

The rhetoric of weapons in Euripides' *Heracles*

Bow versus spear

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Abstract: Euripides' *Heracles* includes an *agon* scene between Lycus and Amphitryon in which great prominence is attached to the value of the bow as opposed to that of the spear. According to some scholars, this debate about the weapons is not appropriate and it even seems to create a break in the dramatic illusion. This paper, however, analyzes the role of bows and spears in the tragedy and it shows how weapons are used to make visible the transformation of the hero in the play.

Keywords: tragedy – Euripides – *Heracles* – *agon* – bow – spear.

Euripides' *Heracles* includes two *agon* scenes. One of them has Lycus and Amphitryon as the main protagonists (vv. 140-251) and takes place in the first episode of the tragedy;¹ the other has Heracles and Theseus as the main protagonists and takes place in the exodos (vv. 1255-1393).² Both scenes have been the subject of much debate but for different reasons. In the case of the *agon* between Heracles and Theseus, the main reason for the debate is the change of mind that Heracles shows in the course of it and the way he expresses and justifies it. In the case of the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon, the reasons are the appealing rhetorical tenor and the unusual prominence given to a clichéd issue (the value of bows as opposed to that of spears) with which, as has been occasionally affirmed, even seems to create a break in the dramatic illusion.³ Nevertheless, although it is true that the issue raised by Lycus in *Heracles* is clichéd and is treated in a highly rhetorical way, it should not be considered as being disconnected to the play for that reason.

¹ The scene between Lycus and Amphitryon is generally considered an *agon* scene, but the fact is that, as Lloyd 1992, 10-11, specifies, some of its features do not match the typical features of these scenes. However, Bond 1981, *ad HF* 140-251 (pp. 101-102), although he admits that the scene is unusual, defends the fact that it is an *agon* scene.

² This scene, as Lloyd 1992, 10, indicates, does not constitute an *agon* strictly speaking.

³ Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1895, 139, asserts that “das fällt gänzlich aus dem Rahmen der Tragödie heraus”. In the same vein Bond 1981, *ad HF* 161 (p. 109), explains that “The debate about archery is too long and not particularly appropriate”.

Much has been said about the peculiar structure of *Heracles* and its apparent lack of unity.⁴ What seems to be clear is that this tragedy has a structure which is not causal, but is based both on the juxtaposition of thematically connected scenes and on the existence of numerous motives which are woven through the play, giving rise to echoes and resonances, as well as to contrasts and ironies, between its different parts.⁵ Thus, in that structure, the debate between Lycus and Amphitryon on the value of the bow as opposed to that of the spear raises certain issues that are central to the play as a whole and that, moreover, generate interesting resonances mainly in the other debate scene in the tragedy. That is precisely what this paper will try to highlight by showing ultimately the relevance of the debate about the bow.⁶

1. Bows in Greek culture

It is difficult to know for certain how the Greeks used bows. This is because, on the one hand, the archaeological evidence is very scarce, since bows were made of perishable materials, and, on the other, because what the literary and iconographic sources offer is a subjective representation or interpretation.⁷

However, traditionally it has been assumed that in Greek culture the bow (ῥαβδονόστος or ῥαβδονόστος),⁸ since it allows one to attack from a distance, was considered a more lowly or less heroic weapon than the sword or the spear which were the characteristic weapons of

⁴ Murray 1946, 112, asserts about the play that “It is broken-backed”. Before him, Norwood 1920, 229, said that “We feel that the play is structureless, or (which is worse) that it falls so clearly into two dramas that we cannot view it as a single piece of art”.

⁵ Today it is assumed that the structure of *Heracles* is intentional. In general, nowadays there are those who divide the play into two parts and those who divide it into three parts, although in essence both positions are not dissimilar. This tragedy is articulated around three episodes, namely, 1) the threat of Lycus to the family of Heracles and the killing of the former by the latter, 2) the madness of Heracles and the destruction of his family, and 3) the salvation of Heracles, made possible by Theseus; but basically the tragedy is divided into two parts (vv. 1-814 and 815-1428), separated by the appearance of Iris and Lyssa on-stage, which functions as a second prologue (cf. Mahaffy 1880, 346). However, the essential thing is that, as Conacher 1955, 146, explains, in *Heracles* there is no causal structure, where each incident derives from a previous incident, but rather a structure of juxtaposition, where the action is directed by three inversions which do not derive directly from the previous events, but which are related to each other thematically. On the questioned structure of *Heracles*, cf., for example, Conacher 1955, 145-150, Kitto 1961³ (repr. 2003), 237-249, Kamerbeek 1966, Shelton 1979, Bond 1981, xviii-xxvi, Barlow 1982, Foley 1985, 200-204, Porter 1987, 85-107.

⁶ The appropriateness of this debate in the structure of the tragedy, as well as for the characterization of Heracles, has been defended on occasion (cf. Hamilton 1985, Ieranò 2016, Michelini 1987, 244).

⁷ On bows in ancient Greece, cf. Lorimer 1950, 276-305, McLeod 1966, Snodgrass 1967, especially 17-18, 23-24, 39-40, 80-84, Tölle-Kastenbein 1980, Lissarrague 1990, Casadio 2010, Davis 2013.

