from antiquity, contained in a few brief lines of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Unlike the first time Aristotle broaches the issue of ugliness (*aischos*) in the *Poetics* (in relation to the comedic mask, discussed above), in this passage Aristotle does not speak in terms of *kalos* and *aischros*, but rather the divergent affective responses of pain and pleasure we have when contemplating the artistic portrayal of what might be called ugly things. Aristotle presents the peculiar circumstance as follows (Arist. *Poet*. 1448b9–17):

> σημεῖον δὲ τούτου τὸ συμβαῖνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων· ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὁρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἠκριβωμένας χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν. αἴτιον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅτι μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἥδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτοῦ. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὁρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος·
>
> An example of this [*sc. the natural pleasure taken in mimesis*] is well known from lived experience: for we are pained to see those same things, the most accurate [*sc. mimetic*] images of which we joyfully contemplate, such as the bodies of the vilest animals and of corpses. And the explanation of this, too, is that learning is not only pleasurable to philosophers but also to others in the same way, but they have a smaller share of this [*sc.* pleasure]. For people take pleasure in viewing [*sc.* mimetic] images on account of this reason: that in contemplating [*sc.* the images] it comes about that they understand and infer what each thing is, such as "this person is that person."

Much scholarly ink has been spilled both over Aristotle's articulation of what has become known as the "tragic paradox" as well as his cognitivist account of this peculiar pleasure.[75] But this paradox is most acute when

75. Else 1957, 29, notes the complementarity of σημεῖον and αἴτιον. On "play" and this passage, see Kidd 2019. On such cognitivism in Enlightenment aesthetics, see Reiter 2021. Halliwell 1986, 64 n. 23, notes the "implicit relevance" of this passage to tragedy. In this connection, Halliwell also cites Arist. *Rhet*. 1371b4–10, which asserts that "anything that is represented well [is pleasurable], even if the object of representation is not, in itself, pleasant" (καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἂν εὖ μεμιμημένον ᾖ, κἂν ᾖ μὴ ἡδὺ αὐτὸ τὸ μεμιμημένον). Notably, that

one takes a formalist perspective, which not only posits a polar antithesis between pain and pleasure, but which also sees little difference between the ontological states and concomitant emotions, between real, material sources of fear and those that are purely represented.[76] As ever, we see in the complexity of this paradox how emotions, materiality, framing, and vision combine to produce affective responses.

In making the cognitivist argument for the pleasure of mimesis, Aristotle obscures two issues that might properly be kept separate. If one sympathizes with the plight of Leontius in Plato's *Republic*, a man simultaneously eager to look upon the corpses of executed criminals outside the city walls but also horrified and perhaps socially restrained from fully indulging in this macabre desire, one recognizes that the fundamental paradox at hand is not that of artistic representation. Rather, it is inherent to our mixed affective response to certain disgusting objects, which have a fascination and allure while we nevertheless find them, directly or otherwise, revolting.[77] But Aristotle's conflation of poetic mimesis and the macabre is not entirely accidental: it reveals that the frame of artistic mediation (which, in the case of drama, occurs simultaneously with words *and* materials) has emotional effect.

Others have gone on to develop this line of thinking in the modern era. Edward Bullough's notion of "psychical distance," for instance, posits a spectrum of emotional engagement within which aesthetic judgments may be said to be made as such, but beyond which, whether on account of fear, passion, or some other emotion, one no longer engages with art as art.[78] Such a concept is essential for establishing boundaries, however gradual, within which a distinctly dramatic ugliness is operative.[79] While it is unclear to what extent the aesthetics of Greek drama (and tragedy in particular) might have relied on shock, we have evidence of emotional limits that could not be crossed. The infamous case of Phrynichus' *Capture of Miletus*, which

passage in *Rhetoric* accounts for more than just cognitive pleasure in mimesis, but also recognizes wonderment, *to thaumazein*, as a distinct pleasure of mimetic engagement, "since to learn *and admire* is pleasurable." On the phenenology of sight and wonder, see Prier 1989.

76. As Dana L. Munteanu (2012, 118–19) notes, "One way 'to solve' the paradox of *oikeia hedone* is simply to factor the tragic emotions out of the equation."

77. On Leontius, see especially Liebert 2013. On its broader connection to tragic pleasure, see Liebert 2017.

78. Bullough 1912. For a modern, culturally comparative perspective on the concept, see Odin 2001.

79. On the application of Bullough to ancient aesthetic attitudes, see Peponi 2012, 34–35.

was banned from reperformance and for which its playwright was fined, is instructive since the tragedy recalled, in Herodotus' words, *oikeia kaka*, "domestic troubles," being produced only two years following the fall of an allied city. This stray comment is liable to produce more speculation than firm knowledge about the sensibilities and sensitivities of Athenian audiences in the early fifth century. Still, if one imagines a spectrum of *kaka* (abstract troubles, yes, but dramatized and perhaps aesthetically framed ones) from *oikeia* to *xena*, Herodotus' Phrynichus depiction was, to elaborate on Bullough's spatial metaphor, "too near" in terms of its dramatic aesthetics as well as being "too soon" in terms of cultural memory. Phrynichus' failure provides a cautionary tale that the dramatic representation of recent, historical griefs could be too disturbing to be enjoyed in the aestheticizing theater, even if these topics could be (indeed, were necessarily) talked about in similar public gatherings, such as the assembly. Psychically or mythically distant atrocities, though, such as those associated with Trojan War narratives, or even those that occurred to the Persian host after their defeat at Salamis, as dramatized in Aeschylus' *The Persians* with many invocations of the word *kaka*, could be aestheticized and engaged with through the material mediation of the theater.[80]

One phrase from Aristotle's consideration of low animals and corpses deserves mention: the aesthetic impression these prototypically repulsive objects have on their viewers, in real life and through the filtering lens of mimesis. With an inclusive use of the first person, Aristotle says *lypērōs horōmen*, "we look with pain" or we "look painfully," a linking of a verb of seeing and descriptive adverb that recalls the many similar expressions encountered in our study of *Oedipus at Colonus*, particularly Creon's words to his former king. These were only mentioned above in passing, but may now be profitably consulted in full (Soph. *OC* 740–48):

ἀλλ' ὦ ταλαίπωρ' Οἰδίπους, κλύων ἐμοῦ
ἵκοῦ πρὸς οἴκους. πᾶς σε Καδμείων λεὼς
καλεῖ δικαίως, ἐκ δὲ τῶν μάλιστ' ἐγώ,
ὅσῳπερ, εἰ μὴ πλεῖστον ἀνθρώπων ἔφυν
κάκιστος, ἀλγῶ τοῖσι σοῖς κακοῖς, γέρον,
ὁρῶν σε τὸν δύστηνον ὄντα μὲν ξένον,
ἀεὶ δ' ἀλήτην κἀπὶ προσπόλου μιᾶς
βιοστερῆ χωροῦντα:

80. For my discussion of Aesch. *Pers.* see chapter one.

> But come now, wretched Oedipus, listen to me
> And come home. All the Cadmean people justly call you
> To return, and I most of all, since—
> Unless I was the worst of all men—
> I feel the most pain at your misfortunes, old man,
> Seeing you suffering and living as a foreigner,
> forever a vagabond, moving through as a beggar
> with only one girl as a servant.

Creon, like Oedipus and so many other characters in the play, uses the language of pain and suffering to structure a verbal response to the visual spectacle of Oedipus in Colonus. Negative vocabulary proliferates, as Creon paints a picture that reveals his mood and guides that of the audience. The positivity of the distant Theban citizens' "just" cries stands in stark contrast to the unmerited sufferings, inverted norms, and religious pollution embodied in the former king of Thebes, who now stands before Creon, reduced to poverty, squalor, exile, and the most paltry of retinues. For Creon, who is anxious to know his own fate as Polynices and his army march toward Thebes, it is an especially chilling and ominous sight. The negativity of the spectacle is perhaps reflected in Creon's own self-presentation, as he hypothetically casts himself as the "worst" of men (*kakistos*), were he not to feel pain (and the associated emotion of pity) in Oedipus' presence.

In this scene we again observe how vision serves as the medium for emotional contagion and resonance: Oedipus' manifest sufferings cause Creon not only to pity Oedipus, but also to fear for his own circumstance. Pity and fear, Aristotle's defining emotions of tragedy, are entwined in the emotional reflexivity of Creon's dramatic vision. Painful sights and painful feelings cohere in a moment of vicarious spectacle for the audience, whose members see Oedipus (again and anew) through Creon's play-internal perspective, experiencing the verbal aestheticization of the costumed actor's embodied presence.

To return in closing to the Aristotelean framework of *Poetics*, we observe that "painful vision," the experience the philosopher associates most with the paradox of mimetic pleasure, is an operative component of tragic aesthetics and intimately linked not only with emotions of pity and fear, but also the production of ugliness on the stage. But is Aristotle right, that we enjoy the sight of a figure like Oedipus because we recognize him, and his sufferings, as something else? In discussing the images (*eikones*) of corpses and low animals, Aristotle emphasizes their visual fidelity and detail, both

conveyed by the participle *akribōmenas*. Does such a quality of pictorial art have a theatrical counterpart? How does one look "more precisely" on the stage? For this, we need to enlarge our theoretical toolkit.

New Approaches to Ugliness, Affect Theory, and Cognitive Science

Before turning to the new frameworks that stand to advance discussion of an old project, we might take stock of what has been presented so far. Although no single Greek or English term is a perfect match for the negative aesthetics this book seeks to trace, the use of negative aesthetic terminology across languages and cultures routinely connects form and feeling. This inherent complexity of the concept poses problems for narrowly formalist aesthetic traditions, which are more successful at framing the unified (and unifying) positive concept of "beauty" than negative ugliness, which becomes endlessly distributed and divided. Formal arguments of classical aesthetics are complex and nuanced, drawing upon ancient theories and precedent, but the direct contribution of materials and their phenomenal experience also need to be considered.

A change is in the wind, however. The historical fortunes of ugliness, long neglected in beauty's shadow, have shifted noticeably in the past century. Ugliness has emerged as a vital, positive component of modern aesthetics because of the problems and paradoxes it exposes, particularly those that pertain to cultural and social difference, the local and global effects of power, and the pervasive and subconscious mass ideology in an industrialized era of previously unimaginable change and environmental degradation. Some see the seeds of this aesthetic turn sown in Romantic-era refusals of Enlightenment positivism, or as in Rosenkranz, a Hegelian turn toward antithesis, but these are only some of many sources of the rise (and, for some, the *triumph*) of ugliness in the twentieth century.[81] As a result of its cultural and critical ascendancy, a considerable amount of work is now available to guide the study of ugliness as an enduring, coherent, yet evolving cross-cultural phenomenon.[82]

In addition to scores of articles and tangential works, recent book-length

81. On the associations of ugliness with twentieth-century modernism, see Eco 2007, 364–89, and Widrich 2014.

82. Local studies of ugliness of particular note include Jamil 2003; Bettella 2005; Baker 2010.

treatments dedicated to the concept, most notably Umberto Eco's richly illustrated and annotated anthology, *On Ugliness* (a companion to his earlier volume, *On Beauty*), and Gretchen Henderson's *Ugliness: A Cultural History*, have attended specifically to the concept's cultural embeddedness and inflections. A collection of essays, *Ugliness: The Non-Beautiful in Art and Theory*, edited by Andrei Pop and Mechtild Widrich, explore the generative power of ugliness across time and culture. These works, among others, have endeavored to trace negative aesthetics and to illuminate, through comparison and contrast, that which is essential, persistent, or historically important about ugliness.[83] Partly abandoned are the earlier taxonomic approaches, epitomized in Rosenkranz's aesthetic study; there are too many ugly sights, and too many ugly viewers, to even attempt such a systematization. If ugliness is to be sought today, it is often done through prototypical examples that, in the tradition of Wittgensteinian "family resemblances," eschew a formal, propositional definition but seek instead paradigmatic examples and trace networked cultural connections between these exemplary cases and others that seem to inhabit the same category.[84] These modern studies demonstrate how, despite its blurred boundaries and overlapping definitions, ugliness still offers a compelling narrative within cultural studies, revealing interesting and often insightful cross-sections across societies and their cultural production.[85]

These diachronic studies of ugliness also reveal that while decidedly a product of its time, the Modernist embrace of ugliness is neither unprecedented nor the product of peculiarly modern anxieties, from environmental degradation to late capitalism to loneliness. The intellectual resurgence of ugliness constitutes, in part, a return to pre-Enlightenment perspectives that were eclipsed by the rise of so-called "classicizing" aesthetics in the eighteenth century. A decades-long program of restoring a sense of ugliness (and horror and the sublime) to antiquity, in particular, is underway. Recent books in Greek and Roman studies appearing under such rubrics as obscen-

83. In addition to interest in the more narrow categories of the "grotesque," "freak," and the like, there has been a broad embrace of "ugly" as a concept across humanistic scholarship in the new millennium: see Betella 2005; Baker 2010; Krečič and Žižek 2016; Forsey and Aagaard-Mogensen 2019, etc.

84. On prototype theory, see Rosch 1973 and Rosch and Lloyd 1978; on its application to the arts, where definitions often prove problematic, see Adajian 2005.

85. I cite in the main body works readily available in English, but scholarship in other languages is also essential reading. See esp. Gagnebin 1978 and the essays in Klemme, Pauen, and Pries 2006.

ity, monstrosity, and the grotesque, have addressed topics ranging from disgust to disability to dismemberment.[86] Taken together, these works aim broadly at recognizing and rehabilitating topics that have historically been marginalized in celebrating a so-called "classical" world. Literary genres from epic to the novel, and the visual arts in particular, are now receiving "the ugly treatment" from scholars, even if tragedy, as a genre, has proven comparably resistant to this trend.[87] This book, while part of the rising tide elevating the status of ugly and disagreeable spectacles in the ancient world, takes seriously the reasons why Attic tragedy (arguably the most canonical of genres, and therefore a prime target for such reappraisal) has mostly evaded this widespread trend.[88] Some obvious reasons have already been encountered; more will emerge over the course of the following chapters.

Studies of ugliness predicated upon its formal limits and historical trajectories have a tendency to pass over the emotional, embodied, and situationally embedded aspects of aesthetics, for which the recent humanistic turn toward "affect" offers a helpful correction. Although singular "affect" suggests a unified theory, this is misleading: affect theory is a "big tent" that houses many areas of scholarly activity. In the introduction to their coedited *Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth outline eight "main orientations" that range from phenomenologically informed feminist theory to political science to systems theory and cognitive neuroscience. From this "inventory of shimmers," Gregg and Seigworth posit a general turn toward the blending of thought and feeling and particularity, and away from the reduction (or abstraction) of experience through formal, linguistic, or purely rational accounting. In short, affect theory involves grappling with the pluralist and material embeddedness of experience, rec-

86. See, for instance, Foley 2000; Miglietti 2001; Robson 2006; ní Mheallaigh 2014; McClellan 2019; Meintani 2022; Piqueux 2022.

87. Some might argue tragedy's embrace of the "Other" (on which Zeitlin 1996 offers the classic study) is a mode of engaging with ugliness, rarely is the visual, affective response to such characters framed as seen, above, in the case of Oedipus. It is nevertheless true that tragic characters, choruses especially, rarely embody the so-called "classical ideal" of a young, abled, fit, aristocratic, citizen male, the prototype of the merged ethical-aesthetic category of καλοκἀγαθία, on which see Bourriot 1995. On departures from the classical ideal, see Cohen 2000, which includes Foley 2000.

88. Some examples: on the grotesque, Harpham 1982; on deformity, see Garland 1995; on badness and antivalue, see Rosen and Sluiter 2008, esp. Lefkowitz 2008; on ugliness in vase painting, see Walsh 2009 and Mitchell 2009 on Senecan horror, see Slaney 2016; on monsters, see Atherton 1998 and Mitchell 2021; on ugly figures in Lucian, see ní Mheallaigh 2014, 58–59.

ognizing our own embodied human subjectivity while nevertheless seeking a "nonanthropocentric" understanding of a broader world.[89]

"Affect," derived from Latin *affectus* (which Lewis and Short define as "A state of body, and *esp*. of mind produced in one by some influence"), seeks to outline human emotional responses to external realities that impinge upon them, without necessarily rising to the level of consciousness or rational thought. The study of dramatic aesthetics thus stands to benefit substantially from engaging with studies of affect, both theoretical and empirical. Clinically, emotional response types, including "disgust," as well as "dimensional" variables of emotion (such as the spectrum between attraction and aversion) offer fleeting glimpses of the evolutionary (and therefore, it is thought, transhistorical) mechanisms through which humans both ancient and modern perceive and conceptualize the world. But contemporary, historically anchored studies can be no less valuable to sharpening our understanding. Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, for example, charts a constellation of feelings, including envy, irritation, and paranoia, by attending to their shared negative orientation and varied, but always destabilizing effect on modern literature.[90] The object and framework of Ngai's study are both pointedly modern, but in adopting ugliness and affective response as orienting principles, Ngai's work illustrates the new insights and connections an affect-based approach can produce.

Under this broad canopy of "affect theory," an active hub of work in and around the cognitive sciences has provided a set of tools that is particularly useful for understanding the experience of drama. Theater, an artistic medium remarkable for the ways it harnesses human sensory and sense-making faculties across sense-modalities, has been at the forefront of the "cognitive turn" in literary studies.[91] In its physicality, especially its dependence upon space, objects, and actors, theater is also overtly material and provides rich examples for exploring the connections between minds and objects.[92] The framework of what has become known as "4E cognition" that approaches thought as embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive is

89. Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 6–8. On "nonanthropocentrism," see Behar and Mikelson 2016.

90. Ngai 2005.

91. On cognition in theater, see especially McConachie 2008, 2013, 2015; McConachie and Hart 2006; Kemp and McConachie 2018; with respect to ancient drama, Meineck 2018; Budelmann and Sluiter 2023; Shaughnessy 2013.

92. On connections between the mind and material world, see especially Malafouris and Renfrew 2010 and Malafouris 2013.

applicable to a variety of crucial dramatic engagements, from actors' experiences in preparation and performance to readers' experience visualizing a scene from a text. By approaching Greek dramatic aesthetics through such critical lenses, one moves past purely linguistic or formal networks of meaning to interrogate how characters' and our own embodied interactions with objects determine meaning and emotional response.

Theater is a manifestly distributed art form, a highly coordinated system of actors and objects in space and time. Less obvious aspects of drama's distributed nature have become a topic of sustained scholarly research.[93] Dramatic aesthetics are likewise distributed in ways that complicate or decenter traditional notions of individual or autonomous subjectivity. The fifth-century Greek theater was a space of intersubjective vision where actors and audience members alike are seen as they see.[94] Aesthetic response practiced in a context of continuous and dynamic interactions with others, as the experience of theatergoers' "mirrors" those of characters onstage and the reactions of fellow audience members.[95]

Empirical psychological work continues to explore and measure how senses are modulated by various stimuli, complicating traditional categorical boundaries between our senses, mood, and cognition. Knowledge of cognitive faculties relating to dramatic spectatorship is advancing quickly, but even as we receive more data and better discern the mechanisms and modalities of thought, the laboratory studies that produce this information are ill-equipped to handle the composite effects of dramatic performance "in the wild," an inexperience influenced not only by numerous factors, but also their innumerable interactions, feedback loops, etc.[96] Experiments will not "solve" the essential questions of theatrical phenomenology, but they can at least advance and give further resolution to understanding how dramatic works affect us as embodied humans through both performance and text, and in turn how our aesthetic proclivities and embodied performances themselves shaped the development of Greek drama.

93. On distribution generally, Sutton 2006; on its application in theater, see Tribble 2011 and Tribble and Dixon 2018; on the interaction of Greco-Roman theatrical architecture (albeit mostly from postclassical evidence) see Taylor 2021.

94. For a cognitive perspective on intersubjectivity, see Duncan 2023b.

95. Spaulding 2011, 2013 argues for caution in discussion of mirror neurons; see also Heyes and Catmur 2022.

96. For the phrase and objection, see Hutchins 1995.

The Importance of Ugliness for Dramatic Aesthetics

There is perhaps no simpler way to recognize the contributions of ugliness to dramatic aesthetics than to imagine its absence from the stage. Take away ugliness, and one takes away from the theater some of its most iconic moments and memorable characters. Without ugliness, gone are Shakespeare's Richard III, Caliban, the witches of Macbeth, and Hamlet's macabre contemplation of Yorick's skull. Gone, too, are the title characters of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Elephant Man*, among countless others. The cast of comedy is especially reduced, perhaps nowhere more than in traditions featuring exaggerated character types, from Atellan Farce to *Commedia dell'arte* and beyond. Looking beyond the Western canon, one easily finds more "uglies" to add to this curious cast of characters. The eponymous characters of Zeami's *Shōjō* and *Tsunemasa*, two classic plays of fifteenth-century Japanese Nō theater, have abnormal aesthetics essential to the narratives and emotional effect of these dramas (nor can one ignore the many frightfully ugly masks worn by spirits, demons, and other bogeys within the Japanese theatrical tradition).[97]

Cross-culturally, ugliness is fundamental to many forms of embodied performance, scripted or otherwise. Religious ritual, akin to secular theater in many ways and in many contexts, regularly traffics in uncanny, painful, or otherwise discomforting images.[98] Halloween, although widely practiced today as a secular holiday, is nevertheless testament to the enduring appeal of seeing, and inhabiting, ugly performances within a community. An essential function of the theater, as both its name and architecture suggest, is to provide a communal space and institution for the visual contemplation of cultural questions and personal anxieties. As a place of demonstration, the theater has long been a home for monstrosity. Indeed, ugliness has occasionally itself been sufficient to qualify as a spectacular event; nineteenth-century "freak shows," performance events associated with figures such as P. T. Barnum in the United States and Thomas Norman in the United Kingdom, leveraged popular (but, it should be said, often racist, ableist, and otherwise bigoted) interest in coming face to face with perceived physical abnormalities or inverted cultural ideals.

97. Smethurst 1989 offers a classic comparative study between Aeschylus and Zeami; on Zeami's style generally, see Hare 1986. For a contemporary, nonacademic perspective on Nō aesthetics, see Vollman 2010.

98. On connections between anthropology and theater, see especially Schechner 1985.

Ugliness is often marginalizing, but it can also be empowering. In any performance context, "the ugly" become a tool for pointed social commentary. When applied to the powerful, ugliness is used to caricature prominent individuals and to refract otherwise blended cultural complexities of history, ideology, and social stratification. Ugliness and abnormality can serve as powerful tools of protest, on the stage as elsewhere. Responding to histories of colonialism and the hegemonic conflation of moral, aesthetic, and racial value, for example, Analola Santana writes in *Freak Performances: Dissidence in Latin American Theater* that "[i]n today's neoliberal world order the freak is the one who is unable, or unwilling, to follow the economic and cultural norms of the institutions in power."[99] The continuum between "freak shows" and the "freak performances," and the potential for the empowering reappropriation of ugliness, suggest that theater, as a social practice, does more than simply *represent* ugliness. It positively *revels* in it.

If ugliness is, as a rule, a fundamental tool of performance across time and culture, the fifth-century Athenian theater was certainly no exception. What, for instance, would the Furies of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* be without their black robes or serpentine hair? What would become of the countless choruses of satyr drama, were the dancers stripped of their suggestive and animalistic loincloths and snub-nosed masks? Without ugliness, how would we look upon Xerxes, Electra, or the countless other tragic figures who, like Oedipus, are reduced to rags? Textiles, as we shall see, offer a powerful material matrix for conveying aesthetics on the Greek stage, but the spectacle of characters' bodies themselves was often no less potent. From Philoctetes' gangrenous wound on the island of Lemnos to Heracles in his death agonies atop Mount Oeta, savage pain and savage appearance often went hand in hand in tragedy. The tableaux of corpses in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Heracles* further reveal how the inanimate tragic body itself was even (if not especially) a locus of ugliness and horror on the stage.

This book is divided into three parts, each subdivided into an introduction and two chapters, which together explore the effects and implications of ugliness in the plays themselves. **Part I** considers the role of costume in creating ugly, yet sympathetic, characters in tragedy, where once-prosperous royals are reduced to rags and thus become affecting figures of pity and fear. **Part II** studies the appropriation of tragedy's ugly costumes in the comedies

99. Santana 2018, 90.

of Aristophanes, where the artificiality of these garments is exposed while the humorous frame sunders ugliness from the suffering to which it is usually attached in tragedy. Deflating these puffed-up symbols of pain without resorting to formal distortion, Aristophanes creates ironic humor out of the very same theatrical costumes and properties that evoked sympathy in tragedy. Finally, **part III** shifts from clothing to the body itself and considers the onstage spectacle of corpses and dying bodies. As objects of unique aesthetic complexity, corpses, with their uncanny likeness to living bodies, fascinate as they disgust. In an epilogue, we consider the suppression of dramatic ugliness in the early philosophical reception of fifth-century Athenian theater.

PART I

Tragedy in Tatters

Ugly Aesthetics through Costume

The dramatic body of fifth-century Athenian drama was profoundly material. The living flesh of theatrical performers was systematically hidden from the spectators' gaze, concealed by masks, long robes, and (at least upon the evidence of certain contemporary visual depictions) form-fitting tights.[1] Tellingly, even characters who appeared fully or partially "naked" on the stage of Old Comedy wore fitted costumes that, through a combination of formal distortion and material substitution, grotesquely represented the body underneath. Fabric in such circumstances served as a second skin that called attention to its own material performativity as it visually marked dramatic genre on the Athenian stage.[2] In those few but significant cases where performers' flesh was an object of aesthetic attention in the theater, as was almost certainly the case with the seminude chorus of satyr play, the indecent spectacle of the hairy loincloths stood in counterpoise to the smooth skin of the youthful dancers, an aesthetic mash-up that underscored the profound hybridity of the genre.[3] In short, fifth-century Athenians turned

1. On tragic costume, see esp. Pickard-Cambridge 1988 and Wyles 2011; on comic costume, see esp. Stone 1984; Foley 2000; Varakis 2010; Compton-Engle 2015; and Piqueux 2022. On connections between materiality, embodiment, and performance across theatrical cultures, see Barbieri 2017.

2. Webster (1970, 29) calls the actor's "tights are his dramatic skin."

3. On satyr play, see especially Antonopoulos, Christopoulos, and Harrison 2021; Shaw 2014; and Seidensticker 1989. On the value of representing satyrs also beyond the theater, see Lissarrague 1990. Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker (1999) collect a number of (mostly) fifth-century vase paintings that depict satyrs in connection to (theatrical?) performance.

to the theater, perhaps uniquely among their various cultural institutions, as a means of turning away from the prevailing, idealizing aesthetic emphasis on the unclothed human body. Materials were an essential component of the production of ugliness in Greek drama.

The idealized body, in various states of undress, was something of an artistic obsession among Greeks of the Iron Age and Classical periods, evident across countless instances of plastic and painterly arts.[4] Nor was seeing the undressed body limited to representational art: in its paradigmatic youthful and athletic form, the nude male body was also a living spectacle in the gymnasia and sports contests of Greece.[5] The structural opposition of nudity and clothedness, linguistically codified in the Greek word *gymnos* ("naked, unclad"), was hardly absolute in practice.[6] Context and convention are essential to distinguishing (or conflating) man and material. Although masked drama may strike certain audiences today as artificial, uncanny, or having a distancing effect, comparative evidence suggest the "alterity" of masks are hardly a given across cultures.[7] While engaged in the creative act of spectatorship, theatergoers may feel the artifice of such objects fade from their consciousness. Even as they never lose sight of the material apparatus, spectators begin to see "through" the materiality of the stage, in ways both metaphorical and profound.[8] Spectators' layered, culturally informed, and

4. On "the role of undress" in Greek art and life during the classical era, see Osborne 1997. On the Iron Age origins of nudity in representational art, see Murray 2022.

5. As cited in Osborne (1997, 505), John Boardman has noted that "in Classical Greece the nude (men only) *was* acceptable in life," particularly in athletic pursuits. On connections between nudity in Greek sport and art across time, see esp. McDonnell 1991, Scanlon 2002, and Murray 2022.

6. LSJ s.v. γυμνός I. Nudity and clothedness are not necessarily absolute categories; on nudity as costume in classical art, see Bonfante 1989.

7. On how audiences see beyond the artificiality of the mask, see Wiles 2007.

8. Various frameworks exist to help explain this remarkable aspect of dramatic spectatorship, although the complexity and diversity of theatrical performance resists falling wholly within any single, systematic account. In terms of the semiotic system advanced by Charles Sanders Peirce, the "iconicity" of performers (i.e., their formal and material commonalities with the characters they represent) is involved in this categorical blurring: on Peircean semiotics as they apply to drama, see Elam 2002, 19–21. Similarly, the idea of "conceptual blending," formulated by Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002), has been applied to theatrical experience: see esp. McConachie 2001 (among subsequent publications by the author) and, in respect to Aeschylean stagecraft, Duncan 2023a. Concepts from nondramatic literature, such as "immersion," may also apply to the verbal components of drama, on which see esp. Allan, de Jonge, and de Jonge 2017. Noel 2018 provides a focused study on theatrical vision in Aristophanic comedy; for cognitive approaches to the ancient Greek stage in general, see Meineck 2018.

phenomenologically dynamic experience of the theatrical body is crucial to any discussion of dramatic aesthetics. In particular, tensions between the materiality-mediated body of the ancient Athenian theater and the privileging of nudity within the general Greek "scopic regime" present a useful point of departure for exploring the aesthetics of a dramatic tradition in which categories of "the material" and "the bodily" were, by dramatic convention, practically inseparable.[9]

It is simplest to trace cultural and visual ironies that attended the theatrical representation of the body in ancient Greece by means of those precious few classical-era vase paintings that clearly depict dramatic scenes.[10] In several well-known images, artists at pains to signify performance by emphasizing certain aspects of production, such as stage buildings, masks, and costumes, nevertheless represent the mythic protagonists of tragic narrative according to a painterly convention widely known as the "heroic nude."[11] (For an illustrated discussion of the heroic nude in relation to Euripides' lost tragedy *Telephus*, see plates 1 and 2 in chapter 2). The iconographic compromise involved in such images, where the artist's interest in capturing the heroic aesthetics of figure's mythical identity supersedes concern with the materialities of theatrical production, is suggestive in regards to the phenomenology of theatrical vision. The beauty of the actor's ornately crafted theatrical costume has not become forgotten or irrelevant; rather, at some deeper level, it has fused with the character represented, in ways comparable to how the dramatic mask is depicting "melting" into the face of the performer. As the garments that that define theatrical dissolve from view, it is as if theatergoers literally see "through" the material to the body underneath.

The same objects and fabrics worn on stage that, on a practical level, concealed actors in the immersive experience of spectatorship were artistically employed to reveal essential, embodied, and emotional aspects of characters. Dramatic materials might simultaneously and partially reveal and con-

9. "Scopic regime," a phrase introduced by Christian Metz (1982, 61) to theorize modern film, has been applied broadly not only in the modern era (for a prime example, see Jay 1988), but also in classical studies: see especially Stewart 1997 and, in relation to Greek drama, Meineck 2013.

10. These images are extensively studied. The seminal study of Trendall and Webster 1971 has been superseded by the publication of many new items, many of which first studied in Todisco (2003) and richly presented in Taplin 2007. Green 1991 remains a useful overview of the historical and visual dimensions; Weiss 2023 sophisticatedly approaches the phenomenology of theatrical vision through vase representations, amidst other evidence.

11. On the development of the "heroic nude" as a scholarly concept, see especially Himmelmann 1990, Osborne 1997, and Hurwitt 2007.

ceal, resulting in a blended identity. The ironies of such blended embodiment could be exploited to comedic effect on stage, as will be observed in scenes from Aristophanic comedy (studied in part II). Again, the peculiar phenomenology of seeing the materially mediated dramatic body finds an analogue in vase painting. On a fourth-century South Italian vessel, unfortunately lost since the nineteenth century but known from its find-site as the "Sant'Agata Antigone," a painting of a comedic scene depicts guards escorting off a male character who has attempted, evidently unsuccessfully, to disguise himself as a woman. The male figure's biological sex, perhaps known to the guards but clearly visible to the viewer, is revealed beneath long, diaphanous, feminine robes.[12] The semitransparent and layered aesthetics of this humorous scene convey a fundamental truth of the material dramatic body: body and clothes mutually define and depend upon each another. Painterly practice, alongside similar verbal ironies highlighted and explored in the following chapters, indicates how Greek theatrical costume could be, almost paradoxically, at once obstinately material and profoundly embodied, concealing and revealing. If corporeal movement lends vitality to garments on stage, so too do garments bring dynamism and mutability to the body itself. Although worn externally, garments shape the body to its core, physically affecting movement and contributing emotionally to one's sense of self.

In sum, the aesthetics of the Greek dramatic body were established through networks of objects, actors, and words and were embedded within the expanding conceptual spheres of the specific production, the genre, and the culture of a whole. In establishing characters as beautiful or ugly, exultant or pained, materials played an especially crucial role. Symbolic and material resonances between clothing and corporeality resulted in rich affective overtones, producing not only tragic pathos but also the comedic incongruities. Costume, although designed to capture attention through its movement, meaning, and forms, never fully obscures the body it enrobes. Clothes mediate the aesthetics of the body, with which they are always in tension. The chapters in this first part of the book attend to the combined use of material costume and verbal description to direct and affect its audiences' aesthetic response in Greek tragedy. Chapter 1 takes Aeschylus' *Persians* as an orienting case study, a seminal play that helped define core aesthetic contributions of costume in Attic drama and prominently featured ragged garments as richly symbolic, patently material, and semitransparent

12. The scene is analyzed, with a line-drawing representation, by Wiles (2007, 39–41).

costumes in order to achieve its dramatic ends. Chapter 2 proceeds to offer close readings of selected scenes from later tragedies that similarly relied upon ragged costume to blur distinctions between representation and reality, body and material, in establishing a profoundly embodied tragic aesthetic. Together, these studies trace the evolving impact of ugliness on the development and form of a genre that has too often been associated simply and exclusively with beauty.

From this diachronic study of ugliness and costume, rags emerge as a particularly potent and enduring tragic costume type, the material and symbolic significance of which are inextricable. Dressing the wounded, poor, aged, and otherwise marginalized characters of tragedy, rags project emotional authenticity and ineluctable suffering even when the dramatic narrative is at pains to highlight the contingencies and choices that inform characters' appearances. Together with other costume elements associated with negative aesthetic effect, rags offer a unique set of evidence, facilitating a cross-sectional view of the fifth-century Athenian stage, linking tragic costume not only to sartorial analogues in Old Comedy (explored in part II) but to the suffering tragic body in extremis (as studied in part III).

ONE

Dressed in Dishonor

Costume, Affect, and Aesthetics in Aeschylus' Persians

Of the many humiliating military disasters reported onstage in Aeschylus' *Persians*, the Queen Mother Atossa is pained most by a single, paltry item: the tattered clothes in which her son, Xerxes, is reportedly dressed. Before an aged Chorus of Persian elders, many of whom have presumably lost their sons in the war, Atossa laments the disgraced appearance of her own (Aesch. *Pers.* 845–48):

> ὦ δαῖμον, ὡς με πόλλ' ἐσέρχεται κακῶν
> ἄλγη, μάλιστα δ' ἥδε συμφορὰ δάκνει,
> ἀτιμίαν γε παιδὸς ἀμφὶ σώματι
> ἐσθημάτων κλύουσαν, ἥ νιν ἀμπέχει.[1]
>
> God, how many pains from evils come upon
> me! This misfortune afflicts me most of all:
> the disgrace of my son, hearing
> of the clothes about his body, which now embrace him.

Atossa's concern for mere appearances in the face of catastrophic defeat has struck many readers of this passage as radically insensitive. Her "ludicrous" preoccupation with Xerxes' clothing has been attributed to the queen mother's womanly vanity, her "Oriental" luxury, a personal proclivity toward

1. I follow Page's (1972) text with my own translations. For commentaries on the play, see esp. Broadhead 1960; Hall 1996; Garvie 2009.

practicality, or even as a later interpolation to the text. These various arguments share a common assumption that such concern with personal aesthetics was markedly uncommon in fifth-century Athenian tragedy.[2]

Atossa's words could be more easily dismissed as idiosyncratic or spurious if they did not serve as the verbal culmination of a series of authoritative pronouncements made earlier in the drama. Indeed, Atossa's complaint is the fourth time Xerxes' torn clothes received mention in the play.[3] The king's tattered garments first figure in the prophetic dream that brings the queen mother to stage; second, in a messenger speech reported by a Persian soldier back from the front lines; and third, just moments before the words quoted above, in a necromancy scene in which Atossa invokes her deceased king and husband to return and speak as a revenant. The ghost of Darius, likely himself dressed in golden finery, confirms the truth of these earlier reports and concludes his speech by ordering his wife to intercept their disgraced son in order to prevent him being seen in shameful defeat.[4] Darius, too, is concerned that Xerxes not appear wearing tattered robes before the public eye in Susa.

Atossa's words echo those of her late husband. Repeated expressions (e.g., *kakōn*, 835; *amphi somati*, 835; *esthēmatōn*, 836) underscore Xerxes' wretchedness and demonstrate the queen mother's eagerness to carry out Darius' wishes "to the letter."[5] And yet, Atossa's speech differs from that of Darius in certain ways, as befits a character with unmatched stage presence in the drama and a complex, if caring, relationship with her son.[6] In these closely parallel speeches, departures from her husband's script mark the

2. Garvie (2009, 322–23 *ad* 845–48) offers a concise overview of the extended bibliography and interpretation of this challenging speech. The queen's proper name is never given in the tragedy; pace Gagarin (1976, 180 n. 34), I follow most critics in referring to the queen mother as "Atossa" for the sake of clarity and convenience.

3. On the theme of tattered clothing in the play, see especially Thalmann 1980.

4. The revenant king delivers his final injunction at *Pers.* 834–36. Darius' costume may fulfill the Chorus's earlier prayer (vv. 658–62) that their late king appear before them with golden sandals and tiara. Most commentators assume a "sharp contrast" between the costumes of Darius and Xerxes, cf. Gagarin 1976, 179 n. 29, and Taplin 1977, 121–22. On the spectacle of Darius' appearance and its dramatic meaning, see Hall 1996, *ad* 681–851 and *ad* 694–96. On Darius' appearance in relation to the other ghosts of Aeschylean drama, see Hilton 2020 and Uhlig 2022.

5. See Broadhead 1960, 211.

6. On Atossa's character in the play and her relations to the Chorus and Darius, see Roisman 2022; on her maternal authority, see McClure 2006; on the way Atossa moderates and modulates Darius' pity, see Danze 2022, 330–34.

queen's affective ties to her son and his material circumstance. The omniscient Darius speaks in cold realities, but Atossa utters a heartfelt response to the aesthetics of Xerxes' degradation, modeling a different sort of viewership by framing the facts of her son's tattered clothing with reference to her personal feelings.[7] Atossa links objects with emotions, verbal reports with direct perception, in ways that encapsulate the production of ugly aesthetics in Greek drama. A prototypical moment of materially mediated aesthetics in our earliest surviving tragedy, the closing sequence of Aeschylus' *Persians* provides a paradigmatic example of the ways words and materials, bodies and characters, combined to produce negative affective states in drama.

As Atossa's words suggest, powerful affective states, including feelings of loss, defeat, and especially dishonor, may be triggered by, realized through, and symbolically represented by costume. Tragic playwrights did more than amplify the semiotics of dress within their theatrical medium by leveraging their audiences' cultural competencies to draw salient connections; they also pioneered novel ways of connecting the layered realities, blended identities, and multisensory experience of drama to produce a distinct and emotionally stirring dramatic aesthetics, producing intense feelings of pity, fear, shame, and glory through the carefully choreographed ugly spectacles of the stage. The repeated structural emphasis on Xerxes' costume in *Persians* provides an early and extended example of the ways theatrical materials frame, anticipate, and reflect the emotional state of the characters with which they are associated. Not only is Atossa's emotional response to the spectacle of Xerxes' clothing both superficial and profound, it is also dramatic.

Setting the Stage and Mood: Atossa's Aesthetic Framing

In their attempts to rationalize the apparent callousness of Atossa's concern for mere appearances, many twentieth-century critics advanced arguments rooted in appeals to psychological realism or gender and ethnic stereotypes. At the height of New Historicism in the 1980s and 1990s, the consensus opinion held that Atossa's sartorial concerns would have been unworthy of any free Athenian male to voice, and perhaps even beneath the dignity of Athens' most venerable tragedian to write, some deeming the lines spuri-

7. Drawing upon Homeric precedent, McClure (2006, 71) considers Atossa's maternal presence "pivotal" to the emotional framing of the exodos.

ous.[8] Early in the new millennium, however, long-time critic of Aeschylus A. F. Garvie mounted a stylistic defense of this passage, insisting that the dramatic purpose with these lines was "to bring the rags to our attention"; for Garvie, reference to the rags at this crucial moment makes a structural contribution wholly in keeping with Aeschylus' habit of verbally setting up his physical stage.[9] By this logic, Atossa speaks not only in her own words as a character within the narrative, but at an "authorial level" as well, telegraphing future stagecraft no less than recalling a thematic motif.[10] Atossa's words telegraph Xerxes' arrival while they frame the audience's aesthetic response; they set the mood as they set the stage.

Atossa's speech primes the audience to focus on Xerxes' costume in subtle ways, a logic traceable through a close reading of the peculiar verbal arrangement of the passage. Powerfully disturbed by Darius' pronouncements, the queen mother is troubled not only by Xerxes' ragged clothes per se, but also by the report of their degradation, as becomes clear only gradually in a syntactically convoluted passage. Atossa begins by singling out a particular source of grief, "*this* misfortune," using a proximal demonstrative adjective *hēde* (846) not only to signal the vividness and emotional nearness of the misfortune, but also perhaps to raise an expectation that the full nature of the misfortune will soon be revealed.[11] Such expectations seem soon to be fulfilled in the word "dishonor" (*atimia*, 847), placed in emphatic line-initial position in the following verse and intensified by the particle *ge*.[12] Xerxes' dishonor, Atossa goes on to explain, lies in the robes (*esthēmata*, 848) wrapped around his body (*amphi sōmati*, 847). Without

8. On the Orientalist tropes in the play, see esp. the reading of Hall (1989) in the footsteps of Said 1979.

9. Citing Aesch. *Ag.* 930–35 and *Ch.* 931, Garvie 2009, 322 *ad* 845–48 notes that Aeschylus "likes to end a scene with some kind of preparation for the next scene," although in this case, "the preparation turns out to be false." Xerxes in fact arrives wearing the tattered robes Atossa is eager to hide. It has long been noted, on practical grounds, that Atossa leaves so that the same actor may return in the role of Xerxes: for further discussion and bibliography, see McClure 2006, 94 n. 52.

10. On the distinction between narrative and authorial communication, see Rabinowitz 1987. For a semiotic interpretation of authorial communication in drama, see Segre 1980.

11. This is the cataphoric use of the proximal deictic, common in tragedy as elsewhere in Greek: see Jacobson 2011, 28. On the discursive use of the demonstrative generally, see Smyth 1984, §1245 and van Emde Boas et al. 2019, 352 (= §29.28).

12. Although some have doubted the text at this point, Broadhead 1960, 211, assesses the arguments and defends the apparently unusual use of *ge* at 847 as properly Aeschylean, a reading followed by subsequent editors.

referring expressly to their torn state, Atossa nevertheless recalls Darius' vivid description of Xerxes' embroidered robes (*poikilia esthēmata*), which had been reduced to "tatters" (*lakides*, 835) in Salamis. These garments were "rent" (*stēmorrhagousi*, 836) in Xerxes' distress (*hyp' algous*, 835) at the military disaster he witnessed, a moment of acute grief and emotional response echoed, present, in his mother's reaction. The metaphorical power of these garments is substantial, leading to a recurrent sense of grief and, ineluctably, to the play's final scene.[13]

It is not, however, simply the wretched state of Xerxes' clothes that disturbs the queen mother. The participle *kluousan* (848), delayed until the verse that follows her mention of Xerxes' dishonor, revises the meaning of Atossa's words. Her belated introduction of sensory vocabulary shifts attention away from the vivid image of Xerxes in tatters and brings listeners' focus instead to the subjective experience of the verbal report. The participle suggests that it is not the ugly garments themselves so much as *hearing* about them that is the proper source of Atossa's many "evils."[14] The participle raises questions that lie at the intersection of experience, epistemology, and emotion: How does an emotion, such as pain, differ in quality or quantity when it is the result of direct perception or through verbal report? To what extent did the spectacle, authority, vividness, or verbal delivery of Darius' report determine Atossa's response? Xerxes' torn robes paint an ugly mental picture of the king's disgrace. Might their aesthetic and emotional effect, as Atossa's words suggest, be limited if the clothes are kept both out of sight and out of mind.[15]

Slipping between emphasis on Xerxes' tattered robes and the experience of learning of them, Atossa invites two contrary, yet not entirely contradictory, aesthetic interpretations. Elevating personal perception to a level on par with form, the queen mother locates aesthetic value not only in objective realities themselves but in subjective experience. For Atossa, Xerxes' torn robes themselves are almost a matter of indifference; their aesthetic

13. On the rich performative, material, and tragic resonances of rags, see Telò 2017, discussed further in the next chapter.

14. Although the Greek verb *kluein* had primarily aural associations (cf. Ar. *Ran*. 1173–74), a transferred and intellectual meaning arose early on: cf. *LSJ* s.v. κλύειν I.1–2. Uncial transmission of the text has rendered the tense of this second-aorist participle ambiguous. Most editors follow Wilamowitz's interpretation as aorist (on analogy with the Chorus's *akousas* at 844); the present tense would place further emphasis on the intensity and vividness of Atossa's experience of the report.

15. On imagery in *Persians* generally, see Anderson 1972.

contribution is to be found in the effects they produce when perceived or imagined. For those inclined to see Atossa as brusquely dismissive of others' suffering, such solipsism (i.e., that her perception is all that matters) might be taken as further evidence of Atossa's vanity. Another explanation, however, might ground her focus on perception in social terms. Strictly speaking, the singular *kluousan* must take the queen mother as its grammatical head; in context, however, the participle refers to the circumstances in which Atossa heard Darius' report, surrounded by the Chorus of Persian elders.[16] Unlike the privacy of her earlier prophetic dream, here Atossa learns of her son's suffering publicly. Disgrace, *atimia*, and its associated negative states, thus surrounds the queen mother as well as her son.

Xerxes' ragged clothing powerfully affects the queen across various sensory modalities, but a fundamental distinction between seeing and hearing about his ugly garments drives the queen mother's next actions. Atossa resolves to leave the stage, not in an attempt to conceal the facts of the Persian defeat, but more narrowly to restore Xerxes from a haggard to a noble appearance (849–851):

> ἀλλ' εἶμι, καὶ λαβοῦσα κόσμον ἐκ δόμων
> ὑπαντιάζειν παιδί μου πειράσομαι.
> οὐ γὰρ τὰ φίλτατ' ἐν κακοῖς προδώσομεν.
>
> But I will go and, taking an outfit from the palace,
> I will attempt to intercept my son. For we
> will not forsake loved ones in the midst of hardships.

This final segment of Atossa's speech, too, serves theatrical and thematic ends. Her words provide motivation for her hasty exit, as she "attempts" (*peirasomai*, 850) to intercept her son; her hedging expression hints, rather literally, at her failure to redress Xerxes' suffering.[17] Ambiguities in the line also hint at the transferability of suffering: Atossa's reference to "hardships" (*en kakois*, 851) may refer to Xerxes' tribulations, but the neuter plural also recalls the "many pains of evils" (*poll' me . . . kakōn / algē*, 845–46) by which Atossa herself feels afflicted, blurring any clear distinctions between her

16. Cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 913–14, discussed below, where Xerxes emphasizes the intersubjective social dynamics of seeing, and begin seen, among the Persian elders.

17. Scodel 1999, 89, finds the lines "clearly an apology" and "an admitted contrivance." For a classic take on dramatic devices in the play, see Avery 1964.

son's misfortunes and her own. The word *kakos*, which frequently serves in both attributive and substantive capacities in the play, here conflates objective reality and subjective experience, since it is evident in Atossa's case that simply bearing witness to the pain can be, itself, a form of pain.[18] Ugly feelings, such as shame and grief, may be readily transferred, and embodied appearances serve as both their visible symptoms and communicable vectors.[19]

Atossa leaves the stage so that the tragedy's exodos, an extended, call-and-response lament conducted between Xerxes and the Chorus, may begin. During a choral song that emphasizes the glories of his father's good rule, Xerxes makes his way into the performance area.[20] At this highly anticipated dramatic moment, spectators' eyes are collectively drawn to the margins of the stage, eager to see whether the disgraced king will appear in regal robes or tattered rags. At this moment, perhaps, theatergoers cannot judge Atossa's concern with simple appearances too harshly: through Aeschylus' dramatic framing, the queen mother's preoccupation with appearances has become their own.

Xerxes' Arrival and the Contagious Aesthetics of Costume

Before appearing themselves on the stage, Xerxes' rags have become a focal point and *leitmotiv* of despair through the pronouncements and laments of a messenger, the revenant Darius, and Atossa. Xerxes' entrance shifts the Chorus from their ode to the extended *kommos* that brings the play to a close.[21] The rags are not verbally mentioned upon his arrival; like Electra's appearance in Euripides, the spectacle of royalty in rags is allowed time to "speak" for itself. But even without explicit mention, every verbal indication pointing to Xerxes' person implicitly emphasizes the Per-

18. On the thematic and structural significance of the word *kakos* in *Persians*, see Garvie 2009, xl.

19. For "ugly feelings," see my discussion of Ngai 2005 in the introduction.

20. On Aeschylus' use of visual delay, cf. Ar. *Ran*. 919f. On his tendency to shift from verbal to visual presentation, see Herington 1986, 67–71. Some suggest Xerxes arrives on a cart (cf. Agamemnon's arrival in the *Oresteia*), but Taplin (1977, 121–22) suggests that Xerxes arrive "in tattered finery, on foot, and by himself." On the ways social cognition affects theatrical aesthetics when viewing significant moments, see Duncan 2023b.

21. On the audience's anticipation of Xerxes' arrival, see discussions at Taplin 1977, 121–22; Thalmann 1980, 266–67; and Hall 1996, *ad loc*.

sian's ragged appearance: "wretched me," "what I have suffered," "ah me, alas, miserable."[22] Xerxes wishes that he could be covered (*kalypsai*, 917) in death with his fallen men. Through playing upon the doubled meaning of *kalyptein*, which denotes both "bury" and "veil," Xerxes suggests that it would be less painful to be covered by the earth in death than by his rags in shame.[23] The visual nature of calamity is expressed by the Chorus (Aesch. *Pers.* 1005–7):

ἰώ ἰώ δαίμονες,
<ὡς> ἔθετ' ἄελπτον κακὸν
διαπρέπον· οἷον δέδορκεν Ἄτα

Oh, oh gods!
What an unhoped for and conspicuous evil
you have set [upon us]—how terribly Ruin looks [upon us]!

The Chorus considers the disaster that has befallen the Persians visually striking (*diaprepon*), even framing the metaphysical destructive force (*Atē*) as an "evil eye" that causes ruin through the process of looking upon the Persians.[24] The theatrical audience, like the internal audience formed by the Chorus of Persian elders, does not see any of the destruction firsthand. The rags of the king visually connect the ugly horrors of the expedition's defeat to the theatrical present.

Finally, in antiphonal threnody, Xerxes makes mention of his robes. He asks rhetorically whether the Chorus can see his robes (Aesch. *Pers.* 1017–18):

Ξε. ὁρᾷς τὸ λοιπὸν τόδε τᾶς ἐμᾶς στολᾶς
Χο. ὁρῶ ὁρῶ.

XERXES: Do you see this, the remainder of my dress?
CHORUS: Yes, I see, I see.

Xerxes' destroyed *stolē* aurally recalls his naval expedition, *stolos*, and his rags are a remnant (*loipon*) of his past glory, metonymically representing the

22. Respectively, *dustēnos egō* (909), *ti pathō tlēmōn* (912), and *hod' egōn, oioi, aiaktos* (931).

23. *LSJ*, *s.v.* καλύπτω I.a, c.

24. On Atē in archaic and classical poetry, see Doyle 1984. Sommerstein (2013) associates Atē with folly rather than divine intervention. On the destructive power of in cross-cultural perspective, see Maloney 1976.

few that returned home from the ill-fated mission.[25] Xerxes recounts that he rent his robes upon witnessing the defeat, and the actor playing the defeated king may well have re-enacted the motion in his narration. According to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Xerxes is an effective orator, using costume, mournful cries, and gestures to represent to his audience the evil that the Persian army experienced weeks before on another continent. Although the messenger's report had already brought the news, it merely served, like the rest of the tragedy, as a warm-up for Xerxes' arrival. It is the raggedly dressed Xerxes who, through visual and verbal means, does not simply report but in a way recreates the disaster before the eyes of both the Chorus and the audience.

Xerxes' representation of past grief sparks a sympathetic response in the Chorus that energizes the second half of the *kommos*. At their king's behest, the choreuts replay Xerxes' physical gestures of lament, and the emotional dirge becomes marked by both lyrical and physical responses. Xerxes' grief is communicated to, and replayed by, members of the Chorus, who not only rend their own robes but also pull out the gray hairs of their beard and head.[26] The ugly and painful realities of defeat, transmitted through the figure of Xerxes, become contagious, as the Chorus visually and vocally amplifies the defeat of the military expedition and the destruction of Asia's youth. In a tragedy that has recalled a glorious past, Xerxes and the aged Chorus, the ragged remnants of Persia's manhood, leave the stage foreseeing a dismal future.

The future, however, could not have appeared more hopeful for the victorious and ascendant Athenian audience, who by 472 were already beginning to enjoy the first fruits of their naval empire. The ruinous defeats by land and sea that fell hard upon Xerxes, Atossa, and the Chorus were, of course, victories for the Greeks and Athenians in particular. But to call Marathon a victory is only to consider the outcome of the battle at a tactical, national level. The reception of war was likely much different for Athenian citizens and their families. The exceptional historical subject matter of *Persians* adds an immediacy to the theatrical display that has no comparison among extant Athenian drama. A sizable portion of Aeschylus' audience, like the playwright himself, must have been present at either Salamis or Marathon, witnessing firsthand the corpses of both Greeks and Persians who died on the battlefield or washed up on the shores. For those who had

25. The king also describes himself as "stripped naked" (*gymnos*) of his military escorts: Aesch. *Pers.* 1036.

26. Aesch. *Pers.* 1056–62. Like the biblical Samson, the depilation of the choreuts' beard and hair symbolizes the cutting of the army's strength: see Aesch. *Pers.* 1035, *sthenos g' ekolouthē*.

not themselves fought, reports similar to that which was brought to Susa by the Persian messenger would have described not only the decisive Athenian victories at Marathon and Salamis, but also the minor losses before these pitched battles and the casualty lists of Greek soldiers as well.

The audience of *Persians* in Athens possessed in their own memory a vision of the ugly horrors of war. The symbolic weight of Xerxes' rags, a manifestation not only of Persian defeat but also of the painful destruction of war felt by both sides, should not be underestimated. As an art form, theater relies heavily on the audience's memory, both collectively and individually. Xerxes' arrival in formless rags and the sympathetic self-mutilation of the Chorus created, in and of itself, an ugly spectacle. But the specter of the Persian wars haunted the production. Though we can appreciate the ugliness of the onstage spectacle and compare it to modern horrors of war and defeat, we can never hope to see the ugliness of *Persians* with the same eyes as its audience in 472.

Conclusion

Xerxes' arrival in tattered robes brings the tragedy to a spectacular and emotional close. However, *Persians*, the world's first extant drama, was merely the prologue to what would become a century-long fascination in Athenian drama with characters placed in extreme circumstances and, not coincidentally, dressed in torn or dirty clothing. The pathetic spectacle of royals in rags was hardly an invention of the tragic stage. Kings reduced to threadbare clothing or who disguised themselves through mutilating their garments, and sometimes their bodies as well, were a familiar trope not only from Greek hexameter epics but from broader folkloric traditions as well.[27] If rags were not native to tragedy, they were nevertheless eminently suited to its dramatic medium. Rags materialize suffering and destruction on the stage, producing both pain and pity not only through the layered cultural associations of these particular garments, but also their direct sensory and affective appeal as ugly objects.

27. Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* (*TrGF* 3 T 5), a tragedy that preceded *Persians* by several years, seems to have influenced Aeschylus' composition; see Garvie 2009, x. It may also have presented a defeated Xerxes in rags. Even as the garments' tragic precedents became primary cultural reference points, the epic origins of rags remained accessible and sometimes salient: cf. Ar. *Vesp*. 351, where the Chorus suggest the protagonist Philocleon follow Odysseus' example (not Euripides') in dressing in rags to make his escape. On the epic background of tragic costume, see Wyles 2011, 55.

In tragedy, rags bend time and space. They are historical documents and affective vessels, a visible and tangible record of painful misfortunes suffered in the past. The painful events materialized in the garments, robes rent into rags, typically occur before the action of the drama.[28] Rags thereby extend the temporal range of the drama beyond its canonical "one-day" scope, retrojecting misfortune onto characters' pasts just as the divine pronouncements *ex machina* project hardship or reward onto their futures.[29] This is especially important in a tragedy such as *Persians*, where the misfortune of defeat occurs before the events dramatized in the work even begin. Unlike later tragedy, *Persians* represents no reversal of fortune in real terms; the uncertainty of pitched battle is transferred to the uncertainty concerning Xerxes' appearance. The distinction between aesthetics and other systems of evaluation (martial, national, and the like) is confounded.

Atossa's speech, and *Persians* as a whole, makes much ado about Xerxes' tattered robes. Whatever their inherent power, the garments are hardly left to speak for themselves, but materially anchor the metaphorical and modal networks of the tragedy. And yet rags, as a costume item, do seem to have a power of their own, at least within the longer history of the fifth-century Athenian stage. This peculiar costume item would go on to become a reliable and efficient shorthand for signaling pain in tragedy. Eponymous heroes and anonymous Chorus members alike took the stage dressed in tatters in the Athenian fifth century so frequently that less than fifty years after *Persians*, entire comedic scenes could be devoted to satirizing the hackneyed convention.[30] Despite such caricature, the tragic stage would remain populated typically by royal characters dressed, like Darius, in conspicuously sumptuous robes. But, as in *Persians*, the visual splendor of such ornate tragic costumes was marked and maintained not only through extra-generic contrast with the grotesquely deformed and hybridized bodies of Old Comedy and satyr play, as is sometimes supposed, but also through frequent intra-generic distinction as well. Rags may have become such a fixture of the tragic stage in part because these ugly garments found and exploited a niche position within the broader aesthetics of the genre that was crucial to the production of its crucial painful feelings.

