

# **PSYCHIATRY AND THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES**

by

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**ABSTRACT OF THESIS**  
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**PSYCHIATRY AND THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES**

In this study, the nineteen extant plays of Euripides are reviewed from a psychiatric point of view. This has not been done before, as few classicists have an intimate knowledge of modern psychology and psychiatry, and few psychiatrists have the requisite classical background.

Two major areas of interest emerge:

1.(a) The clinical descriptions of major psychiatric disorders found in some of these plays are astonishingly accurate by modern standards. The main examples are to be found in the *Herakles* (epilepsy), *Hekabe* (manic-depressive disease), *Orestes* (paranoia) as well as in some of the minor characters in other plays, particularly *Kassandra* (*Troades*, hysteria), *Andromache* (*Troades*, anankastic personality), *Helene* (*Troades*, histrionic-narcissistic personality), *Hermione* (*Andromache*, parasuicide), *Euadne* (*Hiketides*, schizophrenia).

1.(b) Equally good descriptions can be found of characters which could nowadays not be regarded as suffering from a mental "disease" but are decidedly unusual and within the field of psychiatric endeavour. They are the main characters of the *Medeia*, *Elektra* and *Hippolytos*.

1.(c) The remainder of the plays, with the exceptions of the *Kyklops* and the *Rhesos* which are discussed separately, contain astonishingly modern studies of the psychological motivation of ordinary people. These are the phenomena of role playing (*Alkestis*), ambivalence and the causes of irrational behaviour (*Iphigeneia among the Taurians*), the morality of slogans (*Herakleidai*), the fight for social status (*Andromache*), guilt feelings (*Phoinissai*), the causes of violence and war (*Hiketides*), the basic psychology of politics (*Iphigenia in Aulis*), the contrast of religious and everyday morality (*Helene*), the adolescent's struggle for social and religious integration (*Ion*) and the search for social and religious integration in the adult (*Bakchai*).

2. Based on the above it is proposed that Euripides' main interest in writing his plays was in the search for human motivation: why do people behave in the (often ridiculous) way in which they do? In this he differs from Aischylos and also from the ideas of Aristotle. The main interest of the thesis lies in the way that when the plays are viewed from this angle virtually all the passages which have been severely criticised in the past suddenly make perfect sense. Many parts of the plays have been dubbed inept, irrelevant, contradictory or put in for effect only. Seen from the psychiatric point of view they all fulfil vital functions in their respective plays. Choral odes are not detached embolima; epilogues really solve the psychological problems of the play; humorous, patriotic, xenophobic and sophistic passages all have their reasons.

Where there are contradictions they invariably arise from the fact that different characters have different approaches, or frequently the same character is torn between two possible approaches. Euripides himself hardly ever makes a definite statement but allows his characters to put forward the various points of view and the audience is invited to judge. In the process the audience itself often becomes the butt of the playwright's condemnation for they are frequently inveigled by this past master of deceit into adopting a premature stance on various issues which is later shown to be foolish, immoral or plain ridiculous.

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In accordance with the regulations of the University of Natal, I certify that the contents of this thesis are my own original work unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text.

I further declare that this thesis has not been published at any other university.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 1

### AIM AND ARRANGEMENT OF THESIS

This thesis is an account of the plays of Euripides interpreted from the point of view of psychiatry.

The enquiry began with the realisation that some of Euripides' characters are brilliant clinical descriptions of what are nowadays well known psychiatric states. This started an investigation into the psychiatric aspects of all the other plays as well. It proved a very worthwhile endeavour as all the plays began to take on a new aspect. Many features in the plays which had hitherto seemed inept, irrelevant or puzzling could be seen to be highly relevant to a proper understanding.<sup>1</sup>

It will be concluded that Euripides was intensely interested in human motivation. His main concern throughout his plays can be summed up as: "Why do human beings so frequently behave in the (often unreasonable) way in which they do?"

Originally the material was collected in the form of separate essays for each play and in considerable detail. This added up to over 950 pages, too long for a doctoral thesis. The material was therefore cut down, leaving out a number of interesting, but perhaps less important topics. As a further saving in length the plays were arranged in four groups, only some of which will be discussed in depth. For the rest only a brief outline of the argument will be given.

Group 1: Those in which the clear and detailed description of a mental disorder forms the main subject of the play: *Herakles* (epilepsy, chapter 3); *Hekabe* (bipolar affective disorder, old terminology manic - depressive psychosis, chapter 4); *Orestes* (delirium and paranoia, chapter 5).

Group 2: Those where there is an equally brilliantly observed and portrayed mentally sick person, but the character in these is only a side issue, not the main point of the play: *Troades*, (chapter 6), the characters of *Kassandra* (hysteria), *Andromache* (obsessive compulsive personality), *Helene* (narcissistic personality) and *Hekabe*

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<sup>1</sup> Only the *Kyklops* and the *Rhesos* contain hardly any aspects of interest to a psychologist. Of these the former is a satyr play and according to many commentators probably a very early one at that; the latter has long been suspected of not being by Euripides. These are discussed in the appendix.



(balanced personality); Hermione (*Andromache*, parasuicide) Euadne (*Hiketides* schizophrenia) (chapter 7).

Group 3: Those where, again, the study of the motivation of a character is the main object of the play, but the character is unusual rather than clearly psychotic; a lay person would tend to regard them as odd rather than sick: *Medeia* (chapter 8), *Hippolytos* (chapter 9), *Elektra* (chapter 10).

Group 4: The remainder of the plays where the interest lies in observing the behaviour of ordinary people, and what makes them behave in often strange ways. These are subdivided into subgroups:

4.(a) *Homo ?sapiens*: The ridiculous and irrational behaviour of ordinary people; (chapter 11): *Alkestis*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, *Herakleidae* (chapter 12).

4.(b) *Homo socialis*: The importance of social status, superiority and inferiority and feelings of guilt in human behaviour; (chapter 13): *Andromache*, *Phoinissai*.

4.(c) *Homo politicus*: The folly of political posturing and slogans; (chapter 14): *Hiketides*, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*.

4.(d) *Homo religiosus*: The importance of the spiritual and religious in human motivation; (chapter 15). *Helene*, *Ion*, *Bakchai* (chapter 16).

I shall attempt to cover groups 1 and 3 in fair detail, discuss only the relevant characters in group 2, and deal with group 4 in outline only.<sup>2</sup>

In general, the analysis of each play will begin with a brief review of the literature outlining the major approaches which have been advocated in the past and concentrating mainly on the difficulties each of them entails. This will be followed by a psychiatric section in which the main psychological problem contained in the play is presented. Thereafter there will be a discussion of the play designed mainly to show how the psychiatric approach does away with most of the difficulties.

The first two chapters will form a general overview of topics to be brought out. In them I shall give only minimal references to the statements I make, even though many of them will be controversial. Full references will be cited when these topics are discussed in detail in connection with the various plays.

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes a play falls into more than one group; in that case it will be discussed in both of them to bring out the relevant facets.

The plays fall into a series of natural sections according to their psychological content which may not always coincide completely with the coming on stage and leaving of any characters.<sup>3</sup> These will be referred to as "scenelets". In general each play seems to fall naturally into 20-25 such scenelets.

In the psychiatric sections I shall mark each symptom mentioned by (\*) if it is clearly described in the relevant Euripidean play, by (?\*) if it can be read into the text and by (-) if it does not occur in the play.

When quoting individual lines of the plays I shall be guided by the line numbering of the Budé texts. When only the general meaning of the text is at issue I shall report it in English, often amounting to a mere paraphrase or precis, sometimes in racy modern language to enhance its dramatic effect. When I use other people's translations this will be indicated.

When the general meaning is ambiguous or controversial or when the actual wording is of importance for my argument I shall quote in Greek with a translation added.

For the sake of brevity I shall in future refer to the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* as *IA*; to the *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* as *IT*. The Diagnostic and Statistical Handbook of Psychiatry will be referred to as DSM III (1980).

### THE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE THESIS

This thesis is based on four basic assumptions, two of which will probably be accepted without serious challenge; the other two are controversial. It will be the aim of the thesis to show them to be acceptable.

#### Assumption 1: Euripides was a very competent playwright

Most critics will presumably agree readily to this proposition. Yet, in play after play, I shall point out that many have regarded a number of passages or happenings as "inept" and "unworthy" of great tragedy. The assumption is therefore perhaps not quite as self evident as might appear on the surface. I hope to show that, as seen from the psychiatric point of view, it is eminently justified; most of the inept and unworthy passages turn out to be entirely relevant to the function of the play as I shall identify it.

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<sup>3</sup> i.e. different from the standard way of dividing Greek Drama into *stasima* and *epeisodia*.

Indeed, it is astonishing how Euripides manages to convey so many varied and wide-ranging ideas within the rigid conventions of Attic Theatre.

Assumption 2: Euripides was very interested in human character

No one who has read, even once, such plays as the *Medeia*, *Hippolytos* or *Elektra* can be in any doubt about this fact.

Assumption 3: This interest in human motivation is Euripides' main preoccupation in all his extant plays

This is the crucial assumption which this thesis is designed to prove. Aristotle clearly stated that character must be subordinated to plot and most of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century critics followed him in this: "Tragedy" he says "is not an imitation of man, but of action and life."<sup>4</sup> Character study has been regarded by many as a "modern" idea and not a legitimate aim in Greek tragedy.

This is almost certainly true for Aischylos; the proposition is considerably more doubtful in the case of Sophokles. I hope to show that, on the contrary, in Euripides plot is subservient to character. Aristotle's ideas on what constituted good tragedy were not necessarily those of Euripides. This matter will be discussed in more detail on page 14. I shall also put forward an argument that it is wrong to assume that an ancient writer could not have had "modern" ideas (page 11). My assumption should stand or fall depending on whether Euripides' plays make more or less sense with it than without. A growing number of more modern critics<sup>5</sup> contemplate Euripides' characters seriously and generally find them considerably more complex than would appear on the surface. My assumption is therefore not entirely new, but it will be adhered to here more consistently than in most other publications.

Assumption 4: Euripides writes at several levels of understandability at once

This assumption, too, is not new, but is applied more rigorously here than is often done elsewhere. It was Verrall<sup>6</sup> who first proposed that Euripides should not be taken at face value but is writing with ironic intent. There can be no doubt that Verrall's ideas explained some facets of some plays better than previous critics'

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* 1450a and b. 50 - 52. Aristotle distinguishes between ἦθος (character), the inborn emotional reaction which makes a person distinguish between two moral alternatives and διανοία (thought or understanding) which makes him choose on intellectual grounds. For "plot" he uses three words: μῦθος (narrative), πράξεις (the actual happenings) and πραγμάτων σύστασις (the arrangement of happenings) which is the phrase used here.

<sup>5</sup> They will be cited in connection with the individual plays.

<sup>6</sup> Verrall (1895) *passim*.

approaches had done. There was considerable resistance to his ideas<sup>7</sup> but no later commentator could ever afford to disregard them completely and in the more recent literature similar ideas are again becoming more and more accepted. Of modern critics Vellacott<sup>8</sup> is perhaps the most active in advocating them.

A modern theatre audience is self-selected: only people who enjoy Shakespeare plays will go to see one. Euripides' audience included virtually the whole adult, male, free population of Athens. His plays had to please a very heterogeneous collection of people, some of limited intelligence, philistines and "sporty" types as well as highly educated and thinking people; some who knew the current sophistic movement only from third hand report, others who were deeply involved in it; orthodox religionists and free-thinkers; democrats as well as elitists.

I suggest that the method he adopts is to write plays which would make some sort of sense and give satisfaction at a very superficial level, with patriotic and current political slogans, orthodox religious claptrap and granny psychology.<sup>9</sup> People who are not prepared to think critically for themselves will accept it all and approve.

For the more thinking people he puts in some extra pieces, which do not really fit this superficial view; indeed they may frankly contradict it. The fact to note is that Euripides does nothing to try to hide these discrepancies but frequently goes out of his way to let a character point them out. The thinking man will be brought up short by them and realise how trite and unreasonable much of the first level is. This is the ironic approach which Verrall and Vellacott stress so much.

Once the critical thinking process has started a person of analytical temperament is inevitably led to consider why anyone (including himself) could ever, even for a minute, have believed all the nonsense. And then he is forced to consider the causes of human credulity and folly and at that level the play makes a new kind of sense, beyond the plot and the characters and dealing with mankind as a whole.

This is not to claim that Euripides could expect everybody to penetrate all these levels.<sup>10</sup> A large part of his audience, and many subsequent critics, would stick at the lowest level and never go further. If they saw the discrepancies at all, they would

<sup>7</sup> This will be discussed in more detail on pp.16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Vellacott (1975) *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> This term will be explained on p.30.

<sup>10</sup> As Professor B. Kytzler pointed out to me Euripides was not very successful in pleasing everybody. Among the forty odd plays he produced only four gained him first prize.

ignore them or attribute them to ineptitude on the part of the playwright. Suffice it that some, at least, would be able to see the more general conclusions about the behaviour of Man.

Nor is it necessary, or even likely, that anybody could see all the more hidden points immediately at the first performance. Euripides' plays were much discussed afterwards, widely quoted and often circulated in manuscript form.<sup>11</sup> Some of the points may well only emerge at such review. This is, after all, what happens with modern plays and films as well. A third rate work makes its appeal straightaway and is not worth discussing critically afterwards; the beauty of a really good one is often only appreciated on later reflection and discussion.

I shall in the following discussion stress these discrepancies and thereafter attempt to show that they, in themselves, carry an important meaning. Again, the merit of the assumption will have to be judged on whether it enables a play to make more sense than the straightforward face-value approach.

One further level of writing was first pointed out by Segal and I shall discuss this on page 25 under the title of metatragedy.

### **SOME BASIC RULES**

In this section I set out a strict set of rules to be applied when criticising a Euripidean play. They are my own, but other critics often hint at some of them and, in particular, Kovacs<sup>12</sup> sets some of them out very clearly. I shall be careful to adhere to these rules throughout the thesis.

#### **Rule 1: The Minimum**

To establish the validity of a new approach to the plays it is necessary to show that it explains problems which other approaches cannot explain, without at the same time creating an equivalent number of new ones. Ideally all problems should fall away. As this is perhaps too much to hope for, the great majority should.

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<sup>11</sup> Aristophanes in the *Frogs* makes Dionysos tell how he was enjoying reading Euripides in bed.  
<sup>12</sup> Kovacs (1987), 1-6.

### Rule 2: "The Rope and Stopwatch"

If one wishes to claim that the author intended to put forward a certain idea it is not enough to show that it would make sense. One must prove that certain words or passages were put in deliberately by the playwright with that purpose in mind. They must not make sense on any other explanation.

If I see a number of men running along a track I may form a theory that they are running a race. But this, however reasonable, is not proof. They may be merely jogging or running away from some danger. If I see that someone has stretched a rope across the end of the track and is standing by with a stopwatch, my theory may be regarded as proved. There is no other way to explain the rope and stopwatch.

### Rule 3: The List of Oddities

It is therefore very useful, and has proved so in practice, to make out a list of the passages of a Euripidean play which seem inept, unnecessary, contradictory, trite, or plain nonsensical. There are many of them in almost every play, most of them well documented in the literature. On the assumption that Euripides was a competent playwright<sup>13</sup> he must have put them there for a purpose. By studying them this purpose often becomes clear. Any approach which makes sense of all these apparent oddities has, therefore, a good claim to validity.

### Rule 4: No Mouthpiece

One should never accept anything a character says as being Euripides' own opinion; his characters regularly put forward contrasting ideas. The agon is the essence of Greek Tragedy: a problem, moral, political, religious or whatever, is discussed by two characters from opposite points of view and the author does his best to make both convincing. The audience have to make up their own minds about their relative validity.

Euripides is very strict about the format of his agones, though he sometimes differs widely from his predecessors as to what the conflict is about. Frequently it is about human character rather than a moral problem.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it would be rash to jump to conclusions about which side of the argument Euripides would like us to regard as the "correct" one. Even such unsavoury characters as the Argive herald

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<sup>13</sup> Assumption 1, p.5..

<sup>14</sup> Many examples of this will emerge in the later sections of this thesis.

(*Herakleidai*) and the Theban herald (*Hiketides*) talk a lot of good sense and cannot be dismissed out of hand. The only exception to this rule known to me is Lykos' speech in the *Herakles* (lines 140-251) and there the obvious absurdity of his point of view is in itself an important part of the argument (page 52).

#### Rule 5: Jumping the Gun

One should never approach a Euripidean play with one's mind made up about any character or about the poet's intention in writing the play; nor should one come to conclusions halfway through a play, however telling a point has just been made. Judge each character, not on what others say about him or even what he says himself,<sup>15</sup> but on how he performs on the stage throughout the play. This is, after all, how we should judge characters in ordinary life. It is a rule frequently forgotten in Euripidean criticism.

An excellent example is the attitude most critics adopt to Helene. She is generally regarded as a most unsavoury character in both the *Troades* and the *Orestes*.<sup>16</sup> Only in the *Helene* is it believed that an attempt is made to portray her in a kindly manner. If the reader will go to the trouble to find out whence this attitude arises he will find that in the *Troades* it comes directly from what Cassandra, Andromache, Hekabe and the chorus say about Helene. But they are all her enemies. Menelaos is not nearly as convinced<sup>17</sup> and when you analyse Helene's defence it makes a lot of good sense and largely absolves her from blame (page 145).

In the *Orestes* all the criticism of Helene comes from Elektra and Orestes, her enemies. Menelaos and the Phrygian think very differently of her, her servants are ready to die for her and her actions on the stage can be interpreted as those of a decent, unhappy woman as easily as those of a dissembler.

In the *Helene* all the fine excuses for her behaviour come from Helene herself. Her actions on the stage make her out to be an utterly unscrupulous person.

A particularly crass example of the danger of making up one's mind prematurely occurs in the *Bakchai*. If we regard the stranger *a priori* as being the god

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<sup>15</sup> See rule 10, p.13.

<sup>16</sup> I am omitting here the many minor references to her in many other plays, though the same principle applies.

<sup>17</sup> And if you say, like so many, that he is just a dumb ox, this is in itself a piece of prejudice to bolster up your opinion; a clear circular argument: Helene is wicked - Menelaos cannot see it - therefore he is a dumb ox - therefore we can disregard his opinion - therefore Helene is wicked.

Dionysos, (which is what he claims), then the plot of the play is fixed: Pentheus is guilty of *hybris*, he is rightly punished. The play makes good sense but is rather trite.

If we regard the stranger as an impostor, (as Pentheus claims), then the latter becomes a fine champion of rationality over religious mumbo-jumbo. Again the play makes sense, but again it is rather trite.

If we keep our minds open to the end we realise the difficulty of making the decision; the play becomes a representation of the eternal war between the matter-of-fact and the religious principles in every human breast and an outstanding piece of drama.

#### Rule 6: Audience Attitude

It is, however, legitimate to ask oneself how the majority of the original audience might have viewed the character from their understanding of mythology. Whether Euripides meant to prove them right or wrong, he would have to take their likely attitude into consideration in writing the play. This principle is particularly important in the *Medeia*, but also occurs elsewhere.

#### Rule 7: The Fugard Analogy

It is wrong to assume that Euripides could not have had "modern" ideas two and a half millennia ago. An often repeated statement is that Christian ideas of penitence and forgiveness should not be read into his plays, however tempting this seems, because these are Judaeo-Christian concepts, which did not exist in the Athens of his time.

This is a fallacy. Whilst it is true that each society tends to have a set of ideas which are widely held within it, it must be remembered that any society is but a collection of individuals. In each there must be some independently thinking persons who will not conform to what "everybody" believes. Euripides was undoubtedly such an independent thinker.

We might as well claim that Fugard could not have written his plays coming, as he does, from the racialistic, paternalistic, rugby-playing society of South Africa. It is precisely as a reaction to this society that he wrote his plays.

#### Rule 8: Look for the significance of the comedy parts

There are many passages in Euripides which have a distinctly humorous flavour. To my mind Euripides can be seen as a comedian almost as well as a



tragedian.<sup>18</sup> Using such words as tragi-comedy, folk-tale, romance<sup>19</sup> does not help in understanding what the playwright intends. Nor does the term "comic relief" have much meaning, unless we can show that such "relief" is dramatically necessary at this stage, which it rarely is in Euripides. All the author's plays contain such passages, even that most lugubrious of all his tragedies, the *Troades*, has a joke.<sup>20</sup>

If a writer wishes to demolish a current idea, which he regards as faulty, he has three options: He can argue about it intellectually, he can demolish it dramatically or he can hold it up to ridicule. The final purpose is the same in all three. Euripides uses all three methods at will depending on which he judges to be the most effective at the time. He may discuss a problem seriously in an agon, (for instance the credibility of the religious experience in the *Bakchai*), he may seem to put the idea on the stage seriously, only to show that it inevitably leads to absurdity or blasphemy (for instance the *Herakles*), or he may undercut the credibility of an argument by making the character pronouncing it seem foolish or old (for instance Iolaos' heroic self-sacrifice in the *Herakleidai*). Many such "comic" elements have been pointed out by previous critics, but these often do not go far enough.

We must not confuse comedy with laughter. If my worst enemy slips on a banana skin and falls in the mud I may laugh heartily. If the same accident should befall my revered professor I shall not laugh. Yet the situation is intrinsically the same. Most of the "comic" bits in Euripides are of the latter kind. The same situation which in the hands of Aristophanes or Plautus is uproariously funny will not lead to laughter at a tense moment in a Euripidean tragedy. Yet the situation is the same. Generally the audience gets an uncomfortable feeling that something is amiss without, perhaps, becoming conscious of what exactly it is. Many examples of this will appear in various chapters of this thesis.

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<sup>18</sup> I am using the words tragedy and comedy in a loose modern sense, rather than the genres strictly defined by structure and metres used in the classical literature.

<sup>19</sup> A crass example of the use of these and similar phrases is apparent in the literature on the *IT*, chapter 11.

<sup>20</sup> Line 1050.

### Rule 9: Choice of words

The psychiatrist takes relatively less notice of what a patient says, but much more of the way he says it. Thus there is a world of difference between the following two exchanges:

- (a) Question: Do you love your husband?  
Answer: I do!

and

- (b) Question: Do you love your husband?  
Answer: Why on earth shouldn't I?

We are all influenced by such fine nuances, even though we may not always be conscious of it. Is it legitimate to apply this method to a play?

If we believe that Euripides was a careless writer who put down the first phrase that came to his mind, the answer is: No.

If we believe that he chose his words and phrases under constraint by the exigencies of his metre the answer must again be: No.

But if we believe that he chose his words and phrases very carefully indeed,<sup>21</sup> then it is entirely legitimate to read meaning into curiously worded passages. I shall use this method many times, particularly in connection with the *Elektra*.

### Rule 10: Assessing Character

This is a brief survey of the methods available to a playwright who wishes to delineate character. Most of these, of course, also apply to our own everyday assessment of other people's characters.

#### 1. Dress and demeanour

It is striking how often in Euripides' plays a character's dress and demeanour at his first entrance on stage foreshadows in a capsular form his future behaviour. This is particularly evident in the *Troades*, but applies to virtually all other plays as well. I shall point it out at least on some occasions.

#### 2. What the subject says to others about himself

We can certainly not ignore this, but it is fraught with the dangers of direct lying, the subject's desire to project a certain image of himself to others, rationalisation, as well as the possibility that he may be unaware of his own motives.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Aristophanes in the *Frogs* suggests that he did: lines 937-944.

<sup>22</sup> The general revelation of motives in the *Elektra*.

### 3. The soliloquy

Or what comes to the same thing, the aside, or talking to some faceless individual, such as the chorus (in many cases) or a slave who can be guaranteed not to contradict or judge. This, of course, is not common in real life; we rarely speak our thoughts aloud and, anyhow, we tend to think in vivid pictures and phrases rather than connected sentences. On the stage these passages are by tacit assent taken to represent the subject's own thoughts. We can therefore exclude direct lying, but the need to project a favourable image to oneself remains. Rationalisation is particularly prone to occur at this stage (especially well brought out in the *Medeia*). Lack of understanding of one's own motives remains a problem.

### 4. The expressed opinions of other characters

These suffer from the same defects as the subject's statements about himself. It is important to try to assess whether the other characters are friends or enemies and whether they stand to gain from their attitude. Their evidence must be weighted accordingly.

### 5. The expert's opinion

Once a character has been set up as an "expert", in Euripides this is frequently, but not invariably, a god, one is inclined to take his opinion for the absolute truth. But this all depends on how real his "expertise" is meant to be. In Euripides a god cannot by any means be relied upon to speak the truth at all times.<sup>23</sup>

### 6. The subject's actions

Whatever may have been said by anybody about a character's "goodness", if we see him lying and murdering on the stage we must surely at least hesitate before accepting the "goodness" uncritically. It is a very frequent trick of Euripides' to build up a character by what people say for quite a while before he is actually seen on stage and not uncommonly his actions on stage then belie the reputation so carefully built up. Some excellent examples occur in the characters of Oidipous (*Phoinissai*), Eurystheus (*Herakleidai*) Theoklymenos (*Helene*). Sometimes the character never comes on stage at all and his motivation must remain nebulous; (for instance Apollo in the *Ion*, Kapaneus in the *Hiketides*).

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<sup>23</sup> One of the main problems of the *Ion*.

### 7. The subtly odd behaviour

A character may say one thing, but by his wording, phrasing, hesitations or similar devices suggest the possibility of an entirely different motivation. I pointed this out above in Rule 9. This may at times be very blatant (like Menelaos in the *Troades* agreeing to Helene's killing after so much hesitation that one knows it is unlikely to happen) or very subtle. In that case many members of the audience would probably have missed it; even thoughtful people might miss it at first hearing, but on later reflection the possibility of such a different motivation comes to mind and, if it fits well with the rest of the play, should be accepted. I make much of this in the *Elektra*.

It is, of course, a matter of the psychological understanding of each member of the audience and each critic how many of such hints he picks up or is willing to accept as being significant. This is what I called writing at several levels (page 6).

#### Rule 11: Textual Errors

Avoid the temptation to excise or amend on the basis that the passage does not fit in with your preconceived ideas. Try to see whether there is not a reason for the author to have put things in that peculiar way. Crass examples of this tendency occur in the *Medeia* and the *IA*.

#### Rule 12: Grand Summary

Always be aware that you may be activated by preconceived ideas yourself. Constantly ask yourself: What definite evidence do I have for accepting or rejecting this possibility? Only the strictest self-criticism can obviate your falling into this trap and even then you will get caught at times. I hope that in this thesis I shall have managed to avoid the trap most of the time.

## **TRENDS IN EURIPIDEAN CRITICISM**

Euripides was obviously a well known literary figure in his day. This emerges clearly from the writing of Aristophanes in 9 out of 11 of whose extant plays he features in some way; in 3 he is actually portrayed on stage. It is equally clear from these accounts that he was already a very controversial figure. This is perhaps best brought out in the *Clouds* where young Pheidippides defends him hotly against his conservative father's attack<sup>24</sup> and the *Theismophoriazousai* where Mnesilochos finds

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<sup>24</sup> *Clouds* 1361-1379.

himself similarly constrained to defend him against the virulent attacks of the women.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, already in his own time some people saw important messages in Euripides' work which others could not see.<sup>26</sup>

### Aristotle

In his *Poetics* Aristotle sets up standards for what good tragedy should be like and quotes Euripides frequently as an example for his conclusions. In most instances he is rather critical of the playwright, pointing out various passages where Euripides offends against the philosopher's precepts, though he does call him "the most dramatic of all" in one place.<sup>27</sup>

Aristotle's views had a tremendous influence on later critics. They were fully accepted in the middle ages and even in modern critical writing his various objections are still being taken very seriously by many. It must be true that he knew more Attic tragedies than we do and he must have been closer to appreciating what people found good or bad in the plays. But it should not be forgotten that even he wrote almost a hundred years afterwards and cannot have attended any original performances himself.

More to the point, Aristotle did not set out to write a criticism of Euripides. He aimed at proposing his own theory about what constitutes good tragedy. This is just one man's theory and we need not feel constrained to accept it. Nor need we assume that Euripides would have agreed with his sentiments had he been able to discuss them.

### Schlegel

Modern Euripidean criticism can be said to begin with Schlegel.<sup>28</sup> He, like Aristotle, was proposing a generalised theory of poetic art and by his standards Euripides fared rather poorly, nowhere near as well as Aischylos and Sophokles. Schlegel's influence, too, was great and for most of the 19th century Euripides' plays were regarded as markedly inferior to those of his two great contemporaries.

### Verrall

Verrall<sup>29</sup> opened up an entirely new vista. He proposed that Euripides' plays should not be taken at face value; much of the time the playwright is writing tongue-

<sup>25</sup> *Thesmophoriazousai* 378ff.

<sup>26</sup> Compare my fourth assumption, p.6.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453a, line 30. (Hutton edition.)

<sup>28</sup> Schlegel (1795) 202.

<sup>29</sup> Verrall (1895) *passim*.



in-cheek; irony pervades his work. In particular he had the rationalist's aversion to religious claptrap and lampooned religion whenever he could.

There is no doubt that this new attitude explained away many of the "faults" in Euripides' plays; they were not faults but put in deliberately to show up the irrationality of many beliefs. But Verrall encountered determined opposition. Partly, I believe, this was due to the novelty of his approach: established Euripidean critics were loath to rearrange their ideas completely. Partly, it was probably Verrall's own fault: he wrote in a racy style and with infectious enthusiasm, but in the process his enthusiasm often carried him away to build more and more magnificent edifices of conjecture on relatively slender foundations and his "proofs" are frequently not convincing.

Like so many great innovators<sup>30</sup> he was wrong in almost all details but yet did a great service by opening up a new and fruitful approach to a discipline. No one, since his time, has been able to ignore his work completely, though it is frequently dismissed rather lightly. His ideas, however, were followed up by some other critics, notably Greenwood<sup>31</sup> and in more recent times Vellacott<sup>32</sup> and an ever increasing number of more recent articles assume the possibility of an ironic (i.e. two level approach). Such will be followed in this thesis.

#### **Dodds**

In 1929 Dodds published an article in response to Verrall's.<sup>33</sup> This found widespread approval, largely, I suspect, because many regarded it as an antidote to Verrall. Yet it incorporates the idea of a two level approach. Where Dodds differs mostly from Verrall is in showing that Euripides did not by any means always defend the rational against the irrational. He treated the latter, too, with understanding. This is an important consideration and will be followed in this thesis, particularly with regard to the "religious" plays: (*Helene, Ion, Bakchai*).

#### **More recent trends**

With the upsurge of new ideas in many outside fields a number of them found their way into classical studies as well. Thus, Freud's psychiatric researches led to the growth of the psychoanalytic school. Freud, himself, like some of his immediate

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<sup>30</sup> As for instance Galileo, Darwin and Freud.

<sup>31</sup> Greenwood L.H.G. (1953) *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Vellacott (1975)

<sup>33</sup> Dodds, (1929) 97-104.

followers, (particularly Jung and Rank), was well versed in classical literature and all three borrowed ideas and words from it. Their followers built up an enormous edifice of psychoanalysis with its own mystique and jargon. Its often somewhat speculative conclusions are suspect alike to psychiatrist and classicist and, on the whole, psychoanalytical articles have not found much favour in classical studies. In this thesis I shall base much of my argument on tenets ultimately referable to Freud and his immediate followers, but only in as far as these ideas form part of the generally accepted framework of up to date psychiatric thought. I shall eschew the more esoteric psychoanalytic approach.

Heidegger put forward the existentialist approach to philosophy. He, too, gathered a large following and some of his ideas are reflected in some Euripidean criticism.<sup>34</sup>

Lévi-Strauss and some of his fellow-anthropologists advocated the structuralist approach to myths and their views have found echoes in the classical literature.

Altogether the scope of Euripidean criticism has thus widened considerably in the 20th century.

Throughout this time many critics were impressed, often against their will, by the brilliant character portrayals in Euripides' plays. Most critics bring up the question of character study at some time or another; some to decry it in view of Aristotle's dictum that character must be subordinate to plot; some discuss it halfheartedly and some with great enthusiasm. In this thesis I shall attempt to show that an interest in human motivation is, in fact, the primary key to an understanding of these tragedies.

Segal, in connection with the *Bakchai*, introduced the concept of metatragedy. This will be discussed more fully on page 25.

### DEBATABLE POINTS

In this section I shall briefly consider a number of topics many of which are widely discussed in the literature and often the subject of bitter criticism. I shall not attempt to evaluate the vast literature which exists on many of these topics; some are worthy of theses in their own right. My purpose is to show how they appear from a

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<sup>34</sup> Notably Sale (1977).

psychiatric point of view. The proof for this attitude will not be attempted here, but will be found scattered throughout the thesis.

(a) Entrances

As mentioned before (page 13) the dress and attitude of a character when first appearing on stage very frequently is a good preview of how he will behave later. As an example: the four women in the *Troades* are all undergoing the same stress and could be expected to react similarly. Hekabe is first seen, dressed in rags and collapsed from grief and frail old age on the floor. Cassandra wears her seer's robes and rushes in wildly excited. Andromache makes a stately entrance on a chariot, surrounded by her treasures. Helene trips in, beautifully coiffed and arrayed, radiating injured innocence and naivety. Their later behaviour will reinforce these early impressions.

(b) The Prologues

In Attic Tragedy the prologue informs the audience of what has happened before to bring about the present situation. It may also announce which version of the myths on the subject the playwright will be following. In addition, in most Euripidean tragedies, the basic psychological, moral or religious problem is already outlined there, to be amplified in the rest of the play later. As an example: Dionysos in the *Bakchai* gives both the "religious" and the cynical, commonsense version of the Semele story. This will form the kernel of all later happenings.

(c) The Choral Odes

Many of these, particularly those in the later plays, have come under severe criticism as being completely detached from the plot. They are often called *embolima*, put in only for their lyrical beauty. I hope to show in the following that every one of them can be shown to fulfil a vital function in the tragedy. Sometimes they echo in a poetic and picturesque form what the characters have said intellectually. Sometimes they act as a commonsense counterweight to the emotional claims of the characters. At other times they serve to point to the deep underlying principles at stake, which the audience might be forgetting in the heat of the characters' individual claims. More rarely the chorus presents a point of view of its own, separate from that of any of the characters.



(d) The Epilogues

Many of these have puzzled commentators for centuries. The solutions offered in them frequently seem quite unbelievable and contrary to the development of the tragedy as a whole. Some critics believed that Euripides put them in as a sop to the audience, providing a happy ending when no such ending was possible. Among the most puzzling are those of the *Elektra*, *Orestes*, *Andromache*, *Herakles*, *Hiketides*, *Medeia*, *Hippolytos*, *Helene* and *IA*. In the last mentioned some commentators query whether the epilogue was written by Euripides at all.

I hope to show that all of them make good psychiatric sense. The overt problem is not solved by them, but the psychological problems which led to the action are solved or else the epilogues show how easily they could be solved if only human nature were different.

(e) The Comedy Elements

These have already been discussed on page 11, Rule 8.

(f) Development of Character

Aristotle<sup>35</sup> demanded that a character be consistent (or, at least, consistent in his inconsistency), and cited Iphigeneia in the *IA* as offending against that principle. I hope to show that Euripides was fully aware of the fact that human character develops. This will be seen not only in the *IA*, but also, very clearly, in the *Antigone* of the *Phoinissai* and the main characters of the *Ion*, *Medeia* and *Orestes*.

(g) Suicide

This was clearly a topic the morality and motivation for which interested Euripides very much. Almost every one of his tragedies contains an example of suicide, offered suicide or voluntary acceptance of death for the sake of a principle. Is it right to sacrifice a human being for the sake of an ideal?

The problem falls into three categories:

1. has a person the right to sacrifice someone else for his own ideal?
2. has a person the right to sacrifice himself?
3. has a person the moral right to accept someone else's self-sacrifice?

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454a, 26-36.

Going through the playwright's works it is not easy to find a simple solution to the problem. On the whole Euripides' answer seems to be a cautious: "Yes, it is right, but..."

Sacrificing another person is very rarely, if ever, morally defensible. Your fine, pretended ideals have a nasty habit of turning out to be pure selfishness, greed, fear, striving for personal status, revenge or political expediency. This is one of the major issues of the *IA*.

By the same token accepting someone else's self sacrifice is of very doubtful morality. But the allure of this course is so great that very few human beings can resist it. The problem is faced squarely by the characters in the *Herakleidai* and glossed over shamefully by some of the characters (notably Achilles) in the *IA*.

Self-sacrifice is a more difficult problem, but even here we must consider various aspects before accepting its morality:

- (a) Is the ideal worthy of the sacrifice? In the *Orestes* Orestes and his friends attempt to burn themselves in the palace: What for? To punish Menelaos, to teach the people of Argos a lesson? Hermione (*Andromache*) contemplates suicide in order not to have to acknowledge her rival's superiority. Cassandra (*Troades*), Eteokles and Polyneikes (*Phoinissai*) are willing to die in order to involve another in their destruction. Is this moral? Even Phaidra's action (*Hippolytos*) is, partly at least, of this nature, though she has other motivation as well.
- (b) Self-sacrifice as a means of redressing a wrong may be an outstandingly fine action, provided it has a chance of producing this desirable result. Both Makaria's (*Herakleidai*) and Menoikeus' (*Phoinissai*) deaths are designed to be of that nature. But there is no evidence that their glorious act alters the course of events in any way. Certainly, their side triumphs, at least temporarily, but this seems to be brought about by a feat of arms rather than any moral superiority gained. In both cases the glorious action is something of a damp squib, of which device Euripides was a past master.<sup>36</sup>
- (c) Is the sacrifice to be for one's own glory only, or will it affect other people? This is brought out particularly well in the *Hiketides*: Euadne commits suicide out of loyalty to her husband. The sole result of her action is to make life impossible for his old father as well. This problem is again faced in the *Herakles*, but here common sense

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<sup>36</sup> See also his use of that device as outlined three times in the *Elektra*.

triumphs over glorious foolishness: Herakles considers suicide. This would only make matters worse for his father and his friends, it would be the wrong action for a fine hero and Herakles is convinced and lives on.<sup>37</sup>

(d) The self-immolator gains glory. Of this there can be little doubt. In every case the other characters express their approval of the hero's greatness of soul and his courage. The audience, too, cannot help but admire such a person. Even a carping critic like myself feels pangs of conscience about detracting from the glory of the action, even though he is convinced of its futility (as in the examples above). Sometimes the would be self-sacrificer is aware of this and uses it to motivate his act. There is at least an element of this in Makaria, Menoikeus, Euadne and, in a perverted form, Orestes and his friends. It is one of the major facets of Iphigeneia's decision in the *IA*. Is this a legitimate reason for suicide, or itself rather selfish?

(e) Finally, we must consider an element which is difficult to put into words, though easily felt emotionally. Self-sacrifice as a means of self-fulfilment, of refusing to bow to Fate, of gaining the satisfaction of doing the right thing, whatever the cost, of keeping one's identity. We feel this with all the great Euripidean suicides: Makaria, Menoikeus and perhaps most strongly with Polyxena and Iphigeneia. At a personal level self-sacrifice must earn our admiration, whatever we may think of its other implications.

(f) I should like to finish this section by pointing out two characters, which perhaps fit only marginally into this discussion, but to me seem to be among the finest of Euripides' creations: Pentheus (*Bakchai*) and Antigone (*Phoinissai*).

Pentheus does not exactly commit suicide. But he persists in a course which his intelligence must tell him jeopardises his life as well as his social standing. But he will not give up his quest for the truth in religion. He perishes without having achieved his goal, but the attempt was a glorious one.

Antigone has witnessed the evil effects of her brothers sacrificing each other out of rivalry. She has seen Menoikeus sacrificing himself gloriously but uselessly for the good of the city. She has witnessed her mother kill herself out of love and concern for her children, but again uselessly. She has herself offered to undergo Kreon's

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<sup>37</sup> Note that in Sophokles' *Ajax* the self-same problem is discussed; Tekmessa puts forward the only sensible point of view, but in this case the hero chooses glory rather than sense.

punishment for the sake of the rightful claims of her brother for burial, which would have been a fine, but still useless action.<sup>38</sup> She desists. Her final sacrifice is the greatest and finest of them all. She does not give up her life, but everything that is dear to her, her youth, her hope of marriage, her friends, her comforts, for the sake of standing by her blind and deeply disturbed father. Is this not a much greater and much more meaningful sacrifice than that of life itself and one not arrived at in a moment of exaltation, but in a lifetime of devotion?

(h) Sophistry

There are a number of speeches in Euripides which have a distinctly sophistic ring. Critics have pointed them out and condemned the playwright for dragging them in. I hope to show in this thesis that they fulfil a vital role in their plays. Thus Elektra, at the sight of Aigistheus dead, instead of bursting into an ecstatic song of triumph begins a dry speech with: "Where should I start, where end, what say in the middle?"<sup>39</sup> She is playing a role and there is no real triumph in her heart. At the most one can say that some of these sophistic passages are a little longer than absolutely necessary. Many contain well known *topoi*, but this, again, can be taken as evidence that the speaker is not speaking from the heart but rehearsing a learned lesson.

(i) Politics

Many commentators have pointed out passages referring to topical Athenian events in these plays. These are sometimes used in an attempt to date the play. Many of these attempts rest on insecure grounds.<sup>40</sup>

There can be no doubt, however, that political considerations play a great part in at least some of Euripides' tragedies, particularly the *Herakleidae*, *Hiketides*, *Helene* and *IA*. It will be shown that these deal with general, eternal political problems. This is done so well that every generation can read its own political problems and personalities into them. As I point out in connection with the *Hiketides* the play could almost be read as a direct commentary on South African affairs in 1994. The Athenian audience would, no doubt, have been tempted to read contemporary meanings into them. There is no reason why Euripides should not have welcomed and encouraged this.

<sup>38</sup> As in the case of Sophokles' *Antigone*.

<sup>39</sup> Lines 907-8.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance the argument in connection with the *Rhesos*, Iliescu (1976) *passim*.

(j) Religion

This is another topic close to Euripides' heart. Every play contains references to gods, religion or the claim of the spiritual. As we have seen (page 16) Verrall thought that he was wholly condemnatory about these matters, Dodds (page 17) came to the opposite conclusion. In connection with almost every play this argument has raged among critics. I hope to show in the following pages that the truth probably lies halfway between these views. In fact, we can discern a reasonably steady progression in Euripides' works, from the earlier to the later. In the earlier works (*Alkestis*, *Andromache*, *Herakleidae*) gods, miracles and oracles are given rather short shrift. In some of the later works (especially the *IT* and *the Herakles*) the playwright puts forward the interesting view that the trouble may not be with religion *per se*, but with what humans make of it.<sup>41</sup>

In the *Troades* Hekabe tries hard to find some meaning to life, be it through religion, philosophy or something else. Each time a further calamity hits her she adapts afresh and tries to change her spiritual outlook. Eventually she is left completely bereft, but one gets the feeling that she may well adapt once again and find something to believe in, though what this something could be is not explained.

In the *Helene* Menelaos and Helene have come to grief through their own completely self-centered attitudes. Theonoe shows them that the desperate situation could be easily remedied by adopting a spiritual outlook (perhaps along the lines of Eleusis). The couple ignore this teaching and go on in their selfish ways.

In the *Ion* the young hero lives at first in a beautiful world of peace, harmony and safety through his complete dedication to Apollo. After he has met the adult, outside world in the shape of Kreousa and Xouthos he has to adapt. Eventually he opts for "real", political and adult life but the question is left open whether he does not lose something very precious in the process.

In the *Bakchai* the problem reaches its climax. Pentheus, a down to earth realist, yet recognises that religious faith is capable of bringing about great beauty and peace and also awesome power. Tempted by the stranger he goes further and further

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<sup>41</sup> *IT* lines 385 - 391: "It is not true. It is as false as tales of Tantalos feeding the gods a child. O Artemis, these people, being murderers themselves, are charging Thee with their own wickedness. No! I will not believe it of a god!" and *Herakles*, lines 1345 - 1346: "I do not believe in the immorality of the gods; these are just the wretched tales of poets".

in his search for the spiritual, giving up all his previous goals one by one. Eventually he is destroyed, but the claim of the spiritual remains unshaken.

(k) Patriotism and Xenophobia

There are many passages in Euripides' plays which seem to praise Athens (or Greece) to the detriment of other states (or barbarians). Many commentators take these passages at face value and consider that the tragedian is indulging in local patriotism or perhaps playing to the gallery. This is particularly evident in the *Hiketides* which is widely believed to be "an encomium of Athens".

This is to ignore my rule 4 (page 9). If we look at these passages we shall invariably find that they are spoken by a character who has something to gain from this attitude (e.g. Menelaos in the *IA* warning of an imminent Trojan invasion of Greece) or the sort of person who could be expected to be blindly patriotic and xenophobic (e.g. Pylades in the *Orestes*).

If we look at the actions of these "inferior people" on the stage we invariably find that there is little evidence to support the idea of their inferiority. Perhaps the prime example is the Phrygian in the *Orestes*, who for all his strange, barbarian antics is the only character to oppose common sense to Orestes' paranoic ravings.

(l) The Status of Women

Euripides had the reputation in antiquity of being a misogynist. Perhaps, as Aristophanes slyly implies,<sup>42</sup> because he knew women and their tricks only too well. There are certainly a number of passages in his plays which decry women as a whole or insist on their keeping to their allotted inferior status. Once again we must apply rule 4. In each case these sentiments are spoken by women, tongue in cheek (e.g. *Medeia* 869ff) or to get their own way (e.g. Aithra, *Hiketides* 286ff) or trying to persuade themselves (e.g. Iphigeneia, *IA* 1394) or else by the sort of man who could be expected to be persuaded of male superiority (e.g. Xouthos, *Ion* 650ff).

If we look at these women in action on the stage they certainly do not show any marked inferiority. They may be upsetting to the male ego, but are never negligible.

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<sup>42</sup> Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousai* 394 - 434.

(m) Metatragedy

Segal introduced this useful term in connection with the *Bakchai*.<sup>43</sup> It denotes the situation when a play deals with the question of the status and function of tragedy within society. I widen the scope of Segal's definition somewhat here to cover all instances when Euripides seems to be conscious of the role of poetry in general and particularly of his own role as a playwright in society. Of these there are many: sometimes choral reflections on the use of poetry, sometimes the power of poetry to reward a fine action after death, but particularly frequently when Euripides delights in his power to mould his audience to his way of thinking only to lead them into a morass of absurdity. This is the main plan of the *Alkestis*, but occurs again in the *IT* as well as almost all other plays at one stage or another.<sup>44</sup> Aware of his power the playwright must act responsibly. Plato will discuss this problem seriously in the *Republic*.<sup>45</sup>

### EURIPIDES AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

(a) Aristophanes

Aristophanes makes merciless fun of Euripides in most of his plays.<sup>46</sup> Yet, in one of the two main works dealing with Euripides, the *Frogs*, he gives the impression of being, in fact, a great admirer of the tragedian. He intimates that life is drab since Euripides' death and whilst he accords the crown of poetry to Aischylos he hints that the he is just quoting the would-be *literati*, tongue-in-cheek. The play suggests that the Athenian audience, was clearly divisible into two groups: The discerning who, of course, chose Aischylos, and the rascals who were carried away by Euripides.<sup>47</sup>

I shall point out that Euripides appears to have been well aware of the comedian's barbs and reacted to them in his writing. In several tragedies, particularly the *Helene*,<sup>48</sup> he makes such unashamed use of tricks which Aristophanes had already

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<sup>43</sup> Segal (1982).

<sup>44</sup> Critics have often expressed this in the terms: "Euripides likes to shock his audience". This is true in a way, but I hope to show that there is always a purpose to his shocking; it always teaches the audience not to be misled by glib oratory.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Republic* Book X.

<sup>46</sup> We should probably find even more "anti-Euripidean" passages in the comedies if we knew more of the tragedian's plays.

<sup>47</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs* 771-783.

<sup>48</sup> See particularly the insistence on Menelaos' ridiculous rags and the need for a *mechanema* (lines 809-17).



lampooned that we must consider, either that he had the skin of a rhinoceros, or that he was defiantly stating that he was not going to be swayed from his course by satire, or else, by far the most likely explanation, that he made fun of his own manner. Seeing that he is always making fun of people in general, and the audience in particular, this would not be at all surprising.<sup>49</sup>

Another point may be worth considering. I assume<sup>50</sup> that Euripides is writing at several levels, the more hidden ones probably constantly being missed by large sections of the audience. Why is this not pointed out in the ancient literature? Verrall makes a brave, but to me unconvincing, attempt to read such a view into Aristotle and Lucian.<sup>51</sup> Surely, Aristophanes should be the one source where one should pick it up. The nearest one can come to it is at the end of the *Frogs* where Dionysos suggests that Euripides is really too good for the Athenians who do not appreciate him properly. Yet no one has ever doubted that Aristophanes was an intelligent man and, what is even more surprising, that frequently Euripides' hidden message is very much that of Aristophanes himself, particularly in respect of anti-war and feminist sentiments.