⁸ On the main designations of the bow (ῥαβδονόστος and ῥαβδονόστος), cf. Paraskevaides 1984, 86-87, Andrienne 2015, 21, 32-39. On the name of the different parts of the bow, cf. Davis 2013, 53. On the names of the arrow (ῥαβδονόστος, ῥαβδονόστος and ῥαβδονόστος), cf. Paraskevaides 1984, 30-31, Davis 2013, 60-61.

the Greek warrior and, mainly, of the hoplite.⁹ It seems that the bow was Asian in origin¹⁰ and that in their culture it was highly appreciated, to the point of it being considered the weapon par excellence of the warrior. From there it was adopted by the western world which, however, belittled it and considered it a weapon typical of cowards and effeminate people.¹¹ Perhaps because of that, the bow in Greek culture was the weapon of excluded or marginalized people (or also of people operating in liminality), that is, women (Artemis, Atalanta, the Amazons), foreigners or barbarians (for example, Paris), gods of initiation (Apollo or Artemis)¹² or heroes “au statut caractéristique de pré-initié” (Philoctetes, Parthenopaeus, Heracles), people of a lower status, slaves, bastards (Teucer), and traitors (Pandarus).¹³

Of course, the different ways of fighting with the spear and with the bow influenced the different degree of heroism assigned to both weapons. Thus, the use of the bow was based on surprise: its preferred use was from steep places where the archer remained hidden and anonymous, making use of cleverness and, moreover, it could be used at night. By contrast, combat with the spear was well regulated, it was developed on the plains but its usefulness ended when night fell, the fighters knew their mutual genealogy and they mainly used their physical strength.¹⁴

This seems to have been the prevailing view. However, it is important to note that the perception of bows was not static and it depended in some ways on historical vicissitudes. In effect, hoplitic ideology implied the triumph of the spear and shield, and it resulted in a secondary use of light infantry, in which archers, however, were included. But, in later times, the development of naval warfare, the wars with the Persians and the Peloponnesian war generated strategies and tactics more suitable for light troops as opposed to the traditional hoplites. Thus, archers slowly gained in prominence.¹⁵

⁹ “The consensus among classical scholars is that the ancient Greeks and Romans regarded military archery as lower class, cowardly, immoral and ineffectual”; cf. Farron 2003, 169. The consensus is such that this idea can be found in virtually all the bibliography about bows.

¹⁰ There are two types of bows, namely, the plain bow, found in Africa and Europe, and the composite or Asian bow, which is more flexible and, therefore, possesses greater reach and penetration force; cf. Lorimer 1950, 276-277, Davis 2013, 72-74. On the composite bow, cf. Balfour 1889.

¹¹ Sergent 1991, demonstrated that all the western Indo-European peoples agreed with the Greeks in considering the bow as being a more lowly weapon within the hierarchy of weapons, while all the eastern Indo-European peoples considered the bow the weapon par excellence of the warrior.

¹² On the link of the bow to the goddess Artemis as a goddess of initiation and the hunt, cf. Reborada Morillo 1995a.

¹³ Cf. Sergent 1991, 230-232.

¹⁴ Cf. Reborada Morillo 1995b, 29 and 1998, 97.

¹⁵ On the process of how hoplitic ideology evolved, cf. Reborada Morillo 1992. On the inclusion of a body of archers in the Athenian troops, cf. Plassart 1913, Pritchard 2018.

2. The bow in the *Iliad*

Although the view of bows being considered as a more lowly weapon seemingly prevails in the post-Homeric literature, there is not much agreement regarding what actually happens in the Homeric poems themselves, since, while some scholars focus on some passages in line with this view, others defend the idea that the devaluation of bows dates from the 5th century BC¹⁶ and had not yet fully been developed in the Homeric poems.¹⁷

Iliad 11.385-392, in which Paris is called an archer pejoratively,¹⁸ is the *locus classicus* which is considered as evidence of the lowly category of the bow in Homer, and also of the connection of bows to all things foreign and oriental. However, the scholion to v. 385 considers that the attack on Paris is not due to the fact of his being an archer, but to that of his being a vile archer.¹⁹

As has been specified, the contempt for bows does seem to exist in the *Iliad*, but it is not universal or uniform throughout the poem. For example, Teucer is not underestimated although he is the most active archer²⁰ (cf. *Il.* 11.273-299). But the truth is that, in general, in the *Iliad* Trojans use bows more than Greeks²¹ and, mostly, the multitude (ἄλλοι) of both armies uses bows more than the individual heroes do.²²

There are heroes who use bows, but, whenever this happens, they are generally not heroes of the first rank.²³ In the *Iliad* the heroes linked to the use of bows are, mainly, Philoctetes (*Il.* 2.718-725), Pandarus (*Il.* 4.89-126, 5.171-178, 5.204-216), Paris (*Il.* 3.15-20), Teucer (*Il.* 8.266-272, 8.309-334), Scamandrius (*Il.* 5.48-58), Helenus (*Il.* 13.581-600), Diomedes (*Il.* 8.118-121), Meriones (*Il.* 13.650-651) and Dolon (*Il.* 10.333-336).²⁴ But among them all, three are the archers par excellence of the *Iliad*, namely Paris, Pandarus and Teucer. The first two are branded as cowards, and in the case of Teucer, although compliments prevail, the fact that he is a bastard is also pointed out (*Il.* 8.281-

¹⁶ Cf. Davis 2013, 22.

¹⁷ Cf. Andrienne 2015, 23-31, Farron 2003, 169. On bows in Homer, see also Reichel 1901, 112-120, Lorimer 1950, 289-301, Hijmans 1975, Krischer 1998, Casadio 2010, 17-34.

¹⁸ On this excerpt, cf. Hijmans 1975, 349-350, Farron 2003, 171, Davis 2013, 2-4.

¹⁹ Cf. Andrienne 2015, 24-28, who agree with the scholion. Farron 2003, 171 n. 10, instead, considers that the Greek text does not support the reasoning of the scholiast.