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28. Bellerophon's flight, occurring in the middle of the tragedy, is an exception: see Webster 1967, 109, Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995, 101. Phoenix is also, like Polymestor, blinded mid-play; why he appears in rags is unclear. For discussion, see Webster 1967, 84–85.

29. Aristotle observes that tragedy naturally limited its scope to the span of one revolution of the sun at 1449b13; the note is descriptive rather than prescriptive.

30. In *Acharnians*, Aristophanes singles out Euripides as particularly dependent upon the costume. See my discussion in the next chapter, alongside Telò 2017.

The peculiarly theatrical power of rags may be gleaned by the ways these distinctively theatrical garments resisted representation in other media. In studying their function and aesthetics, the absence of these ugly costumes in other media may be as significant as their presence in drama. Simply put, we do not have any reliable visual depiciton of what theatrical rags looked like onstage: evidence from vase painting and sculpture either eschews the representation of tattered clothing and the like, or else places a symbolic bandage on a wounded figure, as in depictions of Telephus discussed in the next chapter. As a result, the dramatic playscripts so often serve not only as the primary, but also our only, description of these paradigmatically ugly tragic costumes. Such evidentiary bias naturally poses interpetive difficulties, but it suggests that ugliness, as an affective mode, may have been a special quality of the theatrical experience.

Surveying the visual evidence pertaining to fifth-century Attic tragedy, Oliver Taplin writes that the conventions of each artistic medium modulate and moderate what is visually presented: "[V]ase paintings [do not] censor everything unpleasant. They still show grief and violence, wounds and corpses; but these subjects are always portrayed in a way that retains a certain distancing calm. However ugly the story, the painting is never ugly."[31]

Taplin is inclined to see such painterly aversion to ugliness as reflecting the broad aesthetics of tragedy itself:

> In experiencing tragedy in the theater, people are taken to a prospect of the depths of horror, crises of instability, and trials of endurance, such as we hope that we shall seldom, if ever, meet in reality. Then, at the end of the play, no one in the theater is really dead or traumatized. And this experience of the abyss, this vision of the dark, this journey into disorder has been seen and heard *in a form that has beauty*. The poetry, dance, music, costumes, and voices, the fluency of sound and action have all conspired to make the experience strengthening, not weakening.[32]

Without denying that tragic production, in its aggregate form, may tend toward the attractive and emotively "strengthening," it is hard to see how the "experience of the abyss" and "vision of the dark" Taplin finds as characteristic of the genre can be accomplished without at least some trafficking

31. Taplin 2007, 47.
32. Taplin 2007, 46, emphasis mine.

in the dark and unsavory. Aesthetic consistency is not a prerequisite of any genre, and while tragedy's embellished language and related features may be normatively attractive, they must not be homogenized.[33] It is in their individual variety, and through their collective tensions and permutations, that they form an essential aspect of the multimedia theater. It is suggestive that vase paintings featuring paradigmatically wounded and wretched heroes, such as Telephus or Philoctetes, eschew rags entirely in their representation. The notable absence of rags in vase painting prompts questions not only concerning what, specifically, about ragged costume is so powerful in the theater, but also why the aesthetic power of such garments translates so poorly into other media.

33. In a passage that resonates with and likely informs Taplin's description of tragedy, Aristotle (*Poet.* 1449b25–26) notes the pleasingly "embellished language" (*hēdusmenos logos*) of the genre. On Aristotle's (aesthetically) ennobling treatment of tragedy, see the previous chapter.

TWO

The Aesthetic Limits of Costume

Beauty, Embodiment, and Performance in Euripides' Helen, Electra, *and* Telephus

This chapter explores the appearance and meaning of "ugly" costumes across tragedy in connection to the other materials of the stage (masks, hair, and properties) as well as the garments' verbal framing in the playscript. Clothing might convey negative aesthetic value onstage through a variety of means: through the form, color, composition, or craftsmanship of the materials themselves, or through their situational use, which marked garments as inappropriate, uncanny, or infernal in relation to their context. The multifactored aesthetics of costume resist simple categorization, and it is often difficult to determine which aspects of the materials, inherent or relational, that are most dramatically salient at any given moment for any given audience. Over the historical course of Athenian drama in the fifth century BCE, however, one costume type became associated with negative aesthetic value: ragged or tattered fabrics. Threadbare from long use or rent in sudden grief, dusty from travel or fetid from oozing wounds, the ragged costumes of tragedy are often jointly framed in formalist and affective terms in drama. As objects of sight, discussion, and emotive response, rags act as important connective nodes within the layered networks of theatrical experience, anchoring a materially synesthetic response to the sight, sound (in the moment of tearing and subsequent movement), and feel (in their rough texture). Few aspects of the tragic stage share such overlapping and negative affective associations; none was nearly so frequently or prominently represented.[1] Appearing in dramas spanning the entire fifth century and the

1. On tragic costume generally, see Pickard-Cambridge 1988 (180–209) and Wyles 2011,

works of all three major tragedians, rags provide a compelling cross-section of the sartorial aesthetics of the ancient Greek theater in tragedy and, as chapters 3 and 4 will argue, Old Comedy as well.

Building upon the study of Xerxes' rags in chapter 1, this chapter offers a series of vignettes that sketch out how core tensions between bodies, materials, and aesthetics, activated by and made manifest in ragged costumes, informed Euripidean tragedy roughly half a century after Aeschylus' *Persians*. It begins with a study of *Helen* that focuses on the vocabulary pertaining to a character's appearance as a whole, calling attention to the difficulty of distinguishing clothing from body, myth from material, when considering beauty as well as ugliness on the stage. Although Helen's beauty resists association with any one aspect of her being, Menelaus' ugly outfit generates not only shame, but also an idea for escape. Turning next to Euripides' *Electra*, a work similarly concerned with the ambivalence of poor clothing as a marker of shame and maker of deception, one observes how knowledge of panhellenic myth but Athenian theater history combines to shape characters' individual aesthetics. Electra's costume conveys more than inward emotion or outward circumstance, but also an awareness of the emergent generic aesthetics of tragedy. Finally, a consideration of the fragmentary Euripidean tragedy, *Telephus*, in dialogue with related moments in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and vase paintings, underscores how both physical and social injury might be dramatically conveyed through costume, even when it is the body itself, in a narrow sense, that is most directly affected. Across these different examples, the dramatic pattern observed in Aeschylus' *Persians* of framing costume in emotional, embodied, and contextually embedded terms makes ragged garments not only highly affecting materials and layered symbols of suffering, but a distinctive and generative generic leitmotif as well.

Transcendent Beauty, Ugly Materials: Locating Personal Aesthetics Between Body and Clothes in Euripides' *Helen*

Costumes were one of the Attic dramatists' simplest and most reliable tools for establishing the beauty or ugliness of individual characters on stage and

who notes the frequency of rags and "poor clothing," and offers (141) a helpful index of references to such costume in extant tragedy. Aeschylus' costumes were considered by later generations to possess a high degree of grandeur: cf. Ar. *Ran*. 1061, and see Rosenbloom 2017 and Munteanu 2018.

yet, in most cases, garments were left aesthetically unmarked in the verbal script. Rather, when it is described, clothing is often categorized according to its quality, ranging from richly embroidered and dyed robes (*peploi*) to the ragged clothes of poverty. Clothing may also be defined with reference to its ritual or social use, from the finery of weddings and burials to plain, black garments of mourning.[2] These descriptions and use cases are aesthetically charged, of course, but they tend to mark the wearer's circumstances rather than an enduring aspect of their appearance. As discussed in the introduction, in contrast to the earlier Greek epic and lyric poetic tradition, the heroes and heroines of the tragic stage are rarely described as "beautiful" with respect to their bodily appearance or clothing. This difference may be attributed, at least in part, to the practical constraints of theatrical production, in which placing mythic characters before "the mind's eye" involved placing actors and objects before spectators' gaze. The dramatic aesthetics of Greek tragedy are always as complex as the layered dynamics of theatrical vision. If costumes rarely if ever play a defining role in establishing Greek dramatic aesthetics, they are nevertheless an essential means for framing and mediating characters' appearances.

For an analysis of the sartorial and semiotic tensions underpinning dramatic aesthetics, Euripides' *Helen* offers a particularly telling example. The tragedy, first produced in 412 BCE, opens when the eponymous character, the archetype of Greek feminine beauty, arrives alone on stage. Helen's solitude is important for several reasons. It allows the character, who inhabits a theatrically powerful position frequently reserved in Euripidean tragedy for divine figures, to deliver a prologue directly to the audience that establishes a counter-Homeric narrative. In Euripides' narrative, as in Stesichorus' palinode, the Spartan queen never sails to Troy. Rather, as Helen herself informs the audience, a divinely crafted image, or *eidōlon*, was sent in her place, while the "real" Helen was placed under the protection of the pious Egyptian king Proteus, whose hot-tempered son, Theoclymenus, now pursues her in marriage. Aesthetically, however, this private moment between Helen and her theatrical audience has spectators see the heroine, and begin to form their aesthetic judgments and expectations, prior to any play-internal observation of her form. The prologue makes clear the disastrous consequences of Helen's beauty for the heroine and those around her, but it leaves the source and nature of her remarkable appearance vague. As before the elders upon the walls of Troy in Homer's *Iliad*, the beauty of Euripides' Helen is traced in its effects rather than its bodily outline.

2. See Wyles 2011, 139–42 for a list of references.

Helen's dramatic aesthetics are at once simple and difficult to pin down.[3] Dressed (as the play-text will later confirm) in plain white linen robes (perhaps a reflection of her Spartan origin), her appearance seems not to have been ornamented by what she wears on stage.[4] She may have appeared on stage looking no different materially than any other tragic heroine, yet Helen laments in her prologue the many misfortunes, personal and public, that have stemmed from her beauty (*kallos*, 27), including her current Penelope-like predicament as the object of an aggressive male suitor's attention. Although ostensibly a gift, through the ironies of mythical narrative and the gendered power dynamics of her society, Helen's beauty has proved a true "misfortune" (*dystyches*, 27). Her personal aesthetics are ineluctable, as if they are fused with her mythic identity. And yet, in a vivid confession to the Chorus of fellow Greek women later in the play, Helen wishes she might be "wiped out" (*exaleiphtheis'*, 262) "like some portrait" (*hōs agalma*, 262) and no longer face the destructive consequences of her beauty.

When she is alone or with her trusted female companions, Helen speaks of her beauty poignantly, but it is rarely the focus of her interactions with others in the play. Rather, when the shipwrecked Greek warriors who appear on stage first encounter her, they are struck far more by her *likeness* to the woman they saw at Troy than by her beauty per se. This is significant. Helen's beauty is received as a "given" from the epic tradition; it does not need to be produced onstage through materials or performance. Identity, rather than beauty, is the thematic focus here.

In a play that places much emphasis on appearance and reality, it is noteworthy that Helen's clothes receive little attention. Teucer, the first of the Greek sailors to encounter Helen, assumes he must be seeing a doppelgänger, since he had just left what he considers to be the "real" Helen on the shore near the wreckage of their ship. Addressing Helen in wonder, Teucer is struck by the "appearance" (*opsis*, 72) and "form" (*eikōn*, 73) of the woman who stands before her; ironically, he judges her a "copy" (*mimēma*, 74) of the woman over whom the Greeks had fought at Troy.[5] *Opsis* and *eikōn* are capacious terms for visual perception, allowing for little practi-

3. As Marshall (2014, 296) notes, "Ultimately, Helen's beauty does not reside in her face alone, and the mask is only one of a series of signifiers that combine to create the composite, complex character."

4. On Dorian dress in tragedy, see Battezzato 1999/2000. On Helen's costume in particular, see Powers 2010; on costume's connections to meta-theatricality in the play, see especially Stavrinou 2015 and Zuckerberg 2016a.

5. Eur. *Hel.*

cal distinction between clothing, gesture, body, or face.[6] Teucer continues to observe also that the woman he addresses has a body (*sōma*, 160) like that of "Helen," the outward appearance of which he contrasts strongly with the personality, *phrenai*, of the apparently gracious woman he has just met. Menelaus, too, when he arrives in another, more successful recognition scene involving Helen, claims to be struck by this woman's *demas* and also, like Teucer, the heroine's *opsis*.[7] *Demas*, a word closely tied to the bodily frame independent of, or at least under, clothes, lays no stress upon her garments. *Opsis*, like *schēma*, often refers to the combined effect of clothing and bodily frame, but it is presumably the particularities of Helen's person that Menelaus stresses here. Of course, there would be nothing particularly wondrous, after all, in finding a person on a far-flung shore who simply dressed like Helen. And yet superlative beauty tends to spark some discussion; Helen's attractiveness in the play is practically only evident in the Egyptian king Theoclymenus' eagerness to marry her. Euripides' *Helen* thus highlights a problem at the intersection of tragic costume, aesthetics, and identity: How can a tragic body be recognized as belonging to a particular character, and a uniquely beautiful character at that, when the visual tools available to the playwright compel beauty to be standardized?

In production, Helen's *demas* would have been fully concealed by her tragic costume, revealing the character's stature, build, and movement, but little else. Helen's *prosōpon* was surely visible, but neither Menelaus nor Teucer explicitly refer to her face, the aspect of her appearance that would naturally constitute the surest token of individual identity. It is, in the end, Helen herself who draws attention to her face when plotting the deception that will ultimately lead her and her husband to escape. In order to appear convincingly in mourning, Helen intends to lacerate her cheeks in a ritual defacement typical of women's lament, which, she claims, will be accompanied by two other changes in appearance: the ritual cutting of hair and dressing in black robes.[8] This necessitates not only a costume change, but a

6. Although *opsis* may refer specifically to the face (*LSJ s.v.* ὄψις I.b), it need not do so here.

7. Eur. *Hel.* 548, 557. *Demas* occurs a remarkable nine times in *Helen* (only *Hippolytus* has more, with ten). Five occurrences (383, 548, 559, 619, and 1672) refer to the heroine, remarking either on her formal similarity to the *eidōlon* or contrasting her ontological difference; twice of Menelaus (1060, 1092), once of Theocylmenus (810), and once of a sacrificial bull (1562).

8. Eur. *Hel.* 1087–89. It may be that the marked meta-theatricality of *prosōpon* would go too far in this tragedy that already pushes generic boundaries; see Jendza (2020). Pucci

rare change of masks.[9] Only in this moment of costume change do we learn that Helen has been dressed in white robes, *leukoi peploi*, a relatively neutral description that, in contrast to embroidered garments (*poikiloi peploi*) often found in tragedy, suggests a simplicity of dress.[10] Helen's *eidōlon*, who is never staged in the play, becomes a screen on which the beauty of Helen, which cannot be realized in physical theatrical production, is projected.[11] In sum, even for a character such as Helen, whose exceptionally beautiful appearance is fundamental to the narrative of the tragedy, other characters may take no notice of her clothing until it is marked as mourning dress.

Costume as Extended Body: Blurred Distinctions between Fabric, Skin, and Hair

Ugly aesthetics do not pass unmarked in tragedy and consistently have a costumed component, whether this is in the color, cut, or state of the materials. Rags, in particular, serve metaphorical and material roles in tragic realization: marked in dialogue (perhaps no less than they stood out on stage), these compromised fabrics represented and resonated with the tragic body discussed above. In a genre generally concerned with royal characters

(1997) offers an ontological study of the play with attention to the drama's comic leanings. On Greek mourning ritual, see Alexiou (1978), Seremetakis (1991), and Holst-Warhaft (1992).

9. The disparity between Helen's intended defacement and how her Theoclymenos responds to her reappearance is intriguing. Dismissing the incongruity between the two possible realizations, Hense (1902, 47) writes "der Dichter würde in beiden Fällen nur zeigen, dass er kein Pedant ist," ("the poet would in both cases only show that he is no pedant." While it may be pedantic to insist upon consistency in Greek drama, as this book is at pains to articulate, dramatic aesthetic depend upon the dynamic synthesis of evidence, however contradictory, within and across sensory modalities.

10. On Helen's dress as Spartan and the ideological significant of that costume in late fifth-century tragedy, see Battezzato (1999/2000). When applied to material objects in tragedy, *poikilos* often signals beautiful luxury: see Wyles (2011); on the cognitive aesthetics of *poikilia* in general, see Lather (2021). Embroidered gowns are frequently mentioned in tragedy: see Aesch. *Pers.* 836, *Ag.* 923–36 , Soph. fr. 586.1f, Eur. *Med.* 1159, *Andr.* 148, *IT* 1150. The use of *poikilos* at Eur. *Hel.* 411 ironically underscores the raggedness of Menelaus' garb; his ship had been richly ornamented, and it is the ruined flotsam and jetsam of that ship that now constitutes his rags.

11. Downing (1990, 2) notes that the *eidōlon* "divests Hellen of her *kallos*," allowing her to be invested with *parthenia*. The staging of Helen in plain robes would support this aspect of his reading.

presented in sumptuous dress, torn or squalid garments never seem to occur accidentally. Even Euripides, a playwright known for the accuracy and realism of dramatic portrayals, no less than his domestic and democratic thematic concerns, never seems to have staged a character who simply happens to be poor in his tragedies. Ragged garments may have been commonplace in the streets and alleys of Athens, but they are always marked in drama.

This association between soiled clothes and hair is borne out in Euripides' *Electra* as well, in which the raggedly dressed heroine describes her own hair as *pinaros*.[12] These two cases suggest an association of ugly hair and dress in tragedy. Three reasons may lie behind this visual link between hair and garments. First, as materials, hair and cloth are especially prone to retaining dirt and dust. Costumes and hair were, as we have seen in the case of Euripides' *Helen*, among the most flexible material aspects of the Greek tragic dress. Additionally, hair and garments are the parts of one's appearance that are disfigured in the process of lament, the standard gestures of which include tearing out one's hair, shredding one's garments, and (mostly in the case of women) deeply scratching one's cheeks.[13] One's hair and dress were particular and practical focal points for expressing abject conditions on through tragic costume. Squalor, for instance, could not be effectively conveyed through the mask or concealed and normalized tragic body, nor could an emaciated frame be clearly presented under tragedies typically long and thick robes. It is through Electra's hair and rags, primarily and perhaps alone, that Clytemnestra leads the audience in seeing her daughter as *aloutos*, "unwashed."[14] Tragic appearances, and the aesthetics that followed from them, could be accomplished through little more than costume, hair, and framing.

The dirt that is regularly associated with rags leads the discussion from the formal or inherent properties of rags to their cultural associations. It is not surprising that rags, through repeated association, would come to signify metaphorically the values and attributes of those who wear them. Worn-out clothes suit worn-out individuals, and it is perhaps for this reason that they became a mark of the aged.[15] Hecuba makes explicit the connection in *Trojan Women* through a *figura etymologica*, envisioning her pathetic life as a slave in Argos (Eur. *Tro.* 496–97):

12. Eur. *El.* 184f.

13. Alexiou 1974, 6, 16–17, and 28–29.

14. Eur. *El.* 1107; in the context of her (false) birth, this would also mark Electra as polluted; see discussion at Parker 1983, 48–53.

15. See the discussion of the materialist trope at Telò 2017, 94. One should not ignore the practical correlation between age and poverty in the premodern world.

τρυχηρὰ περὶ τρυχηρὸν εἱμένην χρόα
πέπλων λακίσματ', ἀδόκιμ' ὀλβίοις ἔχειν.

Wearing about my tattered skin the tattered
Scraps of robes, inglorious for one who had riches.

Rags are especially closely related to the wearer's skin, to such an extent that the same adjective (*truchēros*) applies to both. The aged servant in Euripides' *Electra* who, like the heroine, is explicitly dressed in rags describes himself as wrinkled old man (*rhusos gerōn*).[16] The same adjective might well be applied to the man's garments, a tatter (*truchos*) of which he uses to dry his tears.[17] Again, since the man's wrinkled skin would be covered by his full-length tragic costume, his withered old age is conveyed through his weathered old clothing. The connection between rags and skin, left metaphorical in tragedy, may be used literally in Aristophanes' *Wealth*, where the protagonist Chremylus accuses a humorously lustful older woman of caking her face with makeup to conceal its "rags" from sight.[18] By the Hadrianic period, and possibly before, *rak(i)ōsis* is used in medical writings to describe wrinkles or worn and chafed skin, and it may be that Aristophanes' use of *rhakē* in *Wealth* was not innovative but was the standard term for aged and wrinkled skin.[19] The metonymic relationship between clothes and skin, fundamental to the tragic representation of the body, apparently extends beyond the theater as well.

Dramatic clothes complicate boundaries between biological self and material other perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in the putrescent rags of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. These rags, which the hero Neoptolemus first discovers upon arriving on an empty scene, more than index the wounded hero's physical suffering or signal his inhabitation of a certain Lemnian cave.[20] They also act as a matrix for Philoctetes' bodily fluids, materially distributing and affectively extending the hero, making his painful suffering present even in the absence of his fully embodied self. Close inspection of the rags is particularly affecting and causes Neoptolemus to retch in disgust, inarticulately crying *iou, iou*.[21] Even as they serve as a symbolic and material proxy for Philoctetes, these rags, too, have their own organic

16. Eur. *El.* 490.
17. Eur. *El.* 501.
18. Ar. *Plut.* 1065, *opsei katadēla tou prosōpou ta rhakē.*
19. Sor. *Gyn.* 2.40; Zen. 6.42; Diogenian 8.70.
20. Soph. *Phil.* 38–39.
21. Soph. *Phil.* 38.

object histories, as woolen or linen fabrics that were once a part of discrete living organisms. Once torn and no longer part of a smooth, continuous piece of woven cloth, the stray fibers of these rags not only capture and hold Philoctetes' body, but also present once again their natural origins.

Philoctetes' rags, although indicative of the aesthetic power of costume and its close connections to embodiment, are exceptional in standing as a proxy for a remote body. In tragedy it is far more typical for the wounded or dying character's body itself to serve as the focal point and material anchor for dramatizing the character's suffering. Wounded, exiled, betrayed, and utterly alone on Lemnos, Philoctetes is exceptional in many ways. But in wearing rags, at any rate, the hero is similar not only to the tragic figures already mentioned, but also to many of the poor and downtrodden who eked a living in fifth-century Attica, those regularly abhorred and derided in the city's streets and gutters. Exchanging a royal character's finery for sordid rags does not make her or him more realistic, but rather more pitiful and spectacular.

Rags as Poverty and Performance in Euripides' *Electra*

In Euripides' *Electra*, the eponymous heroine appears in rags just minutes into the production, and the peasant (who may himself be dressed in rags or similarly worn-down clothing) delivers the opening prologue.[22] Placed at the opening of these tragedies, rags are particularly rich conveyors of the narrative and affective backstory. Before the characters even begin to recount their misfortunes, the visible effects of their hardships are clear to the spectator. Tragic rags pair the immediacy of pity with the historical background provided by narrative. A moment of dialogue between Electra and Orestes, who has yet to reveal his identity to his sister, indicates the narrative power implicit in appearance. Electra asks what her brother wants to know (Eur. *El.* 238–41):

Ορ. εἰ ζῇς, ὅπως τε ζῶσα συμφορᾶς ἔχεις.
Ηλ. οὔκουν ὁρᾶις μου πρῶτον ὡς ξηρὸν δέμας;
Ορ. λύπαις γε συντετηκός, ὥστε με στένειν.
Ηλ. καὶ κρᾶτα πλόκαμόν τ' ἐσκυθισμένον ξυρῶι.

22. The heroine enters at Eur. *El.* 44.

Or. If you are alive, and how you are faring in your misfortune.
El. Well then, to begin don't you see my body, how withered it is?
Or. Yes, so wasted with pain that I moan.
El. And hair, cut short as if scalped by a Scythian.

Electra's wasted corporeal frame (*xēron demas*, 239) would be impossible for spectators to see underneath the folds of her dramatic costume. But the short-cropped hair, readily portrayed on the mask, and the heroine's ragged dress visibly communicated her misfortune in general and acted as a material cipher for her emaciation. Electra points to her body as evidence of her misfortune; her rags and shorn locks speak silently, but eloquently, of her plight. As Electra's use of the *oukoun* underscores, she does not need to point out her appearance, which was already manifest to Orestes. But by dwelling on the particulars and by reinforcing the visual with the verbal, Electra affectively and aesthetically frames her exchange, increases the pathos of the scene as a whole.

Independent of bodily appearance, rags were also the primary signifier of poverty. The modern reader of ancient texts must remind herself that in a preindustrial age, clothes that appeared fresh, whether recently woven or washed, were an expensive commodity. New clothes, or an abundance of clothes, were tokens of wealth.[23] The extension of such riches to the lower members of a home or palace was particularly ostentatious. An impoverished Electra rages at the expensive raiment of the Trojan slaves who serve in the Argive palace, casting her further into abjection through the comparison (Eur. *El.* 315–18):

πρὸς δ' ἕδραισιν Ἀσίδες
δμωαὶ στατίζουσ', ἃς ἔπερσ' ἐμὸς πατήρ,
Ἰδαῖα φάρη χρυσέαις ἐζευγμέναι
πόρπαισιν.

And beside [Clytemnestra's] seat Asian
slaves stand, whom my father took as plunder,
fastening their Idaean robes with golden
brooches.

23. One may think of Nausicaa, prompted by Athena, washing her clothes in Hom. *Od.* 6.25–98. Describing Persian luxuries in the Platonic *First Alcibiades*, Socrates lists clothes, *esthētas*, among other badges of these oriental riches: Pl. *Alc.* 1.122c. Denyer 2001, 14–25, addresses the work's authenticity. Platonic authorship is immaterial to the present purposes, so long as the work is from the classical period.

And yet we learn early on in the play that Electra has turned down the Chorus' kind offer to provide her with more becoming clothes that would befit a festive occasion for the young women of the community. From the rural young women who form her sympathetic Chorus to the fineries of the royal palace, several hierarchies of material aesthetics are at play in Euripides' *Electra*. Constantly on her body, Electra's clothes are constantly on her mind as well. Her griefs are many, but it is not her withered frame, nor her rustic home (168), nor even the squalor of her hair (184), cropped short in self-debasing mourning (108), that Electra most emphasizes in recounting her suffering when she meets her brother. In her urgent plea for sympathy and action, among Electra's many deprivations, it is her ruined robes that come first (Eur. *El.* 303–8):

> ἄγγελλ' Ὀρέστηι τἀμὰ κἀκείνου κακά,
> πρῶτον μὲν οἵοις ἐν πέπλοις αὐλίζομαι,
> πίνωι θ' ὅσωι βέβριθ', ὑπὸ στέγαισί τε (305)
> οἵαισι ναίω βασιλικῶν ἐκ δωμάτων,
> αὐτὴ μὲν ἐκμοχθοῦσα κερκίσιν πέπλους
> ἢ γυμνὸν ἕξω σῶμα καὶ στερήσομαι
>
> Tell Orestes my troubles along with his own:
> First, tell him in what clothes I'm living,
> and in what filth I'm weighed down, and beneath
> what kind of roof I live—having come from the royal palace,
> How she, herself, having toiled at the loom,
> or else I would go naked, deprived of robes.

It is artificial to separate Electra's garments from the rest of her self-presentation, formally or spatially. Her garments' tattered and soiled state finds formal parallels in her dirty hair and the skin of her cheeks, scratched in ritual lament. But the narrative primacy of her garments in Electra's speech corresponds to the pre-eminence of her costume on stage. There, too, worn fabrics are hardly distinct from other physical aspects of the scene. But their dynamism and attachment to character, their rich formal and cultural associations, and above all their sensuous materiality, made Electra's rags the principal means of producing ugliness on Euripides' stage.

Electra's theatrical identity reflects the general paradox of rags on the fifth-century stage. Her clothing is arbitrary on one hand, and yet deeply revealing on another; her robes at once artificial and authentic. Although

reflecting in her person and costume the harsher realities of life, Euripides' Electra was also a remarkably *unreal* character, steeped in dramatic tradition. It is hardly coincidental that the deprivations she lists are those most capable of theatrical realization, rent garments, an unkempt wig, and set design being established conventions of the tragic stage. As has been much remarked, Euripides' Electra is self-consciously performative in both her actions and dress: the play makes clear at several places that Electra does not need to appear as she does.[24] Her appearance is "theatrical" in the sense that it is the product of conscious choice. To make a performative distinction in terms, as English does, Electra does not wear "clothes" so much as a "costume," garments intentionally, performatively, and perhaps disingenuously worn to achieve a certain effect.

Rags as Wounds: Wounded Telephus on Stage and in Greek Art

The previous sections of this chapter have argued that costume afforded aesthetic value to the otherwise neutral tragic body and that the correlation between ragged garments and the wounded, impoverished, or otherwise compromised body meant that such garments became not only an indexical signifier, but an affective conveyor of suffering on the stage. These fabrics allowed playwrights to convey effectively not only abstract and affective states, such as dishonor, but also corporeal suffering that would otherwise have been technically difficult to represent. For example, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus' observation that after a painful attack from his disease, blood emanates from Philoctetes' foot (*akron . . . podos*) presents a technical challenge for the theater, but the ragged bandages the hero wears materially anchor and visually focus a bodily emanation for the audience.[25] Likewise, the case of Telephus in his lost but influential eponymous Euripidean tragedy, wounded in his thigh by a spear-thrust from Achilles and compelled to disguise himself as a beggar to gain entry to the council of Achaeans in Aulis, is far more problematic. The image of the wounded Telephus, taking the infant Orestes hostage at the altar in Aulis, inspired by the Euripidean performance, was depicted on several vases from the fifth and fourth centuries, including one held in Cleveland. These images might illuminate how Telephus' peculiarly compromised body may have been represented.

24. Cf. Eur. *El.* 57–58, 125–30.

25. Soph. *Phil.* 783f., 823f.; the hero is likely, although not explicitly, shoeless.

Figure 1. Obverse of Lucanian calyx-krater, ca. 400. Close to the Policoro Painter. H: 51.4 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art. 1999.1.

Figure 2. Detail from the reverse of a Lucanian calyx-krater, ca. 400. Close to the Policoro Painter. H: 51.4 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art. 1999.1.

Interest in the visual aspects of ancient production has led many scholars to examine theatrically relevant vase paintings in an attempt to reconstruct the possibilities of ancient dramatical staging.[26] Too little emphasis has been placed, however, on the role played by iconography in determining, rather than documenting, Athenian stage practice. As modern critics have done, so too might ancient playwrights and directors have sought inspiration in iconography, but in their case to construct, and not reconstruct, dramatic staging. Because tragedy took as its subject matter a set of traditional myths visually portrayed in vase painting, sculptured reliefs, and in more ephemeral media now lost to time, tragedians necessarily confronted established iconographic traditions in the course of composition. If the iconography of a mythic moment was well-known, adherence to or departure from the standard treatment would have been recognized by the audience, affecting their interpretation of the scene.[27]

But, as valuable as theatrical vase paintings are for our knowledge of ancient drama, depictions of theatrical subject matter in an overtly nontheatrical manner are also useful, as they illustrate those elements of myth that tragic stagecraft was poorly equipped to handle. Those places in an otherwise theatrical vase painting where the image departs from anything that might conceivably have appeared on the tragic stage may, in certain situations, indicate those places where tragic stagecraft was strained, pragmatically or aesthetically. The wounded Euripidean hero Telephus is a prime example. In the handful of vase paintings depicting the hero in what was to become the most famous moment of the drama, the "hostage scene," the wounded hero is depicted in a manner impossible to produce on the tragic stage: he is naked.

Let us begin with the most monumental depiction. On the less-familiar side of a Lucanian calyx-krater dated around 400 BCE and widely known, based on its spectacular front, as the "Cleveland Medea," Telephus is presented in the so-called "heroic nude," bare with the exception of the bandages on his right thigh that visually cover and symbolically reference his wound.[28] The other male figures on both sides of the vase are drawn in vari-

26. Among the major works, Webster 1967; Trendall and Webster 1971; Taplin 1993; Taplin 2007.

27. On the theatrical competency of Athenian audiences, see Revermann 2006b. On the continuities between the stage and Athenian visual culture more broadly, see esp. Bérard et al. 1989/[1984] and Steiner 200.

28. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1991.1. Revermann 2005 studies both sides of the vase with attention to the "sociology of reception of ancient drama" within a sympotic

ous states of (un)dress, but all wear more material than Telephus.[29] Telephus' complete nudity may symbolize the character's pretense of poverty, but by painterly convention, it is just as likely to signify his heroism. The other nobles on the vase are all richly, if scantily, clothed. The vase, as a whole, shows distinct marks of theatricality, particularly in the leggings worn by the demonic figures that flank Medea. The depiction of the ugly, low rags that featured so prominently in the Euripidean production would not fit the otherwise noble aesthetics of this monumental crater. In his article on this vase, Martin Revermann finds it remarkable that the scene makes "no hint at Telephus' disguise as a beggar," even though in the Euripidean production this disguise was "crucial and highly significant."[30] From a positivist perspective, this observation certainly holds; however, the negative impression of the rags' absence may be more enlightening. It may be that when the artist was faced with representing Telephus, he was left with no option but to portray the beggar in the heroic nude.

But the Cleveland Telephus' nudity may be inspired by more than an elite or artistic aversion to rags: his nakedness, together with the kneeling, so-called "*agenouilée*," position, draws attention to the Mysian king's bandages. It is this point of the depiction that most highlights the enigma encountered in tragic production: How, in a genre where most of the body is hidden under layers of costume, might a wound near the center of the body be portrayed? Another depiction of the hostage scene occurs on an Attic calyx-krater dated to the beginning of the fourth century held in Berlin.[31] There, Telephus is depicted not as a beggar but as a traveler and hostage taker, wearing a broad-brimmed hat (*petasos*) and cloak (conventional iconographic symbols of a traveler) on an otherwise heroically naked body. No hint is made on the Berlin vase to Telephus' wound, but it may be decorously concealed by the cloak draped over the hero's left thigh. Another painting of the scene from the early fourth century, this time on a Lucanian

context. Taplin 1993, 17, reminds us that "neither painting is an accurate representation of the Euripidean scene," but nevertheless offers theatrically-minded interpretations at 2007, 122–23 and 205–7.

29. Agamemnon, himself sparsely clad, charges at the kidnapper with fabric luxuriously trailing on his left arm. Agamemnon's boots may suggest a theatrical, rather than simply mythic, scene; see Taplin 2007, 207. The boots are nearly identical to Jason's footwear on the front. Jason and the both Tutor have bare torsos, although the former girds his midsection and left arm with a length of cloth while the latter is covered from waist to ankle. Compare the figure of Clytemnestra, whose feet are bare.

30. Revermann 2005, 6.

31. Berlin inv. 3974.

Figure 3. Paestan calyx-krater, ca. 340s, signed by Assteas, depicting Telephus holding the infant Orestes hostage at an altar. H: 56.5 cm. San Antonio Museum of Art, 86.134.167.

bell-krater held in the Museo Nazionale in Bari, depicts Telephus with a thick bandage on his right thigh but otherwise heroically nude, with a thin band of cloth trailing from his left arm.[32] In a painting of the scene on a later fourth-century Campanian hydria held in Naples, the hostage scene is depicted with no allusions to theatrical production, though the limply hanging bands of cloth draped over the crouching Telephus' legs seem as close as any vase painting comes to depicting rags; a thin, white bandage above Telephus' left knee draws attention to his wound.

32. Bari, Museo Nazionale, 12531, reproduced and discussed at Taplin 1993, 37–38. By means of a partially opened (presumably *skēnē*) door on the left side of the vase, the image gestures at theatricality.

Another, much more explicitly theatrical painting hints at the wound through what appears to be an ingenious form of iconographic compromise. On a Paestan calyx-krater in San Antonio signed by the painter Assteas, which on account of its luxurious garments Oliver Taplin has described as having "'theater' written all over it," the slightest sliver of Telephus' bandage is visible below his (pristine) tunic as the hero crouches in the familiar *agenouillée* position on an altar, his wounded right leg extended to the ground.[33] Assteas here has exhibited propriety in his portrayal by only hinting at the wound. The narrow strip of the bandage is enough to confirm the viewer's suspicion, based on the hero's position at the altar with hostage, that this is indeed the wounded Telephus. Assteas visually connects Telephus' wound with his hostage taking: his viewer is left with the impression that, were Telephus standing vertically, the wound would be fully and decorously concealed by his garment.

Overall, it is difficult to know to what extent vase painting's aesthetic conventions or boundaries conformed to those maintained by tragedy. From the evidence just considered, monumental vase painting seems to have been the more visually conservative medium when it came to portraying low, ugly rags. Of course, vases repeatedly represent horrors that were unlikely or not possible to present on the tragic stage: monsters, spurting blood, and the like.[34] Vase-painting conventions were not uniform over the fifth and fourth centuries, and even among the expensive, monumental vases on which the great majority of our theatrical images were depicted, variety and individuality are demonstrated. Even for a character whose beggarly appearance was so striking as to produce cultural aftershocks for thirty years, extant vases do not depict Telephus as a beggar in rags.[35] But as the case of Xerxes' arrival has already demonstrated, rags were sometimes featured unabashedly as the center of spectacle in tragedy. Tragedy seems to have had a higher tolerance for ugly rags in its spectacle; of course, the dif-

33. San Antonio Museum of Art 86.134.167, also reproduced (in black and white) and discussed at Taplin 2007, 208–9.

34. Compare the wounded Neoptolemus, whose flank spurts blood as he crouches, *agenouillée*, very much like Telephus on depiction of Euripides' *Andromache* on an Apulian volute crater held in Milan: Torno coll., (ex Ruuo, Caputi 239).

35. Euripides' *Telephus* was produced as part of the tetralogy including the extant *Alcestis* in 438. The impropriety of Telephus' rags, which Marshall (2014, 70) identifies as a watershed moment for "the new 'naturalism' on the later-fifth-century tragic stage," could still get laughs in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, first produced over thirty years later in 405: see Ar. *Ran*. 855, 864.

ferent media and emotional goals of tragedy and vase painting do much to explain the divergent treatment of beggarly dress in each art form.

Tragic rags may have performed a function similar to that of the bandages observed in the vase paintings of Telephus. Faced with the impracticalities of portraying an inguinal wound near the center of the body, the tragic costumier might have used full-body rags to symbolize, rather than directly represent, this injury.[36] The metonymy between costume and bodily frame, discussed above, would facilitate the connection: as the integrity of the hero's body was compromised, so too were his garments. If there was no direct symbolic connection between ragged dress and bandages in tragedy, the two were at least strongly correlated.[37] Although Xerxes, Menelaus, and both the Sophoclean and Euripidean Electra wore rags without any physical injury, the tattered dress of Sophocles' Philoctetes and Oedipus at Colonus was causally connected to those characters' physical handicaps. In sum, while rags did not invariably signal a wounded body, they were nevertheless associated with physical handicaps, and it was no accident that Aristophanes lumped together both "beggars" (*ptōchoi*) and "disabled" (*chōloi*) in his satire of Euripidean rags. Compromised clothing fit the compromised body, and the gruesome ugliness of a necessarily hidden wound might find dramatic expression, writ large, on tragedy's full-body costume.

The depictions of Telephus in vase painting explored above call into question the possibilities of costumes in production. Rarely is there certainty concerning the appearance of costumes, even though in comparison to other physical aspects of production such as scene painting (*skēnographia*), costumes and properties leave the surest impressions in the play-script through their constant manipulation by actors. The transfer of properties between characters naturally invites verbal comment, as do surprising outfits or certain culturally marked garments, such as the black robes of mourning.[38]

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36. I assume with confidence that stage-nakedness was not practiced in fifth-century tragedy.

37. As will be encountered in a passage discussed in chapter 3, over half of the raggedly dressed Euripidean characters mocked in *Acharnians* were physically compromised in some way. Oineus, Thyestes, and Ino, however, seem to have been merely materially impoverished, living as exiles or prisoners; on this point, see Sommerstein 1980, 175–77.

38. Eur. *Alc.* 512, *Hel.* 1088, 1186f, *HF.* 442f. Prophetic dress may similarly have been marked, as is the case for Cassandra: see Aesch. *Ag.* 1264f; see Wyles 2011, 65–66. Her appearance, however, is not marked in Eur. *Tro.* Likewise, no emphasis is given to Tiresias' appearance beyond his age and blindness at Soph. *Ant.* ca. 988, Soph. *OT* ca. 298, or Eur. *Phoen.* 857–59; cf. his Dionysiac insignia at Eur. *Bacch.* 174–78.

Conclusion

Whether in comedy or tragedy, on the stage or the street, rags in fifth-century Athens were perceived as formless, old, dirty, and associated with the lower classes. As ugly, low, and distorted from clothing's normative state, rags might be thought to accord well with Aristotle's defining features of the humorous (*to geloion*). And, as we shall see in part II, tragic rags would go on to have a particularly illustrious career on the comic stage. But whereas in his *Poetics* Aristotle limits humor to only ugliness that is painless and nondestructive (*anôdunon kai ou phthartikon*), rags are affective vehicles in tragedy with authentic material and metaphorical connections to heroic suffering. The physical conventions of the ancient Greek stage made it difficult for living bodies themselves to convey pain. Wounds and emaciation, as well as forms of social deprivation, as a result found their dramatic instantiation in ragged costume. Tragedians could draw upon a storied tradition of rags in Greek myth, but might also playfully consider the rags self-consciously, as Euripides' *Electra* does, as arbitrary signifiers of dejection.

From Xerxes in the *Persians* of 472 to Oedipus at Colonus in 401 BCE, the persistence and ultimate proliferation of ragged characters in drama suggests an Athenian popular desire to experience, and specifically to look at and consider, a form of material ugliness that was encountered daily, but with some aversion, outside the theater. Although rags may not have been appropriate or practical subjects for vase painting, tragedy itself placed rags front and center on the stage.

PART II

Tragic Ugliness on the Comic Stage

Can a comedian be an aesthetic critic? The proposition is more likely than its converse. And yet, outside of a few oft-quoted passages from *Frogs*, a play that culminates in an extended debate over the aesthetics and value of tragedy, in assessing ancient aesthetic opinions of the Greek theater, scholars have approached the evidence of Aristophanic drama with trepidation.[1] This has left the later writings of Plato and Aristotle, with their powerful if peculiar critical concerns with "artistic representation" (*mimesis*) and "emotional purification" (*catharsis*), to establish key terms and shape the contours of the modern discourse surrounding dramatic aesthetics.[2] Although Aristophanes' plays are the closest and best-informed pieces of evidence we have for the production and reception of Athenian tragedy, they are called upon most often to provide stray observations and historical constraints for our understanding of the fifth-century stage.

The plays have provided tone, rather than a framework, for modern scholarly discussions. Rarely are the comedian's express or implied opinions concerning his contemporary dramatists' poetry taken seriously. Scholars' reluctance to take Aristophanes as an arbiter of aesthetics is, of course,

1. Reflecting the disconnected and unsystematic nature of our evidence, scholarly analysis of literary criticism in Old Comedy has been given piecemeal. The ambitious goal of Raines' (1935) dissertation to consider the disparate evidence on this topic has only been taken up again recently by Wright 2012. Work remains to be done connecting placing this criticism in its theatrical, cultural, and historical contexts.

2. On fourth-century philosophical writings and their influence on aesthetic tradition of Greek drama, see my discussion in the epilogue.

not entirely unfounded.[3] Even when his comedy presents itself as speaking directly and earnestly on issues of aesthetics, Aristophanes, as Helene Foley reminds us, is always up to "something more than just criticism."[4] Aristophanic dramas are irreducibly layered works, where pointed ironies and trenchant observations are purposefully confused with playful inconsistencies and raunchy absurdities. Context and caution alike are required when seeking to establish objective realities or even popular sentiment from Aristophanes' words.

And yet, creators of Old Comedy such as Aristophanes were, in some ways, far more likely to preserve than to pervert the aesthetics of the tragedy they represent. As theater makers themselves, Old Comedians had uniquely privileged access to tragedy, particularly as it was realized on stage. In this section, I argue that approaching Aristophanes' dramatic criticism through his scenic production offers, if not always a more certain, at least a more productive path toward understanding fifth-century dramatic aesthetics than through his words alone.

The material points of contact and overlap between tragedy and Old Comedy were many and varied. Tragedy and comedy shared not only the same theatrical space (including its permanent features, such as the crane and *ekkyklēma*), but also its major festivals, audiences, and financial backers as well. The portable objects of theater, its properties and costumes, also persisted as materials well beyond the "two hours' traffic" of the stage, appearing and reappearing in other festival events (from the *proagon* to possible victory dedications), in secondary markets, or even in private homes.[5] Vase paintings suggests the peculiar power tragic costume might have when in unexpected places. A South Italian vase, crafted in the early decades of the fourth century BCE, presents a famous depiction of a dramatic scene that seems to portray tragic costume (re)appearing on the comedic stage.[6] On the left side of the image, standing atop a low riser near a partially open stage door stands a man dressed in full tragic garb, labeled "Aegisthus," one

3. On the peculiarities of Old Comedy's engagement with "bad poets," see Sommerstein 1996b and Kaimio and Nykopp 1997.

4. Foley 1988, 47.

5. On the dramatic mask before and after production, see Duncan 2018. On choragic dedications, see Wilson 2000. On the sale of costume, see the scholion at Ar. *Vesp.* 1312.

6. The vase, formerly housed at the J. Paul Getty Museum (accession number 96.AE.29). Principal discussion of the vase is found at Taplin 1993, 34–41, which prints the image on the dust jacket. Following Wilson (1996, 316–20), Taplin (2007, 28) calls Aegisthus "an appropriate epitome of tragedy."

of tragedy's most canonical figures. "Aegisthus" faces and regards quizzically three individuals in comedic costume: two are labeled as "choregos" (theatrical producer), while the third, Pyrrias, owing to his name, is likely an enslaved character in the comedy. The presence of two choregoi (representative of a chorus?) suggests a comedy with a meta-theatrical plot, but there is no evidence that allows for a connection between this image and any specific theatrical content or context. Although the image possibly references a fifth-century Athenian comedic production, it more likely does not.[7] What is evident, at least from this vase painting, is that the tragic robes and handsome face of Aegisthus (the painting does little to indicate it is a dramatic mask) presents a marked aesthetic contrast to the figures of comedy, whose simple tunics, visible phalloi, and prominent "stage naked" leotards underscore the comic body underneath. But what if instead of the royal (and, at this point, seemingly empowered) Aegisthus, a more pitiable character were to have appeared, dressed in rags, his tragic "skin" visible beneath the threadbare cloaks?

Wherever there is material and formal overlap between the genres, framing becomes crucial to interpretation. The symbolic and emotional content presented by the tragic Aegisthus is substantially determined by his interaction with the comedic figures. Given the importance of each major dramatic genre in establishing the aesthetics of the other, not only in fifth-century Athens but also in the critical legacies of the Greek theater over the longue durée, it is worth taking the trouble to make meaningful comparisons and connections between the two.[8]

An analogy has sometimes been drawn between Old Comedy's aesthetics and those of an irregularly curved "fun-house mirror," a surface that produces dynamic distortions as one moves past, which allow its viewers to regard familiar objects, most notably themselves, from unexpected and disorienting perspectives defined by exaggeration and inversion.[9] A fun-house mirror is, at best, only a partial metaphor for the diverse ways

7. Compelling arguments for a connection between the South Italian krater known as the "Würzburg Telephus" and Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* were first made by Csapo 1986 and Taplin 1986 and have since been variously discussed: see for instance Compton-Engle 2015, 88–90.

8. On the "definition" of (Aristophanic) comedy within the theatrical context, see Silk 2000 and Revermann 2006a. On the contrastive aesthetics of the genre (and the "pernicious" polarity in criticism it has sometimes engendered), see the epilogue.

9. For the analogy, which he also applies to the representation of satyrs, see Lissarrague 1990, 235.

Athenian Old Comedy may be said to have "reflected" its world. And yet the central assumption behind the metaphor, that Aristophanic parody relies upon burlesquing distortion, is widely (and sometimes dogmatically) maintained.[10] At the risk of overextending the analogy, it should be noted that such distorting mirrors have what are known as "inflection points," locations on the curve where the surface is neither concave nor convex but reflects a proportionally accurate and minimally distorted version of the original. Such regions do characterize the fun-house mirror, the essential purpose of which is to offer novelty. But these inflection points demand our attention all the more on account of their accuracy; they offer a transient moment of recognition and familiarity that anchors and gives meaning to the experience of the fun-house mirror as a whole. The chapters in this section argue that costumes perceived as ugly or inappropriate on the tragic stage, including rags or certain items of women's clothing when incongruously worn, provided a material analogy to such inflection points within Aristophanes' parodic reflection of tragedy. Representation of "the same things" between the genres, even if identical materials were not used, offers a particularly meaningful point of contact and comparison (or "*synkrisis*") between the genres.[11] By focusing on those instances of ugliness in tragedy which comedy materially appropriates and reframes within its own pointedly distorted genre, this chapter aims to shift discussion on Old Comedy's critical engagement with tragedy away from formal features and toward the affective framework that consitutes this definitionally "painless" genre.[12]

This section is presented in three parts, each building upon the former. In this introduction, I make the case for why, and under which circumstances, Aristophanes should be recognized as a valuable and insightful critic of tragic aesthetics. Complementing prevailing theoretical approaches that emphasize the distorting effects of Old Comedy, I argue that in Aristophanes' hands it is often not only exaggeration and adaptation but also emotional identification and material authenticity that structure and support his parodies of tragedy. Aristophanes asks audiences not to reimagine tragedy in ugly form, but to see and recognize properly the ugliness that was always inherent to tragic production. I suggest such direct criticism

10. On the history of parody, see Rose 1993, 3–53; on parody in Aristophanes generally, see Goldhill 1991.

11. For the term and approach, see Taplin 1986 and Bakola, Prauscello, and Telò 2013, 1–3.

12. On comedy as "painless," ἄνευ ὀδύνης, see Arist. *Poet.* 5.1449a337, part of a discussion in the introduction.

had immediate and lasting effects beyond Aristophanes' comedy, evident in the later Euripidean dramas and the critical tradition surrounding both playwrights.[13]

In chapter 3, a study of a highly meta-theatrical scene set at the home of Euripides' in *Acharnians* asks audiences to contrast the painful affective resonances of tragic rags with the "playful" aesthetics of Aristophanic Old Comedy, in which ugly garments are valued for the familiarity, subversiveness, and performativity. Chapter 4 turns "from rags to drag" and to a similarly meta-theatrical scene in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* that highlights the powerful contributions of gender toward the production of dramatic aesthetics. Like the visit to Euripides' home in *Acharnians*, a similarly unannounced house call humorously materializes tragic properties deemed ludicrously incongruous for a male author to possess. Overlapping tensions and ambiguities between the poet's male body and effeminate works explore the importance of "appropriateness" (Greek *eikos*) to Greek dramatic aesthetics and reveal the material tensions between actor and character.

It is not simply the contemporary vantage point of Aristophanic comedy but also its methods of engagement, its "ways of seeing," that render his plays such valuable evidence for considering, and countering, established aesthetic narratives. Aristophanes' proximity to tragedy supported his granular attention to its details, while his medium of theatrical production likewise afforded material-led engagement. Uniting these two factors, and contributing to both the historical and intellectual value of his criticism, was Aristophanes' focus on particulars. Beyond the obvious disparities of verbal tone and presentation, Aristophanes' inductive, "bottom-up" approach to tragic aesthetics differs from the deductive, "top-down" philosophical analyses of Plato and Aristotle, flagged in the introduction and discussed more thoroughly in the epilogue. Where the philosophers offer prescriptive models of theatrical aesthetics built upon universalizing (or even metaphysical) frameworks, Old Comedy engages directly and descriptively with the stage, seizing upon specific costumes, characters, playwrights, and productions.[14] Aristophanes appropriates tragic material, not merely for the sake of examples to anchor his critique, but as part of a rhetoric of comedic critical persuasion that asks audiences not to assent to the truth of his observation

13. On paracomedy in Euripidean drama, see Jendza 2015 and 2020.

14. Rau 1967 offers the classic study of this peculiar generic appropriation, now widely known as "paratragedy."

so much as recognize the inventiveness and skill of his novel framing. What emerges from Aristophanes' comedies is a descriptive account of tragic theater, with aesthetic claims made upon the inductive logic of repetition, similarity, and pattern.

While Aristophanes' critical engagement is inextricable from its comedic context, in certain conditions one may have some degree of confidence in the accuracy and insight of the comedian's approach to tragedy. Among Athenian tragedy's innumerable critics from antiquity to present, Aristophanes is unmatched in his proximity to the genre. Not only was Aristophanes a knowledgeable devotee of the dramas he mocked, but he was also on intimate terms with the playwrights who first composed them and the many people and materials that subsequently helped realize these works on the stage. Aristophanes' dramatic career overlapped meaningfully with those of Euripides, Sophocles, and Agathon and, while Athenian dramatic festival competitions were separated by genre *de jure*, *de facto* rivalries between tragic and comic playwrights could simmer for years. Such jostling for position in the courts of public opinion is evident not only in Aristophanes' comedies themselves but also his later literary-biographic tradition, which was keen to pit this outspoken avatar of Old Comedy against his tragic counterparts.[15]

There were many points of contact between them: Aristophanes shared with tragedians not only the external realties of the Athenian theater, such as its performance space and festival program, but also an internal identity as playwright and trainer (*didaskalos*) of both actors and audience. By as much as *Acharnians* stands closer in time to tragedy than the later aesthetic criticism of Plato and Aristotle, the playwright stands nearer in cultural and personal proximity as well. Participation in the "low" genre of comedy evidently did not keep a playwright of Aristophanes' status from moving in the upper echelons of society alongside tragedians who were celebrated and sought after across Greece. Not only at the annual dramatic festivals, then, but also at drinking parties (as fictionalized in Plato's *Symposium*), Aristophanes privately rubbed shoulders and talked shop with the very the-

15. As Olson notes (2000, 70f), comedic "rivals" (*antipaloi*, cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 1050, *Pax*, 739, and *Eq.* 521) might well include tragedians. On poetic rivalry within Old Comedy in general, see esp. Biles 2011; on Aristophanes' rivalry with tragedy, see esp. Sells 2019.

ater makers his comedies publicly mocked. The visits to the playwrights' homes dramatized in *Acharnians* and *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* may be comedically exaggerated but, coming from an invested member of the theatrical community, they may have conveyed an air of knowledgeable authority and professional intrigue. As a prominent and successful poet of Old Comedy, Aristophanes was positioned to style himself a playwright particularly able to "pull back the curtain," as it were, on contemporary Athenian tragedy. While exaggeration might be expected of any comedic representation, jokes that bore little or no connection to tragic aesthetics, real or perceived, might receive pushback not only from Aristophanes' audiences, but from his fellow theater makers as well.[16] Compelled on the one hand to essentialize and embellish for the sake of humor, for the sake of his social standing Aristophanes needed on the other hand to be prepared to stand by the criticism made in his dramas (a defense he mounts in several parabases). While such constraints are too broad to provide a reliable "litmus test" for testing the credibility of a single critical position, in aggregate Aristophanes' prominence as a critic made his criticism more beholden to the realities and popular sentiment of the fifth-century theater than those writing at a further historical or cultural remove.

The amount of information we have about tragedy from Old Comedy suggests the importance of the comedians' critical responses, witnessed by thousands of interested theatergoers at the dramatic festivals within hours or days of tragic performances, and successfully recorded in both cultural memory and written records. Aesthetic discussions concerning tragedy, in marked contrast to other contemporary poetics, were held in public in one the largest gathering spaces in Athens.[17] Save for the festival judges whose votes determined the ranking of the productions, there were no more important arbiters of the Athenian tragic stage than the poets of Old Com-

16. Public reactions to Old Comedy's provocations in the late fifth century (most famously, Cleon's legal response to Aristophanes' *Babylonians* in 426 BCE or Socrates' allusion, in 399 BCE, to the enduring pernicious effects of Aristophanes' *Clouds* on the public understanding of his work) demonstrate that targets of Old Comedy's satire had various means of responding to, and potentially curbing, such mockery. On Cleon's response to *Babylonians*, see Ar. *Ach.* 377f and Olson's (2002) discussion *ad loc*. On the role of *aischrologia* in humor from archaic through classical times, see Halliwell 2008, 215–62. Although *kōmōdoumenoi*, as will be discussed later, may have had good reason to enjoy even critical attention, satirists of all places and periods had to apply their sting within the boundaries of acceptable abuse and not very far beyond them.

17. On literary criticism at the symposium, see esp. Slater 1991.

edy.[18] With his theater as his workplace, his platform, and his megaphone, Aristophanes was a pre-eminent spin doctor of tragic aesthetics, simultaneously reflecting and informing the genre's development.

In sum, as a contemporary of the late fifth-century tragedians, who was himself a dramatist, who was positioned to make aesthetic commentary that influenced not only his audiences but also the subjects of his satire, Aristophanes should be considered as insightful and important a critic of tragic aesthetics as one could hope to find.[19] If the humorous imperatives of his genre and his close proximity to his fellow playwrights gave Aristophanes a biased perspective in some respects, his was at least the vision of a connoisseur. Aristophanes' material criticism offers a useful complement and correction to the philosophers' assessment of dramatic aesthetics. Recognizing the peculiarities of the Aristophanic evidence is crucial for understanding the aesthetics of drama in general.

18. On the official judging of the dramatic competition, see Marshall and van Willigenburg 2004.

19. Silk (2000, 49f.) writes that Aristophanes had a "preoccupation with tragedy" that was "so marked, so prolonged, and . . . so complex . . . that it is hard to imagine that any other comic poet . . . [had] an interest in tragedy of quite the same kind."