The explanation becomes clearer if we consider Aristophanes' treatment of another well-known public figure: Sokrates.

From Plato<sup>52</sup> we learn that the two knew each other intimately and were on very friendly terms. Aristophanes must have known the philosopher's views very well. Yet in the *Clouds* he lampoons him mercilessly, accusing him of all sorts of misbehaviour, of which, unless Xenophon and Plato are very much mistaken, he was never guilty. Clearly Aristophanes was making fun, not of Sokrates himself, but of the popular idea of Sokrates, such as was current among the general population of Athens. They confused him with a variety of other philosophers, sophists and rhetoricians and hence viewed him with so much mistrust as to condemn him to death in the end.

We can apply exactly the same reasoning to Aristophanes' handling of Euripides. All the things of which he accuses him are matters pertaining to the lowest level of his multiple writing; the sort of things the common crowd would have read

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<sup>49</sup> See *Metatragedy*, p.25.

<sup>50</sup> See p.6.

<sup>51</sup> Verrall, (1895) 166-213.

<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Symposion passim*.



into the plays. These are the very things which Euripides himself parodies in the *Helene*.

(b) Aischylos

There are a number of passages in Euripides' plays which come extremely close to passages in Aischylos. The best known is the recognition scene in the *Elektra*, others are the *teichoskopia* of the *Phoinissai* and the funeral oration of the *Hiketides*. These resemblances have been pointed out by a number of critics and the general interpretation seems to be that Euripides is correcting, or perhaps even making fun of, the older master. I hope to show, particularly in connection with the *Elektra*, that this is not the case but that Euripides' attitude was: if you wish to view the matter from a heroic - mythological point of view, Aischylos has already discussed the problem well. But we are here looking at it from an entirely different point of view and Aischylos' conclusions do not apply.

(c) Sophokles

The resemblances to Sophokles' work seem at first much less pronounced. But I shall point out the very close connection between Euripides' *Herakles* and Sophokles' *Ajax* and suggest that this is probably not coincidental.

(d) Sokrates

Once we accept the psychiatric approach to the writing of Euripides it soon becomes apparent that the tragedian's main target is the shoddy and careless misuse of words, concepts and attitudes in which mankind habitually indulges. In this he greatly resembles Sokrates who, with the use of his elenctic method, constantly propounded: Do not hide behind big words of undefined meaning. Do not assume that something is right just because everybody says so. Examine words and concepts very carefully before you use them to make decisions.

Euripides, like Sokrates, reduces his audience to *ἀπορία*.<sup>53</sup> If one is not allowed to call people good or evil, if one is not allowed to call cowardice bad or self sacrifice good, if the word *καλοκάγαθία* has no definable meaning, where does this leave one? What criteria can one use to justify action? Both Euripides and Sokrates advocate that one should think about it deeply. Neither has a final answer to this

<sup>53</sup> This is particularly well brought out in the *Herakleidai*, but the message applies to virtually all Euripidean plays.

difficult question. A religious outlook claims to have an answer: truth exists and is ordained by the Deity. The *Helene*, *Ion* and *Bakchai* examine the claims of the two approaches.

A number of commentators have appreciated the often close connection between some passages in Euripides and sayings of Sokrates. Generally they have discussed whether the two agree or disagree and, if the latter, which one is correcting the other. *Akrasia* will be discussed especially in connection with the *Medeia*.

(e) Hippokrates

Hippokrates was a contemporary of Euripides. An unsubstantiated story reports that Hippokrates made two trips to Athens and was on cordial terms with Sophokles. It is impossible to state whether he and Euripides ever met personally, but his views, or the views current in Hippokratic circles, would not be unknown among the educated people of Athens in the 5th century. Plato certainly refers to the work of Hippokrates with appreciation.<sup>54</sup>

Hippokrates' novel idea was to treat medicine on rational grounds. He decries accepting ideas just because they seem plausible and are popularly often repeated. The only way is to observe detachedly and accurately and form theories only on the basis of such observed material. In this, it will be apparent, he comes close to both Sokrates' and Euripides' attitudes. It is likely that Euripides would have found much to his liking in this approach. I shall point out how this assumption completely changes the apparent message of the *Herakles* and, to a lesser extent, the *Orestes* and *Hippolytos*.

It is not known for certain who the author of the Hippokratic books is. Some may be by the master himself, some may be lecture notes by students, some written by followers imbued with the master's ideas. Some may even be by outsiders whose books found a place in the library at Kos.

For the sake of brevity I shall, in the remainder of the thesis refer to them as if written by Hippokrates himself.

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<sup>54</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 311. *Phaidros* 270.

## CHAPTER 2

### PSYCHIATRIC TENETS

#### (a) : General

##### (a) Granny Psychology

I shall frequently use the term "granny psychology" (a phrase of my own coinage). This is what it is meant to convey: every man must of necessity be a psychologist. It is essential for us to be able to predict, as far as we can, how another person will react to a given situation. Even my cat, when it rubs itself against my legs at mealtimes, is using applied psychology.

Over the centuries empirical rules have been built up in popular tradition to explain various human phenomena and many people are satisfied with the answers derived from these rules. This is what I call "granny psychology". In modern times, particularly from the end of the 19th century onwards, a more discerning approach to human motivation has been developed. This I shall call "modern psychology". It scarcely needs to be pointed out that there is no sharp distinction between the two. Throughout the centuries some people have had a more penetrating insight into the workings of the human mind than others and have shown deeper understanding than basic "granny psychology". There is also little doubt that one hundred years from now many tenets of "modern psychology" will be classed as "granny" by a more advanced society. There is, thus, no clear definition of these terms. In the following I shall attempt to differentiate between them, fully aware that there are many intermediate positions. There are, of course, many differences in detail, but only a few basic differences:

1. Granny psychology tends to fasten onto one single cause of human behaviour. Thus, a person is believed to be activated by hate, anger, jealousy, or some such emotion. Modern psychology appreciates that human motivation is never as simple as this. There are always a large number of conflicting drives,<sup>1</sup> action being determined

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<sup>1</sup> Except perhaps in such simple actions as tendon reflexes, and even there the situation is more complex than generally appreciated.

by the sum total of their activities. Basic character traits, psychological mechanisms, educational and social considerations must all be taken into account in any one event.<sup>2</sup>

2. Modern psychology appreciates that many of these impulses are subconscious. Quite apart from straightforward lying, a person may be truly unaware of his own motivation.<sup>3</sup>

3. Granny psychology tends to drag moral problems into its judgements: Love is good, hate is bad; courage is good, cowardice is bad. In particular, the concept of "wickedness" is often used as if it were a primary impulse; a good action needs explanation, a bad one can be "explained" by the fact that the man is a wicked person. No further explanation is needed; wickedness is its own motivation. Modern psychology largely eschews moral judgements, except in as far as the person's own moral attitudes affect his actions (i.e. not the would-be psychologist's moral attitudes).<sup>4</sup>

4. In modern psychology physical changes in the brain or hormones play a large part in determining a man's attitudes and are entirely outside his control. Granny psychology assumes that a man could always change his attitudes, if only he could be made to see how wrong they are.<sup>5</sup>

I hope to show in the following discussion that in many Euripidean plays a number of characters as well as many later critics try to use granny psychology to explain what is happening on the stage and fail, because Euripides' insight was deeper than theirs.

(b) Modern Psychiatry and this thesis

My main purpose in this thesis is to show that Euripides was extremely interested in human motivation, i.e. psychology; that he had very pronounced views and original ideas on this; that in many, if not all, his plays he is mostly activated by this interest, and that many of his views are close to those of modern psychology and

<sup>2</sup> DSM III, which is at present the standard summary of psychiatric knowledge, insists that all psychological assessment must be made along 5 axes, as outlined above. I hope to show that Euripides is well aware of this need, particularly as shown in the *Medeia*.

<sup>3</sup> I hope to show that Euripides is again fully aware of this. Perhaps the best exposition occurs in the *Elektra*.

<sup>4</sup> While Euripides certainly discusses moral problems over and over again, he never introduces his own moral stance, but leaves the audience to make up its own mind (compare Rule 4, p.9).

<sup>5</sup> Euripides, of course, could have had no conception of such hormonal changes, but in play after play he points out how difficult it is for people to get out of their characters. Perhaps the best examples occur in the *Medeia*, *Andromache*, *Orestes* and *Bakchai*.

psychiatry. My general procedure is to state the modern views in one section and then compare Euripides' approach with them. There is a danger that this method may induce the reader to see me in the light of a schoolmaster criticising the homework of a rather bright pupil. This is far from my intention.

Whilst there is no doubt that modern psychiatry and psychology have advanced far beyond "Granny Psychology", no one will claim that we have reached the final truth about these matters. The very multiplicity of psychological theories and approaches which the modern psychiatrist has to study and assess in order to keep up with the literature shows that we are far from knowing "the truth" and still in the stage of trying to find a unifying principle. It is, therefore, impossible to judge Euripides' views against any established and true standard, since none exists. All one can do is to show that many of his ideas find their equivalents in modern psychiatric writing, have been put forward seriously by competent modern thinkers, and are widely discussed in the modern literature. Whether or not they are "true" is beyond anybody's competence to assess. If I succeed in showing this I shall be well satisfied.

(c) Compartmentalising

There is a marked tendency in modern times to compartmentalise. A certain item may fall under psychiatry, another under psychology,<sup>6</sup> yet another may be a moral question and still another a religious one. If a problem arises it tends to be referred to the expert in the relevant discipline.

This was not Euripides' approach, nor, for that matter, the approach of 5th and 4th century Greek thinkers. In most of Plato's dialogues one can find moral, linguistic, literary, religious and political questions all discussed at the same time and mutually bearing upon each other. It was probably Aristotle who first attempted to sort these out in separate books. Whether or not he thereby aided the advance of human knowledge must remain a moot point. Overspecialisation is certainly a real headache in modern medicine.

We must for this reason be prepared to find a variety of such "compartments" discussed in Euripides' plays. Whilst I shall try, in this thesis, to stick particularly to

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<sup>6</sup> Psychology is the study of the normal human mind, psychiatry its application to the abnormal one. The two disciplines, of course, shade widely into each other.

the psychiatric items this is virtually impossible and moral, political and religious features must also be considered in order to do justice to the plays.

(d) Madness

This and other terms like insanity and lunacy form part of the stock-in-trade of all languages. We all use these concepts and imagine that we know what we are talking about. In fact, a definition of these words is impossible without the use of equally ill-defined words like "normality" and "majority". Abnormal mental states shade into normal ones over such a broad area that no clear distinguishing lines can be drawn. What may be abnormal for one person and under certain circumstances may be entirely normal for another and under different conditions.

There are two underlying concepts to the use of such words, of which the lay person is usually unaware and which he would probably deny, if he were challenged. Yet they are undoubtedly present in the user's mind, if only in a subconscious form. These are:

1. The belief that madness is a single entity separable from another entity called sanity.
2. The belief that madness has no rules. Any sort of behaviour may be expected from a madman and, hence, to call a person mad will explain whatever it is he does.

Many Euripidean critics have fallen into this trap. Whenever any of the characters behave in an inexplicable or objectionable way they are labelled as mad and this is felt to explain everything. If this were indeed so the critics who state that madness and mad people are not a fit subject for a tragedy<sup>7</sup> would probably be right. If anything is possible what could be the purpose of describing such a condition?

Modern psychiatry takes an entirely different view. Abnormal mental behaviour is ascribed to a wide variety of different conditions and reactions, each of which has its own aetiology and symptomatology. Thus a manic-depressive (bipolar affective state) and a schizophrenic may both behave in a way unusual for the population at large, but their behaviour will be entirely different and, to a certain extent at least, explicable and predictable. The study and classification of these different states is the province of psychiatry. The fact that we have not reached a full and final understanding of mental disorders need not detract from this overall view.

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<sup>7</sup> This will be discussed in connection with the *Orestes*, chapter 5.

If we accept this view then the study of such conditions, particularly where they shade into "normal" behaviour, is not only interesting but also a very worthy objective, entirely fit for a serious playwright. I am suggesting in these essays that this is what Euripides is doing and that he is doing it remarkably well.

(e) Justification for using modern psychological concepts

It seems ludicrous, at first sight, to attribute modern psychological concepts to the mind of Euripides living two and a half millennia ago. It is not so, however. There are certain basic facts about the working of the human mind which have been there from the beginning of mankind. All Freud, Jung and their followers did was to study them carefully and put them forward with a new terminology, with new imagery and new symbols. After all, Freud's "censor" is no less a mental image than the horn gate to *Tartaros* through which dreams escape, Jung's "collective subconscious" as much an image as the curse on the house of Tantalos, and Adler's "inferiority complex" as much as the beauty contest of the goddesses on Mount Ida. I shall try to show that another, widely held body of opinion, that of Christian theology, grapples with the same problems and comes to very much the same conclusions using, of course, an entirely different vocabulary, imagery and symbolism. Indeed, other deep thinking authors throughout the ages have tackled the problems of guilt, conscience and atonement, such as Homer, Aischylos, Shakespeare (see particularly *Macbeth* in this context). There is therefore nothing strange in claiming that Euripides, undoubtedly a deep thinker, should also have come to similar conclusions, using again a different vocabulary, imagery and symbolism. It is therefore entirely justifiable to compare Euripides' attitudes to such matters with those of modern psychiatry.

In the next section I shall draw up a scheme outlining some of these facts in plain language and compare the words and symbols the psychologists and the Christian theologians use for them. We must make allowance for one difference when comparing Euripides' outlook with this: While psychological writing and theology are presented, as it were, by an uninvolved outside observer, in Euripides' work, seeing that he writes plays, the facts are partly stated by involved observers, partly enacted on

the stage. But the facts are still the same. Here, then, is my scheme about **GUILT** and its consequences as described by modern psychiatrists and Christian theologians.<sup>8</sup>

In this table the facts will be set out in psychological terms in the left hand column, in Christian theological terms in the right. This way, I hope, will bring out the differences and also the very remarkable similarities of the two accounts and serve as a basis for understanding Euripides later.

### (b) : Scheme

#### Psychological

Feelings of guilt arise in two ways; some are innate in all human beings, archetypal guilt, free floating guilt), others are specific, personal guilt feelings due to having done something wrong. The emotional results of either are: depression, anxiety and fear.

We try to deal with these guilt feelings in the following ways: (a) trying to explain them away (rationalisation), (b) trying to pretend that they do not exist by putting up a facade before other people (an ego defence), (c) by attributing the guilt to someone else or to society (projection), (d) by moving them from the conscious to the subconscious mind (repression) and pretending that the guilt does not exist (denial). All these are partially successful for a time.

Guilt feelings when repressed into the subconscious continue to exist. The harder they are repressed the more imbued they become with energy. The following may happen: (a) By attaching this energy to a different purpose we may use it to produce a socially acceptable aim (sublimation). (b) The feelings may gain partial re-access to consciousness in altered form: through dreams, free association, slips of the tongue, odd and neurotic behaviour. (c) There may be a

#### Theological

Sin is of two kinds: original sin, innate in all humans through descent from Adam, personal sin from having done wrong. The results of either are: alienation from God and fear of His punishment.

We try to deal with sin in the following ways: (a) trying to explain it away (Pharisaicism, Jesuitry), (b) pretending to others that it does not exist (hypocrisy), (c) believing our own pretence (self-righteousness), (d) refusing to think about it (denying access to the Holy Spirit). All these make us feel better for a while.

(a) We try to abolish guilt by doing "good works", laudable but ineffectual. (b) Sin suppressed still makes us unhappy (conscience, sin prevents Christian Joy). (c) Sin leads us to perform further wicked acts (the devil, the wages of sin are death). Such violent outbursts may temporarily relieve our feelings, but do not solve anything. The only cause us to commit further sins (sin leads to sin).

<sup>8</sup> This section was originally written for the *Phoinissai*. It may, however, stand as an example and its conclusions will be applicable to all other plays as well.



catastrophic explosion, leading to irrational behaviour, dangerous alike to the person and to society. This reduces the energy for a while (abreaction). It may generate further feelings of guilt.

Society reacts to this as follows: (a) For a while they may accept the facade, for the sake of peace. (b) They will begin to see through the cracks in the facade. The subject may react to this by blaming society (projection). (c) Society punishes the violent outburst (rejection by society).

People may be fooled but God knows. Odd behaviour may be tolerated through Christian forgiveness, major outbursts are punished by rejection by the congregation and will be punished by God. The subject may react by rejecting God and the church.

There are several ways of trying to prevent the explosion. (a) The patient's own efforts are usually vain ("Pull yourself together!"). (b) Understanding and explanation temporarily relieve feelings but fail to relieve the guilt. (c) Dramatic re-enactment of the guilt may temporarily relieve the ill effects (abreaction). (d) The most useful way is to bring the repressed feelings into consciousness and to face them. This brings good relief, but will have to be repeated over and over again.

(a) "Good Works" and ritual may temporarily relieve but fail to atone for sin. (b) Christian charity and general absolution also help temporarily. (c) Dramatic conversion is very helpful, but liable not to last very long ("born again"). (d) Confession, followed by penitence and absolution has a more lasting effect and can be repeated over and over again.

Guilt is finally resolved by modifying the Superego (the "unconscious" conscience constructed from introjected parent figures).

By penitence, foregoing one's own desires, laying oneself open to God and accepting His forgiveness, sin can be totally expiated.

### (c) : Some modern psychiatric concepts

In this section I shall briefly mention some modern psychiatric concepts which will be used over and over again in the thesis. Most of the terms are standard psychiatric usage, though some are of my own coining.

#### (a) Subconscious mental activity

It is generally accepted nowadays that a great amount of mental activity can proceed without the subject being aware of it. This subconscious mental activity can be of a high order, though it usually tends to occur in vivid images rather than cool, logical thought. Some subconscious events can easily be brought back into

consciousness by a voluntary effort, others only with great difficulty and yet others will remain subconscious forever, except possibly through psychiatric interference.

(b) Repression

A thought, wish or fear which is felt to be socially or morally undesirable and thus interferes with a person's self-image is frequently dealt with by repression: It is shifted into the subconscious, enabling the subject to deny it consciously. Such a repressed wish, however, does not disappear. It persists in the subconscious, sometimes throughout life, occasionally coming to the surface in an altered or symbolic form such as in dreams, slips of the tongue, unusual choice of words, to influence the subject's actions so that some of them may appear distinctly strange.

(c) Ambivalence

It is thus possible for a person both to want and not to want a thing at the same time, to love and hate a person simultaneously. This will be discussed in more detail in connection with the *IT*.

(d) Automatic Behaviour and Role Playing

The first time we meet a new situation we carefully consider all its possible aspects before we decide on how to act. In subsequent encounters we tend to short-circuit the process and react automatically in the same way as the first time. Learning theory postulates that many aspects of our behaviour are thus acquired in infancy.

This is a very convenient and valuable tool, as there is often not enough time or information to consider each situation *de novo*. Trouble arises, however, if the next situation is not exactly the same as a previous one so that the final decision turns out to be faulty. This is a frequent cause of irrational action.

Some of these automatisms are learned in early childhood from personal experience or from the teaching of our parents. Others arise later in life. It is one of the functions of literature to provide us with a series of roles into which we can slip readily. We go through life playing such roles as "The Fairy Prince", "The Knight in Shining Armour", "The Suffering Saint". I hope to show that this habit will be the major preoccupation of the *Alkestis*.

(e) Pigeonholing

Many of these roles are mutually contradictory. Thus, as the "Conquering Hero" I should clobber my opponent, as "the Christian Saint" I should show mercy.

We believe in both roles but keep them in separate watertight compartments. Normally we use either, changing from one to the other whenever this seems advisable. Trouble arises when we try to play two such roles simultaneously. This also will be seen in the *Alkestis*, the *IA*, as well as in many other plays.

(f) Social Roles

Not only do we play these roles for ourselves, we also play them for the benefit of others and, in turn, expect the people around us to fall in with our role playing. This is the subject of a relatively new branch of psychiatry, called transactional analysis, with its offshoot "Games Theory", popularised by Berne. I shall quote this repeatedly, particularly in connection with the *Elektra*.

Public opinion often demands that we should stay within our accepted roles or suffer grievous consequences. This will be much of the subject matter of the *IA*.

(g) Rationalisation

This is another way of reconciling one's inner drives with rationality and morality. *Homo* delights in calling himself *sapiens* and is convinced that rationality and morality are his main behavioural principles. To realise that this is not so would be a severe blow to his self-esteem. He deals with this problem by evolving a train of superficially rational and moral thought, which necessitates the action he is contemplating on purely irrational and amoral emotional grounds. This is rationalisation. An outsider can usually see very quickly through this manoeuvre and pick holes in its rationality and morality. Indeed, the person himself is quite capable of seeing through it once he is no longer under the influence of his strong, inner driving force. At the time he is unable to see the fallacies of the argument, is completely convinced of its truth and usually only too happy to present it to other people, particularly those whom he suspects of being about to disagree with him. It is one of the commonest psychological defence mechanisms known to mankind.

(h) Projection

A common example of rationalisation is our habit of turning: "I hate John" into "John hates me". This is termed projection and allows us to conclude that, as he hates us, we are entitled to revenge ourselves on him.

(i) Hallucinations and Illusions

These two words will be used on several occasions. By definition a hallucination is a sensory perception without an external stimulus to provoke it, an illusion a sensory misrepresentation of an external stimulus.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE *HERAKLES*

At first reading the early parts of the play seem disappointing. They contain many of the ingredients commonly found in Euripidean tragedies: the suppliants at the altar, the pathetic children, the heroic young woman, the devoted old man, the immoral villain, the friendly but ineffectual chorus, the dramatic change in fortune. In this play these have very little distinction. Megara is no Polyxena or Makaria, Amphitryon is no Iolaos. Lykos is purely evil without any of the redeeming features of a Menelaos or Odysseus. The plight of the children is less dramatic than that in the *Medeia* or *Andromache*. The arrival of Herakles is too pat and contrived. The whole thing seems just a second rate re-hash of the playwright's other works.

Similarly the later parts appear like an inferior reworking of the material of Sophokles' *Ajax*, as will be pointed out presently.

#### Classical

Critics have been very divided on the merits of the play; their opinions vary from Sheppard's "A superb piece of craftsmanship"<sup>1</sup> to Kitto's "A most puzzling play, preserved only for the powerful madness scene. Apart from this quite a poor tragedy".<sup>2</sup>

The main criticisms levelled against the *Herakles* have been the following: The play falls into two, some would say three, distinct parts. It is difficult to see any overall idea connecting these parts. The choral lyrics have little to do with the plot.

The minor characters are flat and uninteresting, Herakles himself difficult to understand. There is a large number of, often lengthy, passages which seem quite irrelevant to the plot. Euripides' attitude to the gods is very difficult to fathom. What does he want his audience and the readers to believe? The happy ending is quite out of keeping with the rest of the play. In addition, some have thought that the entrances of Iris, Lyssa and Theseus are poorly prepared for.

There is no unity in the Aristotelian sense in the play. Some critics have called the tragedy "episodic" or a "diptych" and left it at that. Carrière<sup>3</sup> even suggested that

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<sup>1</sup> Sheppard (1916) 72.

<sup>2</sup> Kitto (1961) 237.

<sup>3</sup> Carrière (1967) *passim*.

the second part was tacked onto the first at a later date. Many commentators have tried hard to find a common unitary idea running through the tragedy. There appear to be three major schools of thought:

(a) The Theodicy school

These commentators point out that the gods' attitude to Herakles is discussed in many parts of the tragedy. In the first part Zeus would be expected to help the virtuous Herakles, his son, but does not appear to do so. The only possible conclusions are that either Herakles is not really Zeus' son, or that the god does not care about virtue. Both possibilities are mooted in the play. Then, as if in answer to Megara's prayer, Herakles appears and Zeus is completely vindicated, as the chorus points out. Almost immediately, however, Iris and Lyssa appear to carry out Hera's arbitrary wishes, throwing doubt on divine morality. This theme is further developed and culminates in Herakles' exclamation: "Who would pray to such a god?" (1307-8). But then he contradicts this and calls it "a wretched tale of poets; gods are not like that" (1345-6). What are we to think of these contradictions?<sup>4</sup> Commentators have differed:

1. The role of the gods is most perplexing, impossible to explain.<sup>5</sup>
2. We see here the irruption of the irrational into ordered life.<sup>6</sup>
3. These are only the characters' temporary views and not meant to be taken seriously. The nature of the gods is more complex than the characters realise.<sup>7</sup>
4. Hera, having been deceived by Zeus, is, in fact, justified in taking her stand.<sup>8</sup>
5. These are Euripides' views, grafted unnecessarily onto a play where they do not fit.<sup>9</sup>
6. This proves that not gods, but Tyche, is in control of things.<sup>10</sup>
7. It is Euripides' purpose to show that the whole of mythology is rubbish. This would undermine the very existence of Herakles as a mythological hero. The message

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<sup>4</sup> Bond (1981) xxi ff.

<sup>5</sup> Lesky (1983) 281-282.

<sup>6</sup> Shelton (1979) *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Halleran (1986) *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Bond (1981) xxiv-xxvi.

<sup>9</sup> Brown (1978) *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Parmentier (1965) ix; Kitto (1961) 246.

of the play, on this interpretation, would be that if gods existed this would be how things must develop. But they are pure phantasy".<sup>11</sup>

8. Euripides puts a knotty problem before the audience and invites them to decide.<sup>12</sup>

(b) The Philia school

These commentators are impressed by the number of references to strength, power, wealth and, particularly, friendship which occur scattered throughout the play. They especially concentrate on the character of Theseus and why Euripides should have put him in against all mythological tradition. For them the clue lies in lines 1425-6, almost at the end: "Whoever tries to acquire strength or wealth, rather than good friends, is foolish." Herakles and his dependents have relied on his strength. Lykos has aimed at power and wealth. Both had to perish. But Theseus' friendship has overcome the troubles and persists. There are many previous references to friendship. The advantage of this view, as Bond<sup>12</sup> points out, is that the play ends on an optimistic note instead of the cynicism and gloom inherent in the theodicy school. Support for this view can be found in many authors.<sup>13</sup>

(c) The Arete school

The hero of the *Herakles* is certainly full of *arete* in the heroic sense of bravery, efficiency and morality. In contrast to other tragic heroes<sup>14</sup> he shows no sign whatsoever of fatal *hybris*.<sup>15</sup> Yet he is punished. Some commentators believe that Euripides meant to show that excessive fame, in itself, invites the punishment of fate or the gods.<sup>16</sup> Others believe that in rejecting suicide he finds a new and better kind of *arete*.<sup>17</sup>

Each of these schools explains a number of facets of the *Herakles* well, but leaves other, large sections unexplained and apparently completely irrelevant.

<sup>11</sup> Grummond (1983) *passim*; Verrall (1905) 134; Conacher (1967) 90; Greenwood (1953) 67.

<sup>12</sup> Halleran (1986) *passim*; Croiset (1919) Vol 3 321.

<sup>12</sup> Bond (1981) xxii.

<sup>13</sup> Conacher (1967) 88; Kamerbeek (1966) *passim*; Sheppard (1916) *passim*; Webster (1967) 190.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Sophokles' *Ajax* and see section 5.

<sup>15</sup> I use the word in its commonly used sense of: overweening pride with more than a hint of violence in it.

<sup>16</sup> Pike (1978) *passim*; Grube (1975) 255. This point of view was well known in antiquity. Compare Amasis' letter to Polykrates; Herodotos, *The Histories*, Book 3 40.

<sup>17</sup> Bond (1981) xxiii; Barlow (1981) *passim*; Romilly (1980) *passim*; Kamerbeek (1966) *passim*; Walsh (1979) 302; Parmentier (1965) 8.

### Psychiatric (Epilepsy)

Epilepsy is now known to be due to spontaneous and purposeless activity of part of the brain. The discharge may remain localised to one area or may spread to others. Different parts of the brain subserve different functions. The symptoms of epilepsy will therefore depend on which part of the brain is affected. This is the explanation of the main types of epilepsy that are commonly seen and which I shall now describe. For the use of (\*) see page 5.

#### Major seizure (Grand mal, cortical, frontal lobe)

There are a number of variants, but the following is a common sequence:

The patient may have an aura, i.e. a preliminary sensation, warning that a fit is coming(\*). This may take the form of visual, acoustic, visceral or emotional phenomena.

After a varying interval the fit proper begins. Head and eyes turn to one side (adversion)(\*).

All muscles become stiff, including the respiratory ones. This produces a noisy inspiration against the closing vocal cords (the cry)(\*). Respiration ceases and the lips become blue (cyanosis)(-). Saliva cannot be expelled and froth gathers at the mouth(\*).

At this stage consciousness is lost and the patient falls heavily(\*).

He lies where he has fallen, with all muscles rigid (the tonic phase)(\*).

After a while rhythmic flexion and extension movements begin with great regularity and violence. These movements are completely purposeless (the clonic phase)(\*).

The movements gradually subside and the patient lies completely inert, unresponsive to any form of stimulus (postepileptic coma)(\*).

Incontinence of urine and faeces frequently occurs at this stage(-).

The coma gradually converts into a deep, normal sleep. The patient looks the same but can now be roused(\*).

Respiration at this stage is deep and slow(-).

After a varying interval the patient wakes. He may be normal or have mental changes of various kinds (twilight states, post-epileptic automatism, mood changes)(\*).



He has no recollection of what happened during the fit (amnesia)(\*).

Minor seizure (Petit mal, Centrencephalic, Absence attacks, Reticular activating substance)

Consciousness is lost abruptly. The patient remains standing or sitting in whatever posture he happens to be. If he is speaking he stops in mid sentence(\*). After a short interval, usually a matter of seconds, activity is resumed at the point where it was interrupted. Speech resumes at the exact word where it stopped. There is amnesia for the time of the fit(\*).

This may be accompanied by twitching of muscles, occasionally producing isolated movements, but quite different from the gross movements of the clonic stage of the major seizure (myoclonus)(-).

Psychomotor seizure (Temporal lobe)

There may be an olfactory or acoustic aura(-) or a changed mood(\*). The abnormal activity tends to cause changes in consciousness and mood. A feeling of having been there before (*déjà vu*) is common(-). Mood changes may include feelings of exaltation, fear, despondency or rage(\*), sometimes called furor epilepticus.<sup>18</sup> There may be automatic behaviour as described under twilight states(\*).

Twilight states<sup>19</sup>

These may occur following a fit, during a fit or, occasionally, in isolation as the main manifestation of the fit. Consciousness is usually clouded, though it may appear normal on the surface(\*). Memory of the attack is usually lost at the end(\*), but may be partially retained. There may be all the signs of an abnormal emotion, such as fear, anxiety or rage(\*). Being completely out of context, the condition may simulate any of the major psychiatric states such as schizophrenia, paranoia, mania, depression(\*).

A set of semi-purposeful movements may be carried out during this stage, usually somewhat aimless, such as smacking of the lips, mumbling, or counting objects(-). But occasionally there may be well coordinated purposeful activity, often directed by the prevailing mood. Such people may make speeches, transact business or commit crimes without remembering it afterwards(\*).

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<sup>18</sup> Trethowan (1983).

<sup>19</sup> Ervin (1967) 806.

### Epilepsy and “Madness”

From the earliest times on epilepsy and madness were confused in the popular mind and this habit continues to this day. Modern scientific research on the relation of epilepsy to other mental disorders has been extensive, but somewhat inconclusive. One gets the general idea that mental disorders are commoner in epileptics than in the general population, but that this may be a secondary phenomenon due to social rejection, feelings of guilt, the effect of drug treatment or due to the illness which caused the epilepsy in the first place.<sup>20</sup> The twilight states, however, as mentioned above, may strongly simulate mental disease.<sup>21</sup>

### Epilepsy and Murder

During a clonic seizure the movements are violent and may cause damage to patients, bystanders or property. They have given epileptics the reputation of being generally violent people. But, seeing that these movements are entirely purposeless, they cannot possibly lead to murder.

The problem is more intricate with temporal lobe epilepsy. A number of recent studies suggest that, whilst crime is commoner among epileptics than in the general population, this is attributable to socioeconomic factors rather than the disease per se.<sup>22</sup>

Violent behaviour during a temporal lobe fit is well recognised. Delgado<sup>23</sup> found 13 cases of violent behaviour, 3 of them involving physical attack, among 5400 epileptics. These figures, as Delgado points out, are probably too low. Nonetheless, even allowing for this, actual physical attack during a fit must be rare.

### Management

There are three separate problems:

1. During the fit: All that is necessary is to take commonsense care to prevent, as far as possible, injury to patient, bystander and property. In prolonged epileptic attacks intravenous drug therapy is helpful.
2. Preventive measures before the fit: Modern drug therapy has proved very helpful in reducing the number and severity of attacks. I shall not discuss this further

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<sup>20</sup> Fenwick (1987) 511-542.

<sup>21</sup> Ervin (1967) 806.

<sup>22</sup> Whitman et al. (1984) 775-782.

<sup>23</sup> Delgado-Escueta (1985) 711-716.

as, obviously, Euripides could have had no knowledge of antiepileptic drugs. The curative measures mentioned by Hippokrates<sup>24</sup> cannot have been very effective.

3. Social Rehabilitation: Society tends to regard epilepsy with fear, horror and disgust and treats sufferers as outcasts, defiled people or potential criminals and tends to reject them. This attitude naturally affects the psychology and well-being of the epileptic to a marked extent.

The patient is often imbued with the same ideas and regards himself as inferior, wicked and unworthy. This also affects his mental equilibrium. He is likely, in turn, to reject society.

The patient's family may react to these feelings either by smothering him with solicitude or by turning against him and rejecting him. Either of these courses has a deleterious effect on the afflicted person.

It is only in recent years that the medical profession has realised its duty along these lines and tends to combat the ill effects of rejection by educational campaigns directed towards the family, the patient and society as a whole. It must be said, however, that even now many practitioners fall far short of ideal behaviour along these lines and many tend to rely on drugs alone for the management of epileptics.

I hope to point out in this chapter that Euripides was, in this respect, far in advance of medical practitioners not only of antiquity but of succeeding centuries right up to the present.

### EURIPIDES AND HIPPOKRATES

Among the *Corpus Hippocraticum* there is a well-known essay on the "sacred disease", that is epilepsy. Its purpose is not to describe epilepsy; the author assumes that the reader knows a good deal about it already. It must therefore have been directed towards fellow practitioners or educated laymen. The book has two purposes: (1) to form a strong polemic against the current view that epilepsy is in any way "sacred", that is, caused by demonic possession and (2) an attempt to push the theory of humours.

The attached table gives a brief outline of the gist of the argument. The part about the humours need not concern us here. It is not only hopelessly outdated, but

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<sup>24</sup> Hippokrates, *On the Sacred Disease*, VI 397.

Euripides does not refer to it. The former purpose, however, is of considerable interest even now and, as I hope to show, can be seen as one of the major sources for Euripides' *Herakles*.

## TABLE

### The Gist of the Argument in the Hippocratic essay on "*The sacred Disease*"

#### Chapter

- 1 The disease is not sacred any more than other diseases, though, of course, all diseases are, in a sense, sacred. Even normal people go through odd phases.
- 2 The disease is attributed to the gods by quacks hiding their ignorance behind a plausible story. They use pointless treatment. If the patient gets better they score; if he gets worse they have an excuse. In fact, if any treatment worked, that would prove that the illness could not be divine. It would mean men are stronger than gods.
- 3 If physical means can cure disease then physical means can also bring it on. These people talk piously, but, in fact, are guilty of blasphemy as they imply that gods do not exist, or are guilty of immoral behaviour.
- 4 If, by magic or other means, you can bring the moon down or cause disease then these things cannot be divine, or else the gods are inferior to men. But, in fact, it is ignorance and self-seeking which causes belief in a divine origin. The names of the responsible gods are usually deduced from the symptoms shown. The quacks purify the patient with blood as if he were polluted and blood-guilty. Instead, they should bring such a sufferer to the sanctuary and make supplication. But they go on purifying and throwing away objects of contact instead of dedicating them to the god. A man's body cannot be defiled by a god who ought to be holy. He is more likely to purify than to defile. It is the godhead which purifies.
- 5 Epilepsy is a natural disease, curable and based on heredity.
- 6 The cause lies in the brain which is fed by veins.
- 7 These veins carry air.
- 8-15 Theory of phlegm and explanation of symptoms.
- 16 Influence of winds.

- 17 The brain is the seat of emotions, of the sense of beauty and goodness, of intellect. Madness moistens the brain.
- 18 Occasionally excess of bile can be the cause of epilepsy (or other forms of madness?).
- 19-20 Summary: The brain is the seat of consciousness, the diaphragm has nothing to do with it, neither has the heart.
- 21 Epilepsy is divine only in so far as it is influenced by winds, etc. It is like any other disease and cure is possible.

### EURIPIDES AND SOPHOKLES

Many commentators have referred to the *Trachiniai* in the past, when discussing the *Herakles*. This is not surprising as both plays have Herakles as their main hero. Most critics point out that the plays are very different, the characters utterly dissimilar, the attitude to the gods, the recounting of the labours and the general message have little to do with each other. I shall not discuss this further here.

What is much more surprising is that these commentators have made so little of the contrast with the *Ajax*. They either fail to refer to Sophokles' play altogether when discussing the *Herakles* or they content themselves with pointing out some of the many points of resemblance. In most cases these are superficial.

Only Barlow<sup>25</sup> and Webster<sup>26</sup> take the trouble to compare the two plays in any connected fashion. A more searching analysis will be given on page 65.

Yet the resemblances are striking. In both plays a previously great and sane hero is driven mad by an intervention of gods and commits senseless slaughter. On waking he is unaware of what has happened. When told, he becomes full of chagrin and contemplates suicide. His friends try to talk him out of it. Both heroes rail against the gods who have treated them so shamefully.

The differences, however, are much more significant. *Ajax* has shown *hybris*<sup>27</sup> before his attack. His punishment, therefore, is merited. This is Sophokles' solution to the religious problem of the *Ajax*. Herakles has never put a foot wrong. We must

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<sup>25</sup> Barlow (1981) *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Webster (1967) 188ff.

<sup>27</sup> As defined on p.42, n.15.

conclude either that the gods are immoral or that his illness was not caused by them, contrary to the mythological tradition.

Ajax does not undergo an epileptic fit, yet his violence is as unmotivated as that of Herakles.

Ajax continues in his violent attitude to his enemies after the attack, Herakles does not.

Ajax rejects any friendly advances by Tekmessa and the chorus, Herakles appreciates the friendship of Theseus.

Ajax is driven to suicide by fear of shame. Herakles has a much more composite view of the situation.

Both characters at first see suicide as the only possible solution worthy of a hero. Ajax pretends for a while to be thinking about it, but never really wavers from his course. Herakles considers the arguments of his friend and reverses his decision.

Thus the two plays are remarkably similar, but differ in the interpretation of the cause of the madness and the morality of the gods and also differ in their ideas of how to handle the problem.

The exact date of writing of either play is unknown. The *Ajax* is generally believed to have been written about 450,<sup>28</sup> the *Herakles* possibly as early as 425.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore very likely that Euripides knew the *Ajax* well.

## OVERVIEW

In the next three sections I shall endeavour to prove the following points:

1. The *Herakles* is written at two levels. The simple minded and credulous can take all that happens on the stage at face value. They are then able to enjoy a series of three pleasant, and often exciting, melodramas. They can be relied on not to worry about the inconsistencies and irrelevancies.

The more thoughtful members of the audience will notice these inconsistencies and by thinking about them will be led to the much deeper real meaning of the play.

2. As long as during an attempt to understand the *Herakles* we persist in believing that epilepsy is a "sacred" disease we are led into a whole series of absurdities and,

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<sup>28</sup> Stanford (1963) 294-296.

<sup>29</sup> Parmentier (1965) 12.

even worse, into serious impiety. (Compare Hippokrates and the problems of the theodicy school.) This is Euripides' method of *reductio ad absurdum*: he puts the goddesses on stage as if we were to believe in them, only to show that this view is untenable.

3. As long as we measure the hero's culpability by the standards of Homeric heroic *arete* we are virtually condemning him to suicide. (Compare Sophokles' *Ajax* and the findings of the *arete* school.) The true *arete* consists in accepting the illness and carrying on one's duties in spite of it.

4. As long as we believe that *philia* consists of being sorry for the sufferer and his family and jollying them along we shall not do any good. True *philia* consists in treating the sufferer as a normal and worthy human being. (Compare the *philia* school and my remarks in the psychiatric section under management.)

When seen in this light the first part of the *Herakles* is a very necessary section of the play, showing that between attacks the sufferer is perfectly normal, his crime completely unmotivated.

The second part is mainly a description of epilepsy and particularly the temporal lobe variety. It introduces the gods as a superficial explanation only to show that this is untenable.

The third part deals with the management. Society (Amphitryon and the chorus) condemn Herakles, though they are sorry for him and the hero himself takes the same attitude; but Theseus teaches all of them that this is the wrong approach.

The play will then be seen to have a strong unity. There are no irrelevancies or unnecessary parts. Every passage, including the choral lyrics, fulfils a vital role in building up the whole and the final message is a much needed and optimistic one.

Finally, I should like to point out the incredible skill of Euripides. A modern playwright proposing these views, as well he might even today, would use a very different format, untrammled by the rigid conventions of Greek Tragedy. Euripides managed to do it within the strict limits of these same conventions.

## THE FIRST MELODRAMA (1-814)

The superficial plot is the unwarranted persecution of Herakles' innocent family by the villain Lykos, in spite of their taking refuge at the god's altar.

### Scenelet 1 (1-59): Amphitryon - the prologue

As usual in a Greek prologue Amphitryon explains how the family came to be in their present predicament. He introduces himself, Megara and the children and Lykos. Significantly though, he also introduces Herakles (13-25). This passage seems dragged in and quite irrelevant to the plot. Straightaway Herakles is described as an excellent son and an altruistic hero determined to rid the world of evil. To make this point Euripides has deliberately altered the standard myth. Herakles' troubles have been brought on by Hera or Tyche, who knows? This is the beginning of the ambivalent attitude to the gods. Now the family are suppliants at the altar.

### Scenelet 2 (60-86): Megara

The young woman bewails her fate. She used to have wealth and power, but no more. We note the introduction of the theme of the mutability of wealth, strength and power as pointed out by the *philia* school. Then she, too, talks irrelevantly about Herakles and draws a charming picture of the delightful relationship between father and children and the utter confidence they have in him.

### Scenelet 3 (87-106): Megara, Amphitryon

A short scene. Their plight is emphasised to get the melodrama going. Their hope is still vested in Herakles' strength. These characters, though this is not yet apparent, will only be minor ones.

### Scenelet 4 (107-139): Chorus - the parodos

This is the first of several passages in which the chorus stress their helpless old age. The theme seems overdone until one realises that this sets the mood for the utter helplessness of the bystander in epilepsy, whether it be brought on by gods or by natural causes. This chorus is a particularly ineffectual one. But even here one cannot get away from Herakles. His sons look like him and promise to become three noble champions like their father. Already the chorus put their faith in the Homeric *arete* of their king. Although the melodrama purports to be about the family's troubles we have learned a lot about Herakles. His friends think he is marvellous. What about his enemies?



Scenelet 5 (140-251): Lykos, Amphitryon (Megara silent) - the first agon

Lykos shows himself to be an out and out immoral villain. He has none of the saving graces of the other Euripidean villains, such as the reasonableness of the Menelaos of the *Troades* or the *Orestes*, the charm of Odysseus of the *Hekabe* or the helpless compulsion of Polyneikes of the *Phoinissai*. Euripides does not wish to focus the audience's attention on him. He will turn out to be of little importance in the drama. This is a formal agon. According to the plot it ought to be about the rightness or wrongness of Lykos' actions. It is not. The whole discussion is about Herakles. Lykos attacks his reputation, Amphitryon defends it. Bond<sup>30</sup> suggests that it is neither good drama, nor good rhetoric. He further remarks, correctly, that there is no hint of the coming madness here. Therein lies the clue to this scenelet. The important facts are the ones which are not said. Lykos' attack, quite ridiculously, is not on Herakles' *hybris* or emotional instability, but on his cowardice. Who could believe this, particularly when coming from such an offensive character as Lykos?

Euripides was up against a problem here. The audience knew all about Herakles. In standard mythology he is certainly an inveterate killer and a man of unrestrained temper, amounting to what, at times, almost verges on madness. This aspect was greatly stressed by Sophokles in his *Trachiniai*.<sup>31</sup> This being so, the audience might easily be tempted to accept the coming murder lightly: "He was always a killer, he is very hot-tempered, he has been mad before." But this is exactly what Euripides does not want the audience to think. The murder must be completely unmotivated and there must be no sign of *hybris*. Even the unscrupulous Lykos cannot accuse Herakles of *hybris* or madness, only the ridiculous cowardice, and he prepares the ground for Amphitryon's rebuttal in which he points out that all the previous killings were done for the benefit of mankind and not through any shortcomings in the hero's character.

This same scenelet also contains a lengthy discussion on the relative merits of the archer and the spearman. As many critics have pointed out this was a rhetorical *topos* in contemporary Athens. But there is more to it in this passage. It refers back to Sophokles' *Ajax* where the same point is made, though much more briefly.<sup>32</sup> It is

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<sup>30</sup> Bond (1981) 102.

<sup>31</sup> There is argument whether that play or the *Herakles* were written earlier.

<sup>32</sup> Sophokles *Ajax* 1120-21.

important to appreciate the difference. Ajax had *been* guilty of *hybris* and an ungovernable temper before his madness; Herakles, according to Euripides, did not. Furthermore the bow, as a symbol of Herakles' *arete*, will crop up again and again.<sup>33</sup>

The scene ends with Amphitryon blaming Thebes and the whole of Hellas for lacking *philia* and Lykos ordering the suppliants to be smoked out and threatening the chorus.

Scenelet 6 (252-347): Megara, Amphitryon, Chorus

The melodrama continues. The chorus again states its helplessness; Megara is being heroic; Amphitryon bravely, but stupidly, offers his own life. At the end he again stresses the guilt of Zeus: The god must either be ignorant or else lack a sense of right and wrong (see theodicy).

Scenelet 7 (348-450): Chorus - the first stasimon

Many commentators point out that this is an *embolimon*, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the plot. It completely ignores the plight of the suppliants, but sings of Herakles and his mighty labours, a sure sign that the melodrama is unimportant; we are concerned with the hero. Eleven or twelve labours are mentioned.<sup>34</sup> But these correspond neither in order nor in content completely with the standard set.<sup>35</sup> The standard canon of labours was not yet fixed in the late 5th century.<sup>36</sup> The table shows the difference between the standard canon and what is mentioned in the *Herakles*, mostly in the first stasimon, but also what Amphitryon mentioned earlier and what Herakles himself will mention later.

## TABLE

### THE EXPLOITS OF HERAKLES

| 1. <u>Exploits mentioned both in the Canon and the <i>Herakles</i>.</u> | 2. <u>Exploits mentioned in the <i>Herakles</i>, but not in the Canon, or not as separate labours.</u> |
|---|--|
| Nemean Lion   | Battle of Amazons  |
| Hydra   | Kyknos   |
| Hercynian Stag  | Clearing of Seas   |
| Mares of Diomedea   | Gigantomachy   |
| Girdle of Hippolyta   |  |

<sup>33</sup> See p.66.

<sup>34</sup> Depending on whether you count the clearing of the seas as a labour.

<sup>35</sup> In Hellenistic times a standard Canon of the labours of Herakles evolved. I am here using the account of Morford (1971) 358-367.

<sup>36</sup> There are 12 labours depicted at Olympia, 9 on the Hephaeston and 10 at the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi.

Cattle of Geryon  
Apples of Hesperides  
Kerberos

Kentaurs  
Minyans

3. Exploits mentioned in the Canon, but not the *Herakles*.

Erymanthean Boar  
Augean Stables  
Stymphalic Birds  
Cretan Bull

4. Exploits mentioned elsewhere,<sup>37</sup> but not in the *Herakles*.

Kerkopes  
Loss of Hylas through neglect  
War on Neleus for revenge  
War on Augeas for revenge  
War on Laomedon for revenge  
Killing of Eurytos and Iphitos in hot temper and for revenge  
Nereus, an act of *hybris*  
Carrying off tripod of Delphi, in *hybris*  
Omphale, madness as punishment for killing Iphitos  
Killing Linos in hot temper  
Killing Chiron through neglect and in hot temper  
Killing Nessos, an exaggerated punishment for a minor offence

Euripides was free to choose which adventures to include, out of the many exploits current in mythology. Can we perceive any criteria on which the decision to include or exclude was based? The answer is an emphatic "yes"! A brief study of the table will show that in all the exploits mentioned Herakles had used violence only in the service of mankind. The victims were monsters or evil-doers.<sup>38</sup> In sharp contrast, most of the exploits left out are the ones which depict Herakles as meting out undeserved or excessive punishment, out of personal spite, or show him as a hot tempered person, or even mad.

