EURIPIDES’ NEW SONG:
THE FIRST STASIMON OF TROJAN WOMEN

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The final section of the final chapter of Walther Kranz’s Stasimon is entitled “Das neue Lied” (Kranz 1933: 228–266) and bears the following epigraph, based on the opening of the first stasimon of Euripides’ Troades (cf. 511–513): ἄμφι μου TEMPLON, ὦ Μοῦσα, καὶ νῶν ὑμνῶν ἄειον ὑδάν. For Kranz, these words serve as an announcement, as it were, of a program for a new style of choral composition, a style that would characterize the works of Euripides’ final decade, from the Troades in 415 BCE until the poet’s death not long before the production of Aristophanes’ Frogs at the Lenaeain 405. Kranz connects this style with the “new music” associated with Agathon, Timotheus and others, referring to the style as “dithyrambic.”¹ Kranz deserves credit for identifying this as a metapoetic statement on the part of Euripides (although “metapoetic” is, naturally, not an element of Kranz’s critical vocabulary), and he deserves credit for acknowledging that the new style coincides in time, paradoxically, with Euripides’ growing tendency to admit certain archaizing features into his dramatic technique.² Kranz addresses this paradox by referring to the “reinvigoration of the earliest form” (“Neubelebung ältester Form,” 1933: 232) of tragic lyrics, which he sees as characteristic of late Euripidean style. There is, however, a difficulty with Kranz’s analysis.³ One of the salient features of the “dithyrambic stasima,” of which Troades 511–567 is supposedly the first, is their self-contained character, whereas the earliest tragic lyrics to which we have access are anything but self-contained. The

¹ Kranz (1933: 313) acknowledges that Wilamowitz (1921: 174) was the first to associate Eur. Tro. 511–567 with contemporary dithyramb. Cf. also Wilamowitz 1906: 272; Hofmann 1916: 77.
² Kranz 1933: 232–233. If the composition of a connected trilogy in 415 BCE is to be regarded as an archaizing feature, however, it must be admitted that it appears to have been an isolated experiment and is not characteristic of Euripides’ last decade. I take it as certain that the plays of 415 do, in fact, comprise a connected trilogy (see Scodel 1980); indeed, further instances of connections among the three tragedies that make up the trilogy will be suggested below.
stasima of the surviving Aeschylean tragedies are in fact notable for the way in which their imagery and thematic material cohere harmoniously not only with the play in which they appear but, as we have learned especially from the brilliant work of Anne Lebeck (1971), with the entire trilogy.

I should like to suggest a way out of this difficulty that preserves Kranz’s understanding of Troades 511 as a metapoetic statement but sever its connection with dithyrambic verse. There is, after all, nothing about the stasimon that suggests an association with the dithyramb. Indeed, there are two features of its opening words that point in another direction entirely. Kranz ignores one of those features and suppresses the other. For his quotation, not only in his epigraph but also when he refers to the passage in his text (1933: 254), is incomplete. Here is how the opening of the stasimon appears in Diggle’s Oxford edition: ἀμψήθησι πῶς ἀψίφησιν ὧ Μοῦσα, καὶ νόαν ὄμος σὺν δακρύοις σὺν ἀπόκλησιν ἐπικήδειν (Eur. Tro. 511–514). In other words, Kranz has omitted the tears and the funereal nature of the song, elements that are antithetical to the character of dithyramb. And he passes over in silence what no commentator fails to point out, the “epic” invocation of the Muse. This invocation is arresting, not only because it is immediately reminiscent of some other genre, but because it is entirely out of place in tragedy, the one genre that by its very nature precludes the poet from invoking the Muse in his own person. Not surprisingly, Euripides’ invocation of the Muse here is unparalleled in tragedy. It appears, then, that Euripides has put into the mouth of his chorus an opening to an epic song which neither they, as captive Trojan women, nor he, as tragic poet, is in a position to perform. This is a “new song” indeed, with the very words of the song calling attention to its own novelty (μανόν ὄμος πῶς ἀμψήθησι). But epic, of course, is not new. What is new, relative to the time of the Trojan War, is tragedy.

Part of what Euripides is doing, then, in this stasimon is asserting the role of tragedy as the successor to, even the supplanter of, epic poetry. The subject-matter is eminently epic; the treatment, however, is neither epic nor dithyrambic but strictly tragic. For the events of the capture

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4 Cf. e.g. Breitenbach 1934: 285; Neitzel 1967: 44; Lee 1976: ad loc.; Barlow 1986: ad loc.; Rodari 1988: 134; Biehl 1989: ad loc. While this invocation cannot be considered an “allusion,” we are reminded of the Greek poetic convention, identified and documented by Richard Garner (1990: 6, 187–188 et passim), whereby allusions to earlier verse are more likely to be found, and therefore more to be expected, at the start of a poem or a strophē than elsewhere.