THREE

Ugly Tragic Materials upon the Comic Stage in *Acharnians*

As the stage doors in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* open to reveal the playwright Euripides composing at home in his poetic atelier, it is as if tragedy itself has been brought onto the comedic stage. Accompanied by the piteous appurtenances of his genre, Euripides is not only intellectually engrossed in, but also materially surrounded by, his dramatic craft. The tragedian himself is dressed in the sort of rags familiar from the many impoverished and disabled heroes of his plays. Momentarily taken aback by the curious and unexpected spectacle of the tragedian's appearance, Dicaeopolis, the intrepidly irreverent protagonist of *Acharnians*, proceeds to request just such a ragged costume for himself (Ar. *Ach.* 410–30):

Δι. Εὐριπίδη—
Ευ. τί λέλακας;
Δι. ἀναβάδην ποιεῖς,
ἐξὸν καταβάδην. οὐκ ἐτὸς χωλοὺς ποιεῖς.
ἀτὰρ τί τὰ ῥάκι'; εἰς τραγῳδίας ἔχεις
ἐσθῆτ' ἐλεινήν; οὐκ ἐτὸς πτωχοὺς ποιεῖς.
ἀλλ' ἀντιβολῶ πρὸς τῶν γονάτων σ', Εὐριπίδη,
δός μοι ῥάκιόν τι τοῦ παλαιοῦ δράματος.
δεῖ γάρ με λέξαι τῷ χορῷ ῥῆσιν μακράν·
αὕτη δὲ θάνατον, ἢν κακῶς λέξω, φέρει.
Ευ. τὰ ποῖα τρύχη; μῶν ἐν οἷς Οἰνεὺς ὁδὶ
ὁ δύσποτμος γεραιὸς ἠγωνίζετο;
Δι. οὐκ Οἰνέως ἦν, ἀλλ' ἔτ' ἀθλιωτέρου . . .

DICAEOPOLIS: Euripides!
EURIPIDES: Why do you cry aloud?
DICAEOPOLIS: You're composing with your feet up,
when you could compose feet down? No wonder you create
cripples!
But why are you wearing rags from your tragedies—
those pitiful clothes? No wonder you create beggars!
But I beseech you, by your knees, Euripides,
give me a certain little rag from the old drama—
because I've got to give a great speech to the chorus,
and it'll be my death if I speak poorly.
EURIPIDES: What sort of tatters? Not those in which this
Oeneus here, the unfortunate old man, struggled/performed?
DICAEOPOLIS: No, not Oeneus, someone still more miserable . . . [1]

Dicaeopolis interrupts and reframes Euripides' poetic activity, compelling the tragedian to pause from his novel composition and instead to reflect upon his past dramatic oeuvre (cf. *to palaion drama*, 415). What began as a curious portrait of the artist at home now promises to reveal, retrospectively, something crucial about the art of tragedy itself.

Tragic poet and poetry are linked in profound but curious ways in the scene. Dicaeopolis' early and repeated assertion that it is "no wonder" (*ouk etos*, 411, 413) that Euripides produces beggarly and wounded characters points to a logic of material causality emergent in Dicaeopolis' understanding of the scene.[2] Objects do not simply *realize* suffering on stage, they also *inspire* it, framing dramatic aesthetics from start to finish. Along with Euripides' peculiar position, "with feet up," the physical circumstances of Euripides' "pitiful clothes" (*esthēt' eleinēn*, 413) are immediately understood by Dicaeopolis to lie at the heart of his poetic composition.

When Dicaeopolis makes an indefinite request for "a certain little rag" (*rhakion ti*, 415), a strategically ambiguous phrase, for a dozen lines (vv. 418–29) the dialogue between the two characters turns into a guess-

1. I follow Wilson's (2007) Oxford Classical Text of Aristophanes and provide my own translations throughout.

2. The intersection of disability studies and theater studies has recently been an area of active research: see esp. Henderson and Ostrander 2010. On disabled characters as "tragicomic" in tragedy and comedy alike, see Garland 2016. On the Greek vocabulary of disability, and *chōlos* in particular, see Samama 2016, 123. On disability in the ancient world in general, see Garland 1995.

ing game in which Euripides names the many wretched heroes he has dressed in rags. This extended series is significant: not only does it reveal the extent of Euripides' reliance on the hackneyed trope of this costume, it also offers a preponderance of evidence that tragic production is truly, pervasively, ugly. Finding reasons to dismiss each character in turn, Dicaeopolis insists that the ragged costume he seeks belonged to someone "more wretched" (*athliōteros*, 422) and "more beggarly" (*ptōchisteros*, 425) than the tragic heroes Euripides first puts forward. Finally, Euripides names the character whose rags Dicaeopolis has in mind: Telephus, the eponymous hero of a Euripidean tragedy, now lost, produced over a dozen years prior to *Acharnians*.[3]

Euripides sends his servant to fetch the garments of Telephus (stored, naturally enough, between the kits of still more raggedly dressed characters) and generously bestows this costume upon Dicaeopolis. Now donning the rags, Dicaeopolis proceeds to beg for more, and increasingly absurd, objects from Euripides. At last, the wheedling comedic protagonist is driven from the tragedian's home, amidst Euripides' protestations that in departing with these assorted ugly items, Dicaeopolis "will rob me of my tragedy" (*aphairēsei me tēn tragōidian*, 464) and that the playwrights works are now "lost to me" (*phrouda moi ta dramata*, 470). Despite their melodramatic tone, Euripides' complaints participate in the critical framework of this scene, which recognizes ugly objects (including, but also going beyond, ragged costumes) as essential features of tragic stagecraft. At the beginning of this scene, the ugliness of tragic production came as "no surprise" to Dicaeopolis. As Dicaeopolis leaves the playwright's home, even Euripides attests to ugly objects being not only the creative and material basis of his own art, but the very essence of tragedy itself.

A Comedic Perspective on Tragedy's Material Aesthetics

Set in an intimate domestic space that presents theatergoers with, as it were, a "backstage pass" with which to observe the inner workings of Athenian theater, Aristophanes' *Acharnians* lays bare in comic terms what tragedy

3. Among the lost plays of Euripides, *Telephus* has received considerable attention. For background, see esp. Handley and Rea 1957; Heath 1987a; Preiser 2000; Wright 2018, 199–201; and Sells 2019, 23–53.

is "really" about.[4] And it ain't pretty. Tragedy, elsewhere regarded as the artistic domain of the serious and the beautiful, of the noble and the good, has in Aristophanes' Old Comedic framing become a genre overrun with wretched characters, heroes who, despite their noble birth, arrive on stage dressed in the meanest of costumes and with the paltriest of props. Playing to its embodied form, *Acharnians* singles out Euripides for mockery, leading some to consider this a specifically ad hominem attack on a tragedian elsewhere associated with promoting a certain realism that threatened to debase the austere grandeur of the genre. As examples considered in the introduction and part I make clear, however, tragedy's proclivity toward raggedly dressed characters was hardly the penchant of any single playwright, but a material and aesthetic leitmotif from Aeschylus' *Persians* to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Nor were such pathetic presentations a trend of the later fifth century; from our earliest evidence, these ugly costumes were core structural components of tragedy, focal points not only of stage action and narrative but also of affective engagement. However much the aesthetic criticism in *Acharnians* revolves around one man, then, it is fundamentally about the broader generic conventions that Euripides, the "most tragic" of the tragedians, had come to represent.[5] Through repeated association with the defeated, injured, and mendicant heroes whom they adorned, these remarkable and formless costumes had become an efficient shorthand for, and recognizable emblem of, suffering across the entirety of the tragic stage.

What novel insights, then, did Aristophanes' critique of ragged Euripidean heroes contribute to late fifth-century discourse on theatrical aesthetics? Such a question has been approached from various directions. Most critics see the scene as an "obvious" and "elaborate parody" of Euripidean drama that highlights the playwright's narrative reliance on disguise and recognition as well as his general emphasis on "realism."[6] More generally, the scene has become a paradigmatic example of meta-theater in ancient drama.[7] It, too, has been approached as a "programmatic" moment in Aristophanic stagecraft, providing crucial evidence as to how Aristophanes' contempo-

4. On the importance of the domestic setting, see Hutchinson 2011, 51, and Papathanasapoulou 2013.

5. Euripides is called τραγικώτατος at Arist. *Poet.* 13.1453a29–30; on Euripides' embrace of comedic devices as part of his persona, see Zuckerberg 2016a and 2016b and Jendza 2020.

6. Harriott 1982, 35; Russo 1994/[1962], 51.

7. Slater 2002, 42–67.

rary audiences conceived of generic norms, dramatic performance, and theatrical politics more broadly.[8]

The scene's peculiar focus on rags has also been noted and ingeniously explained. In two brief notes, Colin Macleod suggested these costume items might be represented in performance by scrolls; fusing the material and verbal identities of drama, Macleod turns Euripides' costume loft into a personal library.[9] Responding to such logocentrism, more recently Mario Telò has interpreted the costumes, in their tattered state, as a "reperforming archive" characterized by reuse and material agency.[10]

Recognizing and building upon these contributions, I propose that the scene's most salient contribution to the history and aesthetics of Greek drama is that, by showcasing tragedy's ugly materials within a comedic frame, but without making any marked change to their form or identity, Aristophanes prompts audiences to reconsider the affective and aesthetic roles of ugliness in theatrical performance. Subsuming tragic materials and mythmaking within his own expansive genre, Aristophanes leverages the unique qualities of ragged costume, a curious point of formal and scenic overlap between the genres, to deflate tragic grandeur and expose the ugly aesthetics common across fifth-century Athenian theater.

Aristophanes revels in the particular. His comedies regularly achieve their humor through some mixture of the gratuitous and non sequitur. General definitions, when they are given, are often pliable and capacious, and may be applied unevenly or ironically across examples. Wading through Aristophanes' chaotic morass of details, a unified aesthetic theory may reasonably prove to be elusive prey. Extended jokes, however, present rare and significant moments where the logics underpinning Aristophanic criticism may be most clearly and confidently inferred. In such circumstances, one can go beyond the mere accumulation of discrete data points and follow logical concatenations. Even if the rationale is only partially or ironically expressed in words, when Aristophanes' engagement with tragedy is sustained over entire speeches, scenes, and series of objects, trends inevitably emerge. It sometimes happens that these extended bits are accompanied by

8. On audiences, see Harriot 1962; on generic connections, see especially Sells 2019, 22–53; on tragedy and politics, see Foley 1988.

9. Macleod 1974 and 1980.

10. Telò 2017, 91.

some verbal heuristic: Dicaeopolis' repeated claim, "no wonder" (*ouk etos*, 411, 413, discussed above), for example, leads audiences to infer some sort of material causality between poet and poetry, although the mechanisms of this connection are left unspecified. In chapter 4 we will see a similar explanation, voiced by Agathon in *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, suggestive of a materialist logic pertaining to gender expression and narrative development. What is significant about these comedic explanations, and what sets them apart from more philosophical approaches, is that they invite interpretation and disagreement. Aristophanic comedy uses particular examples to open, rather than clinch, an argument.

Production as Critical Medium

Although Plato and Aristotle were aware of the power of particulars in drama, their engagements with tragedy were ultimately part of broader intellectual projects that left little room for the specific material concerns of production. In *Apology*, *Republic*, *Philebus*, *Laws*, and other works that touch more briefly upon tragedy or comedy, Plato passes over the issue of theatrical production almost entirely. Drama, which Plato rarely distinguishes from poetry in general, is of interest in the dialogues either because of the (generally pernicious) ethical effects it has on audiences or else the (not entirely unrelated) metaphysical implications of dramatic mimesis, in which superficial appearances correspond to, but also occlude, deeper or more substantive realities. These are important aesthetic concerns of their own, to be sure, which are not wholly irrelevant to the role of ugly materials, such as rags, in performance. But Plato's profound concerns with mimesis and morality leave little room for the consideration of individual object types or the effects of ugliness. His dialogues more often highlight the deceptive pleasures of theater, based largely in beauty, than pause to dwell upon the material means by which pathos is created. While Aristotle is much more attuned to the affective contributions of scenic materials in his *Poetics*, the emphasis of that work is placed squarely on the poet and his craft. If Aristotle did not find *opsis* worthy of his treatment, he at least deigned to recognize it, providing us today with glimpses of the technical and critical vocabulary that surrounded this aspect of the Athenian theater. Still, the result is that even when taken together, these philosophical per-

spectives on tragedy leave the gap between poetic composition and audience reception (that is to say, dramatic performance) largely untheorized.[11]

Aristophanic comedy, by contrast, takes dramatic performance and production as the centerpiece of its studies in tragic aesthetics. The shared resources of Old Comedy and tragedy facilitated the transfer of any element between the genres, such as scene types, rhetorical strategies, characters, costumes, and properties. Similar translations between different media (between, say, tragedy and epic or tragedy and vase painting) entail loss, supplementation, distortion, or some combination of the three. Aesthetic distinctions between artworks across media where no direct, one-to-one correspondence exists are awash in ambiguities. If Old Comedy occasionally purposefully distorted its tragic models, the departures from the original may be no more significant than wrapping an imagined theatrical scene around the outside of a vase or distilling a multimedia artform down to its verbal script.

Old Comedy's fantastically distorted mockeries of tragic productions are of significant aesthetic interest and have been thoroughly studied.[12] A paradigmatic example of this distorted adoption of tragic stagecraft is the giant *hippokantharos*, or "horse-dung-beetle" on which the protagonist of Aristophanes' *Peace*, Trygaeus, rides from his home to Olympus.[13] The scene's mock-tragic language, the flight to Olympus, and a specific jeer at Euripides' penchant for wounded heroes make unmistakably clear that scene alludes to Euripides' *Bellerophon*, in which the eponymous hero flies to Olympus but falls and is gravely wounded.[14] Many aspects of the Bellerophon myth were ripe for humorous burlesque, but *Peace* suggests that the tragedy's remarkably ambitious staging may have been a primary

11. This is slightly oversimplified; for more context, see discussion in the epilogue.

12. See, generally, Platter 2007, who interprets such distortions in staging as part of a broader Bakhtinian "carnivalesque." On humorous distortion and burlesquing, see Walsh 2009 and Mitchell 2009; on the blending of burlesque and politics in Old and Middle Comedy, see Storey 2014, Konstantakos 2014, and Sells 2019.

13. Cf. Rau 1967, 89–97. Scatological humor pervades the scene (see the pun on Διὸς καταιβάτου, at Ar. *Pax* 42) and ultimately determines the distortion. As Sommerstein 1985, 136, *ad Pax* 1 notes, *Kantharos* could also be used as a man's name, but Olson 1998 observes that the association is not picked up elsewhere. The *kantharos* is also a drinking vessel linked to Dionysus in Athenian iconography, named for its scarab-like appearances.

14. On the reception of Bellerophon in *Peace* broadly, see Sells 2019, 119–45. On the play's layering of epic and tragic allusions, see Telò 2013.

enticement to the comedian.[15] In presenting a mythical creature, Pegasus, renowned for its divine status and beauty, Euripides may have pushed the aesthetics of the tragic stage past their natural limit.[16]

As Aristotle suggests in *Poetics*, the most salient lines in determining genre may be determined only after grouping forms of mimesis that share the same medium, manner, and objects.[17] Critics comparing artworks in different media are often forced, as is observed in the *Poetics* itself, to fall back upon wide descriptive evaluative categories such as "high" or "low," modes liable to be less appropriate to the artwork itself than its perceived audience. By sharing a common medium of enactment, however, both manner and objects of representation may be more clearly distinguished between tragedy and comedy. Objects and framing are not independent categories on the Greek stage.

According to the surrealist logic of Old Comedy, a genre thoroughly accustomed to transgressing boundaries between stage and audience, mimesis and reality, dramatic costumes have real consequences, at least within the world of the theater. *Acharnians* thus collapses the hierarchies of mimesis that Plato would later make explicit in the *Republic*. The play partially conflates "representation," that is, a dramatic production of a comedy, with what might be called "the representation of representation," that is, tragic production through comic production or, more specifically, *Telephus* through *Acharnians*. But the conflation can only be partial since comedy maintains or discards the distinction between mimetic levels at will. As Dicaeopolis asserts, comedy's stereoscopic layering of genres at times produces a double vision: "the spectators will know who I am [*sc.*, underneath my tragic guise], but the choreuts will stand there like idiots as I give them the finger with my *bonny mots*."[18]

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15. See Scott 2019.

16. Despite his ghastly birth from the severed neck of the gorgon Medusa, Pegasus was associated with heroes and gods and shared with horses an association with aristocratic beauty and finery: see Griffith 2006a and 2006b and Gregory 2007. On cranes embellished with representations of creatures or vehicles, see Mastronarde 1990, 270.

17. Arist. *Poet*. 1.1447a16–48a7. Aristotle has no term for genre, but his phrase ἐν οἷς ποιοῦνται τὴν μίμησιν (1.1447b29) comes close. On definitions of genre in the ancient world, see esp. Depew and Obbink 2000 and Foster, Kurke, and Weiss 2020.

18. Ar. *Ach.* 443–44.

Materials Make the Man: Trying on Tragedy

It is not simply the quality, but also the quantity, of Euripides' rags that determines their reception in *Acharnians*. Indeed, as a catchall for ripped and degraded textiles of various kinds, the category of "rags" would seem to admit of little formal distinction.[19] And yet, the scene at Euripides' home is predicated upon the idea that these ragged garments are not interchangeable, despite their portability. Euripides indexes his costumes by reference to the character who wore them: Oeneus, Phoenix, Bellerophon, Philoctetes, Telephus, and the like. But this indexical connection is, at best, only nominal: the garments' affective connections to the sufferings of the tragic heroes whom Euripides names is almost completely severed. In tragedy, rags were practically fused to their characters, acting as a second skin on which the past sufferings and tribulations of their wearers were recorded. Those who wear rags in tragedy are often solitary individuals, sometimes a sympathetic chorus, but always figures whose grief stood in marked contrast to the others who fared comparatively well. In Aristophanes' comedy, however, the superabundance of raggedly dressed characters disrupts the garments' ability to signify pity. In dismissing unwanted costumes, Dicaeopolis ranks characters as "more miserable" or "more beggarly" than one another. These garments represent tragic pain no longer in absolute terms, but rather in relational, performance-historical connections. Ultimately, through Aristophanes' satire, the ugliness of tragic rags does not make manifest the painful disintegration of the tragic self so much as hackneyed stylistic conventions of tragic playwrights.

After a handful of failed guesses, Euripides has finally lighted upon the name of the tragic hero whose costume Dicaeopolis has come to find: Telephus.

DICAEOPOLIS: Yes, Telephus!
Give me, I beg you, his wrappings.
EURIPIDES: Boy, give him the fragments of Telephus.
They lie above, between the rags

19. Euripides responds to Dicaeopolis' request for a diminutive *rhakion*, "rag-let," with a variety of sartorial terms, often in an elevated or distinctly tragic verbal register: *truchos* (418), *lakides . . . peplōn* (423), *peplōmata* (425, specified as "fetid," *duspinē*), and *rhakōmata* (432) and finally a simple *rhakos* (433), a term Dicaeopolis repeats (438). On the use of diminutives in the scene, which Olson finds "wheedling," see Petersen 1910, 173.

Of Thyestes and those of Ino.
SERVANT(?): Here, take these.[20]
DICAEOPOLIS: "O Zeus who sees through and under all!—"
Euripides, since you've done me this favor
Give me those things that go with the rags,
The little Mysian cap for the head.
. . .
EURIPIDES: I'll give it [to you] since you devise fine things
with a clever mind.
DICAEOPOLIS: Blessings upon you, and upon Telephus as well.
Wow! I'm already filled up with speechlets!
But I do need a beggar's staff.
EURIPIDES: Taking this, depart from my marble abode.
DICAEOPOLIS: O my heart! Do you see how I am driven from the house
When I'm need of many props? Clinging to your knees, now,
I'm begging and importuning. Euripides,
Give me a little basket singed through by a lamp.
EURIPIDES: And what, poor soul, do you need with that wickerwork?
DICAEOPOLIS: I have no need of it. But I'll take it anyway.
EURIPIDES: Know that you pain me and go away from my house.
DICAEOPOLIS: Ah, bless you—and your mother too.
EURIPIDES: Leave me. Now.
DICAEOPOLIS: But give me one more thing,
A little cup with a broken lip.
EURIPIDES: Take it and go to hell! Know that you are trouble to my home!
DICAEOPOLIS: By God, you don't know yet what sort of troubles you're working!
But sweetest Euripides, give me this one more thing,
A little jar stuffed with a sponge.
EURIPIDES: Man, you will take away all my tragedy!
Take this and get out of here . . .

Following the earlier parade exclusively of rags, the second half of Dicaeopolis' visit opens up a trove of sundry properties. Comedy's inclination toward particulars is rarely more apparent, and though item-by-item dress-up is

20. The attribution of this line is dubious: see Olson 2002, 187–88 *ad* 432–34.

comedic stock-in-trade, Dicaeopolis's transformation is exceptional for its length and detail.[21] As observed in chapters 1 and 2 when discussing the role of disguise in drama, Dicaeopolis' onstage dress-up (indeed, dress-up at all) is markedly nontragic.[22] Decking himself out piteously onstage, Dicaeopolis exploits ugly costumes' potential for humor when made meta-theatrical and, accordingly, painless objects of spectacle. Dicaeopolis dresses neither for war nor for a party in Euripides' poetic workshop, but for the tragic stage. The aggregate result is a verbal image of tragic spectacle unmatched by any literary sources of the period. The usual burlesquing comic distortion is apparent only late into the scene, when Dicaeopolis' requests become increasingly gratuitous, adjusting their satiric focus from Euripides' drama to his person.[23] Despite his special interest in the rags of Telephus, Dicaeopolis departs from Euripides' home not dressed as any specific tragic character, but as a composite figure. From his encounter with Euripides, Dicaeopolis has become an extreme version of the stereotypical tragic ragamuffin.

The many specifics of the scene constrain its production, but despite the many cues regarding rags and other properties preserved in the play-script, the staging of Dicaeopolis' visit remains highly contentious. The scholia on *Acharnians* more often obfuscate than illuminate crucial issues. The speculative conjectures of ancient scholars often confuse issues of stagecraft, but the perceived need for such commentaries at all, and the continuing debate over their content, testify to the fundamental importance of staging for understanding this scene and others.[24] Aristophanic drama, to a degree

21. Within *Acharnians*, the action is matched by the parallel armaments of Lamachus, for war, and Dicaeopolis, for a party at *Ach.* 1096–1142. Compare also Philocleon's transformation at *Vesp.* 1122–73. Elsewhere, note the humorous presentation of scenes of armament familiar from the epic tradition: At *Ar. Ran.* 1036, Homer is noted as a teacher of the "armings of men," *hopliseis andrōn*. On the armament motif in Homeric epic, see Armstrong 1958, and more generally, Lord 1960, 80–87.

22. Costume change in tragedy occurs exclusively behind the *skēnē*. In his later works, however, Euripides seems to toy with this tradition. At E. *Heracl.* 720–27, for instance, a servant carries Iolaus' armor onstage in preparation for battle only to carry it offstage moments later. Likewise, Dionysus describes Pentheus' upcoming transformation at E. *Bacch.* 827–46 in a manner like Ar. *Vesp.* 1122–73.

23. Though, as Roselli 2005 notes, poetry and poet are regularly conflated in the vision of Old Comedy.

24. Byzantine scholiasts, however, were often led to comment on the staging of Old Comedy regularly out of lexical, rather than theatrical, interest; see English 2007, 200 n.5. While the scenic authority of even ancient scholiasts is dubious at best, these learned commentaries potentially derive from Hellenistic scholars who were witness to a continuous performance tradition running from fifth-century Athens to their own time and location.

unmatched by tragedy or New Comedy, requires a consideration of staging to understand verbal meaning.

A crucial but rarely discussed question of historical staging is the appearance of Euripides himself. How the fictionalized tragic playwright appears, in absolute terms but also in comparison to Dicaeopolis, is crucial to the aesthetics of the scene. Before the *skēnē* doors open and his full tragic atelier is exposed, the tragedian is the only visual object the audience has been led to expect and visualize. When the gates open and Euripides' rag and bone shop is brought out, Dicaeopolis immediately interprets this eclectic spread abstractly as an extension of the playwright.[25] It is not only a backward-looking archive, but also a forward-looking set of creative tools. The materials both are, and represent, Euripides' distributed, theatrical self. They "are" his tragedy, in a real sense.[26]

Even among these items, it is perhaps the physical body of Euripides himself that is the most dynamic and important symbol. However elusive it may be to modern audiences, Euripides' appearance matters. Two textual details concerning Euripides' self-presentation, both provided by Dicaeopolis immediately upon the poet's appearance, orient the audience's reception of the visually complex scene and have already received attention: Euripides is dressed in rags and composes *anabadēn*. A discussion of the particulars of the playwright's body, dress, and mask will conclude the consideration of this episode.

In discussing the properties, costumes, and potential masks of Euripides' workshop, the vehicle that brings these elements together, the actor's body, has been entirely overlooked. The distinctive elements of the body types from the two genres are often treated as mutually exclusive, rarely present in the same scene and never in the same body. A handful of vases, however, most famously the early fourth-century Apulian "Choregoi Vase,"

Accordingly, scholia (and particularly the ancient commentary) ought not to be dismissed outright. On Aristophanic scholia generally, see Dickey 2007, 28–31, who traces aspects of the commentaries to the work of early (and respected) Alexandrian scholars.

25. The entire scene, metonymically, could be considered part of Euripides' costume; indeed, Olson's 2002, 190 *ad* 445 interpretation puts most of the properties on Euripides' person! I borrow "rag and bone shop" from Slater 2002, who titles his study of the *Acharnians* episode with the phrase. Although the costumes and properties are given without charge, Euripides *qua* marketeer is (melodramatically?) being cleaned out; cf. *Ach.* 464 and 470.

26. On distribution in the theater, see especially Tribble 2005 and my broader theoretical discussion in the introduction. On the ways materials shape minds, see Malafouris and Renfrew 2010 and Malafouris 2013.

challenge the universality of this separation, at least on a scenic level.[27] In the Choregoi Vase and depictions like it, a "handsome" figure of tragedy stands isolated in a scene otherwise populated with ugly comedic bodies.[28] Might the Aristophanic Euripides, like the bewildered Aegisthus of the Choregoi Vase, have been called out from his tragic home into a brave, new, and comedic world? If so, the Euripides of *Acharnians* may not have been comically distorted in any way, simply wearing a plain (although comparatively beautiful) tragic mask. Aesthetically buttressed by ugly, tragic properties and costumes, sourced either from previous productions of tragedy itself, or simply modeled after the genre, Euripides' appearance could have been presented entirely in accordance with tragic, and not comic, aesthetics and yet fit the formal constraints of the genre.

The Choregoi Vase demonstrates that the aesthetic gulf between ugly-comedy and beautiful-tragedy might be exploited to comic effect, incongruously placing representatives of each type together in the same scene. Such aesthetic incongruity need not be verbally flagged; indeed, it might be all the more comedically powerful for remaining unspoken; as the saying goes in today's improv theater: "Don't play the joke." At any rate, the distance between the comically ugly Dicaeopolis and tragically "beautiful" Euripides would be eased by rags, which (at least in later works like *Helen*) could achieve burlesque effects even within tragedy itself.

In the painless world of comedy, fetishizing his heroes' rags makes Euripides a peculiar figure, but he is not the only poet to appear in rags in comedy. A poorly dressed poet visits the heroes of *Birds*, where his rags mark his own poverty rather than standing in for his genre.[29] But if rags are Euripides' only visual fault in *Acharnians*, the poet might consider himself lucky.[30] Maarit Kaimio and Nicola Nykopp note the "physical peculiarity" attached to the comedic persona of many of the minor tragedians mentioned in Old Comedy, perhaps most notably the minuscule sons of Carci-

27. An image of the vase is presented, and its contents described, in the introduction to part II.

28. Walsh (2009, 249) lists other vases representing mixed genres or registers.

29. The puffed-up poet wears cheap, common clothes (ληδάριον, Ar. *Av*. 915) which the Chorus, mocking his self-description, calls ὀτρηρός, "cutting," a description the scholiast *ad loc*. interprets to mean τετήμενος, that is: "full of holes." For discussion, see Dunbar 1995 *ad loc*.

30. An ancient tradition carried that Euripides, having been derided for his bad breath, scourged the man who mocked him, Decamnichus. Although presented as historical fact (Arist. *Pol*. 1311b33–34), the humorous nature of the anecdote suggests a comedic origin: cf. *Graec. Anth.* 11.241–2, 11.415 with Baldwin 1983, 106.

nus; if Euripides is presented as tragically handsome (apart from the rags), his image would conform more closely to his own art than do the "bad poets' society" found in the Aristophanic corpus.[31]

Were Euripides to wear a ragged costume clearly identifiable from one of his tragedies, the character would present a remarkably "haunted" figure, conflating tragic poet with tragic hero. Aristophanes' audience would see "Euripides" quite literally through the guise of one of his well-known characters. Such layering of a discernible set of rags may have humorous effects. For instance, in *Frogs* the multiple layers of costume on the actor who is dressed as Dionysus dressed as Heracles are made legible in part by means of explicit verbal commentary. The specific and well-known iconography of the two divinities also aids legibility: the actor wears (at least) the saffron robe and tragic *kothornoi* characteristic of Dionysus with Heracles' lion-skin and club.[32] And though Dicaeopolis makes clear from the outset which tragedian he is visiting, there are no verbal indications pointing out (or clarifying) that the rags Euripides wears belong to a certain hero. On balance, it is likely that the Euripides of *Acharnians* sports a generic set of rags. Indeed, if all the rags appearing onstage look alike, it would create the impression that rags were an official Euripidean livery.

A Rebirth of Tragedy

Over the next twenty years, Dicaeopolis' visit chez Euripides would exert an abiding influence on Aristophanes' comedy and the genre's engagement with tragedy. The scene type would form the blueprint for Euripides' own visit to Agathon in *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, an episode greatly enhanced (for those who had knowledge of the original) through recalling *Acharnians*. The Euripidean penchant for beggarly or disabled heroes mocked in *Acharnians* is recalled in *Clouds*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, and *Frogs*.[33] Taken together with *Acharnians*, the association between Euripides and rags appears in nearly half of Aristo-

31. See Kaimio and Nykopp 1997, 25 n. 8. Olson (2000, 66) calls these figures "misshapen rubbish." On the way various elements of the theatrical experience recall past production on a "haunted" stage, see Carlson 2001.

32. After some initial jocular banter in which no reference is made to his Heraclean accessories, Dionysus identifies himself at Ar. *Ran.* 22. The "real" Heracles makes Dionysus' costume explicit at Ar. *Ran.* 46–48.

33. Ar. *Nub.* 921–24, *Vesp.* 1414, *Pax* 147, *Thesm.* and *Ran.* passim.

phanes' surviving comedies and in most of his plays that were staged during or immediately after Euripides' lifetime. Euripides is, to be sure, only one of the many Aristophanic *kōmōdoumenoi* who repeatedly surface in the comedies, but he is a prominent laughingstock, derided as frequently as Cleisthenes, Cleon, Cleonymus, and Hyperbolus, in addition to taking the stage himself in three plays, a feat apparently unmatched in Old Comedy by any historical figure.[34]

An actor onstage caricaturing the identity of an actual citizen (who was himself likely sitting in the audience) would naturally have effects far different from simply mocking an individual by name alone and not in effigy. Yet there are similarities between the two phenomena. Alan Sommerstein has theorized that Old Comedy's process of named ridicule, *onomasti kōmōdein*, operated through a conceptual medium he terms the "comic *persona*."[35] A literary *persona* may be defined as a shared mental projection of an individual, either real or fictional, comprising the values and attributes known to be attached to that individual. Firsthand knowledge, secondhand news, verbal jokes, and physical impersonations all contribute, in their own way, to forming the *persona*. Accordingly, the *persona* is neither a complete nor necessarily an accurate representation of any historical "person." In fact, many successful comic *personae* distill a complex figure (either historical or fictional) into a minimal set of characteristics that, on account of their restricted meaning and thorough repetition, become tenaciously attached to the *persona*. In short, the comic *persona* becomes proverbialized. Fundamentally, a comic *persona*, like any semantic item, is socially constructed and depends upon a certain degree of consensus. The *persona*, however, may be promulgated, and its symbolic meaning focused or shifted, by certain voices in particular.

Aristophanes, as Michael Silk has argued, played a standout role in developing and codifying Euripides' polysemic comic *persona*.[36] Through the plays of Aristophanes, the tragedian's name became proverbial for three distinct phenomena: ragged heroes, misogyny, and (overly) subtle chatter.[37]

34. Sommerstein 1996b enumerates how often each *kōmōdoumenos* is mocked.

35. Sommerstein 1996b, 328.

36. Silk 2000, 55.

37. Euripides was not the only butt of Old Comedic satire to be associated with several poetically suspect qualities (e.g., a penchant for rags, "chatter," *lalein*), nor was he the only figure so accused. Compare the sordid resumes of Melanthios, Teleas, and Meidias compiled by the scholia at *Av.* 151 and 168, and 1297 respectively, and cited at Sommerstein 1996b, 328–29 n. 8.

Sommerstein observed the momentum these *personae* could accrue with each additional reference. A comic *persona* "could not be created *ex nihilo*," but once created the *persona* could "[feed] on itself, so that some frequently satirized persons ended up being better known to the public through comedy itself than in any other way."[38] The ragged heroes enumerated by Dicaeopolis present an already developed germ of the "rag-stitching" aspect of Euripides' comic *persona*. Indeed, the tragedies named in *Acharnians* alone could have kept Euripides' name as a dramatic-aesthetic punch line for years.

The orienting influence of Dicaeopolis' visit is evident in Aristophanes' later attacks on Euripides. The episode allows the fictionalized character of "Aeschylus" in *Frogs* to accuse Euripides of being a stitcher of rags without being called out for his own ragged Xerxes. Euripides' reputation for rags, established if not created by *Acharnians*, eclipses the other tragedians, the majority of whom likely also used the costume device.[39] Although our evidence is slanted, coming almost exclusively from the works of Aristophanes or ultimately attributable to them, it may nevertheless be true that *Acharnians* made Euripides' name a cultural trademark of ragged costumes.[40] In the parallel case of another well-known Aristophanic *kōmōdoumenos*, Socrates, the external evidence of Plato's *Apology* suggests that comic *personae* developed or invented by Aristophanes, exaggerated and fictional as they may have been, all the same had significant cultural implications beyond Old Comedy. Within Aristophanes' work itself, as self-confirming as the evidence may be, Euripides' reliance on rags has broad cultural familiarity. Even Trygaeus' young daughter (who, it must be said, is historically unlikely to have been a theatergoer herself) compares her father's flight on the *mēchanē* to that of Euripides' *Bellerophon*.[41]

38. Sommerstein 1996b, 327–28.

39. Even Philoctetes' putrid bandages and Electra's unseemly threadbare garb, both staged within recent memory at the premier of *Frogs* in 406 BCE, escape mention.

40. On the "branding" this dynamic between Euripides and Aristophanes entailed, see Zuckerberg 2016b, Sells 2019, 23–53; for rags' importance to paracomedy, see Jendza 2020, 82–118. The painful circumstances surrounding his ragged characters may have inspired Aristotle to designate Euripides the "most tragic" of the poets. It is suggestive that in listing characters most tied to the fearsome events (*deina*) he associates with "the tragic," Aristotle concludes with Thyestes and Telephus' raggedly dressed characters, mentioned in *Acharnians*, whose most influential portrayals were penned by Euripides.

41. The tragedy was likely first staged before the daughter's (fictional) birth: a slave calls Trygaeus' daughters *paidia* at *Pax.* 111, suggesting both are less than eight years old (cf. Hp. *ap. Ph.*1.26).

It is true that none of these later jibes at Euripides require knowledge, even secondhand, of *Acharnians* to succeed. High demands on audience competence may suit the composition and interpretation of a tightly knit trilogy such as the *Oresteia*, but such expectations are patently unrealistic for Old Comedy, particularly when allowing for the twenty-year gulf between *Acharnians* and *Frogs*.[42] At the very least, however, comedic resonance of Euripidean jokes benefits from recalling the *Acharnians* and the comic *persona* it helped fashion. And, at most, knowledge of Euripides' *persona* rewarded theatrical experts for their knowledge while guiding novices along.

Aristophanes at times claims, not unlike Euripides and Aeschylus in *Frogs*, to improve Athens and its art through his comedy. In the parabasis of *Peace*, for example, before praising the political engagement of their *didaskalos*, the Chorus boasts that Aristophanes has bettered not only his city but even his dramatic genre:

> πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους μόνος ἀνθρώπων κατέπαυσεν
> ἐς τὰ ῥάκια σκώπτοντας ἀεὶ καὶ τοῖς φθειρσὶν πολεμοῦντας . . .
>
> For he [Aristophanes] alone among men stopped his rivals
> from always poking fun at rags and warring with lice.[43]

Aristophanes, whether through his plays or his actual person, asserts that he shifted comedic practice, not only in his own work but also in that of his rivals. A natural question, then, is who these rivals are and how did Aristophanes bring about this result. The scholia offer Eupolis as Aristophanes' primary target, though as Olson suggests, this is likely conjectural *scilicet*.[44] Aristophanes, writing *Peace* at a time when *onomasti kōmōdein* was not only licit but virulently practiced, would have no cause to resort to plural *antipaloi* ("rivals") to discreetly circumnavigate a certain competitor's name; rather, the plural increases the range of the playwright's artistic sway. How far might this boast extend? Might *antipaloi* signify not only Aristophanes' opponents in comedic competition but poets in other dramatic genres as well?[45]

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42. On audience competence, see especially Revermann 2006b.

43. Ar. *Pax* 739–40.

44. Olson 1998 ad. *Pax* 739.

45. The participle *skōptontes* and the subsequent list of stereotypically comic butts both suggest that the Chorus has other professional funny men in mind. Alhough *skōptein* is

Of course, Euripides continued staging ragged heroes, as did his rivals. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus* were both performed in a "post-*Acharnians*" theatrical world in which tragic rags had already been a comedic punch line. How could rags once considered representatives of pain and misfortune, but travestied time and again by Aristophanes, continue to be placed on stage in serious drama? Aristophanes' focus on rags simply verbalized what was already known: rags, among all of tragedy's beautifully ornate costumes, are ugly. The comedic potential of rags was always present, but the implicit contract that tragedy establishes with its viewers to suspend ontological issues applies also to the generic problems as well. Ugly rags in tragedy are painful *precisely* because they are staged in a tragedy.

But while Euripides stands in for all tragedians in *Acharnians*, he is also singled out as a particular aesthetic offender through his rags. Might this have affected, if not the general portrayal of rags in tragedy, then at least Euripides' own penchant? Alan Sommerstein's advice on how to avoid being a *kōmōdoumenos* is relevant to this point:

> In general, then, the only reliable advice for someone who wanted to avoid being a *komodoumenos* was the advice of Epicurus, "live unnoticed." At the same time, the fact that virtually anyone in the public eye could expect to become a target of comic satire meant that in most cases the effect of comic satire was unlikely to be seriously damaging. Why should I worry when rude comic remarks are made about me, if they are being made about all my political rivals as well? Comedy, then, both was believed to have and did have, from time to time, a significant effect on public feeling about issues and personalities. It did not, however, produce that effect by its regular run-of-the-mill satire on anyone and everyone in the public eye.[46]

If Euripides is repeatedly maligned, he is at least in good company.

The comedic principle of subversion and revelation ought also to be considered. As outlined by Alexandre Mitchell, "To mock a powerful individual . . . one subverts his usual image and by so doing ridicules him;

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strongly associated with Old Comedy, it is not exclusive to the genre. Tragedians, too, engaged in funny business in their satyr plays: the Euripidean Cyclops complains that the satyr Chorus plays a cruel joke (*skōptein*, E. *Cyc.* 675) on him when they report that "Nobody" has blinded him. On the embrace of "paracomedy" in late Euripides, see Jendza 2020.

46. Sommerstein 1996b, 331–32.

but by doing so, one re-affirms or 'reveals' his authority. . . . In the end, a parody pays homage to its serious model."[47] The "homage" that Mitchell cites must be factored into the cultural economy of the fifth-century dramatists. Comedic jesting had real-world effects, as Cleon's anger and Socrates' execution both testify to, but the jokes brought fame along with infamy. Perhaps then as now, bad publicity is good publicity. Euripides at times seems to embrace his ragged image: in *Helen*, Menelaus' anxiety over his rags borders on a dramatic self-consciousness otherwise associated with Old Comedy. Once reunited with Helen, Menelaus is ashamed to admit that she came upon him in the stereotypically Euripidean act of begging.[48] Euripides' *Helen*, and apparently the *Andromeda* as well, left low-hanging fruit for Aristophanes to pick up the following year with *Thesmophoriazusae*. The generic shift detectable in Euripides' late dramas may represent a gesture of encouragement for comedic restaging.

Conclusion

Having considered the production and meaning of Dicaeopolis' visit to Euripides, some aesthetic conclusions may be drawn in closing. Aristophanes had many ways of representing tragic rags and the tragedian Euripides on stage: certain costumes from Euripides' productions were notorious and unique among fifth-century tragic stagecraft. The cultural power of these garments could be played upon in a number of ways: through recycling the very same costumes themselves, through the mimicry (and perhaps distortion) of their appearance, or even through contrast. Staging rags pointedly *unlike* those familiar from Euripidean tragedy would have its own type of effect. If Aristophanes' Euripides did indeed wear a tragic mask and costumes recycled from the real Euripides' productions, the tragic motifs throughout the *Acharnians* would have been even more pronounced. Visual analysis of the staging of *Acharnians* complements the studies of verbal paratragedy, while focus on materiality poses an aesthetic alternative to accounts of comic humor predicated upon formal distortion and burlesque. Recognizing that tragedy and comedy are both dramatic productions, made up of play-script, performance, and material properties, illuminates how, and perhaps why, Aristophanes chose to place Euripidean rags on his comic stage.

47. Mitchell 2009, 12–13.
48. E. *Hel.* 790–92.

Even if the material aspects of production are removed from consideration, the inherent distortion and formlessness of rags make Dicaeopolis' visit a crucial point of comparison between tragic and comic aesthetics. The intrinsic formal ugliness of rags shows that generic difference is determined more by the presence or absence of pain than by a "pure" aesthetic distinction between ugliness and beauty. But as has already been observed in the semantic ranges of the adjectives *kalos* and *aischros*, "purely visual aesthetics" are impossible to delineate. The network of beauty and ugliness, pain and its absence, must be considered in drawing the lines between tragedy and comedy. The unique place of rags in Greek literature, used paradoxically both as a sure proof of suffering and yet familiar from well-known examples as the disguise par excellence, allow these garments to sit astride the generic boundary between comedy and tragedy.

FOUR

Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* and Theatrical Aesthetics at the Intersection of Gender and Genre

Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, often referred to by its Latinized title, *Thesmophoriazusae*, shares substantial thematic and structural similarities with *Acharnians*. Notably, the comedies also share a character, the fictionalized Euripides, promoted from a brief if memorable appearance in *Acharnians* to a play-spanning role in *Thesmophoriazusae*. The dramatic action follows Euripides and his unnamed "Inlaw" (Greek, *kēdestēs*, although ancient tradition and some scholars today also refer to the character as Mnesilochus or else Kinsman), as the pair seek first to infiltrate, and subsequently extricate themselves from, a women-only religious gathering that eventually threatens both of their lives. Over the course of the play, Euripides and Inlaw are compelled to draw upon tragedy's various theatrical resources, borrowing scenic devices and diction, meter, and music in ways that smartly parrot and parody the genre.

Much has been made of *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*'s "paratragedy," especially since this comedy offers by far the most extensive and integrated generic parody of any of Aristophanes' surviving works. If the paratragedy of *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* is exceptional in its scope, it is at least familiar in its methods. Deformations and substitutions abound: burlesqued scenes from Euripides' *Telephus*, *Palamedes*, *Helen*, and *Andromeda* structure and fill the second half of the drama. As in *Acharnians*, direct material borrowings and burlesquing imitation of tragedy jointly support a meta-theatrical commentary that advances the plot as well as Aristophanes' broader concerns with the power of narrative, performance, materials, and the importance of truth-telling, even, if not especially, in hostile circum-

stances. Tragic reverberations may be heard throughout all of Aristophanes' surviving plays, but with *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, Euripidean notes are particularly resonant. Indeed, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* presents what Matthew C. Farmer has called an "echo chamber" of allusive cross-references across the two genres.[1]

In *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, costume once again serves a pivotal role in bringing the aesthetic peculiarities of tragedy to the comedic stage. This later play, however, does more than simply elaborate upon concepts first established in *Acharnians*. The appropriation of tragic costume into this comedy is not predicated upon the garments' formlessness or painful associations, which is to say, its ugliness as perceived within its generic frame. On the contrary, it is the conventional paraphernalia of beauty (e.g., diadems, saffron robes, mirrors, and the like) that not only borrows but transports into patently inappropriate contexts. Like *Acharnians*, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* produces its characteristically comedic ugliness not by distorting or exaggerating items from tragedy, but by shifting their gendered and generic framing. When male characters present themselves, inappropriately, unconvincingly, and unwillingly as women, those items that once had an ornamental and beautifying effects come to underscore the ugliness of the comedic male body and the shameful inappropriateness of its self-presentation.[2] By throwing gender into this mix as a crucial new ingredient, however, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* offers novel, valuable perspective on generic aesthetics. With overlapping emphases on the representation of women and tragedy, the comedy explores the ways in which genre, gender, and aesthetics intersected and interacted on the Athenian stage.

Refracting abstract artistic and social qualities across material bodies, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* calls humorous attention to tragedy's peculiar interest in portraying female characters when cultural and theatrical conventions demanded that all roles be played by male actors. Engaging with two recent Euripidean dramas in particular, *Helen* and *Andromeda*, two plays uncommonly preoccupied with beauty and appearances, Aristophanes' comedy calls attention to the ways tragic production, too, might be seen to traffic in the ugly and the ridiculous. Garments and appurtenances,

1. On the mediating role of *Acharnians* in the play's connection to Euripides' *Telephus*, see Farmer 2017, 163–64. On comedic self-reference as a "multiverse," see Ruffell 2011, 214–60.

2. On *eikos* "appropriateness" or "seemliness" as a facet of beauty, see Konstan 2014, 160–61, and discussions of Tyrtaeus fr. 10 in the next chapter.

objects typically considered beautifying in their real-world, fifth-century Athenian context, come to have a different aesthetic meaning on the theatrical stage. Once again, by appropriating certain aesthetically charged objects from tragedy, Aristophanes reveals the ugliness and the empty vanity of its sister genre.

Despite (and partly) because of its dense and overlapping networks of meaning and significance, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* can be a difficult work to analyze. Beyond the generally destabilizing effects of humor and irony, the play's mimetic layering makes firm distinctions between theater and setting, the actor and his (sometimes multiple) roles, difficult to maintain. Indeed, abrupt and unexpected shifts between these ontological layers frequently lie at the center of the play's humor precisely because they resist linear explication. In accounting for these difficulties and pointed ambiguities, modern readers have brought an extensive battery of theoretical approaches to bear on the play. Seminal structuralist analyses of the play by Froma Zeitlin, Anne Duncan, and Eva Stehle have helped delineate the play's semiotics of dress and gender.[3] More recent work has situated the convoluted mimesis of *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* within cognitive frameworks of extended-mind, "conceptual blending," Gibsonian affordance theory, and similar approaches.[4] While these structuralist and cognitive approaches provide essential background to the present analysis, these studies typically have little regard for the overall aesthetics of the production as embodied performance.

A focus not on the semiotics so much as on the *realia* of the play may offer a stable intellectual foothold. An object-oriented approach cuts through the Gordian knot of layered significations and infinite semiotic regression. Materials in *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* are more than a mimetic cross-section for the critic: they play a formative role in the drama itself. The actor, the character he portrays, and any further roles that character adopts all jointly interact with, and depend on, the same physical space and materials. Essential to maintaining the several mimetic levels in a play like *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, objects serve as a stable material anchor, a connecting node linking various imaginative layers of performance.

Close readings of nearly any scene from *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* might advance discussion of fifth-century material aesthetics, but this section highlights three moments particularly crucial to the comedy's

3. See esp. Zeitlin 1996; Duncan 2000/2001; Stehle 2002.
4. See Duncan 2024.

aesthetic engagement with tragic costume. The first comes early in the play, as Euripides and Inlaw visit the home of the tragic newcomer, Agathon. Despite close parallels to the house call in *Acharnians*, the scene casts the material underpinnings of tragic aesthetics in a different light, placing further emphasis on connections between dramatic costume and poetic composition while making clear that embodied and perceived gender, too, is a crucial aesthetic component on stage. The second moment comes shortly thereafter, when Inlaw is transformed, with help from Agathon and his wardrobe, into a woman. Inlaw receives a piecemeal disguise, creatively improvised from available accoutrements, which carries with it its own (ribald) material history. Third, in a burlesque of Euripides' *Helen*, Inlaw's cheeks, which had been roughly shaved by Euripides as part of the former's disguise, ironically come to represent those of the supremely beautiful tragic heroine who, in Euripides' play, had not only verbally distanced herself from her defining beauty, but also taken material steps, through the rituals of mourning, to uglify herself. *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*'s material connections to tragedy combine with its comedic and verbal art to present tragic ugliness not simply through contrast and travesty, but contextual aesthetics.

Agathon: Just the Wo(Man) for the Job

"Where are you leading me, Euripides?" (*poi m' ageis, ōuripidē*, Ar. *Thesm.* 4). These words, the conclusion of the brief speech with which Inlaw opens the play, activate a host of potential theatrical directions and meanings that set the comedy in motion. Of these, perhaps most salient is the name and identity of the tragedian, Euripides. For theatergoers familiar with Aristophanes' earlier *Acharnians*, this verse suggests that *Thesmophoriazusae* may extend the thematic concerns and characterizations of that play (despite fourteen years and perhaps a dozen Aristophanic comedies intervening). Indeed, it will soon emerge that the destination to which Euripides is leading Inlaw is the home of another tragedian: Agathon.[5] But before Agathon is named, Aristophanes has underscored the thematic prominence of trag-

5. For an extended reading of the prologue and its philosophical resonance, see Clements 2014. Generally, the exchange between Inlaw and Euripides has many stock features associated with Old Comedy. The juxtaposition of tragedy and comedy begins immediately in the play.

edy in this play by placing, once again, one of the genre's most illustrious representatives on his comedic stage.[6] In *Acharnians*, the sudden and startling revelation of Euripides was a memorable *coup de théâtre*; in the prologue of *Thesmophoriazusae*, by contrast, the famous tragedian's appearance is mostly unmarked. Beyond mention of a beard and graying hair (190), the play leaves the details of Euripides' appearance undetermined, leaving those with nothing more than the text to speculate how and to what extent the tragedian's appearance visually signaled his genre.

It may be that in this play Euripides simply conformed to the typical scenic conventions of Old Comedy's middle-aged and beyond male characters.[7] At any rate, it is comedically important that Euripides' costume does not undercut the surprising appearance of Agathon, only minutes away, nor anticipate his own reappearances dressed as characters from his own tragedies.[8] However he is dressed, Euripides is again comedically defined by nothing so much as his past productions. Beyond a passing remark concerning his soft spot for mendicant and wounded heroes, the critical focus on Euripidean drama in *Thesmophoriazusae* is on another category of marginalized character: women. Just as Euripides was not unique in dressing his characters in rags, he was hardly alone in presenting women on stage. But there may have been something particularly jarring in his portrayal of good/beautiful women in 412 that haunts him here.[9]

As in *Acharnians*, Aristophanes locates a quintessentially public and collective art form (choral, choragic, agonal, etc.) at a playwright's private home, behind doors that are, at least for the moment, closed. Through this spatial and social domestication of tragedy, Aristophanes draws upon the rich tradition of domestic scenes across tragedy, satyr play, and Old Comedy, a theatrical history emphasized here, as in *Acharnians*, through express reference to the theatrical device involved in making interior scenes visible, the *ekkyklēma*. As in tragedy, where vividly described and often highly aes-

6. "Euripides" might have been recognized as soon as he became visible approaching the stage, but his comedically potent name is saved for special emphasis until the end of Inlaw's opening verses (lines 1–4). A portrait mask is possible; early information about the play, as in a *proagon*, might also have clued in the audience.

7. Stone 1984: 343–44 discusses Euripides' appearance across Ar. *Ach.*, *Thesm.*, and *Ran*.

8. Indeed, in age, beardedness, and presumably clothing, Euripides serves as a foil to the youthful, beardless, and partially effeminately dressed Agathon.

9. Two of the more notorious characters, Clytemnestra and Phaedra, were dramatized by all three of the "great" tragedians. Even if in his fully extant plays Sophocles shows comparatively less concern with female characters, his plays would echo/reflect misogynistic stereotypes.

theticized events occur offstage before their horrific results are physically revealed moments later (on its presentation of the bodies, see the next chapter), Aristophanes hints at, before exposing, the inner workings of Agathon's tragic composition. But the setting also had a real-world referent. As with Euripides' home in *Acharnians*, the house of Agathon existed in Athenian public space. The setting possibly called to mind Agathon's actual home in the city, which, like the Thesmophorion to which the dramatic action will soon move, might have only been a few minutes' walk from the theater. Nor is this the only time Agathon's home serves as a setting: the drinking party of Plato's *Symposium* also occurs at the home of the playwright.[10] Mapping the imaginary scenic space onto a real, geographically specific space in the familiar city serves to activate physical surroundings, further anchoring the action of the drama to real figures, real places, and real materials.

The setting is also part of an artistic motif of the playwright at home that seems to have emerged in the later fifth and early fourth centuries. Evidence for this is spotty, and in Aristophanes poets are also often presented in some sort of public sphere (*Birds, Frogs*). Beyond representation in Aristophanic drama, we see this in sculpture of the fourth century such as the Ikarios relief, or the Lyme Park relief.[11] Even as it differs from fictional homes, placing Agathon at home puts him in an ongoing relationship with his surroundings. He is not on the *pnyx* or in the agora, shared spaces with only brief time overlaps, but a space over which he has control and which has control over him. Ultimately the domestic location, a comedic shorthand, also offers cultural insight into ancient practice and popular ideas about theatrical composition. Tragedy, once again, is to be projected not only onto the poet himself, but also upon his material surroundings. Materials shape his daily life, an "extended self" or "extended mind" distributed across his home.

Euripides explains to Inlaw (and the theatrical audience as well) that his plan (*mēchanē*, 87) is to persuade Agathon to infiltrate the deliberative gathering at the Thesmophoria festival and, disguised in women's clothing (*lathrai. . . . stolēn gynaikos ēmphiesmenon*, 92), speak on Euripides' behalf (*lexonth' hyper emou*, 91). Despite certain similarities, then, the reasons for visiting this tragedian are, at least initially, shown to be different than those

10. The supposed date of the party in Plato's *Symposium* is 416 BCE, on the occasion of Agathon's first entry, and first victory, at the Lenaia festival. Plato's account gives little detail about the home, but the playwright's wealth and the drunken, staggering arrival of Alcibiades both suggest a convenient location in the urban environment.

11. See Scholl 1995.

in *Acharnians*, where Dicaeopolis' stated intention was to acquire a costume by which he might "dress as wretchedly as possible." In *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, by contrast, Euripides and Inlaw have come in search not of an object, but of an actor, one capable of deception (*lathrai*) and persuasive speech. But actors and objects can be hard to disentangle on the dramatic stage, and it is crucial that Agathon not only act, but also dress the part.

Even the boorish Inlaw realizes that what Euripides proposes is a "clever" or "refined" (*kompson*, 93) affair. The adjective *kompsos*, may in this context apply equally to the plan's conception, execution, or appreciation. It may therefore flatter not only Euripides (as the plot's designer) and Agathon (in anticipation of his performance), but even Inlaw himself (and, by extension, Aristophanes' audience, who are elsewhere encouraged to see themselves as *kompsoi*).[12] As with other terms for mental acuity in the late fifth-century drama, the flattery is tinged with irony.[13] Although its cleverness may refract across various participants, Inlaw asserts that the plan is typically Euripidean, saying it is "very much your style." (*sphodr' ek tou tropou*, 93). Here, too, the wide-ranging semantics of another word, *tropos*, are leveraged, calling to mind not only Euripides' established artistic style and plot devices, but personal appearance and habits as well. Inlaw, perhaps unwittingly, establishes metaphorical connections between actions, individuals, materials, and manners that the play will develop under the rubric of "cleverness."

Agathon is a special asset for Euripides' plans. The opening dialogue between Euripides and Inlaw called attention to the tragedian's unique personal qualities when it was asked "What sort of man is this Agathon?" (*poios houtos Agathôn*, 30). In the ensuing lines, Agathon's nature becomes the topic of a humorous exchange that, for its full effect, relies upon the audience having a caricature of an effeminate Agathon already in mind, against which the descriptors "tanned" (*melas*) "strong" (*karteros*) and "thick-bearded" (*dasypōgōn*) stand in humorous incongruity. The humor here is partly connected to Agathon's name, which calls to mind the aristocratic label of *kalos k'agathos*, which forged connections between class, ethics, and aesthetics.

12. On more than one occasion, Cratinus flattered his spectators as *kompsoi*: see Cratinus fr. 169, 307, and esp. 342 with discussion and bibliography from Bakola (2009, 24–25). Aristophanes, too, associated this quality with Euripides as early as *Knights* in 424 BCE (*kompseuripikōs*, 17).

13. Cf. Ar. *Ran*. 967–70, where the word, like *dexios* (cf. 540), is an epithet of the politically deft, but ethically questionable, Theramenes.

And indeed, as we learn from a variety of classical era authorities, Agathon cut a remarkable figure, even among the many distinctive personages of late fifth-century Athens. On top of being a precocious tragic playwright whose work and personal life broke conventions, Agathon was, we are told, uncommonly handsome. Our sources ascribe to him a youthful, ephebic beauty that, together with his ongoing relationship with an older male lover, Pausanias, carried over unusually into maturity. Against the established sexual-social dynamics of the Athenian elite, this coded as effeminate, and while possibly "shameful" when extended to associated lewd acts, certainly not ugly, but rather the object of homoerotic desire. Indeed, outside of the many professional details that might invite Old Comedic mockery, Agathon's atypical gender expression and beauty stood in stark contrast to the ugliness of the older comedic male, whose receding hairline, wrinkled and bearded face, distended paunch, and outsized phallus formed a hyper-masculine type that, in many ways, symbolized the genre. Scrambling the core binaries of age and gender, Agathon's identity was received as transgressive and is satirized with the full vitriol of the Greek iambographic tradition, with several sexually aggressive jokes made at his expense in the play. If Agathon's self-presentation was out of step with Attic cultural norms, however, it was very much in line with the style and conventions of his tragic genre. Agathon's beauty is never questioned, even as his position in Athenian society is marginalized. Rather, it is simply reframed in feminine terms (Cyrene, etc.), partly in response to the capacious, sexually active eroticism of Old Comedy. Ultimately Agathon, too, is very much "of Euripides' style."