<sup>37</sup> Particularly the *Trachiniai*; this is probably not coincidence. I am indebted to Dr M. Scott for pointing out at a meeting how Sophokles, too, selected Herakles' exploits for the purposes of his drama.

<sup>38</sup> There are four apparent exceptions: The Herkynian Stag is mentioned in the Canon as a beautiful and harmless hind. Euripides is at pains to show that it was a plunderer of farmers' fields (376). In the same way he makes sure that the Kentauroi are called ἄγριοι (wild, uncouth). The Hesperides, guarding the apples were harmless; so Euripides makes Herakles kill a guarding dragon, Ladon, in contrast to the better known myth where he gets Atlas to obtain the apples and then cheats him. The Girdle of Hippolyta and the fight with the Amazons seems like an unprovoked assault on innocent people. But we must remember that to 5th cent. Athenians the Amazons were dangerous barbarians against whom the valiant Athenians under Theseus had to fight for their lives, as represented on the shield of Athena Parthenos.

The whole amounts to a complete white-washing of Herakles' character to counteract any preconceived notions the audience was likely to have had about the hero's hot temper and previous attacks of madness. Whatever they might have thought before, Euripides' Herakles has never been guilty of either violence or *hybris*. In order to accomplish this Euripides even had to reverse the whole chronology. The first stasimon fulfils a vital function in the tragedy.

Scenelet 8 (415-513): Megara, Amphitryon

Megara draws another charming domestic scene of Herakles playing with his children.<sup>39</sup> We get the point of his unalloyed affection and gentle nature. Megara ends with a last invocation of her husband. Amphitryon tells her just how hopeless this is and has a last complaint about Zeus' ingratitude and the fickleness of fortune (see theodicy and *philia*). So they go to their doom. And this, of course, is the moment for Herakles to appear to confound all expectations and reinstate the morality of the gods. So far we have heard about him from others, now we shall be able to observe him ourselves.

Scenelet 9 (514-636): Herakles, Megara, Amphitryon

The hero enters without drama.<sup>40</sup> As Lesky<sup>41</sup> points out he greets the house in the manner of the hero of New Comedy. Amphitryon, and particularly Megara, bubble over in their keenness to tell him what has been happening. Herakles takes it all very calmly at first. He asks searching questions and makes quite sure he knows all the relevant facts before he comes to a decision. There is no trace here of the impulsive hero of mythology, no innate violence. When he decides to kill Lykos it is as if he took on another necessary labour as he points out himself. For a short while he shows that he is not a cold fish but has human feelings: He proposes to murder the fickle Thebans, who have not kept up the *philia*, as well as the villain. But he listens attentively to Amphitryon's advice against such a course and no more is heard of it. He is obviously a man well able to keep his temper in check. He will sacrifice to the gods, as is proper (his basic piety), and then proceed with the task in hand.

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<sup>39</sup> The fact that in his playing he presented them with the very weapons with which he will kill them later is a clever conceit, but is not really necessary for the purpose.

<sup>40</sup> This, as Grummond (1983) points out, is significant.

<sup>41</sup> Lesky (1983) 276.

There follows a short, and somewhat puzzling, exchange between father and son about the adventures in Hades and the fate of Kerberos. Why did Euripides put this in here? Various suggestions have been made.<sup>42</sup> The theme of Kerberos and Eurystheus runs through the play. It was hinted at by Amphitryon earlier on, it is discussed here. It will reappear in the mad scene and again right at the end when Herakles takes up the reins of life again. My explanation for these passages is that they are symbolic for Herakles' sense of duty. However difficult and unpleasant, the trip to Hades is something he has undertaken and which he will see through to the end. This will be brought out particularly in the last scene (page 64).

There follows another charming, domestic and very Euripidean passage. Herakles, with gentle humour and deep understanding, soothes the fears of his children and the trembling of his wife. "Like all men" he says "I love children" (632-633). Here we have the final proof that he is a gentle man, who cannot possibly ever want to hurt his children.

Scenelet 10 (637-700): Chorus - the second stasimon

This is a joyful hymn: Youth is splendid, old age horrid. I shall sing the praises of young and heroic Herakles. Even though too old to act, yet I can still sing in honour of the hero. This stasimon has caused the critics many problems. Parry sees it as a straight-forward, traditional encomium.<sup>43</sup> In his opinion it is a conventional piece of writing and no further meaning should be sought in it.

Dale<sup>44</sup> calls it a *hyporchema*, that is a lyric in which dancing plays the major role, and correctly compares the setting of this stasimon with one in the *Ajax*. In both plays this lyric comes at a time when previous problems appear to be dying down and the new ones have not yet appeared.

To the *philia* school the stasimon is of great significance. Herakles is the universal good friend on whom his followers rely and he is about to be taken from them.

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<sup>42</sup> For instance: It is to introduce Theseus, preparing for his later appearance, Lesky (1983) 277; Kitto (1961) 244; Others have pointed out that the Herakles - Hades - Kerberos myth is one of the widespread death and resurrection myths and therefore important. I grant the premise, but doubt whether Euripides saw it like this and even if he did, how does it fit into the play?

<sup>43</sup> Parry (1965) *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Dale, A. M. *Lyr.Metres* 210, Coll. Papers 34ff.

To the *arete* school it is also relevant. Herakles and the chorus rely on his youth and strength and this is about to be shown to be ephemeral.

The theodicy school can also discern some relevance in it. In spite of the opportune arrival of the saviour seeming to justify the gods, the chorus again voices doubts about the reliability of divine intentions.

Yet other critics see in these lines an autobiographical purpose. Euripides, the aged poet, deplores his age but consoles himself with the fact that he can still sing.

In the context of the first part of the play, the building up of the figure of Herakles, this is like a summary. Herakles is a valuable member of society, everyone's friend, gentle, reliable and the recipient of universal praise and appreciation. It will not last.

#### Scenelet 11 (701-734): Amphitryon, Lykos

This is an excellent piece of dramatic irony. Amphitryon, the chorus and the audience alike know what is about to happen (or think they do). Lykos is quite unaware of what is in store for him and continues on his wicked and ungodly way. Thus he is enticed into the trap.

#### **Summary of the First Melodrama**

For the simple minded there has been a stock melodrama, quite satisfying if one does not look for too much. This has now almost reached its end. All that is left is to see Lykos being punished for his villainy.

From the theodicy point of view the doubt about the morality of the gods seems to have been resolved. A moral Zeus reigns supreme (though the chorus still seem to have some reservations).

Herakles' *philia* and *arete* have been brought to perfection and seem a reliable bulwark against trouble.

Herakles' character has been depicted in great detail. Contrary to our previous idea of him, derived from mythology, as an impulsive and self centred killer, we now see him as a very sober, level-headed and kindly man, fully in control of his temper and killing only when morality demands it. He is full of love and concern for his family and quite obviously incapable of doing them any harm.

All these themes have come to an apparently final resting point. What could possibly go wrong?



Scenelet 12a (735-814): Chorus - interlude, some call it stasimon 3

The chorus finishes this section with a hymn of joy pinpointing all the points I made in the summary. Wickedness leads to ruin. The gods take care of man. The law-breaker rides for a fall. Young and moral Herakles triumphs. He is indeed the son of Zeus. He is fit to rule. The gods favour a just cause.

Quite incidentally, Lykos dies (half a line).

### THE SECOND MELODRAMA (815 - 1152)

The superficial plot of this is the problem of the great hero struck mad by the gods. This is the part which so strongly resembles Sophokles' *Ajax*.

Scenelet 12b (815-821): Chorus

The chorus continues to sing, but what a dramatic change! The mode of the music no doubt changed, the metre certainly does from aeolic to iambic, and the whole atmosphere changes from ecstatic joy to abject terror. In the whole of Greek literature there can surely have been few reversals as dramatic as this. Lyssa, the spirit of madness, and Iris, the mouthpiece of Hera, appear and the chorus is terrified.

Scenelet 13 (822-874): Iris, Lyssa

In one brief scene all the happy, stable state we have reached is shattered. Iris, acting on Hera's orders, commands Lyssa to strike Herakles with madness so that he will kill his wife and children. Lyssa demurs for a while. "The sun is my witness that I act against my will (858)", but agrees to comply in view of the implacable will of Hera. She will use epilepsy for the purpose. Euripides has put his cards on the table. What price the gods now? And of what use will Herakles' *arete* and *philia* be now?

To the thinking man a clear message emerges: If you believe that epilepsy is sent by the gods then you must give up any belief in their morality. If Herakles is going to be tainted by his involuntary act then you must give up all faith in *arete* and *philia*. Now we can begin to see what the play is really about, and this will be amply confirmed as the play goes on. Sophokles, in his *Ajax*, gave himself a way out of the dilemma. His hero had been guilty of *hybris* before, so that the gods could be said to be punishing him justly. Euripides has been at great pains to show that there had been no *hybris*. Either the gods are unjust or they do not cause epilepsy. This is the very message of Hippokrates (see page 47).

Scenelet 14 (875-909): Chorus (some editors divide the lines between Amphitryon and chorus)

This is another astrophic lyric. It excellently describes the violent emotions engendered in those witnessing a fit. The chorus' mood ranges between unhappiness (875-95), horror (880-5), pity (885-90), excitement (891-5), fear (895-900) and disbelief (900-9).

In the last section there is reference to a whirlwind and many critics have taken this literally. Bond<sup>45</sup> goes even further and postulates an earthquake, basing his theory mainly on the fact that later on the roof is said to have collapsed, which Herakles could not have caused himself.

This is the dividing line between the superficial and the second level approach. If we take Iris, Lyssa, the storm and the quake literally, then the implication of the gods is proved and the conclusion must inevitably be that the gods are unjust. If we take them allegorically the problem disappears. We shall find exactly the same forced choice in the *Bakchai*: if we accept the earthquake, the stranger is a god and Pentheus guilty of *hybris*; if we read it allegorically the problem of the rightness of religion remains to be discussed further.<sup>46</sup>

Scenelet 15 (910-1015): Messenger - the epileptic fit

This scenelet should be taken together with the end of scenelet 13. In the latter Lyssa describes what is about to happen, in the former the messenger tells what has happened. Between them they describe the epileptic fit. This constitutes not only a very dramatic scene, but a remarkably accurate clinical description as well.<sup>47</sup> If we compare it with the clinical features described in the psychiatric section we see that Euripides describes the following:

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<sup>45</sup> Bond (1981) 303.

<sup>46</sup> We also have these choices in the *Bible*: Compare the story of Samson pulling down the temple of Dagon (*Judges* 16, 23-30) and the three - hour darkness, earthquake and rending of the temple curtain at the death of Christ (*Matthew* 27 45-54). In both these accounts pious people still maintain the literal truth of these events. Others take it as dramatic embroidery of a highly emotional scene. Note, also, that in John's parallel account (*John* 19, 31-34) darkness and quake are not mentioned, just as in the messenger's account of Herakles' seizure neither storm nor quake are referred to. Surely, an otherwise accurate eyewitness could not have failed to comment on so dramatic an event.

<sup>47</sup> Blaiklock (1945) 48-63 recognised that this part was a good description of epilepsy, but his clinical knowledge of the condition was not adequate to realise just how good a description it is, nor did he understand how closely the rest of the tragedy is connected with epilepsy.



Grand Mal

|                       |                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| The aura              | Tonic Phase       |
| Adversion             | Clonic Phase      |
| Loss of consciousness | Fall              |
| Foaming at the mouth  | Coma              |
| Cry                   | Sleep             |
|                       | Postictal Amnesia |

Incontinence would have been difficult to portray on the stage. Hippokrates mentions the same phenomena, but leaves out fall, coma and sleep.

Petit Mal: This is again well described by Euripides (929-931). Typical is the loss of consciousness with staring eyes whilst posture is maintained. Hippokrates does not mention this.

Psychomotor fit: The acoustic aura is left out, but the rage and the symptoms resembling other psychiatric states which can occur in temporal lobe epilepsy form a large part of Euripides' description. Herakles' delusion in believing he is driving a chariot and wrestling with an imaginary enemy (953-962) are well observed schizophrenia-like symptoms, whilst his mistaking his father and friends for Eurystheus' family and expecting them to murder him (967-971) are paranoid features. Hippokrates mentions such states, but possibly in a different context and not as vividly or in such detail.

### Final comment on Scenelet 15

The messenger describes Athene as appearing and heaving a rock at Herakles, thereby causing the coma. Are we to take this literally? The problem is the same as we have already discussed in connection with Lyssa, Iris and the earthquake. It is here compounded by a difficulty in translation. The word εἰκών can be read as either statue or phantom. Lines 1001-2 may therefore be translated as either: "but there came, and she appeared like a statue to behold, Pallas"<sup>48</sup> or: "but a phantom came; it seemed to us like Pallas".<sup>49</sup> The exact reading makes a huge difference to the interpretation of the play and I should unhesitatingly adopt the latter version. It may

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<sup>48</sup> Bond (1981), 319.

<sup>49</sup> Arrowsmith (1956), 96.

be that Euripides was being deliberately ambiguous in order to keep up his writing at two levels.

Scenelet 16 (1016-1088): Chorus, Amphitryon

This short but very important scenelet introduces society's attitude to epilepsy. Herakles is in deep coma, bound hand and foot. The chorus (i.e. society) and Amphitryon (i.e. family) have a fourfold attitude towards him. Firstly fear: they have bound him; they walk on tiptoes lest they should wake him; they are ready to run away if he should wake, being quite sure that he will exhibit further violence if he does so. Secondly inability to understand: they go through their stock of myths to find comparable cases to help them understand what has happened. They come up with the Danaids and Procne, which are really quite different stories. That is, they have no way of understanding. Thirdly pity: they are sorry for their friend Herakles, but even more so for his poor disgraced father. Fourthly: and most importantly, neither the chorus nor Amphitryon have any doubt whatsoever that Herakles is disgraced and will have to pay the penalty. "The shed blood will rise up against him" (1052). Thus society and the family may still love the epileptic but he is, from now onwards, an outcast.

Scenelet 17 (1089-1162): Herakles, Amphitryon, Chorus

Herakles wakes: at first we get a description of the final phases of the fit: the sleep, waking, postictal twilight state and complete amnesia. Quite obviously the sufferer is no longer violent. Nonetheless his father and the chorus approach him very warily. There is very humanly an inane and lengthy passage informing the hero of what has happened. Amphitryon is too scared to tell outright and Herakles too confused to work it out for himself. Between them they take a long time to get to the point, which the audience knows perfectly well already. At last Herakles knows what has happened and his reaction is the same as that of society: he is guilty, disgraced and will rightly be shunned by society for ever. Suicide is the only decent way left for him as a hero and he unhesitatingly begins to consider the possible means: leaping from a cliff? sword? burning? We note here again the similarity to the *Ajax* whose hero is in a similar predicament and reacts in exactly the same way.

### Summary of the Second Melodrama

The simple minded have watched another melodrama, that of a good man hounded by the gods. For the more thoughtful the question of the morality of the gods is again very much in the melting pot. Herakles is shown up as an epileptic and murderer, condemned alike by society, family and himself. Sophokles' solution must seem the only possible correct one. Only suicide can atone for the guilt and the disgrace.

What has happened to Herakles' *arete*? Where is our great *philia* for him? Once again we have apparently reached an end point. There seems to be no purpose in discussing the problem any further. But Euripides provides his audience with yet another astounding reversal.

### THE THIRD MELODRAMA (1063 - 1428)

The surface plot is a discussion of the morality of suicide, a topic much in Euripides' mind.<sup>50</sup>

Scenelet 18 (1063-1228): Theseus, Amphitryon, (Herakles silent)

Theseus appears. Herakles covers his head in shame and remains dumb. Amphitryon explains what has happened. Nothing new is conveyed to the audience but the attitude of the three actors is most significant: Amphitryon is very sorry, but quite convinced that his son is defiled: (αἶμα τλάς 1184). Herakles is equally convinced of his guilt, hides his head and refuses to speak. He waves away his friend (1218). He knows he is rejected by society and rejects society in turn.

Theseus is sorry for both but neither by word nor by deed does he suggest that there is either guilt or defilement. If anybody is to blame it must be Hera. Friendship is above thoughts of blame or rejection.

Amphitryon makes a pathetic attempt to dissuade his son from suicide, basing his argument on personal appeal and the thought that suicide is wrong in the eyes of the gods. This fails. One notices the strong resemblance to Tekmessa's argument in Sophokles' *Ajax* in this.

Now Theseus takes over the attempt and his approach is quite different. The gist of it is: "I do not regard you as defiled. Friendship is greater than this. Unwrap

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<sup>50</sup> See p.20.

your head and look at me. A noble heart faces misfortune bravely!" He personally removes the concealing cloak.

Scenelet 19 (1229-1346): Herakles, Theseus (Amphitryon silent) - the second agon

First there are 25 lines of stichomythia (1228-1254), then a formal agon with a long speech by Herakles (1255-1310) urging the reasons for suicide; then a reply by Theseus (1313-1339) giving reasons against. Finally there is a short, but very significant, rebuttal by Herakles (1340-1346).

There are several significant passages in the stichomythia. Herakles insists that he is defiled. He wallows in his misery and rejects society and the gods (ἄυθάδης ὁ θεός, πρὸς δε τοὺς θεοὺς ἐγώ 1243). He even tries to reject Theseus (1249). Theseus repeats his offer of friendship, warns Herakles against impiety (compare *Ajax* and *Hippokrates*) and reminds the sufferer that he is still a hero and ought to act accordingly.

Herakles' points in his agon speech are these:

1. He has always been a plaything of the gods; (impiety).
2. All his great deeds count for nothing; (*arete* is useless).
3. Where could he live? Not here in Thebes; not in Argos; anywhere people would whisper and point at him behind his back; (loss of *philia*).
4. Earth and Sea themselves will reject him; (rejection).
5. Hera has won. Here we come to the first climax of the theodicy theme: "Who would pray to such a god?" (1307-1308). The cynical condemnation of the gods, of *philia* and *arete* is complete.

Herakles is in a deep depression,<sup>51</sup> an excellent account of the epileptic's troubles caused by the prevalent attitude of society?

Theseus' reply is equally significant:

1. All men have troubles, but a good man faces them bravely.
2. If you insist on regarding yourself as a prey of the gods, forget them. They are a rather rotten bunch themselves with their fornication and parricide.
3. Come to Athens! I shall purify you (compare *Hippokrates*) and I shall see to your everyday needs.
4. Not only I, but all the citizens of Athens will revere you as a hero.

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<sup>51</sup> Depression will be described in the *Hekabe*.

5. You have been great and you are still great.

This is the proper way to treat an epileptic.

Herakles' rebuttal marks the beginning of the change in his attitude. His first step in getting out of his depression is a renewal of his faith in the gods. This is the famous passage (1345-1346): "I do not believe in the immorality of the gods. These are but the wretched tales of poets." The gods remain vindicated, if we do not accept that they impose epilepsy. It is not a sacred disease.

This passage has much exercised the critics. Some have, like myself, seen it as a reaffirmation of faith. Others have seen it as the final rejection of all religion: all the stories of gods and myths are just nonsense. There are no gods.

Many have taken this passage as an expression of Euripides' own complete lack of faith. Yet others have pointed out that Herakles thereby undermines not only the gods but his own existence as a mythological hero.

Indeed, such a view is logically inescapable, if we believe, with most members of the theodicy school, that the whole play is about the morality of the gods. But if, with Hippokrates, we restrict the problem to epilepsy all the pessimism and irrationality fall away. Gods exist and are moral. To blame them for causing epilepsy is just a wretched tale of poets (such as Sophokles).

Scenelet 20 (1347-1428): Herakles, Theseus - the new approach

Having regained his religious faith Herakles is now ready to adopt Theseus' enlightened approach and face life again: "Suicide would be the act of a coward; he who cannot face the blows of fate will also quail before a spear" (1349-50). He has lost his former *arete*, has even been reduced to tears (1355), but has found a new and better *arete*. He accepts Theseus' true *philia* (1351-52).

He now reverts to his former efficient ways, dealing with new and unfinished old problems. He makes provision for the burial of the dead. He makes what amends he can to his children. The symbolism of the bow will be discussed on page 66. Herakles must complete his unfinished duty to Eurystheus and take Kerberos to him (for Kerberos as a symbol of duty see page 56). He realises that in the eyes of the world he may pollute his friend (1399) but accepts Theseus' freely offered help.

There now occurs a brief passage the significance of which has puzzled commentators,<sup>52</sup> but which is now quite clear. Herakles, in his new-found wisdom, surpasses even his tutor Theseus. He wishes to embrace his father for the last time. Theseus is against this as it might bring back the depression. But Herakles knows that the depression has been fully exorcised and gently rebukes his friend for his lack of faith. He can now afford to act like any normal man.

And so he goes off to Athens and the play ends with a touching reminiscence of a former simile. When his children were frightened he took them under his protection like a great ship its companion barges (ἐφολκίδες). Now he will follow his friend Theseus in the same manner, secure in his great *philia*.

### SOME REMAINING COMMENTS

#### A partial comparison of the *Herakles* and the *Ajax*

The two plays are extraordinarily similar. In each the hero, during a fit of madness, has committed a crime. He is now rejected by society and family alike. He regards himself as guilty and becomes very depressed. The description of depression is as accurate in the *Ajax* 333ff) as in the *Herakles*. Both are miserable, both have suicidal thoughts, both in their turn reject society and become paranoid. This is much more marked in the *Ajax* where the hero continually dreams and plots revenge against his tormentors. Both reject even their friends. This only takes the form of a mild reproof of Theseus in the *Herakles* (1249). In the *Ajax* the hero rejects Tekmessa quite brutally (369-370). Both have lost all religious faith and reject the gods. The remarkable resemblance between *Herakles* 1243: "The gods do not care for mankind and I do not care for them" and *Ajax* 589-590: "Do you not know that henceforth I owe no further duty to the gods?" is surely not accidental.

The resemblance is even more detailed. Both heroes consider fleeing to some other place and reject all possibilities. Bond<sup>53</sup> calls both sets aporetic questions (*Her* 1281-1296, *Ajax* 404-405). Both consider various ways of suicide (*Herakles* 1148-1150, *Ajax* 460-472).

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<sup>52</sup> Bond (1981) 417.

<sup>53</sup> Bond (1981) 386.

Their friends try to dissuade them from suicide by personal appeals to their love and pity. Tekmessa's appeal (485-524) is far more impassioned and heart rending than Amphytrion's half-hearted attempt (1203-1213). But both fail.

Surely the resemblance between the two plays is far too striking to be a coincidence. The great difference between them is that the *Ajax* contains no Theseus to shed a different light on the problem.

Sophokles' message is: Ajax had *hybris*, was punished by the gods, became tainted and must commit suicide; to yield to the entreaties of friends would be unheroic.

Euripides' message is: the epileptic is not morally guilty. The gods have nothing to do with the illness. As long as society regards the sufferer as tainted suicide is the only way out. But once the truth is known there is no call for such an act.

#### **The symbolism of the bow**

The symbolism of the bow, often discussed and usually misunderstood as being dragged in for rhetorical purposes,<sup>54</sup> now becomes clear. Herakles' bow had been his main weapon against the monsters, as the chorus pointed out. It was the very essence of his heroism, as Amphytrion tried to convince Lykos. He playfully bequeathed it to his sons, as Megara told us. He used it as the murder weapon on his family, as the messenger related. What shall he do with it now (1377-1385)? He must take it up again and continue. Note that Ajax first contemplated burying his sword, but finally used it against himself. In Athenian contemporary art, too, the bow is one of Herakles' ikonographic elements.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Did Euripides base his excellent account of epilepsy on personal experience or on descriptions by others?**

The question cannot be answered dogmatically, but I favour the latter view. My reason for this is twofold: his description is both too accurate and not accurate enough.

Too accurate: The average layman witnessing an epileptic fit becomes heavily emotionally involved (see scenelet 14) and generally loses the capacity for accurate observation. I have frequently encountered this when attempting to elicit a case history from family or bystanders. Only an experienced person, such as a doctor or

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<sup>54</sup> See p.52, the bowman-spearman argument.

<sup>55</sup> LIMC Vol 5.

senior nurse, can dissociate himself sufficiently from the drama to take accurate note. It is unlikely that Euripides would have been so experienced, but members of the Hippocratic school probably would have been.

As I pointed out before (page 45) murder is uncommon as a feature of epilepsy. Schizophrenic and paranoid features of florid type are also uncommon. Grand Mal, petit mal and psychomotor fits may occur together in the same patient, but this again is unusual. It would therefore be excessively rare for one patient to exhibit all these features together and it is statistically most unlikely that Euripides should have been the one to observe such a patient.

Not accurate enough: In spite of the overall accuracy of Euripides' description there are some wrong features:

- (a) Petit mal features do not occur as an aura to a grand mal attack.
- (b) Psychomotor features may be associated with a grand mal attack but occur either as an aura before the tonic-clonic stage or as a post-ictal twilight state, following the coma. In Euripides' account they are sandwiched in between the clonic stage and the fall and coma.
- (c) Respiration during and after the coma is deep and slow. Euripides describes it as hot and shallow (πνοὰς θερμὰς πνέω μετάρσι' 1092-1093).

It therefore seems likely that Euripides has conflated the clinical features of different kinds of epilepsy, observed in a number of different patients by men trained in such observations, such as the Hippocratic school.

#### **Epilepsy and madness**

It is possible that Euripides did not fully realise that the schizophrenic and paranoid features may be epileptic in nature but simply confused epilepsy with other forms of mental disease. The same may be said about the Hippocratic account in which the writer mentions such psychiatric phenomena, but in a context where it is difficult to decide whether he is still keeping to his subject of epilepsy or whether he is digressing into other forms of mental disease in order to push his phlegm and bile theory (page 46). In view of the rarity of such florid psychiatric manifestations in epilepsy it is probably more likely that both authors are confused about the relationship between fits and other psychiatric disorders.



## SUMMARY

The *Herakles*, like other plays of Euripides, can be read at two levels. The credulous and unthinking can see it as a series of three melodramas. First, the story of the wicked villain and the helpless suppliants rescued in the nick of time by the glorious hero. Secondly, the drama of the innocent hero smitten by the wrath of the gods. Thirdly, the fight to save the hero from suicide. The play is perfectly enjoyable at this level. But to enjoy it we must suspend our critical faculties and close our eyes to the absurdities and impiety which such a view entails and which Euripides does nothing to hide.

If we take theodicy, *philia* or *arete* as the main thread of the play we can see a much deeper message, but can still explain only parts of the play and have to conclude that there are many irrelevancies.

If we see the play as being about epilepsy and realise that Euripides is putting into dramatic form the same message that Hippokrates put into his book on the sacred disease then it emerges as a powerful work with a strong unity and optimistic conclusion. Every little piece, which on other suppositions seems irrelevant or contradictory falls into place and contributes to the overall effect.<sup>56</sup>

Epilepsy is not due to any moral defect in the sufferer. Nor can it be attributed to the gods without running into absurdity and impiety. The sufferer tends to be rejected by society and this causes great depression and may force him into suicide. The proper way to handle him is to regard him as a perfectly normal person, no different from what he was before his attack. Under this treatment the epileptic can regain his psychological balance and return to fulfil a useful role in society.

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<sup>56</sup> The Rope and Stopwatch, p.9.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE *HEKABE*

#### Classical

The *Hekabe* appears to have been popular in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays it is one of the more neglected plays of Euripides.<sup>2</sup> The assessment of its merit has varied widely from: "Une des plus belles pièces d'Euripide"<sup>3</sup> to: "It cannot be looked upon as a great play" and "not an interesting play".<sup>4</sup>

The main points of criticism have been these:

1. The play falls into two, almost disconnected, parts.
2. There is lack of a unitary theme running through it.
3. Hekabe's character in parts 1 and 2 is utterly different.
4. The choral odes, whilst beautiful, are quite disconnected from the plot.

#### The question of unity

Almost every critic has noticed the fact that the play consists of two distinct parts. Some have accepted it as a fault,<sup>5</sup> others have looked for unity in structural elements. In the prologue both Polyxena and Polydoros are mentioned, the girl reminds her mother of the yet living brother, the queen refers back to her sacrificed daughter in the second part.<sup>6</sup> Whilst this is undoubtedly true and can be seen as a clever device by Euripides it is not sufficient in itself to produce unity. Aristotle<sup>7</sup> specifically states that it is not sufficient for unity that unrelated events should happen to the same character and this is relevant because it reveals a near-contemporary expectation.

Yet other critics have thought that they could perceive a unitary message in the play as a whole, but the nature of this has varied widely. Thus Pohlenz<sup>8</sup> sees the play as an expression of νόμος, the traditional heroic attitude. It demanded reverence for

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<sup>1</sup> Bates (1961) 91; Méridor (1978) 28; Méridier (1973) 175; Arrowsmith, W. (1958).

<sup>2</sup> Bates (1961) 91; Hadley (1955) ix; Méridier (1973) 175.

<sup>3</sup> Croiset (1913) 318.

<sup>4</sup> Bates (1961) 91.

<sup>5</sup> Spranger (1925) *passim* believed that the play originated as two separate short plays and was then put together rather clumsily.

<sup>6</sup> Conacher (1967) 155; Lesky (1983) 247.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451a.

<sup>8</sup> Pohlenz (1954) 278 ff.

heroes; hence the Greeks had a moral right to kill Polyxena, but Polymestor had no such right. Hence the two parts. Similar ideas have been mooted later.<sup>9</sup>

Kitto<sup>10</sup> could find no real unity in the play but suggested that one idea tends to run through it: mankind brings suffering upon itself by its own folly and wickedness. War and political necessity are also strong motifs in the play.

Conacher,<sup>11</sup> after a lengthy polemic against previous points of view, comes to the conclusion that the main argument of the *Hekabe* is the use and misuse of rhetoric, so that the sophistic and rhetorical speeches are, in fact, a major and integral part of the play.

Other critics have stressed the community of suffering between Greeks and Trojans and maintain that this is the purpose of the play.<sup>12</sup> Lesky<sup>13</sup> regards χάρις as a strong permeating motif as it is in other Euripidean plays. Bates<sup>14</sup> can see no real unity but thinks that the function of the play is the arousal of pity on Aristotelian lines.<sup>15</sup>

Hadley's<sup>16</sup> opinion is that unity lies in "an objective impression on ourselves, an answering echo of the unity of conception in the poet's mind". I must leave the reader to decide what this phrase means. Some critics have gone even further afield in their search for a guiding thread.<sup>17</sup>

Another school of thought sees the unity in the character of Hekabe. Almost every critic has noted that she is on stage virtually throughout the play.<sup>18</sup>

Kitto<sup>19</sup> devotes a very long passage to arguing against this point of view. He lists 13 arguments. From these he concludes that Euripides is not trying to depict

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<sup>9</sup> Kirkwood (1947) *passim* saw the essence of the play as Hekabe's reaction to Odysseus' unfair use of νόμος. Méridor (1978) *passim* sees the play as the contrast between traditional moral values, where sacrifice of prisoners is acceptable, and modern ones, where all murder is condemned.

<sup>10</sup> Kitto (1961) 216.

<sup>11</sup> Conacher (1967) 155-165.

<sup>12</sup> Grube (1973) 214ff; Delebecque (1951) 151.

<sup>13</sup> Lesky (1983) 247.

<sup>14</sup> Bates (1961) 94.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b.

<sup>16</sup> Hadley (1955) x.

<sup>17</sup> Thus Pagani (1970) *passim* sees the play as an exaltation of the ἀρητή of women, thereby disproving any tendency towards misogyny on the part of Euripides. Tarkow (1984) *passim* would see the play as portraying the parent-children relationship. Pool (1979) *passim* sees the unity in regarding Hekabe as an earth-mother figure. Rosivach (1975) *passim* contends that the main message is that sexual abstinence, passivity and slavery are acceptable alternatives to death.

<sup>18</sup> Steidle (1966) *passim* was one of the earliest commentators to take up this attitude. Méridier (1973) 178, Grube (1973) 214, Bates (1961) 245 and Hadley (1955) x argue along similar lines.

character. As I shall, in the following discussion, very much range myself on the side of those who see Hekabe's character as the fundamental issue, I shall leave the reader to decide how much merit there is in Kitto's 13 points after he has read the rest of this essay.

Reckford<sup>20</sup> stresses Hekabe's deterioration into a purely negative attitude as much as I do here, but comes to the opposite conclusion: "Are these shapes of chaos only the projection of Hecuba's inner turmoil? I think not!"<sup>21</sup>. In my opinion this is typical of severe depression. But there is no fundamental disagreement between Reckford and myself. The description grips the audience because every man has encountered such gloomy thoughts within himself. Euripides chose a manic-depressive because she clearly brings out aspects of human behaviour which are normally carefully hidden.<sup>22</sup>

#### Change of character

For those who believe that Hekabe's character is of vital importance in the play the undoubted difference in her attitude between parts 1 and 2 needs explaining.

Kitto believes the character to be so badly drawn that nothing should surprise us. Webster<sup>23</sup> puts clearly what, I believe, most critics have felt: "Hekabe is the portrait of a mother driven mad by suffering". I have discussed the concept of "madness" on page 33. Other critics have made similar suggestions.<sup>24</sup>

Grube's<sup>25</sup> opinion comes closest to the one I shall defend in the following. According to him there is a definite break in Hekabe's character. He believes that this is shown by the fact that the sacrifice, unlike the murder, has a defensible moral basis (νόμος).

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<sup>19</sup> Kitto (1961) 217-220.

<sup>20</sup> Reckford (1985) 112-128.

<sup>21</sup> Reckford (1985) 124.

<sup>22</sup> Compare my discussion of why Euripides made Euadne into a schizophrenic (Chapter 7).

<sup>23</sup> Webster (1967) 123.

<sup>24</sup> Thus Hadley (1955) ix describes Hekabe as "a broken but indomitable heart". We note the emotional language avoided in modern psychiatry. Vellacott (1963) 205 attributes Hekabe's mental state in part 2 to "emotional exhaustion". This comes close in obscurity to the ever popular concept of a "nervous breakdown".

<sup>25</sup> Grube (1973) 82-84.

### Other characters

The other characters in the *Hekabe* have received much less criticism. Lesky regards Agamemnon as a beautifully drawn character.<sup>26</sup> Hadley<sup>27</sup> describes Polyxena as noble, Odysseus as plausible and likeable (in contrast to most other critics), Talthybios as tender and Polymestor as sombre but effective. On the whole, however, the critics have shown little interest in these characters.

### Choral Odes

Vellacott regards these as entirely separate from the plot.<sup>28</sup> He notes that in them the chorus ignores Hekabe's troubles and sings of their own; a fact already noted by Kitto. Hadley says that the choral odes are completely detached lyrics, as usual in Euripides (sic!), but are suggested by the plot and of exquisite beauty.<sup>29</sup>

## **Psychiatric**

### **Manic-Depressive Disease**

I shall tend to use this term rather than the more up-to-date "Bipolar Affective Disorder" as it is probably somewhat more familiar to a reader without special psychiatric qualifications.

Depression was known to Hippokrates under the name of melancholia<sup>30</sup> derived from μελάνη and χολή as it was believed to be caused by an excess of black bile.

Aretaeus of Cappadocia (fl. about 150 A.D.) was familiar with the fact that depression and mania can occur in the same patient.<sup>31</sup>

In modern times Falret and Baillarger first hinted at the disorder in the mid 19th century,<sup>32</sup> but it was not established as a clinical entity until the work of Kraepelin in 1896.<sup>33</sup> Since then there have been many changes.<sup>34</sup> Depression is now regarded as a

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<sup>26</sup> Lesky (1983) 245.

<sup>27</sup> Hadley (1955) xiv-xvi.

<sup>28</sup> Vellacott (1963) 208.

<sup>29</sup> Hadley (1955) xvi.

<sup>30</sup> Hippokrates *Aphorisms* Section 5 23.

<sup>31</sup> Aretaeus of Cappadocia Book 1, Chapter 5

<sup>32</sup> Falret & Baillarger quoted by Cohen, (1967) 676.

<sup>33</sup> Kraepelin (1921) (1st ed. 1896) *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> It may be worth while mentioning the once very popular idea of two separate diseases: reactive and endogenous depression; the former was believed to be due to a stressful life event, the latter occurred spontaneously. The distinction is no longer regarded as fundamental but Euripides appears to have thought along somewhat similar lines as will be brought out below.

symptom which can be due to a number of different causes. The modern classification is into primary and secondary depressions, the latter occurring in conjunction with a variety of different diseases.<sup>35</sup> In primary depression no such underlying physical cause can be found.<sup>36</sup> DSM III subdivides the primary depressions into Major Affective Disorders, again subdivided into Major Depression and Bipolar Affective Disorder, Other Specific Affective Disorders (Cyclothymic or Dysthymic) and Atypical Affective Disorders<sup>37</sup>. The character of Hekabe falls clearly into the group of Bipolar Affective Disorders and this will be the only one to be discussed in the following survey.

Bipolar Affective Disorder (manic-depressive disease) is mainly a disorder of mood. Other cerebral functions such as motor, sensory and intellectual remain relatively unimpaired, except in the most severe cases.<sup>38</sup> In depression the mood is generally reduced, in mania elevated. These two conditions tend to replace each other from time to time, usually at longish intervals but sometimes quite rapidly, with often more or less normal periods in between. In general, depressive phases tend to be more common than manic ones.

### Aetiology

The condition frequently follows emotional trauma, but at times such trauma is difficult to discern.<sup>39</sup> A familial basis is now well recognised.<sup>40</sup> Depression may be used by patients for manipulating others.<sup>41</sup>

In recent years biochemical factors have assumed a very large importance in the causation of the disorder, enhanced by the successful use of antidepressant drugs.<sup>42</sup> It would appear that manic-depressive disorder is accompanied by marked variations in hormonal balance, though no final conclusion has yet been reached about which are the most significant hormones.

<sup>35</sup> Rush, (1986), 13-15 gives a list of them.

<sup>36</sup> Which does not mean that it does not exist.

<sup>37</sup> DSM III (1980) 205.

<sup>38</sup> A psychosis is said to have arisen when the patient has lost contact with reality.

<sup>39</sup> The matter is discussed by Paykel (1983) 91-106.

<sup>40</sup> Allen (1984) 443.

<sup>41</sup> Allen (1984) 451.

<sup>42</sup> The matter is discussed by Schlessner (1986) 45- 71.

## Clinical features

In the following two sections I shall describe the main clinical features of Depression and Mania. The account will be based largely on DSM III but amplified by additions from other sources,<sup>43</sup> as the Manual tends to be somewhat terse and dry. Again we must remember that we are not judging Euripides' description according to a "true" standard but comparing his observations with those of reputable modern authorities.<sup>44</sup>

### Depression

*Mood*: unhappy(\*), hopeless(\*) but sometimes irritable (\*) and may shift to anxiety (\*) or anger(\*).

*Physical*: Appetite generally poor with loss of weight (?\*), though occasionally increased with gain of weight(-). Libido may be reduced(-). There are often a number of vague bodily complaints like weakness(\*) or joint pains(\*).

*Sleep*: Insomnia is common, particularly of the early waking variety(?\*), frightening dreams are common(\*).

*Psychomotor*: Agitated(\*) or more commonly retarded(\*). The patient cannot make up his mind(\*); finds it difficult to make decisions(\*); cannot concentrate (-); it may be difficult to gain the patient's attention(\*).

*Loss of interest and pleasure*: The patient may lose interest in matters which normally interest him(\*) and finds it difficult to experience pleasure (anhedonia)(\*). He tends to pick out all the unpleasant aspects of any situation(\*) or interpret them in a gloomy way(\*).

*Fatigue*: The patient tends to complain of constant tiredness and loss of energy(\*).

*Self assessment*: There are feelings of worthlessness(?\*), self reproach(\*) and excessive guilt(\*). Recurrent thoughts of death, suicide or attempted suicide are common and dangerous(\*).

*Thought*: The patient tends to think slowly, often in a restricted(\*) and repetitive(\*) way, but accuracy of thought remains unimpaired(\*) until the most severe stages.

*Speech*: Generally slow and monotonous(\*).

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<sup>43</sup> Trethowan & Sims (1983) 91-110; Cohen (1967) 668-670; Klerman (1978) 254-260; Allen (1984) 435-467.

<sup>44</sup> Compare p.32.

*Insight:* Generally impaired but some degree of insight may be retained(\*). The patient tends to regard himself as mentally perfectly normal and justified in his reactions.

### Mania

*Mood:* elevated, expansive(\*), sometimes irritable(\*).

*Speech:* Rapid(?\*), garrulous(\*), may be disjointed(\*).

*Thought:* Flight of ideas(\*), thoughts crowd each other so that often none can be finished(?\*).

*Insight:* Lacking(\*), excessive self-esteem(\*), grandiosity(\*), feelings of omnipotence(\*).

*Sleep:* Reduced need, overactivity may prevent sleep(-).

*Concentration:* Markedly distractible, attention often drawn to unimportant matters(?\*).

*Behaviour:* Erratic(\*), eccentric(\*), antisocial(\*), aggressive(\*), careless of consequences(\*).

*Libido:* Sometimes hypererotic (-).

*Final State:* Towards the end a state of delirious mania may occur (sometimes termed manic psychosis). The patient is totally out of contact(\*), speech is incoherent and may be unintelligible(\*), activity is violent and purposeless(\*), delusions are common at this stage(\*).

Note that, except for the last stages, intellect is preserved and hallucinations and illusions do not occur.

### **THE BEHAVIOUR OF HEKABE (DEPRESSED PHASE)**

(The words in square brackets refer to the symptoms of depression described on page 74.)

The prologue (1-58) as usual sets the scene and mentions in an almost detached, clinical way the enormous stresses which have befallen Hekabe or are about to do so. Euripides certainly emphasises the stress aspect, heaping calamity upon calamity. The superficial reading, which almost every critic has taken up, is that this will fully explain Hekabe's reactions. As we go on we shall see that Euripides makes it clear that stress alone cannot account for Hekabe's behaviour; there is something within her character which drives her on.

In the first scenelet (59-97) Hekabe comes on stage and is shown as being extremely weak and frail [physical]. This is stressed very forcefully. She needs people



to hold her arms in order to be able to walk. As she says dramatically: "λάβετε, φέρετε, πέμπετε, αείρετε" (64).<sup>45</sup> She says her joints are stiff and her feet slow, she needs a stick [physical]. Why so much stress on her infirmity? Hekabe, herself, describes it as being due to extreme old age and critics have believed this completely and assume that the references are intended to evoke sympathy from the audience. This may be so and Euripides has elsewhere emphasised the frailty of old age (Iolaos, Teireisias). But I find it interesting that all these references occur in the first (depressive) part. In the second (manic) part all signs of decrepitude have disappeared and Hekabe is active and vigorous. She mentions her age only for the conscious purpose of manipulating people (See under aetiology, page 73). She manages to kneel in supplication to Agamemnon and is able to get up again unaided; no mean feat for one so frail! The difference in the two parts is very striking and quite consonant with what happens in depression [fatigue].

She describes her insomnia and her vivid frightening dream (68-70) about Polyxena and Polydoros [sleep]. This dream is good drama from several points of view, quite apart from being a symptom of depression. Euripides is a playwright first and foremost, but his clinical observations serve him well in achieving his results.

In the next few lines Hekabe is fully awake but still filled with fears and pessimistic about the future. She foresees "new grief" (85-86) and prays helplessly.

She then goes on to rehearse her dream fully and dwells morbidly on it (90-97). Her mood is obviously a very unhappy one [mood].

After the parodos we have an encounter between Hekabe and Polyxena (180-215). The mother speaks in broken sentences, takes a long time to come to the point, her thoughts revolve around her misery: "Οἴμοι, τέκνον, Αἰαί σᾶς ψυχᾶς": (180-182) [speech].

In the next scene Hekabe talks to Odysseus (218- 331). She starts with what most editors take to be an aside.<sup>46</sup> Before she addresses Odysseus gloomy thoughts and indecision revolve in her mind. She stresses her inferior status as a slave [self assessment]. In case the reader is not convinced and thinks that this is normal

<sup>45</sup> The line has been queried but, in fact, fits in beautifully, in the best manner of Euripides' entrance sketches, see p.19, Entrances.

<sup>46</sup> Asides are discussed by Lesky (1983) 244.

behaviour under severe stress, let him compare Polyxena's very different attitude to Odysseus.

Line 231 is very interesting: "I should have died before". This is the typical obsession with death, leading to thoughts of suicide which is such a frequent and frightening feature of depression [self assessment]. We shall come across it again.

Having, at last, decided to speak she speaks slowly but very rationally and to the point [thought].

She performs the ritual of formal supplication faultlessly. Her physical performance improves when there is something to do. Note how she again rehearses her grievous loss, but this time without αἰαῖς. She now uses her ill luck for the purpose of manipulation .

After Polyxena's splendid scene Hekabe asks to be killed in her stead (383-388). This is a common phenomenon, usually termed parasuicide nowadays. The patient makes an attempt on her life in a very ineffectual way, not expecting to be successful, but hoping to obtain sympathy or get her own way; a sort of emotional blackmail.<sup>47</sup> Both this and true suicide are common in depression . Odysseus soon points out that this attitude is unrealistic but Hekabe continues to ask to be killed together with her daughter (396) which is even less likely, as Odysseus soon points out. Note that this second attempt cannot be ascribed to Hekabe nobly trying to save her daughter. It is parasuicide.

In the following exchange between mother and daughter (415-428) it is noteworthy that Polyxena, facing death, should be in great need of sympathy, but Hekabe finds it difficult to supply it [psychomotor], always coming back to her own misery: "Poor child - and I, how miserable!" (417). "Where is my life going to end?" (419) "All my children taken away!" (421) "Tell Priam of all women I am the most miserable!" (423). There is little of comfort for Polyxena in this. Hekabe twists the words of others to fit in with her mood: Polyxena says: "Χαῖρε" (farewell) and Hekabe replies "How can I fare well?" She refuses to accept anything that can possibly look hopeful [anhedonia] and refuses to believe Polyxena's pointing out that Polydoros still lives (428).

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<sup>47</sup> It will be discussed in much greater detail in connection with Hermione of the *Andromache*, p.158.

When Odysseus and Polyxena leave there is nothing more to be done. All Hekabe's physical disabilities return and she collapses on the floor (438-443) [physical], where Talthybios finds her. She refuses to get up (495) and indulges in more death wishes (505-512).

After the herald has told his tale Hekabe proffers little sympathy for Polyxena, but rehearses her own troubles once again (584-586) [psychomotor, anhedonia]. This is a good description of the typical inability of the depressive to concentrate on an external subject [psychomotor].

There follows a curious passage of sophistic argument on heredity versus upbringing (592-628) which critics have found out of place. This is not so. Depressed people, unable to formulate new ideas easily, often resort to old-established cliches and trains of thought as something to cling to [psychomotor].

#### **THE BEHAVIOUR OF HEKABE (MANIC PHASE)**

Polydoros' corpse is brought in (660). For a short while Hekabe continues in her depressed phase. She is slow in recognising the victim, asks irrelevant questions such as : "Where was he found?" and is unable to form a plan of action [psychomotor]. "My life is over, what shall I do?" She broods: "Who killed him?" (698).

But then she goes into the manic phase. She is absolutely sure of Polymestor's guilt and of his reasons. Whilst the audience, of course, know from the prologue that she is right and the chorus, and later Agamemnon, agree that it is a likely story, Hekabe cannot possibly at this stage know for certain [thought]. From deep mistrust in her own judgement she turns into absolute belief in it [thought]. "It was my own trusted friend" (710). The chorus is doubtful at first, but Hekabe has no doubt. Her speech becomes rapid and disjointed [speech], new ideas chase each other (710-722) [thought]. She becomes antisocial and aggressive [behaviour]. Her mood becomes excited and almost elated at the thought of revenge [mood]. Where she regarded all Greeks as enemies she now begins to convince herself that Agamemnon may be a friend (745). She carefully considers how to put her plan into action (741-750). Note here the difference from Polymestor who will act without prior consideration. When Agamemnon offers her her freedom Hekabe rejects it. Where before being a slave was

one of the major causes of her depression it now means nothing, provided she has her revenge (756) [concentration].

In the long speech to Agamemnon which follows (787-849) Hekabe uses all means at her disposal to get her own way: logic, pity, honour, persuasion and when all else seems to be failing the honour of her daughter Cassandra as a pawn in the game. This is an excellent rhetorical exercise. It illustrates Hekabe's firm and single minded purposefulness as compared to her indecisiveness before. As for the morality of offering her daughter's services, this is no longer an important consideration. Everything gives way to her need to get her own way. The chorus is amazed at the transformation (846).

In this passage Euripides deviates from modern psychiatric experience. Manic patients, with their rapid flight of ideas are rarely able to stick so closely to a subject and think with such coherent logic [thought]. I shall discuss this below.

