

## AESCHYLUS, EURIPIDES AND THE CONQUEST OF A RE[G]AL THRONE.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE STAGING OF ARISTOPHANES' *FROGS*

*To the memory of my beloved Mom (†2015)*



ABSTRACT: In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the prize awarded to the winner of the *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides is not merely a metaphorical laurel (as recognition for being the best poet in the Underworld), but a real and regal throne. The aim of this paper is to explain how the references to the *θρόνος τραγωδικός* in the comic text have influenced the different hypotheses suggested by the scholars about the staging of the *agon*. In particular, it shows how the occupation — total or partial — of a real throne on the stage determines an asymmetry between the characters of Aeschylus and Euripides, a difference that determines the authority and credibility of each of the dead poets.

#### 1. THE “CHAIR OF TRAGEDY”: A THRONE ON THE STAGE

ARISTOPH. *Ra.* 830-831:

EYP. *Οὐκ ἂν μεθείμην τοῦ θρόνου, μὴ νουθέτει·* 830  
*κρείττων γὰρ εἶναί φημι τούτου τὴν τέχνην.*<sup>1</sup>

EURIPIDES: *I won't let go of the chair; don't try and give*  
*me instructions. I say that I'm a better artist than he is.*<sup>2</sup>

These are the first words pronounced by Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Addressed to Dionysus and not to his rival Aeschylus, as the Scholiast believed (*Σ Ra.* 830b: *πρὸς τὸν Αἰσχύλον Εὐριπίδης*), these words, spoken with the courtesy due to a divine interlocutor,<sup>3</sup> show the poet's will to ignore

1. The text of *Frogs* is quoted from Dover (1993).
2. Trans. by Sommerstein (1996) 103.
3. The optative gives a tone of courtesy to Euripides' response and highlights Dionysus' new *status* in the second part of the comedy: the god has now been 'rehabilitated' from

the exhortations of the god, and, consequently, not to abandon the throne. This throne is the *θρόνος τραγωδικός* ('the chair of Tragedy', see *Ra.* 769), which is the seat reserved for the playwright in Hades who stood out as the most skilful author in life. This throne becomes the object and prize of the contest between Euripides and the older Aeschylus in the second part of the drama. In line 831 Euripides proudly claims the supremacy of poetry: his refusal to leave the tragic *θρόνος* is not simply a caprice, but it is justified because he considers himself better than his opponent (Aeschylus) in his *τέχνη*.

The purpose of this essay is to analyse how the textual references to the throne in the second part of the play have influenced the different hypotheses of reconstruction of the staging starting at line 830.

*Ὄκ ἄν μεθείμην τοῦ θρόνου* are also the first words heard in the *proagon* scene (vv. 830-894)<sup>4</sup>, and they indicate a contest already in progress, which is presented to the audience only at this point. This sentence, conveyed and interpreted at a visual and dramatic level, enables us to recapture a significant detail of the staging of the drama in the *proagon*.

One example is Dover's stage reconstruction with the presence of no fewer than three thrones on the stage<sup>5</sup>: a central throne, reserved for Pluto, the ruler of Hades, a second, occupied by Dionysus, a guest who had just arrived in the Underworld,<sup>6</sup> and lastly the *θρόνος τραγωδικός*. According to Dover, Aeschylus would sit on the latter: the aforementioned first words of Euripides also suggest that the younger tragedian is physically "clinging" to the throne of his older rival. This staging detail is based on the value assigned to *μεθίσθαι*: *Ὄκ ἄν μεθείμην*<sup>7</sup> *τοῦ θρόνου* would not express the refusal by

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a comic character into the deity of the theatre, the only possible judge of the contest between the two tragic poets: see del Corno (1985) 206.

4. "The *proagon* — as defined by Paul Mazon — is a 'battle scene', in which the disputants are presented to the audience and the terms of the debate that will take place in the *agon* are laid before them": Gentili-Lomiento (2008) 87.
5. Dover (1993) 295-296.
6. A fragment of an Apulian bell-krater from Taranto (c. 400-375 B.C., Museo Nazionale, inv. 12613, *PhV* 61) shows a figure (Zeus?) with his sceptre crouching on a chair, which serves as a sort of comic throne, in the presence of Dionysus, and another figure (Apollo?) but too much is missing to allow for a positive identification: Trendall (1967) 16. According to Schmidt (1998) 23, the vase fragment may well portray the competition between Aeschylus and Euripides, adjudicated by Dionysus, but see also Revermann (2006) 246 n. 24.
7. All the modern editors accept the middle *μεθείμην*, the reading of *V* (Venetus Marcianus 474) *A* (Parisinus Regius 2712); the active *μεθείην* is the reading offered by *R* (Ravennas 429). According to Dover (1993) 296, the middle of a verb is used when the attention "is focused on the action of the subject [...]".

