

Euripides and the Political *Pathos* of the Falling House

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In 411/10 BCE, the Attic *polis* punished two citizens for treason by razing their houses to the ground and erecting *horoi* stones upon the bare foundations (Craterus *FGrHist* 342 fr. 5). This punishment provides social context for how Euripides presents the physical house, Greek tragedy's conventional backdrop, as a shared vulnerability for citizen males. In this paper I argue that dramatized falls of the houses in *Heracles* and *Bacchae* exploit the set-building, *skēnē*, as an object capable of arousing fifth-century Athenian anxieties regarding individual household, *oikos*, and stability. While the house in tragedy has frequently been interpreted as conveying danger which the elite family poses to the *polis* (eg. Seaford 1994, 344-69 and Griffith 2011), the trauma of the physical house also suggests a new social reading that considers male audience members' ideologically interlocking *polis*- and *oikos*-identities (Humphreys 1983, Strauss 1993, Lehmann 2016). I propose that in the tragic figure of the falling house (Rodighiero 2013) Euripides reflects the *oikos*' political role in shaping civic identity

In *Bacchae* Pentheus, as head of the Theban proto-*polis*, is blind to the trauma of Dionysus' maternal household which perhaps lies on stage, "the fallen ruins of [her] *oikos* and *domos*" (οἶκων καὶ δόμων ἐρείπια, 7). Pentheus orders the demolition of the buildings of Dionysus-sympathizer Tiresias (348-49), but the king's own household also proves personally and structurally vulnerable as chorus outside watches Dionysus demolish Pentheus' house (585-603, 605-6, 622-26, 632-33). In the wake of further maenadic up-turnings Pentheus fully realizes his loss — which is also his adversary Dionysus' — when he fruitlessly appeals to the house in which he was born in order to confirm his identity (1119). *Heracles* features even more explicit vocabulary of house-razing that centers on the chorus watching this event from outside (903-4). Heracles initially plans to raze the tyrant Lycus' house (566-67), but Hera's henchwoman Lyssa makes him the unwitting agent for demolishing his own house (943-46, 998-99). Theban spectators of the razing call to mind that Hera's plan of razing (1307) only fulfills Lycus' earlier attempts to destroy the household — attempts the Theban *polis* did not prevent. As in *Bacchae*, Euripides uses the physical trauma of the house to emphasize Thebes' failed responsibility towards one of its *oikoi*.

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