The next passage (850ff), a discussion with Agamemnon, shows her truly manic again. When he hesitates to promise help she becomes sardonic: "A free man! - There is no such thing!" (846) [behaviour]. She will do the deed herself (868-874). It is Agamemnon who has to point out all the difficulties: She is a woman, without friends, unable to wield a sword, only other women to help her (876-885). Hekabe feels herself able to cope with anything [insight, behaviour]. Without waiting for his decision she sets her plan in motion and sends off a messenger [behaviour].

When Polymestor appears she shows herself ruthlessly cunning, trapping him into obvious lies and enticing him to his doom. In the process she deceives and tells lies herself and yet believes herself to be acting perfectly normally (968-1003) [insight]. Thus Polymestor goes to his doom. He is blinded and his children murdered. As he screams and rages Hekabe gloats (1044-1055).

There follows what is virtually a courtroom scene (1132-1251). Polymestor pleads his side, Hekabe hers and Agamemnon has to judge. Again, Hekabe's speech is far too coherent and logical for the manic person [thought]. After the judgement in her favour Hekabe is wildly elated and again expresses herself fully justified. "I have punished you, therefore my joy is justified" (1258). The play is virtually over, but if we are really interested in Hekabe's character, we want to know what will happen to a manic person afterwards. Euripides inserts what is virtually a messenger speech taking

the place of the usual epilogue, but dealing with future events rather than the past. Polymestor prophesies what will happen to her: she will become so hyperactive that she will climb a mast and throw herself into the sea [manic psychosis]. She will think herself a dog and her speech will deteriorate into a bark (1259-1273) [final state]. Manic people, though they do not commit suicide, like depressives, may die from their hyperactivity.

### OTHER CHARACTERS : PART 1

The other characters in the *Hekabe*, whilst having distinct personalities of their own are not drawn in nearly as much depth as Hekabe herself. The chorus, Polyxena and Polymestor undergo the same stress as the queen but show that normal people behave quite differently. Talthybios, Odysseus and Agamemnon show how normal people react to a manic-depressive.

#### The chorus

Being Trojan women the members of the chorus have suffered exactly the same as Hekabe. They, too, have lost parents, brothers, husbands and children; they, too, have tumbled from their positions as society ladies into slavery. Yet they react quite differently.

In the first strophe of the parodos (98-105) their concern is only to break the bad news gently to their queen: "My news will not lighten your burden" (104-106). Compare how Hekabe, in the next section, is only sorry for herself and how abruptly she breaks the same news to her daughter (188-190). The remainder of the parodos is virtually a messenger speech, but in the end it reverts to concern for Hekabe (144-153). Coming after the 59-97 section, where Hekabe is only sorry for herself, the contrast is clear. Hekabe has sympathy only for herself, the chorus find it possible to sympathise with others.

In stasimon 1 (444-483), which comes after the scene where Hekabe has collapsed completely, the chorus envisage their future and try to discern some possible redeeming features. Some of their future destinations may be less unpleasant than others. They see themselves in Athens occupied in weaving beautiful garments for Athene. Note their words: "δαιδαλέασι ποικίλλους ἀνθοκρόκοισιν πήναις"

(470-471). This is a vision of beauty rather than distress. They are trying to adapt to their situation which Hekabe is quite unable to do.

Stasimon 2 (629-656) comes after Hekabe's speech in which she cannot see any sense in what has befallen her. The chorus see the hand of inevitable fate in it. They know that even in Sparta there is much sorrow among bereaved women. They realise that they share the blow of fate with other people and find some comfort in that. Again a contrast between their attitude and Hekabe's.

Stasimon 3 (905-951) follows the scene in which Hekabe formulates the plan for her revenge. The chorus, in a magnificent lyrical ode, look back wistfully to the good old days before the fall. Hekabe, in her depression, does not allow herself to consider anything beautiful in past or future. They pray that Helene may be punished for what she has done but they take no steps to bring about such punishment in the way Hekabe does. We all have feelings of wanting to murder our tormentors, but normal people just do not do it.

In the choral interlude (1024-1034) the chorus see Polymestor's fate as a just reward for his misdeeds whilst Hekabe rejoices in her personal triumph. They can even feel pity for the blinded man: "Wretched man, your agony is hard to bear!" (1085). Hekabe has no pity.

In the exodos (1293-1295) the chorus are resigned and go on steadfastly with life. Hekabe never accepts and destroys herself and others.

Thus the chorus show that there is another way of dealing with misfortune. They share Hekabe's normal grief, but do not go to the excesses of depression in which she indulges. It is clear that these odes are not detached from the play, as some critics claim, but fulfil a vital function. Juxtaposed to what Hekabe is doing at the moment they come at exactly the right time.

### Polyxena

This young girl, also, has had exactly the same stresses as her mother; in fact, she has the added stress of her own impending death. Yet she, too, behaves in an entirely different way. We can see her at her first appearance (176-196) worried at her mother's evident agitation, but controlled. She does not, like Hekabe, immediately assume the worst, but waits for the facts: "Μάγνησον μοι, μάγνησον, μᾶτερ" (192-193). Compare this with the similar scene (670-683) where the queen sees the

agitation of her women and immediately jumps to the conclusion that they are bringing the body of Polyxena, then guesses that it is Cassandra and only finally allows herself to be told that it is Polydoros.

When the facts are made clear to Polyxena her first reaction is pity for her mother (197-212). Only after that does she consider her own fate and accepts it almost gladly (213-215). Stated baldly like this her attitude is almost unbelievable, but it will be explained later.

Throughout her mother's pleading with Odysseus Polyxena is silent, considering the situation; only when asked to supplicate the Greek does she begin to speak. Hers is an admirable speech, completely calm and logical. She begins by refusing to supplicate for her life. Indeed, she does more: by reassuring Odysseus, who obviously expects it, that she will not supplicate she gains a moral ascendancy over him which she never loses again (342-346). She does not want to be considered a coward. She rehearses her sad fall from royalty to slavery, but, unlike Hekabe, who constantly bemoans her fate and the chorus, who try to come to terms with it, Polyxena accepts it as a fact (357). She, too has looked into the future; the chorus accept slavery, Polyxena refuses to do so (359-368). She has made up her mind to die and goes on calmly to carry out her intention (368- 378). Is this realistic? Do people ever behave so calmly in the face of death? The answer, I believe, is: "Yes, sometimes". But we should like to know much more about the girl's character before we can accept such calm as natural. Without more evidence one must consider whether Euripides has not treated Polyxena's character much more superficially than her mother's.

More insight is, in fact, provided later. In the scene 415-437 she almost breaks down. She does not want to die, regrets that she will never be married, does not want to die a slave's death. It is obvious that she is not as unemotional as she appeared earlier on, but she has her emotions under rigid control. Contrast this with Hekabe in the same scene who is all unbridled emotion. Whilst Polyxena can advise her mother and Odysseus to be tolerant of each other, Hekabe cannot do it. Polyxena can find love and pity for her mother and respect for her enemy, Hekabe can only see her own misery.

At the end of the scene (432-437) Polyxena is in danger of losing her rigid control: "ἐκτέτηκα καρδίαν!" (433). This is the end of her as a stage character, but we learn more about her from Talthybios' report (546 -570). She never faltered again but retained her dignity to the very moment of death and thereby gained immense approval from friends and foe alike. Here is the major contrast to Hekabe. The queen may have started with some dignity but she loses it descending to groaning, grovelling to the enemy on her knees and eventually offering her daughter's body to get her own way. At first she has everyone's sympathy, but this, too, she loses progressively through her cunning and violent actions; our sympathy turns to horror and eventually disgust.

### Polymestor

Where the chorus and Polyxena form a contrast to Hekabe mainly in her depressed phase, Polymestor provides it in the manic phase. He, like she, has seen his children killed and has been reduced from a king to a cripple. The stress is virtually the same. The two characters resemble each other greatly; both are hyperactive, filled with hate, unable to see any other point of view and intent only on revenge. Both are completely amoral. The difference is twofold. Firstly, Hekabe is much more intelligent. Her plans are carefully laid whilst the Thracian acts on impulse (1124-1126), her lies are subtle and convincing (968-975), his are clumsy and soon shown up (989-997). She utterly defeats him in the verbal battle before Agamemnon, taking each of his feeble points and demolishing it (1187-1237).

Secondly, and more subtly, the difference lies in their basic characters. Polymestor acts in the way he is made. Like a wild animal he cannot be blamed for being violent. He has no sense of morals and hence cannot be expected to act morally. Hekabe, on the other hand, has been shown to be civilised, with a strong sense of morality and for her to lose her morality is a shocking thing. Hence, at the end, it is Polymestor who retains some shreds of dignity and some of our sympathy. We listen with approval to his prophetic words, he lays himself open to Agamemnon's wrath for the sake of truth as he sees it (1282-1284). For Hekabe we have nothing but incredulous horror when she turns into a bitch.



Agamemnon regards Polymestor's outbursts of temper as typical of a barbarian (1129) and some critics have taken this to be the main theme in the *Hekabe*: Barbarian violence versus Greek restraint, just as it is claimed for the *Medeia*.<sup>48</sup> I doubt this, because Hekabe herself is in a somewhat ambiguous position, being a Trojan. Indeed, in 328-331 Odysseus accuses her of being a barbarian. How can we see two barbarians typifying the Greek/Barbarian contrast?<sup>49</sup> Also, the Barbarian/Greek conflict may possibly shed light on the Polymestor/Hekabe scene but does little to explain the rest of the play, including Polyxena's splendid performance.

## OTHER CHARACTERS : PART 2

### Talthybios

This man has no personal axe to grind. He can therefore afford to let his feelings sway him. He is really shocked to find the former queen prostrate on the floor (488), it makes him wonder about justice in this world (488-491). He is genuinely sorry for her but unable to help (493-498). He tries to get her to rise from the floor, a very natural human reaction (499- 500).

Talthybios is equally sorry for Polyxena and admires her greatly (518-520). His long messenger speech (521-582) is a masterpiece which not only describes what has happened but gives a clear description of Polyxena's character and how it affected the Greek host. At the same time it affords an insight into Talthybios' own kindly nature. We note by implication that Hekabe's behaviour earns much less approval than her daughter's.

### Odysseus

This Greek commander is drawn on more conventional lines; intelligent, crafty and civilised with an eye on popular approval, at least as seen through Hekabe's eyes. It is interesting to see how this character has been evaluated by different critics; Grube<sup>50</sup> calls him cold and distant, Hadley<sup>51</sup> "an able man of the world, not ruffianly, plausible". I think he is basically as sympathetic towards Hekabe as is Talthybios. He acknowledges his indebtedness to her and offers to save her life (242-252, 299-302).

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<sup>48</sup> Méridor (1978) *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> See section on xenophobia on p.25.

<sup>50</sup> Grube (1973) 218.

<sup>51</sup> Hadley (1955) xv.

But he has a political role to play. He can foresee that when he arrives an appeal will be made to his sympathy, an appeal to which he has decided he cannot accede, and so he has steeled himself beforehand to resist. It is this which makes him appear cold and unfeeling. On first arrival he tells the queen quite brusquely what she is to do and warns her against resistance (218-228). This is a very typical reaction of a normal person afraid of getting embroiled in the emotionality of a manic-depressive. His long advice to the queen (299-331) begins: "Do not, in your anger, take for an enemy one who gives you good advice" (299-300). This can be taken for crafty deception but I cannot see why it should not be taken at face value. Odysseus has no special reason for being inimical to the queen. His explanation for his attitude is not unreasonable (306-320). Every man feels a need to justify his actions against what he considers unjustified condemnation. Note that Polyxena does not accuse him personally and he does not justify himself to her.

His second point, that other people are suffering just as much (321-325) is again a very natural attempt to cheer up a depressed person though, as here, it always fails. It is the old reaction: "Pull yourself together!" which is just what a manic-depressive is unable to do.

Towards Polyxena Odysseus first has the same attitude, expecting her to supplicate him and determined not to allow it (342-345). But when he finds that she will not play on his sympathy he relaxes.

Towards the end he maintains this double attitude. He does not want Hekabe to die (394-395), a natural reaction to threatened parasuicide. But when the queen persists in her violent demands he becomes brusque again: "I was not aware that I must take your orders!" (397).

### Agamemnon

The great king handles Hekabe with kid gloves. He defers to her whenever he can to avoid "a scene". This is a very common reaction to emotional people. Thus in 747-748: "If you do not wish to tell me, that is fine; I do not want to hear". In spite of considerable misgivings he allows Hekabe to proceed with her plans when he could so easily stop her. But, like Odysseus, he is also personally involved. He has his duties as commander of the army and he is in love with Cassandra. So he wriggles and squirms, trying not to aggravate the queen and yet to keep himself out of mischief. Hence his

rather spineless attitude towards her which earns him her and our contempt: "If we could find some way to carry out your wish without letting the army think that I connived" (844-846). This provokes Hekabe's: "there is no one who is truly free!" (863). Yet what is the poor man to do?

He professes his sympathy for Hekabe: "Φεῦ φεῦ!" "τίς οὕτω δυστυχῆς ἔφυ γυνή;" (785), yet, somehow, his sympathy rings less true than that of Talthybios. He is at his best when he can deal with practical questions and avoid emotional topics. Thus he provides the common sense objections to the manic's grandiose schemes. A very interesting passage, in this context, is the stichomythia (754-785). It begins with Agamemnon offering Hekabe her freedom. (Note how useful manic-depressive disorder can be to the person afflicted). After that there is a long recognition scene and recapitulation of the Polydoros story. We have already heard it in the prologue (1-33) and again when the youth's body was discovered (670-720). Why are we told a third time? The difference between the three accounts is in their effect on the hearer. In the prologue the audience is apprised of the facts almost unemotionally. During the second account there is a most violent effect on Hekabe turning her from the depressed into the manic phase. In this, last account Agamemnon keeps prolonging the story by asking more and more inessential questions hoping to keep off the moment when he will have to respond emotionally. Which of us has not behaved similarly under comparable circumstances?

Following the "court scene" (1132-1239) Agamemnon would rather not have to judge (1240-1243) but on being forced to do so he judges in favour of Hekabe. He is much less afraid of Polymestor's masculine, physical threats than of a renewed emotional outburst by the queen. Physically he is not a coward, emotionally he is.

In the final prophecy scene he keeps right out of Hekabe's future problems but is soon stung into action when Polymestor tells him his own fortune.

### SUMMARY

The *Hekabe* is a powerful tragedy with complete unity and excellent structure if we regard it as a study of different people's reactions to overwhelming stress. The main interest lies in the unusual reaction of Hekabe, as contrasted with those of the chorus, Polyxena and Polydoros. To illustrate it Euripides has chosen to depict her as

a manic-depressive person. His masterly clinical description of this condition shows that he has had experience of such patients and has observed them most accurately. Only in his insistence on her single-minded purposefulness in the manic stage does he differ from modern psychiatric accounts of this illness. He clearly recognises that depression is not due to external stresses alone (old term: exogenous depression), but also depends on character traits (old term: endogenous depression).

Seen from this point of view the apparent dichotomy of the play becomes perfectly explicable, as does the apparent change in the queen's character. The manic-depressive in the manic and the depressive stages seems almost like two different characters. The choral odes are not dragged in but form a vital part of the play. The minor characters are equally well drawn and fulfil a vital function either by contrasting other possible reactions with those of Hekabe or by showing the effect manic-depressive behaviour has on ordinary people.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE *ORESTES*

#### Classical

Critical opinion on the *Orestes* has varied enormously. Thus, Arrowsmith<sup>1</sup> calls it a very unpopular play, neglected, almost unread, because it flouts traditional ideas about tragedy. It is tragedy without affirmation, heroism botched and disfigured. Only a sense of bitterness survives. Many others have been equally scathing.<sup>2</sup> The epilogue, in particular, has come in for much criticism. Yet an early scholiast calls it δρῶμα δεξιότατον (the most splendid play) and some modern critics have been equally enthusiastic.<sup>3</sup> One of the most frequent criticisms levelled against the play is that all the characters are repulsive. Aristophanes' second hypothesis<sup>4</sup> already states that all characters are evil, except Pylades. Most later critics comment that Pylades is no better than the others. There have also been a few spirited defences for Menelaos,<sup>5</sup> Helene<sup>6</sup> and even for Orestes himself.<sup>7</sup> Strangely, few critics have singled out Hermione, surely the only fully likeable character in the play, unless we regard her as too utterly naive.

Many commentators appear to believe that "madness" is not a proper subject for tragedy. Orestes, being "mad" fails to excite either pity or fear.<sup>8</sup> I doubt these sentiments. In modern times we have learned that we ignore the terrorist mentality at our peril. "Madmen" appear in many excellent plays, several by Euripides himself (e.g. Herakles, Hekabe, Euadne, Cassandra). One may not be able to identify easily with a "mad" person but one can certainly feel pity and concern for him and for poor mankind prone to such afflictions. This is what Euripides is doing. I have discussed "madness" as an entity on page 33.

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<sup>1</sup> Arrowsmith (1958) 106.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Haigh (1896) 309; Grube (1941) 395; Verrall (1905) 257; West (1987) 28.

<sup>3</sup> For instance Lesky (1983) 342.

<sup>4</sup> Aristophanes of Byzantium Second Hypothesis to the *Orestes*.

<sup>5</sup> West (1987) 34; Wolff (1968) 136; Vellacott (1975) 54-55; Willink (1986) 192.

<sup>6</sup> West (1987) 36; Vellacott (1975) 58-63; Burnett (1971) 199.

<sup>7</sup> Lanza (1961) 58-72.

<sup>8</sup> Among critics who argue along these and similar lines are: Verrall (1905) 208; Bates (1961) 173; Blaiklock (1952) 189.

The inner message of the *Orestes*

A good play, as Aristotle pointed out,<sup>9</sup> ought to have an internal unity, determined by its subject matter. What exactly is the subject matter of the *Orestes*? There has been much disagreement. No-one doubts that the basic theme of Aischylos' treatment of the story in his *Oresteia* were the conjoined moral and religious questions raised by revenge. Many critics therefore looked for these in Euripides' work as well. They are difficult to discern there. Only Burnett claims that Orestes fails because he is intelligent but has no faith and Schlesier that the theme is the distinction between the human and divine spheres, which one disregards at one's peril.<sup>10</sup>

Some critics despaired of finding a solution: the play was not a tragedy, but a melodrama, a romance, or written for showmanship only.<sup>11</sup>

Others thought that the contrast to Aischylos was quite deliberate. Euripides is criticising, perhaps even satirising Aischylos and, possibly, even himself.<sup>12</sup> The contrast myth/reality is evoked by several.<sup>13</sup>

Yet other proposed themes are σύνεσις (intelligence or conscience), the contrast of σοφία (rationality) and φιλία (emotional involvement) and σωτηρία (salvation, either from fate or from madness).<sup>14</sup>

An entirely different approach is to regard the play as a bitter satire on contemporary Athenian politics, possibly with direct reference to living politicians.<sup>15</sup> Others have not gone so far and regard the play as a condemnation of society, not necessarily contemporary.<sup>16</sup>

Opinion has been most divided on the question whether character study plays any part in the play. Some critics deny outright that it should be considered.<sup>17</sup> Biehl contends that the unity of the play consists in its presentation of Man. Others claim that character study is its outstanding virtue.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451a.

<sup>10</sup> Burnett (1971) 183ff; Schlesier (1985) 44.

<sup>11</sup> Kitto (1966) 346; West (1987) 27; Lesky (1983) 353; Chapouthier (1968) 13.

<sup>12</sup> Particularly Wolff (1968) 132; Chapouthier (1968) 14.

<sup>13</sup> Lichtenberger (1986) 13; Fuqua (1978) 1-28; Arrowsmith (1958) 110.

<sup>14</sup> Chapouthier (1968) 14; Greenberg (1962) 170; Parry (1963) 33-44; Murray (1913) 163.

<sup>15</sup> Vellacott (1975) 53-81; Chapouthier (1968) 7-9; Romilly (1981); Willink (1986) xxiii; Arrowsmith (1958) 111.

<sup>16</sup> Falkner (1983) 13-22; Burkert (1974) 109; Lanza (1961) 60ff; Verrall (1905) 201; Smith (1967) 291.

<sup>17</sup> Willink (1986) xlvi; Blaiklock (1952) 189.

<sup>18</sup> Biel (1968) 197; Burnett (1971) 213; Smith (1967) 291.

The other awkward problem has been the question of the importance of the "madness". Many ignore it, others decry it.<sup>19</sup> Another group of critics would see the νόσος as allegorical.<sup>20</sup> Finally, several commentators regard the "madness" as the central issue of the play.<sup>21</sup> In all these accounts no attempt is made to understand what "madness" means. Only Schlesier<sup>22</sup> begins to address the question of what "madness" may have meant to Euripides.

### The structure of the *Orestes*

For once there has been almost unanimous agreement among commentators that the *Orestes* is a superbly structured play, tightly knit and keeping up dramatic tension all the time.<sup>23</sup> The epilogue, however, has puzzled almost all commentators.

## PSYCHIATRIC : PART 1

### Delirium

#### (a) In Hippokrates

In ancient times various forms of altered mental states were generally attributed to possession of the personality by external agents, such as demons, spirits or gods.<sup>24</sup> To this the older Greek philosophers added a few concepts derived from their various philosophies, such as the physical theories of the Ionians, the biophysiology of Pythagoras, the physiology of Demokides of Kroton, Alkmaeon and Diogenes of Apollonia and the dynamic approaches of Herakleitos and Empedokles.<sup>25</sup> It was the great contribution of Hippokrates and his school to attempt to replace these nebulous ideas by accurate observations, clear clinical descriptions and aetiological theories based on these observations.

I have found 115 references to states of delirium in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. Three words are used frequently: παραφροσύνη, μανία and παράκρουσις. They appear to be used as synonyms. The frequency of their relative use varies in different parts of the *Corpus*. I have found no place in which two of these words are used

<sup>19</sup> Bates (1961) 173; to a certain extent Murray (1965) 80.

<sup>20</sup> Smith (1967) 291; Verrall (1905) 208; Schlesier (1985) 41.

<sup>21</sup> Parry (1963) 345; Smith (1967) 297-8; Boulter (1962) 102-6; Mullens (1940) 153-181; Donadi (1974) 111-127.

<sup>22</sup> Schlesier (1985) 1-45.

<sup>23</sup> Only Decharme (1968) 281 considers the prologue tedious and the lyrical odes disconnected and Wolff (1968) 146 regards the play as disjointed.

<sup>24</sup> Compare the overall message of the *Herakles* in this thesis, Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> The matter is discussed at greater length by Roccatagliata (1986) 161ff.

together in such a way as to imply a contrast between them. Other words are used more rarely: ἐκφρόνεσις, ἔκστασις, ἀφραίνω, παρακοπή, παράνοια. Their exact flavour is difficult to comprehend. Other words have a more obvious flavour. Thus ἀποπληξία and παροξύντικα tend to stress suddenness of onset, λήρησις and παραλογία nonsensical speech, ταραξία agitation. A common concept is φρηνίτις, which is used as if it were a clinical entity. It does not correspond to any modern concept.

Of these words Euripides uses μανία and παράνοια in the *Orestes* in addition to the non-Hippocratic βακχεύω. This may be just personal preference but it is perhaps more likely that these were the popular words, whereas the others tended to be medical jargon.

Many Hippocratic references are clear clinical descriptions of various forms of delirium. One, in particular, is remarkably like Euripides' description of Orestes' illness.<sup>26</sup> Nineteen of the references mention specific precipitating causes, mostly fevers. Drugs are mentioned more rarely and, interestingly, alcohol is mentioned only twice and in passing.<sup>27</sup>

Demon-possession is specifically denied as a cause by Hippocrates, but it is interesting to note that Plato<sup>28</sup> recognised two kinds of delirium; one due to natural illness and the other to possession.

The much stressed Hippocratic theory of humours is not taken up by Euripides in his plays. He must have been aware of its existence.<sup>29</sup> Either he did not regard it very highly or else he did not consider it fit for his characters to express.

(b) Modern concepts

The word delirium is of Latin origin and originally implied any form of mental disturbance. In modern times it has acquired more specific connotations. Attempts at distinguishing different varieties have proved fruitless. Different forms tend to shade into each other both as to aetiology and symptoms. Many modern medical writers have abandoned the term altogether and replaced it by such terms as acute brain syndrome, toxic psychosis and similar ones.<sup>30</sup> DSM III retains the word delirium and

<sup>26</sup> Hippocrates *Epidemics* VII ii.

<sup>27</sup> See section on delirium tremens, p.92.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 265a.

<sup>29</sup> See my remarks in connection with *Herakles*.

<sup>30</sup> For an attempt at classification see Adams (1970) 188.



attempts to delineate its characteristic features as follows<sup>31</sup>: clouded consciousness(\*), lack of attention (\*), sensory misperceptions(\*), sleep disturbances(\*) and changes in psychomotor activity(\*). Emotional disturbances are common(\*), neurological ones rare except for tremor. Delirium usually develops rapidly(\*), fluctuates markedly(\*) and is fairly short-lived(\*).

The whole group is classified among the organic brain syndromes and believed to be due to a widespread dysfunction of brain tissue. The distinction between this and "psychogenic" disorders, however, is not always easy. A large variety of external causes can affect the brain in this way; among the commoner ones are trauma, oxygen and electrolyte disturbances, infections, drugs (including alcohol), tumours, Alzheimer's disease and others. Psychological factors are generally not included in the list of causes, though it is agreed that they may markedly affect the content of thought and perceptive errors.

(c) Delirium tremens

I single out this clinical variety because of its striking resemblance to the description in the *Orestes*. The condition was originally believed to be specific for alcoholism and as such has entered common parlance as "DTs, rum fits" and similar appellations. It is now recognised that other causes may produce a similar picture. In DSM III it appears under the title of acute alcohol withdrawal syndrome.<sup>32</sup>

The pupils are generally dilated(\*), the pulse is rapid and bounding(\*), sweating is marked(\*) and the temperature may be raised (?\*). Consciousness is impaired(\*), speech may be disjointed and rambling(\*), attention span markedly decreased(\*). Hallucinations are very common, particularly of the visual variety(\*), (the pink elephant of popular fame). The most impressive feature is the marked emotional reaction which is nearly always one of acute fear or panic(\*). This colours the hallucinations and illusions(\*). The patient may cower in a corner(\*), attempt to hide under the bedclothes or leap out of bed and attempt to escape(\*). In other cases he may become aggressive, turn violently against anyone attempting to restrain him(\*) and may even proceed to physical assault(\*). The attack generally lasts a few hours

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<sup>31</sup> DSM III (1980) 104-106.

<sup>32</sup> DSM III (1980) 133.

only(\*). The patient recovers gradually or sometimes quite suddenly(\*), often after a sleep(\*)).

Orestes' disease in the play is so startlingly like this that it must have been written after Euripides had observed it in such a patient. But he nowhere even hints at the possibility of alcohol as a cause. Another possibility is that Euripides did not realise the connection between alcohol and delirium tremens. Here it is interesting to note that Hippokrates in his many references to delirium only hints twice at alcohol being a possible causative factor.<sup>33</sup> Did Hippokrates also fail to make the connection?

Clinically Orestes' "delirium tremens" fits a toxic febrile illness much better than alcoholism.

## PSYCHIATRIC - PART 2

### *Paranoia and folie-a-deux*

The term παράνοια was current in classical Greek times signifying an altered mind. It was applied to all sorts of mental aberrations. Thus we have encountered it as a synonym for delirium in Hippokrates (page 91). It appears to have fallen out of use in Roman times, but was re-introduced in the 18th century.<sup>34</sup> Modern ideas are based mainly on the work of Kraepelin and Bleuler.<sup>35</sup> Freud first attempted an explanation of the causative mechanisms in 1896 and greatly amplified it in 1911.<sup>36</sup> His views on the aetiology of the disorder still dominate the field, though his attempts at linking it to homosexuality have not succeeded.

The following decades saw many attempts to establish and differentiate a clinical entity "paranoia" from other disorders with a similar symptomatology (paranoid personality, paranoid states, paranoid schizophrenia, acute paranoid reaction). It would appear that true paranoia, if it exists, is a somewhat rare disorder, whilst the other paranoia-like states are common. In the following I shall use the term paranoia for all the states with a similar symptomatology. Euripides is unlikely to have aimed at differentiation between them.

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<sup>33</sup> "After excessive drinking rigor and delirium are ominous" *Aphorisms* 7 7; "At Elis Timokrates was a heavy drinker" and then the text goes on to describe a fever with delirium *Epidemics* 5 2. One presumes that he regarded the drinking as a significant fact since he included it in the history.

<sup>34</sup> The older history is discussed by Cameron (1967) 665 and Lehmann (1967) 593-595.

<sup>35</sup> Kraepelin (1919); Bleuler (1950).

<sup>36</sup> Freud (1955) Vol 18 221ff; Vol 12 3ff.

The condition is characterised by the existence of a highly systematised set of delusions(\*). General intelligence, mood and thought habits are preserved(\*). Hallucinations do not occur(\*). The delusions may be of various kinds,<sup>37</sup> but by far the commonest is one of persecution(\*) and this is the only one I shall describe.

Basically the defect is a lack of trust(\*). This is frequently due to early upbringing. Many paranoids come from broken homes or are the children of feckless or inadequate parents(\*). The condition may be reinforced by an unstable life situation(\*). Thus it is common in new immigrants and migrant labourers. This lack of trust leads to a general suspiciousness of other people's intentions(\*) and at the same time to a difficulty in communicating emotional feelings to others(\*).

Another important facet, according to Freud, is the mechanism of projection (see page 38)(\*). In the normal person this mechanism is usually tempered by commonsense and lack of evidence. The paranoid with his inborn suspiciousness is much more prone to it and tends to take his feelings for absolute truth. Being of normal intelligence he will begin to look for corroborative evidence of enmity and find it in a variety of ways: covert glances, tones of voice, metaphorical use of words, feeble excuses(\*).

When trying to enlist support against his persecutor the paranoid is hampered by his difficulty in communicating(\*). He generally encounters sceptical disbelief and this proves to him that his confidant, too, is in the pay of his enemy(\*). The condition is thus liable to spread to other people and soon becomes a highly systematised complex(\*).

The patient's reactions to this state of affairs are exactly the same as are those of normal people, given the unusual circumstances: resentment, anxiety, anger or active countermeasures depending on the patient's basic personality(\*).

The longer the state lasts the more confirmed the patient becomes in his abnormal belief. From being regarded as merely odd he often becomes obnoxious, people become resentful of his suspicions, complaints and active countermeasures; they avoid him or take active steps against him so that this purely imaginary enmity may later on become reality(\*).

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<sup>37</sup> Day & Semrad (1978) 245.

This is the basis of the difficulty most people have in diagnosing paranoia. The delusional belief, except in the grossest cases, is after all possible, if unlikely; the evidence put forward by the patient is often convincing and in the last stages there may be quite objective evidence of enmity(\*). This basic credibility of the paranoid delusion may induce the bystander to give credence to it(\*) (see *folie-a-deux* below).

For the purposes of the *Orestes* it should be pointed out that paranoid ideas may occur in delirium, but they are generally less well organised, less all-embracing and more transient than in the full-blown condition.

### Treatment

The condition is generally regarded as incurable by present-day methods(\*). Much, however, can be done to make the life situation more bearable. The first requirement is to listen carefully to the patient, with minimal comment, for agreeing with him will confirm his delusion and disagreeing will be regarded as further evidence of enmity(\*). The patient can be taught to accept the inimical state of society and put up with it and society can be taught to tolerate the patient's vagaries(?\*). In a tolerant environment many paranoids can lead a long and useful life.

### Folie-a-deux

This is an uncommon, but well documented, condition, first described by Lasègue and Falret,<sup>38</sup> sometimes referred to as double insanity or psychosis of association.

In this disease psychotic symptoms - most frequently delusions - are transmitted from a sick individual to a healthy one who frequently elaborates on the induced delusions(\*). More than one person may be affected (*folie-a-trois*, etc)(\*). In one view the collective psychoses (what is popularly known as mass hysteria) may be regarded as a variant of this, where a whole group of people share an abnormal mental state. I shall not discuss this further here, as we shall meet it again in connection with the *Bakchai*.

Lasègue and Falret in their original description observe that it occurs in people living in close association(\*), one of which is usually the dominant (often the more intelligent) one(\*), who have lived in some separation from the rest of society(\*). The shared delusion is usually kept within the limits of possibility and may be based on past

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<sup>38</sup> Lasègue and Falret (1887) *passim*.

events or certain common expectations(\*). We have already seen how even a normal person may be induced to believe a paranoic's delusion.

Lehmann<sup>39</sup> adds that both partners tend to have a somewhat seclusive and suspicious personality(\*). They share many life experiences, fears and hopes(\*) and have a deep emotional rapport with their partners(\*).

The condition is most commonly seen in association with paranoid disease(\*) and, indeed, *DSM III*<sup>40</sup> mentions the condition as a variant of paranoia under the title "shared paranoid disorder".

Separation of the two partners is sometimes sufficient to cure the passive member but more frequently additional psychotherapy needs to be provided to compensate the patient for the loss of the person around whom his whole life has centered.<sup>41</sup>(\*)

## OVERVIEW

In this chapter I shall present the *Orestes* as a study of two conditions of abnormal mental behaviour: delirium and paranoia. The only commentator who has tried an approach resembling this is Smith.<sup>42</sup> The question whether Euripides meant to distinguish between them or regarded them as two aspects of a single disorder will be discussed.

Approaching the play in this manner in no way negates the occurrence of other motifs as suggested by other critics. Euripides was, I believe, first attracted to the subject by observing sufferers from these diseases and realising the dramatic potential of these highly dramatic syndromes. If, in the process of depicting the course of the illness, he came across a chance of showing that the principles applied not only to an individual sufferer, but shed light on more generalised human conditions, such as contemporary Athenian politics or the workings of democracy, there was nothing to stop him from widening his scope to include these. Similarly, Vellacott's interpretation (page 89, n.15) can easily be accommodated by suggesting that paranoic ideas may afflict not only individual people but whole states, such as contemporary Athens.

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<sup>39</sup> Lehmann (1967) 1152.

<sup>40</sup> DSM III (1980) 197.

<sup>41</sup> Lehmann (1967) 1152.

<sup>42</sup> Smith (1967) 296.

Again, the clash between the emotional paranoid and the down-to-earth common man point of view can be interpreted as a clash between φιλία and σοφία (page 89).<sup>43</sup> My argument will be that these other motifs are not able, by themselves, to explain the whole of the *Orestes*, as they form too small a part; but as part of a study of abnormal human behaviour they fit well into the overall scheme.

I shall present the play as a triptych structure. The first part deals with Orestes delirious, the second with Orestes sane, the third with Orestes paranoid. These three parts, as other critics have pointed out, are closely interwoven.

In the first part we shall find a masterly clinical description of delirium, particularly the delirium tremens variety. Apart from this we are introduced to the basic problem whether this is a physical disease or due to demon possession. We are also shown the profound emotional attachment which exists between Orestes and Elektra, which prepares for the later *folie-a-deux*, and their basic suspiciousness which prepares for the coming paranoia.

In the second part the paranoid delusion develops step by step under the influence of Orestes' clashes, first with Tyndareos, then with Menelaos, finally with the Argive assembly. At the end of this section Orestes is left at the borderline between normal and abnormal behaviour.

In the third part the characters of Orestes, Elektra and Pylades fuse into a single paranoid entity, *folie-a-trois*. They gradually drift further and further away from normality, first in planning to kill Helene, then - even worse - the innocent Hermione, finally setting the palace ablaze. At the end the paranoia is full-blown and can only lead to complete catastrophe.

The epilogue, by its very absurdity, points out that the theory of demon possession, on which it is based, is untenable. The disease, paranoia, is incurable by human means, but a suggestion emerges that a religious faith in some benevolent godhead could yet have saved the situation.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 291.

## ORESTES : PART 1

### Scenelet 1 (1-70): Elektra, Orestes (asleep) - the prologue

The prologue is spoken by Elektra, not the usual god. We plunge into *medias res*. Orestes is lying (or perhaps tossing and turning) on his bed in the throes of his illness. From the beginning the attention of the audience is rivetted on where the main interest will lie, Orestes' illness.

Elektra proceeds to put the audience into the picture by recounting what happened before, what is happening now and what is expected in the immediate future. She makes five major points:

- 1.(1-27): She recounts the genealogy of the house of Tantalos. Decharme<sup>44</sup> regards this as unnecessary. I would disagree. The genealogy refers straight back to Aischylos in whose *Oresteia* the curse on the house of Tantalos was the mainspring which kept the action going. Here Euripides reminds us that this is one theory which could explain the illness. He will put forward others in the prologue and throughout the play and discuss them.
- 2.(28-38): Another possible theory; the illness may be produced by demon possession. Apollo is to blame for the original matricide ... but dare one blame a god? The Erinyes are directly responsible for his present mental state ... but dare one even mention them?
- 3.(39-45): A brief preliminary description of the illness in clinical terms. I shall discuss this together with the more extensive description later, but its point at this stage is that we are now given yet a third point of view, that of Hippokrates and his school who regard the illness as a purely physical disorder. Deciding between these theories will be a major part of the play.
- 4.(46-51): The attitude of the city of Argos. This will not only be necessary for the understanding of later happenings, but also for an understanding of Orestes' alienation and the development of his paranoia.
- 5.(52-57): There is yet hope and it is centered on Menelaos and his family. This hope will be of great importance for the onset of the paranoia.

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<sup>44</sup> Decharme p.281-282

Scenelet 2 (71-131): Elektra, Helene, Hermione (silent), Orestes (asleep)

Helene and Elektra converse and in the process their characters come under close scrutiny. But this is no objective character study. In a superb piece of double level writing Euripides shows us either woman as seen objectively as well as subjectively through the eyes of the other. And the two accounts do not tally. Elektra intensely dislikes her aunt and barely restrains her resentment while talking to her. As Helene remarks: "You spoke truly, but not kindly to me" (100). When Helene has left, all Elektra's antagonism breaks out: "May the gods hate her" (130). Seen through her eyes Helene is shallow, vain, insensitive, selfish and hypocritical. If one identifies with Elektra and believes her judgement, Helene is an evil person. No doubt many members of the audience did so, and, certainly, the majority of later critics have adopted this attitude. Yet, if we judge her on what she says and does on the stage we get an entirely different view of Helene. Several commentators have done this. West and Vellacott,<sup>45</sup> in particular, regard her as a kindly, sympathetic woman, grossly calumniated by Elektra. What is important here is: both points of view are tenable. Elektra's view of her aunt is slanted. But she is very convincing. No-one, at this stage, would call Elektra mad or paranoid, a little prejudiced at most, yet here we have the first indication of her later excessive loathing. The seed of paranoia has been sown; it will germinate.

Already at this stage each member of the audience (and each later critic) is challenged to take up his stance: is he prepared to take Elektra's opinion at face value or will he form his own, independent opinion? His understanding of the play will depend on it.

Scenelet 3 (132-207): Elektra, Chorus, Orestes (asleep) - the parodos

This is a very unusual parodos. Instead of beautiful lyrics and expressions by the chorus of their attitudes to the problems we have a dance and mime routine.<sup>46</sup> The chorus crowd round the sickbed, clumsily and noisily, and Elektra has to remind them repeatedly to be quiet and not disturb the sleeper. We are balanced on a knife edge between tragedy and farce. These clumsy old women, with their noisy boots (ἀρβύλαι), raucous voices: "Oh dear, no! Let your voices rather be like the gentle

<sup>45</sup> West (1987) 36; Vellacott (1975) 85ff.

<sup>46</sup> Willink (1986) 103.



breath of the pan-pipe" (145-146), their idle curiosity leading them to sidle up to the sick man to see whether he is still breathing can hardly be taken seriously. As usual Euripides is using comedy to stop the audience from taking the face value approach to the play too seriously.

Between admonitions to silence and Elektra's bemoaning her fate some further points are made. The chorus obviously believe in the demon possession theory. They blame Apollo for what has happened and Elektra, for a while, joins in: "He was wrong to prophesy, prophesy what was wrong" (162). The chorus try to console her: "It was just" - but Elektra has deeper insight: "but not well done" (194) and she goes on to confess her own personal guilt. Once again, the audience must decide whether they will follow the chorus and attribute the illness to gods, or Elektra and see personal guilt.

#### Scenelet 4 (208-252): Elektra, Orestes - the love of Elektra

This scenelet adds some vital information towards an understanding of the characters. It is one of the most tender and moving scenes Euripides ever wrote. Elektra cares for her sick brother with devotion, self denial and, withal, great efficiency. She performs menial tasks for him, such as wiping his eyes and propping him up; she bolsters up his morale by not blaming him but the Erinyes; she readily gives in to all his little whims. At no stage does she say she loves him, but her actions convey this message much better than any words could do. She is magnificent; if we have been ready to dislike her because of her nasty attitude to Helene or because we are already prejudiced against her from previous plays we must now reconsider. And let us remember this aspect of her character later, when she is in the grip of paranoia. This tremendous emotional attachment to her brother will also be a factor in her developing *folie-a-deux*.

Orestes in this scenelet allows himself to be loved, he makes demands on his sister and appears rather selfish. But we see him through his sister's eyes and are ready to forgive him because of his illness.

During the course of conversation he is informed of the arrival in Argos of Menelaos and Helene and we learn his attitude to them. Like Elektra, he dislikes and mistrusts Helene already: "If he is bringing his wife along, he comes with a big pack of trouble" (248). On his uncle, however, he has set all his hopes and explains why: "The

light for your and my troubles, a kinsman and one who owes a debt of gratitude to our father" (243-244). He has no doubt that Menelaos will and can help and this attitude will be of vital importance later.

One further point is worth making: In 237-238 Elektra says: "But listen carefully now, beloved brother, whilst the Erinyes allow you to think straight." This sounds as if she believed in demon possession, though we have already seen in scenelet 3 that she has grave doubts about it. In this scene, however, she is dealing with a sick, weak and already disturbed man; it is kinder to let him blame it all on the gods, rather than face up to his own responsibility. And Orestes tacitly lets it pass, though he, too, as we shall see, is not at all convinced.

Scenelet 5 (253-275): Orestes, Elektra, (Apollo and Erinyes imaginary) - the delirium

At this stage Orestes goes into a state of acute delirium with visual hallucinations. He sees the Erinyes approaching menacingly, first tries to flee, then counterattacks with a bow given to him by Apollo. Commentators have earnestly argued whether this is Apollo's actual bow or some other.<sup>47</sup> This is missing the point. What would a sick man want with a bow by his bedside? The bow is surely as imaginary as the Erinyes. The scholiast<sup>48</sup> records that "modern" actors use no bow. Elektra makes it quite clear that she neither sees the Erinyes, nor believes in their presence.<sup>49</sup> To clinch the matter Orestes, when she tries to restrain him, takes her for one of them and becomes violent. If any member of the audience still has some lingering doubts that the Erinyes, though invisible, are actually present, as they were in Aischylos' play, this must finally disabuse him. And if the Erinyes are nothing but the figment of a disordered mind, what about Apollo? Euripides has again brought us to a point of decision: what do we believe?<sup>50</sup>

The description of the delirium is a superb achievement. I shall now describe it in modern medical jargon and format; the reported facts, however, are all taken directly from Euripides' account.

<sup>47</sup> Burnett (1971) 108; Greenberg (1962) 165; Donadi (1974) 111; Lesky (1983) 344; Willink (1986) 129-130.

<sup>48</sup> Scholia in Euripidem (1887) Vol1 126.

<sup>49</sup> Barlow (1971) 125.

<sup>50</sup> As Wolff ((1968) 138 points out.

PATIENT: Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra. Greek male, aged about 18. History obtained mainly from sister, Elektra.

Patient has always been highly strung and has recently gone through a difficult period culminating in a severe psychic trauma, when he killed his mother. The sister ascribes the onset of the illness to this event six days ago.

Patient has developed a high intermittent fever; during the defervescent periods he perspires greatly so that his dank hair sticks to his forehead and eyes. He has become dehydrated with *sordes* around his mouth and eyes. He has not eaten or drunk anything and has not attended to his toilet. He spends all his time in bed, sleeping fitfully. Sometimes he lies limply, with shallow respiration, appearing almost dead, at other times he tosses and turns and mumbles in his sleep.

When he wakes he is weak, restless, cannot get comfortable. Sometimes he appears perfectly sane and rational, though rather depressed; he may burst into tears. He may be disorientated as to place. At other times he is very agitated and has terrifying hallucinations. At such times he is reported to have seen his dead mother or the avenging Erinyes. He cowers in his bed, or leaps out and attempts to escape so that he has to be forcibly restrained. At other times he brandishes an imaginary bow and threatens his attackers. At these times he does not recognise his friends but mistakes them for part of his hallucinations. These episodes last for minutes only but may recur without obvious precipitating causes. Following these episodes he becomes rational again, but feels weak and despondent. This morning he fell into a deep sleep from which he awoke greatly refreshed, though he has had one further episode of hallucinations after that. Since then he has remained weak but perfectly rational.

DIAGNOSIS: Severe febrile illness (lobar pneumonia?, septicaemia?, malaria?) with toxic delirium. The fever appears to have resolved by crisis.

PROGNOSIS: Good.

This account is much more graphic and at the same time more detailed than any extant descriptions in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. This makes it unlikely that Euripides is merely copying Hippokrates; almost certainly he must be describing his own personal observations to be so accurate. The only fault I can find in this account is the occurrence of one more episode of hallucinations after the resolution of the fever

and the refreshing sleep. This should not have occurred. Euripides, the dramatist, has overcome Euripides the clinician.

There is another curious aspect to the scenelet. It undoubtedly has a comic aspect to it as well. If this were not a tragedy by Euripides about Orestes, but a comedy by Aristophanes about some notorious Athenian drunk, the audience would be splitting its sides laughing at the antics of a man leaping out of bed half naked and fighting off imaginary fiends with an imaginary bow. I am not suggesting that anyone laughed during the performance, but perhaps on the way home ...? Was Euripides aware of this comic aspect? Did he intend it? This question of comedy was discussed on page 11.

Scenelet 6 (277-315): Orestes, Elektra - the love of Orestes

The delirium has passed. Orestes is again rational and now becomes aware of his sister's upset state. He shows himself full of love and concern for her. He tries to reassure her, to exonerate her from any guilt in the matricide. He persuades her to get some rest herself. His argument that she must preserve her strength to look after him does not sound like selfishness but much more like the words of a man who wants to make a decision easy for another. In scenelet 4 we saw Elektra's love for her brother and stressed how this must affect our assessment of her character. Here we see exactly the same in connection with Orestes. Whatever we shall see him doing in future, to call him a "bad" man would obviously not be a full assessment of him. Later we shall see a paranoid doing the most dreadful things; from this scenelet we must remember to blame his illness, not some basic lack of moral fibre. Orestes is not an uncaring brute.

As to the responsibility for the matricide Orestes tries to put the blame on Apollo, but obviously has some difficulty in persuading himself (285-287). He will agonise further about this problem.

Scenelet 7 (316-347): Chorus - the first stasimon

As usual the chorus proceeds to give its interpretation of what is happening. As so often in Euripidean tragedy commentators have claimed that the stasima have very little to do with the plot. Verrall goes so far as to suggest that the play was originally written without any choral part and this was later added to adapt it to the Dionysia.<sup>51</sup> Yet this first stasimon is exactly what is required here. We have seen both

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<sup>51</sup> Verrall (1905) 260.

Elektra and Orestes hesitating whether to accept the demon possession explanation for what is happening. In the delirium scene it became very apparent that the Erinyes were but a figment of a fevered imagination. Elektra made this quite clear: "You are not really seeing those things which you imagine you see so clearly" (259). What then of Apollo? If the audience have airily agreed that he, too, does not exist, the chorus now provides the counterweight. They take the strict traditional view that all this has been brought about by Apollo and the Erinyes. This could almost be an Aeschylean chorus. The problem is highlighted. Are we dealing with a physical illness affecting the mind, as Hippokrates maintains, or is the root cause demon possession? Euripides will not give us the answer on a platter. He puts the argument before us and we must decide.

## ORESTES - PART 2

### Scenelet 8 (348-455): Orestes, Menelaos

Menelaos appears. The chorus hail him effusively. To them he is a great man, head of his house, a candidate for the throne. This attitude will be important later.

He begins with what is practically a subsidiary prologue. He states his position, how much he knows of the situation (it will therefore not have to be explained to him) and where he obtained his information. Part of it came from a divine revelation (364-368), but he lent scant credence to this, being more impressed by what he heard from a common sailor (368-374). This will be his attitude to supernatural explanations: one of scepticism.

He expresses himself shocked at his nephew's appearance. Is he being sincere or pretending? Does he really view his nephew with affection?

Orestes sees him as his great deliverer and he loses no time in making an impassioned plea for help and even resorts to formal supplication (380-384).

There follows an interview which is a prime example of crossed lines of communication. Orestes wants an emotional exchange to relieve his feelings; Menelaos is equally determined to keep things at a factual level.

Previous commentators have noted this and explained it in various ways. Thus Greenberg<sup>52</sup> regards this as the key scene of the whole play, the *agon*, crystallising the opposition of σοφία and φιλία. This may well be true but, as usual, my objection is

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<sup>52</sup> Greenberg (1962) 168ff.

that this attitude excellently explains some parts of the play, but leaves many other parts unexplained and irrelevant.