Agathon's peculiar bodily features, including his pale skin, weak frame, and smooth face, were telegraphed early in the play. In response to his physical presence, however, it is the material aspects of the tragedian's appearance that leave Inlaw nonplussed. In a speech with elements borrowed explicitly from Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* trilogy, Inlaw attempts to decode the seemingly contradictory gender expression of Agathon's person (Ar. *Thesm.* 136–44):

ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννις; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή;
τίς ἡ τάραξις τοῦ βίου; τί βάρβιτος
λαλεῖ κροκωτῷ; τί δὲ λύρα κεκρυφάλῳ;
τί λήκυθος καὶ στρόφιον; ὡς οὐ ξύμφορον.
τίς δαὶ κατρόπτου καὶ ξίφους κοινωνία;
σύ τ' αὐτός, ὦ παῖ, πότερον ὡς ἀνὴρ τρέφει;
καὶ ποῦ πέος; ποῦ χλαῖνα; ποῦ Λακωνικαί;

ἀλλ' ὡς γυνὴ δῆτ'; εἶτα ποῦ τὰ τιτθία;
τί φῄς; τί σιγᾷς;

Where's this man-woman from? What's his fatherland? What's his
manner of dress?
What is his confusion of lifestyles? What does a baritone harp
say to a saffron gown? What does a lyre say to a hairnet?
What—an oil-flask *and* a bra? Why, there's no comparison at all!
What can a mirror and a sword have in common?
And you yourself, boy: Can it be you were brought up as a man?
Where's your dick? Where's your cloak? Where are your Spartan shoes?
Or was it as a woman, then? In that case, where are your breasts?
What do you say? Why are you silent?

The ancient commentary attached to the text confirms that the first (and possibly last) line of this excerpt come from Aeschylus' tragedy *Edonians*, uttered by the king Lycurgus about the effeminate Dionysus who has recently arrived in his kingdom.[14] No provenance is given for the rest of Inlaw's speech, but there are certainly many tragic allusions and comedic interruptions between the bookends of these Aeschylean quotations. In its piecemeal unpacking of Agathon's appearance, for instance, Inlaw's words echo those of Pelasgus in one of Aeschylus' surviving plays, *Suppliant Women*, in which the Argive king interprets the strange habits of the eponymous chorus of North African Danaids.[15] As observed in the previous chapter, Attic tragedy often leads its audience in interpreting the material means of its presentation. It is ironic that the comedic Inlaw, surrounded by tragedians, participates in their own expository practices. Although Inlaw has at this point in the play already demonstrated some familiarity with the Attic stage, this is the first of many times in *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* that Inlaw breaks into full tragic versification. That this occurs in

14. A. fr. 61; cf. Rau 1967, 109–10.

15. On Pelasgus' semiotic decoding, see Wyles 2011, 48–53. The potential for tragic quotation (from *Edonians* or elsewhere), the stock nature of the items adduced, and their perceived inappropriateness to Agathon's "gentle" (*sanfte*) character led Rau (1967, 110) to doubt whether each property mentioned was physically present on Aristophanes' stage, a healthy skepticism, although unevenly applied. It is revealing, nevertheless, that Inlaw places materials first in his interpretation before turning to bodily markers of sex: real or imagined, materials form an important physical basis for broader gender concepts and categories.

response to the tragedian's material panoply is suggestive. Although the lyrical virtuosity of Agathon's entrance has its own effect, it is the playwright's materials, specifically, that elicit from Inlaw a verbal response that reflects their tragic nature.

Echoing Aeschylus' *Lycurgus*, Inlaw begins by classifying Agathon as a category-challenging hybrid, specifically a *gynnis*, or "man-woman." In the verses that follow, however, Inlaw is at pains to map Agathon's gender identity across conventional male-female binaries, a framework within which the playwright's distributed material presence provides copious contradictory evidence. Considering each item of the tragedian's kit in turn and in a tone of mocking disbelief, Inlaw contrasts Agathon's normatively male paraphernalia (viz., harps, oil flask, and sword) with those stereotypically associated with feminine vanity and toilette (mirror, hairnet, bra, and saffron gown). Inlaw suggests there is no association (*koinōnia*, 140) between such materials, that they have no shared experience (*xymphoron*, 139), and even that they fail to communicate (*lalei*, 138) with one another. This is a remarkable use of the verb *lalein*, which is applied to inanimate subjects only for special emphasis.[16] Inlaw presents Agathon's materials as having a society of their own that is almost independent of the playwright.[17] Attributing incoherence to the objects themselves, Inlaw leaves unspoken the consequence that their incommensurability destabilizes Agathon's personal gender identity.

It is only after surveying Agathon's distributed material presence that Inlaw inspects the tragedian's body for biological markers of sex. Even then, materials irrepressibly enter Inlaw's gender calculus. He mentions the visual absence of Agathon's penis in the same breath as his missing cloak (*chlaina*, 142) and Spartan shoes, items which likewise coded as masculine. Yet again, we see how costume and gender are nearly inextricable on the stage. In contrast to the obscenely short tunics of the comedic tradition, the clothes concealing Agathon's genitalia are received simultaneously as a mark of generic and gendered distinction. Ultimately, Inlaw's words reflect not only the gender-policing characteristic of the satirical iambic tradition, but also the gender and generic binaries of Greek culture, structures that sometimes

16. For instance, the dictum of Simonides, reported at Plu. 2.346f., that verbal poetry is "speaking painting" (*zōgraphia lalousa*) and that visual art is "silent poetry" (poiēsis siōpōsa). *Koinōnia*, too, although used more regularly of objects (LSJ *s.v.* I.B.2), retained irrepressibly social meanings in democratic Athens (LSJ *s.v.* I.A. list its primary meanings as "communion, association, partnership.").

17. It would be nearly impossible for the actor to bear all these items simultaneously.

relished, but consistently marked, nonconforming individuals. Inlaw gives voice to popular understandings of gender essential to the play's humor. He also establishes Agathon as an essential link between the masculine world of Euripides and Inlaw and the women's world of the festival. "Man" enough to take the side of his fellow-playwright but "woman" enough to pass among the women at the Thesmophoria, Agathon is a unique asset.

A Tragically Material Girl: Transformation across Genre and Gender

In contrast to Inlaw's frustrated attempts at classification, Agathon promotes a radically different approach to gender. Although he is ostensibly concerned with verbal composition, the playwright's ideas are informed by theatrical realization, predicated not on conceptual binaries but upon material agglomeration. Agathon interprets Inlaw's outspoken perplexity as mockery (*psogos*, 146), but insists he is not harmed (*tēn d' algēsin ou parschomēn*, 147) by it. Forgoing a direct response to Inlaw's more pointed interrogations, Agathon instead presents his own boldly material thesis (*Thesm.* 148–52):

> ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆθ' ἅμα γνώμῃ φορῶ.
> χρὴ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δράματα
> ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν.
> αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ' ἢν ποιῇ τις δράματα,
> μετουσίαν δεῖ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ' ἔχειν.
>
> I change my clothing according as I change my mentality. A man who is a poet must adopt habits that match the plays he's committed to composing. For example, if one is writing plays about women, one's body must participate in their habits.

Although he speaks only for himself (note the emphatic *egō*), for this tragedian, at any rate, mentality (*gnōmē*) and clothing (*esthēs*) are intimately connected. The preposition with which Agathon links his clothes and mentality (*hama*) leaves ambiguous whether dress determines mindset, or vice versa. It is only correlation, not causation, that is implied. With the verb *phorein*, the frequentative form of the more common verb *pherein*, "wear," Agathon signals both that this is a recurrent practice for him and that connections

between clothing and poet extend across time, certainly during composition (guaranteed by the explanatory *gar*), but with a comedic insinuation that this practice (i.e., cross-dressing) bleeds into Agathon's nonprofessional life. Conspicuously absent from this discussion is any immediate audience. Agathon is not projecting interpretable signs or "performing gender" for onlookers, in the way that an actor (or soon, Inlaw) might. Rather, in a materially affective framing of costume, Agathon's sartorial expression is simply harmony with his own thought.

Agathon's conflation of clothing and mental state is furthered by his use of *tropos*, or "habit," a word he emphatically repeats (150, 152). Some commentators on this passage find Agathon's convoluted syntax and prolixity grandiose, but Agathon's phrasing emphasizes key terms, such as *tropos*, that act as a materialist rejoinder to Inlaw's mockery. *Tropos* (for the dramatic audience) recalls Inlaw's earlier observation that the plan to infiltrate the women-only gathering was in line with Euripides' "style." The term underscores connections not only between plot, costume, and performance, but also established patterns of behavior.

Perhaps the most crucial word in Agathon's remarkable retort is kept back until the last line of this programmatic excerpt: *metousia* (152). Meaning "participation," "communion," or, at its most fundamental, "shared existence," *metousia* picks up on *hama*, as Agathon underscores (*dei*, 150, reinforcing *chrē*, 149) the necessity of such connection. Crucially, this share is not permanent, but conditional and changing (as the prefix *meta-* elsewhere conveys). Dressing according to one's thought may be general practice, but what one "participates" in specifically at any moment, is subject to change. To summarize Agathon's position, poetic expression is connected to clothing, and the poetics and material aesthetics of drama are insperable. It is not only gender, which emerges as a particularly salient category, but the poet's own mental state.

Once Agathon refuses to play along with the scheme, fearing repercussions from the Athenian women, the scene turns to regendering Inlaw. So that his relative may pass as a woman and spy on the festival to Demeter, Euripides roughly shaves Inlaw, who cries out in pain for being cut (*temnomenos*, 226). Although the word is ambiguous in English translation, *temnein* "to cut" cannot simply refer to the cutting of his facial hair, for which forms of *xyrein* or *keirein* would be used. *Temnomenos* makes clear that Euripides' razor has penetrated Inlaw's skin, presumably drawing blood (and with it, shouts of pain).[18] The scene becomes even more raucous

18. The mechanics of the scene are complicated. See Austin and Olson 2004: xx).

as Inlaw's cross-gender transformation is made complete with pubic depilation assisted by fire. Surveying the damage he has inflicted, Euripides jokes that he has barbered "beautifully" (*kalōs*, 231) and that Inlaw now looks "quite becoming" (*euprepēs . . . panu*, 233), aestheticizing his now feminized relative and signaling to the theatrical audience the plausibility of the improvised disguise.[19] Inlaw goes on to borrow brightly colored women's clothing and other luxuriously feminine items from Agathon, completing his transformation.

Inlaw's Helen: Reflecting Upon Tragic Ugliness

Making use of the women's garments he wears, Inlaw begins to enact and imitate Euripides' most recently deployed (*tēn kainēn*, 850) female tragic lead, Helen, in the hopes of triggering his own escape in a tragic mold. What follows is a richly allusive and mimetically unstable scene, with a dense web of significations and associations. As soon as Inlaw has hatched his meta-theatrical plot, Kritylla (the woman assigned to guard Inlaw, who overhears but fails to fully understand his plans) warns: "You'll see a bitter Helen soon" (*pikran Helenēn opsei tach*, 853). This idiomatic expression, with a force akin to "You'll be sorry" in English, has meaning beyond that of the set phrase. Its component parts, *horan* and *pikros*, connect Helen to both spectacle and grief while also signaling the theatrical enactment soon (*tach'*) to unfold. To begin his performance in earnest, Inlaw quotes the opening lines of the prologue to Euripides' *Helen*, his dramatic overtures eventually eliciting the arrival of Euripides disguised as Menelaus. The newly arrived Euripides-as-Menelaus gamely engages in an extended series of questions by quoting lines from *Helen* with varying degrees of accuracy. The dramatic force of this initial exchange is to layer the tragic scenic space of Proteus' tomb onto the comedic mise-en-scène of Demeter's altar at the Thesmophorion. After more than twenty lines that stick close to the text of his *Helen* (855–78), Euripides begins to deviate from the tragic script, apparently in response to Inlaw's position and posture.[20] Euripides-as-Menelaus asks, "Why do you remain sitting at this tomb, wrapped in this long veil" (*pharei kaluptos*, 889–91). The veil, a *pharos*, is another marked departure from *Helen*, where before her transformation the heroine wore the white

19. Cf. *Ach.* 442–44, where Dicaeopolis establishes two separate levels of vision, one for the spectators (*theatai*) and another for the choreuts.

20. Sommerstein (1994, 212) offers a chart of the overlap between the two plays.

Spartan *peplos*, a garment generally regarded as quite revealing.[21] Whether in ostensible grief or modesty, Inlaw, unlike Helen, has hidden much of his body from view.[22]

At this point the text begins to stray widely from the tragic original, a sign that Aristophanes has confidence in the audience's acceptance of the scenic transformation and aims at something more complex than verbal paratragedy. Inlaw, derailed by an interruption from Kritylla and eager to bring the escape plot back on track, speeds the dramatic recognition along, indirectly identifying his role by lamenting for "my husband, Menelaus," to which Euripides responds in feigned shock (Ar. *Thesm.* 902):

γύναι τί εἶπας; Στρέψον ἀνταυγεῖς κόρας

"Woman, what have you said? Turn your bright eyes [toward me]"

Though staging must remain speculative, this command (which has no parallel in *Helen*) suggests that the *pharos* referred to in line 891 has covered Inlaw's head, hiding his face from Euripides and possibly from theatergoers as well. At the very least, Inlaw, we now learn, has managed to avoid face-to-face contact with Euripides for more than thirty trimeters despite responding to seven questions in that time. This extended interchange, though itself reminiscent of several drawn-out tragic recognitions, stands in marked contrast to the two parallel recognition scenes in *Helen*, where Teucer and Menelaus are each struck immediately by the woman's uncanny likeness to the "Helen" they fought for in Troy. This change reflects differences in thematic and aesthetic framing between *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* and *Helen*, the former operating at the intersection of gender and genre while the latter explores resemblance and identity. It also drastically changes the meaning of the recognition, no longer predicated upon inner character and personal history but now on outward appearance. Helen's identity remained uncertain for her tragic interlocutors, but in *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, it is the character's outward appearance, and face in particular, that remains unknown.

In response to Euripides' request to turn his head, Inlaw responds, *aischunomai se tas gnathous hybrismenē*, "I dare not, my cheeks show the marks

21. Battezzato 1999/2000.

22. Inlaw's complaint that Kritylla attacks "my body" (*toumon sōma*, 895) may suggest a shielded posture, implying the actor's frame underneath a sheltering veil.

of the insults I have been forced to suffer" (903). Inlaw here most clearly fuses his own rough shaving with Helen's proposed false rituals of lament, namely, *the* tearing her cheeks and the cutting of her hair that formed the physical basis of her plan to deceive her captors and escape.[23] The vocabulary's layered semantics are crucial to this aesthetic union. *Aischunein* in the passive signifies "shame," but the meanings of the verb's active form, "make ugly" or "disfigure," are never fully suppressed and are certainly resonant here. While shame applies most obviously to Helen (even if Kritylla uses assorted insults to remind Inlaw of the shamelessness of his behavior), the concept of disfigurement is difficult to disentangle between the two figures.[24] The juxtaposition of (assumed) feminine modesty and the grotesque features of the Old Comedic male marks the gulfs between genders and genres, actor and role, all while underscoring with *hybrisomenē* the common damage done to the cheeks. But it is debatable whether Helen actually disfigures her face off-stage and returns with a newly scarred mask with shorter hair attached, or merely talks about doing so. One argument against its dramatic realization is the comment by Theoclymenos, who observes her returning to the stage with shorn hair but cheeks stained with pale tears rather than bloodied.[25] Theoclymenus' unexpected observation creates doubt in the audience's mind: Has Helen followed through on her drastic plans and defaced her beauty for years to come? Or has she merely moistened her cheeks with Nilotic crocodile tears?[26]

There has, of course, been considerable scholarly parsing of this paratragic moment.[27] In their commentary, Austin and Olson consider the reference to Inlaw's disfigurement simply a moment of "irruption of the 'real world' of the story into the parody."[28] Sommerstein similarly associates the

23. E. *Hel.* 1087–89.

24. While still passing as a woman, Inlaw's actions are described as *anaidōs*, 525. Once exposed, forms of *anaischuntos* are applied: 611, 638, 702, 708, and 744. Kritylla calls him *panourgos*, 858; *ōlerthe* 860; *pseudetai*, 875.

25. E. *Hel.* 1186–92.

26. Close attention to staging is sometimes able to resolve such ambiguities but is ineffective here for several reasons. First, by a well-attested convention, the tears Theoclymenus eventually notes would certainly have been left to the spectators' imagination: see Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 171–72 and Halliwell 1993, 205. The two gestures most commonly used to represent tears, covering the face with hands and arms or turning it away from the gaze of others, would have obscured Helen's newly changed mask. Jacobson 2015 argues that the vocative demonstrative, *hautē*, suggests the latter gesture.

27. See Stehle 2002; Zeitlin 1996; and Foley 2014.

28. Austin and Olson 2004, 289.

facial damage exclusively with Inlaw and is accordingly troubled by a "slight illogicality" of the gender of feminine *hybrisomenē*.[29] Though the semantics of *hybrizein* entail damage inflicted by one party upon another (i.e., the verb does not appear ever to have been used reflexively, "to outrage oneself" or "be outraged by oneself"), this need not diminish its relevance to the case of Helen's proposed self-mutilation. Eva Stehle has drawn a connection between Inlaw's rough shave and Helen's mourning rituals but without explicitly recognizing the tragic Helen's cheeks were not, in fact, wounded, a point to which we will soon return.[30]

Despite such attention to the scene's many layers, there is perhaps still more humor yet to be wrung from this line in the comedic text. Given the accusations of misogyny against Euripides that frame *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, one might also understand *hybrismenē* to be an indictment of Euripidean poetics and aesthetics. The core meaning of *hybris*, to surpass the bounds of legality and propriety, is salient, for just as Inlaw himself was rudely assaulted, the mythic figure of Helen has been "outraged" by Euripides' tragedy, a portrayal that dared deface her superior, defining beauty. Indeed, the aesthetics of Helen's person would be pushed to the limit once again in Euripides' next (and final) surviving play that stages the heroine: the *Orestes* of 408 BCE. There, as Helen offers a lock of her hair for Clytemnestra's tomb, Orestes claims that her mourning half-measures are intended to preserve her appearances: *idete gar akras hō apethrisen trichas / sōizousa kallos: esti d' hē palai gynē*, "For see how she cuts off [only] the tips of her hair, saving her beauty. She is the same old woman." The partial meta-theatricality of Orestes' pronouncement, which allusively notes Aristophanes' aesthetic critique and uses *palai* to refer back to Helen's tragic characterization in 412, has recently garnered attention.[31] But what has not been noticed is that *palai* may refer not simply to Helen's character, as her vicious characterization in *Orestes* is at odds with her positive portrayal in *Helen*, but specifically to the half-measures taken to preserve her beauty, acts that demonstrate the very limits to which Euripides is prepared to represent an uglified Helen.

29. Sommerstein 1994, 215; see also 7–8.

30. Stehle 2002, 390.

31. An observation made by both Wright 2006, 36–37, and Jendza 2015, 460–61. Indeed, this compounds the more obvious tragic allusivity of the scene, since as the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides both show, laying a distinctive lock of hair upon a tomb of a member of the house of Atreus are clear echoes of the *Oresteia*. Cf. S. *El.* 52, E. *El.* 515–31; and see Torrance 2011.

Conclusions

To return in closing to *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, the recognition scene between Inlaw-as-Helen and Euripides-as-Menelaus continues with a return to verbatim quotations from *Helen*'s script, made humorous by the jarringly different context. Euripides responds to the sight of Inlaw with an interjection and a pause sure to invite laughter (Ar. *Thesm.* 904–5):

τουτὶ τί ἐστιν; ἀφασία τίς τοί μ' ἔχει.
ὦ θεοί, τίν' ὄψιν εἰσορῶ; τίς εἶ, γύναι;

What is this here? Some sort of speechlessness holds me;
O gods, what sight do I behold? Who are you, woman?

Again, scenic double-entendres abound. *Opsis*, for one, combines reference to Inlaw's countenance and theatrical spectacle, framing the theatrical mask, as so often, as symbolic of broader generic and aesthetic concerns. Similarly, the question "Who are you, woman?" has ontological reverberations. Not only is the personal or moral identity of the character challenged, as in *Helen*, but also, given the careful framing and sudden (re)exposure of the face, the question of aesthetic identity is raised: *Can a face this ugly be that of Helen?*

These close readings of Inlaw's transformation and the later recognition scene are intended to highlight the complex and ongoing engagement between *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* and *Helen*, but of course represent just one strand of comedy's broader aesthetic and generic commentary on (Euripidean) tragedy. Those working on the Athenian paratragedy have offered a variety of hermeneutic frameworks, from burlesque to a proto-Bakhtinian analyses, to connect the scene with others in the play and Old Comedy at large. These connections, while valuable, should not obscure the singular quality of this moment since, despite commonalities, the revelation of Helen's face poses a unique aesthetic case that goes beyond humorous distortion or inversion. Rather, it is another example of Old Comedy materializing ugliness that was latent in tragedy: the image of a defaced Helen that, although thematically important to tragedy, was likely left to the audience's imagination rather than the mask-maker's craft. The brutal shaving and extended recognition scenes of *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* reflect the scenic impact of Helen's ambiguous return, a singular moment on the tragic stage that was evidently worth referencing twice in

parody. By compelling a partly unwilling Inlaw to go under the knife as part of a deceptive transformation, the comedic Euripides exerts physical control over another's appearance in ways denied to the real playwright, who may well have demurred when it came to staging any corruption of Helen's beauty. Placing the transformation onstage before the audience's eyes, Aristophanes dramatizes a tragedian infamous for his beggarly, raggedly dressed heroes reaching the limits of his own aesthetics.

The recognition scene also dramatizes the doubt and uncertainty of tragic audiences forced to confront the tragic mask in all of its aesthetic uncertainty, subjecting the author of the original ambiguity, Euripides, to his own devices. Cleverly leveraging a core component of tragedy, recognition between family members, Aristophanes (in a way quite distinct from Euripides in *Helen)* raises to the level of theme the pervasive theatrical practice of working through doubt and ambiguity. Face-to-face with Inlaw for the first time in over five hundred lines, Euripides confronts the reality of his creation. Euripides' question "What sight do I behold?", then, encapsulates many aspects of the aesthetics of doubt sketched above. The first-person verb need not be read as indicative, but (also) as a deliberative subjunctive: "What sight *should I choose* to behold?" Looking simultaneously upon the ugly visage of Inlaw and that of his poetic creation, Euripides stands face-to-face not only with an ugly comedic spectacle but also the ugly imaginary upon which so much of his drama is based. As the recognition scene draws to a close, Euripides quotes his earlier tragic words, "Oh, how you resemble Helen!", signaling the poet's comedic acceptance of (or even comedic triumph over) tragic aesthetics. Showcasing again that it is not only form, but also context, that is essential to the production of ugliness, *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* turns from an investigation of the authenticity of tragic pain to the construction of gender, within and outside of the theater. *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* suggests Athenian audiences felt some aesthetic discomfort with the dramatic representation of beautiful female characters represented by male actors.

PART III

The Aesthetics of the Dramatic Corpse

The preceding sections of this book studied the interactions of viewing subjects, material objects, and affective response as mediated through theatrical costume, the fabrics that envelop, extend, and express the dramatic body. By exploring the ways garments collapse time, elicit emotion, and establish mood, close readings of illustrative scenes (from playwrights as different as Aeschylus and Aristophanes) revealed the crucial contribution of garments and properties to the production of dramatic aesthetics, both within and across the theatrical genres of fifth-century Athens. Costume, although designed to capture attention through its movement, meaning, and forms, never fully obscures the body it enrobes. Clothes mediate, rather than define, the aesthetics of the body, with which they are always in tension.

Although costumes and properties are especially salient, they are not the only significant or affecting materials of the Greek theatrical stage. A full account of the aesthetics of Greek drama demands a broader perspective. Costume, after all, does not achieve its special aesthetic effects in physical or symbolic isolation: as their technical vocabulary suggests, Greeks of the classical era did not conceptually isolate costume from the other physical components of the stage. Words like *opsis* (i.e., "visual production" or "spectacle") and *skeuē* ("costume," including mask and properties) situate fabrics and other worn objects within extensive material assemblages that include set pieces and painted backdrops as well as scenic devices, such as the crane (*mēchanē*) and wheeled platform (*ekkyklēma*) that brought actors and objects on and off the stage. These items served alongside and in conjunction with costume (and, of course, the verbal, aural, and kinesthetic

aspects of the theater) to establish not only the dramatic mise-en-scène, but the affective mood of the production as well.

Although the impact of these features of the ancient theater should not be underestimated, precious little verbal evidence remains through which to analyze their particular contributions to dramatic aesthetics. Next to the apparel and properties worn, handled, or transferred by characters, the impressions left on transmitted playscripts by set pieces and backdrops are relatively spectral. Analysis of their aesthetics is therefore often summary, superficial, or speculative. There is, however, another class of materials that must be taken into aesthetic account. Indeed, it is the material upon which costumes most intimately depend and, conveniently for a study such as this, it is a material much discussed in the playscripts, richly evidenced across verbal and visual media of the era, and extensively theorized in both ancient and modern times. This material is, of course, none other than the human body.

The aesthetic impact of bodies on dramatic performance has been noted since antiquity, but theorizing the body is never simple. Embodiment is difficult to conceptualize for several reasons. The body is itself complex and composite, comprising not only various biological parts, but also (at least according to some understandings) prosthetic extensions, which may take the form of clothing, weapons, tools, and the like. Even when considering the body solely as a biological entity, its inward and outward aspects are observed to stand in close, albeit obscure, connection. Integrating these into an embodied whole demands attention to both the systems and symptoms of the body. To interpret the human body also requires attention to social correspondences, since the accultured body is symbolically fraught, particularly in relation to gender, rank, ethnicity, and other markers of identity. Even as the body often anchors certain forms of identity, it also blurs boundaries of fundamental human categories of self and other, subject and object, particularly in moments of acute biological transition, including birth, death, and the drastic effects of disease.

Although long a topic of discussion, the theorization of the body's aesthetic contributions has been advanced by recent scholarly turns across a number of fields, both literary-cultural and scientific, which reframe certain notions of the body and its place in the world that have prevailed for centuries. For a variety of reasons (of greater or lesser reflection and sophistication), the human body has not always been considered as "material," or at least not in the same category as a piece of cloth, a wooden plank, hempen rope, or leather shield. From an aesthetic perspective, the human

body is critically important as both perceiving subject and perceived object. Humans across time and culture—but especially in the rationalist aesthetic and epistemological tradition of Plato, Descartes, and Kant—have privileged the subjectivity of human bodies as perceiving, self-conscious, autonomous, and agential entities.[1] But this is beginning to change.

A rising tide of scholarship has sought to unsettle established ideas of anthropocentric agency and world construction, often with the result (or goal) of reducing the hierarchical distance and ontological distinction between the human body and other "assemblages" or "networks" of materials, agents, etc. But the surging waters of "nonanthropocentrism" are dashed upon the hard rock of aesthetics, an area of study deeply (and, for some, definitionally) tied to the phenomenal perception of the embodied mind of the individual human subject. This leads to some unexpected theoretical friction and alliances: even aesthetic materialism that rejects metaphysical or transcendental concerns with ideal forms finds itself grappling with a cognitive mind that experiences the world through concepts and ideas as well as through the influx of material stimuli. The idealized human body (as discussed in the introduction in regard to David Konstan's 2014 book, and which will return in a discussion of Plato's *Hippias Major* in the epilogue) would for centuries be the prototypical example of beauty for Greeks. The nude human body, particularly in its athletic male form, was a frequent object of artistic depiction in the archaic and classical eras, in sculpture and in vase painting. Even in scenes that must have recalled myths associated with tragedy (and perhaps even specific tragic productions), images often present these characters in what art historians have called the "heroic nude." Nudity on stage was a common feature of Old Comedy and satyr drama, each of which played with the aesthetic inversion of cultural ideals, using materials to represent nudity in ugly ways. Although the tragic body is never nude, properly speaking, it could occasionally be stripped bare, treated as an unmitigated, unmediated site of excruciating pain.

Broader conversations of embodiment and aesthetics are further complicated, and ocassionally helpfully crystallized, in drama. Bodies are an essential building block of drama in general and a cornerstone of aesthetics in the embodied art form. In contrast to our personal selves, which are only occasionally seen, the dramatic body, to borrow a phrase from perhaps the most theatrically self-aware of all extant tragedies, Euripides' *Bacchae*, "is seen more than it sees" (Eur. *Bacch.* 1075). Theater is remarkable for its

1. See Kirby 1996.

ability to simultaneously "objectify" the bodies of those on stage while also encouraging the audience's subjective identification with these individuals. Theatergoers, that is, both *see* and *see as* the embodied characters onstage. On the ancient Greek stage, this complex perceptual position and psychological identification were profoundly mediated by materials. Tragic and comic actors on the fifth-century stage did not directly mirror theatergoers in the audience, but wore masks and head-to-toe costumes, even when presenting themselves as naked. These costumes underscored the mimetic separation between embodied spectatorship within performance and in "real life." For ancient audiences, costumes continuously asserted the materiality of the theatrical body and its status as an object as a well as a subject.

In contrast to the bodies of Old Comedy and satyr drama, however, which frequently call attention not only to their irrepressible desires and functions but also to their ugliness, the aesthetics of the living tragic body can be difficult to pin down. Within a fifth-century Athenian visual culture otherwise highly interested in the form and aesthetics of idealized human bodies, this is a remarkable (and yet often overlooked) feature of tragic aesthetics, which may reflect the practical challenges of theatrical realization as much as any ideological or artistic generic goal. As the preceding chapters have repeatedly observed, costumes—in their sumptuous elegance and pathetic disintegration—routinely serve to represent the personal aesthetics of their character. And yet in certain circumstances, tragic bodies would become objects of intense aesthetic focus and concern. While living, the dramatic body is both an aesthetic subject and object; in death and extreme suffering, however, the body is transformed.

In this final section we explore the aesthetic peculiarities of dead and dying bodies in tragedy, but it must be noted from the outset that this phenomenon, although highlighted by the materiality of dramatic bodies, is not unique to the theatrical corpse. The fundamental materiality, and objectiveness, of the lifeless corpse is as evident outside the theater as inside its walls. In an article first published in 1979 that considers the peculiar aesthetics of dead bodies in early Greek poetry, Jean-Pierre Vernant approaches the corpse as the visual object par excellence:

> So long as the body is alive, it is seen as a system of organs and limbs animated by their individual impulses; it is a locus for the meeting, and occasional conflict, of impulses or competing forces. At death, when the body is deserted by these, it acquires its formal unity. After

> being the subject of and medium for various actions, more or less spontaneous, it has become wholly an object for others. Above all, it is an object of contemplation, a visual spectacle, and therefore a focus for care, mourning, and funeral rites.[2]

Vernant's attention to formal unity and the opposition of subject and object reveal his formalist interests and structuralist inheritance. Such an approach is also evident in the work of Julia Kristeva, whose influential psychoanalytical work of "abjection" sees in the corpse an invitation to meditate upon the self and the "other," between subject and abject "object." Regardless of the theoretical framework one adopts, the corpse exhibits a peculiar aesthetic power, eliciting rational contemplation alongside affective response, visual attention, and active handling. As fascinating as this power is, the profoundly divergent aesthetic responses it generates are even more compelling. This topic was encountered briefly in the introduction, which considered Aristotle's observation in *Poetics* that corpses, along with certain animals, are painful to see in real life and yet pleasurable to consider in representation, a paradoxical aesthetic transformation through mimesis.

Partly because of the diverse responses it elicits, the dead body challenges categories in fascinating ways. It is familiar, but suddenly different, as it transitions from subject to object with little formal or material change. These peculiarities have aesthetic corollaries and consequences. Aesthetic assessment of bodies typically involves objectification to some extent; the dead body, which no longer can move, return a gaze—can no longer feel itself being watched—becomes peculiar. An uneasy sense of license (or licentiousness) sometimes accompanies viewing the dead.

Blurring distinctions between subject and object, living and dead, actor and prop, dramatic corpses perhaps receive more visual and aesthetic attention than any other feature of the tragic stage. The impulsive rush toward the dead will be observed not only in drama, but in fifth-century prose as well. This drive is perhaps is most famously exemplified in Socrates' tale of Leontius reported in Plato's *Republic*, a dialogue, which like several other Platonic works, takes a negative view of myth and poetry while ironically embracing such literary traditions as parables and dialogic form.[3] It is, in

2. Vernant 1991/1979, 62.

3. On the scene and its connections to tragic emotions and aesthetics, see esp. Liebert

short, a philosophical work that is in dialogue with fifth-century dramatic poetry and which reflects its influence.

Plato's Leontius is represented as possessing an internal ambivalence not witnessed in any of the historical circumstances recently described. His desire to see the bodies of the dead overrules his disgust as follows (Pl. *Resp.* 439e-440a):

> ἀλλα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ποτὲ ἀκούσας τι πιστεύω τούτῳ· ὡς ἄρα Λεόντιος ὁ Ἀγλαΐωνος ἀνιὼν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ὑπὸ τὸ βόρειον τεῖχος ἐκτός, αἰσθόμενος νεκροὺς παρὰ τῷ δημίῳ κειμένους, ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραίνοι καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτόν, καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτοιτο, κρατούμενος δ' οὖν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, διελκύσας τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, προσδραμὼν πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς, "ἰδοὺ ὑμῖν," ἔφη, "ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος.
>
> But, I said, I once heard something [sc. relevant to] this and I believe it. I heard that Leontius, the son of Aglaeon, was coming up from the Piraeus along the outside of the North Wall, and perceiving corpses lying near the execution, he had an appetite to look at them but at the same time he was disgusted and turned himself away. And for a time be battled with himself and covered his face (parakaluptoito), but finally, overpowered by the appetite, he opened his eyes wide and ran toward the corpses: "Look for yourselves," he said, "you evil wretches, fill yourselves with this beautiful sight."

In the context of the *Republic*, Leontius illustrates Socrates' theory of a divided soul, but it also reflects the various appetitive drives and moral taboos concerning the aesthetics of the corpse observed in the chapters that follow. Leontius is mad with a desire, not to see beautiful bodies, such as the heroically dead or the miraculously preserved, but to feast his eyes upon the gruesome dead.[4] And yet Leontius is sensitive to, and restrained by, his feelings of disgust.

The material metaphors of this passage intersect significantly with both the physical staging and emotional framing of Athenian tragedy. After ini-

2013 and 2017. On Plato's response to dramatic poetry and its impact on the history of the study of dramatic aesthetics, see the epilogue.

4. On the divided soul in Plato's *Republic*, see Ferrari 2007, 165–201.

tially obscuring or otherwise resisting the power of sight, "veiling" (*parakaluptoito*) his eyes, Leontius later abandons restraint. In addressing his eyes and instructing them to "look" upon the dead, Leontius closely mirrors tragic literary form, capturing the contradictory aesthetics of the beautiful-ugly corpse through his ironic description of the dead as "a beautiful sight."[5] Through his divided response, Leontius comes across not as having mad and unreasonable desires, but a macabre interest that at least Socrates considers credible, introducing the narrative with the editorial comment, "I believe it" (*pisteuō toutōi*). Indeed, all Athenians' eyes and aesthetic sensibilities had been trained, through the spectacles of tragedy, to look upon the bodies of the dead as objects of aesthetic interest, emotional import, and narrative climax. Leontius mirrors not simply the words and actions of tragic characters, but those of the Athenian theatrical audience itself.

The frequency of corpses in tragedy reveals their generic importance.[6] On average, more than one lifeless cadaver appears per tragedy among the extant plays, in addition to many more dead bodies imagined offstage, either prominently and extensively (as concern with Polynices' corpse structures much of Sophocles' *Antigone*) or anonymously (as messenger speeches convey news of the battlefield dead in Aeschylus' *Persians* and Euripides' *Suppliant Women*). The following presents a list of dead bodies staged and referenced in the extant tragedies, including revenant ghosts.[7] Most corpses listed are exhibited only near the drama's end, a revelation that visually punctuates the plot and frequently marks its climax.[8] Others, like the bodies of Ajax and Alcestis, are introduced much earlier to the spectators' gaze, becoming objects of atten-

5. On the use of quasi-theatrical vocabulary of vision in the Leontius episode, see Duncan 2023b, 194–95.

6. The prominent roles and thematic importance of corpses in Athenian tragedy is observed by, among others, Whitehorne 1986; Loraux 1987; Deforge 1997; Kornarou 2008; and Worman 2015 and 2020b.

7. The "embodied" form of the ghosts who appear on stage seem to have a complicated relation to their corpse. The ghost of Darius, as discussed in chapter 1, is splendidly dressed. Although this may represent his sumptuous royal burial, more immediately it underscores the contrast between the dead king and Xerxes, who returns to Susa in rags and in defeat. There is nothing to suggest, for instance, that Clytemnestra's ghost in *Eumenides* bears any mark of her recent, bloody murder. In the prologue of Euripides' *Hecuba*, the ghost of Polydorus, after vividly describing the fate of his unburied and unmourned body, tossed about on the shores, presents himself as floating disembodied light (σῶμ' ἐρημώσας ἐμόν . . . φέγγος αἰωρούμενος, 31–32)

8. Easterling 1988, 89 and 108, underlines that rituals of all sorts punctuate the drama, lament and burial among them.

tion and contention for the duration of their time on stage. Corpses are never casually staged: a dead body on stage, as in life, is not easily overlooked. Like rags then, but to an even greater extent, corpses are too numerous, too central, and too marked, both visually and emotionally, to be considered gratuitous or exceptional to the generic aesthetics of tragedy.

Rags, as we have seen, symbolize in tragedy the pain and suffering previously endured offstage by a character. Corpses similarly monumentalize suffering and communicate past grief before the eyes of the audience. The emotional effects of corpses, sparking pity and lamentation from friends and family, have long been recognized. What has been left unsaid, however, is how the aesthetics of the cadaver affect the reception of the dead body by fellow characters onstage as well as by the audience. In the visual medium of theater, corpses are aesthetic as well as emotional objects.

Tragedy rarely physically disrespects or abuses the corpse; threats to do so are often (although not always) met with mortal and divine resistance within the genre. And yet, tragedy does not ennoble or beautify the dead and rarely eulogizes them. Tragedy offers little indication of peace, serenity, or the everlasting glories of death in war. Deaths in tragedy are often bloody and almost always violent. In rare cases, such Euripides' *Alcestis*, we have the calm poise and resignation, not unlike the description of Socrates drinking the hemlock in Plato's *Phaedo*. But by and large, tragic corpses are bloody, battered, and in pain.

The "body in pain," as Elaine Scarry has observed, poses challenges to communication. "Whatever pain achieves," Scarry writes, "it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language. 'English,' writes Virginia Woolf, 'which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear has no words for the shiver or the headache.' . . . Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it."[9] There is wisdom in Scarry's observation, based as it is upon a variety of cultural practices, but one might pause before categorically treating pain as "unsharable" in Greek drama. Not only does poetry, in general, seek the verbal articulation of seemingly ineffable emotions and situations as its goal, but dramatic poetry, additionally, has nonverbal tools at its disposal for the communication of pain. Embodiment in performance—in the form not only of movement and convulsions of those in pain, but also the response to those who see, pity, and respond to others in pain—routinely communicates the "painful" emotions of tragedy where

9. Scarry 1985, 4.

Table 1. Bodies of the Dead in Extant Tragedy

Playwright	*Play*†	Onstage	Offstage‡	Dying	Ghosts	Mention§
Aeschylus						
	Supp.					
	Pers.				1	*Numerous**
	PV					
	Sept.	2				
	Ag.	2				
	Cho.	2				
	Eum.				1	
	Total	**6**	**0**	**0**	**2**	
Sophocles						
	Trach.			1		1
	Ant.	2	1			1
	Aj.	1				
	OT	1				
	El.	1				
	Phil.					
	OC					
	Total	**5**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**2**
Euripides						
	Cyc.					
	Alc.	1				
	Med.	2	1			1
	Heracl.		1			
	Hipp.			1		
	Andr.	1				
	Hec.	1	3		1	
	Supp.	5				2
	El.	2				
	HF	4	1			
	Tro.	1				
	IT					
	Ion					
	Hel.					
	Phoen.	3				
	Or.		(1)**			
	Bacch.	1				
	IA					
	[Rhes.]	1				
	Total	**22**	**6/(7)**	**1**	**1**	**3**
Total (all playwrights)		**33**	**8/(9)**	**2**	**3**	**5**

† The plays are listed in their canonical order, which is roughly chronological within each playwright (though A. *Pers.* predates A. *Supp.*, etc.).

‡ By "offstage," I refer to characters who appear onstage at some point in the drama, but are killed after their departure and whose bodies do not return to stage (e.g., Creon in E. *Med.*).

§ By "mention," I refer to bodies that never appear onstage, such as Polynices in S. *Ant.* or Creon's daughter in E. *Med.* This does not include those simply reported to have died (without explicit reference to their corpse), nor references to the anonymous battlefield dead. See (*), below.

* A. *Pers.* 302–30 presents a catalogue of Persian commanders whose corpses are beaten upon the Grecian shore. See also A. *Pers.* 272–77, 421f., 462–64.

** Helen in Eur. *Or.* presents a unique case: although the mortal character is audibly murdered offstage, she returns in living (indeed, immortal) form as a goddess in the exodos.

words alone would fail. Pain cries out for performance, for direct representation. Scarry notes further: "To have pain is to have certainty; to hear about pain is to have doubt."[10] The tools of theater—its costumes, bodies, and words—work in concert to impress painful emotions upon the audiences, internal and external to the drama itself.

Crucial in this endeavor is the ugly spectacle of the body, onstage, an incontrovertible locus of intense feeling and grief. This sight is carefully managed, both to maximize pathetic effect, but also to manage the complex layers of materials/fabric/mimetic lenses. By grafting novel theatrical techniques upon established cultural traditions pertaining to the (re)presentation of the corpse, the tragedians leveraged the powerful but polarized aesthetics of the dead to thrill and tantalize audiences with ugly spectacles that were, paradoxically, pleasurable to see.

In closing this study, part III reflects upon powerful and peculiar aesthetic effects of the dramatic body itself, independent (mostly) of its sartorial extensions. It contains two sections. Chapter 5 traces the body of the warrior hero and its peculiar aesthetics and associations. Close readings from Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Women at Trachis*, as well as Euripides' *Heracles*, deal with the challenges and rewards of staging dead bodies on the tragic stage. These plays reveal the importance of spectatorship, and the lengths dramatists would go to frame effectively and maximize the emotional impact of these scenes. These examples, however, highlight some of the blurred boundaries of death and its aesthetics. Chapter 6 zooms out, to consider the dramatic corpse within a broader, fifth-century framework of embodied aesthetics, considering examples from daily Athenian life, historical accounts from far-flung corners, and the variety of dead and dying bodies encountered on the stage. These suggest how dramatic aesthetics engaged with our macabre impulses. In these two chapters, the dramatic body is framed not as a plain if mobile mannequin upon which a costume hangs, but as an object of aesthetic interest itself, capable of eliciting affective responses as powerful as (indeed, often more intense than) fabrics alone.

10. Scarry 1985, 3.

FIVE

The Divergent Aesthetics of the Dead and Dying Bodies in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Women at Trachis* and Euripides' *Heracles*

ἴθ', ἐκκάλυψον, ὡς ἴδω τὸ πᾶν κακόν.
ὦ δυσθέατον ὄμμα καὶ τόλμης πικρᾶς,
ὅσας ἀνίας μοι κατασπείρας φθίνεις.

Come, uncover him, so that I may see the whole horror.
[Ajax's corpse is uncovered]
Oh, face hard to look upon for its bitter daring,
what sorrows you have sown for me in your death!
Soph. *Aj.* 1003–1005

Such are the words the Greek warrior Teucer utters beside the covered corpse of his brother, the eponymous hero of Sophocles' *Ajax*. Ajax, the largest of the Greek warriors, known through Homeric epic as the "bulwark" of the Achaeans during their siege of Troy, has not fallen in the battlefield at the hands of an enemy, but upon his own sword.[1] Ajax's suicide was, as his

1. Ajax's formulaic epithet, ἕρκων Ἀχαίων/Ἀχαίοισι(ν), occurs at Hom. *Il.* 1.284, 3.229, 6.5, and 7.211. On the way this formula and its parallels and derivatives frames Ajax as Bennettian "vibrant" matter, see Purves 2015. On the symbolism of the Homeric epithet to Sophocles' tragedy as a whole, see Stuttard 2019, 1–14. On the parallel metaphorical connection between Ajax and his shield, see Mills 2019. On the agentive and symbolic power of Ajax's sword, in the play and beyond, see Wyles 2019. Ajax, son of Telamon, was also distinguished from Locrian Ajax, son of Oileus, through reference to his corporeal size: he is the "Greater" Ajax.

half-brother Teucer knows, an act at once of personal shame and political desperation. His plot to kill certain leaders of the Greek army embarrassingly exposed, Ajax could bring himself to face neither his compatriots nor his prosecution.[2] In the wake of Ajax's death, Teucer finds himself, too, in an acute state of emergency. He is anxious not only for the life of Ajax's young son, Eurysaces, but also for himself, Ajax's war-bride Tecmessa, and the Salaminian warriors who compose the dramatic Chorus, all of whom have relied upon the "shield" of Ajax for protection, even after Troy's fall.

Teucer speaks at a moment of crisis and political intrigue that demands immediate and decisive action. Upon the aestheticized Greek dramatic stage, however, the presence of Ajax's body calls for immediate spectatorship as well. The plot is paused for a moment of visual inspection and personal reflection, an indulgence in the macabre that is also an informal ritual of mourning. The pages that follow in this chapter will explore in fuller detail how Sophocles' tragedy anticipates and frames this crucial scenic moment but, even without such further context, Teucer's words illustrate succinctly how sensory experience, material presence, and emotional response combine with verbal expression to produce the characteristic aesthetics of the Greek dramatic stage.

In emphasizing the materiality and affectivity of dramatic spectacle, this scene recalls the many others already studied in this book. Teucer's peculiar response to Ajax's corpse, however, also points in new directions that will orient this and the following chapter. As before, through Teucer's words we notice textiles serving a crucial function for dramatic aesthetics, but the presentation of the body in *Ajax* reveals a novel theatrical use for such fabrics. The covering that Teucer orders removed does not functionally extend the character's embodiment, but rather visually conceals and affectively contains the corpse. Although the body lies onstage from the moment it is discovered until the final exeunt, the full spectacle of Ajax's corpse is revealed only at certain times, at certain vantage points, and to certain viewers. Whereas worn fabrics realize and project the histories and emotional states of suffering characters, the pall that cloaks the corpse restricts visual attention, significantly reframing the aesthetics of the dramatic body.

Visually obscuring the corpse lends compensatory importance to words spoken and responses enacted on stage, and it enhances the function of the audience's imagination. On and off stage, coverings for the dead play a critical social, religious, and aesthetic function, familiar (with variations) across

2. On the suicide, see Garland 2019, 77–88.

cultures still today. But such coverings do not entirely disrupt the power of the body itself. At a formal level, draped fabric, such as that which covers Ajax, reveals the contours, not the details, of the body beneath. Such cloth mediates, rather than hides, the sight of the corpse. Even rigid, opaque, and geometrically abstract containers for funerary remains, however, whether a boxy wooden coffin or smooth funerary urn, cannot fully contain the affective powers of the body within. Independent of form, bodies have a material permanence, agential vibrancy, "social afterlife," and dramatic pull even when they are unseen.[3] As Andrew Sofer observes through an astrophysical analogy, the theater is full of "dark matter," objects that, although optically undetectable, nevertheless exert "gravitational effects" on actors, audience, and other objects on stage.[4] Seen or unseen, carefully mediated or recklessly made visible to all, the corpse is a remarkably powerful component of Greek dramatic aesthetics.

The peculiar spectacle of Ajax's corpse presents an entrée for exploring the ways fifth-century Athenian tragedy employed the dead body to achieve the emotional and aesthetic goals of its genre. Through the play's attention to the prodigious size, strength, and suffering of the hero, Sophocles' *Ajax* is part of a small but distinctly thematically connected constellation of tragedies, which also includes the same playwright's *Women at Trachis* as well as Euripides *Heracles*, that cultivate such emotions as pity and fear by way of some of the most remarkable physical specimens of Greek myth. Although a common interest in the pain both caused and experienced by Ajax's and Heracles's bodies is manifest through such common plot points as divine madness, mistaken identity, and the killing of one's nearest and dearest, the particulars of the play's narrative and scenic permutations reveal the multiple meanings and powers of the dramatic body.

It is telling that, although Ajax and Heracles were both known for their prowess fighting on the battlefield and in the wild, the tragic deaths in which they are involved occur not on the battlefield, but in domestic contexts, surrounded by kith and kin. The aesthetics of death in these plays differ from those familiar from Homeric epic or certain martial strands of the Greek lyric tradition, for which "all was beautiful" because the young man died on behalf of his country. The aesthetic impact of these tragedies was all

3. On vibrancy and related new materialist terms, see the introduction. Our increasingly technologically mediated age has brought attention to "digital afterlife" through digital social media (see Gilden 2019–2020; Savin-Baden and Mason-Robbie 2020), but (analogue) material legacies have always been social.

4. Sofer 2013, 3–4. For an application of the concept to the Furies, see Shanks 2016.

the stronger for this cultural contrast, a distinction further underscored by the predominant beauty of tragic representation. Much as raggedly dressed and physically or socially compromised characters, such as Xerxes, Electra, Philoctetes, and Telephus, were marked exceptions to the general aesthetic rule of the tragic body, the disintegration of the body in death, its loss of composure and dignity, reveals the theater's inclination toward ugliness and negative affect in its many guises.

This chapter begins with a study of dead bodies in Sophocles' *Ajax*, which through its narrative construction underscores how ontological categories, modulated or mediated viewership, and emotions inflect and determine the aesthetics of the dramatic corpse. The chapter turns next to *Women at Trachis*, a later production of Sophocles that leverages the spectacle of Heracles' suffering body to even greater effect in an emotionally gripping and influential scene. The chapter ends with a consideration of Euripides' *Heracles*, which returns to questions of madness and representation raised in *Ajax* by attending to the vulnerability and innocence of children. Although these three tragedies form a particularly compelling set for comparative analysis, resonances will inevitably be felt (and, in the notes, cross-references often drawn) to other tragic bodies in pain or death, some of which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

The Dramatic Corpse: From Margins to Center in Sophocles' *Ajax*

Sophocles' *Ajax*, generally reckoned among the tragedian's earlier extant plays, is thematically concerned with the contested fate of the heroic body that sought to attack its own community. As such, it shares many concerns with another, better known Sophoclean drama, *Antigone*, which likely premiered within a few years of *Ajax*. Unlike *Antigone*, however, the dramatic narrative of which begins only after the battlefield deaths of Oedipus' sons, *Ajax* is centered upon the suicide of the eponymous hero, an act of violence that is remarkably staged approximately halfway through the drama. Classified as a "diptych" tragedy that metaphorically hinges upon the death and discovery of Ajax's body, the play's continuous attention to Ajax's physicality and its agency in madness, in anguish, and in death provides an almost stereoscopic view of the dramatic body across the series of events leading up to, and flowing from, an act of transformative, self-directed, and fatal violence.

On stage for more than five hundred lines, Ajax's corpse is visible for more time than any dead body in extant tragedy, and yet it is not the only

spectacle of violence in the play. From the prologue to the exodos, Sophocles draws upon the many tools of the theater, its words and narrative structures, naturally, but also its incorporation of fabrics, rituals, and responses, to produce an aesthetic mood that is at times remarkable for its luridness and horror. Although singular in aspects of its dramatic form and staging, Sophocles' *Ajax* exemplifies a broader cultural interest in the aestheticization of the corpse, a focal point that would become increasingly common in tragedy over the course of the fifth century.[5] If Aeschylus was the first tragedian to have turned to the affective power of fabric to develop emotionally and aesthetically powerful dramas, Sophocles seems to have been the first to realize the uniquely powerful dramatic spectacle of the corpse and build entire scenes (or, in the case of *Ajax*, entire plays) around the peculiar but potent aesthetics of the dead human body.

Perhaps owing to its exceptional presence on stage, Ajax's lifeless body becomes an intense visual and political focal point during the second half of the tragedy, during which it is sought, discovered, concealed, revealed, contested, detested, and ultimately (through the intervention of an empathetic Odysseus) carried away to be given proper funeral rites. *Ajax* ends with the exit of a heroic corpse, mirroring Sophocles' use of lifeless bodies at the outset of the play to vividly connect and materially anchor its major themes of vision, knowledge, identity, allegiance, honor, and violence.[6] It is the shocking spectacle of slaughtered animals, not human bodies, however, that is the visual focus of the first half of the play. Encircling the eponymous hero who is bathed in their gore, these carcasses establish a ghastly mood for which there are partial parallels, but no real equivalent, upon the tragic stage.[7] The body of Ajax is never seen in the play without being marked by death, either that of others, or his own.

The Prologue of Sophocles' Ajax*: Setting the Stage with Animal Bodies*

Animal bodies are remarkable for the ways they frame, mediate, and layer the horrific aesthetics of *Ajax*. Like suffering tragic heroes, these animals

5. Chapter 6 situates tragic corpses within broader mimetic and cultural contexts.

6. Brook 2019, citing Burian 2003, argues that the promised heroic burial undermines the narrative closure of the drama. Poe 1987 surveys the themes of the play and their interconnections.

7. The carcasses are presumably displayed by the wheeled platform, the *ekkyklēma*, during lines 348–595, like the bodies of the Heracles' children, similarly killed in a state of divine madness, in Eur. *HF*. The scene and play is discussed further below.

are subjected to extraordinary, capricious suffering, as the gods' power over humans is reflected and violently re-enacted in mankind's power over domesticated beasts. Animals complicate, but also help to establish, human boundaries of subject and object, self and other, vital agents and vibrant materials.[8] The substitution between animal and human bodies is as old as Greek myth itself, in which such exchanges often occur in close proximity both to death and to the divine (as Actaeon, in his fatally sequential encounters with Artemis and his own hounds, illustrates, among countless other examples).[9] In tragedy's treatment of Trojan war narratives, the mythical context most relevant to Sophocles' *Ajax*, the last-second substitution at the moment of sacrifice of a deer for Agamemnon's eldest daughter, Iphigenia, is especially salient.[10] The ritual substitution of blood for blood, and the close biological connections between humans and other animals, suggest how individuals can be simultaneously hierarchically above, and equal to, creatures whose subjectivity is routinely dismissed.

But Sophocles' *Ajax* involves not a material substitution between animals and humans so much as a perceptual, cognitive shift. Ajax dramatizes how vision can differ between subjects and dissimulate, scrambling ontological categories of animal, human, and god. In the expository dialogue between Athena and Odysseus that opens the tragedy and establishes sensory experience as a key theme of the drama, the goddess recounts how she placed a divine "madness" upon Ajax.[11] As if to confirm the strength of her divine power, Athena has Odysseus agree that prior to the goddess's intervention, no "man" (*anēr*) was more sensible and prudent (*pronousteros*, 119) than Ajax, connecting both his masculinity and his humanity with his right-thinking mentality. As so often in Sophocles, vision and knowledge are entwined concepts, and Athena tells Odysseus that she has placed "hard to bear ideas upon the eyes" of Ajax (*dysphorous ep' ommasin / gnōmas*, 51–52), an expression that, although commentators have found it challeng-

8. On the abject poetics of animals in pain in Greek antiquity and today, see Payne 2010, 27–58.

9. Actaeon's death is most fully rendered in Ov. *Met.* 3.138–252, but was well known. On the visual and verbal metaphor of body and costume that may have been part of the sixth-century Stesichorean treatment of the myth, see Nagy 1990, 263–65.

10. Cf. Eur. *IT* 28–33 and *IA* 1537–1612. The transmitted end of *IA*, although spurious, may reflect aspects of the original dramatic plot. On the authenticity of the text and how to interpret its interpolations and multiplicity, see Günther 1988; Gurd 2005; and Collard and Morwood 2017.

11. On the remarkable emphasis placed on sensory experience and organs in the prologue, see Worman 2017.

ing to construe in its epistemological details, clearly refers overall to the hallucinatory conceptual mapping through which Ajax mistakes herd animals for human enemies.[12] Ajax may be superficially and temporarily happy enacting his deluded revenge fantasy, but *dypshoros* underscores the negative effects and affect of Ajax's modulated vision upon those who are aware of its true consequences.[13] Hallucinations are traditionally tied to *mania* in Greek tragic thought, but they also reflect realities of theatrical spectatorship, which demands, as a basic tenet, that theatergoers imaginatively (and willingly) "see" one thing as another.[14] Ajax's visual and mental substitution of enemies for animals is analogous to the audience's substitution of mythical heroes for actors. Athena, playing the role of a theater maker in this prologue, establishes the representational, aesthetic, and ethical connections between the killing of animals and humans. The horror of the dead animals surrounding Ajax not only adumbrates his own death, it also signals the connections of ethics, aesthetics, and emotion always involved in spectatorship.

In the play it is not simply what one sees, but also how one feels while perceiving, that is fraught with consequence. Standing outside Ajax's tent, Athena reassures Odysseus, who is anxious about his safety, that she still holds power over Ajax's vision. Athena proclaims, "I, myself, will keep the gaze of his eyes averted from looking upon the sight of you" (*egō gar ommatōn apostrophous / augas apeirxō sēn prosopsin eisidein*, 69–70).[15] Athena uses language of physical restraint (*apostrephein*, "turn back": *apeirgein*, "constrain") consistent with classical-era "extramissive" understandings of vision, which assumed our phenomenal experience was based upon physical links between the subject's eyes and objects of sight.[16] Through her expression, it is almost as if Athena controls the materiality of Ajax's vision. The word *prosopsin* ("appearance"), next to the similarly prefixed term *eisidein*

12. Finglass (2011, 153–45) discusses proposed emendations to the passage but ultimately supports the transmitted text.

13. Tecmessa later (Soph. *Aj.* 271–277) grapples with the paradox that Ajax was "happy" (ἥδεθ', 272; cf. ἥδιστος 105 τέρψις, 114) while delusional, to the grief of sane onlookers (ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἤνια ξυνων, 273), an inversion of the "tragic paradox," discussed in the introduction.