²⁰ Cf. Farron 2003, 184. According to the recount made by Armstrong 1969, 30, Teucer kills fifteen adversaries. Only six warriors kill more than him, namely Hector, Diomedes, Patroclus, Achilles, Ajax and Odysseus.

²¹ Cf. Farron 2003, 177-178.

²² Cf. Lorimer 1959, 289, Hijmans 1975, 343.

²³ Cf. Lorimer 1950, 290, Hijmans 1975, 343. On the individual archers in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, cf. Lorimer 1950, 290-300.

²⁴ Cf. Reboreda Morillo 1998, 92-94.

285).²⁵ A negative characterization is so much related to these characters that some scholars wonder whether they are archers because they have a bad reputation or whether they have a bad reputation because they are archers.²⁶

However, despite the secondary role of bows in the *Iliad*, they do enjoy a prominent role in the Trojan War, since, as is widely known, in order to be able to conquer the city of Troy, Philoctetes, the owner of Heracles' bow, and Neoptolemus, son of the spearman Achilles and receiver of his panoply (cf. *Od.* 11.508-509), had to fight together. Thus, through these two characters, both required to defeat Troy, the epic, in a certain way, highlighted the need to combine both weapons.²⁷ Indeed, both weapons were combined in Euripides' *Heracles* too.

3. The bow in Euripides' *Heracles*

3.1. *The debate scene between Lycus and Amphitryon*

In *Heracles*, Euripides shapes an *agon* scene (vv. 140-251) between Lycus, usurper of the throne of Thebes, and Amphitryon, Heracles' father and, together with his family, victim of Lycus.²⁸ The debate focuses for a large part on Heracles' bow.²⁹ This topic, together with the strongly rhetorical character of the passage, has led some scholars affirming that the scene is not totally pertinent in its context and that it even creates a break in the dramatic illusion.³⁰ However, the truth is that this topic remains on stage throughout the whole tragedy and gains significance in its last part, mainly in the other *agon* scene. In this way the topic of Heracles' bow set out in the first episode of the tragedy contributes, in the same way as some other elements of the play, to connecting both parts of the tragedy.

²⁵ Cf. Reboreda Morilla 1998, 94, Cucuzza and Mari 2017, 16-18. Pandarus, concretely, is considered a coward because during a ceasefire he shoots an arrow at Menelaus while he is hiding behind the shields of his friends (*Il.* 4.104-140).

²⁶ Cf. Hijmans 1975, 343.

²⁷ Foley 1985, 170, affirms that "the epic tradition as a whole (the *Odyssey*, the *Little Iliad* of Lesches) recognized that both the direct violence of the spearman and the strategy of the bowman were necessary to success in warfare".

²⁸ On the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon in *Heracles*, cf. Parmentier in Parmentier, Grégoire 1923, 11-13, Taragna Novo 1973, Hamilton 1985, Foley 1985, 169-175, George 1994, Moggi 2002, 198-201, Casadio 2010, 53-59, Fernández Delgado 2013, Ieranò 2016.

²⁹ There are certain Greek characters that stand out as archers and in whose hands the bows do not seem such lowly weapons. One of them is Heracles. It has already been said that the bow is the distinctive weapon of those who are in the state of initiation. Thus, Heracles is an archer because his whole life is a test, a crossing from the exceptional and marginal human condition to the divine state (in fact, his life closes with an apotheosis); cf. Sergent 1991, 235. On Heracles' bow, see also Papadopoulou 2005, 137-151.

³⁰ Cf. note 3.

In the first *rhexis* of the *agon* (vv. 140-169) Lycus addresses Amphitryon and Megara to reproach them. On the one hand, he reproaches them for their vain hopes in the salvation which has to come from Heracles (vv. 140-147) and, on the other, their pride in being related to this hero (vv. 148-150); specifically, in the case of Amphitryon, there is reproach for his pride in sharing the paternity of the hero with Zeus (which stresses the divine aspect of Heracles) and, in the case of Megara, Lycus reproaches her for her pride in considering her husband as being the most excellent man (ὀρθότατον ἄνδρα, v. 150), which stresses the exceptional human character of Heracles.³¹

It is at this moment when Lycus questions the courage and the labours of the hero (vv. 151-164).³² To this effect, Lycus downplays his feats adducing that all of them imply a confrontation with animals, but not with other warriors in a fight distinctive of the hoplite (cf. Euripides, *Suppliants* 314-319). This differentiation between the two contexts matches the weapon used. Thus, Heracles carried out his exploits with his own arms (ἰσχυρὰ ἄνευ βέλτου ... ἄνευ βέλτου, v. 154) and, above all, with a bow, the most cowardly weapon because it allows the bearer to run away (ἄνευ βέλτου / ἄνευ βέλτου, ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου, vv. 160-161). Although Lycus recognises that Heracles is widely regarded as brave (ἄνευ βέλτου ... ἄνευ βέλτου, v. 157), it is only renown (in the sense of mere appearance), because the fact, as Lycus suggests, is that true bravery is not demonstrated with the bow and in fighting with beasts, but with the spear and the shield, and remaining firm on the battlefield (“The test of a man, of his courage, is not bow and arrows / But staying steadfast in the ranks and looking, even face-to-face, / At the swiftly advancing swathe of troops”, ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου / ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου, vv. 162-164).³³

³¹ I use for Euripides’ *Heracles* the edition of Bond 1981 and the translation of Halleran 1988.