Euripides of an abstract “abandonment of the throne” — a waiver to compete for the tragic supremacy — but to a physical separation from the seat, and to take his hands off the throne would imply leaving it completely to his rival. The *tableau* imagined by Dover represents a crucial moment in the critical debate on the staging of this section of the play; most of the later editors welcomed it as demonstrated by the following stage directions:<sup>8</sup>

Sommerstein (1996) 103: “A platform is wheeled out of the stage-house door, on which stand three chairs in a row. Pluto, in royal robes, is sitting in the middle chair, with Dionysus (now at last dressed as himself) sitting on one side of him and Aeschylus on the other. *Euripides is laying hold on Aeschylus’ chair*; Dionysus is urging him by gesture to desist; Aeschylus is sitting silent and impassive”.

Henderson (2002) 139: “Three chairs are brought out; then enter Pluto, who takes the center chair; and Dionysus (now normally costumed), who takes the left-hand chair; then enter Aeschylus, who takes the right-hand chair, followed by *Euripides, who lays hands on it*; alternatively, the whole *tableau* may be rolled out on the *eccyclema*”.

Mastromarco-Totaro (2006) 641: “Dal Palazzo di Plutone escono degli inservienti che portano sulla scena tre troni; subito dopo esce Plutone che va a sedersi sul trono centrale; lo seguono Dioniso, che va a sedersi sul trono a sinistra, Eschilo, che va sedersi sul trono a destra, ed *Euripide, che si aggrappa al trono di Eschilo*”.

All these scholars agree with Dover’s suggestion about the precarious position of Euripides,<sup>9</sup> who would be the only character to appear before the public without his own seat, and therefore he is forced to cling to the throne occupied by Aeschylus.

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8. The *italics* in these quotations are mine and are introduced to focus on the relevant expressions.
  9. The main point of disagreement between the editors concerns the possible use of the *ekkyklema*, with which it would be possible to transport the actors already seated on three thrones onto the stage. The use of this theatrical machine would place the poetic challenge inside rather than outside Pluto’s palace, since the rotating platform is used to reveal what is happening inside to the audience. On the use of the *ekkyklema* (and of the *mechane*) Csapo-Slater (1995) 258 argue that “Old Comedy appears to have used the devices exclusively in paratragic scenes” (cf. *e.g.* the famous scene of Agathon in the prologue of *Thesmophoriazusae*). In the *proagon* of the *Frogs* the use of the *ekkyklema* could mark the beginning of a paratragic scene, i.e. the *agon* between the two tragedians which includes large chunks of tragic parody (I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees of *Logeion* for this inspiring suggestion). On the use of this device see also Dearden (1976) 69-70 and, more recently, Konstantakos (2005) 202-206.

2. THE STAGING *ANTE* DOVER'S EDITION

Although, as already mentioned, Dover's proposal enjoys considerable success in subsequent editions, it is sufficient to carry out a quick survey of the previous printed tradition to track down some significantly different dramaturgical assumptions. Although most of the editors prior to 1993<sup>10</sup> (when Dover's work was published) only signal the entrance of the actors<sup>11</sup>, in some editions there are more extensive commentary notes. Among them it is appropriate to emphasize the following four, which seem most significant for the purposes of this study:

Paley (1877) 77: "I am not going to give up my claims to the seat.' Sup. 777 Euripides was said to contest the possession of it, ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου. But it does not appear that he was ever actually the occupant of it".

van Leeuwen (1896) 131: "μεθείλην] *mittam*; quod non ad litteram est accipiendum, nam sedes illa, in qua nunc sedet Sophocles (vs. 790-792), in scena non cernitur".

Rogers (1903) 127: "Apparently we have here a complete change of scene. We are introduced into the Hall of Pluto, with Pluto himself sitting on his throne, and Dionysus, Aeschylus and Euripides in the foreground. The parts of Dionysus, Aeschylus and Euripides are taken by the three state-supplied or (so to say) professional actors. Pluto, represented by a Choregic actor, is a mere mute for the next 584 lines (indeed until the poetic contest is over)...".