14. On the cognitive underpinnings of this theatrical process and Aeschylean examples of its use, see Duncan 2023a.

15. On the use of the stage door and the general "melding of inside and outside space" in this prologue, see Clark 2019.

16. On the concept of such vision and its epistemological and aesthetic consequences, see Nightingale 2016.

("look upon"), underscores the inherent directionality and focused attention of sight, a significant point of difference between seeing and knowing, which although concerned with unseen interiority (cf. English "*in*sight") is less directional in nature. Athena makes clear that she is manipulating Ajax's vision, but Odysseus, too, evidently suffers from a limited visual perspective. Odysseus' first words in the drama reveal that he hears, but does not see, the goddess who protects him: "O voice of Athena, although you are invisible to me." (*ō phthengm' Athanas . . . kan apoptos ēis homōs*, 14–15).[17] Athena's divinely corporeal presence is, however, manifest to the audience; the text leaves it ambiguous whether or not Ajax sees the goddess.[18] While staying hidden herself, at least from Odysseus' view, Athena will nevertheless "manifestly show this illness" (*deixo . . . tēnde periphanē noson*, 66) of Ajax's. In response to Athena's repeated commands, Ajax exits from the tent, admits he has (in his mind) already killed Agamemnon and Menelaus, and excuses himself to return to torture "Odysseus," who is, in reality, a large ram tied to the central pole of the tent.[19] When they are alone once more, Athena asks Odysseus if he "sees" (*horas*, 118) the power gods have over mortals, to which Odysseus empathetically responds that in looking (*skopōn*, 124, *eisorōn* 127) upon his fellow soldier in his misery (*dystēnos*, 129), Odysseus "sees" (*horō*, 125) the lot of himself, and all humans, whose lives are at the whim of divine forces. In this way, the prologue combines questions of vision and power, embodiment and ethics, ontology and epistemology, in a complex, quasi-theatrical spectatorial framework. The dramatic audience is implicitly asked to compare their vision and knowledge with those of the characters onstage and to consider their own response to spectacles of violence.

Odysseus' pity is not simply the result of Ajax's folly, but also of the events unfolding within the tent, which Athena recounts to her protégé in

17. On the meaning of the voice and its connection to corporeality and drama, see esp. Nooter 2017 and Sampson 2019.

18. Turkeltaub (2007, 61) observes the "exaltation" of Homeric warriors who hear and recognize the voice of divinities on the battlefield, but aural communication with the gods is not an unalloyed good in tragedy, as Ajax's communications with Athena make clear. Seeing the divine in tragedy could be a mark of mania: cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 918–24. On the staging of the prologue, see Mastronarde 1990, 278, who places Athena "on high" above Ajax's tent.

19. As generally in the play, here Homeric resonances (i.e., to Odysseus' escape from the cyclops Polyphemus' cave under a ram, to his being bound to the mast to hear the Sirens' song) are particularly strong. On some of the play's Iliadic intertexts, see Schein 2012, 429–31.

occasionally gruesome detail.[20] The horrific descriptions of torture, spoken coolly by the goddess in trimeters, are later taken up by Ajax's bride, Tecmessa (235–44, 298–300), in emotive anapests. Entering the playing space to express to the Chorus the events she witnessed during the night, despite the "unspeakable" nature of the horrors, Tecmessa does not hold back in her description, but paints a verbal picture of what others *would* see were they to enter the tent:

πῶς δῆτα λέγω λόγον ἄρρητον;
θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον πάθος ἐκπεύσῃ. 215
μανίᾳ γὰρ ἁλοὺς ἡμὶν ὁ κλεινὸς
νύκτερος Αἴας ἀπελωβήθη.
τοιαῦτ᾽ ἂν ἴδοις σκηνῆς ἔνδον
χειροδάϊκτα σφάγι᾽ αἱμοβαφῆ,
κείνου χρηστήρια τἀνδρός.
(Soph. *Aj.* 214–20)

How can I speak of things that are unspeakable?
For a suffering equal to death has befallen him.
Our glorious Ajax was seized with
madness during the night.
Such things you would see inside the tent,
Hand-killed offerings drenched in blood,
The sacrificial victims of that man.

Although relating offstage happenings, at this point in the play Tecmessa offers not so much a "messenger speech" (that is, a a vivid presentation of events, delivered with rhetorical skill) as a panic-stricken account of horror that tantalizes as much as it informs.[21] Entering from the upstage doors (note the meta-theatrical resonances of *skēnē*, 218, which refers doubly to Ajax's war tent and the stage building of the theater), Tecmessa' dramatic circumstance is most comparable to that of the Pythia in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, who similarly exits from the *skēnē* (representing the Temple of Apollo

20. On Odysseus' pity on the play, see Falkner 1993.

21. Tecmessa goes into fuller detail at vv. 284–330, only once Ajax has returned to his right mind. On the form, function, and authority of the tragic messenger speech, see Barrett 1994; on the connections between agency and spectatorship in some messenger speeches, see Allen-Hornblower 2016, 171–246; for a cognitive approach to the "attention" directed by the speeches, see Budelmann and van Emde Boas 2019.

in Delphi), crawling on hands and knees because she is too stunned to stand after seeing the terrifying Erinyes gathered around the blood-stained supplicant, Orestes.[22] But whereas the Priestess of Apollo re-emerges onto an empty stage in the prologue of *Eumenides*, Tecmessa greets a sympathetic Chorus, who she knows will be also be emotionally and practically rocked by this revelation. Their collective response, delivered in sung anapests, equals the emotional tenor of Tecmessa's report (Soph. *Aj.* 221–30):[23]

οἵαν ἐδήλωσας ἀνέρος αἴθονος
ἀγγελίαν ἄτλατον οὐδὲ φευκτάν,
τῶν μεγάλων Δαναῶν ὕπο κληζομέναν,
τὰν ὁ μέγας μῦθος ἀέξει.
ὤμοι, φοβοῦμαι τὸ προσέρπον. περίφαντος ἀνὴρ
θανεῖται, παραπλήκτῳ χερὶ συγκατακτὰς
κελαινοῖς ξίφεσιν βοτὰ καὶ
βοτῆρας ἱπποκόμους.

What a report you have made plain,
unendurable, and yet inescapable, of a man on fire—
a report spoken of among the great Danaans,
which their powerful story-telling spreads.
Ah, I fear what creeps slowly forward. In view of all,
the man will die, slayed by a frantic hand
with a darkened sword, alongside the herds
and the horse-guiding herdsmen.

In response to Tecmessa's visual description, the Chorus explores the complementary emotional impact of the verbal report. The Salaminian warriors, despite not having seen Ajax (or his crimes) since the onset of his madness, can well attest to the way words not only travel, but grow and spread socially and emotionally so as to become ineluctable. They fear these

22. Aesch. *Eum.* 34–63.

23. Stanford (1963, 252) suggests the entire choral exchange that opens the first episode (lines 221ff.) is sung, but Finglass (2011, 202–3) lists many compelling objections. Following Heath (1987, 177), Finglass sees a shift to song at only at 221/222, noting a pattern: "In general, [Tecmessa] informs, and [the Chorus] react to that information; she describes what happened, and they imagine the consequences." Such musical-verbal modulations underscore the layered dramatic aesthetics that frame the gruesome (although at this point, still only imagined) spectacle.

reports will materialize in stones, as they are punished alongside Ajax for his transgression (vv. 251–55). Visible evidence of Ajax's crimes remains hidden in the tent, but the impact of his horrific act cannot be so easily compartmentalized. Tecmessa's report (*angelia*, 224), and the broader discourse (*mythos*, 226) to which it contributes, have an affective and practical agency independent of spectacle. Even so, the Chorus fearfully speculates that Ajax will suffer a publicly visible (*periphantos*) death, recognizing that the sight of dead and dying bodies has a unique force of its own.[24]

Ajax is revealed to the Chorus and theatergoers only when he has returned to his senses. In response to the hero's agonized (but seemingly right-minded) offstage cries and the Chorus's urging, Tecmessa opens the door to the tent with the following words (Soph. *Aj.* 346–47):

ἰδού, διοίγω· προσβλέπειν δ' ἔξεστι σοι
τὰ τοῦδε πράγη, καὐτὸς ὡς ἔχων κυρεῖ.

There, I'm opening the tent door. You are able to look upon
The works of this man and see how he, himself, fares.

This invitation for the Chorus to look extends, of course, to the dramatic audience as well. Tecmessa reveals a shocking tableau that, in its grisly carnality, is unparalleled in extant tragedy. Historical specifics of the staging are unknowable, but as Patrick Finglass has argued, the "appalled but undetailed" response of the Chorus (lines 354–55) suggests the tableau presents a spectacle that is not wholly reliant on verbal description for its effects.[25] The sight, not only of the violently broken animal carcasses, but the way in which they surround a worryingly dazed Ajax, is a source of acute pain for the Chorus. Tecmessa emphasizes Ajax's perspective (Soph. *Aj.* 260–62):

τὸ γὰρ ἐσλεύσσειν οἰκεῖα πάθη,
μηδενὸς ἄλλου παραπράξαντος,
μεγάλας ὀδύνας ὑποτείνει.

24. On this point, however, the Chorus is proved (at least partially) wrong. Within the narrative of the play, Ajax is alone, perhaps in a natural area away from the Greek camp, when he puts an end to his life; on the significance of the location, see Martin 2017. Esposito 2010 argues that the Chorus's prediction is fulfilled meta-theatrically through the audience witnessing the event. On the debate over the staging of the suicide and its immediate aftereffects, see below.

25. See Finglass 2011, 241.

To look upon one's own sufferings,
When they are the work of no one else,
Intensifies great pains.

From the prologue to the scenic exposure of the inside of the tent, in the first half of Sophocles' *Ajax*, the shocking image of animal carcasses establishes a morbid aesthetic framework that is essential context for interpreting the human body that will later take the stage. Within the intersubjective vision of the tragic stage, we understand that Ajax *has* seen the death and torture of humans. Even before the carcasses are seen, Tecmessa invites identification between the Chorus and theatergoers ("Such things you would see in the tent"), fomenting interest in and shaping response to this horrible spectacle. The ultimate revelation of the animal bodies directly to the theatergoers, then, is not so much about horrific detail in representation (details of which would have been impossible for the nearsighted theatergoers to glean), but in the fulfillment of this anticipated spectacle.

In this way, the dramatic aesthetics of the ghastly tableau of Ajax among the animal cadavers it is not unlike those associated with the arrival of the ragged Xerxes or Philoctetes' arrival. We observe tragedy working, again by using materials to collapse not only mythic time (of the character's past actions and sufferings) but dramatic time as well, as earlier verbal reports are reactivated in the presence of material. The tortured animal remains do not need to be described when they are seen; the groundwork has already been laid. Instead, their aesthetic effects are measured by (and sympathetically felt through) reactions of those on stage. Ultimately, the dramatic audience looks upon the material spectacle of the stage not only with their own eyes, but also through the layered filters of aesthetic perspectives focalized in the play.

Seeing "The Whole Horror": Unveiling the Tragic Corpse

The first half of Sophocles' play centers on Ajax's challenging predicament, when, returned to his senses, the hero is personally ashamed and politically hemmed in by this act of provocative, if vain, violence. Painfully aware that his actions will be considered treasonous by the leaders of the Greek army, Ajax offers ominous but ultimately ambiguous words to Eurysaces, Tecmessa, and the Chorus, who all exit, leaving the hero alone on stage to deliver a plaintive soliloquy before falling upon his sword. The staging of

Ajax's suicide is one of the most contested questions in Greek stagecraft.[26] Although the transmitted text presents no easy solution, most historically plausible ways to stage this death occur at the periphery of the playing space, which allows for the actor's body to be substituted by a dummy.

After Ajax's death, the first figures to return to the stage are the Chorus members, who, when it was discovered that the hero was missing, had formed a search party. Like other choral entrances in Greek drama, the Chorus members are engaged in a visual search for an individual. They lament that they have no one to guide them in a search that, despite their efforts, has failed to reveal (*mē leussein*, 890) their king. Tecmessa, who quietly enters at approximately the same time but perhaps separately from the Chorus, is the first to come upon the body somewhere on the margins of the stage. Her emotive cries (*iō moi moi*, 891, *iō tlēmōn*, 893), although they convey nothing about what Tecmessa sees, reveal her emotional distress and draw the Chorus's attention. The Chorus leader recognizes Tecmessa as Ajax's unfortunate "spear-bride" and notices she is acutely overcome with grief. The Chorus asks what is the matter, and Tecmessa cries out (S. *Aj.* 898–99):[27]

> Αἴας ὅδ' ἡμῖν ἀρτίως νεοσφαγὴς
> κεῖται κρυφαίῳ φασγάνῳ περιπτυχής.
>
> Here is our Ajax, just now slaughtered,
> He lies draped around his hidden sword.[28]

Tecmessa's words underscore the suddenness and emotional impact of this turn of events. The proximal deictic, *hode*, emphasizes Tecmessa's physical and emotional proximity to Ajax's body, while the adverb *artiōs* (together with prefix *neo-*) underscore her temporal nearness to his suicide as well.

26. For a thorough summary of scholarly debate over the scene, see Finglass 2011, 375–79. Most and Ozbek (2015) present papers from a 2013 conference dedicated to the staging question; Campbell (2018) offers a modern practitioner's perspective. On the prologue as a "a sort of play within the play," see Burian 2012, 70–71, who also situates this death of Ajax in the epic tradition. On the prologue and its connections to vision and other thematic concerns, see Seale 1982, 144–50; Pucci 1994, 17–31; and Barker 2009, 284–90.

27. The so-called "diptych" structure of Ajax is discussed by March 1991, 3, 24 n. 116. The staging of the scene is deeply problematic: see Jebb (1907, *ad* 899) and Taplin (1978, 189 n. 5).

28. The Greek text follows that of Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990. Translations are my own.

Tecmessa likens Ajax's body to a covering cloth, enfolding (*periptuchēs*) a sword, the fatal symbol of his heroic pride. Lamenting over the news, the Chorus asks after Ajax's body in a series of questions that suggest his cadaver is still hidden, at least from their view and perhaps that of theatergoers as well.[29] Impatient to see Ajax for themselves, the Chorus asks Tecmessa repeatedly where Ajax lies. Suddenly protective of her husband's image, Tecmessa responds peremptorily (Soph. *Aj.* 915–19):

οὔτοι θεατός· ἀλλά νιν περιπτυχεῖ
φάρει καλύψω τῷδε παμπήδην, ἐπεὶ
οὐδεὶς ἄν ὅστις καὶ φίλος τλαίη βλέπειν
φυσῶντ' ἄνω πρὸς ῥῖνας ἔκ τε φοινίας
πληγῆς μελανθὲν αἷμ' ἀπ' οἰκείας σφαγῆς.

He must not be looked upon! No, I will cover
him all over with this enveloping cloth, since
no one who is dear to him could endure to see
him spurting blood up from his nostrils
and the black blood from the stroke of his self-slaughter.

Her curt command, "He must not be looked upon" (*outoi theatos*, 915), underscores the aesthetic transformation of Ajax through death.[30] Ajax may have hardly seemed presentable earlier, covered in the fresh blood of slaughtered animals, when Tecmessa opened the *skēnē* doors to present him to the Chorus and brought out the young Eurysaces to sit upon his father's knees, even as Ajax himself felt compelled to allay his son's fear and apologize for seeing him covered in fresh blood.[31] Death has changed the aesthetic and social calculus.

Taking a *pharos* (916), a wide cloth she has perhaps worn herself as a veil, Tecmessa enshrouds Ajax' corpse, obscuring it from view, as earlier the fabric of his tent had contained his bloody acts.[32] The rare adjective

29. Although, as the prologue makes clear, what a character sees on stage is not always what theatergoers or other characters see.

30. As various commentators note, the particle οὔτοι is an emphatic negative: see Denniston 543–40.

31. Cf. Soph. *Aj.* 538–46.

32. On the "unveiling" of Tecmessa and possible nature of the φᾶρος, see Finglass 2009. A depiction of the mythological moment, found on a red-figure kylix by the Brygos Painter held in London, shows a large, rectangular cloth with decorated border (British Museum

periptuchos (915) recalls how Ajax's body materially concealed the sword, as if it were a folded cloth (899).[33] Such verbal connections reveal the visual irony of the scene. Ajax, target of the Chorus's search, must, in death, remain hidden from view; Tecmessa's words reveal, as her fabric conceals, the image of Ajax.[34] Translating her private visual perception into verbal representation, Tecmessa mediates the shocking appearance of the gruesome cadaver; a vision so horrific that it cannot be endured may, at least, be heard described and imagined.[35] However this remarkable scene is staged, by the time Tecmessa departs in mourning, the shrouded corpse of Ajax is in a position where it is in full view of actors, Chorus, and spectators alike for the remainder of the play.[36]

Having heard the news of the suicide, Ajax's brother Teucer arrives immediately, with only two spoken trimeters from the Chorus separating the departure of Ajax's war-wife and his half-brother.[37] Teucer's words upon seeing Ajax reiterate Tecmessa's distinction between indirect description and direct sight of the corpse, creating a stereoscopic experience for the audience, who themselves "see" Ajax's body through the verbal descriptions and emotive reactions of characters on stage. Teucer addresses the dead Ajax, still concealed by Tecmessa's *pharos* (Soph. *Aj.* 977f., 992f., 998–1001):

ὦ φίλτατ' Αἴας, ὦ ξύναιμον ὄμμ' ἐμοί,
ἆρ' ἠμπόληκας ὥσπερ ἡ φάτις κρατεῖ;
. . .
ὦ τῶν ἁπάντων δὴ θεαμάτων ἐμοὶ

E 69, *LIMC* I.1., 326 no. 84). The painting is dated to the first quarter of the fifth century. Images of this type may have influenced the staging or reception of Sophocles' *Ajax* (or both), but the theater had its own conventions for using fabrics.

33. S. *Aj.* 658. On the expression of "hiding" the sword, see Jebb 1907, 142 *ad* 899. Ajax's sword, which formerly belonged to the foremost Trojan prince and hero Hector, had come to symbolize the slaughter of cattle; on the symbolism of this property, see Segal 1980, 127.

34. Concealing Ajax behind a covering fulfills overlapping emotional, religious, dramatic, and aesthetic purposes.

35. Tecmessa's insistence that no friend could bear to look upon Ajax's corpse recalls the Chorus's statement that Tecmessa's verbal report was "unendurable" (ἀγγελίαν ἄτλατον, 224).

36. The staging of this scene is deeply problematic. For a through discussion, see Finglass 2011, 13–20, and his commentary *ad loc.*, as well as the papers collected by Most and Ozbek 2015.

37. As in Eur. *Hel.*, where his character first comes upon Helen before Menelaus, Teucer is involved in a "double" recognition and discovery of an aesthetically significant body.

ἄλγιστον ὧν προσεῖδον ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐγώ
. . .
ὀξεῖα γάρ σου βάξις ὡς θεοῦ τινος
διῆλθ' Ἀχαιοὺς πάντας ὡς οἴχῃ θανών.
ἀγὼ κλύων δύστηνος ἐκποδὼν μὲν ὢν
ὑπεστέναζον, νῦν δ' ὁρῶν ἀπόλλυμαι.

Dearest Ajax, my kindred face,
have you fared as the report holds?
. . .
Truly, of all the sights I've seen, this is
the most painful which my eyes have looked upon
. . .
For a bitter rumor about you, as if from some god,
went among all the Achaeans—that you had passed away.
Having heard these things from far off, I felt wretched
and groaned. But now, seeing them, I am destroyed.

Teucer's words are multivalent. They mark the epistemological difference between knowledge gained through anonymous rumor and that which is acquired by means of the senses. It is not merely "seeing," but especially "seeing for oneself," that escalates Teucer's earlier, offstage groans into a fuller expression of grief onstage. Teucer's words on arrival (*theamata, opthalmoi*, and *horaō*) suggest the primacy of vision, not knowledge, to his experience.[38] Yet all of Teucer's senses are bathed in affective feeling: Teucer is especially close to Ajax, a blood relation, magnifying the emotions of his experience; he apostrophizes the corpse as "dearest" (*ō philtat'*, 977) and "most painful" (*algiston*), while recalling Tecmessa's earlier words that "no friend could bear to see him." In fact, Teucer has not yet seen Ajax's bloodied face, and yet, through a typically Sophoclean stylistic feature, referring synecdochally to an individual through a particular body part, by addressing his brother's body as the *omma*, or "face" of Ajax, Teucer further activates memories of Tecmessa's gory description. In a horrific and pointedly aesthetic example of dramatic irony, theatergoers watch in anticipation as

38. Vision and knowledge are closely linked in the Indo-European language families: cf. the Indo-European roots, *woid-, weid-, wid-*, cognate with English "wit" and *idein*, S. *Aj.*1003. One might compare Socrates' desire to see Theodote, whose beauty surpasses all description: Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.

Teucer approaches the body. Teucer calls the report of Ajax's death "bitter" or "sharp" (*oxeia*, 998), a word that might also describe the sword.

His next request confirms the emotional and aesthetic powers of direct sight (S. *Aj.* 1003–5):

> ἴθ', ἐκκάλυψον, ὡς ἴδω τὸ πᾶν κακόν.
> ὦ δυσθέατον ὄμμα καὶ τόλμης πικρᾶς,
> ὅσας ἀνίας μοι κατασπείρας φθίνεις.
>
> Come, uncover him, so that I may see the whole horror.
> *[Ajax's corpse is uncovered]*
> Oh, face hard to look upon for its bitter daring,
> what sorrows you have sown for me in your death!

Teucer uncovers the corpse, removing Tecmessa's *pharos* and undoing her concealment, a reversion verbally marked by opposition of *kalupsō* and *ekkalupson*.[39] These actions underscore the aesthetic importance of the fabric that surrounds the corpse and yet, as the Chorus suggests, Teucer is now tasked with the more substantial act of hiding the corpse under a grave (*krupseis taphōi*, 1040), a permanent fulfillment of Tecmessa's desire to protect the body from sight. Menelaus, seeking to deny proper burial and make a political spectacle of Ajax's corpse, enjoins Teucer not to bury the body (1089–90), and the ensuing debate keeps Ajax's corpse at the visual and verbal heart of remainder of the tragedy. Justice (*endikos*, 1363; Dikē, 1391) is finally served through the intervention and mediation of Odysseus, and the body is removed from the stage for burial in the tragedy's final exeunt.

Upon pulling back the veil from the bloody body, Teucer's response to the sight of the corpse echoes and amplifies earlier phrases from the play. Tecmessa felt her husband's death bitterly (*pikros*, 966), and the ensuing sight became something that no friend might dare (*tlaiē*, 917) to look upon. Using similar vocabulary, Teucer projects and combines these attributes upon his brother's suicide, an act of "bitter daring" (*tolmēs pikras*, 1004), which may be construed as referring to the actions against the Greek generals and his own body.[40] And as Teucer proclaimed upon his arrival, but now

39. S. *Aj.* 915, 1003.

40. This transference is aided by the semantics of the Greek word group anchored to **tlaō*, which signify both "daring" and "enduring," suggestive of an affective mirroring of act and response. *LSJ* *τλάω *s.v.* I, II.

reiterates in the unmediated experience of direct and close sight, the corpse "is hard to look upon" (*dustheatos*, 1004), a partial echo of Tecmessa's command that Ajax "must not be looked upon" (*outoi theatos*, 915) that underscores the quasi-theatrical spectacle of the corpse.[41] The body, thus, is at once emotionally painful (marked by *pikros*), visually abhorrent (*dustheatos*, etc.), and morally transgressive (*tolmē*, etc.). These senses and more, perhaps including a sense of "cowardly," are combined in Teucer's use of *kakon*, translated here as "horror." *Kakos*, a word that appears more frequently in tragedy than in any other genre and acts as a "hypernym" denoting negative values of all sorts, applies to a constellation of events: the circumstances Ajax faced in the play, his suicide, its effect on those dear to him, and the appearance of his dead body.[42] The corpse materializes, crystallizes, and distills the "whole horror" (*to pan kakon*, 1003) of Sophocles' play. Ajax, who so recently beheld his own mightily horrific works and despaired, can no longer return a gaze, the semantic core of the Greek term, *prosōpon*, the term for both face and theatrical mask.[43] The gruesome body becomes the material distillation and visual expression of the preceding thousand lines of the tragedy.

In both its verbal and scenic expression, this sequence from Sophocles' *Ajax* is sensitive to its characters' varied aesthetic and emotional responses to the bodies of the dead. The verbally marked concealments and revelations of the corpse indicate the importance not only of the body's physical presence, but also its visible accessibility. The affective and aesthetic mediations of Tecmessa and Teucer reveal their crucial roles in managing the stage.[44] Three degrees of affective distance from the body may be distinguished: (1) aural report of the death, (2) sight of the corpse's outline shrouded by a cloth, and (3) direct sight of the uncovered, gruesome body. Teucer is the only character to experience each stage, progressively coming nearer to

41. S. *Aj.* 1004 and 915, respectively. *Dustheatos* may have had Aeschylean overtones. A. *Sept.* 978, describes the pains (*pēmata*) tied to the twin deaths of Eteocles and Polynices; cf. [A.] *PV* 69, 690.

42. On *kakos*, see especially Sluiter 2008, 4–8, discussed further in the introduction and referenced in several chapters of this book.

43. Compare the joy at the "mutual seeing and being seen" at the unveiling of Alcestis, returned to life at E. *Alc.* 1121–34, discussed at Steiner 2001, 150. Elsewhere (Duncan 2023, "Seeing Together . . .") I have argued that Attic theater, in general, was a profoundly intersubjective experience.

44. Taplin 1978, 189 n. 5, discussing the addition and subtraction of the *pharos*: "These actions are rather conspicuously marked in the words, and I can detect no more far-reaching significance for them."

the body and focalizing theatergoers' aesthetic experience. Although Ajax's corpse will remain shrouded but visible on stage until the end of the drama, gradations of access to the "whole horror" of the corpse remain potentially in play during the second half of the tragedy, as Menelaus seeks to expose the body not only visually, but also physically to all, carrion birds included.[45]

This episode in *Ajax* exemplifies the peculiar connections between aesthetics and circumstances with regard to the visible dead that may be observed in responses to cadavers across early Greek literature, from epic and lyric poetry to the historical and philosophical prose writings of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and, of course, in Athenian drama. The dead body is a corruptible monument, freezing in time the circumstances of its death. Its circumstances may be interpreted as noble, as when a man dies valiantly defending his country, or pathetic, in the case of Ajax's suicide, precipitated by a god-sent delusion. As the responses to Ajax's body above indicate, it can be difficult to disentangle affective and aesthetic reactions to the corpse, an object at once familiar and abject. There can be no "disinterested" gaze upon the corpse, by friends, by enemies, or even by those indifferent to the dead. Teucer's impulse to see the corpse, in spite of the pain he knows the sight will induce, reveals the complexity of his spectatorial frameworks He looks upon Ajax not only as a brother, but also as a protector; acting as an interpreter for the dramatic audience, too, Teucer reveals how the macabre drive to inspect the dead, an urge documented elsewhere in Greek literature and life, found special fulfillment in the aesthetics of the Athenian tragic stage.

The Ambiguous Ontology and Aesthetics of the Dying in Sophocles' *Women at Trachis*

The objectification of the corpse is on occasion foreshadowed upon the still-living bodies of characters who are about to die or, in the case of certain heroes, experience a similarly final, yet semidivine transformation. These extraordinary "bodies in pain" serve as crucial middle ground between the aesthetics of the objectified corpse, and those of still-living characters in a tragedy whose sufferings, although real and substantial, are less acute (and embodied). Unlike the aesthetics of the battlefield dead, wherein formal unity is achieved categorically in the moment of death, tragedy presents,

45. S. *Aj.* 1065.

in comparatively slow motion, a transformation through which the dying body slowly, and not always smoothly, assumes qualities of a corpse. A variety of experiences mark the transition: the wounded and dying in tragedy drift in and out of consciousness, experience paroxysms of pain, lose control of their faculties (yet occasionally display unexpected feats of strength), see hallucinations or acquire prophetic knowledge of future events, and deliver efficacious curses.

The mortally wounded bodies of Heracles here (and, in chapter 6, Hippolytus), serve as exemplary cases, brought on stage for the final scenes of the tragedy when they teeter on the bring of mortality.[46] In both cases, messenger reports make sure that the audience has been made aware of the hero's extraordinary suffering, and theatergoers may well anticipate witnessing with their own eyes these horrors they have heard about.

Heracles, who has been mutilated by a poisoned robe unwittingly given to him by his wife, Deianeira, who believed it was a love charm, arrives on stage as a particularly gruesome spectacle. Whetting the audience's appetite for the upcoming spectacle, Hyllus, having returned from Euboea, where Heracles first put on the poisoned robe in offering a sacrifice, directly quotes, in first person, the anguished words of his father (S. *Trach.* 797–806):

ὦ παῖ, πρόσελθε, μὴ φύγῃς τοὐμὸν κακόν,
μηδ' εἴ σε χρὴ θανόντι συνθανεῖν ἐμοί·
ἀλλ' ἆρον ἔξω, καὶ μάλιστα μέν με θὲς
ἐνταῦθ' ὅπου με μή τις ὄψεται βροτῶν·
εἰ δ' οἴκτον ἴσχεις, ἀλλά μ' ἔκ γε τῆσδε γῆς
πόρθμευσον ὡς τάχιστα, μηδ' αὐτοῦ θάνω.
τοσαῦτ' ἐπισκήψαντος, ἐν μέσῳ σκάφει
θέντες σφε πρὸς γῆν τήνδ' ἐκέλσαμεν μόλις
βρυχώμενον σπασμοῖσι· καί νιν αὐτίκα
ἢ ζῶντ' ἐσόψεσθ' ἢ τεθνηκότ' ἀρτίως.

"Child, come here, do not run away from my *kakon*,
not even if you must die along with me.
Get me out of here, and—what I want most of all—set me in a place

46. These form a particular set of bodies, but they overlap with bodies in pain that will be miraculously healed (including those of Philoctetes and Telephus, considered in earlier chapters), miraculously heroized bodies (as occurs in Oedipus at Colonus), and those who will die less painful deaths (such as Alcestis).

> where no living soul may set eyes upon me;
> But if you are kept back from taking pity, then at least convey me
> from this land as quickly as possible, so that I do not die here."
> We set to doing such things, putting him in the middle of the hull,
> and, with difficulty, we brought him to this land,
> roaring in his convulsions. Straightaway you
> will see him, either living having just died.

Several structural and thematic resonances between this passage and the aesthetic framing of the corpse in *Ajax* are evidence. Again, neuter *kakon* serves as a untranslatably unifying term, linking adverse circumstance, negative feelings, close presence, and embodied materiality through common evaluation. Heracles' special (*malista*) injunction, that he be placed out of the sight of mortals, recalls Tecmessa's similar concern that Ajax "must not be looked upon (*outoi theatos*, 915).[47] Again, the question of visual endurance is at stake, but here it is not Heracles' nearest and dearest (cf. *philos*, S. *Aj.* 917) who could not endure the sight, but rather Heracles himself who cannot endure being seen in his compromised state. It is significant that these words are not delivered by Heracles in person, but by Hyllus, who quotes his father in the first person, a performance that blurs the boundaries between visual subject and object as he physically embodies, verbally describes, and mentally relives seeing his father in agony.

Stray details, delivered in Hyllus' proper persona, add vividness to what might otherwise be a perfunctory description of the transfer of Heracles' body in agony. That Heracles was placed in the middle of the boat (803) and that it was "difficult" (*molis*, 804) to transport him together suggest the size of the body and the strength of his "roaring" convulsions (805) threatening to capsize the vessel.[48] The difficulty of bearing Heracles across water will soon be mirrored by the difficult experience of seeing his body, wracked with pain. Hyllus underscores, with line-final *autika* and *artios*, the speed with which events are unfolding in dramatic time. Although the audience knows the hero will be "immediately" seen, Hyllus makes it pointedly unclear if he will arrive onstage alive or dead. As with the ambiguity introduced by Atossa's departure to intercept Xerxes, to provide the rag-

47. It also recalls Oedipus' wish to be buried underground or drowned in the sea, so as to no longer be seen: cf. discussion in the introduction.

48. Indeed, in his sound Heracles blurs the boundaries between dying battlefield warrior and roaring surf, both meanings of the (likely onomatopoetic) verb βρυχάομαι: LSJ *s.v.* βρυχάομαι cite Hom. *Il.* 13.393 and *Od.* 5.412, *Il.* 17.264, and cf. Beekes *s.v.* βρυχάομαι.

gedly dressed king with fresh robes, Hyllus' words raise the visual stakes of the arrival, guiding the theatergoer's gaze toward the edge of the stage as Heracles' body is transported. Although seasoned Athenian theatergoers likely intuited from Hyllus' disjunctive statement that the theatrically dynamic scenario of a still-living Heracles would be adopted, simply stating the alternative raises multiple, contrastive expectations that might be compared. Indeed, Heracles might die while on stage, allowing the audience to contemplate the fine line between the quick and the dead.

Once Heracles arrives on stage, the protective attitude over the sight of his body has evidently changed. Abroad among enemies and under the scrutiny of a public eye, the hero was keen to hide his misfortune from others. But on the domestic stage of the tragedy, Heracles becomes adamant that the disfigurement of his body be seen, treating the wounds of his body as courtroom evidence for convicting his wife, Deianeira, of treachery. Having entered the stage lying unconscious on a stretcher (a vehicle that will later serve as a funeral bier, leading his still-agonized body to a funeral pyre and hero's burial), Heracles speaks of seeing his own wounds, and verbally recounts his wounds in gross detail.[49] But verbal description alone is insufficient, and the hero calls to his son Hyllus to visually showcase his suffering (S. *Trach.* 1076–80):

καὶ νῦν προσελθὼν στῆθι πλησίον πατρός,
σκέψαι δ' ὁποίας ταῦτα συμφορᾶς ὕπο
πέπονθα· δείξω γὰρ τάδ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων·
ἰδού, θεᾶσθε πάντες ἄθλιον δέμας,
ὁρᾶτε τὸν δύστηνον, ὡς οἰκτρῶς ἔχω.

And now come here, stand close to your father,
and look upon the things I have suffered from
such misfortune. For I will show these things without veils:
Gaze, be spectators, all of you, to my wretched body,
look upon this wretch, how pitiful I am.

49. In his note at S. *Trach.* 996, Jebb notes of Heracles: "Though the malady is his own, he can be said 'to look upon it,' in the sense of experiencing it." The conflation of vision, knowledge, and experience in Sophoclean drama contributes substantially to its aesthetics. S. *Trach.* 1053–57. The scene is remarkably vivid, inspiring Cicero to put his hand to a (liberal) Latin translation: see Cic. *Tusc.* 2.20f.

As in *Ajax*, the revelation of Heracles' body is conspicuously marked. *Kalummata* (1078), properly garments used as a mournful head-cover, are referred to metaphorically here as a cover for Heracles' agonized body (*athlion demas*, 1079). The word may well have been chosen as a cognate of *kaluptein*, the proper word for the concealment of bodies under either garments or the earth.[50] Heracles exhibits to his son his wretched body, which like Ajax's, is a frame once formidable in its size and strength but now thoroughly deformed.[51] Heracles' mangled body (*sōma*) serves as a sign (*sēma*) that proves through its mutilation the evils that have been wrought upon him. But the body is not only courtroom evidence, but like Hippolytus before Artemis, the innocent Heracles seeks pity from his son and the broader audience that the plural imperative *theasthe* implies. Heracles, as speaker, not only cites his body for substantiation, but also uses the wounds as Aristotle had suggested the orator use piteous garments, in order to elicit the pity and sense of injustice in those who hear him. The hero's disfigurement brings his misfortune before the eyes of the theatrical audience, an ugly and pitiful object. This spectacular corporeal disintegration may be compared to the mental breakdown and recovery Heracles experiences on the Euripidean stage, in a drama that shares many points of interest with Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Women at Trachis*.

50. *Kalumma* is prone to metaphorical usage, and while mournful associations apply, Sophocles here is not boldly stretching lexical norms. *LSJ s.v.* κάλυμμα. If *kalummata* refers to the robe, *peplon* (674, 758, 774, 924), with which Deianira unintentionally doomed her husband, then Sophocles' stagecraft imbues the same property/garment with two functions: the poisoned robe, the instrument of Heracles' demise, is also the means by which his unsightly wounds are concealed. It is a lovely robe that, upon first donning, Heracles was pleased to wear: *kosmōi te chairōn kai stolēi*, S. *Trach.* 765. Segal (1980, 129–31) assumes that the robe is still visible, but does not mention the *kalumma*. Davies (1991, *ad* 1078) implicitly argues against *LSJ* that "the present phrase is not metaphorical but perfectly literal: H exposes his hideously maimed body." Davies seems to ignore the difference between *peplos* and *kalumma*: see Evans and Abrahams 1964, 28. The poisoned garment may well have burned off into smoke: cf. S. *Trach.* 672–79. The scene may allude to a bride's unveiling: see Seaford (1986, 58f.) considering S. *Trach.* 1071f.

51. S. *Trach.* 1056, where his wasted state is contrasted to his former glories enumerated at lines 1046–49, 58–62, and elsewhere.

Euripides' *Heracles*: A Play of Embodied and Material Bonds

Euripides' *Heracles*, as the play is named in most Greek manuscripts or *Hercules Furens*, in its Latinized title, dramatizes part of the hero's mythic narrative that is hardly even alluded to in Sophocles' *Women at Trachis*.[52] Heracles, returning from the underworld, from which he has successfully extracted the three-headed dog Cerberos, arrives in his hometown of Thebes to find that his wife, Megara, children, and aged father have been sentenced to death by the ruler, Lycus, and have as a result sought protection at the altar of Zeus.[53] Megara, having given up hope that Heracles will return to save them, has already arranged that she and her children be dressed in black robes for death. Heracles, however, arrives in the nick of time, and the hero escorts his family into the palace, where he ambushes and kills Lycus.

At the moment of this victory, however, through the vengeful wrath of Hera conducted through her emissaries Iris and Lyssa, the personified goddess of madness, Heracles becomes the source of violence himself, killing his wife, Megara, and all three of their children. The play closes with Heracles, restored to sanity coming to recognize the heinous deeds as his own under the guidance of his mortal father, Amphitryon. Despite suicidal urges reminiscent of *Ajax*, the arrival and consolation of Theseus, whom Heracles had just saved from Hades, give the distraught hero sufficient reason to live, and he subsequently accompanies Theseus to Athens. This suppliant play ends, if not "happily," at least better than it otherwise might.

In light of its peculiarities and paradoxes, *Heracles* is, as Toph Marshall observes, a "hugely ambitious" play.[54] It is about many things at once: the capricious role of divine justice in human life, the changing character of heroism, and a whole canvas of human emotions and ideas, such as hope, fear, grief, virtue, and consolation.[55] Although many of its thematic emphases are abstract, anchoring and substantiating these ideas are the bodies dra-

52. On Heracles' various aspects across fifth-century tragedy and their connections, see Silk 1985.

53. Eur. *HF* is, in some respects, a "nostos" narrative of homecoming, not from war, but from similarly dangerous circumstances: see Rehm 1999–2000. The play parallels Homer's *Odyssey* in several respects ,including the hero's patient but importuned wife, aging father, and endangered offspring. Like the broader Odysseus myth known from the epic cycle, Euripides also centers mental acuity, mistaken identity, and divine intervention as central thematic concerns.

54. Marshall 2016, 182.

55. Willamowitz-Moellendorff's 1895 edition of the play.

matically represented on and off stage which, although crucial features of the play, have been the subject of comparatively less scholarly discussion.[56] Euripides' *Heracles* is also a play about corporeality: of bodily presence and absence, embodied causality, psychological interiority, and the precarity of the self between life and death. Heracles' exceptional and significant body, as in the finale of Sophocles' *Women at Trachis*, is an important focal point of the drama. But, as in Sophocles' *Ajax*, whose "diptych" structure this play reverses, Heracles' violent and delirious acts make other bodies in the play focal points of pity, horror, and contemplation. As with *Ajax*, too, the embodiment of dramatic performance establishes a curious ontological hierarchy between divine, living, and dead. The dead bodies of Heracles' family members (father, wife, and children), his enemies (Lycus and, in less direct ways, Eurystheus), and the disturbing numinal presence of divinities (Iris and Lyssa), all provide corporeal nodes within the play's dense thematic networks and visual spectacle. The positions of these bodies, their clothing, their frailty, and ultimately their affective power shape not only the emotional impact, but also the dramatic meaning of the play in profound ways.

Euripides' *Heracles* is in particularly close dialogue with *Ajax* and *Women of Trachis*, but it shows structural resemblances to many other tragedies as well. In portraying not only a filicide, but also an attempt to protect one's children from negative political outcome, it reflects Euripides' *Medea*. Its violent and divinely inspired hallucinations not only reflect those of *Ajax*, but anticipate Agave's killing of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.[57] Above all, in its focus on death, highlighted through Heracles' trip to Hades and manifest in the bodies presented on stage, *Heracles* suggests the remarkable power of the spectacle of the dead body in tragedy.

Euripides' *Heracles* thus presents points of continuity, but also peculiarity, within the extant Greek tragic corpus. Heracles appears not to have been so common a figure in tragedy as in other dramatic genres, or in the visual arts, such that Heracles' presence inevitably puts the play in cross-generic, cross-modal dialogue.[58] Michael Silk has observed that "Heracles was the

56. Holmes' (2008) attention to the body is a notable exception. The editions of Bond 1981 and Barlow 1996 do not engage thoroughly with staging, for which see Rehm 1999–2000, essential concepts from which reappear in Rehm 2002, 100–110.

57. This recognition scene prefigures the mediated "therapy" scene between Cadmos and Agave in the "talking cure" scene of Eur. *Bacch.* See Mills 2020.

58. On the generic qualities of Heracles as subject and the challenges that poses to tragedy, see esp. Ehrenberg 1946, 144–66; Silk 1985. To consider only Euripidean drama, *HF* almost certainly appeared after *Alc.*, a pro-satyric drama which presents the hero in a con-

greatest and strangest of all Greek heroes" and that the play's "exoticisms like lurid deaths and Madness herself on stage" have harmed the standing of the drama among modern critics. *Heracles* seems not to have resonated with ancient audiences, either: the play was not part of a winning tetralogy at the Dionysia, and the historical preservation of the text is due more to chance (as one of the "alphabet" plays) than editorial selection. And yet, as Brooke Holmes has noted, "Heracles was virtually synonymous with his body, and specifically with the amoral forces, *bia* and appetite, that were often associated with it."[59] An embodied approach to the drama and its aesthetics reveals the way Euripides' placed the affective experience of ugliness at the core of his dramatic focus.

Clothing and Connective Embodiment between Heracles and His Children

Clothing plays a remarkable visual and symbolic role in the play, in close connection (as always) with the body. The thematic salience of costume and its connections to embodiment are first indicated in the prologue, where the desperation of Heracles' suppliant family is emphasized by Heracles' father, Amphitryon. The family is in need "of all things," the patriarch observes, including the basic needs of "food, drink, and clothing" (*pantōn . . . chreioi sitōn potōn esthētos*, Eur. *HF* 51–52). The suppliants are not naked on the tragic stage, so their "lack" of clothing must refer to the deplorable condition of their garments, which would have conventionally been portrayed on the tragic stage through rags. As so often in tragedy, embodied and social deprivation alike are realized through garments. As Rosie Wyles has observed, in seeking the special dispensation from Lycus to dress Heracles' children for death, Megara does not merely foreshadow (or worse, agentively cause) the violence to come, she also asserts dignity and pride in the face of mortal danger.[60] When the children are later revealed on the *ekkyklēma*, covered in blood and dressed in black, the scene might well recall the presentation of the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, a prototype for the macabre on the tragic stage.

The children's black robes ominously connote death on the stage, but elsewhere in *Heracles*, clothing serves as a particularly vital link to life and safety. Clothes are something that can be held for security, as when the

trastingly jovial light.

59. Holmes 2008, 252.

60. Wyles 2010.

Chorus suggest in their parodos that the frail should "take hold of the hands and robes" of others (*labou cherōn kai peplōn*, Eur. *HF* 124), blurring distinctions between bodies and fabrics. And indeed, immediately upon Heracles' return, before the hero himself even has a chance to speak, Megara instructs the children to join their bodies to their father's through the medium of his garment (Eur. *HF* 520–22):

δεῦρ', ὦ τέκν', ἐκκρίμνασθε πατρώιων πέπλων,
ἴτ' ἐγκονεῖτε, μὴ μεθῆτ', ἐπεὶ Διὸς
σωτῆρος ὑμῖν οὐδέν ἐσθ' ὅδ' ὕστερος.

Here, children, grab hold of your father's robes,
hurry, and don't let go, since this man
is in no way second to Zeus our Savior.

The divine protection of supplication requires touch and proximity in a holy precinct, within which the presence of divinity is active. But the protection provided by Heracles' body can be communicated through fabrics.[61] In moving herself and children from the altar to their father, Megara recognizes Heracles' clothing as a vital extension of Heracles' strength. Megara and the children grasp his garments for over a hundred lines, a remarkable length of time on stage, in which the assemblage of bodies becomes something of a tableau. This remarkable scene of domestic (re)union ends in a no less remarkable speech that, through its use of metaphor, continues to blur distinctions between bodies and objects (Eur. *HF* 626–32):

σύ τ', ὦ γύναι μοι, σύλλογον ψυχῆς λαβὲ
τρόμου τε παῦσαι, καὶ μέθεσθ' ἐμῶν πέπλων:
οὐ γὰρ πτερωτὸς οὐδὲ φευξείω φίλους.
ἆ,
οἵδ' οὐκ ἀφιᾶσ', ἀλλ' ἀνάπτονται πέπλων
τοσῷδε μᾶλλον: ὦδ' ἔβητ' ἐπὶ ξυροῦ;
ἄξω λαβών γε τούσδ' ἐφολκίδας χεροῖν,
ναῦς δ' ὡς ἐφέλξω: καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἀναίνομαι
θεράπευμα τέκνων.

61. Cf. the transfer of power in Luke 8:40–48, where a woman is miraculously healed by touching the hem of Jesus's himation (ἥψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου, 8:44), and Christ senses the loss of power (δύναμις, 8:46).

And you, my wife, take hold of your courage,
Stop trembling, and let go of my robes:
For I will not fly away, like a bird, from my family.
Ah,
They do not let go, but hold on to my robes
all the more: did you all stand so much on the razor's edge?
Taking these little boats into my hands, I will tow them after me,
Like a ship, since I, too, do not reject
Taking care of my children.

In telling Megara to "take hold" of courage (*psychē*) and "let go" of his robes in sequential lines, Heracles' words materialize an intangible concept while recognizing the affective power of his corporeal self. Heracles and his robes stand in not only for the protective altar of Zeus, but also as the embodiment of courage for his family. Clothing, bodies, emotions, and physical connections link and confound Heracles with the members of his family.

The Appearance of Iris and Lyssa: The Aesthetics of Affect

The unexpected return of Heracles temporarily dispels the air of dread and foreboding that had marked the first half of the tragedy. The offstage killing of Lycus, reported from inside the palace, suggests that danger has truly and finally passed for Heracles' family. The choral ode that is sung in celebration of this happy turn of events, however, is suddenly interrupted by the shocking appearance of Lyssa and Iris above the palace. In lieu of a proper epode, the Chorus members react immediately to this shocking vision (Eur. *HF* 815–21):

ἔα ἔα·
ἆρ᾽ ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν πίτυλον ἥκομεν φόβου,
γέροντες, οἷον φάσμ᾽ ὑπὲρ δόμων ὁρῶ;
φυγῇ, φυγῇ
νωθὲς πέδαιρε κῶλον, ἐκποδῶν ἔλα.
ὦναξ Παιάν,
ἀπότροπος γένοιό μοι πημάτων.

Ah, ah
Have we not arrived at the very apex of fear,

old men? Such an apparition I see above the home!
Run, run!
Shake a leg, and get out of the way!
Lord Apollo, Paean,
Protect me from harm!

The Chorus's initial inarticulate response, "Ah, ah," not only calls visual attention to the top of the stage (cf. Barlow's translation, "Look, look!"), but also acts as a "gasp of astonishment" that conveys their collective, visceral, and negatively affective response.[62] The Chorus's frantic response to the divine epiphany communicates to the dramatic audience, more strongly than any verbal description, that these divine figures are horrifying, even before their identities are firmly established.[63] As Shirley Barlow notes in her commentary, "The appearance of these two sinister figures is a spectacular piece of theatre designed to dazzle the audience and seize their attention for a new set of events about to take place." Suspicious of the extent of visual spectacle the fifth-century theater could offer, however, Barlow asks whether the dramatic audience is meant to feel "the same movements of fear" as the Chorus. The vision of the Chorus (as with that of any play-internal character) is, of course, fundamentally different from that of members of the dramatic audience, whose interpretation of the scene is substantially informed by play-internal responses. But regardless of how Lyssa and Iris appear on stage, their dramatic aesthetics are perceived as shocking and horrifying through because of the words, reaction, and general performance of the Chorus. The cognitive tendency of our minds to "mirror" the reactions of others suggests that, although surely theatergoers did not themselves scramble away from the shocking spectacle of the divinities, they were nevertheless imaginatively invested in such a fearful response.

Iris' words, ostensibly directed at the Chorus members, are absorbed no less by theatergoers (Eur. *HF* 822–26):

62. On ἔα, see (Dodds 1960, 157 = n. *ad* 644), Page (1976/1938, 146 = n. *ad* 1004), and Fraenkel (1950, 580 *ad* n. 4), who observes that 'without exception in Eur. ἔα expresses the surprise of the speaker at some novel, often unwelcome, impression on his senses." The response is at once individual and collective, and some attention has been paid, mostly fruitlessly, to the assignment of lines: see Bond (1981, 280 = n. *ad* 815–821), who supposes that "all now execute the same rhythmic movement indicating fear," a collectively embodied response.

63. Bond (1981, 281 = n. *ad* 822–73) observes "The chorus have not identified Iris and Lyssa."

θαρσεῖτε Νυκτὸς τήνδ' ὁρῶντες ἔκγονον
Λύσσαν, γέροντες, κἀμὲ τὴν θεῶν λάτριν
Ἶριν· πόλει γὰρ οὐδὲν ἥκομεν βλάβος,
ἑνὸς δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὸς δώματα στρατεύομεν
ὅν φασιν εἶναι Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τ' ἄπο.

Never fear, you old men, looking upon this child of night,
Lyssa, and me, the messenger of the gods,
Iris: for we bring no harm to the city,
But we wage war against the house of one man,
Who they say is the son of Zeus and Alcmene.[64]

Divine epiphanies in tragedy typically interrupt ongoing stage action and require an explanation. There is nothing peculiar in Iris introducing herself and Lyssa as such, but by calling attention to Lyssa's genealogy, as a daughter of Night (*Nyx*), Iris calls to mind her companion's particularly monstrous pedigree.[65] Lyssa, for her part, begins similarly, noting her descent from a noble mother and father, not only Night but also "the blood of Ouranos."[66] Verbal evidence provides us with little to assess the details of their appearance. One might imagine the usual trappings of divine danger and power as serpents, wings, and dark robes, but this is speculative, since later Choral description may well be imaginative rather than descriptive.[67] What is both

64. Scaliger's (*teste* Diggle 1994) δώματα is almost certainly a correct restoration of the manuscripts' σώματα, but the origin and persistence of the scribal error is nevertheless revealing, since the house and well-being of Heracles are so intimately tied to the bodies of his family members within. If we imagine Heracles' identity as distributed amongst his φιλοί, the phrase "we wage war upon the bodies of one man" is perhaps not entirely out of place.

65. The Offspring of Nyx, which include the Erinyes, in tragic genealogies (although cf. Hes. *Theog.* 84–85, where they are children of Gaia) are famously fearsome in both their appearance as well as power. On the Erinyes in drama, see for example Aesch. *Eum.* 321, 415, 745, 961. The chorus of libation bearers at Aesch. *Choe.* 228 list Lyssa (not usually capitalized in modern editions) alongside "vain fear" (μάταιος . . . φόβος) as one of the πρόσβολαι ("visitations") of the Erinyes.

66. Νύκτος Οὐράνου τ' ἀφ' αἵματος, Eur. *HF* 844. Line 845 poses textual difficulties; Diggle (1994) notes "the general sense demands 'I am descended from noble stock and I shrink from this ignoble task,'" recognizing that the words, at least as transmitted, reflect an uglier side, "It is to be expected that Lyssa, like those other children of Night, the Erinyes, will be abhorred by the gods."

67. Cf. Eur. *HF* 880–84, which presents Lyssa as if driving a chariot as a gorgon with "a hundred heads of hissing serpents."

most certain and most significant is that Iris immediately attends to the emotional state of the Chorus, which she connects directly to their vision.

Shortly afterwards, offstage shouts from Amphitryon hint at the horrific murders happening out of sight, a common Euripidean trope. Spectacularly, the Theban palace roof is said to collapse (lines 905–6), a massive material metaphor for the dissolution of Heracles' household. A rhetorically rich messenger speech sets the stage for the visual spectacle that will soon be revealed. The Chorus, as often, is eager to know what has happened behind the closed doors of the stage building, asking the messenger (E. *HF* 919–21):

λέγε, τίνα τρόπον ἔσυτο θεόθεν ἐπὶ
μέλαθρα κακὰ τάδε,
τλήμονάς τε παίδων τύχας;

Tell us, in what way did these god-sent
Evils fall upon the home,
And tell us the fates of the unhappy children.

Again, the adjective *kakos* unites the situation and the spectacle, although here it is portrayed agentively as the grammatical subject of the verb. Far from the herd animals of *Ajax*, the children, who had long been fixtures of the stage, are described by the messenger as "lovely" (*kallimorphos*, 925), a rare reference to personal aesthetics in tragedy designed to heighten not only the pathos of their death, but also to strengthen the aesthetic contrast with the painful sight of their corpses.[68] In the wake of the killing of Lycus, the family performs a cleansing sacrifice, a ritual that, like the slaughter of animals in *Ajax*, is soon perverted by the madness that descends upon the hero. The messenger describes how the children see a change come over Heracles, particularly in his eyes (Eur. *HF* 930–34):

καὶ χρονίζοντος πατρὸς
παῖδες προσέσχον ὄμμ': ὁ δ' οὐκέθ' αὑτὸς ἦν,
ἀλλ' ἐν στροφαῖσιν ὀμμάτων ἐφθαρμένος
ῥίζας τ' ἐν ὄσσοις αἱματῶπας ἐκβαλὼν
ἀφρὸν κατέσταζ' εὐτρίχου γενειάδος.

68. On the special roles of children in Greek tragedy, see Yoon 2012, 31–38, who notes the "distinct" and "ironic" deaths of Heracles' sons in this play.

And as their father paused,
The children beheld his face: he was no longer himself,
But, distraught, his eyes were rolling
And bloodshot, and foam was dripping down from his bearded cheek.

Eye-rolling is a symptom of madness in tragedy, suggesting the delirious and incorrect vision of the afflicted.[69] What is particularly noteworthy in this passage is that the eyes are not simply described by the messenger, but focalized through Heracles' children as they behold his face. That Heracles is "no longer himself" in their eyes is suggestive of the reflexive nature of dramatic vision. The messenger speech, with its many horrible details concluded, the Chorus soon see the spectacle of an unconscious Heracles among the bodies of his wife and children. The Chorus's initial response paints a lurid picture of the stage, highlighting the amount of blood: "Alas, how much blood is here." (*oimoi, phonos hosos hod'*, Eur. *HF* 1051).

The Chorus sees that something is very wrong, but Heracles is slower to understand fully what has happened. The transition from mania to right-mindedness is slowest when it comes to recognizing present circumstances and the meaning of vision. Heracles is aware that he is surrounded by dead bodies, a disturbing fact for most, perhaps, but an observation that does not unduly shock this battle-hardened hero. Of equal concern for Heracles is the state of his bow and arrows, which had been a material extension of his body. Their scattering reflects the disintegration of his heroic self (Eur. *HF* 1097–1100):

ἧμαι, νεκροῖσι γείτονας θάκους ἔχων;
πτερωτά τ' ἔγχη: τόξα δ' ἔσπαρται πέδῳ,
ἃ πρὶν παρασπίζοντ' ἐμοῖς βραχίοσιν
ἔσῳζε πλευρὰς ἐξ ἐμοῦ τ' ἐσῴζετο.

I sit, having corpses for neighbors
And my winged arrows, and my bow lie scattered on the floor,
which were before allies to my arms,
which protected my flanks and were protected by me.

The objective spectacle of the corpses as scenic tableau is important, but so is the visual framing of the scene. Heracles cannot understand why his

69. Cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 1122 with Dodds (1960) note *ad loc.*

father shields his eyes (1111–12), to which the father replies, "You yourself may see, if you have mastered your senses" (*horas gar autos, ei pronōn hēdē kureis*, 1117). The gulf between their vision presents for dramatic audiences two radically different ways of interpreting corpses: as objects of triumph or of horror. It is in this context that Amphitryon invokes a divine spectator, "Oh Zeus, beside Hera's throne, can this be just to see?" (*ō Zeu, par' Hēras ar' horas thronōn tade?*) before, at last, clearly stating the facts to his son: "Behold, look upon the felled bodies of your children" (*idou, theasai tade teknōn pesēmata*, 1127). Through his verbal framing, Amphityron, as it were, pulls back the veil that has intervened between Heracles' eyes and the bodies of his dearly departed. Only then does Heracles' visual understanding come back into alignment with that of his father and the dramatic audience. Echoing the tragic vocabulary of Teucer, Tecmessa, and Hyllus, the hero groans, "What are you saying? What have I done? O father, you are a messenger of horrible things!" (*ti phēs; ti drasas; ō kak' angellōn pater*, 1136).