³² As Bond 1981, *ad HF* 151-164 (p. 106), says, this speech by Lycus must have been paradoxical, since Heracles was the perfect example of the ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου. Nevertheless, such speeches were the result of the rhetorical training that taught the idea that any topic could be seen from two opposite perspectives. In fact, as Bond affirms, “Lycus’ argument against archery prepares the way for another paradox, enunciated this time by Amphitryon, that standing up to the enemy is not necessarily the best way of fighting”.

³³ Lycus’ argument is in line with tradition; that is why this ideology can also be found in some other sources; for example, in Aeschylus’ *Persians*, in which the playwright uses the expression ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου to refer to the Persians and ἄνευ βέλτου ἄνευ βέλτου to denote the Greeks (vv. 147-149), and the victory of the Greeks over the Persians is perceived as a victory of spears over bows (vv. 239-240); cf. Casadio 2010, 36-40, Davis 2013, 263-264.

These fourteen lines, in which the bow (and the place and the way of fighting that this weapon implies) is opposed to hoplite weaponry, that is, the shield and, above all, the spear³⁴ (as well as the context and way of fighting with these weapons imply), form the bulk of Lycus' *rhesis*.

The replying *rhesis* of Amphitryon (vv. 170-235) is double the length of that of Lycus (66 lines in contrast to 30).³⁵ Initially, Amphitryon rejects the charge of cowardice levelled against Heracles (vv. 174-187) and, hereafter, he carries out an elaborate defence of bows (vv. 188-205).

While Lycus links the weapon to the bravery or cowardice of the person who carries it (the bow is typical of cowards, the spear typical of brave people), Amphitryon dissociates the concept of bravery from the weapon used. For that purpose he does two things. First, he separates the two accusations; in other words, he defends Heracles initially from the accusation of cowardice and then he defends his use of a bow. Second, he makes it clear that it is also possible to be a coward using a spear ("The heavily armored soldier is a slave to his armor: / And if those arrayed in battle with him are cowardly, / He himself is dead because of the cowardice of those near him", ἄλλοτε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀσπίδοσσι / ἄλλοτε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀσπίδοσσι / ἄλλοτε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀσπίδοσσι / ἄλλοτε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀσπίδοσσι / ἄλλοτε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀσπίδοσσι, vv. 190-192).

On the other hand, while Lycus links the weapon to the context in which it is used, by establishing a relationship both between the bow and the domain of wild nature and between the spear and the warlike domain of the warrior, Amphitryon dismisses this relationship and considers both weapons within the warlike domain. In that way, Amphitryon brings Heracles within the world of the hoplite, although it is true that his exploits have mainly taken place outside their world.

Moreover, while Lycus links the choice of the weapon exclusively to courage, Amphitryon introduces a new value into the debate: astuteness. Thus, while the bow is, in Lycus' opinion, the most cowardly of weapons (ἄσπεδος ἄσπεδος, v. 161), in Amphitryon's view it is a wise invention (ἄσπεδος ἄσπεδος, v. 188). And on the

³⁴ ἄσπεδος, v. 160; ἄσπεδος, v. 164. 'Spear' is designated in Greek with different names, although the most typical ones, at least in the Homeric epic, are ἄσπεδος and ἄσπεδος. On the difference between these names, cf. Encinas Reguero 2016.

³⁵ The main *rhesis* of an *agon* scene are usually similar in length. The difference of length between the two *rhesis* of this scene has no parallel in Euripides; cf. Bond 1981, *ad HF* 140-251 (pp. 101-102). Verrall 1905, 149, considers that Amphitryon's purpose consists of gaining time, confident as he is about the fact that Heracles will come back to their aid.

basis of that new value, Amphitryon accepts the argument of Lycus (that the bow allows one to run away easily) but turns the argument on its head. In his opinion the possibility offered by the bow to kill from a distance must not be seen as something negative, which implies cowardice, but rather as something positive, which shows astuteness.

Lastly, while Lycus links the spear with hoplitic fighting and with the challenge of holding the enemy's gaze (ὄφρα φάσκει, v. 163), Amphitryon also appeals to the topic of seeing, but he does so to emphasize that the archer defends himself from enemies by "Striking them with unseen arrows as they watch" (ὄφρα φάσκει ἀβυσσὸς ἀφανὲς, v. 199). That is, if in spear fighting the combatants look at each other, in bow combat "the enemy are watching out but they cannot see (or avoid) the fast arrows".³⁶ Thus, Amphitryon makes it clear that in combat watching the enemy is sometimes not the decisive factor.³⁷

With these four changes Amphitryon elaborates a defence of the bow, in which he emphasizes the freedom it provides (the archer does not depend on his comrades, as in the case of the hoplite), the possibility of escape, the high loss of lives it causes and the fact that it protects the person who uses it. And, thanks to the new concept of astuteness or ἀστυνότης that Amphitryon brings into play, those characteristics of the bow are presented in a positive way because "In battle this / Is especially wise – to hurt your enemies / While saving yourself, without being anchored to chance" (ἦν δὲ μάχῃ / ἰσχυρὸς οὐδὲν ἄλλοις / ἀστυνότης ἰσχυρὸς οὐδὲν ἄλλοις / ἢν δὲ μάχῃ / ἰσχυρὸς οὐδὲν ἄλλοις, vv. 201-203). Then, after finishing his defence of bows, Amphitryon goes on to the following point of this speech, namely the defence of Heracles' sons, which starts precisely by highlighting Lycus' cowardliness (ὄφρα φάσκει, v. 210), just as it started the defence of Heracles by denying the cowardliness of this hero.

