

MISZELLEN

EURIPIDES, TROADES 442 REVISITED

In a recent note in this journal¹, Gerson Schade argues that the phrase λίμνης ὕδωρ (Tr. 442), used by Cassandra in the course of her prediction of the trials awaiting Odysseus, should be taken as indicating the *Stygia palus*, and not ‘the sea’, as it is usually understood to mean. The whole expression κάκφυγών λίμνης ὕδωρ, then, Schade maintains, would refer to Odysseus’ successful negotiation of his Underworld experience, not to his ‘escape’ from the many dangers of the sea which he encountered on his way home to Ithaca.

Schade emphasises that on all other occasions in which the word λίμνη occurs in tragic trimeters it means ‘lake’, and he suggests that the burden of proof lies with anyone who wishes to have it mean ‘sea’ in this passage. He also argues that his interpretation avoids what he regards in the usual reading as a blatant pleonasm, out of character with the sketchy narrative style of the passage as a whole, by which two expressions (κάκφυγών λίμνης ὕδωρ, and μολών in line 443) would be used to refer to Odysseus’ homecoming.

Schade’s arguments are, however, debateable. To begin with, his own reading of line 442 would involve an overly wordy reference to the Underworld experience (ζών εἶς ἐς Ἶτιδου κάκφυγών λίμνης ὕδωρ), which, it can be argued, would be even less desirable in an impressionistic narrative than the pleonasm to which he objects in the usual reading. Secondly, while it is certainly true that the ‘lake’ or ‘marsh’ idea is closely associated with the Underworld in general, and can even ‘stand’ for the Underworld itself, Odysseus’ experience in Od. 11 does not in itself involve a lake. The geography of the Odyssean Underworld is certainly rather confused, especially with regard to its waterways, as Schade notes². However, no reader of Od. 11 could possibly say that the successful outcome of the hero’s adventure could be described as an escape from the ‘lake’. That would not be the appropriate way for Euripides to evoke the conclusion of the Nekyia.

For these reasons, then, Schade’s position seems open to question. What, though, of the point, if λίμνη here does mean ‘sea’, that it would be the only example of the use of the word with this meaning in tragic trimeters? K. H. Lee seems already to have provided the answer. Noting that the word is often used of the sea in Homer, he writes: “Perhaps the unusual usage is due to the fact that it occurs within a précis of events originally described by Homer”³. This seems eminently sensible. *Troades* in general evokes Homer in a wide range of aspects, both verbal and situational⁴. The allusions are mainly to the *Iliad*, of course, but the *Odyssey* is

1) Gerson Schade, Euripides, *Troades* 442, RhM 141 (1998) 206–8.

2) Schade (above, n. 1) 207 n. 2.

3) K. H. Lee (ed.), Euripides, *Troades* (London 1976), note ad loc.

4) There is little direct verbal allusion as such, on which see Richard Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy* (London and New York 1990) 165 and 253 n. 3. However,

also involved, especially in the spectre of the reconciliation of Menelaus and Helen, as seen in Od. 4, which hangs over the Helen/Hecuba ἀγών⁵.

A Homeric linguistic feature in Cassandra's prophetic and stylistically unusual utterance would be quite unexceptional.

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the commentaries of Lee (above, n. 3), S. A. Barlow, Euripides. Trojan Women (Warminster 1986), and W. Biehl, Euripides. Troades (Heidelberg 1989) note a range of passages whose language strongly recalls the Homeric texts in various ways. In addition, a significant Homeric connection is provided by the use of themes involving ships, walls and fire in particular, and the figures of Poseidon, Cassandra, Talthibius, Andromache, Astyanax, Hecuba, Menelaus, Helen and the dead Hector, and situations relating to these figures.

5) Virtually no critic agrees with the view expressed by M. Lloyd, The Helen Scene in Euripides' *Troades*, CQ 34 (1984) 303–13, specifically 304, that what happens in Od. 4 is totally irrelevant to the ἀγών in *Troades*. Lloyd, in fact, modifies his earlier position in his book, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford 1992) 99–112.