I do not regard this as a crucial scene, but nonetheless an important one. Orestes' attitude is slowly changing. From having fawned on Menelaos as his saviour he is gradually becoming irritated by him. He will presently become truly hostile and then vicious. This is the development of the paranoid state and it is beautifully done.

Whichever explanation one believes, Menelaos certainly manages to keep the conversation at a factual level. He avoids all emotional topics: "I have heard about it (the murder), don't tell me" (393). "(Grief) is a fearsome god; yet curable" (399). "I have heard of the ones you spoke of (the Erinyes), but I do not want to talk about them" (409). "Don't talk about death (suicide); that is unreasonable" (415).

In the process Menelaos shows his own attitude to religion: he knows all the stories but is sceptical: "He (Apollo) is rather inexperienced in doing the right thing and the just" (417). As far as Orestes' feelings are concerned Menelaos' attitude proves to him that he will not get away with blaming Apollo for what has happened, but has to take responsibility himself, which is exactly what he does not wish to do.

The word *σύνεσις* has been singled out by commentators:

Menelaos: "What sickness is killing you?"

Orestes: "*σύνεσις* ... I am aware of having done fearful things" (395-396).

*Σύνεσις*, in later Greek, had the meaning of our modern word "conscience" and this would fit the context admirably. Two authors<sup>53</sup> take it in this sense. But West<sup>54</sup> points out that the concept of conscience had not yet developed in Euripides' time and Wolff<sup>55</sup> notes that the word is later used by the Phrygian, connoting "intelligence". It is possible that Euripides is here an innovator and among the first to give "intelligence" a new flavour, that of "conscience". Either way it shows that Orestes is at least half aware that the trouble arises from within himself.

Lines 429-437 are worth singling out. Menelaos asks whether there is anyone particular in Argos who is responsible for the city's shunning of Orestes and we are told of Oiax and the party of Aigisthos. Both these were traditionally known to be

<sup>53</sup> Wolff (1968) 137; Borowska (1980) 413-420.

<sup>54</sup> West (1987) 210.

<sup>55</sup> Wolff (1968) 137.

inimical to the house of Agamemnon. Orestes' suspicion is therefore reasonably founded. Yet it is significant that in the later council meeting neither of these two parties will play any role. The suspicion, however reasonable, was, in fact, unfounded and paranoia-like. This is the first mild hint of what is to come.

Whichever way we read the scene the end result for Orestes is one of frustration and disappointment in Menelaos. At the end he starts a new, and impassioned appeal for help, but is interrupted by the arrival of Tyndareos.

Scenelet 9 (456-629): Orestes, Menelaos, Tyndareos

No previous critic appears to have asked himself why Euripides should have introduced Tyndareos at exactly this point. The fact that he is introduced halfway through the meeting between uncle and nephew is a vital step in the progression of the paranoia: Menelaos friend ... Menelaos suspect ... Tyndareos enemy ... Menelaos enemy ... Argives enemies ... everyone enemies. No other order of scenelets will do.

Tyndareos is the father of Klytemnestra and Helene, hence Orestes' grandfather. He could be expected to have tender feelings for his grandson, or hate him. Orestes brings this out right at the beginning. He is ashamed and afraid to meet this old man who has, in the past, been kind to him. Two facts emerge: Orestes feels responsible for his deed, no hiding behind Apollo here, and Tyndareos has loved him in the past and may be expected to do so still. His opinion will be very important to the incipient paranoic.

Tyndareos shows himself to be a passionate person with fixed views on what is right or wrong. His attitude is that his daughters had done wrong, earned punishment, but that it was wrong of Orestes to have undertaken that punishment himself. The correct procedure would have been to bring Klytemnestra before an impartial court at Argos.<sup>56</sup> He expounds this view in what sounds remarkably like a piece of Athenian forensic oratory (507-525).

Menelaos is nettled by this uncompromising attitude. He defends his nephew. His stance is that one must temper justice with mercy. Orestes is, after all, their nearest relative and one must forgive him and support him in his need. Tyndareos will have none of it. Right is right and brooks no compromise. The two have a spirited

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<sup>56</sup> This was Aischylos' view on the matter in his *Eumenides*. It is an anachronism here; popular courts did not exist in heroic times, but such anachronisms are not unusual in a Euripidean play.

argument heatedly accusing each other of lax, barbarian-like morality and the opinionated attitude of old age.

Greenberg<sup>57</sup> regards this scene as the acme of the σοφία versus φιλία debate. But who actually represents what? Menelaos claims that true σοφία demands a recognition of mitigating circumstances, not a predetermined law. Tyndareos regards this as the modern, pernicious sophistry, not good old-fashioned σοφία. In fact, both speakers are more activated by φιλία, a stress on personal relationship and opinion.

Euripides makes no decision on this fundamental problem here; the audience was probably divided on the question and modern critics certainly are. But what is important for our play is not who is right and who wrong. It is what effect this will have on Orestes.

That young man does not like either argument. All he senses is that he is being condemned by both his hoped-for friends. He feels that he must take an active stand and defend himself before Tyndareos. He launches into a lengthy speech of defence (544-604).

This speech has been variously evaluated by commentators. Kitto calls it: "not sophistry, but plain lunacy";<sup>58</sup> Vellacott "insane folly";<sup>59</sup> Blaiklock<sup>60</sup> feels that "he convinces neither Menelaos nor Tyndareos, but really argues with himself". On the other hand Greenberg<sup>61</sup> is of the opinion that "Orestes' argument competently changes ground according to the topic discussed". The unfortunate fact remains that this speech, far from helping, makes matters worse.

It is an accomplished rhetoric speech in form, with a prooemium, an outline of facts and an emotional appeal. But it takes no cognizance of the audience at which it is directed<sup>62</sup>. This is the paranoid's inability to convey his feelings to others. Had he thrown himself on his grandfather's love and mercy he might well have succeeded<sup>63</sup>. Instead of this he says all the things certain to infuriate the old man further.

He begins by saying he honours Tyndareos' old age, (which Menelaos has just thrown in his face as a fault) (544-555), then makes his strongest point, that he was in

<sup>57</sup> Greenberg (1962) 167-181.

<sup>58</sup> Kitto (1961) 349.

<sup>59</sup> Vellacott (1975) 67.

<sup>60</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 184.

<sup>61</sup> Greenberg (1962) 176.

<sup>62</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 184.

<sup>63</sup> Both Verrall (1905) 227 and Willink (1986) 173 stress this point.



a dilemma between his duties to father or mother. But in this he stresses Klytemnestra's guilt overmuch, and she was, after all, Tyndareos' daughter (551-563).

He then leaves commonsense ground and attempts to say that he is really a public benefactor. A clever argument, but guaranteed to infuriate the old man who has shown himself very suspicious of clever arguments.

Then he proceeds to put the last nail into his coffin by attacking Tyndareos personally and blaming him as the person really responsible because of the way he brought up his daughters. This is almost designed to provoke a counterattack (573-590).

His final argument might have been effective earlier on, seeing that Tyndareos is presumably a traditional religious man: he blames Apollo for what has happened. But he does so without conviction, the time for this argument has passed and he concludes by demanding that Tyndareos "should regard Apollo as wicked and kill him"(595). This is particularly shocking to the old man. It is plain blasphemy. Orestes' belated appeal for sympathy naturally falls on deaf ears (600-604).

The exasperated old man reacts as one would expect. He not only refuses to help, but he threatens independent action. He will go to the Argives and demand Orestes' death. He upbraids Menelaos for sticking up for such a villain and threatens to stir up a revolution against him at Sparta, if he continues to support his nephew.

This passage, too, has been interpreted in different ways. Many have seen it as an effective threat and the one which finally turned Menelaos against his nephew. But it was spoken in anger and did Tyndareos mean it? And did he, in fact, have the power to do it? It is significant that Euripides gives us no evidence that Tyndareos ever implemented his threats. He will not appear at the Argive assembly, nor does Menelaos seem unduly perturbed or influenced by the argument. But Orestes is convinced and will hold it against his uncle.

What we have seen here is the gradual development of the paranoid delusion. So far Orestes' faith in Menelaos has had a severe setback, but is not yet destroyed.<sup>64</sup> Tyndareos is now seen as a definite enemy and, to a certain extent, has become so, though possibly not as much as Orestes imagines. The borderline between normal

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<sup>64</sup> As Lesky (1983) 345 points out clearly.

suspiciousness and resentment and a paranoid delusion has become smudged, but has not, as yet, been transgressed.

Scenelet 10 (630-724): Orestes, Menelaos - the first agon

Tyndareos has stormed out, Menelaos is visibly undecided what to do: "Why do you circle around immersed in thought?" (632). Orestes makes a last attempt to enlist his help in yet another sophist-like speech (640-679). Again Kitto<sup>65</sup> calls this appeal "plain silly", Vellacott<sup>66</sup> "tactless and abusive", Verrall<sup>67</sup> "completely dry and rhetorical, frigid." It is a perfectly reasonable and well organised speech, but once again takes no cognizance of the person at whom it is directed. As the proponents of the σοφία-φιλία school point out, his argument is all based on φιλία: What would be the decent thing to do? But Menelaos is a realist: What would be the sensible thing to do? Their lines are crossed and no reasonable communication is possible.

Orestes' arguments are: I know I have done wrong (sic! 646), but my father helped you when you were in trouble; now it is up to you to help me - a perfectly fair argument (though somewhat spoilt by exaggeration) followed by: it is precisely in times of trouble and difficulty that friends are needed to help. Again perfectly fair, but he only sees his own trouble, not Menelaos'. So once again his arrow misses the mark.

He then, quite consciously and ingenuously, tries to reach Menelaos at a vulnerable point: he appeals to him by his wife, Helene. But he spoils the appeal by apologising for stooping so low as to hide behind so evil a person (671-672). This must surely have been said in an aside; even Orestes could not have been so foolish as to say it aloud. But even so, the appeal sounds very insincere and would put Menelaos' back up.

Finally Orestes conjures up a vision of his father weeping in Hades. This is good poetry but not the sort of thing that would make a modern business man invest money in a new venture.

Menelaos in his reply is all common sense. He would love to share his kinsman's trouble (682), but ... we are brought up against the fundamental problem the audience faces: What are we to believe? Is it truth or paranoia? Are Menelaos' excuses valid or subterfuges?

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<sup>65</sup> Kitto (1961) 349.

<sup>66</sup> Vellacott (1975) 67-68.

<sup>67</sup> Verrall (1905) 231.

Most critics believe the latter, others, notably Vellacott, the former. Either view is tenable. One of the major problems in dealing with a paranoid is to decide how much of his sincere belief is truth and how much delusion.

Menelaos leaves and Orestes makes his views absolutely clear: Menelaos is a traitor, a hypocrite, an enemy. He, Orestes, is betrayed by all and there is neither decency nor hope left (717-724).

Scenelet 11 (725-807): Orestes, Pylades - the enrolment of Pylades

We have left Orestes not only on the border of paranoia, but also severely depressed. Here comes relief. His friend Pylades arrives and supports him unconditionally. As many critics have pointed out, he is the very antithesis of Menelaos. According to the φιλία-σοφία school he is pure φιλία. In fact, he is very little else. He has virtually no qualities other than unquestioning loyalty. Orestes outlines the position to him as he sees it: there is a conspiracy afoot, headed by that dissimulating traitor Menelaos and that unreasonable old man Tyndareos. Helene, too, is in it. They want to kill Orestes for their own ends.

Pylades believes every word of this. More than that, he encourages Orestes in his beliefs, sometimes even attributing evil motives to the opposition before Orestes himself has thought of it.

Pylades: "You are speaking of Tyndareos. Surely, he is angry with you for the sake of his daughter!"

Orestes: "You have good insight" (751-752).

We see here the great convincing power of the paranoid, based on his utter inner conviction and we see the beginning of *folie-a-deux*. Pylades is rapidly joining the delusional system. He has all the qualifications, a less forcible personality tied to the principal by very strong bonds of affection.

At first Orestes is ineffectual, in the throes of his depression. It is Pylades who suggests various ways out of the unpleasant situation, all of them impossible. As Orestes' depression lifts it is he who resolves on a course of action: he will face the Argive assembly and fight his case. Pylades supports him in this as in everything else. The assembly is not yet seen as an enemy, but as a neutral body, possibly friendly.

Some commentators have regarded Orestes as being motivated only by thoughts of self-preservation. Maybe this is true at a subconscious level, but in the

open Euripides emphatically denies it in this scenelet. Lines 777-788 deal entirely with the moral principles concerned. Is it not more manly and heroic to fight than to submit meekly? The paranoic has delusions, but he is not morally inferior. Common sense also comes into it: it surely is reasonable to grasp at what is at least a chance of salvation, rather than stay inactive. Given the truth of his delusions the paranoic has as much common sense as any other man.

Should Elektra be told? The friends agree that she should not. She is but a woman and hence not to be trusted. She too is at present under paranoic suspicion.

There remains a practical problem. Orestes is still weak from his delirious fever. Pylades will support him physically as well as emotionally and morally. Here Euripides gives us a very interesting line (793):

Orestes: "Beware you do not catch my insanity".

Pylades: "Perish the thought!"

Is insanity catching? Orestes believes so thinking of his delirium. This is not catching and Pylades rightly spurns the idea. But he is, in fact, "catching" the paranoia well and truly. This is superb irony.

So the friends go to face the Argive assembly full of confidence and utterly convinced of the rightness of their cause.

Scenelet 12 (808-843): Chorus - the second stasimon

The chorus have learned nothing. They still see everything in Aischylean terms.<sup>68</sup> Once again they rehearse the curse on the house of Tantalos. This led to the matricide which in turn led to the pursuit by the Erinyes in whom they believe implicitly. In the first stasimon this was set out as an alternative theory to Hippokrates' view of disease. It was reasonably credible then. By now it appears an old, outworn approach. It comes as a shock at this stage of the play. If there are people in the audience who still cling to this view let them take stock now, lest they make fools of themselves like these silly old women.

Scenelet 13 (844-956): Elektra, Messenger - the debate at Argos

A messenger reports the Argive debate on the matricides. He is somewhat unusual for a Greek Tragedy messenger in that his point of view is very strongly biassed. He is an old family retainer of the house of Agamemnon, intensely loyal to it,

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<sup>68</sup> As Fuqua (1978) 1-28 rightly points out.

and hence his report is shot through with personal comments, all prejudiced in favour of Orestes.<sup>69</sup> This report is best viewed as if spoken by Orestes himself.

This is another superb piece of Euripidean double level writing. Each speaker is reported and the audience can view him from two opposing points of view. To bring out the difference I shall in what follows first report the straight facts and then add the messenger's comments. Straightaway we note that the four people whom Orestes most suspected of being his enemies, that is Oiax, Aigisthos' party, Tyndareos and Menelaos never spoke.

First came Talthybios who spoke a lot but said virtually nothing; a typical fence-sitting politician's speech. The messenger suspects that he had an eye on Aigisthos' party.

Then Diomedes who proposed a reasonable compromise. The messenger suggests that he did not put himself out very much and hence had little effect.

The third, nameless, speaker proposed stoning the couple. Fourteen lines are given to the messenger's opinion about him: he was a loud-mouthed, selfish, publicity-seeking troublemaker, the sort that is the bane of any democratic assembly. He was put up to it by Tyndareos. (How did the messenger know this?)

The final, also unnamed, speaker proposed that Orestes should be crowned as a public benefactor. To condemn him would be to condone all shameless behaviour by women.<sup>70</sup> According to the messenger this was a brave man, one of the sturdy yeoman farmers which are the backbone of a nation, intelligent, uncorrupted and self-disciplined (917-930). Decent people approved of his speech. (Who are the decent people?).

Many critics see this scene as a satire on contemporary Athenian society, some go as far as seeing direct references to contemporary politicians,<sup>71</sup> though one can just as easily regard it as satire on modern committee procedure. Parkinson would have been proud of it.<sup>72</sup> Others believe that such satire is the main purpose of the play as a whole. But this would again leave too many other parts of the *Orestes* unexplained.

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<sup>69</sup> As Verrall (1905) 237-238 clearly brings out.

<sup>70</sup> The same as Orestes' own argument to Tyndareos.

<sup>71</sup> For instance Chapouthier (1968) 7-9.

<sup>72</sup> Parkinson (1958) 44-53.

For the purpose of our interpretation the importance of the scenelet lies in its two-tiered structure. Are these facts or paranoid delusions?

Orestes feels compelled to speak in his own defence. He rides rough-shod over the assembly's feelings by reminding them they are descendants of the Danaids who killed their husbands on the wedding night and repeats already debunked arguments. The result is a foregone conclusion. The couple are condemned to death, the only boon granted to them is that they may commit suicide.

Scenelet 14 (960-1012): Elektra, Chorus - *the dirge*

First the chorus and then Elektra bemoan the evil fate that has befallen the house of Agamemnon. The chorus, as before, can only see the hand of the gods in it. Elektra, too, can only blame the ancient curse on the house of Tantalos and she proceeds to give a brief, very Aischylean review of this curse. Naturally, Elektra, herself a sufferer, cannot appreciate the situation as an illness.

### **ORESTES : PART 3**

Scenelet 15 (1012-1097): Elektra, Orestes, Pylades

The three friends are left alone, three separate, unhappy individuals. We shall now see them fusing into one in a *folie-a-trois* relationship.

Elektra's unhappiness is at least as much for her brother as for herself. She shows the same love and concern as she showed in scenelet 4. Orestes at first rebuffs her harshly. The reason he gives is that he has made up his mind to die and she makes his courage falter with her crying. "Don't envelop me in unmanliness with your tears" (1032-1032). "I have enough to bear over my mother's blood. I won't kill you. You must die by your own hand in whatever way you please." (1038-1040). At first it almost looks as if he were utterly selfish and cared only about his own feelings. But this will be shown to be untrue later. The real reason is that he still suspects Elektra. But as she hugs him and smothers him with kisses his heart melts, he accepts her as an ally and now he returns her love as ardently as she gives it (1048-1052). To modern ears this has an almost incestuous, erotic sound. Possibly it did not jar in the same way on an Athenian audience. There is certainly nothing else in the play to suggest such a relationship.

Elektra has been accepted, now she can join the delusion: "Did not Menelaos speak up for you, the evil-doer, the traitor to my father?" Orestes: "He never showed his face" (1056-1058).

Now it is Pylades' turn. He offers to die with them. Orestes first refuses so noble a sacrifice, but Pylades is adamant and he is accepted. With this the three cease to be individuals, they now form a composite paranoic *folie-a-trois* character. It will not matter who suggests or does something; all three agree together and any decision is a joint decision.

Scenelet 16 (1098-1154): Orestes, Pylades, Elektra (silent)

The first decision of the new paranoic personality is to revenge themselves on Menelaos. The best way to do this is by killing his dearly beloved Helene. She does not deserve to live, anyhow, seeing what a vile person she is. In fact, killing her will be a real service to all mankind and the whole of Greece will applaud it. They will win eternal glory. If, by any chance, the plan does not succeed, they can always set fire to the palace and die gloriously in the flames.

This is a very crucial step. If anyone still believes in the correctness of Orestes' view then this further step is hardly surprising. We may condemn personal revenge as morally wrong (with Aischylos) but it is surely a very human reaction. This latest step, therefore, is not a sign of insanity either, but a perfectly reasonable one. But most people by this stage, or, if not then, by the next will cry: "Halt! There is something unhealthy here." But where has the transition from sanity to madness occurred? Surely in the formation of the delusional belief, which is therefore not normal but a sign of paranoia. Euripides, with fiendish ingenuity, has developed this in such a gradual fashion that we have not really become aware of it until now. So thin is the line between sanity and madness in paranoia.

The conspirators are intelligent enough to realise that this plan needs justification. They find it in the denouncement of Helene as an evil person. This is pure rationalisation. They have disliked and mistrusted her before, now they whip themselves up into a new frenzy: She is sealing the rooms ... that means she wants to take over their house(1108). She has brought a number of body-servants from Troy ... Greece is not good enough for her (1113). If they complain to her she will pretend to weep, but will be inwardly joyful (1122). Only after they have thus persuaded

themselves of her wickedness are they able to resolve to kill her. This is still a normal human reaction. It is virtually impossible for us to harm another person knowingly until we have justified our action in our own minds.

There only remain the logistic details to be worked out. They will lock up the servants in various parts of the house. They are, after all, only Phrygians and easily dealt with (1111, the point will recur later). They will murder her. This is all very moral when dealing with so wicked a person. If any of the servants get killed in the process that is just too bad (1128).

Even they must consider the possibility of failure. Hence the alternative plan of setting fire to the house. The details of this have not been worked out as it is only an alternative, but somehow it seems emotionally right and desirable to them. Perhaps as an added punishment for that fiend Menelaos.

Scenelet 17 (1155-1245): Orestes, Elektra, Pylades (almost silent)

Just in case there is a member of the audience who still considers that, maybe, the conspirators are acting reasonably in view of the excessive wickedness of Menelaos and Helene, Euripides now proceeds to reduce this idea to the ultimate absurdity. The conspirators turn on Hermione. In all this welter of morally suspect people Hermione has stood out as the one unimpeachable person: young, tender, loving, she has no faults unless one dislikes her because she is too impossibly good. There can be no excuse for using violence on such a person, but this is what the three propose. They will use her as a hostage, with a sword at her throat, and kill her if necessary.

We need not be unduly influenced by the fact that it is Elektra who suggests the scheme.<sup>73</sup> The three must now be regarded as a single character and certainly the other two concur enthusiastically with the plan, as soon as it is explained to them. This takes a little time, Orestes appears somewhat dense.

Once again, such an unusual deed needs moral justification. They will exchange Hermione's life for Menelaos' help. We have seen before that it is very doubtful whether Menelaos can, in fact, help; but little details like that no longer sway our trio.

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<sup>73</sup> Verrall (1905) 212 and 260 suggests that she has always hated Hermione. The reasons he gives are psychologically perfectly possible, but there is no shred of evidence in the text to suggest that Euripides had such a possibility in mind.



Intellectually no one can doubt any further that the three have passed the limits of sanity. Euripides concludes the scenelet by making the same point emotionally. In a ghastly travesty of the prayer to Agamemnon in Aischylos' *Choephoroi*<sup>74</sup> Orestes, Elektra and Pylades join in a macabre invocation of Agamemnon to assist their unholy plans (1225-1245).

Scenelet 18 (1246-1312): Elektra, Chorus - the second stasimon

Elektra and the chorus remain outside the palace to guard against interruption by a relief force. Why should there be a relief force at this stage? The plan exists only in the minds of the conspirators. As in the parodos, so here, the lyrical song is replaced by a dance and mime. And here, as before, the scene borders on farce. The old women trip up and down, changing sides, peering anxiously into corners. They start at nothing, see imaginary enemies and squabble with each other. Elektra is just as bad, she reaches a pit of despondency at one of the false alarms (1271-1272).

During this mime cries are heard from within the palace. They obviously come from Helene; she is being murdered. This is a shock to the audience. Myth reported that Helene lived on and was eventually deified. Is Euripides taking unwarranted liberties with the myth? Nonetheless, one must admit that the way the play has progressed there can really be no alternative to Helene's death.

Scenelet 19 (1313-1365): Elektra, Chorus, Hermione

Hermione arrives and is lured into the net. She shows herself to be the splendid character we know her to be: trusting, defenceless, full of goodwill and sympathy, ready to do all she can for her unfortunate relatives. Elektra, on the other hand, is full of deceit. She plays with her victim as a cat with a mouse. The scene is crammed with dramatic irony as we and Elektra know what is about to happen while Hermione is completely unaware. This could again be comic, were it not so obviously pathetic. Irony in Euripides is comic or tragic depending on whether we identify with the tormentor or the victim. Here we surely identify with Hermione. Elektra has forfeited our sympathy.

Hermione is dragged into the palace and Elektra sings a song of triumph.

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<sup>74</sup> The point is stressed by Lesky (1983) 348; Kitto (1961) 350; Verrall (1905) 246; Vellacott (1975) 75.

Scenelet 20 (1366-1502): Chorus, Phrygian - the second messenger speech

This is a most unusual messenger for a Greek tragedy. Instead of coming through the door he leaps from the roof.<sup>75</sup> He is a Phrygian, one of Helene's attendants, dressed in outlandish clothes, excitable, incoherent, talking a kind of pidgin-Greek, almost certainly a eunuch.<sup>76</sup> He is obviously a comedy figure and his many references to barbarian cowardliness, his excitability and lack of manhood appeal to the xenophobic element and invite us to laugh. Yet his message is far from laughable.

At first the chorus find it difficult to follow him at all. He seems to be lamenting over Troy rather than the present situation, but eventually they get the truth out of him. But this truth is itself very odd. Helene appears to have escaped. Did she do so through her own efforts? Or did Orestes relent at the last minute and let her go? Or was the whole murder scene perhaps imaginary, a figment of the conspirators' paranoid delusion? Or was there some sort of divine intervention? The chorus, the characters, the audience and the critics are all equally mystified. Orestes apparently took hold of Helene, then let her go to grab Hermione, then looked for Helene again to find her gone.

Apart from this confused story the Phrygian provides us with another view of Helene altogether: she is a wonderful person: a vision of beauty like swan-plumage (1386), engaged in quiet, wifely chores such as spinning(1431-1434), devotedly caring for her deceased sister (1435-1436). Her staff are devoted to her to the extent of risking their own lives for her safety (1486-1487).

Orestes and Pylades, by contrast, are like wild boars (1460), striking without pity (1468-1473). We must put this view against the conspirators'.

It is difficult to make sense of this scene intellectually, but emotionally it leaves us with a profound sense of a violent and senseless attack by wild beasts on a charming person. This is how an unprejudiced outside observer must view what is happening.

Scenelet 21 (1503-1537): Orestes, Phrygian

This is essentially an agon: the proponents of the paranoid view and of common sense face each other. It is also another comedy scene. But are we invited

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<sup>75</sup> Willink (1986) 306.

<sup>76</sup> Willink (1986) 306; Burnett (1971) 198.

to laugh at the antics of the madman or of the despicable foreigner? Gredley finds it so out of place<sup>77</sup> that he regards it as an interpolation. Why should Orestes want to prevent the Phrygian from raising the alarm? He expects and wants Menelaos to come to be confronted with Helene's death and Hermione's peril. Obviously, Orestes is no longer thinking clearly. His suspiciousness has reached out to encompass even the lowly Phrygian. He bullies and blusters, waves his sword furiously, but the Phrygian handles him beautifully. He agrees with everything that is said, demeans himself and praises Orestes quite shamelessly, thereby depriving him of any excuse for violence. Orestes half realises this but falls under the spell none-the-less. He even seeks reassurance for his own doubts from this despised man: Orestes: "Was it justified that Tyndareos' daughter should perish?" Phrygian: "Absolutely! Particularly if she presented three throats for death" (1512ff).<sup>78</sup>

This is a superb example of quick-wittedness triumphing over emotion-driven stupidity; the only way to handle a homicidal paranoid.

Orestes lets him go, realising at last, that that is what he wants anyhow.

Scenelet 22 (1537-1548): Chorus - choral interlude

And still the chorus have learned nothing. They sing once again that this is all part of the old curse. Unlike the Phrygian, they have no common sense, only prejudices.

Scenelet 23 (1549-1624): Orestes, Menelaos (Elektra, Pylades, Hermione, Chorus all silent) - the climax

Menelaos rushes in with armed attendants. He has heard that Helene has been murdered, or perhaps vanished, though, being a realist, he cannot believe the latter. Now he proposes to rescue his daughter and punish the offenders. Orestes appears on the battlements holding a sword to Hermione's throat. An angry altercation develops between the two. This is not an agon, where two opposing points of view are stated and discussed rationally. Orestes does not, in fact, have a clearly defined point of view, he keeps changing his position.

Elektra's original plan to use Hermione as a hostage may be morally indefensible, but, at least, understandable. But Orestes demands the throne of Argos

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<sup>77</sup> Gredley 409-419.

<sup>78</sup> See Willink's (1986) 332 remarks on the allusion to Herakles' doughty slaying of Geryon.

as well, which is inconceivable, as Menelaos points out. Even if the older man agreed, he could not bring it about. Anyway, Orestes seems by now to have forgotten all about this plan. He tells Menelaos he **will** kill his daughter, no conditions attached.

Orestes then justifies his action by claiming to be the great punisher of wicked women, though he is as puzzled as everyone else as to what has actually happened to Helene. This argument breaks down over Hermione, who cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a wicked woman.

His real motivation is different. He feels that if he can only destroy Menelaos, the kingpin of the great conspiracy against him, all his troubles will disappear. There is no logic to this, only intense feeling. If that should be impossible he will set fire to the palace and, at least, die gloriously rather than submit meekly to the conspiracy.

Menelaos can destroy all these arguments easily on moral, as well as on common sense grounds, but this does not help. Orestes is well beyond reasonable argument and the fact is: he has the upper hand. He does not mind dying. There is, therefore, nothing with which Menelaos can threaten him.

A brief attempt to make at least Pylades see reason fails, as he is as much part of the paranoid personality as Orestes himself.

The problem is insoluble, words fail and the conspirators prepare to kill Hermione and set fire to the palace.

### **THE EPILOGUE (1625-1693)**

The drama has come to an end. Orestes' illness has propelled matters to their inexorable catastrophic conclusion. There remain a few problems which have not been answered yet:

1. What exactly happened to Helene?
2. Was Orestes' view of Menelaos and Helene being unutterable scoundrels true or a delusion?
3. What was the basic cause of Orestes' illness?
4. Could anything have been done to avert the cataclysm?

It is the function of the epilogue to answer these questions.

Apollo appears and, in one stroke, makes everything come right. Helene was apparently saved by his personal intervention and will be deified, according to the inflexible will of Zeus who has envisaged this outcome right from the beginning.

Menelaos and Orestes will cease their quarrelling and become friends.

Elektra and Pylades will marry each other, go abroad, and live happily ever after.

Orestes will go to Parrhasia for a while (thus evoking the well-known Peloponnesian version of the myth), then to Athens where he will be cleared of his blood guilt. (For details consult Aischylos' *Eumenides*). Thereafter he will take up his rightful heritage as king of Argos. He will marry Hermione, with Menelaos' approval, and they, too, will live happily ever after.

This certainly solves everything. But a large section of the audience, assuredly, and the great majority of later critics, certainly, found this solution utterly unacceptable. What can have been Euripides' purpose in putting forward so impossible an idea? It runs flatly counter to everything the play has suggested so far.

Some critics have given up the task of trying to make sense of it. Euripides, they imply, has written himself into an impossible situation and added this bit to please the audience by providing a happy ending.<sup>79</sup> Others have suggested that the very absurdity of the solution underlines the hopelessness of the situation.<sup>80</sup> Yet others have tried to see a more profound message in the epilogue.<sup>81</sup>

This is typical Euripidean multilevel writing. The credulous (like the chorus) who still cling tenaciously to the idea that the ancestral curse and the mysterious intentions of the gods explain everything will heave a sigh of relief: is not Apollo wonderful?

Others will be so put off by the obvious absurdity of it all that they will be driven to conclude that myths and religion alike are all nonsense. Whether the prime cause is Fate or human frailty, there can be no solution to the problem.

Those who have realised that they have witnessed the relentless course of a mental illness must ask themselves what has caused it and conclude that the basic

<sup>79</sup> For instance Decharme (1968) 269.

<sup>80</sup> Arrowsmith (1958) 110; Vellacott (1975) 79; Parry (1963) 343; Lichtenberger (1986) 1-13; Murray (1913) 162.

<sup>81</sup> Burnett (1971) 220; Wolff (1968) 147-148; Schlesier (1985) 44; Parry (1963) 343; Greenberg (1962) 181.

trouble was the abnormal suspiciousness of Orestes and his companions. If that could have been eliminated none of these awful happenings need have occurred. Helene could have been seen as a perfectly decent person and need not have died. Orestes and Menelaos could have remained friends. Elektra and Pylades could have been united in love as they were in their delusional state and lived happily. Orestes could have been cleansed of his blood guilt (see Aischylos). Thereafter he might even have reclaimed the throne of Argos to which he was entitled. A happy union with Hermione would have been an entirely satisfactory arrangement.

Apollo's solution is thus a very sound and effective one. It founders on the fact that it is beyond human power to achieve; but is it beyond a god? This god cannot be the fickle and amoral Apollo of popular religion.<sup>82</sup> He stands utterly discredited. But how about some other, moral and benevolent godhead? Would faith in him not achieve exactly what is required?

Apollo gives Orestes a new trust in his benevolent divinity. "Oh Apollo, true prophet, in your oracles you were no false prophet, but speaking the sterling truth, though a fear had gripped me lest I were heeding the voice of some evil demon rather than yours. But all ends well: I shall follow your orders to the letter." (1666-1670)

We come to the conclusion that had Orestes not been activated by abnormal suspiciousness but had faith in something beyond himself, such as Apollo, none of these events need have happened.

### SOME REMAINING QUESTIONS

#### (a) One disease or two?

As we have seen, the *Orestes* is basically a description of two mental disorders, delirium and paranoia. In modern psychiatry these two are regarded as completely distinct. Admittedly, paranoid features may occur in delirium, but these are poorly systematised and short-lived, disappearing as soon as the delirium is over. This is unlike what is described in the play. Did Euripides also regard the two as separate or did he treat them as different aspects of the same disease?

The two diseases are kept quite separate in the play. Delirium is shown only in part 1. It is referred to in later parts as something that is past and has left its mark, but

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<sup>82</sup> As Schlesier (1985) 3 points out.

it is no longer enacted. The paranoia, on the other hand, is scarcely hinted at in part 1. In part 2 it develops visibly in front of our eyes and in part 3 it is shown full-blown.

The characters themselves frequently refer to Orestes' illness (νόσος). In every case this reference is to the delirium. Nobody refers to the paranoid behaviour as a νόσος. The conspirators, of course, regard themselves as completely sane, Tyndareos and Menelaos regard them as wicked, but responsible for their actions. The chorus are sorry for them, as being unjustly punished, but at no time do they regard them as sick. On the contrary, for most of the time they approve of Orestes' actions.

Only later critics, in referring to Orestes' madness, or criminal depravity, or hereditary insanity,<sup>83</sup> appear to have both diseases in mind. I have not come across any reference that would separate them. All would seem to agree that madness is a single disease, from which Orestes suffers in all three parts.<sup>84</sup>

On this evidence it would seem that Euripides was well in advance of all later critics.

However, if we accept that Euripides is consciously describing two separate and unrelated conditions, then the play loses its unity. Euripides has frequently been accused of writing plays without unity, but I have not found this to be so. Every play proves to have a clear message running through it without significant deviation. The *Orestes* would be the first exception to this.

Hippokrates frequently discusses delirium, but there is no reference in the extant *Corpus* to paranoia as an entity. In the many references to the causation of mental disorder, mainly disturbances of temperature, moisture or "humours", most mental conditions appear to be treated alike. It would therefore seem that in Hippocratic circles no clear distinction was drawn between different mental disorders.<sup>85</sup> This would suggest that Euripides, too, seeing how well versed he seems to have been in Hippocratic lore<sup>86</sup> would see delirium and paranoia as different aspects of the same disorder.

No final answer can be given to the question. Perhaps the best way to look at it might be that Euripides, following Hippocratic teaching, regarded mental disorder as

<sup>83</sup> Smith (1967) 292; Haigh (1896) 159; Bates (1961) 170; Vellacott (1975) 64; Wolff (1968) 134.

<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, Boulter (1962) 102-106.

<sup>85</sup> Smith (1967) 295.

<sup>86</sup> Compare my remarks in connection with the *Herakles* as well as the present chapter.

a single phenomenon, but as an independent observer of both delirium and paranoia he recognised the difference and represented them accurately.

(b) The cause of the illness

Elektra, quite openly, and the others by implication, state that the illness arose from the matricide, whether we believe that it is due to the Erinyes or to a physical ailment. This, however, may be an example of *post hoc propter hoc*. As any physician has experienced, whatever the illness, every normal patient will try to ascertain its cause, and, on looking back on events about the time of onset, is liable to find something unusual, be it dietary indiscretion, overwork or psychological trauma. Most times the connection between ostensible cause and illness is illusory. So Wolff<sup>87</sup> regards Orestes' guilt as erupting in physical illness.

It is well known that psychological events can produce physical changes in the body.<sup>88</sup> There are, however, certain symptoms for which a psychological cause has never been proved. Fever is such a one.

Delirium, too, is not believed to be induced by psychological causes, though the content of the illusions and hallucinations may be greatly influenced by them. Modern medicine would, therefore, not accept the matricide as a direct cause of the delirium. The position is more difficult with regard to the paranoia. This condition is almost certainly psychologically determined, according to our present state of knowledge. But there is no evidence that it can be caused by a single, acute psychic trauma. What may happen, however, is that someone already predisposed to schizophrenia may develop overt manifestations of the disease after a psychic trauma, and this may take paranoid forms.

In the Hippocratic writings fevers, and hence delirium, are not generally attributed to spiritual factors. There is, however, a passage<sup>89</sup> where the writer begins: "A female, following a severe grief (ἐκ λύπης) developed a fever...." and goes on to describe toxic delirium. This does not prove, but makes it very likely, that some Hippocratic writers, at least, would regard grief as a possible cause for fever and delirium.

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<sup>87</sup> Wolff (1968) 125.

<sup>88</sup> Compare my discussion in connection with the *Hippolytos*.

<sup>89</sup> Hippocrates *Epidemics* III 15.



Euripides gives no indication in the *Orestes* of what his thoughts were on the subject, other than what Elektra says. The question of whether he connected the matricide and the later illness other than temporally cannot, therefore, be answered definitely.

(c) The elements of comedy

I have discussed this in general terms on page 11. It will suffice here to give a list of the scenelets where I believe such an element can be discerned:

1. The behaviour of the chorus, scenelets 3, 18 and 22.
2. The antics of a madman, scenelets 5 and 21.
3. The debate at Argos, scenelet 13.
4. The Phrygian, scenelets 20 and 21.
5. Orestes' "sophistic" speeches, scenelets 9 and 13.
6. Possibly the epilogue, by the apparent absurdity of its solution may be seen as such.

In each case the possibility of a "comic" interpretation serves to undercut the credibility of what the characters say suggesting that we are not dealing with real events but paranoia.

### SUMMARY

The *Orestes* is presented as a study of two mental disorders: Delirium and Paranoia. The relationship of the two is discussed in the end section.

The play has a triptych structure. In the first part there is a masterly clinical description of a condition resembling delirium tremens. At the same time the characters of Orestes and Elektra are presented as a basis for the development of paranoia.

In the second part there is a superb description of the development of the paranoid delusion from very slight beginnings to a fully organised form. The influence of other characters on this development is clearly outlined.

In the third part the fully blown paranoia is dramatically described and leads to its inevitable disastrous conclusion.

The epilogue shows that all the troubles of the tragedy arise from an illness emanating from Orestes' abnormal suspiciousness. Faith in something outside himself could so easily have avoided them all.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE *TROADES*

#### Classical

Aelian<sup>1</sup> tells us that in 415 B.C. Euripides came second in the competition with his plays *Alexander - Palamedes - Troades* and the satyr play *Sisyphos*. As the three main plays all deal with the Trojan War cycle critics have wondered whether they were connected in some way and perhaps formed a trilogy like Aischylos' *Oresteia*. If that were correct we might find that the basic message of the *Troades* might not be understandable without a knowledge of the other two tragedies. The literature has been excellently surveyed, particularly by two authors, Koniaris<sup>2</sup> and Scodel,<sup>3</sup> who, however, come to opposite conclusions. Koniaris can see no convincing evidence for a connection between the plays; Scodel maintains that the connection is very close, though probably not as close as that of the *Oresteia*. The interested reader should refer to Scodel's work for an attempt at reconstructing these two plays.

The *Troades* has had a mixed reception from critics. Whilst everyone recognises its emotional impact, opinions have varied about the play's merit. At one extreme we have Haigh's assessment:<sup>4</sup> perhaps the least interesting of the extant tragedies; a series of unconnected scenes, depicting miserable fate. The execution is not in Euripides' best style. Rhetoric takes the place of pathos. The choral odes are lifeless and unsuitable. There is a gloomy monotone about the whole play.

At the other extreme we have Barlow's view:<sup>5</sup> one of the greatest of all tragedies, very different from others in structure, form and content, a less intricate plot; the characters are normal people caught up in abnormal circumstances. There is a skilful blending of emotional and reasoned response and a clear unity.

The structure of the play, too, has evoked a varied reaction. It has been characterised as a series of loosely connected themes,<sup>6</sup> chaotic,<sup>7</sup> episodic,<sup>8</sup> without

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<sup>1</sup> Aelian *Varia Historia* II, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Koniaris (1972) *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Scodel (1980) *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Haigh (1896) 300.

<sup>5</sup> Barlow (1986) 232.

<sup>6</sup> See Gilmartin (1970) 213; Sienkewicz (1978) 81.

<sup>7</sup> Kitto (1961) 210.

<sup>8</sup> See Sienkewicz (1978) 81.

dramatic structure,<sup>9</sup> a triptych,<sup>10</sup> an oratorio rather than a tragedy.<sup>11</sup> Others have regarded it as a well structured play.<sup>12</sup>

The basic problem, of course, is: what is the play all about? Concerning this there is a very wide divergence of opinion.

Some critics see nothing in it but pathos and gloom.<sup>13</sup>

Others regard the pathos as even more deep-seated. It is that of mankind. Time and time again our hopes are raised that underneath all this brutality, folly, and injustice there may be some enduring principle. Each time this hope is dashed. The full message is: there are no gods, there is no justice, there is nothing.<sup>14</sup>

Some critics have thought to discern that something is saved out of the ruin: perhaps human dignity as exemplified by Hekabe<sup>15</sup> or that Hekabe finds an undying splendour<sup>16</sup> or fame, as *Kassandra* (1242) points out.<sup>17</sup> Or should one regard revenge and its ravages as the point of the play?<sup>18</sup>

A very popular view in the early years of this century and perhaps showing some signs of revival<sup>19</sup> is the belief that the tragedy is a biting denunciation of War. But was such a denunciation necessary in 415 B.C.?

A development of the anti-war point of view can be seen in the attitude of those who stress the importance of references to the events at Melos and the Sicilian campaign.<sup>20</sup> There are certainly striking resemblances, but it is easy to read too much into them. Parmentier<sup>21</sup> discusses the matter well.

Another, entirely different approach lays stress on Euripides' attitude to the gods. There can be no doubt that this subject is discussed in the play, but only Desch,<sup>22</sup> of modern commentators, maintains that it is the major theme of the *Troades*. As usual in Euripides' work, we are left in ignorance whether he rejects only the

<sup>9</sup> Conacher (1967) 129.

<sup>10</sup> Grube (1971) 280.

<sup>11</sup> Sartre (1965) 6.

<sup>12</sup> Poole (1976) 257; Albini (1970) *passim*; Barlow (1986) 31.

<sup>13</sup> Kitto (1961) 210; Bates (1961) 198; Lesky (1972) 290; Orban (1974) 13.

<sup>14</sup> Poole (1976) *passim*; Orban (1974) *passim*; Havelock (1968) 127.

<sup>15</sup> Gellie (1986) 121; Bates (1961) 201; Conacher (1967) 144.

<sup>16</sup> Murray (1965) 68.

<sup>17</sup> Parmentier (1968) 17; Lesky (1983) 285.

<sup>18</sup> Amerasinghe (1973) *passim*; Grube (1971) 281.

<sup>19</sup> Griffero (1980) *passim*; Grube (1971) 280; Sartre (1965) 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Griffero (1980) 234; Orban (1974) *passim*; Murray (1965) 63; Pertusi (1952) 251-253.

<sup>21</sup> Parmentier (1968) 13-16.

<sup>22</sup> Desch (1985) *passim*.

mythological trappings or religion altogether (see page 23). Critics have differed in their views on this point and some made the rejection of all religion only a part of the totally nihilistic outlook of the play.

Yet another approach is to read the play as a serious enquiry into the status of slaves or of women. Of the former there are only traces in Cassandra's and Andromache's attitude to Talthybios (424-6, 717) but there may have been more in the *Alexander* (see below). The question of women's status is much more thoroughly discussed in Andromache's speech (647-675) and references to it can be read into a number of other speeches.<sup>23</sup> Certainly, the fact that all the main characters are women, an unprecedented step in Greek tragedy, is consonant with such an idea. It is difficult, however, to see this as the main purpose of the play. It leaves too many passages unexplained.

Only one author, to the best of my knowledge, has gone out of her way to suggest that the differences between the characters should be seen as the main purpose of the play.<sup>24</sup> As this will also be the approach adopted in this thesis I shall not discuss it further here.

## OVERVIEW

### PSYCHIATRIC (Personality Types)

The attitude to disease in psychiatry is changing rapidly, as, indeed, in the rest of medicine. Older attempts at classifying mental disorders into distinct aetiological entities have proved unrewarding and much more stress is laid nowadays on psychological defence mechanisms. The latest widely accepted system of classification is embodied in the DSM III (1980) and DSM IIR (1987). This maintains that any patient should be assessed along 5 axes:

1. The clinical syndrome; this is descriptive and more or less what older psychiatry stressed
2. Personality traits
3. Associated physical disorders
4. Social stress factors

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<sup>23</sup> Vellacott (1975) 89-91; Gellie (1986) *passim*; Havelock (1968) 115.

<sup>24</sup> Barlow (1986) 30ff.

5. Highest level of previous function (education, etc).

In the assessment of axis 2 psychiatrists feel uncomfortable. Their job is to deal with mental disease, but abnormal personalities merge imperceptibly into normal ones and the study of these ought to be the domain of the psychologist. But the psychologist is also in trouble, not knowing which of the innumerable systems of causation and classification to use. Meissner takes 31 pages and Millon 43 pages to list the more important systems, past and present. The two accounts overlap but are by no means identical.<sup>25</sup>

A study of personality is, of course, very ancient and found throughout literature. The first attempt at classifying personalities is generally ascribed to Aristotle,<sup>26</sup> but it is for him only a side issue. His follower Theophrastos (371-287 B.C.) wrote a list of human characters devoid of moral considerations and purely descriptive in character. We probably have only lecture notes preserved and even then not the complete set.<sup>27</sup> Little more work appears to have been done on the subject until modern times, though writers, of course, did not cease to be interested in human character.

Freud himself, though inevitably compelled to deal with character types tried to avoid the subject and confine himself to mechanisms. Some of his followers, however, particularly Jung and Adler wrote volubly on character types and since then a veritable flood of publications has appeared. The interested reader is referred to Allen and Millon.<sup>28</sup>

In the DSM III twelve character types are listed, but even the most enthusiastic followers of this manual will not claim that this is the final word on the subject. Even the compilers acknowledge that the list does not claim to be exhaustive and individual patients often need to be placed into two, or even three, separate classifications. At best we can say with Millon that the manual fairly represents the state of the art at present.

In the following I shall base my account of various personality types on DSM III; not the original, which is brief and dry, but the expanded accounts of Allen and

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<sup>25</sup> Meissner (1978) 283-295; Millon (1981) 225-227.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle *Eudemic Ethics* 1220-1221; *Rhetoric* II 1389a-1391b.

<sup>27</sup> Vellacott (1967) *Theophrastos' Characters* 8.

<sup>28</sup> Allen (1984) 507-508; Millon (1981) 225-227.

Millon. There is no need to go through all twelve types but I shall confine myself to those which have a direct bearing on the *Troades*. Instead of the term "histrionic" personality I shall use the older "hysterical" which will be more familiar and which I shall discuss in some detail below. In this I shall largely follow Nemiah's account.<sup>29</sup>

### Anger and Hate

The role of these two emotions in determining human reaction is also an important factor in the *Troades* and worth a very brief comment. Hate and anger are positive emotions which temporarily make a person feel good, whatever their later effects may be. Many personality types, including all the ones discussed below, have a tendency to resort to these emotions as a relief from the unpleasant negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, guilt feelings. As anger and hate are liable to provoke retaliation from their victim and this could be dangerous to the individual, they are frequently displaced onto another person, less able to fight back. Thus an innocent bystander may find himself violently attacked.

### Overview of approach to the play

In this chapter I hope to show that there is considerable merit in the assumption that Euripides' main interest in writing the play lay in the different reactions of various character types to the same stress. Of modern critics only Barlow<sup>30</sup> makes much of this point. Yet, if we make this assumption, a large number of passages in the play which have puzzled previous critics will be found to be entirely relevant and necessary. At the same time many of the motifs discussed by previous critics will be seen to follow naturally from it.

Hekabe, Cassandra, Andromache and the chorus have all undergone the same stress and Helene a slightly different, but basically similar one. Yet, each reacts in a different way. Fundamentally Helene refuses to believe that catastrophe is inevitable and goes on fighting with every means at her disposal; Hekabe accepts that her present situation is deplorable but tries to adapt to it; Andromache also accepts the situation but refuses to adapt; Cassandra denies the reality of disaster altogether and attempts to prove to herself and to others that all is for the best.