Lattimore (1969) 55: "Enter from the door Aeschylus and Euripides, Dionysos, (in his proper costume, without the gear of Herakles or Xanthias), and Pluto. The poets stand one on each side of the stage. Three chairs are placed. Pluto sits in the middle, Dionysos on his right, and the chair on his left is empty".

This selection — albeit brief and partial — shows that the critical debate on the staging is characterized by some uncertainty about both (1) the tragic throne (whether or not it is present in this scene)<sup>12</sup> and (2) its occupant. Regarding (1), Paley (who translates v. 830: "I do not want to drop my claim to

10. See Radermacher (1954) 65; Stanford (1963) 145; del Corno (1985) 85; see also García López (1993) 153; Marzullo (2003) 869; Judet de La Combe (2012) 107.

11. See also the *scholium vetus ad v.* 830, where it reads κορωνίς δὲ εἰσιόντων τῶν ὑποκριτῶν.

12. See also Russo (1961) 14 and (2002) 200, who argues that "the famous throne of tragedy is never once brought out on-stage".

the throne”) and van Leeuwen does not believe that *μεθείμην* can have a literal / concrete value (on which the reconstruction of Dover is partially based on): Euripides could not physically leave the throne, as, despite his intentions, would never really have occupied it. Van Leeuwen denies the real presence of the throne of poetry on the stage, as does Rogers, for whom Dionysus appears to be the only sitting character. Regarding (2), while a lot of recent editors imagine Aeschylus on the throne, van Leeuwen and Lattimore offer two particularly original ‘solutions’: Lattimore, one of the first to imagine the scene with no fewer than three thrones, leaves the throne of poetry vacant, as a prize to be adjudged to whoever comes out triumphant from the *agon*, while van Leeuwen, who awards it to Sophocles — the only playwright who is not an active character in the drama — places it in the extra-scenic space taking it away from the spectators’ sight.

### 3. THE SECOND PROLOGUE

The reference to Sophocles highlights the necessary link between the staging of the *proagon* and what is previously described in lines 755-829, which belong to the ‘second prologue’ (so called because it introduces the next part of the dramatic action). In these verses we find five of the six instances of the noun *θρόνος* present in the *Frogs*<sup>13</sup>:

1. vv. 761–767: *Νόμος τις ἐνθάδ’ ἐστὶ κείμενος, / ἀπὸ τῶν τεχνῶν, ὅσαι μεγάλοι καὶ δεξιάι, / τὸν ἄριστον ὄντα τῶν ἑαυτοῦ συντέχνων / σίτησιν αὐτὸν ἐν πρυτανείῳ λαμβάνειν / θρόνον τε τοῦ Πλούτωνος ἐξῆς [...] ἕως ἀφίκοιτο τὴν τέχνην σοφώτερος / ἔτερός τις αὐτοῦ· τότε δὲ παραχωρεῖν ἔδει.*

*There’s a law in force here that from each of the professions, those of them that are lofty and intellectual, the person who is the best among all his fellow-professionals, that he should have official maintenance in the Prytaneum and a chair next to Pluto (...) until someone else should come here more expert in the craft than he is, and then he was supposed to give place.*

2. vv. 769–770: *Ἐκείνος (scil. Aeschylus) εἶχε τὸν τραγωδικὸν θρόνον, / ὡς ὢν κράτιστος τὴν τέχνην.*

*He held the chair of Tragedy, because he was supreme in that art.*

3. vv. 771 and 777–778: *Ὅτε δὴ κατῆλθ’ Εὐριπίδης, ἐπεδείκνυτο [...] / κἄπειτ’ ἐπαρθεὶς ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνον, / ἦν’ Αἰσχύλος καθῆστο.*

13. Trans. by Sommerstein (1996) 103.

*When Euripides came down here, he began giving display performances [...] and then he got so fired up that he laid claim to the chair where Aeschylus was sitting.*

4. vv. 786–787: *Κάπειτα πῶς / οὐ καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου;*  
*Then how come Sophocles didn't also lay claim to the chair?*

5. vv. 788–90: [...] ἀλλ' ἔκνυσε μὲν Αἰσχύλος, / ὅτε δὴ κατήλθε, κἀνέβαλε τὴν δεξιάν· / κἀκεῖνος (*scil.* Sophocles or Aeschylus?<sup>14</sup>) ὑπεχώρησεν αὐτῷ τοῦ θρόνου.