The confrontation between Lycus and Amphitryon can be understood as a confrontation between community and individual. Ironically, Lycus, the usurper, defends hoplitic combat and, hence, the values of community, while Amphitryon praises the bow, which is more associated with individual actions.³⁸ These two aspects, however, come together in Heracles, a hero who moves outside the community, but who curiously enough

³⁶ Cf. Bond 1981, *ad HF* 199 (p. 119). On the topic of seeing in the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon, and, in general, in *Heracles*, cf. Padilla 1992.

³⁷ The topic of seeing is essential in this tragedy. In fact, Heracles himself kills his family looking at but not seeing them.

³⁸ Cf. George 1994, 150.

when acting alone and outside the community defeats monsters and removes dangers which threaten society, thus becoming a cultural hero (ἄλλοτρεπὲς ἥρωϊσμός, v. 1252). Nevertheless, it is the punishment he receives that finally makes him return to the community by accepting the help of Theseus.³⁹ Actually, in the first part of the tragedy his exploits are exalted, but he is an isolated hero; in the second part, conversely, his misfortunes are exalted, but it is here that the hero discovers the value of community. The conflict or opposition between both dimensions is made visible on stage thanks to the bow/spear debate led by Lycus and Amphitryon. “Thus through their exchange Heracles’ bow becomes the visual vehicle of this conflict of individual over corporate values”.⁴⁰

The explicit dispute about the value of bows and spears is restricted to this passage. However, Heracles’ bow is also relevant to the rest of the tragedy.

3.2. *Heracles’ bow*

Heracles’ bow is mentioned for the first time in the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon, but it recurs in some other moments of the tragedy. For example, in the first *stasimon* (vv. 348-450), which enumerates the exploits of Heracles, the hero’s bow and arrows are mentioned explicitly with reference to the death of the Centaurs (vv. 366-367), Cynus (v. 392)⁴¹ and Geryon (v. 422). In contrast to the spear, which is connected to organized combat among humans, the bow is the weapon which characterizes the confrontation with the creatures of the wild and uncivilized world.

In the second episode Megara bids farewell to her three children and, when she talks to each of them, she mentions each of the three objects linked to the hero. Heracles wanted to give the skin of the lion (ἄρκαδίου ... ἄρκαδίου, vv. 465-466), which, it seems, he had killed with his bare hands, to the first child; his club (ἄρκαδίου ἄρκαδίου, vv. 470-471) to the second child; and to the third child he wanted to give not the bow, but Oechalia, which had been conquered with that weapon (ἄρκαδίου ἄρκαδίου ... ἄρκαδίου, vv. 472-473).

³⁹ “Theseus’ heroic career was modelled upon that of Heracles, and in his *Life of Theseus* (29.3), Plutarch calls the Athenian hero ἄλλοτρεπὲς ἥρωϊσμός, ‘another Heracles’”; cf. Papadopoulou 2005, 160. Moreover, through the character of Theseus a glorification of Athens takes place in *Heracles*. On this, cf. Tarkow 1977.

⁴⁰ Cf. George 1994, 150.

⁴¹ The Chorus says that Heracles killed Cynus with his arrows, but this version does not coincide with the version related in Hesiod’s *Shield of Heracles* (Sc. 122 ff., 413 ff.) or with some iconographic representations, in which Heracles kills Cynus with his spear; cf. Bond 1981, *ad HF* 392 (p. 165), Ieranò 2016, 113.

Afterwards, Heracles' bow is again the protagonist in the messenger speech (vv. 922-1015), which explains how Heracles, by now out of his mind, asks for his bow, to which he also refers to as his hand weapon (ἄρμα ... ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 942), in order to head for Mycenae, where he expects to kill Eurystheus and his children.⁴² When in his imagination he thinks that he has arrived, he aims the bow at his own children⁴³ (ἄρμα', v. 970). He kills the first one and then he gets ready to use the bow to kill the second one (ἄρμα', v. 984), who, however, throws himself at his father's feet and thus obliterates the necessary distance which would allow his father to use the "ruinous bow" (ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 991); for that reason Heracles finally kills him with his club (ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 993), precisely the weapon which, according to Megara, Heracles had intended to give him (vv. 470-471). Then, Heracles kills his third child together with Megara using only one arrow (ἄρμα ... ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 1000).⁴⁴

After this messenger speech, in the lyric dialogue between Amphitryon and the Chorus prior to the awakening of the hero, Amphitryon refers to the crime committed by the hero (the murder of his wife and of his three children) and to the bow with which he has committed that action (ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ... ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα, vv. 1062-1063). But from that moment on Heracles' bow experiences a change.

When Heracles awakens, he mentions the vision of the world around him, namely, the air, the land and the bow of Helios (ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 1090). Then, Heracles sees the corpses and his weapons, of which there are, curiously, two: on the one hand, the bow, which protected him like a hoplite shield (ἄρμα ἄρμα ... ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα, vv. 1098-1099), and, on the other, a spear (ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 1098). It is here, just at the worst moment for

⁴² The use of the bow when Heracles confronts wild creatures is understandable. But the use of the bow to kill Eurystheus and his children in a civilized context and inside the domestic sphere is problematic and brings to light the dual nature of the hero; cf. Papadopoulou 2005, 150. Moreover, the intention of killing Eurystheus and his children (similar to Lycus' intention of killing the Heracles' family, including his children) brings the figures of the hero and the tyrant closer to one another; cf. note 43. The choice of the children as victims is not a casual one. On the one hand, they represent innocence. On the other, and perhaps more importantly, in the play the love shown towards children seems to differentiate humans ("everyone loves his children", ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα ἄρμα, v. 636) from gods (Zeus has not taken care of his progeny; cf. vv. 339-347).