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<sup>29</sup> Nemiah (1964) 870-885.

<sup>30</sup> Barlow (1986) 30-35.

Straightaway this approach will explain the organisation of the play, which previous critics have found so unsatisfactory. From our point of view it is the natural way of approaching the problem: after pinpointing the stress in the prologue each character is brought to the forefront in turn and her reaction minutely studied. Each of these sections contains its own agon, in which the character argues with Hekabe about the propriety of acting in this manner. The agones contain much cerebral as well as emotional material, which some critics have found distasteful. We must appreciate that a person's character type affects not only his emotions, but his thinking as well and it is therefore absolutely realistic that the characters should argue intellectually as well as act emotionally.

The varying and conflicting attitude to the gods is also a necessary feature as each character tries to find her own religious as well as intellectual stance .

Each character, at some stage, displaces her feelings into anger and hate; this explains the apparent change which the characters of Hekabe, Andromache and Helene undergo and which critics have found puzzling.

Once we see the play in this light it will appear that there is a very strong unity running through it. The basic problem turns out to be the problem of human responsibility. If the gods make us do what we do, then we cannot be held responsible. If the gods have no influence on our decisions then we are responsible. If we are of a certain character type then we cannot help acting in the way we do and our responsibility is at least diminished. This is a very modern concept which judges in all Western countries find a problem, as I hope to point out.

## **HYSTERIA**

### Ancient

From the beginning of mankind it must have been apparent to students of human nature that most people react fairly predictably to stress. At the same time it must have been observed that now and then a person may react in an entirely different manner which seems quite inappropriate and frequently the exact opposite of what one would expect. So striking is this phenomenon that it seemed the person must have become the mouthpiece of an alien personality, be it demon, god, or ancestral spirit, which has taken possession of her. Evidence for this belief abounds in the literature.



This view of the matter pervades all primitive tribal thinking; it was common in 5th century Athens and throughout the middle ages in Europe and has not entirely left us yet. There are many Christians who regard possession by the Devil or the Holy Spirit as an undoubted fact.

### Hippokrates

In 5th century Greece Hippokrates and his school first took issue with this interpretation. In his view the phenomenon was a disease and being, according to him, confined to women he attributed it to the uterus. Hence the use of the word "Hysteria" from the Greek word ὕστέρα (womb).

In his book "About Human Conditions"<sup>31</sup> he gives an account of the displacements of the uterus. A downward displacement produces symptoms which would nowadays be discussed under uterine prolapse. An upward displacement causes symptoms, both physical and emotional, which would nowadays be called hysterical. In his book "About the Nature of Women"<sup>32</sup> he describes these in more detail and outlines his treatment: Evil smelling substances are applied to the nostrils to chase the vagrant uterus downwards and good smelling substances between the legs to entice it back into position. This method, though based on a faulty theory, would undoubtedly have worked well in many hysterics.

Another interesting remark in this book foreshadows the sexual ideas of Freud. It states that hysteria is particularly common in elderly virgins and young widows and that, however you treat it, the best resolution occurs after marriage or re-marriage and consequent pregnancy.<sup>33</sup>

Additional remarks on hysteria can be found in other Hippokratic works.<sup>34</sup>

### Charcot

Towards the end of the 19th century Charcot, a Paris physician, took up the study of the disease seriously. His wards were full of hysterics. His work attracted wide attention so that a would-be gentleman in Victorian times was expected to know something about the condition. Hence the words hysteria and hysterical became accepted terms in common parlance. It is at this stage that the popular image of a

<sup>31</sup> Hippokrates, *About Human Conditions* chapter 47.

<sup>32</sup> Hippokrates, *About the Nature of Women* chapter 3.

<sup>33</sup> Hippokrates *About the Nature of Women* VII, 315.

<sup>34</sup> Hippokrates, *Epidemics* 7, 68, 96, 97; *Coan Prognoses* sect. 2 xviii, sect. 7 xxxii, 543.

"hysterical female" arose, as that of a woman who laughs uproariously when struck by disaster. This image is still with us today,<sup>35</sup> though, in fact, it is only one of many kinds of hysterical behaviour and has become quite rare. The behaviour of *Kassandra* in the *Troades*, as we shall see, largely conforms to this image.

### Janet

Janet was a pupil of Charcot's and continued the research into hysteria. He first advocated the concept that hysteria is not so much a disease as a psychological reaction. This he called dissociation and suggested that through it an unpleasant emotional experience is dissociated from consciousness, but still persists in an unconscious form, and is capable of influencing the patient's behaviour. This is the beginning of the modern idea of a "subconscious mind".

### Freud

Freud had worked both with Charcot and with Janet for a while. He worked on hysteria all his life, during which time he formed and discarded or modified a number of theories which renders a clear description of his ideas somewhat difficult. I largely follow Krohn's account in this.<sup>36</sup> Freud first took up Janet's idea of dissociation, which he renamed "repression" and regarded as a normal defence mechanism. With increasing pre-occupation with libido (psycho-sexual energy) he replaced dissociation by the concept of conversion: the energy of a suppressed thought is converted into physical symptoms such as paralysis, mutism and a host of other hysterical phenomena. The mechanism of this conversion he never succeeded in explaining satisfactorily. In a later work he ascribed the role of the original stress to memories of seduction in early childhood, which, he thought, was very frequent. Later still, he rejected this theory in favour of one where early childhood sexual phantasies take the place of actual seduction and regarded hysteria as a reversion to a pre-phallic mode of sexuality and tied it especially to the Oedipus (and its female counterpart, the Elektra) complex. The psychoanalytic school generally continue this tradition.

### More recent trends

Here I follow mostly Meissner's account.<sup>37</sup> Freud's ideas first received enthusiastic welcome (and equally enthusiastic rejection), but not everyone was willing

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<sup>35</sup> See Eliot (1936) 32.

<sup>36</sup> Krohn (1978) 9-45.

<sup>37</sup> Meissner (1978) 283-295.

to follow him into the more rarified regions of his sexual theories and gradually Janet's views crept back into favour. Later studies produced a variety of other, and often non-sexual wishes and fears which, after repression, could lead to hysterical phenomena. Some of the major ones are:<sup>38</sup>

1. Gratification of dependency needs (the hysteric instead of solving his problems clings to others for support)(\*).
2. Environmental stresses: any form of stress can set off the reaction and once this has been experienced as a useful way of dealing with problems, it tends to be resorted to more and more frequently(\*) .
3. Psychosomatic disorder: a physical disorder may cause psychological reactions which, in turn, by conversion, produce further physical symptoms (-).
4. Need to communicate: The hysteric is trying to communicate some of his repressed feelings to other people(\*). Thus the hysterical parasuicide is really calling for attention and help.

With this tremendous widening of the concept of hysteria it was soon appreciated that the reaction occurs in males as well as in females. Gradually psychiatrists came to dissociate three aspects of the whole complex:

1. The hysterical attack, seen as a disease, an abnormal state of mind.
2. The conversion mechanism to which we are all prone and which is a normal human defence mechanism.
3. The hysterical personality type: this postulates the existence of a tendency (genetic or acquired) to react to stress in this particular way. These three aspects are not synonymous. A patient who produces a typical hysterical fit may not have shown the hysterical personality trait before and, conversely, a typical hysterical personality may never show the psychiatric entity called hysteria.

#### Current views

With the ever widening concept of hysteria psychiatrists have become progressively disenchanted with the concept. The clinical features covered by it before are now divided up between several psychiatric diagnoses, of which I shall only mention the most frequent (the page numbers refer to DSM III): dissociative disorder

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<sup>38</sup> Nemiah (1967) 870-885.

(252); somatisation disorder (231); conversion disorder (244); the brief reactive psychosis (DSM III-R 205). The hysterical personality type is now called histrionic.

### Wessels

In view of the close connection between psychiatric phenomena and cultural factors (see below) Wessels, working among Zulus, has recently advocated that the term hysteria should be retained when working in societies other than Western European.<sup>39</sup>

### Hysteria and Society

Not only does the dramatic behaviour of the hysteric markedly affect other members of his society, as we shall see in the *Troades*, but it is becoming increasingly clear that society, in its turn, affects the manifestations of hysteria. Thus, in a society which believes in the power of ancestral spirits, possession by such spirits is a common manifestation. In a charismatic Christian group possession by God or Devil is often experienced. In a society looking for a physical explanation of disease physical (Freudian conversion) symptoms abound. Even the psychiatrist himself, by his intervention, is liable to produce or alter hysterical manifestations. It is widely believed that many of the dramatic hysterical phenomena which Charcot found among his patients may have been due to his own flamboyant personality.

One of the most striking features of hysteria is its virtual disappearance in Western society of recent years, at least as far as the dramatic Charcot-like symptoms are concerned.

### Ukuthwasa

This is a common event<sup>40</sup> in traditional Zulu culture, though also becoming less common now. I mention it here because of the marked similarity which it shows to Euripides' description. Classical Greek attitudes to gods, spirits, ancestors (heroes) and the status of women were in many ways similar to current Zulu beliefs and it is therefore not surprising that the hysterical manifestations based on them should also be similar.

*Ukuthwasa* is believed to be due to possession by a single ancestral spirit. The sufferer, usually a young woman, shows the following features:

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<sup>39</sup> Wessels (1983) 22-25.

<sup>40</sup> Wessels (1985) 51-63.

1. Sudden attacks where she loses her own identity and speaks in the voice of the intruder(\*). What she says often contains a large element of truth(\*) which may have been hidden from others.
2. The person is aware of the possession, resists it, but cannot help speaking out(\*).
3. These attacks of possession sometimes appear spontaneously, at other times they can be induced by others or by mystical rites(\*).
4. The patient is full of anxiety with its many physical symptoms(\*) and may have hallucinations (?\*).
5. She tends to neglect her personal appearance (\*). Frequently this is the first stage of becoming a diviner (*isangoma*)(\*), the patient thereafter going through a prolonged training period before graduating.

It is the frequent occurrence of these and similar phenomena, together with the fact that conversion hysteria similar to what was observed by Charcot (paralyses, anaesthesias, mutism, epileptiform seizures) are extremely common among the Zulus, which led Wessels to plead for a retention of the concept of hysteria when dealing with Zulu patients. For this reason I shall retain the older term "hysterical personality" in the following.

### **THE HYSTERICAL PERSONALITY<sup>41</sup>**

Basically the hysteric reacts by denying the reality of a stress situation and diverting its energy into other channels(\*). The following are the major manifestations:

#### Dramatic (\*)

The patient tends to talk rapidly and use very vivid language, often accompanied by theatrical gestures. She is discursive and inclined to see a situation only from her own point of view.

#### Exhibitionistic (\*)

The patients are often overdressed for the occasion and tend to reveal more of their bodies than necessary.

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<sup>41</sup> In this account I shall mainly follow Nemiah (1967) 881-882.

Emotional (\*)

They tend to express a whole gamut of emotions, commonly in a bewildering array and to show marked flights of fancy. They frequently give the impression of play acting and of being incapable of really experiencing lasting, profound emotions.

Seductive (?\*)

Such patients are often coy, flirtatious and seductive. Paradoxically they are in actuality often sexually frigid.

Dependent (\*)

This is frequently not obvious at first contact, but on coming to know the patient better she is discovered to crave attention, sympathy, praise or advice.

Manipulative (\*)

The patient is very skilled in getting what she wants by a variety of artful manoeuvres such as threats, fits of temper or attempted suicide.

### KASSANDRA

Kassandra's basic reaction to stress is to deny that anything untoward has happened and be convinced that all is for the best. This attitude colours both her mood and her thoughts. Her scene is divided into three parts: in the first she acts entirely emotionally (296-356) to produce a typical attack of "grande hystérie" in Charcot's sense, or, in modern usage, a "brief reactive psychosis" or, in Zulu belief, *ukuthwasa*. In the second part (357-405) she calms down and argues logically, but the aim of the argument is still to show that all is for the best<sup>42</sup>. In the third part (445-461) she returns to an emotional attitude, repeating what she said logically in an emotional way and takes to weird play acting again.

Her entry (296-307) singing, dancing and waving a flaming torch is most dramatic. Comparing hers to the entries of Hekabe, Andromache and Helene (see below) the difference is striking. Each, in fact, symbolically demonstrates her personality type in the manner of her entry. Kassandra's dress is inappropriate as she is wearing her full ceremonial priestess' garb, when she should be a slave. Her mood is ecstatically joyful, her speech rapid, vivid, full of words like ὕμην, μακάριος, βασιλικός (wedding, blessed, royal). Ideas chase each other rapidly. Thus, within a

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<sup>42</sup> When it suits her the hysteric will use logical argument as often as any other means to get her way.

few lines, she declares that she is dancing for Hymen, Hekate or Apollo. None of these is properly followed up. Not only has she convinced herself that she is happy, she despises others who do not see things in that way: "Mother, you continually weep (315) ... but I burn with fire for wedding and light" (319-320). She completely ignores reality, exhorting poor decrepit Hekabe to lead the highstepping dance (ἔλισσε πόδα 332).

In the second part apparently cool reason takes over. I regard the next passage (356-405) as the first of the three agones of the *Troades*. In each of them a character confronts Hekabe and puts her point of view reasonably and in the manner of a trained rhetorician. This one differs from the others and from most Euripidean agones in that Hekabe does not give a balanced counter argument. Instead, Cassandra's argument is dismissed as the ravings of an unsound mind. But is her argument really nonsensical? It contains three main points:

1. The Greeks must inevitably suffer themselves for what they have done, an argument which permeates the whole of the tragedy.
2. Cassandra's forced relation with Agamemnon must in itself bring about his death and be revenge for the Trojans, a point well known to the audience from the *Oresteia* and the myths.
3. Death is preferable to living in misery, a point made later by Andromache, Talthybios and Hekabe herself. Cassandra's argument should therefore by no means be discounted. There is no formal reply to it for two reasons. Euripides, as usual, is writing at two levels: at the lower, traditional level the myth has it that Cassandra's truths would never be believed. At a higher level the hysteric gets her audience so worked up that no one will regard her words as intellectually significant. Yet, as I pointed out above, the hysteric frequently perceives truths hidden from other people and therefore makes a good diviner.

Even in this, more cerebral section, we can see the typical flight of fancy: "I shall pass over ..." 361ff) and, of course, her ideas are strongly coloured by her basic drive not to acknowledge catastrophe. She is partially aware that she is acting on the borderline of normal and abnormal (366-7): "I know I am filled with god, but yet I shall step outside my inspired role".

Her final conclusion is (400-405) that war should be avoided, but a glorious death is preferable to inglorious living. This point is never disproved, though it flies directly in the face of the futility of War argument.

In the third part Cassandra reverts to a more emotional level. She tries to show her superiority to Talthybios and all heralds (compare Andromache's similar reaction for different reasons). She then repeats her prophecies about herself and Agamemnon; but whereas before they were matter of fact, now they are highly emotional tableaux: naked corpses being flung (448) etc. Similarly the fates of Hekabe and Odysseus are hinted at with the typical flight of fancy. The latter is treated very extensively (433-445) recounting many of his coming ordeals. This does not fit in at all well with the rest of the speech. These lines were regarded as an actor's interpolation by Tyrrell and this suggestion has been accepted by several later editors.<sup>43</sup> She leaves still describing herself as victorious (νικηφόρος) (460).

Some critics have accepted that Cassandra is inspired by Apollo, in which case the doubts later expressed in the play about the existence of gods make no sort of sense. Others thought she is talking with bitter irony, but then her audience should certainly pick it up. There is no purpose to irony if its point is not appreciated. Neither Hekabe, nor Talthybios, nor the chorus give any indication of this. They all agree that she is mentally deranged. This is a common experience when dealing with hysterics: one tends to take them seriously for a while until one is forced to realise that there is an emotional disturbance. The marked similarity between Cassandra's behaviour and *ukuthwasa* shows that Euripides may well have been aware of the problem whether divine possession is a form of illness. This is Euripidean multiple level writing. If one accepts things at face value one must put up with absurdities.

#### The sexual component

Surprisingly Euripides lays little stress on this aspect, which Freud regarded as fundamental and others as very important. Sartre, in his modern adaptation, stresses it much more.<sup>44</sup> Yet the material was ready to hand. In his *Agamemnon* Aischylos clearly described Cassandra's attitude (1206-1217). She first attracted Apollo sexually,

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<sup>43</sup> See Barlow (1986) 179.

<sup>44</sup> Sartre (1965) 6.



surrendered to him, but at the climax recoiled and could not perform. Compare the seductive aspect of the hysterical personality (page 137).

At first discovery I thought that this remarkable perspicacity on the part of Aischylos was pure coincidence. After finding, however, that Hippokrates was well aware of the sexual component (page 132) I am no longer so sure. Either Euripides was unaware of this aspect, or, perhaps, he thought it unnecessary to stress it as it had already been done so well by Aischylos and the audience ought to remember it. There are several aspects in Euripides' account which could be read in a sexual way, though these would depend more on the interpretation by producer and actor than on the actual words transmitted. Thus Sartre talks about the "erotic fascination of Kassandra, who propels herself into Agamemnon's bed". The girl certainly talks repeatedly about her *χρῶς* (body, skin), a word possibly related to *χρίω* (stroking).<sup>45</sup> She also keeps stressing her virginity (which she has actually lost) and the imminent loss of it. Marriage is uppermost in her mind from beginning to end. In the last scene she tears the garlands from her body (451-453) with much reference to her *χρῶς*. How much of this is symbolic for renouncing the god and how much is she actually undressing in public? (see page 136). Agamemnon as well as Ajax Minor and Apollo were certainly overcome by *ἔρως* (sexual love) for her. Is this possible without some help on her part? In her case the final stress was being raped by Ajax. Is it chance that during the fall of Troy, when many women must have been raped, only the rape of Kassandra is singled out for special comment?

As for the manipulative side of the hysteric's character, Kassandra certainly gets what she wants, be it vengeance, as she says, or sex, which she deprecates.

### THE COMPULSIVE PERSONALITY

This is nowadays sometimes referred to as the anankastic personality. In this section I shall mainly follow the descriptions of Allen and Millon.<sup>46</sup>

The basic problem here appears to be an unresolved conflict between obedience and defiance, where the compulsive personality overtly chooses the path of obedience to resolve the conflict, though the defiance is liable to break out every now and then.

<sup>45</sup> Chantraine, P. (1980) *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque* 1249.

<sup>46</sup> Allen (1984) 507-508; Millon (1981) 225-227.

These people tend to be grim and cheerless(\*), conventional in dress and behaviour(\*); efficient but inflexible(\*). They tend to procrastinate(\*?) and resist deviation from routine(\*). They stick to rigid rules of conduct and expect the same from others(\*). Their behaviour is formal(\*). They are very conscious of social standing and authoritarian rather than egalitarian(\*). They tend to be deferential towards superiors(\*) and condemnatory towards inferiors(\*)).

Aggressive tendencies, when they break through, tend to be cloaked in appeals to "a higher law"(\*). These persons have little insight and tend to blame or praise themselves as well as others in an exaggerated fashion(\*). They tend to block feelings aroused by stressful events but are often unsuccessful in this(\*). They often show a strong sense of personal possession(\*) and hence appear miserly and unforgiving(\*)).

### ANDROMACHE

Once again her entrance sets the tone. She arrives in state in a carriage<sup>47</sup> compared to *Kassandra* and *Helene* who have to walk, and *Hekabe* who crawls on the ground. We are not told of her dress (*Kassandra's* was flamboyant, *Helene's* sumptuous and *Hekabe's* rags); so we assume it is decent though unremarkable, but she is surrounded by *Hektor's* weapons and the Trojan spoils, all precious things. *Andromache*, therefore, though as much a slave as the others, expects and receives the treatment due to her previous station. She has refused to change and has induced others to fit in with this view of herself.

Her relation to *Hekabe* is cordial enough; only in half a line (597) does she hint at any possible guilt of her mother-in-law's and she excuses it as being due to the envy of the gods. This guilt was probably a major theme of the *Alexander*; *Andromache* makes little of it here;<sup>48</sup> *Helene* will do more. The compulsive is deferential to superiors and condemnatory to inferiors. This is also brought out in her attitude to *Talthybios*, whom she treats politely but disdainfully (709-16). In return *Hekabe* is polite and sympathetic towards her. But it is perhaps significant that she has previously asked for news about *Kassandra*, *Polyxena* and herself and commented

<sup>47</sup> Whichever way we envisage an ὄχος ξενικός or an ἀπήνη, the fact remains it is a carriage of sorts.

<sup>48</sup> Sartre (1965) 67-70 makes the resentment between the two a major issue, Euripides does not.

emotionally about their fates. She has asked after Andromache without comment. The compulsive, grim and petty, is not very much liked.

At first the two women agree that they are facing the same stress (601-9) but soon Andromache hints that her loss of Hektor is greater than anyone else's. This is what Berne calls "one element in the game of WAHM (why does this always happen to me?<sup>49</sup>) ... my misfortunes are better than yours" and which he regards as common in compulsive personalities. She, like Helene, tends to see the catastrophe only in terms of her own and her family's fate, where Hekabe and Kassandra take a much wider view.

Andromache reports Polyxena's death without any attempt at softening the blow. By comparison Talthybios found it very awkward to talk about it to the mother. This, again, is typical of the compulsive who is usually unaware of the effect of her attitude on others.

Lines 630-683 form the second agon of the *Troades*, much more formal in this case. Emotion again subsides into a lower key whilst intellect takes over; but it is still coloured by the basic personality. Andromache begins on the thesis that death is better than living in misery. But she gradually moves away from this to talk about what really interests her: herself and her attitude to life. Here she beautifully reveals her compulsive character. She has always done the "right" thing and by "right" she means the conventional. She has, as Sartre puts it, "the petite bourgeoisie attitude".<sup>50</sup> She aims at high repute (εὐδοξία) rather than morality per se. It failed to give her τύχη, variously translated as happiness, success, good fortune. She has worked hard; done all that is considered right for women; never went outside the house, though she longed to do so. She did not encourage κομπῶς θηλειῶν ἔπη (the lavishly decorated talk of females, i.e. gossip). We shall presently see Helene blamed for this quality of being κομπῶς. She stuck to her own opinions; knew when to subordinate herself to Hektor and when to insist on her rights. Now look where this has landed her! She may be forced into Neoptolemos' bed but she will never agree to it. This may earn her dislike and punishment, but she will refuse to act in any other way. It would be disloyal to Hektor and contrary to accepted morality. It is her very "goodness" which

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<sup>49</sup> Berne (1964) 73.

<sup>50</sup> Sartre (1965) 6.

has landed her in this trouble. Only then does she revert to her original theme: therefore Polyxena is luckier being dead than I, being ill treated.

Hekabe's reply shows her understanding of the widow's real problem. She does not refer to the argument about death and misery but goes straight to the point: you must learn to adapt, change your ways, sway with the wind. Honour your new husband and make him love you (686ff).

The agon is interrupted by the entry of Talthybios. He announces that Andromache's son must perforce be killed and continues Hekabe's argument in a slightly altered form: do not fight the inevitable; do not provoke; do not show hatred; it will be better for you and for everyone else that way (726ff.).

Andromache's first response to this is to be sorry for herself and the dashing of her great hopes. She cannot switch quickly from her old ways of thinking to the new situation. Thereafter she shows real grief and concern for her baby in a very touching passage (749-60). Note the difference from Helene and Cassandra who show little real grief. But the surprising thing is that she puts up virtually no fight for her son. She says: "Kiss your mother for the last time" and a few lines later: "Take him, carry him away, fling him to his death, feast on his flesh" (ἄγετε, φέρετε, ρίπτειτ', δαίνυσθε) (774-775). This is very different from Helene's fight for her life, different from the fight Hekabe puts up for her daughter in the *Hekabe*.<sup>51</sup>

We hear more about Andromache in Talthybios' report later (1123-1155). Neoptolemos carried her away in a hurry. She pitifully mourned her country and addressed Hektor's tomb (inflexibility). But she also made careful and detailed arrangements for the disposal of her son's body and Hektor's shield. Compulsives are efficient but rigid and to the last she sticks to social conventions.

### THE HISTRIONIC-NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY

In this I largely follow Millon.<sup>52</sup> These subjects tend to be clever(\*), charming(\*), flippant(\*), capable of weaving fanciful images which intrigue and seduce the naive(\*). They need excitement and stimulation(\*), are unable to delay gratification(\*). They undertake fleeting adventures with minimal regard for later

<sup>51</sup> It is also different from Seneca's Andromache who at this stage puts up a magnificent fight.

<sup>52</sup> Millon (1981) 146.

consequences(\*). They seek thrills(\*), are easily infatuated, but only transiently attached to other people(\*). They are undependable(\*) and show a disdain for the effects of their behaviour(\*). They leave a trail of broken promises, squandered funds and distress among their associates(\*).

### HELENE

Helene enters the stage at 895 and once again her attire and attitude mirror her personality. She is fetchingly dressed and beautifully coiffeured, entirely self possessed in spite of being dragged in by the guards. Her whole demeanour reflects ill used innocence. This attire is as startling and as inappropriate for a recently enslaved woman as was Cassandra's. Both are histrionic personalities but the tragedian distinguishes sharply between the two characters on the basis of their sincerity. However "way-out" Cassandra's actions and words may be, we are in no doubt about the fact that she consciously believes herself to be completely in the right, even though we may doubt the "real" sincerity of her attitude to sex. With Helene we are in much greater difficulty. Does she really believe in her own innocence or is she, quite consciously, putting up a false front? This is a difficulty which any physician or layman dealing with such people encounters every time. Their performance is impressive and convincing but on viewing the situation cynically they obviously stand to gain by their performance. People's responses to this vary. Some are completely taken in, some regard the gain motive as being entirely subconscious and tend to feel sorry for the victim: "She cannot help herself". Most regard it all as sham and become very annoyed at being manipulated. Euripides provides us with good examples of all three attitudes. Helene was obviously taken at face value by Paris, and perhaps Deiphobos. Menelaos is cruelly torn between pity and anger and does not know what to believe. All the other characters regard her as a schemer and make her the butt for their hate.

Her first words show the role she will adopt. She is a poor, bewildered ingénue, victim of forces she cannot understand. Line 898 is brilliant: "(Menelaos!) I could **almost** (σχεδόν) believe that you hate me." Were this not so dramatic a moment this could almost have raised a good laugh. The audience has already been preconditioned by Cassandra, Andromache, Hekabe, the chorus and only a few lines ago by Menelaos that she is a most hateful creature. The "almost" makes her either

very naive or very scheming. She continues unabashed. She can easily prove her innocence, may she have permission to do so? Menelaos, in his ambivalent attitude, would rather she did not; it might shake his tottering resolve to kill her. It is Hekabe who allows her to speak. She is not satisfied with seeing Helene punished, she wants to score a personal victory over her opponent (906-10).

And so we enter the third agon. Once again emotions are temporarily shelved and pure reason (apparently) has the field. Helene starts in proper rhetorical style: her judges are prejudiced against her but she will make purely logical points. These points are as follows:

1. Hekabe and Priam are as much to blame as she is. They bore and allowed Paris to live, who was the cause of all the trouble.<sup>53</sup>
2. She is actually the saviour of Greece for Paris chose her as a gift from Aphrodite in preference to the gifts of Athene and Hera who had offered him, the barbarian, domination over Greece.
3. She left Menelaos under strong compulsion from Aphrodite. Who was she to defy the goddess of Love whom even Zeus cannot withstand? If anyone is to blame it is the goddess.
4. Menelaos himself must share the blame. He left her alone with the handsome youth.
5. After Paris' death she frequently tried to escape back to the Greeks, but Deiphobos prevented her by force (βία). This shows where her real sympathies lay.

Superficially this argument is logical and convincing but only on the assumption that the gods exist and meddle powerfully in human affairs. But again we must read Euripides at two levels. What if the gods do not exist? There is plenty of evidence in the *Troades* that they do not. Surprisingly, Helene's argument still stands, on two points. She is human and like all humans is activated by powerful emotional drives. Can she help being what she is (beautiful, histrionic, narcissistic)? Is she more culpable than Priam, Hekabe and the others who similarly reacted according to their own natures?

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<sup>53</sup> This was probably the theme of the *Alexander*.

Modern judges will appreciate the cogency of this argument. Many an accused is let off leniently ("extenuating circumstances") because he came from a broken home or is psychiatrically disturbed. Our courts have never yet resolved this difficulty.

The chorus are impressed by the argument and turn to Hekabe to counter it. She, too, starts rhetorically. Her points are these:

1. The story of Paris' judgement is ridiculous. Why should three goddesses want to enter a beauty contest?
2. It was not Aphrodite, but Helene's own wayward nature which caused her desertion and, as people will do, she is blaming the gods for her own evil impulses.<sup>54</sup>
3. It was not love, but greed, which motivated Helene. She wanted to enjoy the luxuries of the splendid Trojan Court rather than the meagre assets of provincial Sparta.
4. How can she claim to have been abducted by force (βία)? Did she ever call out for help? We know this argument from rape cases in our courts. But Hekabe is off beam here; Helene never claimed that Paris had used force. She is beginning to lose her logicity.
5. Whose side was Helene on? She, Hekabe, can testify that she kept changing sides as the fortunes of war fluctuated.
6. Where is the evidence that she tried to escape? The guards who could prove this are dead. How convenient!

We note that the last three points are already more emotional than logical and thereafter Hekabe's cool logic deserts her altogether and she resorts to vituperation: how dare Helene breathe the same air as her wronged husband? How dare she dress up in all this finery? She should be mortified by shame! Why did she not commit suicide? (1022ff).

Hekabe has well countered the religious arguments but on the point of diminished responsibility due to personal character traits she has failed and has had to resort to invective. Who has won the argument? Menelaos has to judge. He temporarily judges in favour of Hekabe. But Helene has not yet exhausted her armamentarium. As she throws herself on his mercy and asks for forgiveness he

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<sup>54</sup> We find the same argument in the *Herakles* and the *IT* and Phaidra and her nurse in the *Hippolytos* battle mightily with this question of human responsibility.

begins to waver. He will postpone final decision until they reach Greece. Both Hekabe and the chorus realise that Helene has won.

Helene's character comes out more clearly in Hekabe's long speech than in any other part of the play. We see her need for love and adulation (1021). She expresses her thoughts and feelings well, but is greatly taken up with her own importance. She draws attention to herself in dress and behaviour. She is capricious and easily infatuated (she fell for Menelaos, then Paris, then kept alternating between them, possibly Deiphobos.) She is intolerant of frustration (1020). To others her thoughts appear shallow and insincere (but are not necessarily so). She is entertaining ... the audience will agree. She is sexually provocative and coquettish ... Menelaos fell for it and some of the other women's resentment may well be coloured by jealousy. She is fickle (Which lover? Whose side is she on?). She shows her narcissistic cool indifference to criticism but at other times confesses herself guilty (1043), though one does not know whether this is yet another pose or a real feeling of guilt.

Yet, withal, she is clever, flippant at times (950) and talks convincingly. She craves excitement and is unable to delay gratification and so she had to elope with Paris with minimal regard for later consequences; easily infatuated but only transiently attached to people. She leaves a trail of broken promises and distress among her associates. One could hardly ask for a better representation of this type of personality.

### **HEKABE**

Hekabe represents the middle of the road, balanced personality. She is able to use any of the psychological techniques and mechanisms which other types use but never to excess. She changes from one attitude to another as she thinks appropriate, whilst the others tend to persist in their attitudes, whatever the problem.

Euripides uses her as a foil against which the other, more flamboyant personalities stand out in stark contrast. This is particularly brought out in the three agones: In the first Cassandra proposed that all was for the best. Hekabe refuses to argue about so absurd a proposition but treats her daughter with kindly tolerance. In the second Andromache states the proposition that there are immovable basic moral principles, which must not be broken. Hekabe disagrees: One must adapt to altering circumstances. In the third Helene maintains that people should not be held



responsible for their actions; they act under duress by the gods or according to their inborn nature. Hekabe insists that they remain responsible for their actions.

Throughout the play Hekabe attempts to evaluate the changing situation accurately and adapt to it. After each incident she has to begin anew to readjust her thinking and feeling. In order to succeed she has to adapt physically, intellectually, religiously and emotionally. I shall discuss each of these in turn.

Physically she tries to adapt to her slavery by wearing appropriate clothes and behaving in the appropriate manner. She is found dressed in rags and lying on the ground.

Intellectually she tries and tries again. She says she will not sail against the current (98-150). Neither silence nor non-silence matter, yet she will seek easement by singing of her fine past (120-130). She bravely faces what the future might hold for her personally (190-195). Similarly she tries to make her women see that the future need not be all grim (244-245).

After being told she will be Odysseus' slave this hope fails. She first finds refuge in hate (see below), looks around for a ray of hope (490-496) and finally finds consolation in the thought that she is not alone in her fate. No one is fortunate before death (509-510). In the second agon she advocates adaptation: the simile of the ship (686-694). Astyanax is dragged away and her equanimity again breaks down (790-798).

Once again she tries to find refuge in hate and revenge: she attempts to get domination over Helene, physically, emotionally and intellectually. For a while she becomes quite animated (883-1059). But this, too, fails when Menelaos obviously weakens.

In 1156-1206 she tries to find a reason for Astyanax' murder. It must be fear on the part of the Greeks and this enhances the status of Troy. The Greeks will have to pay for their crimes. There remains glory. She, Troy and Hektor will remain the subject of poets' songs long after Odysseus' arms have rusted away.

But then Troy goes up in smoke. Can she adapt any further?

Religious attitude plays a large role in the tragedy. Hekabe has been a fairly devout person before disaster struck. She used to sacrifice (1242) and lead the sacred dance (147-150). Seeing "holy" Kassandra bereft of her senses as well as fortune she

starts questioning the gods: Apollo (253-4), Hephaistos (342). As her daughter is led away she automatically calls on the gods (496), but quickly the doubts rise to the surface: they have been poor allies to her (469). Yet she adapts her belief: there is still something to be said for calling on gods in times of trouble (470-1). The Greek of this passage is somewhat tricky: ἔχει τι σχῆμα could be translated: One still likes to give the appearance of calling, or: the decorous action is still to ....<sup>55</sup> Either way suggests that she has serious doubts but is not yet ready to abandon popular religion.

In 580 she calls again on Zeus and in 612-13 she reaffirms her faith: "I see the works of the gods in this." But which gods? In 616 it is the power of ἀνάγκη (necessity) which is paramount.

The loss of Polyxena and condemnation of Astyanax shatter her faith completely: "What can prevent complete disaster?" (797). But she attempts to build up a new faith. Menelaos finds her in the middle of and comments on her "strange prayers" (884-8): "Oh pivot of the earth (ὄχημα = carriage, vehicle, wheel, base) whose seat is on the earth, whoever Thou art, impossible to know, Zeus or necessity of physical laws or human mind power! I pray to Thee. Thou silently followest Thy path through the universe and orderest human affairs according to justice." The form is traditional prayer form but she has obviously abandoned the old polytheistic beliefs and is groping for faith in a single, unitary entity, though unable to give it a name. Having reached that point in her religious development Hekabe finds it easy to pour scorn on traditional religion, gods and myths in the third agon: "All foolish acts of humans are habitually attributed to Aphrodite (and the other gods)" (983).

But after Helene's escape and the death of Astyanax this faith, too, crumbles. Is the world ruled by blind chance? (τύχη 1204-6). In 1240 her disillusionment comes out: "So the gods amounted to nothing after all!"<sup>56</sup>

But once again she tries to recapture her faith: "If god had not turned everything upside down we should remain unsung". Still in 1280 she calls on the gods, but this is sheer force of habit. She soon retracts (1281). Why should she call them? They do not listen to appeals. Having lost all faith, she attempts suicide.

<sup>55</sup> Lattimore (1960) 264.

<sup>56</sup> It must be admitted that the text at this point is defective and the meaning could have been different. See Barlow (1986) 225.

Emotionally she finds adaptation most difficult. It is one thing to convince herself and Andromache intellectually that one must adapt, quite another to accept it emotionally for herself. We note that Kassandra is much more successful in this. Hekabe, as we have seen, tries over and over again but the prevailing mood remains one of grief and gloom.

I regard this struggle of the human soul to come to terms with reality as one of the fundamental issues of this play. Hekabe represents all mankind and this would make her the central character in the tragedy. Perhaps this is borne out by Poseidon's lines in the prologue (36-7). Having had his say he turns to the audience and, indicating with his hands Hekabe, huddled on the floor, he says: "If anyone wishes to observe this unfortunate woman, Hekabe, here she is!"

### **HATE AND ANGER**

As I pointed out earlier these are positive emotions, easier to bear than the negative ones like grief, anxiety, fear, feelings of inferiority and guilt. All of our four main characters, at one stage or another, replace those negative feelings by anger and hate and in the process appear to change their characters completely. All of them tend to displace their hatred onto a person other than the one common sense would suggest. Thus it would be understandable if Kassandra hated Ajax, who has just raped her, Andromache Achilles who killed her beloved Hektor and Hekabe Neoptolemos, who slaughtered her Priam. But this does not happen. The butts of their hatred are poor, innocent Talthybios, absent Odysseus and, above all, Helene.

Talthybios is viciously attacked by Kassandra and treated disdainfully by Andromache because he happens to be the only Greek present and has no power to fight back.

Odysseus, who is a prime mover in the killing of Polyxena and Astyanax might well incur hatred for that, but Hekabe unloads all her loathing on him before these matters come up. This is perhaps the strongest point Scodel makes for a unity in the trilogy (page 126, n.3). Hekabe, herself, is very briefly blamed by Andromache (Sartre makes a much bigger issue of this (page 141, n.48) and more extensively by Helene. But, as usual with Helene, one is left with a doubt whether this is genuine anger or a clever arguing point. Maybe Helene is as incapable of true hatred as of true love.

All agree on Helene's wickedness. Yet this, too, is displaced. If we try to apportion blame for the events at Troy we must set up a whole chain of culprits: From Priam and Hekabe who failed to heed the oracle to destroy the "firebrand" Paris, to Paris who seduced Helene, to Helene who eloped with him, to Menelaos who at first almost threw them together and then insisted on vengeance, to Agamemnon who organised the whole war (for personal glorification?), to the Homeric heroes who fought outside the walls, to Epeus who constructed the horse and all the perpetrators of recent atrocities. Helene is only one link in this chain, as she is careful to point out in her agon. But she is an ideal objective for hatred because of her lack of power to retaliate, the jealousy her beauty and sexuality arouse in other women and because of everyone's dislike for the manipulative aspect of the histrionic-narcissistic personality.

### OTHER CHARACTERS

#### The chorus

These women are undergoing the same stress as the major characters. They react differently again. They represent the less intellectual person, who feels rather than thinks.<sup>57</sup> When left alone, as in the choral odes, they express their mixed feelings. They, too, must inevitably try to adapt their religious beliefs to what is happening, but do so emotionally, in contrast to Hekabe's intellectual efforts.

In the parodos they express their anxiety about the future, but also consider that some places in Greece might be better than others.

In the first stasimon they recall the glory of Troy, their personal feelings and doings when the Greeks appeared to have gone, their adoration of the gods and their dismay when the Greeks were back.

In the second stasimon they again consider the possibilities of some parts of Greece and express their astonishment at the indifference of Ganymede, Eos and Eros who had been closely connected with Troy, but appear not to care. "The gods' love is lost to Troy"! (859).

In the third stasimon they feel betrayed by Zeus. They say this concerns them deeply: "μέλει, μέλει μοι" (1077), but they never go as far as rejecting the gods

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<sup>57</sup> As pointed out by Grube (1971) 283; and Kitto (1939) 216.

altogether. They pathetically recall their husbands and children and turn to a hate of Helene.<sup>58</sup> They finish up in a mood of total defeat.

Thus they mirror emotionally the progress which Hekabe makes intellectually.

The choral odes, therefore, far from being disconnected fulfil a vital function in the tragedy.

### Talthybios

He is a decent and kindly man unless you insist on seeing him through Cassandra's prejudiced eyes. He shows that any simplistic view of the tragedy such as: Trojan = good, Greek = bad cannot stand. Some characters focus their hate on him simply because he is the only Greek at hand who does not have the power to do them harm.

### Menelaos

Menelaos is a man with pronounced ambivalent feelings.<sup>59</sup> He loves and hates, admires and despises Helene. Intellectually he has made up his mind to kill her, emotionally he wants to re-instate her. Torn between these extremes he appears ineffectual, fickle and easily manipulated. Both Helene and Hekabe are fully aware of this and try to cash in on his ambivalence.

Line 1050 has worried critics: "Does she (Helene) carry more weight than she used to?" There is no doubt about the text and the word βρῖθος can hardly be translated in any other meaningful way. Almost all critics agree that this is a joke. Only Buttrey<sup>60</sup> maintains that it is an obscure reference to Pherekydes' account of the Argonauts. Apart from being a very feeble joke, what is it doing here in this tension-laden atmosphere? And why is it spoken by Menelaos who is not noted as a humorist in any of the ancient accounts. Some commentators have gone so far as to suggest that this whole scene should be played as a comedy with the stupid oaf Menelaos falling over his own feet.<sup>61</sup> There is nothing in the play, apart from this one line, which would support such an interpretation and surely it would completely destroy the dramatic tension.

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<sup>58</sup> Again Sartre (1965) 11-114 stresses this attitude much more than Euripides in an effort to bring out more dramatically what he believes the main message of the play to be.

<sup>59</sup> The concept of ambivalence is discussed in detail on p.262.

<sup>60</sup> Buttrey (1978) 286-287.

<sup>61</sup> For instance Gellie(1986) 114-121; Grube (1971) 288.

The scholiast<sup>62</sup> remarks: Καὶ τοῦτο γέλοιοι, γελούτερον δὲ ὁ ἀντερεῖ (Her remark is humorous?, laughable?, ridiculous? and what he answers even more so.)

Lee<sup>63</sup> suggests that Menelaos is trying to dismiss Hekabe's request with a laugh. This makes much more sense in view of Menelaos' psychological position. Torn between what he thinks he ought to do and what he would really like to do, he has come to the decision to postpone judgement. But Hekabe goes on and on at him until he feels driven into a corner. He must either round on her and abuse her, which would be tantamount to declaring Helene the winner, or give in to her and commit himself to killing his wife. He resolves the dilemma by a flippant joke. This is a common human response when driven into a corner in argument. Hekabe ignores the feeble joke and goes on with her serious argument and tension continues. Nonetheless, in retrospect, we can see that the joke was really the turning point. From 1050 onwards the possibility of Helene's death recedes further and further into the background.

## SUMMARY

### First agon

Kassandra states the principle that if a situation is irremediable it is best to accept it and make a virtue of it. This principle is ignored and never contested and must stand by default.

### Second agon

Andromache takes the position that there are certain basic, moral principles which are eternal and which a person ignores at the peril to his soul. Hekabe takes the opposite view that one must not be rigid, but always must try to adapt. Neither side can be said to win the argument.

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<sup>62</sup> Scholiast Vol II, 369.

<sup>63</sup> Lee (1976) on lines 1049-1050.

### Third agon

Helene's attitude is twofold. The gods are to blame, not she; everyone is forced to act according to his own character and should therefore not be blamed. Hekabe, very efficiently, destroys the first position but fails even to appreciate the second, which therefore must stand.

### Attitude to War

No one can doubt the message that war causes suffering to innocent people on both sides and neither victor nor defeated gain in the long run. But Andromache, and later Hekabe, make the point that unless one fights for what one believes right one sinks into obscurity. If one does, then at least fame and remembrance in poetry remain out of the chaos. Which is correct?

### Attitude to Gods

Hekabe effectively destroys Helene's (and, perhaps, Cassandra's) religion-based argument. She, herself, has to change her attitude from one of traditional religion to a mystic searching for a unitary godhead and eventually appears to fail even in this. But the chorus, though bewildered, never falter in expressing some sort of faith and are carried through by it. Euripides condemns neither side.

### Attitude to a basic plan

All the characters try to find a basic meaning to life. Hekabe, in particular, tries again and again. Each time a new catastrophe hits her she starts afresh. In the end she and all the other characters have failed. Many critics have maintained that this is Euripides' message: "There is nothing!" (see page 127). But can we really say this? The fact that all the characters have failed to define the meaning of life does not mean there is no meaning. They have searched and we need not assume that they will not continue searching after the play is over. Even Hekabe may yet find a way to adapt to the last blow.

### Conclusions

It seems to me that Euripides' attitude is very much the same as that of Sokrates, as outlined in Plato's *Apology*. He ruthlessly attacks all sham, but does not pretend to know the final answer to the great problems of human life. He is, however, always prepared to listen to a reasonable argument about them. Euripides puts the alternatives fairly before the audience. It is up to them to choose.

When looked at in this light the *Troades* can be seen to be a masterly work with complete unity, without irrelevant parts and with superb psychological insight.



## CHAPTER 7

### HERMIONE AND EUADNE

In this chapter I shall discuss Hermione (*Andromache*) and Euadne (*Hiketides*), as these are again beautifully observed and depicted representations of well known mental conditions. They differ from the characters of previous chapters in that the psychiatric problem is not the main interest of the play which lies elsewhere. Here I shall only hint at the roles they play in their respective tragedies. A discussion of the overall meaning of the plays will be presented in later chapters.

### HERMIONE

#### Parasuicide

#### The Influence of Society

It must be obvious to any thinking person that human behaviour is influenced by the society around him. Yet the general trend in psychology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was to try to find the basic motives for human action within the individual himself. Even Freud had strong leanings in that direction. Although he appreciated that the early moulding of the human mind in childhood was greatly influenced by parents and other members of society, he proceeded largely as if thereafter the moulded mind reacted in an automatic fashion no longer subject to external influence.

#### Trotter

From 1908 onwards Wilfred Trotter began pointing to the continued influence of people around us. Brought up in the era of William James, where a study of instincts was regarded as basic to psychology, he introduced the concept of the "herd instinct".<sup>1</sup> This, together with the whole "instinctual" approach has long been abandoned, but his vision of man as a gregarious animal subject to the same laws as other species has had a useful impact and has been extended by anthropologists since his time. The concept of the "pecking order" has entered into common parlance and certainly finds many useful applications.

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<sup>1</sup> Trotter (1947) *passim*.

## Adler

Alfred Adler<sup>2</sup> was at first a student and colleague of Freud's. Later they came to disagree on a fundamental question. Adler saw the origin of human drives in what the person is trying to achieve, whilst Freud saw it in terms of past events. Adler later extended his ideas. To him the main psychological drive is a person's attempt to fit himself into society around him. As an infant he is born completely at society's mercy; as he grows up he has to find his rightful place in it. If he does so successfully he becomes a normal individual. If he fails various neuroses and psychoses result.

Much of Adler's work has fallen into disrepute, but his stress on feelings of inferiority and the attempted compensation therefor,<sup>3</sup> the so called "inferiority complex", developed a wide following and has entered into everyday speech, if only in a somewhat oversimplified version. There can be no doubt that this sort of explanation can go a long way towards explaining certain behavioural characteristics, which are much more difficult to explain in other ways. In the *Andromache* Euripides appears to be thinking along similar lines.

## The histrionic personality (old term: hysterical)

This has already been described in connection with the *Troades* (page 135) and I shall not repeat it here. Both Cassandra and Helene showed some of its traits and Hermione is another histrionic.

## Suicide

Euripides was fascinated by this topic: it turns up in virtually every one of his extant plays.<sup>4</sup>

Hippokrates was obviously aware of suicide, but seemed not to regard it as a medical matter. In six out of his seven allusions to the subject he only mentions it in passing whilst discussing some other topic. In two of them he mentions depression (ἄθυμία and ἀνιώμενος) as being associated.<sup>5</sup> In one reference, however,<sup>6</sup> he goes into considerable detail about the mental and emotional changes of women during menstruation and pregnancy and several times alludes to suicide under these

<sup>2</sup> For a brief review of Adler's work see Papanek (1967) 320-326.

<sup>3</sup> Adler (1964) *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> For a definition of suicide in this respect see below.

<sup>5</sup> Hippokrates *Epidemics* VII 89; *The Places of Man*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Hippokrates *The Diseases of Girls*, *passim*.

conditions. This has a considerable bearing on parasuicide and the character of Hermione in the *Andromache*.

In modern times the serious scientific study of suicide began in the late 19th century with Durkheim.<sup>7</sup> His approach is still valid in many regards.<sup>8</sup> He was the first to attempt a social approach.

Freud<sup>9</sup> recognised the connection between depression and suicide and gave a sexual explanation which developed into the concept of the "death wish" and has caught popular fancy. In later publications he acknowledged the existence of aggression, and hence the death wish, from non-sexual causes and in this form his work is widely accepted, though not as an explanation for all suicides.

Since then the literature on suicide has become enormous both in the psychiatric and the sociological fields, though it is largely stultified by the number of divergent approaches and by a serious lack of definition.