[...] *When he came down here, he kissed Aeschylus and put his right hand in his, and he withdrew any claim against him to the chair.*

Text 1 provides information on what the *θρόνος* is — which is identified as being the seat close to Pluto's in a sort of underworld Prytaneion — and on how to determine the holder; the remaining four texts all allude to the form of ownership that the three famous Athenian playwrights exercise (or would like to exercise) on the tragic throne. Aeschylus is the first real occupant of the throne. This is confirmed with certainty in vv. 769 and 778, where the verbs *ἔχειν* and *καθῆσθαι* indicate a material possession of the seat of poetry by the Eleusinian poet (texts 2 and 3). However there are more interpretative doubts regarding the other two verbs, which in the second prologue always include the genitive *θρόνου*: (1) *ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι*, firstly with Euripides as the main subject (text 3), and later Sophocles (text 4); and (2) *ὑποχωρεῖν* (text 5), with the pronoun *ἐκεῖνος* as subject, even if the referent is of uncertain identification (an exegetical problem that has repercussions on the editorial level, which may require an emendation of the text). Depending on the value we want to assign to expressions such as *ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου* (vv. 777 and 787) and *ὑπεχώρησεν [...] τοῦ θρόνου* (v. 790), and to the overall interpretation of the respective passages, we can suggest hypotheses on the staging devised for the *proagon*. Therefore it is necessary to discuss the possible meaning of both phrases from a dramaturgical perspective.

*Ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου* appears twice in the second prologue: in v. 777 it is the expression used by Hades' servant to describe Euripides' behaviour concerning the throne occupied by Aeschylus; and ten verses later (v. 787) the expression is repeated by Xanthias, who asks about the reason

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14. See *infra*.

Sophocles did not resort to *ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τοῦ θρόνου*. In the early translations this phrase is rendered with *contra assumpsit thronum*<sup>15</sup> and *sedem prehendit / sedem occupavit*<sup>16</sup>. Both of these expressions indicate physical possession of the seat: when Euripides arrived in Hades and gave proof of his talent, driven by a fan club made up of all kinds of criminals,<sup>17</sup> he would have occupied the tragic throne “instead of” (*ἀντί*) Aeschylus. By accepting this interpretation, the scenic consequence would be that the tragic throne, visible to the viewers, would be occupied by Euripides (as yet this hypothesis has never been put forward). In order to prevent the effective replacement of Aeschylus with Euripides on the throne it is necessary to assign a different value to the verb *ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι*, making it more figurative than concrete: “to claim” or “to vindicate” (so LSJ *s.v.* II b: “metaph. c. gen., *lay hold of, lay claim to, τοῦ θρόνου* Ar. *Ra.777* and *787*”), which is commonly accepted in most modern translations. Thus interpreting *ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι*, Euripides would not materially take possession of the throne, but he would claim it for himself for being the most skilful writer.

In fact, the exegetical choice between a concrete or abstract sense — an issue already commented above, with regard to v. 830 and v. 777 — recurs also in the interpretation of the verses that immediately follow and are dedicated to the figure of Sophocles. The need for this semantic leap (the transition from a literal sense to a metaphorical one), discussed above in connection with v. 777, had already been perceived by Kuster (1710) 70. In his commentary on v. 787, in fact, this scholar stated: “id est sedem affectavit: vel, sedem sibi debere contendit: non, ut Frischlinus, sedem occupavit”. The second attestation of *ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου* can probably provide a broader reflection on the value and function of the expression. In v. 787 the phrase shows Xanthias’ attempt to establish a parallel between the previously described Euripides’ behaviour and that merely assumed for Sophocles: it almost seems that, in the comic slave’s mind, claiming the tragic throne should be an obvious act “innate” to all the poets freshly arrived in Hades.