⁴³ Ironically Heracles finally carries out what Lycus wanted to do against his family. In fact, it has been contended that in this play Heracles "becomes indeed the mirror of Lycus"; cf. Papadopoulou 2001, 116. On the similarity between Heracles and Lycus, see also Chalk 1962, 16-17, Papadopoulou 2005, 25-28. On the other hand, Heracles is driven crazy while he carries out a purification ritual after the murder of Lycus, and his acts against his family become in that way a perverted sacrifice. On this, cf. Foley 1985, 147-204, specially 155-162.

⁴⁴ In the version of Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.4.12, Heracles does not kill his children with the bow, but he burns them.

the hero, when the bow acquires different connotations. In part, because this word is used to allude positively to the sun and also because, as a weapon, it is a protector bow (ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς of v. 1099 remembers the shield or σφαιροειδής) that, moreover, is accompanied by a spear. This union of the bow which protects him like a shield and of the spear starts to assimilate Heracles with the figure of a hoplite.⁴⁵

In the following *stichomythia*, when Heracles asks who has killed his family, Amphitryon again mentions the bow (“You and your bow and arrows and the god who is responsible”, ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, v. 1135). But it is the last time in the play that the bow is mentioned. When Theseus comes onto the stage and asks Amphitryon about the man tied beside the corpses, he (Amphitryon) describes Heracles as already being a hoplite (vv. 1190-1194), since he presents him going to the war (ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς / ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, vv. 1190-1191; note that the term used to designate the battle is ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, which mainly designates the spear) armed with a shield (ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, v. 1194).

This metamorphosis of Heracles into a hoplite has its decisive point when Heracles refuses to commit suicide in the *agon* with Theseus at the end of the play. First, Heracles justifies his decision of remaining alive arguing that, otherwise, he could be accused of ‘cowardliness’ (ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, v. 1348), exactly the accusation Lycus made against the hero in the *agon* with Amphitryon. Second, he adds that “anyone who cannot withstand the blows of fortune / Would not be able to withstand a man’s weapon” (ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς / ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, vv. 1349-1350). This argument also alludes directly to the words of Lycus, who in his speech equated bravery with hoplitic action (cf. vv. 162-164). But for Heracles, bravery is associated with supporting the misfortunes of life. Thus, living despite what happened, assuming and enduring unexpectedly occurring misfortunes, becomes an act of bravery comparable to the steadfastness of the hoplite.⁴⁶

Yet there is more. In Lycus’ lines the spear is called ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς or ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς. In vv. 1349-1350 pronounced by Heracles, however, the term used is ἄρκετοσφαιροειδὲς, a very general word which refers to a projectile and which can be used to denote almost any type of

⁴⁵ As has been said (Papadopoulou 2005, 151, Ieranò 2016, 115), the manner in which Heracles’ weapons are presented at this moment suggests that the hero has fought like a hoplite.

⁴⁶ Curiously, in Sophocles’ *Ajax* it seems that cowardice means not dying. In fact, likewise for Megara at the beginning of *Heracles*, cowardice means not accepting death. As Parmentier in Parmentier, Grégoire 1923, 8, explains, “l’intention d’Euripide était justement de présenter à ses spectateurs une conception de l’honneur différente de celle que connaissent les guerriers des temps épiques”.

weapon. In fact, this word has been used in the tragedy to denote the arrow with which Heracles kills Megara and his third child in one act (v. 1000). In this way, Heracles reworks the ideology employed by Lycus, that is, the idea that bravery is displayed by remaining firm in the face of the enemy. Heracles transforms it into the idea that bravery is displayed by remaining firm in the face of adversity. Besides, he uses a word that, although it can denote a spear, can also denote arrows, so that the clear differentiation created by Lycus between bow and spear and, consequently, between Heracles and a hoplite warrior, becomes blurred. Heracles shows himself now as a hoplite (by facing adversity), and, in so doing, he resorts to a vocabulary which seems to include in some way the bow within the hoplitic panoply.

Further on, Heracles alludes again to his weapons, but he avoids mentioning the bow specifically and, instead, uses a generic word (ἄσπερα ἄσπερα, v. 1377; ἄσπερα, v. 1382), interestingly, the same one with which Amphitryon referred to the hoplite's weapons in the *agon* scene with Lycus ("The heavily armored soldier is a slave to his armor", ἄσπερα ἄσπερα ἄσπερα ἄσπερα ἄσπερα ἄσπερα, v. 190). In these lines (vv. 1377-1385), in which the personification of the weapons culminates in even giving them a direct speech, Heracles wonders what to do with them and he underlines their dual value (as agents of the hero's labours, but also as the killers of his children), which coincides with the dual nature of the hero himself.⁴⁷ Finally, Heracles decides to take the weapons with him and to put up with the pain caused by remembering what he has done with them. The hero's weapons, which for Lycus were the symbol of the hero's cowardice, become, thus, a symbol of bravery, yet not of the bravery which is shown on the battlefield, but of the bravery which is demonstrated when life is confronted.⁴⁸

Therefore, the bow, the characteristic weapon of Heracles, is redefined in the tragedy's final part, and from being a lowly weapon connected to the wild world it becomes a weapon which has a place in the hoplite's panoply, with the hoplite being understood from a new perspective that is less heroic and more human.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ According to the view that Papadopoulou 2005, 56, has of the tragedy, "Heracles' disaster is not to be seen in terms of undeserved or a deserved punishment; the central problem is rather the inherent ambivalence of Heracles and the way in which this ambivalence can be dealt with. The tragedy problematizes the nature of Heracles' heroism and the ways in which this heroism can be accommodated in a civilized world after the performance of his labours".