#### Definition

There is no clear definition of suicide as may be seen from a consideration of the following series of clinical presentations:

- (a) A man has a sound reason for killing himself, announces his intention and does it.
- (b) Another with equally good reason and identical action is "saved" in time and does not die.
- (c) Another has been found dead without announcing his intention. Is his death accidental or suicidal?
- (d) A man has killed himself (or tried to) but his reason for wanting to die seems frivolous to others.
- (e) Yet another has made such a pitifully inadequate attempt at killing himself that one must seriously doubt whether he really wanted to die. This is the commonest case one encounters in hospital. Kreitman<sup>10</sup> introduced the term parasuicide for it. It has become a popular term, particularly in the British literature.

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<sup>7</sup> Durkheim (1951) *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Hendin (1967) 1171.

<sup>9</sup> Freud (1949) *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Kreitman (1969) *passim*.

Some authors would include in this group also the people who talk about committing suicide, but do not actually proceed to any specific action. These, again, would seem similar to those who do not talk about it, but have suicidal thoughts at one time or another. I wonder how many of all of us do not fall into this category.

These various categories shade into each other and it is usually impossible to say with conviction where a patient should be placed. "True suicide" occurs more frequently among patients who have shown the features of "parasuicide" before.

### Psychiatric Studies of Parasuicide

The main message that comes out of the literature is that there is no single determinative factor; there is no "suicidal personality". A variety of factors have been characterised which appear to be commoner among parasuicidal patients than among the general population. The most important among these are:

- (a) There is among parasuicides a high incidence of abnormal personality types of various kinds(\*).<sup>11</sup> Among these the histrionic personality is common (\*).
- (b) A substantially large proportion of these patients show "hostile" behaviour(\*).<sup>12</sup>
- (c) Many of them tend to think in terms of "black and white", with no shades between, though this is common in many emotionally disturbed people.<sup>13</sup> (\*)
- (d) They have unlimited reserves of self pity, together with anger and resentment(\*). This association is much less common in normals.<sup>14</sup>

In Kreitman's study<sup>15</sup> three criteria stood out among a host of lesser ones:

1. These people are less able to control their immediate impulses to the extent of jeopardising a more lasting future benefit(\*).
2. They are very prone to be suffering from guilt feelings to an extreme degree(\*).
3. They show great tension and inability to relax (?\*).

### Manipulative parasuicide

This is a very common special subgroup which was well discussed by Sifneos.<sup>16</sup> The patient (usually a female) uses the threat of suicide for the purpose of

<sup>11</sup> Kreitman (1977) 24-32.

<sup>12</sup> Vinoda (1966) 1147.

<sup>13</sup> Neuringer (1961) *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Foulds (1967) *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Kreitman (1977) 88ff.

<sup>16</sup> Sifneos (1966) *passim*.

manipulating other people into giving her what she wants, be it a material benefit or a psychological one, such as attention or sympathy. Some people term it a "cry for help". It is a remarkably effective method. Her friends become very agitated and are only too willing to do anything to ease the situation. However, after a while even the most kindly tend to realise that they are being manipulated and resent it, so that the would-be suicide's final lot may be worse than her former.

### Romantic suicide

To these I should like to add one other type, absent from clinical practice but very widespread in literature and often seen in Euripides' works. I call it the "romantic suicide". It is particularly well shown by Menoikeus, Makaria and Euadne. For the average reader of Euripides these characters and their heroic actions are, at first, very convincing. But when one studies them psychologically they all appear very flat and unrealistic portraits. Real people just do not behave like this. The practical effects of their glorious actions are equally disappointing: the remainder of the relevant plays simply ignore Makaria's and Menoikeus' suicides, the plot goes on as if nothing had happened. In Euadne's case the play goes out of its way to show that her action is nothing but a nuisance to society. In these characters Euripides shows that theirs is an unrealistic and irrational attitude. It is part of his double level writing (compare page 6).

### **Hermione's Suicide**

This is described in lines 802-878 of the *Andromache*. We shall first hear about it from the nurse, as an independent outside observer, and then see Hermione herself in action on the stage. That way we first get an independent opinion before we are tempted to believe everything the girl says and we can study the effect her actions have on society in general. This is a standard trick of Euripides' encountered in many of his plays.

### Motivation

Hermione claims that she has been driven to the act by the fear that her husband may kill her for what she has done. The nurse explains her actions in that way (808-810) and the girl, herself, says so (920 and 927). This is entirely unreasonable. Killing herself is no lesser disaster than being killed. Furthermore she has not, in fact,

done anything, only planned it. Menelaos would hardly have left her behind had he thought her in any danger.<sup>17</sup>

As to the question whether Neoptolemos is likely to kill her, she has, according to the nurse (808-809), also considered being sent away, surely a lesser fate. Even Peleus, at the height of his anger, considered no worse punishment than sending her away (639) or dragging her by the hair (710). Even that is an unlikely chance, as the nurse reasonably points out (868-9): "Your fear is altogether excessive. Your husband will not revoke his bond to you." This is not a valid reason for suicide.

Her real reason comes out involuntarily later: "Must I fall on my knees to supplicate my slave?" (860) and: "Shall I be a slave in the very room where she conceived her bastard, and where once I was mistress?" (927-928) It is the thought of being made to look inferior to Andromache which has driven her to this state. Few of us will regard this as an adequate reason for suicide either. We are clearly not dealing with "true" suicide or even "heroic" suicide, but parasuicide. This is further attested by the fact that, as soon as Orestes offers to take her away, all thoughts of killing herself are forgotten. This is not the way a depressive or schizophrenic acts.

### Method

In the nurse's account (811-816) Hermione has attempted to use strangulation and swords. In her own ravings she also mentions those two (841-844). Foiled in this, she looks for other methods (846-851): burning and precipitation. These are all dramatic methods and their multiplicity again suggests parasuicide. The determined suicide may consider various methods, then chooses one and gets on with it. The parasuicide is likely to use several at once, none of them effectively.

Some of Euripides' wording is interesting. The nurse mentions not a sword but "swords" (ξίφη 813). This suggests that the girl got hold of several such weapons in turn, only to allow each to be removed from her. Line 849 is even more interesting: she wants to throw herself off a rock "into the sea or into the mountain forest" (ἢ κατὰ πόντον ἢ καθ' ὕψαν ὀρέων). Throwing oneself off a high point is a well known and effective method of suicide. But why into the sea? This would surely only cushion her fall. The answer is that mentioning the sea brings in the further suggestion of drowning. And even more so, why the mountain forest? This, too, could only

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<sup>17</sup> As pointed out by Grube (1973), 207.

cushion her death fall. Again the alternative suggestion of being torn to pieces by wild animals is being hinted at. In Greek the words ὕλη and ὀρέύς certainly carry these associations. She, as it were, gets two for the price of one: several ways of dying excitingly without actually having to die. According to Stevens<sup>18</sup> this interpretation has been suggested before, although he himself rejects it on the grounds that this is reading too much into the terse Greek construction. What, I think, he missed is that this is not loose writing by Euripides, but loose talking by Hermione and fits in excellently with the parasuicide character. As so often in Euripides, obscure writing is not due to incompetence but quite deliberate.

How seriously can she have contemplated these various methods? Hanging was the time honoured way of suicide for women<sup>19</sup> and well within her reach. The sword, on the other hand, is a curious choice. By its very shape it is practically useless for stabbing oneself. When Homeric heroes use it they wedge it into the ground and fall upon it.<sup>20</sup> Even that is difficult, but was apparently practised on occasion by Roman soldiers. For a woman it seems an impossible choice. A poniard would suit the purpose better, but is still, in practice, extremely difficult to apply to oneself. In my long experience of parasuicides I have never come across one to use a knife in this way. The nearest approach in modern times is to slash one's wrists with a razor blade. The highly dramatic and stage-effective way of a girl plunging a dagger into her bosom<sup>21</sup> is simply not a practical proposition. Either Euripides is carried away by his own rhetoric, or, more likely, Hermione is. Self exposure to wild animals, too, is more romantic than useful. The difficulty of finding such beasts and inducing them to attack would be enormous.

We thus see Hermione envisaging a large variety of different methods of suicide, all of them dramatic, all of them romantic, the majority quite useless and none of them, in fact, carried out. This is typical parasuicide, extremely well observed.

#### Success and intent

Hermione does not succeed in her endeavour. The reason lies in her pitiful lack of efficiency. Phaidra and Jokasta quietly hanged themselves in their chambers,

<sup>18</sup> Stevens (1971) 196.

<sup>19</sup> See my discussion in connection with the *Hippolytos*.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Sophokles' *Ajax* and *Exekias*' visual representation (obverse Boulogne 558; *ABV* 145, 18.

<sup>21</sup> As, for instance, Liu in Puccini's *Turandot*.

Euadne threw herself from rock into fire when there was no one near enough to stop her. Hermione lets everybody see the rope and swords and their purpose, knowing full well that this will preclude any chance of success. None of her schemes ever had any chance of succeeding and she must have known it. One must, therefore, very much doubt her intention to kill herself. This is parasuicide.

### Effect on Society

The nurse is very frightened and upset, alternately pleading with her ward, reasoning with her and preventing her by force from acting. She also tells us that the "guarding servants" had a hard job to take the girl's rope and swords away. Even the chorus is urged to come in to help, which, presumably, they indicate in some symbolic manner when Hermione appears.

Society, obviously, does not know how seriously to take Hermione's threats. People become frightened, unsure of themselves and rush about doing things. This is the usual reaction to threatened parasuicide. Nor should they be blamed. As I pointed out in the psychiatric introduction, it is impossible to be sure at that stage how serious the problem might not be.

### Manipulation

If Hermione's attempt was so obviously doomed to failure that she must have known it, why did she attempt it at all? One way of looking at it is to ask oneself what she might be getting out of behaving in this way. She has just suffered severe defeat in her battle for superiority, both in herself and in her "house". As a result she feels small and rejected (923-925):<sup>22</sup>

"The very walls here  
Seem to be howling at me: go! go! go!  
All Phthia hates me."

and (line 929):

"How did you fall so low? someone may marvel."

She needs reassurance that she is still somebody, that someone still cares for her. That reassurance she gets in plenty from the bustle of nurse and chorus.

She is afraid of what her husband might do (even though her fear is exaggerated) and needs reassurance that she will be safe. There is a good chance that when Neoptolemos returns and is told of her repentance and her pitiable state he will

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<sup>22</sup> Nim's translation.



not punish her any further on the grounds that she has suffered enough. As it happens, this plan is misplaced as Neoptolemos is already dead,<sup>23</sup> but she is not to know that at this stage.

Finally, there is the hope that her great "distress" will bring a rescuer. Orestes appears immediately.

Seen from this point of view her actions become very sensible and very effective. She gets just what she really wants. She has successfully manipulated people.

### **The Basic Personality**

It remains to see what sort of a person Hermione is that she should behave in this parasuicidal way. For this we shall look at some earlier passages of the play as well. We shall start by going through the list of characteristics which have been found associated with parasuicide, as set down in the psychiatric section (page 159).

High incidence of abnormal personality types: there is no doubt that Hermione is such a type. We shall presently call her histrionic.

Hostile behaviour: this is beautifully brought out by her attitude to Andromache. To a lesser extent she also shows hostility towards Menelaos: "Father, you have left me derelict here!" (854-855), and all Phthia: "All Phthia hates me" (925), a typical case of projection.

Thinking in black and white: to Hermione it seems that she must either be absolute mistress, or abject slave to Andromache; there is no other way between. Neoptolemos must either love her or kill her; nothing between. Things are either going well or badly enough for suicide.

Unlimited reserves of self pity, together with anger and resentment: all three are brought out well in the play, the anger and resentment mostly in the first part, the self pity in the second. She fairly drips with self pity, even though the nurse points out that things are hardly as bad as she makes out.

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<sup>23</sup> Or as good as dead. There is considerable argument among critics as to when the murder occurred; before Orestes' appearance at Phthia or during the time lapse signified by the fourth stasimon? See the long discussion by Stevens (1971) 211-213.

Inability to control immediate impulses: this, too, is clearly brought out in the play. In fact, it is the overall message of the play: Look how foolish people are, jeopardising their whole future for the sake of gratifying an immediate impulse. (See chapter 13.)

Prone to excessive guilt feelings: these are well shown (837-839, 920, 938-940).

Tension and inability to relax: this is not clearly indicated in the text, though it might have been brought out by a competent actor.

Histrionic personality: of this she shows a number of features: it would be useful for the reader to review the relevant remarks on page 135 and compare them with Hermione's behaviour. I think I need say little more to show how well Euripides' description of Hermione fits into this pattern. I should just like to emphasise three points: in connection with "exhibitionistic" we note the stress on her fine clothes at her first appearance and the baring of her breasts (826-835).

In connection with "seductive" note her coy attitude to Orestes, but also the fact that she is "barren" with Neoptolemos.<sup>24</sup>

In connection with "dependent" note her attitude first with Menelaos, then with Orestes.

Euripides has certainly produced an extremely life-like portrait of a not uncommon personality type here.

### **Hermione's Role in the *Andromache***

I shall attempt to show in chapter 13 that the main purpose of the *Andromache* is to show the overwhelming importance for human behaviour of a desire for status within society. Hermione and Andromache battle for status, so do Peleus and Menelaos and so do Orestes and Neoptolemos. The histrionic and parasuicidal Hermione is admirably suited for enacting this struggle dramatically.

### **EUADNE**

#### **Schizophrenia**

I shall present Euadne as a schizophrenic. In this case the diagnosis rests on more slender evidence than in the portrayals in the *Herakles*, *Hekabe* and *Orestes*. This may be due to the fact that she is a minor character, on whom Euripides does not

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<sup>24</sup> This will be further discussed in chapter 13.

spend much time, perhaps to Euripides' not having much experience of such patients, but very largely to the fact that even in modern psychiatry schizophrenia is not a very clear-cut entity.

We have many theories but no consensus on whether it is a disease entity rather than a hotchpotch of various abnormalities lumped together for lack of knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Nor can we be sure that it is a purely psychological disorder or due to some underlying somatic dysfunction.<sup>26</sup> There is no clear-cut test which can characterise the disorder.

Many of its various forms had been described earlier, but it was put forward as an entity for the first time by Kraepelin<sup>27</sup> (1898) under the name of dementia praecox and studied at length by Bleuler<sup>28</sup> (1911) who coined the term schizophrenia (on the, as yet unproven, assumption that the main problem is a splitting off of thought and affect from reality). Most modern psychiatrists follow Kraepelin and Bleuler and discuss schizophrenia as if it were an entity, but the more the disease and its symptoms are studied, the more ill-defined it becomes. The very severe and advanced cases generally conform fairly consistently to certain well recognised patterns and are relatively easily diagnosed. For every clear-cut case, however, there are a number of borderline cases where the diagnosis can only be made tentatively. Eudamie would present such a borderline case. Had Euripides included her hearing Kapaneus' voice ordering her to immolate herself or perhaps made Iphis describe in more detail why she needed careful watching even before she made her strange resolve, the diagnosis would have been much more clear-cut.

Most workers in the field believe that there is a definite hereditary component to the disorder, though even this has been contested.<sup>29</sup> Schizophrenia appears to be a fairly common disorder. Because of the difficulty in diagnosing it statistics are unreliable. Modern researchers, when using a narrow definition come up with figures

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<sup>25</sup> At present the pendulum is swinging more in the direction of it being a group of diseases of differing aetiologies. In DSM III, 181ff it is discussed under the heading "The schizophrenic disorders".

<sup>26</sup> Here again, over the last two decades the belief in a physical causation seems to be gradually gaining ground. (Kety (1978) 98-101).

<sup>27</sup> Kraepelin (1918).

<sup>28</sup> Bleuler (1950).

<sup>29</sup> Kety (1978) 94-98.

of 0,2-1,0% of the population, others, using wider criteria put the figure higher.<sup>30</sup> Up to 10% has been suggested.<sup>31</sup>

In the following I shall describe some of the major symptoms often ascribed to schizophrenia and in this I shall largely follow the account of Lehmann, as well as those of Crocetti and Weiner.<sup>32</sup> Though somewhat older they give more vivid clinical descriptions of the symptoms than the rather dry DSM III. It should be noted, of course, that not every schizophrenic demonstrates every symptom. Each case tends to be different in its selection. The more of the symptoms we find in any given case, the more likely the diagnosis becomes.

#### Symbolism(\*)

The patient's speech and actions are full of symbolism, often incomprehensible to the onlooker. Euadne's wedding attire is a case in point (1048).

#### Social withdrawal(\*)

The patient cannot fit happily into a group and establish normal rapport with other people. Euadne can neither comprehend nor be influenced by the feelings of the chorus and of Iphis. Their suffering means nothing to her.

#### Sensitivity(\*?)

The patient experiences ordinary stimuli as excessive, is generally shy and retiring, but may overreact when confronted. Euadne was odd before, she needed watching (1040-1042). She regarded her previous life as intolerable, though she was very fortunate indeed until her husband's death (1005).<sup>33</sup> After that death she overreacted.

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<sup>30</sup> DSM III (1980) 186.

<sup>31</sup> These two facts lead to an interesting speculation. In strict Darwinian terms a deleterious gene should automatically remain infrequent. There can be little doubt that schizophrenia is deleterious in view of the fact that it tends to occur in young people in the full reproductive stage of life. Yet it is common. A similar situation occurs in the highly deleterious sickle cell disorder which reaches a frequency of up to 30% in West Africa. The modern explanation is that the homozygote in the latter disorder is at a disadvantage, but the heterozygote is protected from the equally dangerous disease, malaria. The optimum prevalence for society as a whole occurs when the protecting effect against malaria just balances the negative effect of the disease itself. Could a similar mechanism be at work in schizophrenia? Is society enriched by the inclusion of a moderate number of mild schizophrenics? Is the high incidence of the disorder among artists of all sorts a possible clue?

<sup>32</sup> Lehmann (1967) 621-648; Crocetti & Lemkau (1967) 599-603; Weiner (1967) 603-621.

<sup>33</sup> Recent commentators have appreciated these points: Burian (1985) 150 states that Euadne shows the extremes of heroism and passivity; Smith (1966) 164 calls her a victim of war as well as of herself; Collard (1975) 367 points out that her life, before her husband's demise, appears to have been one of sheltered ease. Why did she find it intolerable?

### Loss of Ego boundaries(\*)

The patient's personality tends to fuse with that of other people, or often even with inanimate objects. They may experience someone else's troubles as if it were their own. (This may possibly be the cause of their tending to withdraw from society.) Euadne completely identifies with her husband. She also describes herself as: "lightly poised, like a bird, over this rock". The word is αἰώρημα (hovering aloft) (1045-1047). Also: "My body will mingle in fiery glow with my husband" (1019-1020).

### Variability(\*)

This distinguishes the patient from a demented one. He may act most oddly and incomprehensibly at one time and extremely competently, even conventionally, at another. Euadne sometimes talks clearly and compellingly, at others most strangely. Her actions strike one as most admirable at some times and distinctly odd at others.

### Perceptual disorders(-)

Everything may seem strange and unreal to the patient (derealisation), or at other times strangely familiar (the *déjà vu* phenomenon).

### Hallucinations(-)

These are frequent and among the most dramatic of schizophrenic symptoms, but certainly do not occur in every patient. They are usually auditory in nature, the patient hearing voices abusing him or ordering him to do things. They may be the voices of strangers or familiar ones. It would have been easy for Euripides to have Euadne say Kapanaeus was actually ordering her to immolate herself and this would have made the diagnosis almost foolproof. But he does not do so.

### Delusions(\*)

The patient has false ideas that cannot be corrected by reasoning and which are idiosyncratic to himself, not part of his cultural environment. Most commonly these are of a persecutory nature (schizophrenic paranoia) but may take other forms such as apophany: the patient has a sudden vision, when he becomes immovably convinced of the truth of certain new facts or attitudes. When argued with his answer is: "I just **know**", though after a while most schizophrenics learn that they will encounter resistance from society and prefer not to discuss these matters at all. Euadne has suddenly conceived of the necessity of *suttee*, although this is not part of the Greek

cultural tradition.<sup>34</sup> No amount of argument on the part of Iphis and the chorus can shake her determination, but for a long while she just does not want to discuss it with her father: "You would only become angry if you heard of my designs. I do not want to tell you!" (1050-1051).

#### Abnormalities of language(\*?)

The patient's language is often difficult to follow owing to its flamboyant nature, the excessive and personal symbolism, the dark allusions to deeper matters (such as mysticism, witchcraft etc), the often stereotyped and poetical nature of the speech and sometimes the recourse to neologisms, as ordinary speech cannot express in words all he wants to convey. In the case of Euadne this aspect is difficult to estimate. As she is part of a traditional Greek tragedy her language is naturally poetic, full of symbols and sometimes overcondensed. Euripides was capable at times of making his characters talk in contemporary language (and was blamed for it) but one cannot claim that this is an invariable practice and that its lack here has special significance. Yet the chorus describe her speech as: strange words, unheard of before (νεωτέρους λόγους οὓς οὐ κατειδὼς πρόσθεν) (1032-1033). Even they regarded her speech as unusual. Lines 1026-1030 will be discussed below (page 172).

#### Other, rarer, speech abnormalities(-)

Mutism, echolalia, verbigeration may occur but are not exemplified in Euadne's portrayal. They are, anyhow, relatively uncommon.

#### Behavioural disorders(\*)

Schizophrenics generally exhibit a reduction in energy and spontaneity, but in the acute stages they may become excited to the point of threatening their own safety and that of others. Euadne certainly threatens both.

#### Mannerisms(-)

Grimacing and tics are common. There is no reference in the text to show that Euripides wished her to be portrayed in this way.

#### Stuporose States(-)

These form the other very dramatic feature of schizophrenia. Katatonia, katalepsy and *flexibilitas cerea* are among the most dramatic events in medicine. The patient may remain utterly immobile to the extent that when his body is contorted into the most

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<sup>34</sup> Note that in traditional Hindoo society Euadne's act would not have been a schizophrenic symptom.

impossible positions he retains these positions, often for a long time, a feat quite impossible to the normal person. These phenomena, however are relatively rare.<sup>35</sup>

#### Deteriorated manners(\*?)

The patient often is ungroomed, unwashed and sometimes socially very unacceptable. Possibly Iphis' shock at his daughter's appearance may be connected with this (1054).

#### Emotional responses(\*)

The patient generally shows a very flat or absent emotional response, but in the acute stages may become hyperemotional. The emotional response is commonly entirely inappropriate to the life situation or to what he is saying. Euadne's response is, to say the least, highly unconventional. Her description of her previous life as "a weary weight and the pain of being" (1004-1006) is hardly in consonance with her wildly excited state.

#### Abnormal emotions(\*)

Schizophrenics often experience emotions unknown to the normal individual, religious exaltation, feelings of oneness with the universe or omnipotence. Euadne's state of exaltation fits well into this category.

#### Suicide(\*)

Suicide is much commoner in schizophrenics than in normal people. It may be precipitated by depressive episodes, by the relentless command of the "voices" or in a state of exaltation, the patient trying to merge with the Unknowable. The latter fits Euadne's experience closely.

Modern research suggests that the basic symptomatology of the disorder is the same in all societies, but the contents of the symptoms vary in different cultures. Whether the disease existed at all and what its prevalence may have been in ancient Greece cannot be stated. A few examples are quoted from classical authors,<sup>36</sup> but these suffer from the same defect as the present attempt: the diagnosis is difficult even with a full psychiatric examination and much more so from relatively brief ancient accounts.

### **Euadne**

<sup>35</sup> And appear even rarer nowadays than in the earlier part of the twentieth century (DSM III 191).

<sup>36</sup> Day & Semrad (1978) 200.

Euadne's schizophrenic features are well observed. It will be argued below (page 172) that as a schizophrenic she admirably fulfils her role in the tragedy. Yet Euripides was almost certainly unaware that he was describing a mentally deranged person. Indeed, it would have diminished his argument severely had he done so. We could then have objected: "Your argument is fallacious, you are transferring concepts from a sick mind onto normals." Euripides probably regarded Euadne in the same way that almost all lay people regard the mild schizophrenic: An odd fellow, an unusual character, but not a sick person.

Scenelet 19 (990-1033): Euadne, Chorus

As usual with Euripides, Euadne's first appearance dramatically symbolises the whole of her later stand. A young woman, dressed quite inappropriately in her wedding garments, perched on top of a rock, which in Athenian stagecraft presumably is the *theologeion*, where normally only gods are expected to appear, starts off by uttering obviously inspired but incomprehensible words, out of keeping with the mood that has prevailed so far.

For the first six lines (990-995) she talks in a transport of glory about splendour and light, sun and moon and their glorious chariot course through the αἴθηρ. Only after that are we told that she is referring to the splendour of her wedding day.

She has escaped from her home, she says, (why was she imprisoned there?), a veritable bacchant.<sup>37</sup> She seeks not "death" but an "entering of the fiery light of the tomb". Then, apparently aware that these must seem very strange words to everyone else, she tries to justify her actions on commonsense grounds: she wishes to end the pain and troubles of this life. But, as Collard<sup>38</sup> points out, her life heretofore, until the death of her husband, has been anything but painful. She was, after all, the daughter of a wealthy citizen, sister to a leader, married to a wealthy and much admired man, with a high position in society. Where, one might ask, were the "pain and troubles" of her life? This is obviously mere rationalisation.

Euadne continues: Yes, τύχη (Fate, God, the Unknowable?) has guided me here. For the sake of glory (εὐκλεία, the word originally means having a good name

<sup>37</sup> The exact flavour of βακχεύουσα is almost impossible to reproduce in English. It suggests one carried by spiritual forces beyond the realm of normal human behaviour, with overtones of inspiration by the gods and communion with the Unknowable.

<sup>38</sup> Collard (1975) 367.



among one's peers and it is put at the beginning of the sentence here for maximum stress) I shall launch myself from this rock, leaping into the flames.<sup>39</sup> I shall not "join you" but "mingle body with body" with you. I shall not be a traitress to your spirit below ground.

The next few lines (1026-1030) are virtually incomprehensible. Most commentators have decided that the text is corrupt beyond repair. This may be so, but I have pointed out above that the schizophrenic's speech is often incomprehensible to bystanders. I should suggest that the wording was probably difficult even before scribes corrupted it and perhaps that is precisely why they did. The general gist seems to be that her glorious death will be a shining example to all Argos of what a noble marriage ought to be like.

Scenelet 20 (1029-1071): Iphis, Euadne

Iphis, Euadne's father has come to look for her. He is full of guilt feelings. He has relaxed his vigilance over her and now she has fled.

There follows another typically Euripidean scene, a cat-and-mouse game between them. Euadne (and the audience) know perfectly well what is going to happen, Iphis does not and his daughter plays rather cruelly on his ignorance, so that he appears foolish and pedestrian, almost, in fact, comic. Euripides has done this often before.<sup>40</sup> In this play it shows the utter rift between the person who relies on reason and the schizophrenic, who is actuated by subconscious inner psychological drives. They cannot understand each other.

### **The Role of Euadne in the *Hiketides***

It will be suggested in Chapter 14 that the main conclusion of the *Hiketides* is that war arises from the perpetual seeking for status and glory which is innate in all human beings. Euadne, as a schizophrenic, shows this usually hidden inner drive very openly and clearly and thus fulfils a vital role in the play.

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<sup>39</sup> It is difficult, in English, to render the unusual words πῦρ, ἄιθος and φλογμός. They all mean fire, but carry connotations of splendour and glory.

<sup>40</sup> See p.267.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE *MEDEIA*

#### Classical

In this section I shall not give page references for the authors quoted, as my purpose is merely to give an overview of the trends in the literature. Most of these authors will be quoted again in the relevant sections of the discussion of the tragedy and page references will then be given.

The play is undoubtedly gripping, convincing and tautly constructed. Hardly any critic in this century has condemned it.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, however, there has been a great deal of argument about what Euripides is trying to say.

There are two main schools of approach, though very many authors try to have a foot in each camp:

#### School A

Followers of this school adhere to Aristotle's dictum that character study is not a primary aim of Greek tragedy; character must be subordinate to plot. These commentators have to battle with two problems: firstly, Medeia conflicts badly with the four characteristics Aristotle requires of a good tragic character:<sup>2</sup>

1. Medeia is not a "good" person, but the first of a long line of Euripidean "bad women".<sup>3</sup>
2. She is not appropriate, with her repeated assumption of a masculine heroic attitude quite unbecoming for a woman and a barbarian to boot.
3. There is considerable argument among critics as to whether she is lifelike.
4. Medeia is anything but consistent, she changes with every scene and even halfway through scenes.

The other difficulty of this school is this: if we are not allowed to view the tragedy as character study, then what is Euripides trying to say? There have been many attempts at answering this question. Only a brief review can be given:

The play is about *ἁμαρτία* (fateful errors).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Though Pucci quotes earlier, 19th century criticism, particularly Nietzsche's, as wholly unfavourable.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454a.

<sup>3</sup> Barlow (1989) 169; Page (1938) x.

<sup>4</sup> Though Kitto (1961) 191 expressly denies this.

Euripides aims only at evoking the utmost horror.<sup>5</sup>

The play is about the opposition of passion (bad) and rational thought (good).<sup>6</sup> This attitude would imply that Euripides is condemning Medeia and praising Jason, but that is very difficult to believe; he seems such an unsavoury character.

The play is about "inappropriate" passion. Medeia has too much, Jason too little. Proper behaviour should lie somewhere in between: "Nothing to excess".<sup>7</sup>

It is a discussion of the traditional heroic attitude. But is it legitimate to give such heroic characteristics to a woman? This question is avidly discussed by many.<sup>8</sup>

It concerns the opposition between male and female. This is discussed by very many.<sup>9</sup>

### School B

Adherents of this school feel perfectly justified in viewing the *Medeia* as a character study in the modern sense. This is very much easier than trying to read a hidden meaning into the play. But there are difficulties here, too, particularly as many of these authors attempt to use granny psychology (see page 30) and look for a single cause to explain her actions.

Murray<sup>10</sup> solved the problem very simply by calling Medeia a maniac. This, of course, explains everything!

It would take too long to list the various suggested motives, particularly as I shall mention nearly all of them under "motifs" below. The point will be that we must regard all of them as partially correct, but not any one alone can solve our problem.

I should like to point out here that Musurillo and Walsh already made a point which I shall stress later. Many of Medeia's (and, indeed, Jason's) arguments can be called rationalisations as easily as sincere arguments.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Decharme (1968).

<sup>6</sup> Among the authors taking this attitude are: Dihle (1976), Easterling (1977), Kitto (1961), Méridier (1970), Pucci (1980) and Webster (1967).

<sup>7</sup> Among these are Cowherd (1983), Grube (1973) and Lesky (1978).

<sup>8</sup> Particularly Barlow (1989), Bongie (1977), Conacher (1967), Easterling (1977), Knox (1977), Kovacs (1986), Rehm (1989) and Walsh (1979).

<sup>9</sup> Grube (1973) disclaims its importance, but Burnett (1973), Cournut-Janin (1982), Decharme (1968), Foley (1989), Guzzo (1972), Knox (1977), Reckford (1968), Rehm (1989) and Vellacott (1975) regard it as very crucial.

<sup>10</sup> Murray (1965) 40.

<sup>11</sup> Musurillo (1966), Walsh (1979).

One interesting and much debated question concerns the problem of when Medeia first considers infanticide; is it only in the monologue, or does Aigeus put the idea into her head, or perhaps Jason even earlier, or do the nurse's gloomy forebodings in the prologue already refer to it?<sup>12</sup>

### Psychiatric : Child Abuse

Medeia killed her children. What sort of a person is she to bring herself to do this? What can have motivated her to such a deed?

In Seneca's play the reason is very simple: it is anger (*ira*) and madness (*furor demens*). To the modern psychologist this explanation is very unsatisfactory.

Euripides goes more deeply into the matter. I hope to show in the following that he pinpoints a number of possibly relevant factors.

The subject has been a very topical one in the last two decades of our century. Modern scientific research approaches the problem from a rather different angle, sociological rather than psychological. I shall present several studies from the most recent literature.<sup>13</sup> Basically the approach is the same in all of them: the investigator takes a number of causes which might be relevant, tests a sufficient number of families, both abusers and non-abusers, with regard to them and applies statistics to determine which of them are commoner in the abuser group and hence causal.

Lynch<sup>14</sup> identified abnormal medical and social factors during pregnancy, labour, delivery and postpartum illness of the mother as adverse factors.

Benedict et al<sup>15</sup> wrote that mothers at increased risk for maltreatment were found to be younger, to have shorter birth intervals, less prenatal care, and were more likely to have had stillbirths, abortions or a prior child death.

Browne and Saqi<sup>16</sup> compared the influence of 13 risk factors. They found that the most important indicators of vulnerability towards maltreatment were: parental indifference and intolerance; a history of family violence; socioeconomic problems; the presence of a premature infant; the parent having been abused as a child; the

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<sup>12</sup> Bremer (1989); Ebener (1961); Easterling (1977); Dyson (1987); Musurillo (1966); Schadewaldt (1966); Schlesinger (1966); Schlesinger (1983); Webster (1967).

<sup>13</sup> The literature is reviewed by Ayoub & Willett, (1992) *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Lynch, M. (1975).

<sup>15</sup> Benedict et al. (1985).

<sup>16</sup> Browne, & Saqi, (1988).

presence of a step-parent or cohabitee; unmarried or divorced status; low maternal age; a history of drug or alcohol abuse; separation of mother and child for more than 24 hours at birth.

Altemeier et al<sup>17</sup> found that unwanted pregnancy, aggressive parental tendencies, aberrant childhood nurture and lowered parental self-esteem indicated higher risk. The following were **not** significant factors: deficient support from others, maternal age, maternal education and isolation, family alcohol and drug history, expectations of the child's development.

Egeland et al<sup>18</sup> concluded that the mother's understanding of the psychological complexity of the child and her relationship with the infant best distinguished the abusive and non-abusive groups.

Famularo et al<sup>19</sup> stated that 67% of children which suffered significant maltreatment had parents classified as substance abusers.

Consideration of these various articles would make it appear that modern research is hardly any more satisfactory than Seneca's and Euripides' efforts for an understanding of the condition. We find a number of directly contradictory statements (e.g. maternal age and importance of alcohol and drug abuse). In spite of extensive research, we are as yet unable to give an explanation of child abuse.

### **Depersonalisation<sup>20</sup>**

Before a person can harm another he must first depersonalise him. Before I can bring myself to murder anybody I first need to cease thinking of him as an individual and convince myself that he is a Jew, a nigger, an oppressor, a silly old fool, a useless member of society, a wild beast dangerous to myself, or whatever. This serves a useful function in that it endows something I want emotionally with an appearance of logicity. A conviction of depersonalisation is thus difficult to shed as it is kept alive by strong desires.

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<sup>17</sup> Altemeier et al (1982).

<sup>18</sup> Egeland & Brunnuell, (1979).

<sup>19</sup> Famularo et al. (1992).

<sup>20</sup> The word "depersonalisation" is also used in another sense in psychiatry meaning: "the patient feels detached and views him- or herself as strange and unreal (Scully (1989) This is not the meaning used here.

### Rationalisation

This, as well as depersonalisation, lends an air of logicity and morality to our desires. It was discussed on page 38.

### Akrasia

Akrasia is not a modern psychiatric term. The word was first used in its philosophical sense by Aristotle,<sup>21</sup> the underlying concept goes back further. It implies the state where a person deliberately chooses a worse course of action over a better one. Sokrates began the classical discussion on the matter, as reported by Plato and Xenophon,<sup>22</sup> by claiming that it did not exist: if Man chooses the worse course it is done only from a lack of knowledge. Others, from Plato onwards have violently contradicted this claim. In their view external or internal forces (particularly gods or emotions) can overcome a person's feeling of rightness and make him act unreasonably or wrongly. The problem is still discussed in classical circles as a lively issue. It is known as the Sokratic paradox and is regarded as important, as it appears to deal with the practical means of preventing wrongdoing (by education or punishment?) and with the important issue of personal responsibility. Modern psychology has not so much solved the problem as made it appear to be of a somewhat trivial nature.

As the concept of *akrasia* can be made out to be of the most fundamental importance to an understanding of the *Medeia*, particularly *Medeia's* great speech (1021-1080) which has been seen as a direct reply by Euripides to Sokrates,<sup>23</sup> it is worth discussing it briefly here.

To begin with we must remove some possible misapprehensions about the matter.

1. Choosing a wrong course, when there is only a choice of two wrong courses is not *akrasia* unless the choice falls on what is known to be the worse course.
2. The words: "bad" and "worse" may be taken in a moral sense, but may equally be taken in a rational or self-seeking one. It is still *akrasia* to choose the irrational over the rational, one's own disadvantage over one's advantage.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1 (1145a 16).

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 352b, 1 ff; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3, 9, 4.

<sup>23</sup> The main critics to discuss the matter are Rickert (1987) and Irwin (1983). The latter, in particular, discusses the Sokratic paradox very lucidly and convincingly, but yet wrongly from the modern psychological point of view. Both consider the possibility that Euripides meant this passage as a direct refutation of Sokrates. Snell (1967), on the other hand, considered that Sokrates might have come to his conclusion as a result of studying the *Medeia* passage and wanting to contradict it.

3. It does not matter whether the dubbing of one of the choices as "worse" is defensible in an objective sort of way. All that matters is that the person himself must perceive it as "worse" at the time of choice.

A person does not embark on a course of action until he has convinced himself, consciously or subconsciously, that it is the "best" one under the circumstances. Thus, an alcoholic, perfectly aware of the danger of drinking, will first convince himself that "just one" cannot harm, or that his drinking is really necessary under the particular social circumstances at the moment. The fact that these "convincing" arguments are often mere rationalisations, very much engendered by emotional events, does not alter the fact that for the time being he is "convinced" and therefore, by definition, not subject to *akrasia*.

What it comes down to is that it does not really very much matter whether we say: "emotion has overcome his judgement" or: "emotion has so clouded his judgement that he has chosen what others, or he, himself, on a different occasion, would regard as worse". I hope to show in this chapter that Euripides is very well aware of the existence of this approach and brings it out well in Medeia's speech and actions. He contradicts neither Sokrates nor Plato; but mediates between them.

### Overview

The *Medeia* is written at three levels.

#### Level 1

The audience probably had preconceived ideas about Medeia from their knowledge of the current myths. However much these differ in detail,<sup>24</sup> most agree that she is a witch, full of murder and evil and an adept at magic practices. Euripides could expect a portion of his audience to stick to these views, whatever he said, and on this view, of course, there is no problem. Medeia murders everybody and escapes magically.

#### Level 2

To the more thoughtful in the audience this view of the matter must have seemed as unsatisfactory as it is to us in the 20th century. They must have asked themselves: "How can a woman bring herself to kill her children?" Thinking about it

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<sup>24</sup> See the discussions by Bremer (1989) 250ff; Von Fritz (1953) *passim*; Knox (1977) 223; Méridier (1970) 105ff; Page (1938) xxii ff.

they would apply their granny psychology and come up with the obvious answer: we are seeing here the tragedy of the jilted woman. Most of the other characters in the *Medeia* take this view throughout the tragedy. If we take what any of them say at face value, that is what Euripides is saying. At this level the play makes sense of a sort.

### Level 3

But then again, there were probably some in the audience, and there are undoubtedly many nowadays, who were still not satisfied. After all, many women have been jilted at every period of history, but they did not all resort to such violent means of retaliation. What is it about *Medeia* that makes her so special as to behave in this astonishing manner?

It is only when we look at the *Medeia* in this light that the full power and beauty of the tragedy become apparent. Most readers have felt this instinctively, without really knowing why (there can be no doubt that the *Medeia* grips). Others have recognised some of the third level themes, but made the mistake of trying to elevate one of them to the level of "the real explanation". This is only another form of granny psychology. Yet others have realised that *Medeia* is a complex person, activated by many, and often opposing drives.

Euripides deals with two problems:

1. What are *Medeia's* basic drives which urge her along on her reckless course?
2. How can she reconcile the evil results of these drives with her undoubtedly great intelligence and her sense of morality?

To both of these questions Euripides gives some very convincing answers. With regard to the second he clearly shows the working of the mechanisms of depersonalisation and rationalisation.

With regard to the first he introduces a number of recurring motifs, scattered throughout the play. Most of them will be seen to be not only motifs in the play but also possible motives for *Medeia's* actions. The majority of these have been individually recognised by previous critics (see Classical Section). As I shall refer to them frequently it will be useful to provide a list here.



## Motifs

### 1. Glorious Athens

An unashamed glorification of Athens stemming from Euripides' patriotism, or possibly a longing for some sort of utopia inviting the audience to decide in how far the real Athens measures up to it.

### 2. The witch

This is the idea of Medeia, as seen at level one: she is an evil woman, imbued with occult powers. Wickedness is its own motivation.

### 3. The princess

Medeia is the daughter of kings and a descendant of the god Helios. Hence she is a superior sort of person, different from the common herd. This makes her feel entitled to special consideration.

### 4. Dominance

The above, together with her undoubtedly very superior intelligence, makes her want to dominate everyone around her and she is usually successful. I shall make much of this motif, perhaps more than the majority of previous commentators, though it has been hinted at before, always in the very recent literature.<sup>25</sup> In modern psychiatric thinking such an overwhelming desire to dominate usually springs from a hidden feeling of inferiority. Of this there are only traces in the *Medeia* (see other motifs). Possibly Euripides was not aware of the connection, though it may be that he knew it but decided that the many facets of her character are already complicated enough without introducing yet another whole level of complications.<sup>26</sup>

There are, however, a number of circumstances which militate against her being able to dominate:

### 5. "Feminism"

She is a woman in a male orientated society. She is not expected to dominate or even feel herself equal to men. As a result she throws herself wholeheartedly into an ancient form of the modern Women's Liberation Movement. No doubt a very shocking idea to many in the audience.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Gredley (1987) *passim*; Pucci (1980) 131, 158; Schlesinger (1983) 300.

<sup>26</sup> He certainly knew about and clearly described the connection of inferiority feelings and the desire to dominate in the *Andromache*.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Aristophanes' similar idea in the *Lysistrata*. From this we can see that Euripides was not alone in having such ideas. Pace Vellacott (1975) 110.

6. The barbarian

As a non-Greek she would be regarded as an inferior by Greek society and expected to keep to her inferior station. This is a common theme in Euripides.

7. The exile

Having left her home country and alienated her family, she has no roots and feels rejected by society.

8. Laughter

There is one thing a person who would dominate cannot abide at any cost and that is being laughed at. Laughter is the most powerful destroyer of dominance.

9. The *lechos*

Λέχος, or its virtual synonyms λέκτρα and εὔνη, designate the conjugal couch. This is the basic motif of the second level. It is assumed that sex is all that a woman is really interested in. Hence she will meet any threat to her sexuality, her husband or her marriage with the utmost vigour.

10. The oath-breaker

The sanctity of oaths is the very foundation on which society is run. This applies even more strongly to women who have little redress against a broken oath, which is their best means of keeping a man tied to them. When Jason, therefore, breaks his vows to Medeia he threatens the whole of society and to punish him is a worthy social duty.

11. Earth and Sun

The sanctity of oaths has divine backing, above all by Zeus, but also by the deities by which the oath was sworn, in this play particularly Γῆ (Earth), Ἥλιος (Sun) and Θέμις (Justice).

12. Children

Children are desired by men and women alike. Men want them as a perpetuation of their line (a sort of immortality) and an insurance against their old age. Women desire them even more strongly as the very reason for their being.

13. Metatragedy

Whilst all the above motifs are also possible motives for Medeia's behaviour, this one does not refer to her but to the intentions of the tragedian. Euripides in some parts discusses the role of poetry and the power of the playwright in society.<sup>28</sup>

**MEDEIA****Part 1 : 1-662**

The Athenian audience probably began by expecting to see Medeia as a murderess and witch. They will be led into a series of unexpected reversals of attitude by the crafty playwright (metatragedy motif).

Scenelet 1 (1-48): Nurse - the prologue

In rehearsing what has led up to the present situation the nurse goes far back to the Argonauts. This suggests the male, heroic outlook and already there is some doubt about its validity.<sup>29</sup> She mentions the murder of Pelias (witch motif), but without criticism. It was all done for love. The greatest boon is harmony between husband and wife (14-15, *lechos* motif).

But in this Medeia has been cheated; everyone's hand is against her (16, exile motif) and Jason has left her for a new and younger wife (*lechos* motif). It is not surprising that she is in a highly emotional state, sometimes contemplating suicide (24-25), sometimes hurling curses at the traitor (21-22, oath-breaker motif), sometimes invoking the gods of justice and oaths (21, Earth and Sun motif), sometimes bemoaning her decision to leave her home and relatives (31-32, exile motif).

There is more. She hates her children (στρυγέη is a strong word) and takes no pleasure in them. The nurse is much afraid of some possible violent deed, (children motif).

Lines 38-43<sup>30</sup> detail the nurse's fears: Medeia may kill with a sword (but whom? - herself? - Jason? Perhaps the children, seeing that this passage comes immediately after mentioning the children?). She may even kill Kreon and Glauke.

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<sup>28</sup> See p.25.

<sup>29</sup> Some commentators argue that we already see Fate at work. Musurillo (1966) 52 suggests that from the time of the Argonauts the dreadful outcome is already determined.

<sup>30</sup> deleted by some on inadequate grounds.

For her soul is of great weight (βαρεῖα φρήν, 38). These lines foreshadow the possibilities. They are thunderclouds before the storm.

Scenelet 2 (49-95): Nurse, Tutor - continuation of prologue

The tutor enters with the children. The latter will be silent throughout the play except for a few shouts of fear (1271-1278), but their utter innocence and unawareness of the issues involved, including their own danger, is forcibly stressed (children motif).

Only one new fact emerges: Kreon has determined to send Medeia into exile. The main purpose of this scenelet is to review the situation from the point of view of comparative outsiders. Tutor and nurse are both slaves. Her sympathies lie more with her mistress, his with his master, but both agree that a grave injustice has been done. Both take it for granted that Medeia's reaction is exactly what could be expected from a jilted woman (*lechos* motif).

Lines 92-93 are significant: already the nurse has seen her casting her eyes on her children like an enraged bull, as if about to proceed to action. The word ταυρουμένην suggests irresistible fury and the likelihood of violent action. Particularly in the presence of these innocent children the audience must begin to envisage the horror that is to come.<sup>31</sup> (children motif).

Scenelet 3 (96-130): Nurse, Medeia off stage

Medeia's voice is heard in an excess of suffering. She seems quite demented. Her attitude to the children is: "Cursed children of a cursed mother, may you die!" But it is not clear whether she is cursing them or bemoaning their fate.<sup>32</sup>

The nurse is extremely sorry for her mistress but her main fear is for the children. "Why do you hate them, they have no share in their father's guilt?" This is rational thinking, but will Medeia behave rationally?

"What will this high-spirited, difficult-to-check soul decide?" (108-110). The words μεγαλόσπλαγγνος and δυσκατάπαυστος are very unusual in poetic usage; Euripides is finding it difficult to find words to describe Medeia's "spirit". We are being introduced to this concept of "spirit" with its manifold meanings as an essential component of Medeia's psychological make-up.

<sup>31</sup> And they must know that, according to some versions of the myth, she will kill her children. Will Euripides choose one of these versions?

<sup>32</sup> The word κατάρρατοι may mean cursed by me or cursed by fate, i.e. hateful or unfortunate.

Scenelet 4 (131-213): Nurse, Chorus, Voice of Medeia - the parodos

Medeia first wishes for death; then she implores Zeus and Themis, the gods of vows, to punish the oath breaker (Earth and Sun motif); she then hopes to see her husband perish in agony; finally she deplores her act of leaving her home under a cloud (exile motif).

The chorus, though Korinthians themselves, are very sympathetic. This undercuts to a certain extent Medeia's self pity as a lonely exile; she does have friends. This is because they are women themselves (the "feminist" motif). They fight when the sanctity of the home is threatened. They and the nurse would like to console the sufferer, but, as the latter points out, she will resist all attempts at friendship. She is her own worst enemy (exile motif).

The nurse ends the scenelet with a rather inconsequential passage (190-203): men know how to enliven parties with music; but in grief, when real solace is required, they have little to offer. Although these remarks are somewhat dragged in, they convey the idea of the inability of art to come to grips with the real tragedies of life (metatragedy motif). Neither intellect nor art can cope with strong emotions.

Scenelet 5 (214-270): Medeia, Chorus and Nurse silent - Medeia's first monologue

Now Medeia comes on stage and we can form our own opinion about her.<sup>33</sup> She seems no longer demented with grief. Now she is cool and collected and entirely intellectual.<sup>34</sup>

She explains why she comes among the chorus, when before she kept aloof. She is an exile in a foreign land and must try not give offence (exile motif).<sup>35</sup> She refers to the bitter blow she has suffered in a few, almost clinically detached words (no sign of the *lechos* motif). She feels that it is the fate of all women to be men's playthings. It is unnecessary to rehearse her arguments here; they are very familiar to us nowadays.<sup>36</sup> This is the major expression of the "feminist" motif in the play.