15. Divus (1542) 133.

16. Frischlinus (1586) 271.

17. The entire exchange of words between the servants (vv. 768–778) seems to allude to an alternation of the seat between the two poets: the assertion of Pluto’s servant, *εἶχε τὸν τραγωδικὸν θρόνον*, is followed by Xanthias’ question *Νυνὶ δὲ τίς;* to which Pluto’s servant replies with *Ὅτε δὴ κατῆλθ’ Εὐριπίδης [...]* *ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου*, *ἴν’ Αἰσχόλος καθῆστο*. Indeed, the servant of Hades pays no attention to his colleague’s interruption, but simply continues his speech, without giving any response to Xanthias (see e.g. Russo (1961) 14; del Corno (1985) 202 *ad v.* 765).

But the attempted association between the two poets is immediately arrested by the response of Pluto's servant, who opens with the negative expression *μὰ Δί' οὐκ ἐκεῖνος* [...] ("[...] 'not he!'; lit. 'not that (right-minded) man' [...]": Tucker 1906, 183) and continues with the description of Sophocles' attitude in direct opposition to that of Euripides. In this description, two actions replace *ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου*:

1) *A manifestation of fraternal friendship*, which is expressed in a kiss and a narrow right-hand shake: vv. 788-789: [...] *ἀλλ' ἔκνυσε μὲν Αἰσχύλον, / ὅτε δὴ κατῆλθε, κἀνέβαλε τὴν δεξιάν* [...] (... *When he came down here, he [scil. Sophocles] kissed Aeschylus and put his right hand in his* [...]).<sup>18</sup>

These two gestures, so connected to be considered a single greeting action<sup>19</sup> — which were also performed shortly before by the two servants, concluding with their recognition as being 'brothers in mischief' (vv. 754-755) — here establish the encounter between the two poets who identify themselves as similar and, therefore, unwilling to give rise to dispute.<sup>20</sup>

2) *The decision to leave the poetic throne to the other contender*: [...] *κἀκεῖνος ὑπεχώρησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου* [...] (... *and he withdrew any claim against him to the chair* [...]).<sup>21</sup>

As previously mentioned, there has been a long discussion about which of the two playwrights lurks behind *ἐκεῖνος*.<sup>22</sup> The identification of the subject also determines the value of *ὑπεχώρησεν*. If in v. 790 the pronoun refers

18. Trans. by Sommerstein (1996) 99.

19. Handley (2000) 151-154 separates the two gestures, assigning the kiss to Aeschylus and the right-hand shake to Sophocles.

20. See Russo (1961) 16.

21. Trans. by Sommerstein (1996) 99.

22. As would be expected, the text of vv. 788-790 has been variously emended: Coulon (1928) 325-326, prints *κἀνειακος* for *κἀκεῖνος* in v. 790, and translates: "Par Zeus, il s'en est bien gardé, lui. Mais aussitôt descendu ici il a embrassé Eschyle et lui a donné la main, lui cédant *sans dispute* le droit au trône"; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1929) 472, would delete the entire verse 790. Naber (1883) 35-36, changes the accusative *Αἰσχύλον* to the nominative *Αἰσχύλος* in v. 788. This last emendation — printed also by Wilson (2007) 170 — is highly praised by Sommerstein 1996: "It is very tempting, however, to cut the knot by adopting Naber's emendation of 788 [...] which would make Aeschylus the subject of 788-9 and remove all grammatical difficulty; this view is persuasively championed by J. Fettes, *LCM* 15 (1990) 132-8 — to whom the emendation had occurred independently — and it may well be right. The picture would then be one of mutual gestures of esteem, with Aeschylus spontaneously rising from his



to Aeschylus, as argued by those who believe that the second *ἐκεῖνος* necessarily requires a change of subject from the previous instance in v. 787<sup>23</sup>, the verb should acquire a full literal value: the Eleusinian, seated on the throne at the time of Sophocles' arrival, would abandon his seat in favour of the latter or — in a far more paradoxical solution, yet not impossible if the comic tone is taken into account — he would make room on the throne for the new arrival, thus giving rise to a sort of 'double throne'.<sup>24</sup> Otherwise, if in v. 790 *ἐκεῖνος* refers to Sophocles as in v. 787,<sup>25</sup> *ὑπεχώρησεν* can only have the figurative value of *giving up the throne* or *withdrawing from contest for the throne*, since Sophocles has never really occupied the poetic seat. Of the two exegetical options, the second — accepted by the majority of recent interpreters — is the most convincing. The expression *ὑπεχώρησεν... τοῦ θρόνου* could be considered the final moment of Sophocles' action, who, as already highlighted, must symmetrically oppose that of Euripides.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the verb *ὑποχωρεῖν* is the opposite of *ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι* (similarly, in vv. 764-767, the compound *παραχωρεῖν* contrasts with the previous *λαμβάνειν*), and both have figurative value: if Euripides, by considering himself *σοφώτερος* than Aeschylus, has laid claim to the throne, Sophocles, with his fraternal gestures, recognizes the Eleusinian playwright as his peer and shies away from contending for the seat against his most senior colleague by not taking part in the *agon* (thus remaining in the extra-scenic space) and only intends to reappear as the next challenger in case of Euripides' victory.