Conclusion

Dead bodies are not aesthetic objects in isolation, but their entire mythic and material history is essential framing for their meaning, emotional resonance, and aesthetic impact. In the case of Euripides' *Heracles*, myth, biology, close calls, costume, parental love, divine vengeance, all shape the aesthetics of the grisly spectacle, but materials and frames play especially crucial roles in shaping dramatic aesthetics. In the next chapter, we will see how broader frames, material and ideological, frame the aesthetics of the dead.

SIX

The Corpse, In and Out of Frame

In a striking passage late in the *Iliad*, delivered shortly before his son Hector's death on the battlefield, the Trojan king Priam offers an aesthetic argument for war that is anchored to the remarkable beauty that, Priam claims, surrounds the body of the fallen young warrior. An elaborate forerunner of the Horatian dictum, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, "it is sweet and proper to die on behalf of one's country," the Homeric verses run as follows (Hom. *Il.* 22.71–76):[1]

> νέῳ δέ τε πάντ' ἐπέοικεν
> Ἄρηϊ κταμένῳ δεδαϊγμένῳ ὀξέϊ χαλκῷ
> κεῖσθαι· πάντα δὲ καλὰ θανόντι περ ὅττι φανήῃ·
> ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ πολιόν τε κάρη πολιόν τε γένειον
> αἰδῶ τ' αἰσχύνωσι κύνες κταμένοιο γέροντος,
> τοῦτο δὴ οἴκτιστον πέλεται δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν.
>
> And for a young man, everything is seemly (*epeoiken*)
> When he lies killed in war, cleaved asunder by the sharp bronze.
> And everything appears beautiful (*kala*) around him although he is dead.
> But truly when the dogs whom an old man possessed disfigure
> His gray head and gray beard and private parts,
> That, truly, is the most pitiful (*oiktiston*) thing to wretched men.

Sketching a sharp contrast between two types of death, Priam attends first to the appropriateness of a young man's heroic death on the battlefield, and

1. Hor. *Od.* 3.2.13, a line famously questioned by Wilfred Owen in the face of the ugly horrors of modern warfare.

then to the negative (and pitiful, *oiktiston*) example of an old man's corpse, disfigured by his own dogs. In a closely parallel elegiac passage, the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus propounds a similar blend of martial ethics and aesthetics. Composed sometime in the seventh century BCE, Tyrtaeus' poem anchors the emergent aesthetic opposition between *kalos* (meaning "good," "noble," and "beautiful") and *aischros* ("shameful," and "ugly") to the bodies of the young and old dead (fr. 10 West, 1–2, 21–30)[2]:

τεθνάμεναι γὰρ καλὸν ἐνὶ προμάχοισι πεσόντα
ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν περὶ ἦι πατρίδι μαρνάμενον . . .
. . . αἰσχρὸν γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο, μετὰ προμάχοισι πεσόντα
κεῖσθαι πρόσθε νέων ἄνδρα παλαιότερον,
ἤδη λευκὸν ἔχοντα κάρη πολιόν τε γένειον,
θυμὸν ἀποπνείοντ' ἄλκιμον ἐν κονίηι,
αἱματόεντ' αἰδοῖα φίλαις ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντα–
αἰσχρὰ τά γ' ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ νεμεσητὸν ἰδεῖν,
καὶ χρόα γυμνωθέντα· νέοισι δὲ πάντ' ἐπέοικεν,
ὄφρ' ἐρατῆς ἥβης ἀγλαὸν ἄνθος ἔχηι,
ἀνδράσι μὲν θηητὸς ἰδεῖν, ἐρατὸς δὲ γυναιξὶ
ζωὸς ἐών, καλὸς δ' ἐν προμάχοισι πεσών.

It is *kalon* for a good man to die falling
in the front lines, fighting on behalf of his country . . .
. . . for truly this is *aischron*: for an older man
falling among the front lines lying ahead of the youths,
by this time having white hair and a gray beard,
exhaling his mighty soul in the dust,
holding his bloody genitals in his dear hands–
aischra things for the eyes and worthy of indignation to see,
the naked skin. But all is seemly (*epeoiken*) for young men,
still possessing the glorious flower of their lovely youth,
a miracle for men to see. Being beloved of women
while he was alive, he is a *kalos* man when falls in the front lines.

2. For text and commentary, see Prato 1968; on Tyrtaeus' connection to Homer beyond what is discussed in Vernant 1991, see Pucci 2006. The focus on the body is in contrastive dialogue with the warrior's extended materiality, on which see Brockliss 2020. On the specifically aesthetic opposition between these broadly evaluative terms, see the introduction.

Jean-Pierre Vernant, as noted in the introduction to part III, has influentially examined the aesthetic and cultural significance of these crucial passages from the Greek archaic poetic tradition.[3] Vernant emphasizes that, in death, the heroic body obtains a "formal unity" critical to its positive aesthetic and conceptual evaluation. Such unity is, however, precarious, as these passages also reveal.

The beautification-*cum*-beatification of the young soldier's corpse, as idealized by both Priam and Tyrtaeus, stands in contrast not only to that of the old man, but also to the pervasive cultural anxiety over the mutilation of the corpse, evident elsewhere in the *Iliad* and Greek heroic tradition more broadly.[4] Whatever its formal status, the physical unity of the corpse is under constant threat. The aesthetic idealization of the young warrior's death passes over the more ghastly details one might expect of real death on the battlefield, where not only sudden violence, but also the slow biological process of decomposition, stand to leave the body disfigured.[5] As a practical matter, the unity, and beauty, of the dead body is never assured. In death as in life, in poetry as in our lived social interactions, preservation of the body, and therefore the self, requires active maintenance.[6]

These passages from the *Iliad* and Tyrtaeus cosmeticize and sanitize the warrior's death by stressing the symbolism of the body while suppressing its materiality. Traumatic wounds may be recognized, so long as these injuries remain conceptually and visibly tidy. This extended to visual art as well: one might consider the wounds of Sarpedon, as portrayed on the monumental fifth-century Athenian krater by Euphronius, from which blood flows visibly but also symbolically. This classical image of the beautiful but wounded body might be compared to Renaissance paintings of the wounded Saint Sebastian, which, despite drawing upon a distinctly Christian iconography and ideology of fleshy suffering, similarly captures the aesthetic tension between the perfectly integral body and the wounds that promise to

3. See Vernant 1979 and 1982, compiled and translated into English in Vernant 1991, 50–91.

4. Four extant tragedies are also strongly concerned with the protection of a corpse: Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Ajax* and Euripides' *Phoenician Women* and *Suppliants*.

5. The disfiguring violence of war is not only an obvious fact, but also occasionally vividly illustrated in the *Iliad*. For a particularly gruesome sampling from one book of the *Iliad*, see Hom. *Il.* 345–50, 401–14, 739–43, and compare also the violence in Polyphemus' cave at *Od.* 9.288–93, 373f.

6. On wounded, dead, and abused bodies in Roman epic, see especially McClellan 2019 and Dinter 2019. On the artistic representation of the body in extreme conditions generally, see Miglietti 2003.

Figure 4. Saint Sebastian and a Bishop Saint. Oil on wood panel, attributed to the Master of the Virgo inter Virgines. 1480–1495. 30 1/8 x 15 11/16 in. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. 37.299.

unmake it. Whether caused by spears or arrows, in their artistic representation, the beautiful body's wounds do nothing so much as highlight the sensuous vitality of remainder of the body, which conveys its divine favor through its miraculous preservation. Priam's words do not omit the fact that a beautifully dead warrior lies wounded; they simply hold back from exploring the disfiguring, troubling, viscerally ugly image such deaths, in reality, often convey.

Even so, the physicality of the corpse plays a crucial role in its peculiar aesthetic power, no less than its formal quality. The fate of the old men in these passages is no less affecting than that of the youths. Although fifth-century Athenian tragedy routinely constructed its narratives around the suffering and death of warriors and kings familiar from hexameter mythic tradition, its presentation of the dead and dying bodies was, as we have seen, hardly beautiful. As an embodied art form, drama resists reduction of the corpse to a mere symbol. The material presence and persistence of actors and costumes counters such abstraction. The corpse, as theatrically realized onstage and ritually mourned onstage, serves a crucial function in the ethical and aesthetic reframing of traditional Greek myth that occurs in drama. Embodiment shapes aesthetics not only through audience response, but also through the very structure and medium of art.

This is not to say that the archaic poetic tradition ignores bodies altogether. Indeed, the body of the old man presented by Priam and Tyrtaeus is essential to the construction of the beautiful heroic death. What matters is that the body of the old man, presented as something of an ugly, anti-ideal, does not achieve a "formal unity" in death, but it anatomized and broken down, its parts singled out, each in turn, for emphasis and visualization.[7] Disturbingly, both examples present the corpse as an object of scavenging as well as spectacle, its dismemberment as carrion for dogs mirroring in its piecemeal poetic description. These passages reveal the body to be a locus not only of political and aesthetic struggle, but of conceptual disintegration as well.

In drawing and limiting their audiences' attention to beautified aspects of the heroic dead, Priam and Tyrtaeus present an ancient analogue to what Judith Butler, in theorizing our modern media environment, has called a "frame of war." Butler argues that to take in the human cost of war,

7. The color of the man's hair and beard, emphatically repeated in each passage, underscores the systemic effects of age upon his body.

including loss and pain measured on scales so overwhelming as to surpass emotional endurance, requires looking at violence through subtle but surreptitious representational windows or "frames" that render the suffering of others, if still unpalatable, at least psychological tolerable.[8] Where Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain*, sees a basic challenge to the verbal communication of individual pain, Butler observes a purposive cultural filter: "[T]he frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated."[9] Taking the "frame" not only as a visual but also a linguistic metaphor to guide her study, Butler meditates on various aspects of the concept and their interrelations:

> As we know, "to be framed" is a complex phrase in English. A picture is framed, but so too is a criminal (by the police), or an innocent person (by someone nefarious, often the police), so that to be framed is to be set up . . . the frame tends to function, even in a minimalist form, as an editorial embellishment of the image, if not a self-commentary on the history of the frame itself.[10]

Frames, as described by Butler, are so powerful as to be pernicious, affecting not only viewers' phenomenal perception, but reality itself. For Butler, it is through frames that we come to objectify (and dehumanize) others, including enemy combatants as well those we consider our own.

Applying Butler's "frames of war" to the archaic Greek world, we see in *Iliad* 22 how Priam "frames" the young warrior and thereby sets up his own son for death. Tyrtaeus, likewise, framing the front lines as a place of beauty, encourages not only death but war itself, a "set-up" that Wilfred Owen, quoting Horace, would famously call the "the old Lie."[11] Butler, and many others, would stipulate that there is a moral necessity to question and counter malicious frames, ancient and modern, but the "frame" itself is inescapable. Frames cannot be deconstructed; they may only be displaced.

Whatever their contemporary consequence, frames offer tremendous value for the cultural historian since, as Butler recognizes, frames not

8. Butler 2009, which the author offers as a response to Sontag 2001/1977 and 2003.

9. Butler 2009, 8.

10. Butler 2009, 8. On the overlapping conceptual and linguistic metaphors, see Lakoff and Johnson 2003/1980.

11. On Owen's poetry and life, both cut tragically short, see Cuthbertson 2014.

only present those images they limn and editorially embellish, but they also simultaneously reveal their own history and function. In attending to the various ancient Greek frames applied to the dead body in war, in peace, in foreign and domestic contexts, on stage, and in real life, one stands to gain a sense not only of the uniquely affective powers of the corpse across all of these contexts, but also its close interaction with the frame itself.

To view the theater as a cultural frame is, of course, nothing new. Thinkers and practitioners, from Aristophanes to Artaud, from Plato to Pirandello, have theorized and toyed with the borders of the art. Athenian tragedy's tendency to "set up" its characters (and audiences) to act, suffer, see, and be seen in certain generically determined ways may be observed in almost any play. And yet, unlike the modern media environment Butler critically traces in *Frames of War*, the various frames of Athenian tragedy are particularly well-attuned to the apprehension of injury and loss. Indeed, the frame of Greek tragedy typically inverts the function of Butler's frame of war, humanizing fictional characters, rendering masked and costumed actors' bodies not just as objects, but fellow subjects of intense pity and identification.

This final chapter seeks to consider the various "frames" within which the dead body was viewed in fifth-century Athens, tragedy among them. In chapter 5, the remarkable aesthetic power of the corpse and its fabric coverings revealed how vision, emotions, and materials might function together in close proximity. Here, we zoom out from these intimate, often private encounters to take in corpses as viewed, in public and en masse. The mimetic frame of Greek drama, although certainly relevant to the "paradox" of taking pleasure in painful sights, prototypically as that of corpses, is not the only frame that mediates the spectacle, and shapes affective response to, the dead body. From the ritual and social framing of the corpse in archaic and classical-era mortuary practice and historical narratives of Thucydides and Herodotus that reflected various cultural contexts and attitudes that informed engagement with the dead, one observes how frames inevitably mediate and structure humans' experience of the corpse. A selection of scenes from tragedy reveal how, by embedding such frames within the particular generic and mimetic frames of theater, dramatists could harness the affective and aesthetic power of the corpse and direct it toward various dramatic ends.

The Familiar Frame: The Corpse as Aesthetic Object and Practical Concern in Classical Greece

Students of classical art and literature inevitably approach the ancient world through the frame of mimetic representation. Though certain features distinguish fictional "representation" and historical "documentation," even the most documentary of texts (e.g., legal inscriptions, accounting papyri) participate in ideological systems that project and frame realities that lie beyond words themselves. Factual or fictional, texts signify and participate in an extended, connected symbolic world. By modern academic standards, classical-era prose writings often fall somewhere between the two poles of fiction and fact, using narrative to represent and structure information. Historians, orators, and philosophical writers record the aesthetic responses of Athenians, other Greeks, and (less reliably, perhaps, but no less significantly) members of other nations and cultures of the sixth through fourth centuries BCE to all sorts of stimuli, including corpses. As purely documentary in describing real and plausible events from the fifth and fourth centuries, these sources allow closer (and certainly more varied) access to the contemporary Greek attitudes toward dead bodies that informed the experience and aesthetics of corpses on the dramatic stage.

Ancient Greek funeral practices have received extended attention from historical anthropologists and literary critics alike, and the relevance of these traditions to tragedy has been extensively explored.[12] Without unduly repeating this important work, here we may briefly survey some of the salient aesthetic features of those Athenian funeral rituals which themselves provided a quasi-theatrical frame of the dead body in order to better understand the meaning and response to similar rituals as staged in drama.

Corpses received substantial visual, ritual, and aesthetic attention in classical Greece.[13] Dead bodies were a familiar and deeply affecting part

12. On ancient Greek funeral practice, see esp. Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 142–61; Alexiou 1974, 4–23; Vermeule 1979; Morris 1992. With respect to drama, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1995. On the persistence of certain aspects of ancient Greek lament into the modern era, see esp. Seremetakis 1991; Holst-Warhaft 1992; and Suter 2008. On the intersection of funeral and tragedy, see Rehm 1994.

13. Parker (1983, 45) notes that although we moderns are not entirely heedless of the fate of human bodies, modern art and literature generally exhibits less concern over the corpse.

of life that prompted a variety of human responses. The dead were objects of ritual care, practical engagement, and emotional attachment as much as they were prompts to psychological self-definition through abjection. Mortuary practice was not specialized among a few professionals. In every Greek home, family members, and women in particular, took active roles in preparing the body for its passage out of the world of the living.[14] In war, where death occurred in the open, men, too, saw to abbreviated forms of these last rites, as the exigencies of the situation might allow, or through formalized rituals at home, such as Athens' annual tradition of a public funeral oration.[15] Upon reaching adulthood, many Greeks would have come into close contact with bodies of the dead through various channels of interaction, both public and private. The physical handling of the dead represented only one, albeit the nearest, perspective from which bodies of the dead were encountered. Extended family members and the deceased's network of friends would come to pay last respects to the dead at the home, and bodies would be seen in their transit to burial, not in closed caskets, but openly on funeral biers.

As much as the dead body was an object of collective stewardship and ritual practice, it was also a focal point of community spectatorship. The open display of the corpse was essential to the two principal moments of the ancient Greek funerary process: the laying out of the body within the home, known as the *prothesis* or "wake," and the public procession that conveyed the body from home to burial site, the *ekphora*. During the archaic period it appears both events were outdoor spectacles that took place during daylight hours, presented before the community.[16] These extraordinary private rituals complemented the regular festivals of the civic calendar and were not only sources of mourning and collective expression of grief, but also celebrations of life and crucial moments in the formation of collective identity. The open display of the dead allowed mourners to share a final, embodied experience of the departed. Although the deceased's voice was silenced by death, the body could still be observed, a conduit of communion between living and dead. Constant visual contact with the corpse was not maintained simply for the emotional interests of the dearly beloved, however. The corpse's

The majority of information concerning funerary rituals comes from Athens, an evidentiary bias that in this case provides useful local context for fifth-century drama.

14. Alexiou 1974, 5.

15. On battlefield practice, see Parker 1983, 35; on the funeral oration, see Loraux 2006, Shear 2013 and Pritchard 2023.

16. Alexiou 1974, 6.

guarded presence in common, open space helped ensure nothing unseemly happened to the body between death and burial. Like an infant at the dawn of its life, the body of the recently deceased needed constant observation. The etymological connection between "wake" and "watch" in Germanic languages is a reminder, admittedly from another time and culture, that in the *prothesis* the dead body may be regarded as much for its own protection as for providing a focal point for the attention of others.[17] Within the spectacle of Greek funerary practice, the watchful eyes of the bereaved served their own personal interests as well as those that might be attributed to the deceased.

A similarly double motivation informs the cosmetic treatment of the body, where rituals of ablution and decoration materially preserve and aesthetically frame the cadaver in order to honor the dead through spectatorship. Sight of the corpse was controlled, although hardly concealed, through processes that made the body visually accessible and religiously acceptable. Specifically, in preparation for the *prothesis*, the body was cleaned, anointed, and surrounded on its bier with aromatic herbs and the beautiful evergreen leaves.[18] Fresh robes were placed over the prepared body; the face was left uncovered, however, but was crowned with a garland as a marker of ritual purity and purpose.[19] Although the face was a particular focal point, the body was not obscured in the Greek funeral. During the *ekphora*, in the archaic period at any rate, the body was borne to the funeral site prominently displayed on a wagon followed by an entourage of mourners, either familial or, in the case of the wealthy or important, hired keeners and armed guards to ensure safe transit. As a result, at every step of the ceremony onlookers and participants encountered a visually present corpse.

Legislation was introduced in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE to limit the expense and spectacle of burial throughout Greece, particularly curtailing the public *ekphora*.[20] A Solonian restriction, introduced during the beginning of the sixth century, demanded that the procession to the burial site occur before dawn, evidently to limit public spectatorship and the gathering of large crowds. Such legislation suggests political anxieties over the

17. *OED*, 2nd *s.v.* wake, *n.*, itself cognate with Latin *vigil*. Alexiou (1974, 5) notes that the wake was a "time of a danger . . . when a *daimon* appointed to look after each man during his lifetime endeavoured to lead away his soul."

18. Alexiou 1974, 5.

19. Alexiou 1974, 7.

20. In addition to the works cited above on ancient Greek funeral practice, Garland (1989) provides a brief summary of the *ekphora*.

public presentation and celebration of the corpse which may have affected the meaning of similar presentations within the dramatic frame. As part of the larger Solonian project of reforms, one may imagine that sumptuary laws were meant to address the political effects of economic inequality, constraining the power of wealth over this crucial rite of passage. But the change would have had aesthetic and cultural spillover as well. Limited spectatorship, not only of the procession's ostentatious apparatus, but of the body itself, was one concrete result.[21] Over time, as funerals became increasingly private affairs, Athenians' exposure to the bodies of the dead, beyond the circle of the family, would have diminished. Even so, fifth-century Athenian audiences were far more accustomed to the direct sight of the dead than many inhabitants of our modern world.

In concluding this discussion of classical-era Athenian funerary practice, some points of broader significance may be made. The handling of cadavers in real life was a tactile, visual, and odiferous experience that most Greeks would have had cause to go through on a number of occasions. The bodies of those who died at home were not hidden or transferred to professional care, but handled, beautified, and viewed by their family members. Dressed up and "staged," not entirely unlike dramatic actors, corpses were objects of spectacle in real life as in the theater. The theatricality of domestic mortuary ritual would have both informed and been reflected in tragic spectacles that, in a post-Solonian world in which *ekphorai* were no longer public, would serve as a shared, polis-wide ritual of mourning. Although the ontological and affective framing of dramatic corpses was far different from those experienced personally by Athenian audiences, the presentation of corpses on stage united theatergoers in the processes and practices of grief.

Aesthetics of Death, at Home and Abroad, in Thucydides' *History*

The *prothesis* and *ekphora* are relevant to the handling of Greek dead who die at home, but they have little bearing on the more exceptional circumstances of death encountered in plague, war, or foreign nations. The fifth-century historical accounts of Thucydides and Herodotus record little about the standard mortuary practice of their times. But they do offer accounts of exceptional corpses, indicating cultural anxieties over the possible fate of the corpse. Between them, Thucydides and Herodotus tell a number of tales

21. See Parker 1983, 36, citing Dem. 43.62.

of horror and pollution with mythical analogues: of corpses left unburied or disinterred, of bodies disfigured by disease, and cadavers allowed to pollute temples. Herodotus, among his many inquiries into exotic peoples and practices, also speaks of the beauty of dead bodies miraculously preserved or heroically presented on the fifth-century battlefield. These accounts of cadavers in extreme conditions do not document historical practice so much as project an image of the corpse as it might appear in the Greek imaginary—outside of, but perhaps influenced by, the portrayal of corpses in tragedy and other art.

Let us start with Thucydides, whose work is generally not characterized by an ekphrastic or highly visual prose style. It is only in relating the atrocities of the plague year in Athens and the Sicilian military disaster that the historian makes a particularly visual spectacle of his subject matter. Much was made of the vividness (*enargeia*) and emotional power (*pathos*) of such scenes in antiquity, which were praised for creating emotions in the reader similar to the reactions of those who took part in the events themselves.[22] In a remarkable passage, Plutarch compares the historian to a painter:

> . . . ὁ Σιμωνίδης τὴν μὲν ζωγραφίαν ποίησιν σιωπῶσαν προσαγορεύει, τὴν δὲ ποίησιν ζωγραφίαν λαλοῦσαν. ἃς γὰρ οἱ ζωγράφοι πράξεις ὡς γινομένας δεικνύουσι, ταύτας οἱ λόγοι γεγενημένας διηγοῦνται καὶ συγγράφουσιν. εἰ δ' οἱ μὲν χρώμασι καὶ σχήμασιν οἱ δ' ὀνόμασι καὶ λέξεσι ταὐτὰ δηλοῦσιν, ὕλῃ καὶ τρόποις μιμήσεως διαφέρουσι, τέλος δ' ἀμφοτέροις ἓν ὑπόκειται, καὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν κράτιστος ὁ τὴν διήγησιν ὥσπερ γραφὴν πάθεσι καὶ προσώποις εἰδωλοποιήσας. ὁ γοῦν Θουκυδίδης ἀεὶ τῷ λόγῳ πρὸς ταύτην ἁμιλλᾶται τὴν ἐνάργειαν, οἷον θεατὴν ποιῆσαι τὸν ἀκροατὴν καὶ τὰ γινόμενα περὶ τοὺς ὁρῶντας ἐκπληκτικὰ καὶ ταρακτικὰ πάθη τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσιν ἐνεργάσασθαι λιχνευόμενος.
>
> Simonides calls painting silent poetry, and poetry speaking painting. For the actions that painters portray as they are happening, history relates and writes these down when they have been done. And what one portrays in colors and shapes, the other tells in words and sentences; but they differ in the means and manner of imitation. However, both have the same goal in mind, and the best historian is the

22. [Longinus] *Subl.* 38.3.

> one who can make the most fantastic portrayal of both persons and passions. Therefore Thucydides always pushes toward this vividness (*enargeia*), to make the hearer a spectator (*theatēs*), and to fill his readers with the same passions and agitations as the emotions in those who beheld the causes of those effects.[23]

In connecting vision (*horan*) to emotional passions and agitations (*ekplēktika kai taraktika pathē*), Plutarch recognizes the affective nature of sight, not simply its formal aspects. In emphasizing emotion, Plutarch presents Thucydides as a prose writer whose verbal accounts attain a visual vividness that rivals not just painting (*zōgraphia*), but drama: his use of the term "spectator," *theatēs*, although appropriate to any visual context, may recall theatrical spectatorship in particular.[24] Let us follow Plutarch in taking Thucydides as a control against which we may test the tragic representation of the corpse and its aesthetics.

In describing the plague in Athens of 430 BCE at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides lists the disease's various symptoms in quasi-medical detail. Although the historian claims to share his firsthand account for the benefit of those who might be afflicted by the disease in the future, Thucydides presents the plague in a manner liable to elicit an emotional rather than a strictly medical or rational response.[25] One of the most horrific aspects of the plague is the way it affects the bodies of those who succumb to the illness; again, we see in the anatomization of the body, and a descriptive focus on its local deformities, as a way to emphasize the uglier physicalities of human life. The disfiguring effects of the plague are described one by one: the general inflammation and ulceration of the skin, as well as the loss of function of specific and sensitive organs, including the genitals, fingers, toes, and eyes.[26] The anatomical approach of considering the body one part at a time, as we shall later see, is a staple of tragic lament over the body.

The anatomical metaphor suggests a scientific approach, but it is not without aesthetic consequences. Likewise, Polybius, in his histories of a much later date, uses the medical, limb-by-limb inspection of a once beau-

23. Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 347a (§3).

24. *LSJ s.v.* θεατής.

25. Thuc. 2.48.3. On Thucyidides' *autopsy* of the scene and its relationship to *opsis*, see Walker 1993, 372f. Below the smooth surface of Thucydides' famous claim that he writes a work for all time (*ktēma eis aei*, 1.22.4), one should imagine that the historian is sensitive to the work's immediate reception, and its own various audience, as well.

26. These horrors are described at Thuc. 2.49.7–9.

tiful body as a metaphor for the historian's work, the notion likely echoing Aristotle's work on the parts of animals.[27] From a medical perspective, the historian marks that the underlying form (*eidos*) of the disease is beyond reason (*logos*), but the same expression could signify an unspeakably horrible image.[28] Thucydides indicates that what most clearly showed (*edēlōse malista*) the plague's extraordinary nature was the carrion animals' aversion to the unburied corpses. This observation aligns the Athenian plague with mythical concerns over the mutilation of the corpse familiar from epic and tragedy. Likewise, deaths occurring within sacred precincts, another typically "fictional" horror, mark the depth of the Athenians' despair.[29] Thucydides' concern with these aspects of the dead may reflect contemporary observations, but it also underscores the mythic proportions and tragic resonances of the plague in the way it affected and framed corpses for all sorts of audiences.

Significantly unlike tragedy, however, in his lengthy description of the plague Thucydides refrains from mentioning the Athenians' emotional or aesthetic response to the sight of corpses. He notes, however, that the sight of the men dying indiscriminately inspired the pragmatic response of pursuing pleasure among those for whom life and health still remained.[30] It is also remarkable that, as Athens in Thucydides' description becomes a charnel house, not once is a ritual of lament mentioned. That such formal rituals were abandoned in the face of the public health emergency can be inferred from the presence of carrion animals, but the cries of private mourning must have been heard, nevertheless. Nor can it be said that due to the exigencies of the plague, that laments simply did not happen, since their traces are clearly left in the text.[31] But the scenes of mourning, fundamental to tragic stagecraft, have no place in Thucydidean narrative.

With practical prose and a stiff upper lip, Thucydides passes over the Athenians' pain and horror at the sight of the cadavers. Instead, he uses the mistreatment of the dead body, rather than the spectacle it presents, to mark the depth of the Athenians' impiety and amorality under the extreme

27. Polyb. 1.4.7; cf. Arist. *Part. an.* 645a, discussed in the first chapter.

28. Thuc. 2.50.1.

29. Thuc. 2.52.3. See Parker 1983, 33 n. 5.

30. Two references to the sight of the plague occur in Thuc. 2.52. First, Athenians are described as "witnessing the sudden change in the fortunes of their neighbors" and "seeing all in common, both the righteous and unrighteous, dying in equal measure." Both discouraging sights trigger licentious responses among the populace.

31. Attempts at burial and stolen funeral pyres are described at Thuc. 2.52.4.

duress of the plague. This is not to claim, against Plutarch, that Thucydides does not create a vivid portrayal in his description of the plague's effects. The historian simply does not model aesthetic responses to sights within his narrative. His engagement with the plague is far different from that of the tragedians who, although they refrain from overt reference to Athenian circumstances, nevertheless reveal the cultural trauma of the event.

In general, Thucydides' history rarely includes internal audiences who offer emotional or aesthetic responses to the many speeches and events that characterize the historian's work. Whereas tragedy relays the ugliness of the dead to the audience by means of onstage character response, Thucydides conveys the horrors of the plague through direct narration. The detail (if not the accuracy) of the historian's representation is matched in some dramatic texts, but what sets tragedy apart from history in creating such descriptions is the mediating role of characters' "sight" and verbal relay.[32] This narrative framing affects not only the image presented to the audience, but the emotional and aesthetic response as well.

In contrast with his "objective" account of the plague, Thucydides' narration of the Athenian naval disaster in Sicily in 413 BCE takes the emotional impact of corpses very much into account. Following a number of strategic errors, the Athenian generals Demosthenes and Nicias are forced to lead their army in retreat through lands where they had recently fought. The retreat of Athens' troops is a terrible (*deinos*) experience in both practical and sensory terms. The spectacle of unburied corpses is painful (*algeinos*) to the sight and mind (*opsis* . . . *gnōmē*) of each soldier.

> δεινὸν οὖν ἦν οὐ καθ' ἓν μόνον τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅτι τάς τε ναῦς ἀπολωλεκότες πάσας ἀπεχώρουν καὶ ἀντὶ μεγάλης ἐλπίδος καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἡ πόλις κινδυνεύοντες, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀπολείψει τοῦ στρατοπέδου ξυνέβαινε τῇ τε ὄψει ἑκάστῳ ἀλγεινὰ καὶ τῇ γνώμῃ αἰσθέσθαι. τῶν τε γὰρ νεκρῶν ἀτάφων ὄντων, ὁπότε τις ἴδοι τινὰ τῶν ἐπιτηδείων κείμενον, ἐς λύπην μετὰ φόβου καθίστατο, καὶ οἱ ζῶντες καταλειπόμενοι τραυματίαι τε καὶ ἀσθενεῖς πολὺ τῶν τεθνεώτων τοῖς ζῶσι λυπηρότεροι ἦσαν καὶ τῶν ἀπολωλότων ἀθλιώτεροι.
>
> It was terrible, not only on account of the circumstances, since they [*sc.* the Athenians] were departing after having lost all their ships,

32. Mitchell-Boyask 2008, 45–55, 67–104.

> and in place of high hopes both they themselves and their city were threatened—but it was also terrible since, in leaving the camp, they came across things that were extremely painful for every eye and heart to perceive (*aisthesthai*). For the corpses laid unburied, and whenever someone would recognize a friend among them, he would shudder with pain and fear. And those who were being left behind alive, wounded or weak, were far more grievous to those leaving than the dead, and more wretched than those who had perished.[33]

This passage is as close as Thucydides comes in his history to treating the dead as emotionally potent visual objects; it is perhaps not surprising that, in doing so, the historian invokes the vocabulary and aesthetic framework of tragedy. His focus on pain (*algeinos*) and perception (*aisthesthai*) mark the affective spectacle encountered by the soldiers in defeat, which was particularly powerfully attached to the bodies of fallen soldiers, and acutely actualized at the moment of recognition. Thucydides highlights two modes of perception, *opsis* and *gnōmē*, calling attention to the blended visual and mental reaction, of both sense and sensibility, required to fully process the horror of this wartime spectacle. His text also highlights two emotions, pain and fear (*lupē* and *phobos*), a phrase that anticipates Aristotle's isolation of "pity and fear" (*eleos* and *phobos*) as the characteristic emotions of tragedy. It may be that pity is only possible from a position of security, a luxury the retreating Athenian soldiers are not afforded.

Yet even here, the bodies are not a source of interest in and of themselves. The corpses on the battlefield symbolize the Athenian defeat of the mission and abandonment of friends and compatriots. The bodies are described as painful, not ugly, to see: in addition to the word *algeinos*, noted above, the text includes both *lupē* and *lupēroteros*. The field of dead is difficult for the mind (*gnōmē*) as well as the eye (*opsis*) to bear. From comparative evidence from modern warfare, one might imagine that the sight causes pangs of survivors' guilt among the retreating Athenians whom necessity compels to leave their compatriots' bodies unburied, against strong moral and social custom.[34] It is particularly telling that these painful feelings become even more grievous when looking upon the abandoned living than upon the dead. It is not the objective disfigurement of the bodies so much as the

33. Thuc. 7.75.2–3.

34. For a moving comparative study of the guilt of abandonment felt in Homeric epic and the American Vietnam War, see Shay 1994, 69–72.

destruction of the campaign and moral bonds of camaraderie that makes the retreat a terror for the Athenian soldiers and subsequent audiences.

In this passage, we get a sense of what common elements tragedy might look like, not only outside of the mimetic frame of poetry or drama, but also beyond the comforting religious framework of ritual. The battlefield death is traced in Thucydides' history not through an objective description of the bodies themselves (as he would anatomize the victims of the plague), but rather in the moral and circumstantial frame of a failed military expedition. It is, like the frame of tragedy, at once pessimistic and pacifistic.

In sum, Thucydides, writing in the same period in which many of our surviving dramas were composed, and recording contemporary events, demonstrates that the dead body was not invariably treated as an object of visual interest. Others' aesthetic response to corpses is never shown, but Plutarch's praise of Thucydidean *enargeia* is evidence that the historian's audience might experience visceral responses of their own. Thucydides does not always model aesthetic or emotional responses to the ugly scenes he documents and portrays; he often relies, instead, on the description itself, in its vividness, to elicit an emotional response. In this stylistic sense, despite the grievous tales of plague or the aftermath of military defeat (both frequent subjects of tragic and collective lament), Thucydides' work is presented in a manner far from that of the tragedians. The different media of representation between the two works help explain, in part, the difference: Thucydides can offer no material object before the eyes of his readers as a focal point of visual attention. He must, in Plutarch's words, like a painter or a tragic messenger portraying an offstage event, depict a scene as if from scratch.

Exotic Corpses and Foreign Frames in Herodotus' *Histories*, Books 2 and 3

The stylistic boundary between Herodotean history and tragedy is often more blurred than that between the tragedians and Thucydides. Although in its focus on the geopolitical rise of the Persian Empire and its wars with Greece, Herodotus' *Histories* treats earlier subject matter than Thucydides, its composition is roughly contemporary with the majority of extant Greek tragedy, and, while Herodotus was not Athenian by birth, he spent much time in Athens and among Athenians, who were evidently quite familiar

with his work.[35] It has been noted that Herodotus at times writes a distinctly "tragic" history, using prophecy, *hamartia*, and tragedy's other stock-in-trade devices to structure his own tales.[36] The death of Atys in the so-called "Lydian Logos" of book 1, in which the corpse of Croesus' son is brought home to the palace, as if back onto the stage, is a prime example of what seems a distinctly tragic narrative. While thematic and structural entanglement between the *Histories* and tragedy complicates the use of Herodotus as a "neutral" voice against which to compare specifically tragic aesthetics, nevertheless the historian's repeated visual objectification of the corpse is crucial textual evidence from the fifth century and is directly relevant to the tragic reception of the cadaver on stage.

As an *Ur*-ethnographer, Herodotus exhibits an interest in human remains throughout his work.[37] Herodotus is particularly attentive to practices from remote parts of his world that were seemingly most at odds with Greek sensibilities, shocking his audience with tales of cannibalism and other peculiar mortuary practices.[38] Herodotus approaches one nation of "man-eating" *anthropophagi*, the Callatiae, with a remarkable sense of cultural relativism. The historian recounts that the Persian king Darius, acting himself as a sort of cultural anthropologist or intermediary (not unlike Herodotus), asked the Greeks in his court at what price they would eat their deceased fathers, to which the appalled Greeks responded that no price was high enough to commit such a highly polluting act. Darius then asked representatives from the Indian nation of Callatiae at what price they would burn (rather than eat) their fathers, to which they cried aloud in disgust.[39] This example is significant within Herodotus' narrative on several levels.

35. Dicaeopolis' "great speech" in *Acharnians*, vv. 524ff., produced in 425 BCE, pointedly alludes to early chapters from first book of Herodotus' *Histories*, See Olson 2002: liii–liv and 209 *ad* 524–29. Herodotus makes reference to events in the 420s, and was therefore still composing his work after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. On his popularity in Athens, see Hartog 1988, 275. The relevant evidence for Attic drama's continued engagement with Herodotus is marshaled in Fornara 1971; cf. Sansone 1985.

36. Hdt. 1.34–7. See Chiasson 2003 and Sheffield 1972.

37. Parker 1983, 32, observes that "Almost any book of exotic travels, any ethnographic study will tell of . . . the monstrous impurity of the corpse": cf. Gutiérrez 2019.

38. Cf. the Massegetae, Padaei, and Issedones, discussed respectively at Hdt. 1.216, 3.99, and 4.26. On cannibalism and its invocation when exoticizing and denigrating other cultures, see Sagan 1974, Murphy and Mallory 2000, Avramescu 2009.

39. Hdt. 3.38.3f. For Herodotus, the tale confirms the Pindaric apothegm (fr. 169a Maehler), "culture is king of all."

Most obviously, it recalls a thematic leitmotif of the *Histories*, a formulation borrowed from Pindar, that "culture is king." But it also reveals, more specifically, the polarized responses and conceptions of the human corpse, an object of potent but sometimes contradictory attraction and repulsion. To eat the corpse, as practiced among the Callatiae, is to incorporate it into one's own body perpetually, a process of unparalleled material intimacy. On the other hand, the Greek practice of purifying and atomizing the body through fire and thus reducing it to bones is a rejection, and apparent destruction, of matter.[40] While Herodotus' tale does not cast doubt upon the correctness of Greek modes of funeral practice, it situates them amidst other possible solutions to the problem of the dead body.[41]

The stories of cannibalism in Herodotus' *Histories* prompt three observations. Greeks of the fifth century BCE had (i) emotional and religious investment in their own mortuary practices, (ii) a nebulous, and often fanciful, knowledge of competing or contradictory foreign practices and, most importantly for our purposes, (iii) a fascination with those treatments of the dead that differed most widely from Greek custom. Transgressive treatment of cadavers represented a Herodotean *thōma*, a wonder worthy of hearing or, as the word's etymology suggests, worthy of sight. Functionally, the cannibalistic processes of these exoticized nations replace or obviate Greek funerary practice. Greeks of the classical period either hid the body from sight through burial or purified the corpse through cremation, rendering the bones that remained stable, that is, nonputrescent. Formally, cremation made the bones sufficiently unlike the former appearance of the body to be considered not as a *de*-formation of the body, but as a full *trans*-formation of the cadaver. Bones are not degraded, but purified by fire. Despite their differences, Greek and cannibalistic practices share the common goal of removing the sight of the decaying body from view. Herodotus' account leaves space for this to be common ground.

In Egypt, however, Herodotus recounts miraculous tales of the preservation and display of the dead in which the body is kept integral and is maintained on display or accessible to a certain few. In Ethiopia, for example, the dead are prominently exhibited, and cadavers are mummified, painted, and placed into a sealed, transparent crystal container. The historian describes

40. Darius overlooks inhumation, not uncommon among Greeks at the time, but which offers a less pointed contrast. See Morris 1992.

41. Lukes (2003, 5) observes, "the reader's view is likely to be similarly tied to conscious or unacknowledged assumptions about how the dead should be honoured."

the involved process, which is remarkably akin to a modern museum display (Hdt. 3.24):

> μετὰ δὲ ταύτην τελευταίας ἐθεήσαντο τὰς θήκας αὐτῶν, αἳ λέγονται σκευάζεσθαι ἐξ ὑάλου τρόπῳ τοιῷδε. ἐπεὰν τὸν νεκρὸν ἰσχνήνωσι, εἴτε δὴ κατά περ Αἰγύπτιοι εἴτε ἄλλως κως, γυψώσαντες ἅπαντα αὐτὸν γραφῇ κοσμέουσι, ἐξομοιοῦντες τὸ εἶδος ἐς τὸ δυνατόν, ἔπειτα δέ οἱ περιιστᾶσι στήλην ἐξ ὑάλου πεποιημένην κοίλην (ἡ δέ σφι πολλὴ καὶ εὐεργὸς ὀρύσσεται). ἐν μέσῃ δὲ τῇ στήλῃ ἐνεὼν διαφαίνεται ὁ νέκυς, οὔτε ὀδμὴν οὐδεμίαν ἄχαριν παρεχόμενος οὔτε ἄλλο ἀεικὲς οὐδέν· καὶ ἔχει πάντα φανερὰ ὁμοίως αὐτῷ τῷ νέκυϊ. ἐνιαυτὸν μὲν δὴ ἔχουσι τὴν στήλην ἐν τοῖσι οἰκίοισι οἱ μάλιστα προσήκοντες πάντων τε ἀπαρχόμενοι καὶ θυσίας οἱ προσάγοντες· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐκκομίσαντες ἱστᾶσι περὶ τὴν πόλιν.
>
> And after that [the embassy] went to see the funeral cases (*thēkas*) of them [*sc*. the Ethiopians], which are said to be made out of crystal in the following manner: When [the Ethiopians] cause the corpse to shrink, either as the Egyptians do or in some other way, they apply gypsum all over and embellish (*kosmeousi*) the mummy with painting, rendering the sight as closely as possible (*exomoiountes to eidos*; *sc*. to the living person), then they stand it up within a vertical column (*stēlē*) of crystal which they hollow out, for they have a lot of crystal and easily mine it. Being in the middle of the column the corpse is plainly visible; neither is there any unpleasant smell nor any other unseemly thing, and everything can be as distinctly seen as if looking upon the corpse itself. For a year the columns are kept in the homes of the nearest relatives who offer first fruits and conduct sacrifices. Then, they carry them to the edge of the city and stand them up.

For Herodotus, the Ethiopian mortuary practice is a wonder worth close consideration. Spectators look, as if directly, upon the perfectly preserved body of the beloved in his or her tomb. The body is encased (in a *thēkē*), and therefore ritually and physically contained, and yet visible to all. Herodotus compares looking at the case to looking at the corpse itself (*autōi tōi nekuï*), as the painted mummy dissolves the mimetic boundaries between the dead body and its artistic representation. The corpse, simultaneous artistic canvas

and subject, becomes a self-representational *eikōn*. And yet, through the use of hollowed out crystal frame, Ethiopian practice has found a way to make the corpse not at all "unseemly" (*aeikes ouden*), mitigating the aesthetic risks that attend the regular material processes of decay and disintegration. The final act of this mortuary process, which involves sacrificial offerings and the transportation of the body to the edge of the city, offers clearer parallels to the Greek practices of *prothesis* and *ekphora*. What the wondrous Ethiopian practice holds out for Herodotus' Greek audience is the quasi-miraculous ability to maintain and commune with the dead for an extended period, to be in their visual and embodied presence, during a year-long mourning period. It offers a practical solution to the affective Greek problem of an expedited mourning practice dictated by the biological decomposition of the body. Fundamentally, it recognizes the natural human desire to look at and linger among the dead, as well as the social and structural constraints on a macabre desire that can slip subtly into problematic territory.

The Ethiopian solution reflects a persistent cultural practice of representation evident in ancient Greek funeral art, examples of which the use of *kouroi/korai* as grave markers in the sixth century as well as the *Totenmahl* commonly depicted on later stone grave reliefs, which present an ersatz image of the deceased at a funeral feast. In such "funeral portraits," broadly speaking, the appearance of the dead is kept alive and beautiful, at least in memory, through the graven or painted image.[42] In a blend of Greek and North African traditions, anthropoid sarcophagi of the fourth century manufactured in the Levant showed lifelike faces chiseled into a stone case, which though mostly rectangular, had smooth contours that represented the shape of the body contained within.[43] This, too, reflects the urge to compress and conflate the body (Greek *sōma*) with its funerary representation (*sēma*). What seems an enduring human drive to memorialize the dead

42. Painted mummy portraits from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt are a well-studied later comparandum: see Riggs 2002, 2005.

43. Kurtz and Boardman, 1971, 271. The mixture of Greek and Egyptian funerary traditions were also amalgamated in the handling of Alexander the Great's corpse, which is recorded as being embalmed and placed in a golden anthropoid sarcophagus before being later transferred into a crystal (*hualinē*) tomb: cf. Strabo 17.1.8 p. C 794. If the crystal sarcophagus was transparent and not simply decorative, this might explain why the tomb itself was called "The Body of Alexander," a conflation of architectural and corporeal material. Jones' (1932, 34ff.) provides an overview of the issue in the footnotes; Jacoby (1903) gives a historical overview of Alexander's gradual interment. Cf. Jeremy Bentham's "auto-icon" on display at University College London.

using the body itself is recorded early among Herodotus' Ethiopians, whose mortuary practice renders moot the distinction between the corpse and its mimetic copy by preserving an incorruptibly beautiful body for all to see.

The blurred distinctions in the case of the Ethiopian dead between subject and object, reality and mimesis, depend explicitly upon the accuracy of their representation: *exomoiountes to eidos*. This recalls the discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the introduction, where the philosopher emphasized that the accuracy of depictions of ugly objects was important to the pleasure taken in the mimesis *tas eikonas malista ēkribōmenas*.[44] The philosopher's interest in the representation of detail is apparently anticipated, or perhaps even influenced, by that of the historian. Despite Herodotus' remark concerning the artists' precision, however, one might expect beautifying treatment in the Ethiopians' commemoration of their dead.[45] The painted mummies are, after all, neither illustrations from an anatomical textbook nor representations of tragic heroes on stage, where the goals of representation are respectively accuracy or the stirring of emotions.

In Herodotus' other account of corpses in North Africa, it is not the presentation of the corpse, but its aberrant viewership, that commands attention. While on campaign in Egypt, the mad Persian king Cambyses develops an appetite for unearthing bodies from ancient tombs for inspection. It is significant that, like tragic narratives involving madness, dead bodies and peculiar viewing practice are combined. In the case of Cambyses, however, his engagement with corpses is mostly nonviolent, but transgresses many other local norms. This mania for inspecting the dead is listed first in a series of religious and aesthetic transgressions (Hdt. 3.37):

> ὁ μὲν δὴ τοιαῦτα πολλὰ ἐς Πέρσας τε καὶ τοὺς συμμάχους ἐξεμαίνετο, μένων ἐν Μέμφι καὶ θήκας τε παλαιὰς ἀνοίγων καὶ σκεπτόμενος τοὺς νεκρούς. ὡς δὲ δὴ καὶ ἐς τοῦ Ἡφαίστου τὸ ἱρὸν ἦλθε καὶ πολλὰ τῷ ἀγάλματι κατεγέλασε . . . πυγμαίου ἀνδρὸς μίμησίς ἐστι. ἐσῆλθε δὲ καὶ ἐς τῶν Καβείρων τὸ ἱρόν, ἐς τὸ οὐ θεμιτόν ἐστι ἐσιέναι ἄλλον γε ἢ τὸν ἱρέα· ταῦτα δὲ τὰ ἀγάλματα καὶ ἐνέπρησε πολλὰ κατασκώψας. ἔστι δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ὅμοια τοῖσι τοῦ Ἡφαίστου· τούτου δέ σφεας παῖδας λέγουσι εἶναι.

44. Arist. *Poet.* 1448b9–12. See also the discussion in the introduction.

45. Aristotle specifies that the good dramatist should be like the good portrait artist, improving their subject's defects. Arist. *Poet.* 1454b8–11.

> And in all the following ways he [Cambyses] went mad against the Persians and his allies: during his stay in Memphis, he broke open ancient coffins and examined their corpses. And he even entered the temple of Hephaestus and jeered at the image of the statue . . . which has the form of a pygmy. He also entered the temple of the Cabeiri, into which no one except a priest is allowed to enter: there he burned the statues and made much fun of them. For they are like those of Hephaestus, and people say that they are his sons.

In his mania, Cambyses models neither proper behavior nor aesthetic sensibility in a foreign land.[46] But to Herodotus' Greek audience, at any rate, the tyrant's desires are not beyond common understanding, only beyond common decency. Cambyses' impulse to laugh at the pygmy representations of Hephaestus may have been shared by many Greeks, culturally conditioned to laugh at pygmies in myth and visual art.[47] Hephaestus too, a divinity marked out for comedic treatment because of his disability, is an object of Olympian laughter on a number of occasions.[48] In the eyes of Herodotus' contemporary Greeks, Cambyses' impious behavior in the temples might seem to be an unchecked obsession with the humorous fulfillment of fantasy not far afield from Aristophanic comedy.[49] It is not his sense of humor but his unrestrained religious indiscretion that sets Cambyses' mockery apart from Herodotus' Greek audience.[50] Uniting his interests, however, is a profane engagement with sacred objects that are human in form. Linking corpses and divine icons, laughter and macabre spectatorship, Cambyses' mania reveals that formally similar and embodied figures require and deserve different treatment in different contexts.

If his jeers at Hephaestus share certain qualities with the mockery of Athenian Old Comedy and traditions of Greek visual humor, Cambyses' eagerness for inspecting corpses might, at first glance, seem tragic. Unlike

46. On the characterization of Cambyses relative to tragic models, see Baragwanath 2015, 20–21. On the madness of Cambyses, see Munson 1991.

47. On humorous representations of pygmies in Greek art, see Dasen 1993; Mitchell 2009, 34; and Walsh 2009, 48–58. On grotesque bodies from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt and their connection to earlier local practices, see Meintani 2022.

48. Hom. *Il.* 1.599f; *Od.* 8.256–366. See Garland 1995, 253–56.

49. One might imagine a drunken and rowdy Philocleon (cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 1326–1515) committing similar offenses while on holiday.

50. Mitchell (2009, 5) takes Cambyses as a cautionary tale of aesthetic misunderstanding stemming from cultural bias and ignorance.

the Egyptian religious icons, toward which Cambyses adopts an attitude of mockery, the despot's emotional or aesthetic reaction to the corpses is left undeveloped by Herodotus. It is unclear whether Cambyses found the cadavers ugly or beautiful, or whether his impulsive drive to see them was motivated, or simply enabled, by his madness. What is clear, at any rate, is that the tyrant's desire to look at the bodies was more than passing. Cambyses' perverted interest exemplifies a nonetheless recognizable aesthetic response to the unique spectacle of the dead. Having broken open the tombs, presumably at some personal effort and at the expense of the goodwill of the local inhabitants, the Persian ruler gazes carefully (*skeptomenos*) upon the bodies, a word that conveys a sense of visual as well as intellectual interest.[51]

In offering accounts of exotic practices and exceptional instances of viewership, Herodotus negatively frames relations with the corpse as normatively practiced by Greeks. The funeral practices of the Callatiae reveal that while culturally appropriate treatment of the dead is of paramount concern across cultures, the proper form of this ritual engagement can be divergent in the exteme. This, in itself, is analogous to the aesthetic spectacle of the dead body within traditional Greek culture, where the corpse is always aesthetically marked, but becomes powerfully beautiful or ugly depending upon context and framing. In turning from Near Eastern examples to those from North Africa, Herodotus highlights, in particular, the pains to which individuals and cultures go to see, inspect, and be among dead bodies. The Ethiopian practice of exhibiting their mummified dead through wondrous means suggests a cross-cultural interest to maintain ties with the dead; not unlike the anthropophagic Callatiae, the Ethiopians have found ways to materially incorporate the bodies of loved ones in their lives through a burial practice that fuses body (*sōma*) and representation (*sēma*), a union that is ever only aspirational in Greek funerary art.[52] Finally, Cambyses' singular interest in viewing corpses and other sacred bodies in Egypt exposes the transgressive potential of regarding the dead outside of proper, culturally established frameworks. Although his sacrilegious actions may have been interpreted as inexcusable, a clear sign of his madness, Cambyses' interest in inspecting and communing with the dead represents a common,

51. The only other occurrence of σκεπτόμενος in Herodotus describes Carthaginian traders examining the quality of gold, suggesting a close and extended view: LSJ *s.v.* σκέπτομαι I.a.

52. Rathnam 2018.

cross-cultural urge. As with Darius' comparison between the Greeks and the Calliatiae, Herodotus routinely invokes examples of foreign "otherness" to establish and clarify Greek identity and values. And yet it is difficult to conclude from this small, vivid, and varied set of examples how fifth-century Greeks themselves framed their experiences and emotions when looking upon the dead. How did they perceive the corpse aesthetically and emotionally: with pain or pleasure? Books 2 and 3 of Herodotus' *Histories* do not provide answers to these questions, but they do frame the aesthetic experience of closely viewing dead bodies as culturally significant, religiously and emotionally powerful, and the product of local cultural practices and norms. Herodotus' narratives reflexively raise the question of how non-Greeks might have written about the curious spectacles of the dead presented on the Athenian stage.

The Spectacle of an Exotic Corpse in Greece: The Presentation of Masistius in *Histories*, Book 9

One last example from Herodotus, taken from the final book of his *Histories*, presents a decidedly Greek response to seeing a spectacular corpse. Herodotus provides a scene unlike any other described in classical-era prose, recording how, in the Battle of Plataea (479 BCE) that concluded the second Greco-Persian Wars, Greek hoplites rushed en masse to see the corpse of the fallen Persian general, Masistius. The story of the army's impetuous rush is as follows (Hdt. 9.25.1):

> οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνες . . . καὶ πρῶτα μὲν ἐς ἅμαξαν ἐσθέντες τὸν νεκρὸν παρὰ τὰς τάξις ἐκόμιζον· ὁ δὴ νεκρὸς ἦν θέης ἄξιος μεγάθεος εἵνεκα καὶ κάλλεος· τῶν δὲ εἵνεκα καὶ [ταῦτα ἐποίευν·] ἐκλείποντες τὰς τάξις ἐφοίτων θεησόμενοι Μασίστιον.
>
> The Greeks . . . first put [Masistius'] corpse on a cart, parading it along the lines. And the corpse was truly worth looking at (*theēs axios*), on account of its size and beauty (*kalleos*). For these reasons they did these things [*sc.* parading him on the cart], since the Greek soldiers were already beginning to abandon their ranks to get a sight of it.

This is a historical narrative but, as so often in Herodotus, it borrows from established narrative tropes, especially from Homer.[53] In particular, the parade of Masistius' corpse follows an Iliadic fight around the body of the fallen Persian general who, in his size and beauty, is cast as a second Sarpedon, a son of Zeus and major fighter for the Trojans.[54] But, in part because his armor has proven invulnerable to weapons, Masistius is ultimately killed by a disfiguring wound to his unprotected eye (9.22.2). Mourned by the Persians with laments and the cutting of hair, Masistius' body is incorporated into an aesthetic framework of the warrior's "beautiful death" as voiced by Priam's speech; heroic aesthetics nevertheless determine Masistius' corpse to be beautiful despite its disfigurement. Masistius' ruined face is forgotten in the spectacle of the general's inert but still formidable frame. Though the soldiers' impulsive rush toward the body recalls the macabre drive of Cambyses, in the case of Masistius, the Greeks' desire is normative rather than maniacal. The pleasure felt in contemplating the beauty of Masistius' corpse is reinforced with the sweetness of victory over a foe.

Carted around the army on a wagon as in a funeral *ekphora*, and not dragged behind a chariot, the parade of Masistius' body represents an aesthetic inversion of the mutilation of Hector around the walls of Troy.[55] Sarpedon's beauty is celebrated, not destroyed. If the handsomeness of Masistius' corpse alone was insufficient to attract so much attention; the defeat of an important and seemingly invincible opponent certainly was cause for curiosity and excitement among the Greeks. But Masistius' beauty cannot easily be separated from his martial prowess. Whatever the reason, Herodotus notes the body to be worthy of visual attention, proclaiming the corpse *theēs axios*, "worth seeing," a catchphrase and leitmotif for his *Histories* as a whole.

Within the *Histories*, the parade of Masistius' body has structural simi-

53. On Herodotus' literary indebtedness to Trojan War narratives, especially in Book 9, see Baragwanath 2012.

54. Hom. *Il.* 16.548–683 is a clear intertext for the scene; on the account of this battle and its favorable connection to Athenian audiences, see Oliver 2021. Sarpedon was a favorite of visual artists as well, as exemplified in the Euphronius Krater, formerly on display at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, now repatriated to Italy's Archaeological Museum of Cerveteri.

55. Hom. *Il.* 22.369–76, 22.395–405. See also Soph. *El.* 749–56, Eur. *Hipp.* 1236–39, although in both cases the driver of the chariot is caught in his own reins.

larities to the cunning presentation of Phye as Athena in the first book. The story is as follows:

> ἐν τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Παιανιέϊ ἦν γυνή, τῇ οὔνομα ἦν Φύη, μέγαθος ἀπὸ τεσσέρων πήχεων ἀπολείπουσα τρεῖς δακτύλους καὶ ἄλλως εὐειδής. ταύτην τὴν γυναῖκα σκευάσαντες πανοπλίῃ, ἐς ἅρμα ἐσβιβάσαντες καὶ προδέξαντες σχῆμα οἷόν τι ἔμελλε εὐπρεπέστατον φανέεσθαι ἔχουσα, ἤλαυνον ἐς τὸ ἄστυ, προδρόμους κήρυκας προπέμψαντες, οἳ τὰ ἐντεταλμένα ἠγόρευον ἀπικόμενοι ἐς τὸ ἄστυ, λέγοντες τοιάδε· "ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, δέκεσθε ἀγαθῷ νόῳ Πεισίστρατον, τὸν αὐτὴ ἡ Ἀθηναίη τιμήσασα ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα κατάγει ἐς τὴν ἑωυτῆς ἀκρόπολιν." οἱ μὲν δὴ ταῦτα διαφοιτῶντες ἔλεγον, αὐτίκα δὲ ἔς τε τοὺς δήμους φάτις ἀπίκετο ὡς Ἀθηναίη Πεισίστρατον κατάγει, καὶ <οἱ> ἐν τῷ ἄστεϊ πειθόμενοι τὴν γυναῖκα εἶναι αὐτὴν τὴν θεὸν προσεύχοντό τε τὴν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἐδέκοντο Πεισίστρατον.
>
> In the village of Paeania there was a woman by the name of Phye, who was nearly six feet tall and beautiful (*eueidēs*) besides. [Megacles and Pisistratus] outfitted her with a full suit of armor and, mounting her on a chariot and making her posture such that she might appear as lovely as possible (*euprepestaton*), they drove into the city [of Athens], where messengers who had run ahead of them were already and were proclaiming the things that had been ordered, saying such things as the following: "Athenians, welcome Pisistratus back with good will! Athena herself honors him most among men and brings him home to her own acropolis." And so thy went around, saying such things, and immediately the rumor spread to the villages that Athena was leading Pisistratus, and those in the city believing that the woman was the goddess herself, came to worship a human being and they welcomed Pisistratus.[56]

Like Masistius, Phye is remarkable in size and beauty, armored, and paraded for maximum visual exposure. The similarities between the two figures are surprising given the fundamental differences between them: Masistius is hailed as a corpse while Phye passes as an epiphany of Athens' tutelar goddess, comparable to the wooden effigy of the goddess that would follow a similar parade route into the city as part of the procession that opened

56. Hdt. 1.60.

the city's Panathenaia festival. As with Cambyses' visual embrace of all forms of embodiment, we see Greeks, across Herodotus' histories, attracted to embodied spectacle. In the case of Masistius, an exotic foreign soldier remarkable for his strength and beauty, whose death was a welcome source of joy on the battlefield, presents a sharp contrast to the Athenian battlefield dead recorded in Thucydides' history. As in drama, emotional, practical, verbal, and generic frameworks all contribute to defining the aesthetics of the corpse in historical writing.