⁴⁸ Cf. Papadopoulou 2005, 179.

⁴⁹ All the characters mention explicitly Heracles' bow, except the goddesses (Iris and Lyssa) and Theseus, Heracles' friend, who, as will be seen, represents another weapon, the spear.

3.3. *The bow-spear opposition*

Although the bow is the main weapon of Heracles, the first weapon of the hero which is mentioned in the tragedy is the spear (ἄσπερον ἄσπερον, v. 49), specifically the spear used by Heracles to defeat the Minyans and placed on the altar of Zeus Soter, where the hero's family seeks refuge.⁵⁰ In contrast to the bow, with which Heracles confronts the wild world and with which he commits his most abominable and inhumane crime, the spear is primarily the weapon used to confront an enemy city within established civic parameters.⁵¹

The spear, in *Heracles* called ἄσπερον, ἄσπερον or ἄσπερον, begins to gain relevance, mainly in Lycus' *rhesis* during the *agon* with Amphitryon, in which it is presented as a weapon in contrast to the bow and typical of the hoplite ("He who never held a shield in his left hand / Nor came near a spearpoint", ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον / ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον, vv. 159-160; cf. vv. 162-164). And while Heracles clearly stands out for his use of bows, the rest of the characters in the play stand out for their use of spears.

Thus, the spear is the weapon of Amphitryon, who ends the *rhesis* in which he praises the bow by regretting his old age and affirming that, if he were young, he would take his spear (ἄσπερον, v. 233) and he would attack Lycus. In fact, Megara also links Amphitryon to the use of the spear ("You got an illustrious reputation for combat⁵² / So that it's intolerable for you to die through cowardice", ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον / ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον ἄσπερον, vv. 288-289).⁵³

Likewise, the spear is the weapon of the Chorus, composed of elderly men from Thebes, who, like Amphitryon, regret the passing of their youth and, with it, the possibility of gripping the spear in order to be able to defend the throne of the city (ἄσπερον, v. 268; ἄσπερον, v. 437). And the spear is also the weapon which Thebes should grip in defence of Heracles' family in appreciation for the service that the hero provided them facing the Minyans (ἄσπερον ἄσπερον, v. 224). The spear is, besides, the weapon of

⁵⁰ The spear and the altar are the symbols of how much the whole community of Thebes owes to Heracles; cf. George 1994, 153.

⁵¹ There are also references to this episode with the Minyans in vv. 220-221.

⁵² The Greek word used here is ἄσπερον, which designates both 'war' and 'spear'. Halleran 1988 translates it as 'combat', but I think that a better translation here would be 'spear'.

⁵³ See how the use of the different weapons is recurrently linked to the concepts of bravery or cowardice.

Athena (ἄνακτα, v. 1003), representative of the hoplitic fight; with that spear the goddess puts an end to Heracles' madness and prevents him from killing Amphitryon too.⁵⁴

However, the character that undoubtedly best represents the spear in this tragedy is Theseus, who enters the scene in line 1163 and states that he is going to bring to Heracles his ally spear (ἄνακτα ... ἄνακτα, v. 1165) and his allied hand too (ἄνακτα ἄνακτα ἄνακτα ἄνακτα ἄνακτα, v. 1171). The mention of the hand and the weapon seems to refer to the characterisation made by Lycus of Heracles in the *agon* of the first episode, in which Lycus reviled the hero for using a bow and his arms as his weapons. But, in the case of Theseus, his hand and spear are “allied”.⁵⁵

Thus, by placing Theseus and Heracles together on scene, Euripides, at the end of the tragedy, visually confronts the weapons which have played the leading role in the *agon* of the first part. But the solution offered by the playwright at this moment does not consist of stating the victory of one weapon over the other, but rather in completely reworking the ideology of both. In the *agon* between Lycus and Amphitryon both utter paradoxical speeches: Lycus, because he uses traditional and very widespread beliefs to attack the hero par excellence of Greece; Amphitryon, because he defends the hero through praising the bow, and such exaltation of the bow was not in line with traditionally assumed ideas. Then, in the second *agon* of the play, at the end of the tragedy, Euripides places Theseus and Heracles, the spear and the bow, face to face. And what he does is to appeal to traditional ideology (that established by Lycus), but applies it to a different context (life, instead of the battlefield). Furthermore, he mentions the weapon with a noun (ἄνακτα, v. 1350) which can, in Greek, designate different types of weapons, including also the bow, as Amphitryon contended. In that way, Euripides blurs the lines of the confrontation between Lycus and Amphitryon, between the spear and the bow, and shows that bravery or cowardice are displayed by being able to endure that which matches each. Heracles' decision to keep his bow indicates this same direction.

Theseus and Heracles leave the scene together, each of them carrying his weapon, which shows, among other things, that the most important thing is not so much the weapon but unity and mutual aid among people. Above all it is a new value, ἄνακτα.

⁵⁴ On the character of Athena in Euripides' *Heracles*, cf. Carrière 1972, Papadopoulou 2005, 123-126.

⁵⁵ As George 1994, 155, states, in contrast to Heracles, Theseus does not arrive alone, but he is a hoplite who arrives with some other hoplites.

4. Conclusion

The *agon* scene which confronts Lycus and Amphitryon brings to the foreground a rhetorized discussion about the spear and the bow, which seems to have no direct relation to the rest of the tragedy and even seems to create a break in the dramatic illusion. However, in this scene Euripides directs the spectator's attention to an issue which will be essential in the final part of the tragedy and also in its concluding message.