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chair to embrace and welcome Sophocles, and Sophocles courteously inviting him to resume it without challenge [...]"

23. See e.g. van Leeuwen (1896) 124-125; Denniston (1954) 584; Radermacher (1954) 254; Kells (1964) 232-235.
24. See Van Leeuwen (1896) 124-125: "Aeschylus (*ἐκεῖνος*) non totam quidem sedem cecit Sophocli [...], sed in sedem suam, quam satis amplam fuisse libenter credimus, eum recepit".
25. Stevens (1955) 235-237 and (1966) 2-4, followed by the most of recent editors and interpreters: see e.g. Russo (1961) 17; Stanford (1963) 139; del Corno (1985) 203; Dover (1993) 288-289; García López (1993) 148-149; Sommerstein (1996) 224; Mastromarco-Totaro (2006) 636-637, n. 116; Judet de La Combe (2012) 236-237.
26. See Judet de La Combe (2012) 236-237: "Sophocle ne revendique même pas [...] Il est fidèle à lui-même, comme l'indique la répétition du pronom, et n'agit pas comme Euripide".

#### 4. THE *PROAGON* SCENE: IS EURIPIDES DEFEATED FROM THE START?

From this brief analysis of the second prologue the centrality of the tragic throne is evident. The throne is presented as the very cause of the comic action which will follow. The importance of this object could be further highlighted by the appearance of the throne at the beginning of the *proagon* scene. In fact the chair of the Tragedy becomes visible at the same time as the protagonists of the *agon*, who had been previously announced in the second prologue: the antagonists Aeschylus and Euripides (v. 758), Pluto — the god who instituted the contest (vv. 784-786) — and Dionysus — who was appointed judge of the contest (vv. 810-811). The throne, therefore, should not be seen simply as a symbol of the supremacy in poetry, a kind of metaphorical laurel or “the tragic palm.” Rather, it is a concrete prop — to be added to the others listed by Stanford (1963), xxxii — around which the comic action revolves at least initially.

Once again the second prologue seems to highlight how of the three playwrights only Aeschylus can really claim possession of the *θρόνος τραγωδικός* (*ἔχειν* and *καθῆσθαι*). In the account of Pluto’s servant, Euripides and Sophocles, upon entering Hades, find Aeschylus on the throne; therefore, it is again Aeschylus that Aristophanes shows sitting on the poetic seat to the audience. Euripides’ words in v. 830, as Dover points out, transform the claims made by Euripides on the Aeschylean throne (*ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου*: see *supra*) into an image, as they portray the hands of the younger poet stretching out over the seat of the older. The *stasis*, announced by Pluto’s servant (760), comes alive in a vivid picture. While in the subsequent *agon* the two protagonists will carry out a poetic-literary *certamen*, each one reciting parts of his own dramas and putting to shame the main characteristics of his rival’s art, the *proagon* instead stages a physical contention, in which Euripides, like the villains who support him, tries — clumsily and unsuccessfully — to steal the throne from Aeschylus. The scenic spectacle provided by Aristophanes in this scene, with Aeschylus firmly seated on a chair that Euripides can only cling onto, highlights the inferiority of Euripides and his forthcoming defeat, which is already foreshadowed as being inevitable, despite the favour granted to the younger poet by Dionysus in the first part of the play. The tragic throne belongs to Aeschylus both before and after the *agon*: at the end of the play the poet himself says twice *τὸν θᾶκον τὸν ἐμόν* (vv. 1515-1516 and 1522) and, as if the poetic seat were his personal property, he will pass

it on to Sophocles as an inheritance, thus removing any chance for his rival Euripides to occupy it:

vv. 1515-1523

σὺ δὲ τὸν θᾶκον / τὸν ἐμὸν παράδος Σοφοκλεῖ τηρεῖν / καὶ διασφύζειν... / μέ-  
μνησο δ' ὅπως ὁ πανοῦργος ἀνήρ / καὶ ψευδολόγος καὶ βωμολόχος / μηδέποτε  
εἰς τὸν θᾶκον τὸν ἐμὸν / μηδ' ἄκων ἐγκαθεδεῖται.

