

Pacifism, idealized countryside, and war Realism and politics in Euripides

Stefano Ceccarelli (La Sapienza, Rome)

As a man of his times, Euripides was naturally sensitive to contemporary politics and, therefore, its tragedies are known to be permeated in varying degrees by contemporaneous events. If comedy writers were allowed to speak earnestly about the πόλις, tragedians had to cover their political ideas under the mythological pattern and, so, Euripides could only hint at his present by tearing aside the veil of the myth. The longing for peace is notoriously one of Euripides' distinctive *Leitmotive*: in fact, he staged tragedies like *Hecuba* and *Trojan women*, in which war is negatively depicted and the poetic of sorrow is deeply developed. Euripides wrote these tragedies at a time when Aristophanes was staging comedies like *Acharnians* and *Peace*, where countryman characters tried to return to their beloved fields, i. e. a highly idealized countryside. The historic reason behind Aristophanes' choice was the presence of several countrymen in Athens, who had been forced to move to the city from their demes because of Spartan invasions during the Archidamic war. As a poet sensible to contemporary literary innovations, Euripides chose to use these typical comedy situations in some of his tragedies: the poor and honest Farmer of the *Electra* and the ugly but just αὐτουργός of the *Orestes* (vv. 917-922) are two well suited examples. Therefore, the aim of this paper is studying Euripides' use of 'comic' realism as a poetic way to hint at his contemporaneity. In this way, it will be shown how his poetic technique worked to stress *e silentio* political messages in front of the audience, borrowing images directly from comedy which were consequently perceived as an alien element in tragedy. In a nutshell, realism allows the tragedian to speak about society and politics in the frame of an unhistorical and mythical plot: the result is Euripides' own hidden voice about the present history, joining the dramatic choir to defend pacifism against war.