The first half of the tragedy, in which the *agon* about weapons is included, is a Euripidean innovation. Specifically, Lycus is an invention by Euripides, in the same way as his attempt to usurp the throne and his threats to the Heracles' family.⁵⁶ Since the second part, the murder of Heracles' children, has its origin in tradition and the first part is an innovation, it has to be understood that this first part was composed by Euripides as a compensation. In other words, if Heracles has to kill his children, Euripides creates a situation in which he saves them. In that way, the play goes from salvation to murder, from the despair of the family to their happiness for the salvation and then to catastrophe, from the abandonment by the Thebans to the help offered by Theseus, etc. In short, Euripides consciously creates a play of contrasts and counterpoints full of common issues which connect both parts of the tragedy.

Within this scheme, Euripides reverses, thanks to a change in the motivation of the tasks, the sequence of Heracles' tasks and the murder of his wife and children, which traditionally happened in the opposite order.⁵⁷ By doing so, Euripides portrays a Heracles who is at his zenith, and from there he shows his downfall.⁵⁸ But this downfall is used to redefine the hero by using the ideology about the hoplites to this effect. Heracles is the hero par excellence, linked to the wild and uncivilized world; on the contrary, the perfect

⁵⁶ Another innovation is the introduction of Theseus, who offers Heracles a place in Athens (he will be buried there and will receive cult status, which goes against the traditional version in which his corpse was burned on the mount Oeta). On innovations in *Heracles*, cf. Parmentier in Parmentier, Grégoire 1923, 6-9, Bond 1981, xxviii-xxx.

⁵⁷ Actually, as Papadopoulou 2005, 74-75, explains, there are no sources prior to this Euripidean tragedy which allow one to affirm strictly that the usual order was madness-tasks. However, the fact that, despite the success of *Heracles*, after this play the usual order was madness-tasks (cf. Nicolaus of Damascus, *Historiae*, *FGrH* 90 F 13; D.S. 4.10.6; Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 2.4.12), that is to say, the opposite to the order proposed by Euripides in his tragedy, seems to denote that this was the traditional sequence and that Euripides reversed it. In fact, that is what is generally accepted. The same scholar states, besides, (*ibid.*, 80) that, when the order is madness-tasks, the tasks are a step toward the hero's deification, but Euripides changes the order and shows the path toward his humanization. In the same vein, Gregory 1991, 122, emphasizes that, instead of showing in this tragedy a hero who goes toward his apotheosis, Euripides shows a Heracles who sees himself reduced to mere mortality.

⁵⁸ Heracles is the protagonist of two preserved tragedies, namely Euripides' *Heracles* and Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. The most striking thing is that, in order to make of Heracles a tragic hero, Euripides and Sophocles too choose a moment in which his tasks have finished and the hero confronts the final catastrophe of his life; cf. Parmentier in Parmentier, Grégoire 1923, 3-5.

example of a hero within civic patterns would be the hoplite. Therefore, the playwright turns the hero gradually into a hoplite, so that he integrates him within the civic parameters. In this process, the hero's weapons have an essential prominence.

In the second part of the tragedy a process of redefining Heracles through his weapons begins, which culminates in the other *agon* scene, when Euripides joins Theseus with his spear, and Heracles with his bow, on-stage. Thus, at the end of the tragedy both weapons which have the leading role in the discussion between Lycus and Amphitryon are visually displayed in the scene. At that moment, the arguments recall the words of Lycus, which reproduced the traditional ideology about the lowly value of the bow in contrast to the spear. Those words, however, and that ideology, are completely redefined and they acquire a new meaning in the final part of the tragedy.

The final scene presents to the public the two weapons that have been so harshly opposed in the first part of the tragedy, yet at that moment there is no confrontation, but rather a joining together. The context is no longer war, but life. Heracles shows that, effectively, as Lycus said, being brave implies being able to resist, but he also demonstrates that the aforementioned resistance has nothing to do with the weapon used.

As has been stated on many occasions, *Heracles* accomplishes a process of humanizing the hero, redefining him and also redefining his place in Athens and in Greek civilization.⁵⁹ In that process, the weapons, brought into the foreground thanks to the debate between Lycus and Amphitryon, play an essential role, because they help the audience to gradually perceive the changes that take place in the hero.

Finally, at the end, Heracles discovers the relevance of human relations and of $\pi\iota\pi\alpha$, and he seems able to withstand the moral suffering nobly, in the same way that he has faced physical challenges.⁶⁰ The tragedy ends by highlighting the idea of $\pi\iota\pi\alpha$ and the interdependence of people over individuality. This is visually brilliantly portrayed when Heracles and Theseus leave the stage together, ready to cooperate in the last task of the hero, carrying and symbolizing respectively the bow and the spear.

⁵⁹ As Foley 1985, 150 (also 175-192), reveals, *Heracles* sets out how the $\pi\iota\pi\alpha$ of a hero such as Heracles can be celebrated in the Athenian context.

⁶⁰ After the murder of his family, Heracles only has sadness and despair left. His heroism is then demonstrated by putting up with this new situation. Euripides "place donc dans la fermeté de l'âme la véritable grandeur (...) Héraclès persévère et sa victoire morale est le dernier et le plus héroïque de tous ses travaux"; cf. Parmentier in Parmentier, Grégoire 1923, 10. According to Yoshitake 1994, 142, instead, the fact that Heracles only rejects suicide after Theseus assures him a place to go and the receipt of some honours implies that not even Heracles is able to withstand everything.

If the Trojan War ends with the joint action of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, the joining together of Heracles and Theseus at the end of the Euripidean *Heracles* seems to symbolize the end of the heroic world and the beginning of a new period.⁶¹

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