*And would you hand over my chair to Sophocles to look after and keep safe  
... And remember to make sure that that rogue, that liar, that buffoon, nev-  
er sits down on my chair, not even by accident.*<sup>27</sup>

## 5. A LAST EXEGETICAL SUGGESTION: AESCHYLUS AND THE FATHER OF THE GODS

A last consideration comes from a suggestion that, if accepted as plausible, could further strengthen the possibility of the appearance of Aeschylus sitting on the throne at the beginning of the *proagon*. Between the second prologue and the *proagon* itself there is a short strophic song (only 15 verses), in which the Chorus presents the two contenders without naming them explicitly. Nevertheless, the sections of the song dedicated to each of the two poets are easily identifiable and aim to highlight the contrast between them regarding both their human and their poetic characteristics. In language strongly coloured by epic and tragic style, rather similar to the Aeschylean *lexis*, Aristophanes introduces the forthcoming clash by making Aeschylus the passionate and proud protagonist, while Euripides is nothing but his subtle and devious antagonist.<sup>28</sup> The very structure of the song appears to reflect a preference for the Eleusinian poet: most of the text is devoted to him (nearly three fifths of the entire piece).<sup>29</sup> In addition, key sections of the song such as the *incipit* of the first stanza also refer to Aeschylus. In particular, in the first verse (v. 814) the chorus gives Aeschylus the epithet of *ἐριβορέμετας* (*loud-thundering*), used in *Il.* 13.624 with reference to Zeus. Thus, the song opens with a sign of possible identification between the poet and the father of the gods.<sup>30</sup> If this parallelism between Aeschylus and Zeus

27. Trans. by Sommerstein (1996) 155.

28. See del Corno (1985) 204.

29. Sommerstein (1996) 227.

30. See del Corno (1985) 204: "l'epiteto è usato in Omero [...] per Zeus, signore del tuono, così come Eschilo è il signore della tragedia".

is intentional,<sup>31</sup> there was probably not a better crowning moment than the poet's appearance in v. 830, seated on a throne, another traditional attribute of the king of the gods. This can be seen, for example, in *Il.* 8.442 (... αὐτὸς δὲ χρύσειον ἐπὶ θρόνον εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς ἔζετο...; ... and Zeus, whose voice is borne afar, himself sat upon his throne of gold)<sup>32</sup>, where Zeus εὐρύοπα (an epithet presumably referring to the god's thundering voice, cf. ἐριβρεμέτας in *Ra.* 814) sits on his golden chair. Aeschylus' "deified" apparition, and his portrayal *quasi* in the guise of Zeus on a throne, might immediately suggest the outcome of the contest to the spectators: Euripides will in fact be vanquished, following the fate of all the opponents that have dared to challenge the lord of Olympus.

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31. Even in the following part of the song — especially in the third stanza — we can probably detect additional points of contact between the portrait of Aeschylus made by the Chorus and some characteristics related to the father of the gods: (1) In v. 823 the phrase δεινὸν ἐπισκύνιον ξυνάγων might allude to the image of Zeus shaking the whole of Olympus merely by raising an eyebrow (see *Il.* 1.528-530: Ἥ και κτανέησιν ἐπ' ὀφροῦσι νεῦσε Κρονίων [...]. μέγαν δ' ἐλέλιξεν Ὀλυμπον); (2) in vv. 823-824 the "poet who throws spiked words" (ἦσει / ὀήματα γομφοπαγῆ) may allude to the usual gesture of Zeus hurling a thunderbolt (see *Il.* 8.132-133: εἰ μὴ ἄρ' ὄξ' ὀξὺ νόησε πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε / βρο- ντήσας δ' ἄρα δεινὸν ἀφήκ' ἀργῆτα κεραιάνον).

32. Trans. by Murray (1928) 371.

- poeta longe facetissimus & eloquentissimus: repurgatus à mendis, et imitatione Plauti atque Terentii interpretatus, ita ut ferè carmen carmini, numerus numero, pes pedi, modus modo, Latinismus Graecismo respondeat, Francoforti ad Moenum.
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