Herodotus and Thucydides' thematic, structural, and epistemological connections to fifth-century tragedy are well known; their prose accounts do not offer a "real" documentary picture of fifth-century attitudes, but simply offer an alternate perspective on the aesthetics of the dead that informed, and was in turn informed by, Greek drama. The use of wagons to present the bodies of Masistius and Phye, for instance, is not simply a practical matter, but is also analogous to theatrical production, where the display of immobile bodies, dead and divine, was a basic tool of the tragedian's stagecraft from at least the time of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The crane is used to transport the semidivine Medea and her murdered children, Alcestis is carried aloft by servants, and in Euripides' *Suppliants*, the bodies of five of the Seven against Thebes (a corpse load unprecedented in tragedy) may have had to be transported on wagon to enter the stage.[57] Phye, appearing costumed (note the theatrical resonances of *skeuazein*), on a moving device, impersonating the form if not voice of a goddess, stood almost as a tragic actor outside of the theater, lacking only the dramatic mask.

The visual sensibilities of Masistius' Athenian spectators in 479 BCE, too, might have been informed by tragic stagecraft and aesthetics, as certainly Herodotus' own audience was.

Altogether, evidence from classical-era Greek funeral practice and fifth-century accounts of interactions with dead bodies provide a cultural backdrop against which the dramatic presentation of corpses in tragedy can be better assessed. Although in life the human body was a prototypical aesthetic object, profoundly informing cultural ideas of beauty and ugliness as well as the resonances of those concepts in other related domains, in death the aesthetics of the body both require, and respond powerfully to, framing.

57. Eur. *Med.* 1317, *Alc.* 606–8, and Eur. *Supp.* 815. The staging of the corpses in *Suppliants* is problematic: see Hourmouziades 1965, 8; Morwood 2007, 26–30; and Kornarou 2008, 32f. If the bodies are not on wagons, there may have been as many as fifty figures, an unprecedented although not impossible amount on the Greek stage. On the length and visual prominence of entrances and exits in Greek tragedy in general, see Taplin 1985, 32.

The dead may be received as supremely beautiful or the utmost of abjection, a source of wonder and hope as well as dread and painful realization. Tragedy, with its verbal, material, and technical tools, as well as its multiple layered subjectivities, was particularly well positioned to provide and adjust the cultural frameworks through which the aesthetics of the corpse could be produced. Tragedy harnessed not only the remarkable affective power of the dead body, but also its remarkably variability, to produce a variety of aesthetic effects. The following exemplary studies explore three different frames which tragedians repeatedly employed when making onstage spectacles of the dead. Highlighting the tragic body's religious status as polluted object, its biological status as an anatomical assemblage, and its mimetic status as theatrical material in performance, playwrights might activate different points along a spectrum of affective and cognitive responses to the spectacle of the dead body, each powerful in its own way, to fulfill the aesthetic demands of the play.

Ritual Frame and Embodied Aesthetics in Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*

As highlighted in this book's introduction, ugliness, as an aesthetic category, has historically proven resistant to purely formalist analyses because it is predicated upon embodied negative affective response. Ugliness is materially felt as much as it is formally perceived. These two aspects of ugliness often function together: ugliness plays its powerful cultural role in no small part because extensive symbolic systems have been pinned to, and elaborated upon, our basic embodied responses. As a result, moral and aesthetic ideas are often conflated.[58] Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection pointedly combines such embodied and social attitudes, drawing expressly upon anthropological work, including Mary Douglas' 1960 book *Purity and Danger*, which emphasized the conceptual basis of pollution. Through an orienting material metaphor, Douglas asserts that pollution, or "dirt," is to be defined not by any inherent quality, but is "matter out of place."[59] For

58. On the interconnectedness of disgust across historical and cultural contexts, see Miller 1997.

59. Douglas 1966, 2 (and passim); Douglas recognized the subjectivity of the category, noting that "disorder . . . is in the eye of the beholder" (44).

Douglas, "place" is essentially a spatial and cultural frame, a conceptual border that defines the meaning of matter, not on an intrinsic of even formal basis, but through relation and expectation. The blended material and social ontologies of ugliness, pollution, and the human corpse combine to make their dramatic expression a source of particular aesthetic interest.

The human corpse is a site not simply of Kristevan abjection, but of Douglasian pollution as well. The dead body is not *aischros* or *kakos* to perceive simply because it is deformed or a source of shame; in Greek contexts, its negative affectivity is intimately tied to the pollution that often accompanies death. As Andrei and Ivana Petrovic argued, among agentive human Greek subjects, pollution exhibited a strong degree of interiority, such that the concept of ritual purity was defined as much by correctness of religious action and thought as by such materially assisted cleansing processes as animal sacrifice or ablution.[60] And yet, in death, when human subjectivity and interiority are dissipated, the corpse becomes a peculiar and troubling vehicle of religious unease.

Just as the on-stage corpse demands particular attention from its audience, so too does the cadaver pose problems of ritual pollution that rarely occur elsewhere in tragedy. Where pollution does occur in Greek tragedy, it is often a point of thematic and aesthetic interest. In his 1983 study of pollution in ancient Greece, *Miasma*, Robert Parker accounts for the relative silence in most Greek literary texts concerning the quotidian forms of pollution encountered by Athenians. Parker writes that "although funerary pollution was familiar at Athens, literary texts often fail to speak of it when treating of death or mourning. It is as though being polluted were, like wearing dark clothes, just one aspect of the state of mourning, and required no special mention."[61] And yet, as observed in preceding chapters, tragedy gives special attention to the "dark clothes" of mourning and dramatizes transgressive acts and violence with notable frequency. Deaths often come at the tail end of the tragic narrative, leaving relatively little space for discussions of pollution. Exceptions occur in two special, although not infrequent, cases: when divinities are on a trajectory to come in close contact with the corpse, when the cadaver is the result of the especially polluting crime of kin murder.[62] Such situations reveal that, at least in tragedy, the salience of

60. See esp. Petrovic and Petrovic 2016, 8–10.

61. Parker 1983, 35.

62. The following citations may serve as a representative, but not exhaustive, sample of

ritual pollution is not categorical but a latent force that may be invoked, or dismissed, by the playwright as fits the dramatic needs of the moment.

Pollution was tied to location as well as to the body; people and places become contaminated by death. Parker notes that, in addition to the living who come into contact with the corpse, the home or similar delimited spaces (e.g., temple precincts) also become polluted by death.[63] In Athenian drama, such local contamination is best exemplified by the palace of Admetus in Euripides' *Alcestis*, a generically peculiar "pro-satyric" drama which, unlike typical tragic fare, presents the death of the eponymous character early in the narrative and on stage. At the end of the prologue, the god Apollo leaves the stage explicitly on account of Alcestis' impending death: "But I myself, in order to avoid this pollution (*miasma*) in the house, am taking leave of this beloved home."[64] An aura of pollution emanates from Alcestis even before her death and suffuses the home. Once Alcestis has passed away, the home becomes to Admetus a visual symbol of death. That which Apollo avoided on the grounds of religious propriety, Admetus now confronts through the negative emotional framework of grief and loss. Returning home from his wife's burial to the palace, Admetus laments, "Hateful is the approach, hateful is the sight of the bereaved home."[65] On the point of entry, he addresses the *skēne* wall as "the structure of a home" (*schēma domōn*, 912), a periphrasis that marks the palace as a visual object, albeit a hollow or superficial one. Alcestis' ontological shift in death, from animated wife and mother to inert corpse, materially ramifies through domestic space. The transformation of death materializes the formerly living in unexpected ways in *Alcestis*. In a curious phrase that has attracted much attention and speculation, Admetus tells his wife he will have a painted statue made in her image, an ersatz substitution which he will sleep beside in his bed.[66] In addition to the psychosexual aspects of Admetus' plan, and Euripides' general interest in transgressive substitutions in *Alcestis*, the carving exemplifies the latent uncertainty of the boundaries between material

gods concerned about the pollution of the body, cf. Eur. *Alc.* 22; *Hipp.* 1437–39; of familial murder, Eur. *Med.* 1269; *Hipp.* 35; *HF* v. post 1324; *Phoen.* 816; *Or.* 517, 598.

63. Parker 1983, 39.

64. Eur. *Alc.* 22–23: ἐγὼ δέ, μὴ μίασμά μ' ἐν δόμοις κίχῃ, / λείπω μελάθρων τῶνδε φιλτάτην στέγην. Ironically, Apollo does not retreat from the presence of Death himself, who arrives on stage shortly after these lines.

65. Eur. *Alc.* 861–62: στυγναὶ πρόσοδοι, στυγναὶ δ' ὄψεις / χήρων μελάθρων.

66. Eur. *Alc.* 348–56.

and human, mimesis and reality, in Attic drama.[67] Although Alcestis' buried body is no longer an source of religious pollution, the memory of her Admetus seeks to maintain, materially or otherwise, reflects the profound loss of subjecthood encountered at death.

Though the environment around the cadaver becomes not only polluted but aesthetically charged, the visual importance of the dead body itself remains paramount. Euripides' *Hippolytus* is similarly concerned with the intersecting questions of purity, appropriateness, and embodiment, particularly at the end of the play. In the final scene, the eponymous hero, whose excessive focus on sexual purity (*hagneia*) has led to divine intervention and his downfall, is brought on stage as a spectacle of suffering, in ways similar to that of the dying Heracles at the end of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis, studied in the last chapter*. In *Hippolytus*, however, the hero has a divine audience for his suffering. Artemis, looking down from on high on the failing strength of Hippolytus, motivates her exit from the stage as follows (Eur. *Hipp.* 1437–39):

> καὶ χαῖρ'· ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐ θέμις φθιτοὺς ὁρᾶν
> οὐδ' ὄμμα χραίνειν θανασίμοισιν ἐκπνοαῖς·
> ὁρῶ δέ σ' ἤδη τοῦδε πλησίον κακοῦ.
>
> So farewell! For it is not lawful for me to see the dead
> nor to defile (*chrainein*) my eyes (*omma*) with the dying breath.
> For I see that you are already close to this *kakon*.

As observed in Apollo's departure early in *Alcestis*, proximity to mortal bodies on the verge of death imposes ritual constraints even divinities cannot endure. For the Olympian gods, simply *seeing* the dead can be polluting, a circumstance that is against *themis*, the set laws of nature.[68] Artemis localizes the point of visual contact with the dead in her *omma*, translated above as "eyes" but also, more broadly, including the face and faculty of sight in general.[69] For Greeks, the last breath (rather than, in modern medical contexts, final heartbeat) marked the transition from living to dead, and yet it is not the miasma of his exhalation, but the sight of this final moment, that

67. Markantonatos, Nesselrath, and Scholz (2013, 149) offer an extensive bibliography, including Stieber 1998 and 2011; see also Steiner 2001.

68. Cf. the "extramissive" theory of vision widely current in the classical era: see. Nightingale 2016.

69. *LSJ*, *s.v.* ὄμμα I, IV.

threatens to defile the immortal goddess. Appearing herself on the higher plane of the stage, Artemis is separated from the mortal world below in ways that mirror the theatergoers seated across the orchestra in tiered rows. The goddess, too, can only see and hear, not touch, the dying Hippolytus.[70] And yet the theatrical audience has the painful prerogative to witness death itself, within the mimetic frame of the tragedy no less than over the course of their own lives. Like Teucer in Sophocles' *Ajax*, Artemis, calls Hippolytus "most beloved" (*philtaton brotōn) of all mortals*, labeling his death a *kakon, an evil or misfortune which, in this aestheticized ritual context, is akin to English "horror."*[71] And yet, unlike the mortal Teucer, Artemis' divine status precludes the goddess from witnessing death directly and, perhaps, from feeling its impact as a mortal would. The framing of Artemis' divine spectatorship of Hippolytus' final moments is fundamentally different from the situation Tecmessa outlines in *Ajax*, namely, that, no one who is dear can endure to look upon the gruesome death of a beloved individual. As a divinity occupying a separate ontological (and, in the theatrical realization of the scene, vertical) plane, it is not that Artemis cannot endure the spectacle so much as she is not *allowed* to look directly upon death. Artemis' response to imminent death of Hippolytus reveals the complex aesthetics of the imbricated, intersubjective visual communities of Greek drama.

The sight of the dead is more polluting than simply being within their vicinity, but direct physical contact with the corpse surpasses both. Outside of battle, where such contact was often a practical necessity, touching a cadaver was a particularly polluting act for Greeks.[72] In a scene from *Iphigenia among the Taurians* that echoes some of the concerns in *Hippolytus* noted above, the eponymous heroine calls out the hypocrisy of the goddess Artemis' stance toward pollution in light of the cult of human sacrifice practiced at her temple (Eur. *IT* 380–84):

> τὰ τῆς θεοῦ δὲ μέμφομαι σοφίσματα,
> ἥτις βροτῶν μὲν ἧν τις ἅψηται φόνου
> ἢ καὶ λοχείας ἢ νεκροῦ θίγηι χεροῖν

70. Halleran (1995, *ad* 1283–1466) prefers the *mēchanē* to the *theologeion* that sits atop the stage building, but is nearly certain that "the god appeared on high." Mastronarde 1990, 282, prefers the *theologeion*.

71. Eur. *Hipp.* 1333, 1439. Cf. [E.] *Rhes.* 890, where a Muse arrives, *ex machina*, holding the corpse of her son, Rhesus.

72. The exigencies of handling corpses in the battlefield trumped religious punctilio; see Parker 1983, 42, n. 38.

βωμῶν ἀπείργει, μυσαρὸν ὡς ἡγουμένη,
αὐτὴ δὲ θυσίαις ἥδεται βροτοκτόνοις.

I blame the subtleties of the goddess,
who drives from her altars one who
murdered, or handled a woman in childbirth
or a corpse, considering that person impure (*musaron*),
but *she* takes pleasure in human sacrifices.

This passage is remarkable in a genre that typically takes pedestrian forms of defilement, such as childbirth, into little consideration.[73] Iphigenia speaks from an exceptional position: standing before a temple, tasked with sacrificing fellow Greeks (in the present circumstance, as it turns out, her own brother), the heroine serves as the mouthpiece for the play's broader concerns with religious crime and pollution.[74] The passage places particular emphasis on physical handling of defiled objects as a primary means of communicating pollution (note *hapsētai,* 381), but one cannot simply separate haptic from visual experience. These rituals are not conducted in the dark, and there is some sense that the goddess's supposed "pleasure" (*hēdetai*, 384) comes from witnessing these (to a Greek mind) unholy sacrifices in which the material and visual communication of pollution are conflated,

In sum, although some degree of pollution and ritual sensitivity shapes all Greek encounters with the dead, tragedy rarely engages with those forms of ritual observance that would be most familiar to its fifth-century audiences. Attic drama rarely insists on verisimilitude: wherever "realistic" engagement with the corpse in tragedy might distract from the pity and fear that corpses so powerfully provoke, it is easily dispensed. Tragic pathos emerges out of static feelings of misfortune and religious unease, not than the practical pursuit of its ritual resolution. Those rituals of mourning that tragedy typically portrays, *ekphorai* and *threnoi*, amplify rather than contain the emotional impact of the corpse. While ritual pollution cannot be separated from aesthetic concerns in any simple fashion, religious responses

73. On this aspect of pollution, see Parker 1983, 36–39. It may be that the self-reflexive nature of this late-Euripidean "escape" play (on which, see Wright 2005 and Torrance 2013), or else the prismatic refraction of Artemis cult in a "barbarian" setting (see Hall 2013, 26–47), motivates a concern with pollution seen more commonly in comedy than tragedy.

74. Iphigenia will later fabricate regulations concerning impurity as a ruse to effect her escape: Eur. *IT* 1159–1233. Euripides reuses the device in his *Helen*: cf. Eur. *Hel.* 1061f., 1239–1300, esp. 1271.

to the dead on the fifth-century tragic stage often differed from the common lived experience of Athenian spectators, highlighting that the way one looks upon the dramatic dead is ultimately depends upon overlapping mimetic, affective, and aesthetic frames.

Disintegrated Bodies through an Anatomical Frame in Euripides' *Medea*, *Hecuba*, and *Bacchae*

The mortally wounded, such as Hippolytus, are not the only bodies to be looked upon aesthetically before death. Those who are about to die as well may be treated in much the same way as cadavers. The following examples, spanning entire period of extant Euripidean tragedy, illustratre how distinctions between living and dead bodies might be blurred by introducing an anatomical frame that conceptually disintegrating bodies into their component parts. Such anatomizing might seem, at first glance, to alienate the body emotionally from its audience, in fact the opposite effect is observed. Attention to the sensuous aspects of these body parts, and in particular their haptic texture and reciprocal affordances—as hand holds hand and the eyes hold each others' gaze—renders the positive affective dispositions associated with living bodies salient just when the violent, painful, and gruesome death of these characters is imagined. In the materially mediated theater of the Greeks, where a living face is also an inert mask (both indicated by the Greek verb, *prosōpon*), such moments leverage the layered mimetic ontology of performance to present aspects of the body as simultaneously living and dead.

Contemplating the murder of her children near the end of the tragedy that bears her name, Medea is struck by the corporality of the seeing their youthful bodies. On the cusp of death, Medea leads the audience in seeing her children not as integral organic wholes, but affective "assemblages," to borrow Nancy Worman's application of a Deleuzean concept, whose subjecthood is physically distributed across the living frame (Eur. *Med.* 1040–43, 1070–73):[75]

τί προσδέρκεσθέ μ' ὄμμασιν, τέκνα;
τί προσγελᾶτε τὸν πανύστατον γέλων;

75. Worman 2020b, 190. On the affective function of children in Greek drama, see Griffiths 2020. On the dynamics of emotion in this scene and its context in the play, see Cairns 2021, 20–22.

αἰαῖ: τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται,
γυναῖκες, ὄμμα φαιδρὸν ὡς εἶδον τέκνων . . .
. . . δότ', ὦ τέκνα,
Δότ' ἀσπάσασθαι μητρὶ δεξιὰν χέρα.
ὦ φιλτάτη χείρ, φίλτατον δέ μοι στόμα
καὶ σχῆμα καὶ πρόσωπον εὐγενὲς τέκνων.

Why are you looking me in the face, children?
Why do you smile this last smile at me?
Ah! What shall I do? My heart leaves me,
women, as I see the shining face of my children . . .
. . . Give, children,
give your mother your right hand to hold.
O dearest hand, and mouth dearest to me
and form and noble face of my children!

It is not only Medea's anatomical attention to her sons' bodies, but also the way she frames their significance, that establishes the particularly horrific aesthetics of this scene of anticipated murder. Words such as "dearest" (*philtatos*) and "noble" (*eugenēs*) suggest not only personal familial relations, but broader social evaluative frameworks as well.[76] The children's dignity, as objects of love and individuals of social standing, are referenced to humanize them in contrast to what is presented as a deeply inhuman, non-maternal, act. The importance of the children's appearance, in particular, is marked by the emphasis on their faces, their form (*schēma*, 1073), and Medea's sight (*eidon*, 1043), which guides the audience's own visual impression of the children.[77] Such attention to corporality is atypical of the interactions between securely living characters in tragedy; the body emerges as an object of aesthetic intent when it is threatened.[78] Hesitating over her plans to kill her children, Medea scrambles the time-lines of action and intent. She begins to see her children as living corpses, objects of future actions and unfulfilled longing. The maternal tone of the passage is important: the pathos of the scene derives largely from domesticity and femininity

76. As observed in a footnote in a previous chapter, Iole's beauty is confounded with her nobility: Soph. *Trach.* 308–13, 352–68.

77. Eur. *Med.* 1073 and 1043, respectively. On the affective power of the face, here an (un)familiar mask, see Duncan 2018.

78. One might compare the children's corporal *philtatē cheir* with, for example, the more formal *philtata prosopsis* of the sight (and not the body) of Menelaus at Eur. *Hel.* 637.

of Medea's sentiments. As subsequent examples will demonstrate, Medea's words are strikingly similar to those of other women lamenting over the bodies of their (male) "most beloved" (*philtatoi)* relations.[79]

Hecuba's lament in *Trojan Women* over the body of her young grandson, Astyanax, provides a parallel scene of maternal grief. In a scene that is arguably the emotional climax of the the play, Trojan queen receives onstage the mangled corpse of Astyanax after the helpless child was thrown by the Achaeans from the high walls of Troy (Eur. *Tro.* 1173–80):

> δύστηνε, κρατὸς ὥς σ' ἔκειρεν ἀθλίως
> τείχη πατρῶια, Λοξίου πυργώματα,
> ὃν πόλλ' ἐκήπευσ' ἡ τεκοῦσα βόστρυχον
> φιλήμασίν τ' ἔδωκεν, ἔνθεν ἐκγελᾶι
> ὀστέων ῥαγέντων φόνος, ἵν' αἰσχρὰ μὴ στέγω.
> ὦ χεῖρες, ὡς εἰκοὺς μὲν ἡδείας πατρὸς
> κέκτησθ', ἐν ἄρθροις δ' ἔκλυτοι πρόκεισθέ μοι.
> ὦ πολλὰ κόμπους ἐκβαλών, φίλον στόμα . . .
>
> Poor child, how wretchedly have the walls
> of your father, built high by Loxios, shorn your curly head
> which many times your mother caressed
> and kissed, from which slaughter now
> grins through the fractured bones—but, to limit ugly (*aischra*)
> thoughts.
> O hands, how you have possessed the pleasant
> likeness of your father, yet lying limp in your sockets before me.
> O the many boasts you made, dear mouth . . .

Much as Medea addresses her still living children, so Hecuba laments her dead grandson through piece-meal anatomical observation, shifting her gaze back and forth from head to hands to mouth. Hecuba halts herself from going further into grisly details and painful reveries. Her use of the term *aischros* instead of *kakos* (the adjective, as examples considered above and in the preceding chapter indicate, most often associated with the corpse in tragedy) underscores not only the egregious moral affront of the murder of the innocent Astyanax, but also the limits of tragic decorum

79. Medea speaks these lines as if she were saying goodbye to the children simply because she was going, alone, into exile. Cf. Eur. *El.* 1321f.

that hold Hecuba back from expressing further details. Even as Hecuba maintains some degree of composure, her depiction of the child's death is one of the most horrifying in extant tragedy. In its attention to gory details, it echoes descriptions of violent deaths on the epic battlefield or the threatened violence of certain strands of vituperative iambic poetry. And yet, in Hecuba's focused, serial attention to discrete body parts, Astyanax is lamented over like Medea's two boys, again blurring distinctions between living and dead bodies.

The staging of this scene is worth considering further. Astyanax, killed as a small child, is brought onstage on his father's shield. Hector's son is young (*brephos*), and while the small size of the child's body poses fewer difficulties in staging than an adult cadaver, the ugly details Hecuba describes, confined mainly to his face, would likely be invisible to the audience.[80] The Greek herald, Talthybius, carries the body onto the stage, reports that he has already bathed the body in the Scamander and washed the blood from the child's wounds—actions that may indicate theatergoers were not presented a visual spectacle more gruesome than might be imagined from Hecuba's words alone.[81] Beyond showing Talthybius' character as a humane Greek, the herald's ritual cleansing of Astyanax's body obviates the need either to attend to matters of pollution onstage or stage a convincingly bloody and particularly ugly body.

To return our consideration briefly to *Medea*, the construction of that play's revenge plot demands that the heroine make a hurried escape after the climactic murders of the Corinthian royals as well as her children. Medea has no time to lament over the boys after their death, but presumably in order to include the pathos of such an encounter within the scope of the drama, Euripides retrojects the maternal lament over the corpse (a tragic scene-type, as the case of *Trojan Women* intimates) before the infanticide. As in the case of Heracles and Hippolytus, the close examination of a living body anticipates its death in *Medea* as well.

A lament similar to Hecuba's may have occurred in a speech, possibly preserved in fragments, given by Agave from the exodos of *Bacchae*, a play in which Euripides may have taken the trope of maternal anatomical lament to its macabre extreme. The general setting is clear: following a messenger speech detailing how the king Pentheus met a grisly end at the hands of the Theban bacchants on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, the queen mother

80. Eur. *Tro.* 1066.

81. Eur. *Tro.* 1150–52.

Agave arrives on stage, still in the grips of a divine madness, brandishing aloft the head of her son, which she believes to be that of a lion. Agave's stage entrance is followed by that of her father, Cadmus, the aged founder of Thebes, who arrives bearing the remains of his grandson, painstakingly collected from various locations in the wilderness. A conversation between father and daughter leads to Agave properly recognizing the head of her son, and simultaneously, the full tragedy of her situation at line 1280. In this Euripidean scene of maternal lament, much like Hecuba's grief in *Trojan Women*, the audience witnesses Agave's initial, emotional reaction to the gruesome spectacle of death. However, the manuscript of *Bacchae* appears to become lacunose shortly after line 1300, leaving important details of this scene, including the arrival of Dionysus as *deus ex machina* and possibly the arrangement of Pentheus' body parts, unclear.

If the third-century AD summary of the work by the Greek rhetorician Apsines of Gadara accurately reflects the classical-era Euripidean production, in the final scene Agave holds Pentheus' limbs in her hands, lamenting over each in turn.[82] The horror of such a display would be unmatched in extant tragedy, where, as observed in the current and the preceding chapters, wounded bodies might be verbally described in grisly and emotionally affecting ways, but typically with some degree of sanitization or framing. The "whole horror" of the spectacle, to echo Tecmessa's words in Sophocles' *Ajax,* may be located more in audience members' minds than on the theatrical stage. Except for brief, circumscribed moments, the gruesome bodies of the dead Ajax and dying Heracles are covered by cloth; similarly, that of the dead Astyanax has been washed and prepared before appearing on stage. In terms of the abjection, disgust, and horror of the spectacle —in a word, the *ugliness* of the scene—the onstage reassembly of rent limbs would far surpass the aesthetic norms of tragedy.

The on-stage composition of Pentheus' limbs would be an extreme moment of stagecraft, but hardly *sui generis*. Rather, it would extend and reformulate common elements of tragic ugliness. Scholarly consensus holds that certain verses from Pseudo-Gregory's *Passion of Christ,* which reflect the tropes of tragic maternal lament traced above, may have been cribbed from a fuller version of the *Bacchae manuscript available in that era*.[83] The

82. Walz vol. 9, p. 587: ἕκαστον γὰρ αὐτοῦ τῶν μελῶν ἡ μήτηρ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ κρατοῦσα καθ'ἕκαστον αὐτῶν οἰκτίζεται. See Whitehorne 1986, 60–66.

83. I follow Dodds (1960, 58f) who considers it highly probable that the verses from *Christus Patiens* flow largely from the Euripidean source: see also Krauss 2020.

relevant excerpts from *Passion of Christ*, arranged in their potential Euripidean order, are as follows (*Chr. Pat.* 1313–14, 1256–57, 1466–72, 1122–23):

τίνα <δε> θρηνήσω τρόπον
καὶ πᾶν (κατασπάσαι με) σὸν μέλος, τέκνον . . .

ὅπως (κατασπάσαιμι) καὶ σύμπαν μέλος,
κυνοῦσα σάρκας ἅσπερ ἐξεθρεψάμην . . .

φέρ', ὦ γεραιέ, κρᾶτα τοῦ (τρισολβίου)
ὀρθῶς προσαρμόσωμεν, εὔτονον δὲ πᾶν
σῶμ' ἐκακριβώσωμεν εἰς ὅσον πάρα.
ὦ φίλτατον πρόσωπον, ὦ νέα γένυς,
ἰδοὺ καλύπτρᾳ τῇδε σὴν κρύπτω (κάραν·)
τὰ δ'αἱμόφυρτα καὶ κατηλοκισμένα
μέλη . . .

ποίοις δὲ πέπλοις κατακαλύψω σοι μέλη;
τίνες δὲ κηδεύσουσιν, ὦ τέκνον, χέρες;

But how shall I bewail
and (draw together) every limb, child . . .

Would that I could (draw) your limbs all together,
kissing the flesh which I nurtured . . .

Come, old man, let us bring forward the head of the thrice-blessed
(wretched?) man
in order, and let us accurately reconstruct the whole,
well-strung body to the extent possible.
O dearest face, o young cheeks,
look, I hide your (head) with this veil,
and the blood-stained, lacerated
limbs . . .

In what sort of robes shall I hide your limbs?
What hands will bury you, my child?[84]

84. Some words or phrases from *Christus Patiens* are clearly non-Euripidean; following

The questionable and disconnected sources of these lines, and the potential for interpolation and influence from similar scenes from any number of tragedies now lost, leave connections between these verses and a classical-era production of *Bacchae* thoroughly speculative. Even so, the lines (written in trimeter, reflecting Euripidean style and thematic concerns) are well worth noting within this broader discussion of the generic aesthetics of Athenian drama and their enduring cultural impact. With all the pathos that typifies tragic characters placed in ironic or impossible rhetorical and ritual positions (one might compare the predicament of Electra in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers,* tasked with offering ritual sacrifices to her father on behalf of her mother, his murderer), Agave questions how she can properly lament her son when, owing to the dismemberment of his body, his unity as a ritual subject is unclear. Here the practical limits of anatomical lament are revealed in a way that, nevertheless, underscores the affective power of body parts, taken separately or together.

Reassembling her child, Agave underscores the totality of Pentheus' self (*pan*, *sympan*) of Pentheus' body, encountered limb by limb. Apostrophizing the assemblage of the body as "child," Agave asserts an enduring unity to "Pentheus" as subject, but this does not prevent her from similarly addressing specific body parts and labeling them, as she does initially with the face of Pentheus, as "most dear." This application of *philtatos* to a body part, the mention of kissing, are just some of the points of verbal and thematic continuity between the Agave's lament and those of Medea and Hecuba, discussed above. Similarly, the use of a garment to cover Pentheus' body (*peplois katakalupsō*) link his dismembered corpse to the bodies of Ajax, Heracles, and Hippolytus, piteous displays of pain and grief that emphasized the body's disintegration, although not its full dismemberment.[85] Regardless of whether these lines were originally uttered in *Bacchae*, they gesture toward the centrality, and limits, of tragic lament over an anatomized body.

To speak in more general terms, the tragic body not simply a monolithic object of aesthetic contemplation, but always also a collection of visual focal

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Dodds, I place parentheses around words likely of a later date and include supplements in angle brackets. Further semantic adjustments, such as replacing τρισολβίου ("thrice-fortunate", *Chr. Pat.*) with τρισαθλίου ("thrice-wretched"), are also needed to fit the Euripidean context.

85. Studied in the chapter 5. Also compare Antigone's lament over the corpse of Polynices at Eur. *Phoen.* 1667–71, whom she has been denied the ability to bury. She pleas with Creon to be allowed to bathe, bandage, and kiss her brother.

points. Vernant's observation that, in the quietude of death, the body of early Greek poetry achieves aesthetic unity and beauty seems not to apply to the tragic corpse; rather like the ugly and piteous corpses of old men described in Priam's speech and Tyrtaeus' elegiacs, in tragedy the cadaver is analyzed part by part. The cultural and practical demands of the fifth-century Athenian theater surely played a role in this generic distinction. Again, Lessing's temporal distinction between painting and poetry may be invoked: while one can take in a whole sight in a moment, words must be conveyed in sequence and through time. Individual spectators' gaze might be drawn to different body parts in different orders, but verbal depictions synchronously align audiences' responses with those of the characters onstage. Through visual and verbal means, as we have now had occasion to observe over the course of the preceding two chapters, tragedy engages unabashedly in the negative affective impact of the dead body. The ugliness of the corpse, and its anatomical description, are one and the same, reflecting the conceptual disintegration of death that unites social and biological realities. Whereas beauty in tragedy tends to be distributed evenly and equally across the entire body, ugliness is often (although certainly not always) described body part by body part, or through the enumeration of its fatal wounds.[86]

The opposition between monolithic beauty and plural ugliness may be found outside of drama as well. In the *Iliad*, one might compare the list of Thersites' deformities to the simple observation that Helen is beautiful.[87] A passage from Xenophon's *Symposium* is similarly revealing, in which a lighthearted beauty contest is proposed between the handsome Athenian youth Critobulus and the notoriously ugly Socrates. The philosopher's visually deformed but sensorially keen anatomical features (*viz.*, his protruding eyes, snub nose, and full lips) are ironically enumerated as evidence of his beauty; their apparent departures from cultural ideals renders each organ "beautiful" in the utilitarian sense of *kalon, by which something* may be said in English to be "serviceable" rather than "fine" or "elegant." Ultimately,

86. Compare the singularity of the tragic hero's dead body with the plurality of its wounds in the Messenger's description of Neoptolemus, Eur. *Andr.* 1154–56: "And his entire beautiful body is consumed by savage wounds. His corpse . . ." (πᾶν δ' ἀνήλωται δέμας / τὸ καλλίμορφον τραυμάτων ὕπ' ἀγρίων. νεκρὸν δὲ . . .).

87. Indeed, if she is even directly labeled as such: on the "reflected" beauty of Helen, see my discussion of a famous passage from Edmund Burke in the Introduction. For Thersites, see Hom. *Il.* 2.217–9. For Helen, cf, Hom. *Il.* 3.158, 9.140, 9.282, cf. Sappho fr. 16.1–8. On Helen generally, see Blondell 2013.

the appearance of the holistically handsome Critobulus is defined not only in opposition to the form of Socrates' many ugly figures, but also to their enumeration, itself.[88] This reflects no fixed rule in Greek aesthetics: among other possible (and, perhaps tellingly, often post-classical) counterexamples, the story of Zeuxis selecting specific features from among a number of models to represent a perfect (composite) Helen suggests that, for Greeks, beauty could be anatomized no less than ugliness. Still, tragedy reflects an aesthetic sensibility toward the body shared with its epic and lyric forebears according to which it is not simply bodily integrity, but corporeal wholeness or unity, that most positively correlates with beauty.[89]

These examples from epic and Platonic dialogue underscore the pervasiveness of the aesthetic opposition between monolithic beauty and plural ugliness in archaic and classical-era Greek thought, a dichotomy that tragedy exploits to powerful effect in its representation of the corpse. Through considering tragedy's several anatomical descriptions of bodies in pain and death, we observe again the production of dramatic beauty and ugliness depends upon a variety of cultural frames and affective responses.

Zooming Out: Seeing Actors and Objects through a Mimetic Frame

In Athenian tragedy, corpses occupy a middle position between living character and inert property. In ways that sometimes parallel and reinforce the psychological discomfort brought on by the corpse's blurring of boundaries between self and other (i.e., Kristeva's abjection), so too does the dramatic corpse problematize simple distinctions between subject and object, living actor and inert stage property. Although in rare cases, such as Euripides' *Alcestis*, where a character dies onstage and in full view of the audience, one can be certain that the dead character onstage is represented by a living actor, what or who embodies the onstage cadaver in production, human or dummy, is not something that can be reconstructed from the text. In

88. Xen. *Symp*. 5.1–10.

89. Again, cf. Burke's discussion of Homer's rendering of Helen's beauty, which he contrasts with more modern efforts to elaborate upon details. Ancient elaborations of feminine beauty may be found Anac. frr. 16f. W., which frames the poem as a set of instructions for a visual artist. Tellingly, the poem ends with a singular impression of beauty, "Stop—now I see her." ἀπέχει· βλέπω γὰρ αὐτήν (16.33). For the itemized objectification of the erotic body in comedy, see Ar. *Ach*. 811, 1197f., etc.

those few cases where the distribution of speaking roles allows for it, it is possible that the corpse may have been played by one of the three principal tragic actors.[90] But in the great majority of cases, the corpse is represented by either a silent supernumerary (*kōphon prosōpon*) or a stuffed mannequin.

The full-body costumes and masks allow a character's identity to be transferred, not only between actors, but between living and artificial bodies. Although the dead may have been marked on the tragic stage through some convention (i.e., a mask with closed eyes), it is probable that inert living characters were visually indistinguishable from lifeless bodies in tragedy.[91] The uniformity of appearance between living and dead dramatic bodies could be exploited for humor in Old Comedy, such as the scene in Aristophanes' *Frogs* that presents an absurd inversion of the worldly *ekphora*. Instead of being carried to his burial, the dead man is carried from his grave to his new home in Hades. In Greek he is labeled a *nekus*, a term that conveniently refers both to the material body (corpse) and its nebulous spiritual counterpart (shade). In a pallbearing scene, whose appearance onstage might have evoked images of similar processions familiar from tragedy, Aristophanes surprises his audience by having the "dead" corpse suddenly move and speak. Dionysus barters with the dead man to carry his luggage along on his funeral bier, to which the dead man retorts that he would "rather walk on earth" than accept Dionysus' lowball offer.[92]

The quibbling cadaver of *Frogs* fits the standard comic portrayal of the dead as those "living" in Hades as if it were simply another Greek country. He is a corpse who is not truly a corpse at all. Staging a procession that mimics the *ekphorai* of tragedy, *Frogs* subverts a painful event with its painless comic values, much as comedy played upon the ugly aesthetics of tragic

90. It is possible for the actor who played Cassandra to also embody that character's corpse. Were this the case, the neighboring body of Agamemnon (in a net?) would need to be played by a dummy or silent actor, as the role of Aegisthus must be fulfilled.

91. It was the job of the next of kin to close the eyes upon death; see Alexiou 1974, 5, who cites Hom. *Il.* 11.453, *Od.* 11.426, 24.296, Pl. *Phd.* 118a. But this may have been a feature of the Greek tragic mask, like tears or cheeks lacerated in grief, that was conventionally left to the imagination.

92. Ar. *Ran.* 170–79. That the corpse is carried as in a funeral procession is indicated by *ekpheromenoi*, 168. Additional humor comes from the contrast between these lines and Achilles' famous words at *Od.* 11.488–91, which place the value of "life" in Hades below that of a peasant farmer on earth. Funeral processions, often much abbreviated in comparison to real *ekphorai*, occur in tragedy at Aesch. *Sept.* 1054–78, Soph. *Aj.* 1402–20, *Ant.* 1257–60, Eur. *Andr.* 1166–72, *Supp.* 795–1030, *Tro.* 1118–22. See my discussion of Athenian *ekphora* above.

costume in the scenes of *Acharnians* and *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*, studied in section II. Old Comedy mocks tragedy in many ways and for many purposes, but paratragedy is consistent in denying the pain and destructive loss that are essential to tragic plots and emotions. In comedy, rags that once materialized characters' real and profound suffering become costumes for playing dress-up; in *Frogs*, corpses are as vivacious underneath as on the surface of the earth. The comic reversal of the *ekphora* changes the direction of the procession: the dead man *leaves* his funeral at the beginning of his afterlife and an endless future in Hades stretched out before him. The comic corpse experiences rebirth, not death, in the metaphysical underworld.

The embodiment of the dead is different in tragedy. Whether spectral, like the *eidōla* of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* or Darius in *Persians*, or more corporeal and permanent, as in the case of the returned Alcestis, the deceased who return to the stage blur distinctions between the quick and the dead. Allowed brief leave from Hades on account of his status, Darius stands an awesome sight before the Chorus of Persian elders, with no indication that the king appears any differently than he had in life.[93] The Chorus gives ready obeisance to Darius as their one-time ruler, not as a frightful revenant.[94] But when Alcestis is returned to life and her husband through the intervention of Heracles, she apparently looks like her former, healthy self.[95] Admetus cannot at first believe the material presence of his wife, assuming her image to be a ghost (*phasma*, 1127) by which he is deluded (*kertomos*, 1125). Alcestis' notable silence in this scene, explained by Heracles as a consequence of the pollution that adheres to her body from having belonged to the underworld gods, also renders Alcestis not yet fully alive in the dramatic sense. Although she stands vertically, in her silence Alcestis is not only strikingly similar to the mute image Admetus had wished to have fashioned in her stead, but to a dramatic corpse as well.

In conclusion, let us return, now informed by a wider context, to Sophocles' *Ajax* and the scenes studied at the beginning of chapter 5. The words used to describe vision in that play tend to emphasize pain: no friend could *endure* to look upon Ajax's corpse (*tlaiē blepein*, 917), his death is *bitter* to

93. Aesch. *Pers.* 688–92.

94. Aesch. *Pers.* 694–96.

95. Eur. *Alc.* 202f., 1061f. Alcestis' return has an erotic charge, since Admetus' initial refusal to accept this woman into his home seems to recall his promise to Alcestis not to take a second wife. The body of the returned Alcestis must not simply look like Admetus' dying wife, but like a potential new (and therefore traditionally beautiful) bride.

Tecmessa and to Teucer (*pikros*, 1004, 1024), for whom the body is the most *painful* sight (*algiston*, 993). The pain of Ajax's suffering is affectively shared with others voicelessly and through vision. The language of pain is subjective: no one dear (*philos*, 917) to Ajax could dare to look upon him. Tecmessa contrasts her pain with both the sweetness (*glukus*, 966) with which Ajax's enemies will receive his death and the pleasure (*terpnos*, 967) Ajax gained for himself through his suicide.[96] This subjectivity derives, in part, from the frame within which one approaches the hero's death, the implications of which extend beyond the visual presence of the corpse. And yet the objective, visual presence of the dead body is significant. How do the effects of pain, pity, and ugliness combine in the case of dead bodies?

Aristotle's definition of pity in *Rhetoric* will be useful for disentangling these various aspects of visual reception. The philosopher writes (Arist. *Rhet.* 1385b13–6):

> ἔστω δὴ ἔλεος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινομένῳ κακῷ φθαρτικῷ ἢ λυπηρῷ τοῦ ἀναξίου τυγχάνειν, ὃ κἂν αὐτὸς προσδοκήσειεν ἂν παθεῖν ἢ τῶν αὑτοῦ τινα, καὶ τοῦτο ὅταν πλησίον φαίνηται·
>
> For clearly pity is a sort of pain coming from an apparent evil that is either destructive or painful, which happens to one who doesn't deserve it, and which a man might expect himself or one of his acquaintances to suffer, and further an evil which appears close at hand.

The interrelations of pity and tragic ugliness, as the aesthetic-generic concept was outlined in the first chapter, are clearly relevant to this passage from *Rhetoric*. In that earlier chapter it was argued, also within an Aristotelian framework, that tragic ugliness differs from comic ugliness on account of the pain and destruction associated with tragedy.

By way of closing this chapter, and with it our study of the dramatic texts, we may turn again to Aristotle's paradoxical *sēmeion* that compared the pleasure and the pain of looking upon the dead (Arist. *Poet.* 4.1448b9–12):[97]

> σημεῖον δὲ τούτου τὸ συμβαῖνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων· ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὁρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἠκριβωμένας

96. Soph. *Aj.* 917, 966, and 967, respectively.
97. The passage is discussed in the introduction.

> χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν.
>
> An example of this [natural pleasure taken in mimesis] is well known from lived experience: for we are pained to see those same things, the most accurate images of which we joyfully contemplate, such as the bodies of the vilest animals and of corpses.

Having surveyed some of the ways corpses were seen and visually imagined in life and in art, we are better able to assess how various frames (including, but also extending beyond, mimesis) shaped the affective responses to this uniquely affective, embodied material. The pain Aristotle associates with the sight of corpses may be the result of any number of frames: formal, familiar, ritual, and otherwise. Seeing materially mediated representations of the corpse on stage removes practical barriers (and, in some cases, those of religious or social propriety) that shape the sight of dead bodies in real life. Corpses in art, whether on painted *eikones* or on the dramatic stage, invite viewers to experience and reframe these taboo objects. The impulse to look upon the tragic dead is derived not entirely from a desire to contemplate the beauty of their presentation and fictional circumstances, but to revel in their ugliness from within the safe and socially sanctioned space of the theater. The staging of the tragic corpse does not itself resolve the paradox of our macabre interest in looking upon the dead, but in reframing these bodies, it certainly facilitates it.

Epilogue

Plato, Aristotle, and the Remaking of Dramatic Aesthetics

In this book I have argued for a dramatic aesthetics situated principally in affective response. In so doing, I have highlighted the strategic interplay of the verbal and material components of the Athenian theater as they combine to render a composite, aesthetically charged, and ultimately psychologically moving artistic experience. To support this argument, I have adduced scenes from across the historical length and generic breadth of fifth-century Greek drama, from Aeschylus' *Persians* to Aristophanes' *Frogs*, situating these works within cultural contexts and theoretical frameworks to underscore the crucial importance of material contributions to the "feeling" of the stage.

My arrangement and interpretations of this dramatic evidence are original, but none of these scenes has escaped the notice of earlier critics similarly interested in the related issues of genre, aesthetics, and performance. Athenian drama in general, and tragedy in particular, is no stranger to study and theorization, having attracted over the past two and a half millennia a wide range of analytic approaches, wider, arguably, than any other literary genre. If the novel ideas about dramatic aesthetics introduced here have interpretive value (and, what is more, if they accurately reflect important aspects of our experience of dramatic works), the question naturally arises: Why has an affective approach not been a more prominent presence over the *longue durée* of the reception of Athenian drama? And why has ugliness, an undercurrent of tragedy I assert to be crucial to understanding the genre as a whole, been so neglected?

This epilogue addresses such questions by tracing the early and pivotal fourth-century reception of fifth-century Athenian drama in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. These works, and the evolving cultural context in which they came into being, shifted both critical and popular ideas of drama away from the materialities of production and toward intangible texts. The plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, predominantly received in the fifth century as embodied performances anchored to specific festival spaces and times as well as to certain materials and people, were in the fourth century undergoing a gradual process of becoming literary "classics," abstract verbal texts whose existence (and, for some, *essence*) stood largely independent of theatrical realization. Even as production remained a powerful mechanism for supporting the promulgation and prestige of playwrights' works, the multiplicity of these reperformances lent increasing authority to, and critical fetishization of, an abstract *Ur*-text that was conceived of as not only independent from, but often chronologically and artistically prior to, performance.

The fourth-century "textualization" of fifth-century Athenian theatrical works—by which I refer not only to their recension and codification that began under the Athenian statesman Lycurgus in the 340s, but also to a broader and more general sense that once-dynamic plays came to function and be imagined as fossilized texts—would have profound effects on dramatic aesthetics, highlighting certain (often formal) aspects of the works while suppressing others. The decomposition of an integrated, embodied, and ephemeral performance into vestigial components over time is inevitable; *verba volent, scriba manent*, in the theater as elsewhere. But the ways in which these fifth-century productions came to be seen and imagined through written texts, and how these texts were interpreted and received, were hardly predetermined. This epilogue traces the peculiar impressions Plato and Aristotle left upon the reception of Athenian drama, considering how their ideological "spin," the result of formal and political influences, ultimately served to suppress discussion of the aesthetically and socially productive aspects of tragedy's ugly affective frameworks.[1]

While situating Plato and Aristotle's work within broader historical and cultural currents of Athens in the fourth century, it should be flagged from

1. On the vibrancy and expansion of theater after the fifth century, see esp. Csapo et al. 2014 and several of the contributions to Wilson 2007. On the official canonization of fifth-century tragedians in the Lycurgan era, see Hanink 2014. On reperformance in and beyond theater, see Hunter and Uhlig 2017.

the outset that the philosophers themselves positioned their engagement with dramatic aesthetics as being quite apart from the mainstream thought of their time. In an era when monuments to the glory and civic importance of Athens' dramatic festivals were being erected, Plato's suspicions toward poets, and Aristotle's insistence upon a narrow set of criteria for good tragedy, were each in their own way iconoclastic views. On several well-known occasions, Plato's Socrates draws categorical distinctions between a philosophical and rationally controlled engagement with *mimesis* and the free rein given to the passions by the vulgar crowd, "lovers of sounds and sights" who were attentive merely to the sensory (and therefore, as Plato's Socrates would hold, superficial or illusory) pleasures of theatrical spectacles. Aristotle, likewise, distinguishes between popular engagement with dramatic literature and the more refined pleasures of an informed connoisseur.[2]

The peculiar reception of Athenian drama among the philosophers was not merely a result of their moral and epistemological commitments, but a response to the politics of their era as well. The domestic and regional politics of Athens in the fourth century BCE, as Johanna Hanink reminds us, were crucial to the "making" (or, as this epilogue frames it, "remaking") of fifth-century aesthetics. Ethics and aesthetics, always interwoven in ancient Greek thought, became entangled around new cultural snags, as a growing library of written texts emerged alongside growing popular concern with the correspondence between democratic art and democratic politics, leading to discussions about how failures in one sphere might be connected to shortcomings in the other. This cultural discourse led, in turn, to some otherwise seemingly curious intellectual maneuvering among the philosophers who, despite being firmly established members of the social elite, were nevertheless interested in the aesthetic effects and social power of the theater's entertainment of the masses. Despite the many differences in their approaches to drama, both Plato and Aristotle introduced hierarchical demographic taxonomies into their aesthetic judgment, classifying artistic taste in tandem with social rank and mental aptitude. This shared argumentative move underscores the crucial importance of subjectivity to aesthetics, but it also runs the risk of pulling critical attention away from the material mechanisms by which art affects its viewing and listening subjects. Different audiences are not simply differently predisposed to drama, but respond dynamically, and within a broader artistic-cultural-social context, to art.

So, while much has been made of Plato's and Aristotle's claims to "dis-

2. Pl. *Resp*. 476b4–5.

tinction" and their dismissal of alternate aesthetics, in their tendency to abstract the plays away from their original cultural context, at any rate, the philosophers are not so unusual for their age.[3] In *Poetics*, Aristotle could claim, evidently without apology or hedging, that not only was plot (*mythos*) the soul (*psychē*) of tragedy, but also that theatrical production (*opsis*) was not, at least when properly understood, within the ambit of a (literary) tragic poet, but rather fell under the purview of the "props-master" (*skeuopoios*).[4] One imagines such an idea, were it to be voiced by a character in Aristophanes' *Frogs*—where substantial attention is paid to issues of staging, music, and the like—would have attracted an ironic reading and dismissive response.[5] In the cultural and historical gap between Aristophanes and Aristotle, then, something seems to have changed. This epilogue traces the ways *opsis*, that is to say the material aspect of theatrical performance and its many affective entanglements and aesthetic consequences, first became separated from the critical assessment of dramatic work. This separation did not start or end with Aristotle; it is prefigured in Aristophanic parody and Platonic formalism and continues to extend, through plays' textual tradition, into our modern academic and disciplinary conventions.

This epilogue proceeds chronologically, from Plato to Aristotle, with close readings of passages from *Hippias Major*, *Laws*, and *Poetics*. Several of the passages are frequently referenced in work pertaining to Greek drama or aesthetics. My readings here seek to place this book squarely within these ongoing scholarly discussions. Other passages, although hardly obscure, are at least less commonly cited within these discourses and are presented with the goal of reframing or refocusing important arguments. For reasons of space and because there is often little I can do to improve upon the work of others, this epilogue eschews several passages pertinent to this discussion, most notably those from Plato's *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, as well as Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. I refer readers to these passages in the notes, alongside the most relevant secondary scholarship.

Ancient and modern philosophical approaches to theatrical aesthetics is a well-worked academic field, but one that remains fertile. James I. Porter's

3. On "distinction" in this cultural sense, see Bourdieu 1984. On the application of Bourdieu's theories to literary judgment and Athenian drama, see Wright 2009, 142.

4. Arist. *Poet*. 6.1450a38–b20. This assertion, which has attracted considerable critical attention in recent years (including Sifakis 2013 and Konstan 2013), is discussed further below.

5. Using another embodied metaphor, Euripides calls words and songs the "nerves" of tragedy at Ar. *Ran*. 862.

2010 publication of *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation, and Experience* was a shot across the bow that challenged the hegemony of traditional academic formalism in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle in particular.[6] Porter's was an early and important work within a much broader turn in classical studies (and humanities, more broadly) that has sought alternate approaches to, and authorities of, the study of (ancient) aesthetics. This epilogue does not return to Plato and Aristotle to restore their authority or to reinscribe their frameworks, but rather to encourage further exploration in the ways objects and affect subtly but profoundly informed the aesthetics even of philosophers who have sometimes been too readily dismissed as "antimaterial."

Plato's *Hippias Major*: The Different Aesthetics of Seeing and Hearing Dramatic Performance

The impact of Plato on the history of poetic criticism is so pervasive that it is worth recalling that his influential assessments were anticipated, and made partly in response to, earlier critical work.[7] Aristophanes' *Frogs*, first produced in 406 BCE (and reprised the following year, in response to public acclaim), is our earliest extant direct and sustained criticism of the fifth-century Athenian theater. The comedy's critical assessment of tragedy has been studied from many angles, as the play itself analyzes dramatic works from a diversity of perspectives and under a variety of rubrics.[8] In the competition between Euripides and Aeschylus that occupies the last third of the play, sundry criteria are invoked, in a haphazard series, to distinguish which of the two poets deserves the honorific "chair" of tragedy in the underworld. Dramatic characters, topics, word choice, meter, staging, even the social and educative contribution—that is to say, the essential building blocks of tragedy—are thoroughly, albeit ironically or absurdly, assessed.

Occupied chiefly with analyzing and comparing the work and creative merits of two of fifth-century tragedy's paragons, Aeschylus and Euripides, *Frogs* does relatively little (explicitly, at any rate) to assess theatergoers' subjective experience of Greek drama. Tragedy's affective dimension

6. On Porter's dismissal of the formalism of Plato and Aristotle, see the review by Peponi 2012.

7. On poetic criticism prior to Plato, see especially Harriott 1969 and Ford 2002.

8. Griffith 2013 offers an approachable and relatively recent summary of aesthetic issues raised in the play.

is not entirely absent from *Frogs*, of course. Perhaps most notably, Dionysus' semierotic longing for Euripides that motivates the god's mock-heroic descent into the land of the dead, and various pleasures to be had from tragedy, in terms of both poetry and performance, are mentioned in passing.[9] Yet little is said in earnest about what makes a drama "beautiful" or "ugly" to experience as a whole. For a proper theorization of the pleasure and pain derived from artistic performances, our earliest source, outside drama itself, comes from Plato's *Hippias Major*.

Although the authenticity of the *Hippias Major* has sometimes been questioned, current scholarly consensus situates the work early in Plato's writing, composed around the time of the *Euthyphro* and *Phaedo* in the first decades of the fourth century.[10] If the consensus is correct, the *Hippias Major* represents Plato's first sustained engagement with issues of aesthetics, which the philosopher would further elaborate and refine for many years to come. Unlike the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, each of which engages with aesthetics in "focal" yet argumentatively diffuse ways, the *Hippias Major* tackles the essential aesthetic question head on: "What is *to kalon*?"—or, as it is often translated into English, "What is beauty?"[11] This aporetic dialogue is perhaps best known today for its ostensibly failed attempt to settle upon a single, simple definition of *to kalon*, with the dialogue ending in the traditional Greek dictum, *chalepa ta kala*, "beautiful things are difficult." Its focus on a single verbal concept allows the dialogue to articulate not only how *to kalon* (and, with it, its supposed antithesis, *to aischron*) may be theoretically framed, but also the ways these two concepts paralleled, overlapped with, and connected to other ideas and values.

Among other Platonic works also interested in *to kalon*, the *Hippias*

9. On Dionysus' "longing" (πόθος) for Euripides and its connection to reading dramatic texts, see Sfyroeras 2008. On the scene in the context of broader hedonic function of literature, see Wohl 2015, 482–85. Creative wordplay "pleases" (ἀρέσκει) Dionysus at Ar. *Ran*. 116; the god "is pleased" (ἐγὼ δ' ἔχαιρον) by Aeschylean silences no less than contemporary babbling at 916–17, etc.

10. Woodruff 1982, 93–103 provides an overview of the date and authenticity; Hyland (2008, xi) makes the observation that, in the wake of Leo Strauss's work on the Platonic authorship, the conceptual issue of what constitutes an author itself is now the more pressing question than the individual who may be said to have composed the work. See also Heitsch 2011.

11. On Plato's engagement with beauty across dialogues, see Hyland 2008; on his joint engagement with beauty and "art," see Denham 2012. The dialogue is discussed, in a modern attempt at understanding the Greek idea of beauty, at Konstan 2014, 115–19.

Major demands special attention for what it does *not* do: namely, it does not associate certain aesthetic values with certain types of art. It thus avoids locating genres or media within a hierarchical matrix of values such as truth, goodness, and beauty.[12] Art and similar cultural productions are discussed in the *Hippias Major*, but often in comparatively (and, indeed, sometimes pointedly) rudimentary ways. Socrates, for example, talks about the relative applications and merits of wooden and golden spoons to establish distinctions between *to kalon* as "the beneficial," "the appropriate," or "the fine."[13] For our present purposes, the *Hippias Major*'s lack of direct engagement with questions of poetic genre or cultural production is not a shortcoming, but rather a unique strength of the dialogue. In theorizing beauty (mostly) apart from these issues and such other rich and complex topics as erotic desire and rhetorical persuasion, *Hippias Major* provides a useful comparison to similar passages of *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* without becoming entangled within the broader political and psychological webs that transect *Republic* and *Laws*.

This is not to say that the *Hippias Major* is unconcerned with aesthetic experience in social contexts. As soon as Socrates turns his conversation with the eponymous interlocutor, the sophist Hippias of Elis, to the issue of defining *to kalon* (which Socrates introduces by holding this term in contradistinction to *to aischron*, Pl. *Hipp. Maj.* 286d1), he presents these terms in the context of making an informed distinction between which parts of speeches are "beautifully" or "shamefully" said. In the discussion that ensues, first Hippias, then Socrates, offers a priamel of three definitions of beauty. The sophist provides a list of exemplary cases (viz., an attractive woman, gold, and a traditionally venerated life), while the latter proposes three near synonyms as definitions (the appropriate, the able and useful, and the beneficial).[14] Each of these suggestions is found, in turn, to be deficient in some crucial respect. Exceeding structural symmetry within the dialogue, Socrates at last introduces a fourth definition of beauty, which he frames, as he had with his previous suggestions, as an entry into a competition between various definitions:

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12. On aporia in Plato, especially when pertaining to questions of pleasure and value, see Rudebusch 2002, 9–18, Miller 2008, and Nightingale 2010.

13. Pl. *Hp. Mai.* 291b.

14. On the history and form of the priamel (a term that was not used in the ancient world), see Race 1982, ix–x. Woodruff (1982, 46–77) walks readers through the logical strengths and faults of each "definition."

> ὅρα γάρ· εἰ ὃ ἂν χαίρειν ἡμᾶς ποιῇ, μήτι πάσας τὰς ἡδονάς, ἀλλ' ὃ ἂν διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς καὶ τῆς ὄψεως, τοῦτο φαῖμεν εἶναι καλόν, πῶς τι ἄρ' ἂν ἀγωνιζοίμεθα. Pl. *Hp. Mai.* 297e5–298a1
>
> Look: if we were to say that that is beautiful which makes us feel joy—I do not mean all pleasures, but that which makes us feel joy through hearing and sight—if we were to say this, how might we fare in the contest?[15]

Illustrating more specifically what he has in mind, Socrates lists a number of examples taken, as moderns might say, from the "fine arts."[16] He continues:

> οἵ τέ γέ που καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ὦ Ἱππία, καὶ τὰ ποικίλματα πάντα καὶ τὰ ζωγραφήματα καὶ τὰ πλάσματα τέρπει ἡμᾶς ὁρῶντας, ἃ ἂν καλὰ ᾖ· καὶ οἱ φθόγγοι οἱ καλοὶ καὶ ἡ μουσικὴ σύμπασα καὶ οἱ λόγοι καὶ αἱ μυθολογίαι ταὐτὸν τοῦτο ἐργάζονται . . . 298a1–5
>
> Men, when they're fine anyway, Hippias—everything decorative, pictures and sculptures—these all delight us when we see them, if they [*sc.* the art objects] are fine. Fine sounds and music altogether, and speeches and storytelling have the same effect.

The discontinuous syntax with which Socrates delivers these words calls attention to the broader conflation of objective and subjective evaluation in Greek thought. By identifying his interlocutor and himself as *kaloi anthrōpoi*, "fine men" (one of several instances of ironic flattery in the dialogue), Socrates suggests that it is only those who are "fine" (which might be variously construed as nobly born, properly educated, handsome in appearance, etc.) who, when it comes to matters of taste, can properly discern the pleasures given in the various media Socrates lists. Socrates does not insist upon this point, but what might be called the "subjectivist position"—that beauty and ugliness are properties of the beholder as much as the object itself—is an argumentative posture Plato will repeat in Diotima's ladder

15. I follow the translation of Woodruff 1982, with modifications.

16. On "fine arts," a phrase and concept attributed to Charles Batteux, see my discussion with notes in the introduction. On Plato and painting, see Keuls 1978; on ancient views of art more generally, see Pollitt 1974; on Plato and "mass media," see Nehamas 1999, 279–99.

of love in *Symposium*, in the education of the guardians in *Republic*, and in an important passage of *Laws*, discussed below. Socrates' proposition, and Hippias' assent, suggests a general resonance and affective receptivity not only between art and its audience, between also between one's senses and one's sensibilities. To recognize beauty in art is (implicitly) to recognize and project the same quality in oneself. Attending to ugliness becomes, by contrast, a riskier social proposition.

The focus of this section of the *Hippias Major* is admittedly not on subjective affect, but on the objective sources of aesthetic pleasure. Socrates speaks next of "decorations" (Greek, *poikilmata*), paintings, and sculptures, visual examples of art that Socrates follows up with auditory analogues, both nonverbal (e.g., sounds, the instrumental component of music) and verbal (e.g., speeches, stories).[17] Several items could be understood to apply to the natural world. Socrates speaks, for example, of the *poikilia* of the stars at *Resp*. 529d and the *phthongoi* of animals at *Resp*. 397a, and numerical abstractions are discussed as *poikilmata* at *Leg*. 747a. The overall concern here, however, seems to be with cultural production, from high art to handiwork, from concert music to euphony in speaking. Socrates' pairing of seeing and hearing reflects Greek popular sentiment with respect to art—part of a long-standing privileging of these sensory modalities—but the philosopher recognizes that limiting *to kalon* to pleasures felt in just two senses is prima facie a suspicious argumentative move.[18] Indeed, only a few lines after first offering this definition, Socrates goes on to attack it on two separate grounds: not only is the separation of seeing and hearing from other sensory modalities unjustifiably arbitrary, but the inherent complexity of such a definition is antithetical to Socrates' general insistence upon the essential unity of verbal concepts.[19] Socrates introduces next a counterexample to any argument that would equate "beauty" with sensory "pleasure" in general, and in so doing returns again to the concept of *to aischron*:

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17. Grand-Clément 2015 offers a succinct overview of sensory *poikilia* in ancient aesthetics. For a cognitively and materially informed approach, see Lather 2021.

18. A Routledge series on The Senses in Antiquity, edited by Mark Bradley and Shane Butler, offers an expansive and current overview; on seeing, hearing, and their interactions, see especially Butler and Purves 2014; Squire 2015; Butler and Nooter 2018.

19. Woodruff 1982, 78, follows others in calling such "multiple form" definitions "Gorgian," after the philosopher from Leontini with whom they are most associated. He notes such definitions entail no logical contradiction, only different assumptions, from those Socrates prefers.

> τὰ δέ που περὶ τὰ ἀφροδίσια πάντες ἂν ἡμῖν μάχοιντο ὡς ἥδιστον ὄν, δεῖν δὲ αὐτό, ἐάν τις καὶ πράττῃ, οὕτω πράττειν ὥστε μηδένα ὁρᾶν, ὡς αἴσχιστον ὂν ὁρᾶσθαι. Pl. *Hp. Mai*. 299a3–6
>
> And as for making love, everybody would fight us; they'd say it is most pleasant (*hēdiston*), but that one should do it, if he does it at all, where no one will see, because it is the foulest (*aischiston*) thing to be seen.

The conflation of aesthetic, moral, and social categories, which apply to the concept of *to aischron* no less than *to kalon*, results in a socially powerfully logical contradiction: sexual activity is be considered extremely "foul" while being, at least to normative aristocratic Greek male perspectives, supremely pleasurable, an antithesis Socrates underscores through the superlatives *hēdiston* and *aischiston*. At least beyond the sensory modalities of seeing and hearing, beauty and pleasure have demonstrably different domains.

Socrates moves on to investigate the relationship between the senses of sight and hearing (299d–300a). It is noteworthy that, at least for these two senses, the equation of sensory pleasure (*terpsis* or *hēdonē*) with beauty (*to kalon*) is never openly refuted. Socrates interrogates the senses of vision and hearing separately, with the goal of isolating the nature of a pleasure felt in each experience:

> ΣΩ. δι᾽ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὅτι ἡδοναί εἰσι προείλεσθε ταύτας τὰς ἡδονὰς ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων ἡδονῶν, τοιοῦτόν τι ὁρῶντες ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοῖν, ὅτι ἔχουσί τι διάφορον τῶν ἄλλων, εἰς ὃ ἀποβλέποντες καλάς φατε αὐτὰς εἶναι; οὐ γάρ που διὰ τοῦτο καλή ἐστιν ἡδονὴ ἡ διὰ τῆς ὄψεως, ὅτι δι᾽ ὄψεώς ἐστιν· εἰ γὰρ τοῦτο αὐτῇ ἦν τὸ αἴτιον καλῇ εἶναι, οὐκ ἄν ποτε ἦν ἡ ἑτέρα, ἡ διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς, καλή· οὔκουν ἔστι γε δι᾽ ὄψεως ἡδονή. Ἀληθῆ λέγεις, φήσομεν;
>
> ΙΠ. Φήσομεν γάρ.
>
> ΣΩ. "Οὐδέ γ᾽ αὖ ἡ δι᾽ ἀκοῆς ἡδονή, ὅτι δι᾽ ἀκοῆς ἐστι, διὰ ταῦτα τυγχάνει καλή· οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε αὖ ἡ διὰ τῆς ὄψεως καλὴ ἦν· οὔκουν ἔστι γε δι᾽ ἀκοῆς ἡδονή." ἀληθῆ φήσομεν, ὦ Ἱππία, λέγειν τὸν ἄνδρα ταῦτα λέγοντα;
>
> ΙΠ. Ἀληθῆ. 299d7–300a5

So. You saw some quality in the pair of them, something that differentiates them from the others, and you say they are fine by look-

ing at that. I don't suppose pleasure through sight is fine because of *that*—that it is through sight. Because if that were the cause of its being fine, the other—the one through hearing—wouldn't ever be fine. It's not a pleasure through sight. You say that's true. Shall we say that's true?

Hp. We'll say it.

So. And again, pleasure through hearing turns out not to be fine because of *that*—that it is through hearing. Otherwise, pleasure through sight would never be fine, because it is not a pleasure through hearing. Shall we say that the man who says this is saying the truth, Hippias?

Hp. It's true.

It is noteworthy that, at this point, Socrates and Hippias both reject the possibility of the cross-modal experience of pleasure, insisting on the one hand that each sense seems to have its own distinct version of pleasure, and, on the other, that *to kalon*, the "fine" or "beautiful" thing, must be distinctly perceived through one sense or the other. It is at this point that the examples given at the outset of this line of reasoning—pictures and sculptures, sounds and music, speeches and storytelling—may be seen as carefully chosen so as to appeal narrowly to one sense or the other. It is significant that choral and theatrical performance are not mentioned by name in this list, given that elsewhere Plato prominently attributes both senses to theatrical engagement and even slips between one sensory modality and the other.[20]

This definition does not satisfy Socrates' insistence upon a universally applicable framework. As Socrates pushes further into questions of logical duality, Hippias becomes increasingly hostile toward what he seems to regard as Socrates' quibbling. Frustrated by the most recent turn in the discussion, Hippias interrupts:

ΙΠ. Ἀλλὰ γὰρ δὴ σύ, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὰ μὲν ὅλα τῶν πραγμάτων οὐ σκοπεῖς, οὐδ' ἐκεῖνοι οἷς σὺ εἴωθας διαλέ γεσθαι, κρούετε δὲ ἀπολαμβάνοντες τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ἐν τοῖς λόγοις κατατέμνοντες. διὰ ταῦτα οὕτω μεγάλα ὑμᾶς λανθάνει καὶ διανεκῆ σώματα τῆς οὐσίας πεφυκότα. *Hp. Mai*. 301b2–7

20. Cf. *Resp*. 476b7 and c3–4. For Plato, both visual and aural components of dance are both subsumed under the category of *mousikē*; see Peponi 2012; on the linking of vocal and kinetic activities in the appreciation of dance, see Peponi 2015.

> Hp. But Socrates, *you* don't look at the entireties of things, nor do the people you're used to talking with. You people knock away at the fine and the other beings by taking each separately and cutting it up with words. Because of that you don't realize how great they are—naturally continuous bodies of being.

Hippias does not cut a particularly sympathetic figure in his Platonic representation, being characterized as both falsely confident and impatient here and especially vain in the *Hippias Minor*. Although Hippias speaks in anger when he accuses Socrates of drawing pointless academic distinctions, his words nevertheless reflect a real danger of overly fine analysis. Paul Woodruff sees Hippias' concern with Socratic overanalysis as a broad-based conceptual objection, noting that the sophist's "commitment to 'naturally continuous bodies of being' would probably bar him from dividing the fine from the good."[21] But Hippias' words can also be interpreted in their more immediate aesthetic context, in which Socrates seeks distinctions between the pleasures of seeing and hearing. Hippias' concern that Socrates and his ilk are "cutting it [*sc. to kalon*] up with words" (*en tois logois katatemnontes*) need not refer exclusively to hair-splitting conceptual distinctions, but to the (related) categorical separation of sensory modalities. If this is true, then Hippias is also raising the objection that by cutting up *to kalon* beyond its current definition—"what is pleasurably perceived through seeing and hearing"—Socrates is rejecting an elegantly framed, coherent concept with real-world application. Indeed, aesthetic beauty will be framed in similar terms across time. Socrates and Hippias both take for granted that these sensory pleasures are distinct, and that viewing a painting is fundamentally separate from listening to a speech. The multimodal art forms of dance and dramatic performance not only resist such distinctions, but they also serve as crucial, connecting links with the Wittgensteinian "family resemblances" shared across the so-called "fine arts."[22]

Leaving aside the question of whether pleasure itself can be complex (a discussion Plato would later have in his *Philebus*) when it comes to the pleasure taken in seeing and hearing art, the "beauty" that is perceived is not necessarily to be thought of as the simple sum of pleasures separately in each sense, but from the complex mental interplay of the senses that recognize and respond to the composite existence of embodied, material

21. Woodruff 1982, 74, referring to Pl. *Hp. Mai*. 301b6.
22. See Wittgenstein 2009, §66.

artistic production, in which words and objects, sights and sounds, all combine to create a composite aesthetic effect. Hippias' positive examples of beauty, despite their limitations as theoretical models, nevertheless reveal how our aesthetic concepts are experientially grounded in objects and our sensibilities toward them. An affective approach to this dialogue casts Hippias' assertions in a more positive light.

The Aesthetics of Genre in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* Book 2

Through the *Hippias Major*, Plato passes no ethical judgment on art or any of its forms. That the philosopher would go on to offer a firm, if occasionally reluctant, dismissal of tragedy is well known from certain frequently cited passages of *Republic* and *Laws*, where an "ancient quarrel" between poets and philosophers is first introduced and subsequently resolved in the remarkable claim that philosophically informed laws are the "truest tragedy of all."[23] Plato's engagement with dramatic aesthetics is evidently an important part of the philosopher's broader engagement with mimetic art in general. Poetry—from its inspired creation and puzzling ontological status to its profound social effects—fascinated Plato throughout his career.[24] But, as so often with the author's elusive engagement with certain recurrent topics like *to kalon*, he offers no positive or systematic approach to the subject. As with the topic of "beauty," no single Platonic dialogue is dedicated to poetry, let alone one of its aspects or genres, but this interest is spread across various works.[25]

When compared with later theories of poetry (Aristotle's *Poetics*, Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*, and other treatises now mostly lost,

23. The *locus classicus* for debates concerning the "ancient quarrel" between poetry and philosophy is Pl. *Resp*. 607b–608a, where Socrates tells his interlocutor Glaucon that he will happily admit poetry into Kallipolis, provided it can be shown to be useful (ὠφέλιμος), truthful (ἀληθής), and elevated (σπουδαῖος). Pl. *Leg*. 816d., another crucial passage in this regard, is discussed below. See also Pl. *Phdr*. 268c–d (on tragedy's ability to produce pity and fear among its audience), *Grg*. 502b (suggesting tragedy's principal aim is creating pleasure), and *Ap*. 22a (where tragic poets are revealed to be ignorant of key aspects of their craft). The pseudo-Platonic dialogue, [Pl.] *Min*. 321a4–5, gives further evidence of the anxieties felt about tragedy's crowd-pleasing, soul-stirring ability.

24. Murray 1981, 87–100, examines poetic inspiration from Homer to Pindar, with special interest in the Platonic reception of this tradition.

25. For discussions on Plato and the poets, see esp. the edited anthology by Murray 1996 and the volume edited by Destrée and Hermann 2011.

such as Philodemus' *On Poems*), Plato's approach to verbal art is relatively nonaesthetic. Indeed, the most sustained Platonic critique of poetry and the mimetic arts, offered in the tenth book of *Republic*, focuses on the ontological separation of artistic representation and reality. What Stephen Halliwell has called the "aesthetics of mimesis" is clearly at play across the entire *Republic*, and especially in its tenth book, which ties together many of the various (and not always consistent) strands of what has become popularly described as Plato's Theory of Forms.

Plato's interest in mimesis in *Republic* has little concern for "beauty," at least as it was popularly understood at the time, and this mature work seems disconnected from his earlier *Hippias Major*. Rarely in *Republic* or in his later works are words such as *kalos* or *aischros* used by Plato to describe poems or poetry.[26] Rather, poetry is typically viewed through its social effects: it is described as flattering, protyrannical, deceptive, soul-stirring, and crowd-pleasing.[27] Although Plato's interest in poetry is an abiding one, by his later Middle Dialogues it is not nearly so "aesthetic"—that is, to borrow Porter's key terms, concerned with "matter, sensation, and experience"—as *Hippias Major* (or even *Symposium*) might lead one to believe.

But in his last major work, *Laws*, Plato returns to discuss poetry in terms of aesthetic evaluation, but in ways different from his earlier dialogues.[28] Here, too, "beauty" is not at stake exclusively, but is inseparable from the broader "goodness" signified by *to kalon*. In contrast to *Republic*, where the concern with poetry was pervasive, only two passages in the colossal *Laws* discuss the aesthetics of dramatic arts. This pair is significant, since both are concerned, not simply with art qua mimesis, but with its aesthetics, in

26. Earlier passages from *Republic* that deal with poetry and, in particular, tragedy, include worries expressed at Pl. *Resp*. 378d–81e (poetry's inaccurate and unflattering portrayal of the gods), 394b–5b (drama and Homeric poetry's use of direct quotation), 408b–c (denigration of Asclepius), and 568a–b (Euripides apparent protyrannical sympathies). Halliwell (2002) dedicates large sections both to Platonic and Aristotelian texts (of the latter, chiefly *Poetics*) and follows the philosophical afterlife of mimesis through modernity.

27. For tragedy as flattery, see *Grg*. 502b; protyrannical, *Resp*. 586a–b; deceptive, ibid. 378d, 394b, etc.; crowd-pleasing and soul-stirring, [*Min*.] 321a.

28. After falling out of favor in the second half of the twentieth century, *Laws* has received much focus at the start of the new millennium, with new translations with commentaries by Brisson and Pradeau (2006); Sauvé-Meyer 2015 (Books 1 and 2 only); and Griffith 2016. The dialogue's concern with civic life, particularly poetry and performance, have been particularly explored: see esp. Peponi 2013; Prauscello 2014; Folch 2015; and Laks 2022. The dialogue's influence on generic discourse is profound: see Prauscello 2013; Stephens 2022.

a discussion that is sensitive to both the materiality of performance and the affective disposition of the audience.

The first passage, from the second book of *Laws*, artfully and provocatively makes what could otherwise be the banal observation that the assessment of poetic performance is subjective. The speaker, an anonymous Socratic figure who claims to be from Athens and is traditionally known as "the Athenian" or "the stranger," makes the claim that each genre of poetry is particularly suited to a certain type of audience. At this juncture of *Laws*, the Athenian's conversation has drifted to the subject of choral festivals and the practice of rewarding the festival performer "who best succeeds in giving us joy and pleasure," which is declared a sensible custom.[29] In typical Socratic fashion, however, the Athenian stranger doggedly pursues the further ramifications of rewarding a prize to the best pleasure giver in competition. He instructs his interlocutor Clinias to imagine a hypothetical festival that includes a variety of forms of live competition—athletic, choral, and dramatic—in which a prize is given to the competitor "who provides the most pleasure" to those assembled.[30]

The crux of the passage resides in what, at least to a modern reader, is the dual significance of *agōn*, a word that denoted athletic as well as musical-artistic competitions.[31] Although musical and athletic competitions occurred in parallel at several Greek festivals, the Athenian's hypothetical competition is provocative for seeking to directly compare apples to oranges, judging pentathletes directly against playwrights, dancers against discus throwers. Clinias, while recognizing the absurdity of the Athenian's proposal, nevertheless responds in a way that suggests he believes an "objective" winner of such a diverse competition to be possible—with no regard to the different genres of performance—depending upon the competitors'

29. Pl. *Leg.* 657e2–3. The details of performance are implicit and liable to generalization (as, indeed, the Athenian goes on to do); that old men are described as being only able to watch such performances, however, suggests dance may be suggested.

30. Pl. *Leg.* 658b1.

31. I use "musical-artistic," to refer to those performances which Greeks simply grouped under the umbrella term of *mousikē*, viz., music, poetry, drama, dance, and their various combinations. The parallel practice of athletic and musical-artistic competition at the same festival was familiar from the expansion of the Pythian *agōnes* after the First Sacred War (early sixth century BCE; see *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*,4th ed., *s.v. Pythian Games*), and were, during the classical era, a noteworthy feature of the Panathenaic festivals, which Plato and his audience would have attended. Drama, notably, was not included in these competitions, but reserved for Dionysian festivals. On agon as part of the early Greek vocabulary of athletic competition, see Scanlon 1983.

abilities. With the aplomb of a utilitarian, Clinias assumes that were a universal yardstick of pleasure possible, there would be no problem in judging one performance "more pleasurable" than another. The Athenian stranger counters, however, with an answer that leads to a further qualification. Noting that different parts of the audience will prefer different genres of performance, the Athenian suggests that what is truly the most pleasing performance is that which most pleases the best judges, whom the Athenian takes to be older men, very much like Clinias and himself (Pl. *Leg.* 2.658c10–59a1):

ΑΘ. Εἰ μὲν τοίνυν τὰ πάνυ σμικρὰ κρίνοι παιδία, κρινοῦσιν τὸν τὰ θαύματα ἐπιδεικνύντα· ἦ γάρ;

ΚΛ. Πῶς γὰρ οὔ;

ΑΘ. Ἐὰν δέ γ' οἱ μείζους παῖδες, τὸν τὰς κωμῳδίας· τραγῳδίαν δὲ αἵ τε πεπαιδευμέναι τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τὰ νέα μειράκια καὶ σχεδὸν ἴσως τὸ πλῆθος πάντων.

ΚΛ. Ἴσως δῆτα.

ΑΘ. Ῥαψῳδὸν δέ, καλῶς Ἰλιάδα καὶ Ὀδύσσειαν ἤ τι τῶν Ἡσιοδείων διατιθέντα, τάχ' ἂν ἡμεῖς οἱ γέροντες ἥδιστα ἀκούσαντες νικᾶν ἂν φαῖμεν πάμπολυ. τίς οὖν ὀρθῶς ἂν νενικηκὼς εἴη; τοῦτο μετὰ τοῦτο· ἦ γάρ;

ΚΛ. Ναί.

ΑΘ. Δῆλον ὡς ἔμοιγε καὶ ὑμῖν ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστιν φάναι τοὺς ὑπὸ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἡλικιωτῶν κριθέντας ὀρθῶς ἂν νικᾶν. τὸ γὰρ ἔθος ἡμῖν τῶν νῦν δὴ πάμπολυ δοκεῖ τῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἁπάσαις καὶ πανταχοῦ βέλτιστον γίγνεσθαι.

ΚΛ. Τί μήν;

ΑΘ. Συγχωρῶ δὴ τό γε τοσοῦτον καὶ ἐγὼ τοῖς πολλοῖς, δεῖν τὴν μουσικὴν ἡδονῇ κρίνεσθαι, μὴ μέντοι τῶν γε ἐπιτυχόντων, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐκείνην εἶναι Μοῦσαν καλλίστην ἥτις τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἱκανῶς πεπαιδευμένους τέρπει, μάλιστα δὲ ἥτις ἕνα τὸν ἀρετῇ τε καὶ παιδείᾳ διαφέροντα

ATH: If the tiniest kids are to be judges, they will vote for the puppet-showman (*ho ta thaumata epideiknuōn*), or won't they?

CLIN: Of course.

ATH: And older children, they will vote for the man putting on comedies? And the educated women and the young men and the whole crowd generally, they will vote for the tragedy.

CLIN: It seems likely.

ATH: And a rhapsode, beautifully (*kalōs*) putting on the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* or something by Hesiod—we old men (*gerontes*), taking delight in hearing him, would quickly say that he's the winner by a long shot. Who then would rightly be the winner? That is the next affair, right?

CLIN. Yes.

ATH. Clearly it is necessary, for both me and you all, to say that those who are judged best by men of our age win the competition rightly (*orthōs . . . nikan*). For we are accustomed to think that of all the poetry now in all the cities of the world, epic is the best anywhere.

CLIN. Of course.

ATH. This much I concede to the majority: that the criterion of *mousikē* ought to be pleasure—but not the pleasure of any chance person, but instead, that most beautiful Muse (*Mousa kallistē*) which most pleases the best (*beltistoi*) men of sufficient education, and which pleases the one who excels others in virtue and education.

The Athenian slips between initially considering old men to be the best judges, apparently by dint of their age alone, to allowing for anyone "of sufficient education" (*hikanōs pepaideumenos*) to be the best judge.[32] The stranger extends the educative component of pleasure, complaining that popular art forms have corrupted taste, adding that the good judge ought to be an instructor (*didaskalos*), rather than a student (*mathētēs*), of public opinion.[33] The use of *didaskalos*, which in addition to the generic term for "teacher" (and would therefore apply to those who first taught young Greek pupils their Homer), was also a widely recognized technical term of the theater, where it referred to the "trainer" of the chorus, a role closest to our modern sense of a theatrical "director." Art and authority, pedagogy

32. The Athenian's link between audience "taste" and artistic value anticipates the aesthetic notion, articulated by Hume, that the most beautiful artworks are those which please the most discerning minds over the longest time. For an up-to-date bibliography on the contributions of Hume's "standard of taste" to contemporary aesthetic discourse, see Hagberg 2020.

33. At *Leg.* 6. 764d–e3, the Athenian sets further standards for "competition-judges" (ἄρχοντες ἀγωνιστίκης): they must be over forty years of age for choral performance and thirty for solo performance.

and politics, all commingle in the Athenian stranger's short hypothetical, which simultaneously problematizes and conflates two parallel critical systems: the judgment of diverse performances or objects according to a single property (in this case, pleasure) and the qualitative variety of that property among sundry audiences.

In the section quoted above, the Athenian offers a characteristically Platonic ascending hierarchy of genres whose value is directly correlated to the judgment and education of devotees of each art form.[34] The value of athletic and artistic performance articulated in this passage is presented as some mixture of hedonism and aestheticism: though pleasure is the primary benchmark of assessment, these pleasures are also ordered upon a contentious social-artistic scale, determined by cultural notions of what is "properly" good or beautiful. Although pleasure is the sole express criterion of the hypothetical competition, by grouping the performances into certain genres that are pleasurable to certain demographics, the Athenian (unlike Clinias, who makes no distinction between types of performance) suggests that pleasure cannot be separated from its artistic context and associated audience. According to the Athenian, the pleasures of poetic performance are genre-dependent, not wholly unlike how the pleasures discussed in the *Hippias Major* by Socrates and Hippias were sense-dependent. The notion that each genre appeals differently resembles the theory of "appropriate pleasure" (*oikeia hēdonē*) fundamental to Aristotle's definition of genre in *Poetics*. Artistic pleasure, and with one's sense of aesthetic beauty, is being embraced as fundamentally fragmented and discontinuous.

The link between genre and audience is thus essential to the evaluation of art in *Laws*. Puppet shows occupy the lowest rung on the Athenian's scale of value, not simply on account of that genre's intrinsic faults or merits (or, at least, not directly), but rather because puppets please the most ignorant of audiences: children.[35] By contrast, Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, is "the most beautiful" or "the best" (*kallistē*) of the Muses. The Athenian stranger's generic hierarchy also plots a positive correlation between symbolic arts and pleasure; aesthetic value gradually increases from the firmly material

34. Other hierarchies include the so-called "ladder" (Greek ἐπαναβασμός) of erotic desire proposed by Diotima at Pl. *Symp*. 210a4–2a7 and the distinction between form, physical object, and mimetic representation developed at *Resp*. 596–99.

35. It is no coincidence that puppet shows represent the state of philosophical ignorance allegorized in the cave at Pl. *Resp*. 514b; note that Socrates' interlocutor there also remarks on the absurdity of the example of puppet shows, which seem to have been widely considered a low form of entertainment.

(puppet shows) into the embodied representations of drama and finally to the verbal, musical narratives of rhapsodic performance.

But, as in the ladder of love in Plato's *Symposium*, bodies are not entirely forgotten in this argument. That Plato invokes the anthropomorphic Muses as representatives of their arts, rather than discussing the arts themselves, is a reminder that the embodied, erotic resonances of *kalos* are rarely inert. Translating *kallistē* as "the best muse" would be insufficient, particularly when a different superlative of *kalos*, *beltistoi* (the "best men" to whom Calliope, or epic, is pleasing), is invoked lines later. *Mousa kallistē*, the "most beautiful muse" charges the otherwise neutral adverb *kalōs* (used in this context to describe the performance of hexameter verse) with a pointedly aesthetic force. The epic rhapsode does not simply sing *well*; inspired by the most beautiful Muse, he performs *beautifully*.

Judging art by the quality of the audience that favors it, although not original to this passage from *Laws*, presents a radical mode of artistic assessment.[36] It is an aesthetics of reception rather than of content. To focus on audience, especially in the case of live performance events like those listed, also entails the materiality of representation—*opsis*, to borrow Aristotle's term—as well the connections between performer, audience, space, and other tangible components of performance that contribute to the mediated aesthetic effect.[37] Such practical concerns, however, are bracketed in what amounts to a teleological narrative of educative-aesthetic development from the Athenian stranger that moves from the embodied and physical to the abstract and divinely inspired. The sights and sounds of the theater (as well as the pleasure audiences take in them), which were topics of close analysis in *Hippias Major* and of moral concern in *Republic*, fade to the background as audience demographics and divine inspiration come to define what is "pleasurable," and by extension "beautiful," in art. Little room is left by such a discussion for materially mediated ugliness or affective response.

36. The construction of dramatic audience, by author, is an important part of Aeschylus' criticism of Euripides in *Frogs*. A passage similar to the one presently under discussion, Arist. *Poet*. 1461b26–28, considers whether and how tragedy is "vulgar" (φορτικός), a failure Aristotle intriguingly attributes to overzealous actors rather than poets. Although the distinctions made by the Athenian in the *Laws* refer primarily to age, gender, and education, poets may well have approached their audiences along other demographic lines: cf. Battisti 1990, 5–25; and Roselli 2011.

37. On the importance of such materials in citharodic performance, see Power 2010, 11–27.

Further Linking Genre and Aesthetics: *Laws*, Book 7

The Athenian stranger's preference for epic over tragedy in the second book of *Laws* sets the stage for a more directly confrontational stance he will take against tragic drama near the end of the seventh book of *Laws*.[38] Here, the Athenian stranger begins with a comparison between comedy and tragedy that is, at least compared to his own earlier hierarchy or Aristotle's assessment in *Poetics*, favorably inclined toward the humorous genre. Positing an antithesis between comedy and tragedy, a local instance of the broader antithesis between "the humorous" (*to geloion*) and "the serious" (*to spoudaion*)—a distinction strikingly parallel to Aristotle's taxonomy of poetry—the Athenian stranger seeks an externalizing, peculiarly debasing, way to shore up comedy's ethical and aesthetic shortcomings. The passage is long, but merits being quoted in full (Pl. Leg. 816d–817a):

> τὰ μὲν οὖν τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων καὶ γενναίων ψυχῶν εἰς τὰς χορείας, οἵας εἴρηται δεῖν αὐτὰς εἶναι, διαπεπέρανται, τὰ δὲ τῶν αἰσχρῶν σωμάτων καὶ διανοημάτων καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ τὰ τοῦ γέλωτος κωμῳδήματα τετραμμένων, κατὰ λέξιν τε καὶ ᾠδὴν καὶ κατὰ ὄρχησιν καὶ κατὰ τὰ τούτων πάντων μιμήματα κεκωμῳδημένα, ἀνάγκη μὲν θεάσασθαι καὶ γνωρίζειν: ἄνευ γὰρ γελοίων τὰ σπουδαῖα καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐναντίων τὰ ἐναντία μαθεῖν μὲν οὐ δυνατόν, εἰ μέλλει τις φρόνιμος ἔσεσθαι, ποιεῖν δὲ οὐκ αὖ δυνατὸν ἀμφότερα, εἴ τις αὖ μέλλει καὶ σμικρὸν ἀρετῆς μεθέξειν, ἀλλὰ αὐτῶν ἕνεκα τούτων καὶ μανθάνειν αὐτὰ δεῖ, τοῦ μή ποτε δι' ἄγνοιαν δρᾶν ἢ λέγειν ὅσα γελοῖα, μηδὲν δέον, δούλοις δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ ξένοις ἐμμίσθοις προστάττειν μιμεῖσθαι, σπουδὴν δὲ περὶ αὐτὰ εἶναι μηδέποτε μηδ' ἡντινοῦν, μηδέ τινα μανθάνοντα αὐτὰ γίγνεσθαι φανερὸν τῶν ἐλευθέρων, μήτε γυναῖκα μήτε ἄνδρα, καινὸν δὲ ἀεί τι περὶ αὐτὰ φαίνεσθαι τῶν μιμημάτων. ὅσα μὲν οὖν περὶ γέλωτά ἐστιν παίγνια, ἃ δὴ κωμῳδίαν πάντες λέγομεν, οὕτως τῷ νόμῳ καὶ λόγῳ κείσθω.
>
> What concerns the actions of fair and noble souls in the matter of that kind of choristry which we have approved as right has now been

38. The passage is discussed by Folch 2015, 194–201. Laks 2010 approaches it from a political, rather than poetic, angle. On connections between comedy and Plato's *Laws* in general, see Prauscello 2013, 218–222.

> fully discussed. The actions of ugly bodies and ugly ideas (*aischra sōmata kai dianoēmata*) and of the men engaged in ludicrous comic-acting (*hoi epi ta tou gelōtos kōmōidēmata tetrammenon*), in regard to both speech and dance, and the representations given by all these comedians—all this subject we must necessarily consider and estimate. For it is impossible to learn the serious without the comic (*aneu gar geloiōn ta spoudaia . . . mathein . . . ou dynaton*), or any one of a pair of contraries without the other, if one is to be a wise man; but to put both into practice is equally impossible, if one is to share in even a small measure of virtue; in fact, it is precisely for this reason that one should learn them—in order to avoid ever doing or saying anything ludicrous (*geloia*), through ignorance, when one ought not; we will impose such mimicry on slaves and foreign hirelings, and no serious attention shall ever be paid to it, nor shall any free man or free woman be seen learning it, and there must always be some novel feature in their mimic shows. Let such, then, be the regulations for all those laughable amusements which we all call "comedy" as laid down both by law and by argument. (Bury 1967 translation, with modifications.)

The Athenian stranger's language is soaked through with the vocabulary of aesthetic and generic criticism, using terms that are evaluative (*aischros*, *geloios*, *kalos*, *spoudaios*), experiential (*choreia*, *paignion*, *theasthai*, *manthanein*, *prattein*, *gnōrizein*), and embodied (*sōmata*, *psyche*). Materials, bodies, and the spectators' affective engagement with performance are on full display, but the stranger is no longer talking about tragedy, which in Book 2 of *Laws* was the "most pleasing" of all performances save for rhapsodic renditions of hexameter poetry, but rather comedic productions. The Athenian stranger's proposal is framed by negation and antithesis, suggesting that negative exemplars and anti-ideals realized through embodied appearance, speech, and movement should be provided for citizens to note, learn from, but ultimately to avoid.[39] This inverted framework allows ugliness, shame, and similar negative evaluations of dramatic performance to be not only recognized but also valued, but only as cautionary examples. Interestingly, while the stranger recognizes that wisdom requires considering and learning from opposites (*manthanein . . . ouk dynaton*), free citizens are discour-

39. Laks 2022, 102–6, cites this passage in discussing the obligations of freedom, which include avoiding ugliness.

aged from being seen publicly "learning" (*mathanonta . . . phaneron*) these acts. The Athenian stranger describes as ugly or shameful (*aischros*) both the bodies (*sōmata*) and ideas (*dianoēmata*) that such comedy represents, drawing comparisons between generic medium and message in ways Plato consistently avoids in discussions of tragedy.

The negative exemplarity of comedy gives the genre intellectual purpose within an ideal society, but tragedy, the Athenian stranger goes on to argue, would play a redundant and inferior role, second to a better (*beltiōn*) literary work, namely the laws. The Athenian stranger continues (Pl. *Leg.* 816d3–817d8):

> τῶν δὲ σπουδαίων, ὥς φασι, τῶν περὶ τραγῳδίαν ἡμῖν ποιητῶν, ἐάν ποτέ τινες αὐτῶν ἡμᾶς ἐλθόντες ἐπανερωτήσωσιν οὑτωσί πως: 'ὦ ξένοι, πότερον φοιτῶμεν ὑμῖν εἰς τὴν πόλιν τε καὶ χώραν ἢ μή, καὶ τὴν ποίησιν φέρωμέν τε καὶ ἄγωμεν, ἢ πῶς ὑμῖν δέδοκται περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα δρᾶν;'—τί οὖν ἂν πρὸς ταῦτα ὀρθῶς ἀποκριναίμεθα τοῖς θείοις ἀνδράσιν; ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ δοκεῖ τάδε: 'ὦ ἄριστοι,' φάναι, 'τῶν ξένων, ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν τραγῳδίας αὐτοὶ ποιηταὶ κατὰ δύναμιν ὅτι καλλίστης ἅμα καὶ ἀρίστης: πᾶσα οὖν ἡμῖν ἡ πολιτεία συνέστηκε μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου, ὃ δή φαμεν ἡμεῖς γε ὄντως εἶναι τραγῳδίαν τὴν ἀληθεστάτην. ποιηταὶ μὲν οὖν ὑμεῖς, ποιηταὶ δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν τῶν αὐτῶν, ὑμῖν ἀντίτεχνοί τε καὶ ἀνταγωνισταὶ τοῦ καλλίστου δράματος, ὃ δὴ νόμος ἀληθὴς μόνος ἀποτελεῖν πέφυκεν, ὡς ἡ παρ' ἡμῶν ἐστιν ἐλπίς: μὴ δὴ δόξητε ἡμᾶς ῥᾳδίως γε οὕτως ὑμᾶς ποτε παρ' ἡμῖν ἐάσειν σκηνάς τε πήξαντας κατ' ἀγορὰν καὶ καλλιφώνους ὑποκριτὰς εἰσαγαγομένους, μεῖζον φθεγγομένους ἡμῶν, ἐπιτρέψειν ὑμῖν δημηγορεῖν πρὸς παῖδάς τε καὶ γυναῖκας καὶ τὸν πάντα ὄχλον . . . νῦν οὖν, ὦ παῖδες μαλακῶν Μουσῶν ἔκγονοι, ἐπιδείξαντες τοῖς ἄρχουσι πρῶτον τὰς ὑμετέρας παρὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας ᾠδάς, ἂν μὲν τὰ αὐτά γε ἢ καὶ βελτίω τὰ παρ' ὑμῶν φαίνηται λεγόμενα, δώσομεν ὑμῖν χορόν, εἰ δὲ μή, ὦ φίλοι, οὐκ ἄν ποτε δυναίμεθα.'
>
> Now as to what are called our "serious" poets (*spoudaioi*), the tragedians—suppose that some of them were to approach us and put some such question as this—"O Strangers, are we, or are we not, to pay visits to your city and country, and traffic in poetry? Or what have you decided to do about this?" What would be the right answer to make to these inspired persons regarding the matter?

> In my judgment, this should be the answer—"Most excellent of Strangers, we ourselves, to the best of our ability, are the authors of a tragedy at once superlatively fair and good (*kallistē hama kai aristē*); at least, all our polity is framed as a representation of the fairest and best life (*kalliston kai ariston bion*), which is in reality, as we assert, the truest tragedy (*tragōidia hē alēthestatē*). Thus we are composers (*antitechnoi*) of the same things as yourselves, rivals (*antagonistai*) of yours as artists and actors of the fairest drama (*to kalliston drama*), which, as our hope is, true law, and it alone, is by nature competent to complete. Do not imagine, then, that we will ever thus lightly allow you to set up your stage beside us in the marketplace, and give permission to those imported actors of yours, with their dulcet tones (*kalliphōnos*) and their voices louder than ours, to harangue women and children and the whole populace (*paides te kai gunaikes kai o pas ochlos*) . . . So now, ye children and offspring of Muses mild (*malakai Mousai*), do ye first display your chants side by side with ours before the rulers; and if your utterances seem to be the same as ours or better (*beltiō*), then we will grant you a chorus, but if not, my friends, we can never do so."

This comparison between laws and poetry is in close dialogue with a number of points raised in the passage from the second book of *Laws*, discussed above, as well as in Aristotle's *Poetics*, discussed below.[40] In addition to underlining tragedy's particular influence upon youth, women, and crowds, this passage from Book 7 continues the theme of agonistic competition across traditional boundaries. No longer contending with athletic events, however, tragedy here is judged against an apparently nonmimetic verbal creation: laws. The goalposts of the competition have been shifted as well, from pleasure to beauty and goodness, the two values being both distinct yet conjoined through the superlatives *kallistos* and *aristos*.[41] Third, the Muses make another appearance, no longer beautiful, but soft and weak (*malakos*) in comparison with the truest (*alēthestatos*) law.

40. Of the curious structure of the laws, Laks (2022, 31) writes, "This freedom of composition encourages an anthological reading of the Laws—which does not mean that Plato thought that schoolteachers should extract appropriate passages from his book for pedagogical purposes, as the Greeks did with their poets." See discussion of Plato's appropriation of tragedy for political ends and Laks 2022, 149–53.

41. On the connection between "the stage" and "the stage of life," compare Pl. *Phlb.* 50b2–3: "Not only in dramas but also in the entire tragedy and comedy of life," μὴ τοῖς δράμασι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ τοῦ βίου συμπάσῃ τραγῳδίᾳ καὶ κωμῳδίᾳ.

Plato's Athenian stranger, once again, and not unlike Socrates in the *Hippias Major*, enters tragedy into a competition it is ill-suited to win. In each case, these competitions are framed in affective and aesthetic terms, facilitating a conflation between tragedy itself, its audience, and the objects and manner of representation. Tellingly, this new competition between poetry and laws does not feature the poetic form previously declared best at pleasing in its performance: hexameter verse. Given its superiority to other entertainments as proclaimed in the second book, it is perhaps surprising that epic poetry does not leave more ripples in *Laws*.[42] Despite its auspicious introduction in Book 2, epic receives no further attention in *Laws*. Instead, the general handwringing over mimetic poetry seen earlier in *Republic* has been sharpened into a particular concern with tragedy, a genre that can be treated as strictly verbal when that suits the comparison Plato intends to make, or as an embodied and sensorily pleasing art form when otherwise argumentatively convenient. It is not always wise to seek doctrinal unity or intellectual development across Plato's discrete and dialogic works, but it is enough to note here that tragedy—together with epic in *Republic*, on its own in *Laws*—is presented as poetry's greatest threat to Plato's political philosophy.

Why, among genres putatively more pleasurable and sacrilegious (epic), ugly and shameful (comedy), or distracting and inane (puppet shows), does the Athenian stranger present tragedians as the anti-artists and antagonists (*antitechnoi tekai antagonistai*) to philosophers in the "old quarrel" between poetry and philosophy? The treatment comedy receives in *Laws* perhaps offers our best clues. The ugly (*aischros*) characters and thoughts of comedy, in the Athenian stranger's assessment, are so thoroughly, transparently, and formally ugly that they may serve as negative exempla.[43] The generic framing of comedy, a dramatic form marked as distinct from tragedy through the material means of its masks and costumes, represents those embodied appearances and behaviors that ought to be avoided but which (the Athe-

42. The only other reference to hexameter verse occurs in the seventh book, where edicts concerning rhapsodic performance are promised, but not delivered in the text as we have it, a reminder that one ought not to insist upon, or seek, consistency in this dialogue.

43. On moral education through literature's use of negative examples, one could compare Hor. *Sat*. 1.4, where the practitioners of Old Comedy are compared to Horace's "excellent" father, who used the virtues and vices of others for the moral education of his son: cf. *Sat*. 1.4.1–5 (Old Comedians) and 105–6: *insuevit pater optimus hoc me,* | *ut fugerem exemplis vitiorum quaeque notando*, "My excellent father instructed me in thus: that I flee from examples of vice even while noting them."

nian fears) might unwittingly be practiced by citizens who are not properly trained to recognize such pointed absurdities. The Athenian stipulates that fresh instances of absurdity and ugliness must constantly be introduced to avoid habituation.[44] There remains the general Platonic apprehension, expressed most famously in the *Phaedrus*, that the soul becomes like what it contemplates, but in *Laws* Book 7 Plato gives fullest voice to a perspective many of his critics are quick to raise. Audiences (for Aristotle, even children) readily distinguish between reality and make-believe, and the theater provides a social play space for embodied experimentation and participation in anti-ideals. While the *aischros* bodies and thoughts characteristic of comedy are antithetical to a (good) life lived according to the laws, for the Athenian stranger comedic ugliness represents a known evil that may be obviously recognized, delimited, and ultimately appropriated by the skilled lawgiver to serve the interests of the state. Tragic aesthetics, and their influence, are worrisome precisely because they are more surreptitious and intractable: when beautifully dressed, noble characters may act or simply appear in ways unbecoming of their elevated station. For Plato, theater runs the risk of habituating its audiences to ugliness.

From the early *Hippias Major* to the late *Laws*, across the Platonic corpus, tragedy is discussed as beloved by the senses, and even as beautiful (*kalos*), but as social practice, it comes with caveats for not fulfilling the broader Platonic ideal of *to kalon*. Within *Laws*, the Athenian stranger takes a dualist approach to comedy and tragedy that leverages what seems to have been popularly perceived as an opposition or complementarity between the two principal dramatic genres.[45] Transitioning first from the beautiful bodies and noble souls represented in choral performance to the ugly bodies and thoughts of comedy, the Athenian justifies the inclusion of comedy in the ideal city by saying that "it is not possible to learn the serious (*spoudaios*) without the comic (*geloios*), or any one of a pair of contraries without the other, if one is prudent."[46] Whether on account of this dualist extrapolation or some other reason, tragedy, like the choral performances considered in

44. A justification, interestingly, consistent with the invention of new plots for Old and Middle Comedy, which might be contrasted to the well-worn myths represented in tragedy—a reality of dramatic production noted in a fragment attributed to Antiphanes (fr. 89 K-A, 17–18), noted at Arist. *Poet.* 1453a17–22, and scenes from Aristophanes' plays as well.

45. Silk 2000, 78, n. 116, helpfully summarizes the scholarship on the "opposition" between tragedy and comedy.

46. Pl. *Leg.* 816d9-e2: ἄνευ γὰρ γελοίων τὰ σπουδαῖα καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐναντίων τὰ ἐναντία μαθεῖν μὲν οὐ δυνατόν, εἰ μέλλει τις φρόνιμος ἔσεσθαι.

Laws, comes to be understood as representing beautiful bodies and ideas, a contrast that seemingly blurs distinctions between tragedy and laws, leaving the Athenian stranger to treat tragedy as a direct rival to the laws. Andrea Nightingale has suggested that the quarrel is "part of a bold rhetorical strategy designed to define philosophy and invest it with a near-timeless status" despite the quarrel being, on the face of it, "ludicrous," since "philosophy was no real match for poetry in this period."[47] A quarrel between *law* and poetry, however, might occur on more equal footing. Poetry and laws were invested with profound cultural significance in Athens since at least the time of Solon; the conflation of laws and poetry in *Laws* hints at the laws that would come, under Lycurgus' leadership in Athens, that would officially seek to preserve and codify tragic drama.

Despite some points of convergence between law and tragedy—their cultural importance and serious matter, their elevated language and concern with justice and right action—their differences are too many and obvious to enumerate. One would never confuse reading Shakespeare with reading a penal code. Particularly with respect to beauty, the Athenian's comparison of law and tragedy seems forced and unnatural, unless one accepts broad equivalence between the beautiful and the good. Ultimately, when it comes to beauty as an aesthetic concept, comparing musical-artistic and athletic performance in Book 2 of *Laws* proves as problematic as the comparison of laws and tragedy in Book 7.

With *Laws*, I suggest, Plato sets for tragedy a generic and aesthetic trap. On the one hand, tragedy is framed as better and more beautiful than comedy, yet the Athenian stranger finds comedy so thoroughly ugly and bad that it can, rather against expectation, become positively valued *for the sake of* what would otherwise be its extremely devalued and ugly aesthetics. Comedy's aesthetics are uniform and unambiguous, and it is its patent ugliness that allows comedic performance to become intellectually and ethically useful, at least within the distinctive and delimited circumstances of theater. Tragedy, a genre popularly associated with beautiful, noble characters who sometimes engage in questionable behavior or face painfully ugly suffering, presents a more complicated aesthetic and ethical picture. Its pleasures are, for the Athenian stranger, dangerously mixed and compromised in ways that the Athenian stranger's (vaguely abstract) verbal laws can avoid.[48] As the associations between genres and audiences in Book 2 of

47. Nightingale 2000, 60.

48. On mixed pleasures and their relationship to genre, see Pl. *Phlb.* 50b1–4. While trag-

Laws demonstrate, tragedy appears more pleasing to some of its spectators than others.[49]

Hippias Major engages with aesthetics of art by dividing pleasure along sensory lines, denying the possibility for an affective, aesthetic experience that combines verbal and material stimuli, as in dramatic performance. It thus hamstrings our sense of dramatic aesthetics. In *Republic*, a widely read and seminal work apparently even in antiquity, Socrates pronounces a damning critique of mimesis while laying a rhetorical challenge to those who would defend the art of poetry, a challenge some see Aristotle taking up in *Poetics*.[50] In *Laws*, Plato presents a literary-critical and aesthetic hit job, not on poetry in general, but tragedy in particular. In a unified response to the Platonic denigration of tragic mimesis, the genre's associations with ugliness and inferiority, although recognized in *Laws*, might plausibly lead a defender of tragedy to pass over tactfully, or mention only tangentially, its uglier qualities, accentuating instead more unambiguously positive claims. The obscure chronology of the composition of *Laws* and *Poetics*, and the limited ability of brief passages to represent entire schools of thought, should not prohibit considering these works to be in dialogue with one another.[51] *Laws*, a work that is monumental in its size and scope, and perhaps, in the end, the editorial product of several members of Plato's Academy, represents an extended period of composition and thought. Despite, or because of, the ironies and intellectual tensions of its dialogic presentation, the work is the fullest representative of the discourse on dramatic aesthetics, in and around the Academy, close to the middle of the fourth century.

Throughout *Republic* Plato is less concerned with the aesthetic value of the representational arts than with the ontological status and moral effects of mimesis. Discussion of mimetic poetry is not given in terms related to the art's beauty or ugliness, but with its distance from truth and reality. By insidiously parading itself (in Socrates' account) as true and real, poetic

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edy's mixed aesthetics—painfully ugly sights juxtaposed with beautiful characters, etc.—are related to the painful emotions of pity and fear that bring about its cathartic pleasure, they are not the sole cause of tragic drama's mixed pleasure. Note that in the same passage, comedy also produces mixed pleasures in its viewers, though the genre is unalloyed in its ugliness.

49. Pl. *Symp*. 211a.

50. That Aristotle is responding to directly to Plato's *Republic* is a tempting interpretation that has been long held. However, scholars have long warned against overestimating the connection; cf. Montmollin 1951.

51. On the date of Book 10 of *Republic* and its temporal and intellectual relation to the *Poetics*, see Else 1972.

representation threatens the proper moral functioning of the ideal state. Tragedy is linked to Homer in an association of the poetic forms with the greatest cultural cachet. It is this cluster of serious and weighty genres that receives Plato's wary attention. *Laws*, by contrast, estranges tragedy from epic poetry, making the genres as distinct from one another as tragedy is from comedy. As a discrete and independent genre in *Laws*, tragedy goes on to be singled out for skepticism, with the Athenian stranger going so far (perhaps ludicrously so) as to allow the blatantly objectionable genre, comedy, to assume a positive social role while condemning tragedy to status well below the law, despite tragedy's greater appreciation, as mentioned in Book 2, among more refined audiences. It is the "in between" qualities of tragedy that make the genre a social threat and that invite comparison against other genres and works predicated upon shifting criteria. Although sufficiently close (in the Athenian stranger's mind) to the ideal of beauty to deceive even sophisticated audiences into thinking the genre all-beautiful, tragedy remains a corrupting force in *Laws* through its unspoken ugliness.

Aristotle's *Poetics*: Tragedy's Painful Ugliness

In closing let us return to Aristotle and the immensely influential *Poetics*, discussed in the introduction. In writing his notes on poetry, framed within a groundbreaking analysis of mimetic creation, Aristotle was in the delicate position faced by a radical theorist. On the one hand, in order to be relevant, his poetic taxonomy would be required to reflect the generic landscape of his day, with its rich and familiar cultural associations. Yet on the other hand, the taxonomy would need to stand as integral, complete, and elegant on its own. Aristotle's analysis had to account for the history of genres that were born from, and evolved within, specific performance contexts. Arranging these disparate genres within a broad matrix of mimetic performance, determined by aspects such as "medium," "mode," "content," "meter," and of course "aesthetics" was certainly a bold and contentious move.[52] Aristotle might, with good reason, have been reluctant to make a

52. Halliwell 1987 finds Aristotle's attempt to reconcile historical evidence with a teleological narrative unsatisfactory: "The whole of the framework of ostensible literary history in *Poetics* 4 and 5 is so theory-laden, so heavily grounded in *a priori* and philosophical assumptions about poetry, that it can only be judged to offer a historical account in a severely qualified sense of that term." Aristotle does not consider performance context in his taxonomy, preferring to think of poetry independent both of its performer and its intended

subjective criterion such as "beauty" a determining aspect of his taxonomy, preferring instead to employ terms with less directly aesthetic (and therefore less subjective) connotations: the words *semnos* and *phaulos*, *spoudaios* and *eutelēs*, each have their own, independent, social and ethical meanings.

Aristotle faced the further challenge of resuscitating tragedy from the tarnish it received from attacks at the hands of Plato's Academy. These assaults were themselves likely in response to the groundswell in tragedy's popularity as the drama evolved from Aeschylean severity to the luxurious "New Music" of the late fifth century. Aristotle's two principal approaches to remediate the critical reception of tragedy, first arguing for the cognitive pleasure of all mimesis and later focusing upon tragic catharsis, are skillful strategic responses to the positions against tragedy found in the *Republic* (against mimesis) and *Laws* (against tragedy itself) discussed above.[53]

Aristotle never explicitly tackles the issue of tragic ugliness, a charge made implicitly in *Laws*. Hints throughout *Poetics* suggest, however, that Aristotle was both aware of, and theoretically accounted for, a painful form of tragic ugliness, but chose to suppress its discussion in mounting his defense of the genre as a whole. Through insinuations to open attacks on tragic aesthetics from Plato or other sources, Aristotle's defense strategically avoids unnecessary forays into the muddy terrain of tragedy's mixed aesthetics. Such a specification, even in one or two lines, was of course possible. If one may be excused for following the example of Janko or Watson's heuristic reconstructions of the promised second book of *Poetics* on comedy, it may be helpful here to compose this purely hypothetical addition to *Poetics*, one that is consistent with the rest of the extant work while clarifying the position on tragic ugliness:

> As has been discussed, tragedy in general represents *kalos* men performing *kalos* deeds, but to achieve the pity and fear needed for catharsis and the creation of the genre's proper pleasure, tragedy must also represent scenes of painful ugliness (*aischos odunēron*), such as those that feature corpses, beggars, etc.

This textual bricolage—it should be counted as a playful exercise and nothing more—clarifies that Aristotle could, in little time or space, have included a plain but explicit explanation of tragedy's aesthetic mixture of

audience, a bias that has material implications for his consideration of theatrical objects.

53. These arguments are discussed in the introduction.

beauty and ugliness that would have complemented comedy's incomplete but aesthetically dependent "definition." It does not aid our understanding of *Poetics* to develop the contrafactual ramifications of such a passage upon the subsequent literary theory, although presumably they would be immense. The fact that Aristotle does *not* include such specification may or may not be significant; *Poetics* remains frustratingly obscure at many points, and it is surely wrong to seek, *ex silentio*, ideological positions behind every omission. Allowing due measure to all these concerns and avoiding the pitfalls of intentionalist fallacy, we might at least conclude that neither *Poetics*, nor the fifth-century Attic dramas upon which the work is built, associated tragedy with beauty to the exclusion of comedy.

Political meanings expressed through Greek drama evolved dynamically as the battle lines of ongoing cultural wars shifted.[54] In short, albeit for different reasons and in different ways, the political impact of fifth-century Athenian dramatic works was as significant in the fourth century as it was in its original era. In serving their own philosophical and political agendas, Plato and Aristotle found it convenient occasionally to abstract the verbal and propositional aspects of drama away from its embodied production, or to present the generic aesthetics in simplified, schematic, and sometimes ennobling terms. The philosophers' aesthetic pronouncements are not always read in the light of this cultural context, with the result that what might have initially been understood as a politicalized assertion is unwittingly taken as an unbiased aesthetic prescription. In tracing the early history of arguments over theatrical aesthetics, this epilogue seeks to keep these historical narratives in mind.

Changing politics and aesthetic sensibilities are, of course, not just an ancient phenomenon. This epilogue itself enters a shifting scholarly terrain, as the study of aesthetics undergoes a sea change triggered by emergent attention to materials, cognition, and affect theory in general. Although it aims to advance and refine core aesthetic arguments in its own modest way, this epilogue is offered primarily as an early reception study of fifth-century drama and its aesthetics. It offers a cautionary tale for those who engage with the theater primarily through its texts (as we moderns are so often compelled to do), even as it recognizes that to do so is to fight an uphill battle, in terms of both argument and evidence.

54. On Lycurgus' political use of a speech from Euripides' *Erechtheus*, see Hanink 2014.

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