<sup>33</sup> Bringing a character on stage after he has already been discussed by others is a favourite Euripidean trick, found in many plays.

<sup>34</sup> Many commentators have commented on this unexpected change, particularly Greenwood (1972) 132ff.

<sup>35</sup> Hübner (1985) 20-21 wants to delete most of this section on the grounds that it does not follow smoothly from Medeia's character. This is a typical example of deleting whatever does not fit in with your preconceived ideas. It will be discussed more fully later.

<sup>36</sup> Grube (1973) 152 considers that any resemblance between this speech and the modern situation is entirely coincidental. I cannot fathom why he should say this. Euripides is dealing with a perennial human problem.

She is contemplating some sort of revenge against her husband, no hint of a definite plan as yet.

The meaning of this scene has been debated by many,<sup>37</sup> but one should not jump to premature conclusions. It is possible that feminism is a real motive in her actions. It is equally possible that Medeia is putting on an act for the benefit of the women to enlist them on the side of women against men, so that she becomes the women's champion. In this she succeeds admirably.

Scenelet 6 (271-409): Medeia, Kreon - the Kreon scene

In this long scenelet the plot hardly advances at all: Kreon confirms that Medeia is banished, but she gains one day's respite.<sup>38</sup> Either Euripides is wasting 138 lines on very little or his aim is Medeia's character and here we advance greatly in two ways: (a) The audience learns more about what she is like and (b) she is gradually crystallising her own attitudes.

(a) What the audience learns

Kreon is afraid of her: she is wise and an adept at mischief (witch motif). She is naturally upset at losing her λέκτρα. Kreon, like the nurse and the chorus, can see only the *lechos* motif at work. These two are struggling for moral ascendancy and the king is not at all sure of himself. He blusters, refuses to listen to any argument, his mind is made up, all the signs of a man unsure of his own standing. After a while he even admits that he is doing wrong (850). But she plays most intelligently on his weaknesses, makes him listen against his will, subtly hints that people might regard him as a tyrant, suggests that he is being foolish in fearing her, as she is neither dangerous nor even inimical. She puts him in the position of having to refuse a formal supplication and plays on his love for his own child to make him consider the plight of hers. Eventually she asks for something apparently quite innocuous, a single day. And Kreon succumbs completely, against his better judgement. He has been morally defeated. This is the first appearance of the dominance motif.

After Kreon has left Medeia soon makes it apparent that it was all deceit. She has planned the whole action coldly and efficiently.

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<sup>37</sup> Particularly Reckford (1968) *passim* and Kutáková (1988) *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> We learn, incidentally, that Kreon envisages her taking her children into exile with her. This possibility will turn up again.

(b) The crystallising of her plans

Up to now there have been no definite plans. Suicide has seemed as likely a course as any. Now, after her set-to with Kreon her plans are much more definite. She will undoubtedly be revenged on Jason, but Kreon and Glauke must also suffer. After careful deliberation she chooses poison as her weapon, a feminine specialty. If she is forced to play a woman's role she will play it. Women are what men make them ("feminist" motif).

She also needs a place of refuge. We note the absence of the witch motif. If she were aware of her power to summon the dragon chariot she would need no other refuge. Her plans are delayed until this problem can be solved.

One new motif has appeared here. She is afraid that if she were prohibited from carrying out her vengeance her enemies would laugh at her (laughter motif).

We note that the fate of the children has not so far come into her calculations. But possibly her successful appeal to Kreon's love for his children has added further substance to the germ of an idea which has been slowly developing.

Scenelet 7 (410-445): Chorus - the first stasimon

The chorus takes up some of Medeia's motifs. Deceit and oath breaking reign among men (oath breaker motif); women are given an unfair deal (feminism motif); Medeia is a victim of these evil forces, condemned to roam the vast Black Sea (exile motif). Sandwiched between these complaints the chorus dare hope for better times to come, when women may have equal rights and when the music (of public morality) is no longer composed by men (metatragedy motif). This verges on an escape ode.

The chorus share Medeia's sentiments completely, but they do not advocate murder. There must be something else than feminism driving her.

Scenelet 8 (446-626): Jason, Medeia - first confrontation

This is not an agon where contrasting principles are discussed, it is a clash of two personalities. We have already found Medeia lying atrociously when it suited her and Jason, too, will soon show himself to be a most unreliable witness. We cannot easily believe either of them if they pretend to stand for some moral principle.

**Jason**

Everyone, so far, has condemned him. At the end of the scene he is even more execrable than before and certainly Medeia thinks so. But what are the grounds for

this universal condemnation? Many just take him to be wicked and wickedness, as usual, is its own motivation.<sup>39</sup> Some critics try to set him up as the champion of rationality against Medeia's emotionalism.<sup>40</sup> This is certainly the picture he tries to project, but it does not seem at all convincing. Others would say he is completely lacking in emotion, where Medeia has too much; they err on opposite sides of the golden mean.<sup>41</sup> Most agree with Medeia that, apart from having done wrong, he shows himself a despicable sophist,<sup>42</sup> trying to pretend to a virtue which he does not possess.

We are overlooking the fact that he **has** come to see her. It would have been much more sensible for him to stay away and let Kreon deal with the sordid business. Jason is as much actuated by his own, obscure inner drives as ever Medeia is. He realises that his action could be condemned (451-452). He tries to make honourable amends to the best of his own understanding (money and letters of safe conduct 609-615). But above all he feels the obscure need to justify his actions before this woman, whom he has loved and whom he still respects (459-460). In his own mind Jason has not done wrong. The fact that his arguments to himself and to Medeia are rationalisations does not invalidate this conclusion. Medeia will equally rationalise in her monologue.

Only Sale<sup>43</sup> has taken the trouble to try to understand what motivates Jason. One may take issue with this author on some points (such as his calling Jason "thoroughly neurotic"<sup>44</sup>), but his is a brilliant analysis which anyone interested would be well advised to read. I can only give Sale's main points here.

Jason's primary desire is for peace and security. He mistrusts all emotion, he is afraid of sexuality, he despises and detests women, who might embroil him in those states.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps this is because he, too, is an exile. What he looks for is a home, status, money, the security of words and ideas as opposed to sordid real life, a stable marriage and children for his old age.

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<sup>39</sup> See p.31.

<sup>40</sup> Such as Murray (1902) ix.

<sup>41</sup> Grube (1973) 155.

<sup>42</sup> Decharme (1968) 39-40.

<sup>43</sup> Sale (1977) *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>45</sup> Sale (1977 20ff) correctly draws attention to the similarity with Hippolytos and, to my mind with less reason, to Pentheus.



This is why he offers money and safe conduct to Medeia, not understanding that these things mean nothing to her who is activated by very different drives. Neither can understand the other. Even in his choice of words to her he is unfortunate: "You could easily have borne the plans of the powerful!" (449). In Greek the word is much more subtle. *Κρεισσόνων* is indeed derived from *κρατύς* (powerful) but in classical Greek is more often used as the comparative of *ἀγαθός* (good) and the line is equally well translated as "submitting to your betters!". That is exactly the wrong thing to say to Medeia, and she reacts violently.

Similarly, (534-542) according to his own lights he has helped Medeia as much as she has helped him. He has never regarded her as a barbarian but given her the chance of becoming a full and honourable Greek (barbarian motif). This, too, cannot but infuriate her.

According to him his alliance with Glauke has nothing to do with sexual desire<sup>46</sup> but is a matter of entry to a royal house and security, wealth and status, both for himself and his family. Why should we not believe him? But to Medeia these arguments have no validity whatsoever.

In his assessment of Medeia he makes some very telling points: she has brought much of her misfortune on herself with her aggressive attitude (dominance motif). She is her own worst enemy. She refuses to let friends help her.<sup>47</sup> She is overconcerned with sexuality (*lechos* motif). In this last he shows that he misunderstands Medeia as much as all the others.

### Medeia

Gone is the cool, calculating Medeia of the Kreon scene; on seeing Jason she flies into an access of fury and, hence, lets slip a little more of what is really tearing her apart. The first ten lines of her speech are pure invective (465-475) and the last section of the encounter (579-626) is again little more than an angry altercation between the two. But in between Medeia brings out her real grievances (465-519).

Of the various motifs which have turned up so far some are conspicuous by their absence, as for instance the witch motif; Medeia does not regard herself as a witch. Nor does she mention the *lechos* motif. The feminism motif also does not

<sup>46</sup> Bongie (1977) 45 vehemently exclaims against the attempts of many authors to equate Jason with lust.

<sup>47</sup> The nurse made the same observation in scenelet 3.

appear. In spite of the opinion of many commentators these are not what agitates her and not the essence of the play as a whole.

Her real feelings come out first in 475-487. This is a rehearsal of the Argonaut story but the message is clear. Throughout their association Medeia has been the dominant character. It was she who planned and executed everything, she who protected and guided Jason. Seeing Jason on stage we can well believe that. She has dominated and he wants to rebel. This is intolerable.

488-491: Had they not had children she could easily have forgiven him some sexual peccadillos,<sup>48</sup> (denial of the *lechos* motif) but now that she has bound him to her with children, this is rank insubordination.

492-495: She has also bound him with strong oaths, but now he is reneging on them and escaping her dominance. This is the oath breaker motif, but the impression one gains is not of an academic discussion of the sanctity of oaths. What she objects to is that the oaths **to her** have been broken.

499-528: She tries a last means of regaining her dominance over him; she appeals to his gratitude and sympathy. It is because of him that she is in her parlous state. But this, of course, is doomed to failure. Jason can see it only as another attack on himself. Even in this she is still trying to dominate.<sup>49</sup>

In the final altercation Medeia's main point is: If you did all this for me (as Jason has claimed) why did you not consult me? His offence is to have made his own decisions without consulting the dominant partner.

One last point comes out (508-515): what will Greece think of her (and, for that matter, of him) when this story comes out?" (laughter motif).

### **The Children**

The children are not on stage, nor overtly mentioned, but the children motif is never far from the surface. Jason has mentioned (562-565) that the possession of children is one of the mainsprings of all his actions; they will give him a sort of immortality and security in his old age. This must add to Medeia's outlook which we have seen developing slowly in previous scenes, of seeing the children not as people

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<sup>48</sup> Like Andromache in the *Troades*. We note also that she uses the word ἐρασθήναι, (having sexual desires). This is what she sees as Jason's main motive.

<sup>49</sup> Again Hübner (1985) 32-37 would like to delete the whole of the passage 490-515. To him, imbued with the importance of the *lechos* motif, all these arguments seem quite inept for Medeia. A typical example of the circular argument (see p.195).

but as a means for hitting at Jason. No plan is yet made, nothing is said openly, but line 608 strikes a sinister note: "I shall yet prove a curse to your δόμοις (house)". Not the building, for sure, but does it refer to the marriage to Glauke or to the children and his security in them?

Scenelet 9 (627-662): Chorus - the second stasimon

The chorus have completely failed to see what this scene has been about. They return to the *lechos* motif, as if both Jason and Medeia had been actuated only by sexual desire. They decry the vehemence of sexual passion.

In the second part they rehearse the exile motif. This, according to them, is one of the main problems.

They end up with wishing death on Jason, but no one considers doing anything to the children.

## MEDEIA

### Part 2 : 663-1020

Scenelet 10 (663-762): Medeia, Aigeus - the Aigeus scene

This has caused much discussion among critics. In 100 lines it produces only one fact: Medeia is offered refuge in Athens. Euripides must surely have meant more. Many modern commentators have discussed this scene.<sup>50</sup>

669-688: An attempted explanation by Euripides for Aigeus' appearance here (unsatisfactory according to Aristotle):<sup>51</sup> the king has been to Delphi to consult about his childlessness and is on his way home with a very obscure answer (children motif). He is willing to consult Medeia on the oracle as she is a wise woman (witch motif). She responds in an almost professional manner.

689-712: Then it is her turn to explain her situation and, astutely guided by her, Aigeus comes to the usual conclusions: Jason is activated only by lust; he is an oath-breaker; Medeia's reaction is entirely understandable (*lechos* motif). She is gradually getting dominance over Aigeus and reinforces her hold by playing on his sympathy (exile motif) and again a formal supplication.

<sup>50</sup> Particularly Bongie (1977) 47-48; Bremer (1989) 254; Buttrey (1958) *passim*; Dunkle (1969) 97-101; Grube (1977) 157; Kitto (1961) 199; Lesky (1978) 144; Méridier (1970) 115-117 and Worthington (1990) 504.

<sup>51</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1461b. It should be pointed out, however, that this passage is not absolutely clear. It may be referring to some other Aigeus scene. See Buttrey (1958) 37.

713-730: Aigeus appears sympathetic enough, but in him Medeia has found a tougher opponent than gullible Kreon and guilt-ridden Jason. This man looks to his own advantage. And so Medeia plays her trump card, bribery: she will cure his childlessness. To this Aigeus agrees as a matter of a good business arrangement.

731-755: But of trust there is none between them. Medeia proceeds to bind him with sacred oaths (Earth and Sun motif).<sup>52</sup> Aigeus is suspicious but agrees.

Medeia undoubtedly has got the better of the bargain. He is fully bound by oath, but she has carefully kept from him the extent of the coming revenge. Had he known it he might not have agreed so readily.

Aigeus leaves and the simple chorus, who have completely failed to understand what has been happening, bless him for his (Athenian) greatness of spirit (759-763) (glorious Athens motif).

Scenelet 11 (764-823): Medeia - the second monologue

Lines 764-773 are a brief song of triumph: She calls the gods of oaths<sup>53</sup> (Earth and Sun motif) to witness that she is *καλλινίκος*, the standard title for the triumphant athlete. Now the last logistic obstacle has been removed and she can go ahead with her plans.

The Glauke plan only needs the final touches (774-789): she will send a poisoned robe which will consume the girl. Some would see this as the witch motif, but we should consider that the use of such potent drugs was on the border of witchcraft and normal human skills to the Greek mind. She resolves to send the robe via the children; their innocence will reassure Glauke as to the safety of accepting the gift.

As to the morality of this plan, she has completely convinced herself that she is acting correctly and has induced the nurse and the chorus, and, hence, one would presume, at least part of the audience, to accept her verdict (metatragedy motif).

As to the fate of her children: at first she merely disliked the sight of them, as they reminded her of their father's perfidy. Kreon first implanted the seed of the idea that the children could be used as a weapon against Jason and this idea was amplified by Jason himself and even more so by Aigeus. Now that she needs them in her Glauke

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<sup>52</sup> Schadewaldt (1966) 112 stresses the formality of the procedure.

<sup>53</sup> See Schadewaldt, above.

plan she will use them. She has succeeded in depersonalising (page 176) them into tools to be used.

But she is intelligent enough to realise that this will entail danger for the children. This danger is not, as yet, from her, but from the Korinthians' revenge. To try and save them would jeopardise the whole of all her plans and she begins to rationalise her actions: what good is life to them anyhow (798)? There is no way to happiness for herself. All her troubles began when she left her loving home for That Man (800-802). This reminds her of Jason and the seed implanted in her bursts into flower: the children can be a potent weapon against their father as well: "He will never see those children, **born of me**, again (803)". And another happy thought: he will not see children born of Glauke either (804). He will be another Aigeus. Thus she will finally dominate him (dominance motif).

As for the morality of this, she would rather be called wicked than weak and indecisive. These are the thoughts of a great soul (807-810). The words she uses to convince herself are all ambiguous in the best Euripidean tradition: φαῦλος (evil or cowardly), ἀσθενής (powerless or weak-willed), ἡσυχος (peace loving or submissive). With the children depersonalised these considerations suffice for a decision. She manages to carry the nurse with her in all this, but the chorus (and hence most of the audience) see the ambiguity and refuse to follow her any further. They urge her to desist (811-818). Medeia is adamant (819-823).

Scenelet 12 (824-865): Chorus - the third stasimon

The first two parts are a glorification of Athens. Taken at first level this is pure patriotism and some critics have taken it as such.<sup>54</sup> But, if so, it has absolutely no place in this play.

It is much better to take it as another "escape ode". The chorus, seeing the ghastly things about to happen here, long for a place where Harmony, Wisdom and Love reign. They call it Athens; the audience must decide whether the Athens of their own knowledge measures up to this idyllic state (glorious Athens motif).

In the second part they doubt whether such an idyllic state would accept a murderess (exile motif). They urge Medeia to think again.

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<sup>54</sup> e.g. Lesky (1978) 145.

Scenelet 13 (866-975): Jason, Medeia - the second confrontation

We note that Jason comes again at Medeia's request, in spite of the tongue lashing he received last time. We have seen his motivation before. What all his soul cries out for is for Medeia to absolve him of guilt. And to his wonderful relief this is exactly what happens.

Medeia, for her part, had failed in her attempt at domination in the last encounter. Now she changes her tactics to womanly wiles (feminism motif).

869-893: She apologises abjectly for her "folly", admires Jason for being so right. She appeals to all that he was longing for: a submissive wife, an acknowledgement that women's ways are foolish, their previous love which is still present, his love for his children. "But we are what we are .... women" (889) (the feminism and dominance motifs) is a very double edged remark, but Jason, in his relief, is completely taken in by her. He is as putty in her (dominant) hands.

894-907: She makes an almost mawkish appeal to sentimentality: she calls the children to embrace their father. This will prove dangerous to her plans. She is using them deliberately as tools for her revenge; seeing them will make it hard to keep them depersonalised.

908-924: Jason, overjoyed, is completely ready to forgive and forget: all that has occurred was just the reaction of a jealous woman (*lechos* motif). He promises the children all sorts of benefactions to come. I, personally think he is quite sincere at the moment, but Medeia clearly does not think so at all.

925-931: Again she bursts into tears and we can take our choice whether we regard this as another womanly wile or whether seeing her children is making her decision much more difficult. Surely, both motives are present at the same time. Euripides has made different parts of the audience believe opposite things (metatragedy motif).

Jason, of course, is only too pleased to accept her explanation: "Women are always ready to cry" (928).

932-945: Then she continues with her preset plan. She must find a way of getting the children to Glauke. So she induces Jason to intercede with Glauke and Kreon to let the children stay on in Korinth. She is shutting her eyes to the other alternative of taking them with her and avoiding their death. This will bear bitter fruit. Jason is fully dominated, the children are sent off.

Scenelet 14 (976-1001): Chorus - the fourth stasimon

The chorus have not understood the motivation of either Medeia or Jason (they see only *lechos* and lust); but they see very clearly the horror which must result.

Even the simplest person can see the inevitable catastrophe that must follow from Medeia's actions; why can this highly intelligent woman not see it herself?

Scenelet 15 (1002-1020): Tutor, Medeia, Children - the run-up to the final decision

The tutor announces that the Glauke plan is running its course. He expects that Medeia ought to be very happy now. But she is not. Having seen her children she can no longer depersonalise them so easily. She, too, is forced to face up to the horror of her actions. He can easily believe that she is unhappy because she will be separated from her children. But Medeia and the audience know that we are talking about a much more permanent separation. Can even Medeia go as far as that and not attempt to save the children? We are approaching the ultimate point of decision in her progress to perdition.

## MEDEIA

### Part 3 : 1021-1080

Scenelet 16 (1021-1080): Medeia - the third (great) monologue, the decision on infanticide

The majority of critics have seen this as the crucial part of the play, the acme of its plot.<sup>55</sup> I shall therefore discuss this great monologue in some detail.<sup>56</sup>

I shall first deal with some general considerations and then proceed to a line by line analysis.

#### The argument for deletion

Many previous critics have found this scenelet very difficult. It seemed to be self contradictory and out of line with Medeia's previous attitudes and later actions. Many have resorted to excising large parts of the monologue as having been added by another hand later. How much should be deleted has been much argued. The most radical school would excise all the lines from 1056 to 1080. Others would be satisfied

<sup>55</sup> A few critics, e.g. Bremer (1989) *passim*; Buttrey (1958); Dunkle (1969) *passim*; Mills (1980) 289; have tried to contest this attitude and would put the earlier Aigeus scene in the centre of the play.

<sup>56</sup> This has been done several times before: Kovacs (1986); Reeve (1972); Rickert (1987).



with lesser cuts.<sup>57</sup> As Dyson<sup>58</sup> points out this is a dangerous, circular argument. The commentator has made up his mind beforehand as to what Medeia's "real" motivation is, deletes the parts of this speech which contradict his chosen attitude and then triumphantly proclaims that now the play makes perfect sense. It does, but this does not prove that this is the sense Euripides meant to give it.

Kovacs<sup>59</sup> discusses the metrical, grammatical and stylistic evidence in detail and it is by no means convincing. Perhaps the strongest point is the verbatim repetition of lines 1062-1063 in lines 1240-1241; but one should investigate very carefully into which context the lines obviously fit better. As they fit equally well into either it would be wrong to decide on excision.

It is a much more worthwhile procedure to try and retain as much as possible, preferably the whole, and try to appreciate what Euripides may have meant to convey.

### **The presence of the children**

A seriously discussed point revolves round stage directions. Are the children present throughout this speech or do they come and go several times? It seems to me that the latter would be very distracting.<sup>60</sup>

### **Line by Line**

1019-1020: Medeia tells the tutor to take the children into the house and "see to their everyday needs". If she has already firmly resolved to kill them this sounds like needless mockery, if she has not yet finally decided, this adds pathos and is in line with her later exclamations on their tender ways. To take the words literally would suggest that she is still a long way off a decision of infanticide, though she has certainly envisaged their death before (894), not necessarily at her own hands.

1021-1039: In previous scenelets Medeia succeeded in depersonalising the children into mere pawns in her game with Jason, now she has to face the painful task of seeing them as actual people.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Barlow (1989) 166; Dyson (1987) 23; Foley (1989) 66; Gredley ((1987) 36; Kovacs (1986) 343; Reeve (1972) 56-59; Rickert (1987) 91.

<sup>58</sup> Dyson (1987) 23.

<sup>59</sup> Kovacs (1986) 346ff.

<sup>60</sup> The matter is discussed by Méridier (1970) 161-163 in his stage directions and Kovacs (1986) 345 among others.

<sup>61</sup> It is important to realise that in all her changes of mood and attitude she will take at least a portion of the audience with her. Such is the power of the poet (metatragedy).



"Oh my children, you have a house and a city .... whilst your mother must be exiled!" (1021), a beautiful piece of Euripidean double level writing. She may be referring to Korinth and the house of Glauke, implying that she is resigning herself to their living apart from her, or she may be referring to the underworld and the house of Hades, in which case she has already made up her mind to murder. She visualises all the happiness she could have had from them in childhood, marriage and adulthood.

"Alas, for my αὐθαδία!" (1028) This word could mean her presumption in hoping for happiness, or her self-willed resolve to kill them. Again Euripides is writing ambivalently when ambivalence is needed. Recollections of the past and visions of the hoped for future pass before her eyes: labour pains, the sorrows of motherhood, the boon of children in old age. The children motif has come out in full force.

The section ends with "you will no longer see me with your dear eyes .... you are going to a different existence."<sup>62</sup> Once again, we are left hanging between two interpretations.

1040-1048: "Alas, why do you look at me with those last radiant smiles?" The children have now become completely personalised and she decides against the possibility of murder. (Incidentally, a very weak remark if the children are not on stage). "My heart fails". For this the playwright uses a very strange word: οἴχεται means to walk. It can mean walk away, hence fail, but gives rather the impression of moving restlessly, straying. I should prefer to translate: "My heart is on the move, adieu to my designs!"<sup>63</sup>

"I shall take my children abroad" (1045). This line has incurred much editorial wrath and is deleted by many: If this option is open to Medeia she ought not to agonise so much. It will also contradict her later statement that the die is cast. Euripides cannot have written it. I should think that, on the contrary, the line is highly relevant. Euripides has not given us a single reason why this should not be feasible. No other character (Kreon, Jason, the tutor) has so far ever doubted that she will take the children. Medeia's decision must depend not on external circumstances but purely on her own character. The die is certainly not yet cast.

<sup>62</sup> The word σχῆμα is as polyvalent as any in Greek.

<sup>63</sup> The words used for heart (καρδία) and designs (βουλεύματα) will crop up again and will be discussed.

"Must I double my own sufferings in order to punish the father?" (1046-1047). Again highly relevant. She is fully aware that murder will entail her own suffering. On selfish as well as on moral and rational grounds it is the wrong choice. "No, not I! Adieu to my designs!"

1049-1055: But then she considers the alternative and the children again become depersonalised. Whether the audience can follow these rapid swings of attitude is another matter. She cannot bear the thought of being laughed at (laughter motif), of being regarded as a coward, of acting in the traditional women's way (feminism motif).<sup>64</sup> She again tells the children to go into the house, so that their personalisation should not sway her.<sup>65</sup> She strangely refers to her future action as *θύμασιν* (sacrifice, 1054). Possibly its similarity in sound to *θυμός* (spirit), which is so important to her thinking, is part of the explanation, but mainly it helps to depersonalise the children to see them as victims of a ceremonial sacrifice.

1056-1058: The mood swings become dramatically more and more frequent: "Spare the children, oh my spirit (*θυμός*)! Living there they may yet give us pleasure." Where is "there" (*ἐκεῖ*), Glauke's palace, in Athens, in Hades? Medeia is not calmly discussing a logistic problem, but is actuated by vague but vivid feelings of "here and there". The point is that she is still contemplating taking the children to Athens, or even allowing them to stay in Korinth, as viable alternatives.

1059-1069: And so the final mood swing. Again her fear of ridicule takes possession, but now in a subtly altered form. She will not let her enemies have sport **with her children** (laughter and dominance motifs). She is beginning to convince herself that she is, in fact, acting for the children's own good.<sup>66</sup> Glauke, she argues must by now be dead; there is no way of saving the children from the Korinthians. It is better to let them die by their mother's hand than by that of enemies.

Logically this does not hold water. She cannot know whether Glauke has perished;<sup>67</sup> nor is it a certainty that the Korinthians will revenge themselves on innocent children, still protected by their father; as she, herself, will obviously escape,

<sup>64</sup> These are the same arguments we have heard before. There is nothing new; the battle lines between the opposing principles of killing and saving are firmly drawn.

<sup>65</sup> Once again it is necessary that the children be on stage.

<sup>66</sup> We have seen Jason attempting the same rationalisation in scenelet 8.

<sup>67</sup> She says: I know that she has died, but she cannot know and one would expect her to postpone so important a decision to the last possible moment.

there is no reason why the children could not; it is doubtful whether the children would prefer being killed by their mother. But it is typical of rationalisations that they are only superficially logical and do not bear critical analysis.

Having thus rationalised her desire and succeeded in persuading herself that she is acting in the best interest of the children she is now free to decide on murder. She knows that this is fraught with suffering both for them and for herself, but she has by now convinced herself that their death is inevitable (πάντως πέπρακται) and she is choosing the lesser of the two evils.<sup>68</sup>

1069-1080: With that achieved she can now look at her children as persons and yet continue with her plan. She caresses them, but even now this contact is almost too much for her decision. Once again she is forced to send them away, lest her resolution should falter at the last minute. And she concludes with the much discussed words: "I know I am doing wrong; my θυμός is stronger than my βουλεύματα. This is what causes the greatest evils in men" (1078-1080).

#### *Thymos and bouleumata*

It is from these words that the argument between *akrasia* and not *akrasia* arise. If she really knows that she is choosing the worse course then this is *akrasia* (by definition). But she only says "κακά" (bad things). If we believe that Medeia has long since made up her mind to murder her children then all the heart-searchings in this scenelet are either pure hypocrisy,<sup>69</sup> or inexplicable and the lines should be deleted.

Very many critics see the opposition of θυμός (emotion) and βουλεύματα (rational thought) as the main motif of the monologue, and, indeed, of the *Medeia* as a whole. But these two Greek words carry other meanings as well. Θυμός, as well as meaning passion, emotion, is often used for spirit, in the sense of the English "a high-spirited woman", denoting a refusal to put up with inferior, shabby or dishonest things (princess motif). Βουλεύματα are the outcome of clear thinking and may indeed stand for logical thought. Just as often the word has the meaning of plans.

The main problem with accepting the simple emotion/thought opposition is the difficulty of deciding which side of Medeia's choice is emotional/spirited or

<sup>68</sup> The word πέπρακται very frequently has the meaning "ordained by fate" and some commentators, e.g. Reeve (1972) have deduced from this line that Medeia is driven by inexorable fate and that this is the overall message of the tragedy. I should regard this as too slender a bit of evidence to alter the whole purport of the play.

<sup>69</sup> This would be unusual in a monologue.

logical/planned. She has two clear-cut choices: revenge, or the children's welfare. Both of them are obviously emotionally based and we have seen how hard Medeia has been trying to endow either with a semblance of reasonableness by employing depersonalisation and rationalisation. The opposition, therefore, is not between emotion and thought, but between two rival emotions, each capped with a semi-logical rationalisation. Which will win will depend on the relative strength of the two emotions, and the believability of the rationalisations.

And this is how all of us make our choices. Medeia is not unusual in this, merely more dramatic. The question of *akrasia* is irrelevant (page 178). Euripides has shown his insight into the working of the human mind.

## MEDEIA

### Part 4 : 1081-1419

#### Scenelet 17 (1081-1120): Chorus - the fifth stasimon

Gloomily the women of the chorus wait for the inevitable and muse on what they have seen.

1081-1089: They are only women, not expected to be able to think or argue rationally. Yet women, too, may have a Muse<sup>70</sup> (metatragedy motif); not all women, only an occasional one among many, to be sure, but some.

If we regard this as Euripides' own view on the matter, he is backpedalling furiously on his militant feminist stand in scenelet 5. But there it was Medeia speaking, here the timid chorus. They feel as she does but do not have the same courage of their convictions. Euripides' message is: Women have as much greatness in them as men, but few have the courage to act accordingly.<sup>71</sup> But Medeia did.

#### Scenelet 18 (1121-1251): Tutor, Medeia, Chorus - the messenger speech

This stresses the difference between the beauty and happiness a real reconciliation could have provided and the horror of what actually did occur.

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<sup>70</sup> The use of the word *μουσα* here is unusual, representing more or less what *θυμός* did in the previous sections. Perhaps Euripides felt that this word was by now too heavily laden with emotion to be used reflectively by the chorus. The use of *μουσα* also recalls the first stasimon (scenelet 7) in which the point was stressed that women also have music (metatragedy) and also recalls the third stasimon (scenelet 12) where Athens is the scene of the muses (glorious Athens motif).

<sup>71</sup> Perhaps because they are so conditioned by centuries of male dominance.

1121-1135: Glauke and Kreon are dead. Medeia is delighted and wishes to hear more detail. Her dominance will not be complete until she has seen her victims suffer. The ghastliness of the following report will be balm to her soul.

1137-1143: The reactions of bystanders. All believed that a reconciliation had occurred, were overjoyed and showered the children with love.

1144-1156: Glauke was still suspicious (and jealous?), but Jason, the dominant male, ordered her to desist.

1157-1166: A picture of Glauke: a vision of innocence and beauty, perhaps a little coquettish, perhaps a little mercenary, perhaps a little vain. These are minor faults; Glauke's death is as undeserved as the children's.

1167-1203: A prolonged and gruesome description of her fatal disease with no clinical details spared. Beauty, happiness, innocence, intelligence are all taken from her and replaced by pain and decay. There is no modern medical explanation of this clinical picture. But then it is meant to be a magic event (witch motif).

1204-1221: Kreon rushed to her assistance. He saw himself as being deprived of his child (as Aigeus was and Jason will be) but he was consumed himself, equally unpleasantly. Medeia's idea of using the children as tools for revenge is beginning to pay off.

1222-1230: The tutor has finished and cannot refrain from adding his own comments: "You will reap your reward!"<sup>72</sup> Man may plan but cannot guarantee happiness." A somewhat trite comment, from a trite man, about a most unusual occurrence. Ordinary people can only observe and note, they cannot possibly understand.

1231-1235: The chorus express their pity for Glauke and Jason. We note that there is no more pity for Medeia. She has put herself beyond the pale (exile motif).<sup>73</sup>

1236-1250: Medeia wastes no more time on her minor enemies. The Jason plan must now proceed. She will kill her children (a pure act of mercy). For a moment she still hesitates (1242-1243), but makes herself proceed. Note line 1246: μηδ' ἀναμνησθήεις (do not let yourself remember the children, i.e. keep them depersonalised). She

<sup>72</sup> This line (1223) could also be translated: "Tell me your orders so as to avoid punishment" (see Méridier (1970) (168) but the more usual reading seems much better. The tutor, who has so far been Medeia's least staunch ally must surely be completely alienated from her by now, as all her former friends are.

<sup>73</sup> Wilamowitz (1887) 485 wanted to delete the references to Glauke as a sentimental actor's interpolation. To me it seems to fit the situation perfectly.

accepts sorrow for herself. And with that she leaves the stage for the first time since scenelet 3.

Scenelet 19 (1251-1292): Chorus - the sixth stasimon

The chorus start off on another formal stasimon, but language, grammar and metre become gradually more and more deranged in their agitated state.<sup>74</sup> Soon the voices of the children are heard off stage, being killed by their mother and the formal ode peters out into isolated sentences.

Strophe 1 (1251-1260): Yet another appeal to the gods of the oath, Earth and Sun, and a reminder that the latter is, in fact Medeia's ancestor. (Earth and Sun and princess motifs). They pray that the gods will stop her. Then an obscure reference to ἐρίνυες and ἀλάστωρ, ungrammatical as well as difficult to follow, though the allusions are clear enough. A heinous crime is being performed which will hardly leave the avenging furies unmoved. Perhaps Medeia is turning into such a fury herself, or perhaps she will become the next victim. I do not think the chorus are working this out rationally.

Antistrophe 1 (1261-1270): Their thoughts fly to her past: childbirth, the Argonauts, her leaving her home. Again we have a mixture of motifs all jumbled up and very difficult grammar. They call her δειλαία, another polyvalent word; it may mean unfortunate, cowardly, wicked. Also αὐτοφόντης, which should mean self-killing, but here seems to refer to killing her own children. Or does it? Perhaps the inference is that with that deed she is destroying herself.

Strophe 2 (1271-1281): is constantly interrupted by the cries of the children and the deliberations among the members of the chorus about what to do. There are only loose metrical correspondences with Strophe 1.

Antistrophe 2 (1282-1293): reverts again to a clearer correspondence and easier grammar. The chorus try to make sense of what has happened. They look through their stock of myths which might shed a light and come up with the story of Ino.<sup>75</sup> Finally they revert to their usual explanation: γυναικῶν λέχος πολυπόνον (the grief-

<sup>74</sup> As usual the lack of clear sense has been attributed to defects in the transmitted text and all sorts of emendations have been proposed. For a discussion see Page (1938), 168-171. It seems to me that these faulty passages in Euripides occur most commonly when the stage characters are at their most agitated.

<sup>75</sup> From the little we know of this myth it does not correspond very well with the Medeia story. See Page (1938) 172.

bringing preoccupation of women with their *lechos*). Granny psychology just cannot go any further.

Scenelet 20 (1293-1316): Jason, Chorus

Jason is somewhat behind with the news. He has just heard of Glauke's death and comes on stage fuming with rage. Medeia has alienated him as well as everyone else.

But, according to Jason, his main aim is to make sure that the children are all right. This is further proof that their fate was not inevitable. Medeia was rationalising when she claimed that it was. Finally Jason hears the latest news and he is shattered.

Scenelet 21 (1317-1419): Medeia, Jason - the epilogue

Right from the beginning of this scenelet the audience is exposed to four separate shocks.

1. Medeia appears on the *theologeion*, the raised platform on which, traditionally a god appears to deliver the final verdict. What is a mere woman doing there?
2. She is in a chariot drawn by dragons and supplied by the god Helios. This converts the woman, whose actions we have followed so far, back into a folk-tale figure.
3. As to character, this Medeia is different from all the others we have seen so far. Now she starts off aloof, distant, utterly calm and divorced from human emotion.
4. It is obvious that she will escape scot-free. This offends against our sense of morality.

These surprising features have caused commentators many headaches. Aristotle already complained about the mechanical contrivance of the chariot<sup>76</sup>. There have been many conjectures from more recent critics.<sup>77</sup>

These apparent anomalies become understandable when viewed in the way outlined in the overview (page 178) as writing at three levels and by considering the motifs.

For level 1 there is no problem. Medeia has always been a witch and a barbarian to boot. She always solves difficulties by murder and magic. This is only what we should expect of her. Wickedness is its own motivation.

<sup>76</sup> Aristotle *Poetics*, 1454 b, 1-2.

<sup>77</sup> See Pucci (1980) 13; Grube (1973) 164; Worthington (1990) *passim*; Cowherd (1983) *passim*; Bremer (1989) 263; Schlesinger (1966) *passim*; Conacher (1967) 197.

At level 2 we now find that she acknowledges that her *lechos* has been of importance to her (line 1368, this will be discussed in more detail below). It is what we have always maintained.

At level 3 we still find ourselves dissatisfied. One has to ignore too many aspects of the play we have seen unrolling before our eyes to find either of these explanations sufficient.

All our motifs (with the notable exception of one), are repeated in the epilogue, some as accusations by Jason, some as explanations by Medeia. But let us first analyse the state of mind of the speakers.

### States of Mind

In his state of blind fury and despair Jason reveals some truths about his outlook, repressed before. Note his choice of words: He calls his wife *αἰσχρόποιε* and *μιαίφονε* (1346), two words not found elsewhere in Euripides and apparently, according to the scholiast, hissed off the stage as being obscene.<sup>78</sup> As noted before, at times of great stress Euripides' characters talk in peculiar language. So also the neologism *ἀναμοχλεῖν* (1317), ridiculed by Aristophanes later.<sup>79</sup>

At the beginning Medeia is completely detached, but under the influence of Jason's invective she, too, bursts into fury and the last section (1389-1404) is no more than a slanging match between the two, an unworthy domestic quarrel without rationality or dignity.

### The Motifs

#### The witch

Only hinted at a few times in the rest of the play, except for the poisonous robe, which is more pharmacology than witchcraft, this motif reappears here in full force, a highly unsatisfactory explanation except for those still at level 1.

#### The Princess

At several places in the tragedy Medeia has resented the fact of having lost her princely and semi-divine status. Now here she is, on the *theologeion*, exalted above all mortals and surrounded by divine appurtenances. She has regained her status of princess.

<sup>78</sup> Scholiast: Schwartz (1891) II, 211.

<sup>79</sup> Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1397.



### Dominance

Medeia has fought for and gained dominance throughout the play. She was dominant over nurse and tutor; no wonder, they were slaves. She also dominated the chorus, setting herself up as their champion, though an alien among the Korinthian women. She bent Kreon and Aigeus to her will in spite of their reluctance. She destroyed her rival, Glauke. But these were minor characters. With Jason the position was more critical. She had dominated him completely, but he had mutinied. In the first encounter she attempted to bring him to heel by shouting, threatening and semi-logical argument. This failed. In the second encounter she bent him to her will, as she had done the other men, but this victory was not enough. He had to be made to grovel and confess himself beaten. This happens before our eyes in the epilogue. By the end of the tragedy Jason is utterly cowed and Medeia completely dominant. Again she has achieved her goal.

### "Feminism"

This is the one motif not represented in the epilogue. We gather that it has not, in fact, been an important motive for her. She believed in "feminism" and used its arguments to enlist the help of the other women, but the academic question of women's status was not of importance to her, only her own status and her difficulty, as a woman, to obtain it. She has obtained it, though at what cost!

### The Barbarian

Throughout the tragedy Jason has denied seeing her as such; his attitude, according to him, has been one of love and respect. He has made a proper Greek of her. Now, under the influence of his anger he finds this accusation to hurl at her (1330). She has always known that this was at the back of his mind (591-592).

### The Exile

She has always felt an exile and has resented it greatly. And now here she is on her lonely pedestal, a permanent exile from all humanity. Jason sees this very clearly: "Hated by gods, by myself and by all mankind" (1324). Even Athens, on which she has pinned her hopes, will not accept her, as the chorus prophesied in the 4th stasimon.

### Laughter

This she has dreaded above all things. She has won; no one is laughing at her now. But even now, at the height of her (imagined) victory she fears it. Her enemies

may yet make sport (καθυβρίξειν) of the bodies of her children so that she cannot allow Jason to bury them here (1380).

### Lechos

We have seen how throughout the play all other characters have seen this as the mainspring of her actions. She has always denied it, except when she consciously pretended to agree, in an attempt to bamboozle both Aigeus and Jason. There has been no doubt that she has objected to being seen as behaving like any other woman; she has always been an individualist. Now Jason brings up the subject again: "And all because of your λέχος and εὔνη!" (1338) and again: "Did you regard your λέχος as so important that you could kill for it?" (1367) and she replies: "Did you think that this was a small matter to a woman"? (1368). Admittedly, this is spoken in the rapid exchange of a heated stichomythy, perhaps only to gain a debating point, but it looks as if, after all, the *lechos* motif has not been without some force, though not as overwhelmingly important as others have thought.

### The Oath-Breaker

If the justified punishment of an oath-breaker had been Medeia's prime concern, this epilogue would have been the place for her to drive home the lesson. She does not. On the contrary, it is Jason who invokes the gods to punish **her** for her oath-breaking (1390), a complete turn-around. Only in reply to this sting, again in the heat of stichomythy, she replies: "Which god will listen to you, an oath-breaker and friend-deceiver yourself?" (1391-1392).

### Earth and Sun

It is Jason who now evokes Earth and Sun to deal with such wickedness (1327-1328) and Zeus to note the unfair treatment meted out to him (1405). We humans always expect the gods to see things our way.

### The Children

As Barlow points out,<sup>80</sup> bringing the corpses of the children on the stage is not just melodrama but essential for the play. Their presence is necessary to let both Jason and Medeia see to what extremes their quarrel has led and to bring home to the audience the final fact, that it is always the innocent who suffer the consequences of our human folly.

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<sup>80</sup> Barlow (1971) 130.

If we see the development of ideas within Medeia's mind as the main plot of the play the whole tragedy assumes a new aspect. Every portion of it makes excellent sense, nothing is out of place.

What we learn from the *Medeia* is that the desire to dominate is not a prerogative of men, but occurs in women as well. In their case social conventions cause enormous frustration and make the reactions much more violent. Mankind is not primarily activated by rational thought, but much more by inner emotional drives, modified by various psychological mechanisms. The desire to dominate leads to great social evils and a disintegration of the whole personality. Euripides has succeeded in explaining credibly how a woman may bring herself to murder her children.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE *ELEKTRA*

We have preserved four plays on the same subject: Aischylos' *Oresteia*, Sophokles' *Elektra* and Euripides' *Elektra* and *Orestes*. A brief and necessarily superficial comparison will bring out the main differences. The matter has been discussed by many authors.<sup>1</sup>

For Aischylos the main problem is the moral rightness of revenge. His approach is that the problem is not soluble at a human level but needs resolving first at a divine level which happens at the trial on the Areiopagos. Thereafter Orestes' personal problem resolves itself. Because of this stress on the moral and religious issue the character of Orestes and, even more, of Elektra, is of little importance and they are only lightly and superficially drawn.

For Sophokles the main problem is again a moral one: whether it is right to stick to one's principles or adapt to circumstances. This difference is polarised in Elektra and Chrysothemis of which the former seems to carry the day. With Aischylos' monumental work as a background it is arguable whether Elektra's principle is, in fact, a sound one. Sophokles' play is not fully understandable without taking into account the *Oresteia*. Because of this main purpose the characters of Elektra and Chrysothemis are drawn much more fully than in Aischylos, but even so, remain somewhat one-sided, stressing only those aspects which bear on the moral question. The character of Orestes is fairly colourless; he is not a major character.

In Euripides' *Elektra* I hope to show that the main purpose is a study of the motivation of Elektra. What makes a person behave in this sort of way? Her character is therefore drawn more fully with its overt, semi-conscious and subconscious features. Orestes and Klytemnestra, whilst also drawn comparatively realistically, are of much less importance. The question of the morality of revenge is not tackled, but the audience is referred to Aischylos for this aspect. Euripides' *Elektra*, like Sophokles' is not fully understandable without Aischylos and the direct references to the older master are both numerous and very explicit.

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<sup>1</sup> Gellie (1968) *passim*; O'Brien (1964) 13-15; Kitto (1961) 330; Conacher (1967) 202; Lesky (1983) 300; Parmentier (1969) 173ff; Webster (1971) 34.

Whilst the heroine of the *Elektra* is a woman on the borderline of normal behaviour, the characters of the *Orestes* are definitely abnormal. Orestes, Elektra and Pylades behave in a pathological way and it is their psychology and its impact on society that forms the main purpose of that play.

In this chapter I shall concentrate mainly on the character of Elektra, discussing in detail the scenes which have a bearing on it, touching only lightly on the other characters, however interesting they may be.

### Classical

As Haigh<sup>2</sup> remarks, much of Euripides' reputation hangs on his *Elektra* because this is the one play where direct comparison with the other two masters is possible. There appears to have been a gradual, but very pronounced change in critical attitude to both Euripides and his *Elektra*. In the early 19th century Schlegel roundly condemned both.<sup>3</sup> About the *Elektra* he said: a singular moment of poetical, or rather unpoetical, perversity. (Quoted by Vermeule<sup>4</sup>). The majority of 19th century critics followed his example and condemned the *Elektra* and often Euripides altogether.<sup>5</sup> A fairly typical attitude at the end of the century is that of Haigh,<sup>6</sup> who said that the *Elektra* was not one of Euripides' most successful plays. It suffered greatly from comparison with Aischylos and Sophokles. Thereafter a psychological approach to the *Elektra* gradually gained in popularity. The change was neither sudden nor complete. Many, even fairly recent critics have persisted in the older approach. Thus Parmentier<sup>7</sup> calls the play "disconcerting, without unity of tone, harmony, nor even dignity or seriousness"; Arnott<sup>8</sup> believes that Euripides' purpose was only to be different at all costs; Kitto,<sup>9</sup> similarly, calls the *Elektra* a melodrama whose main aim is to produce startling stage effects; there is no message. Other commentators acknowledged the presence of psychological studies, but attempted to fit them into a "classical" approach. A common view was that Euripides was poking fun at Aischylos or Aischylos and Sophokles (Parmentier<sup>10</sup>) or generally debunking the heroic tradition (Blaklock<sup>11</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> Haigh (1896) 303.

<sup>3</sup> Schlegel (1964) 182-187.

<sup>4</sup> Vermeule (1959) 2.

<sup>5</sup> Kitto (1961) 330 denies its being a tragedy.

<sup>6</sup> Haigh (1896) 303.

<sup>7</sup> Parmentier (1969) 178.

<sup>8</sup> Arnott (1973) 49ff.

<sup>9</sup> Kitto (1961) 330.

<sup>10</sup> Parmentier (1969) 178.

Yet other commentators attempted to find some all-pervading moral in the play, such as an attack on religion<sup>12</sup> or legends,<sup>13</sup> a defence of women<sup>14</sup> or a study of "true nobility".<sup>15</sup> There is much to support these contentions, but the main objection to all of them is that they admirably explain isolated passages, but leave large sections of the play unexplained. Some of these authors acknowledge that it is precisely the "bad" parts of the play, which make it enjoyable.<sup>16</sup> More daring critics have wondered whether psychological insight may not be the major purpose of the play. Thus Vermeule<sup>17</sup> asks: "Did Euripides explore psychology for its own sake or did he have an extraneous moral purpose? Either way the play is a serious one." Conacher<sup>18</sup> remarks that the play is difficult to categorise as a "tragedy" because of its lack of universality, but when one looks at it as a character study, then everything falls into place. More recent commentators have frankly regarded the play as a psychological study and discussed it in these terms.<sup>19</sup> If we see the *Elektra* in this light it must be judged on the depth of its insight. Here critics have differed greatly depending on the level of their own psychology (see granny psychology, page 30). Thus Orestes has been called a coward,<sup>20</sup> a dreamer,<sup>21</sup> "a spiritless coward marked by fatal irresolution",<sup>22</sup> a self-portrait of Euripides,<sup>23</sup> or a complex personality. Elektra has been summarised as a virago,<sup>24</sup> a gentle and non-vindictive girl,<sup>25</sup> a most unpleasant person.<sup>26</sup> She is said to be activated only by pride of birth,<sup>27</sup> to exhibit both sadism and masochism<sup>28</sup>; a subtle touch of nymphomania<sup>29</sup>. All these scientific terms are used loosely as in popular parlance and not in the strict psychiatric sense.

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<sup>11</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 165.

<sup>12</sup> O'Brien (1964) 38.

<sup>13</sup> Adams (1935) 121.

<sup>14</sup> Ferguson (1987) 21.

<sup>15</sup> O'Brien (1964) 37.

<sup>16</sup> Parmentier (1969) 186.

<sup>17</sup> Vermeule (1959) 6.

<sup>18</sup> Conacher (1967) 201.

<sup>19</sup> Thury (1985) *passim*; Karsai (1979) *passim*; Albin (1962) *passim*; Gellie (1981) *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Adams (1935) 120.

<sup>21</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 166-172.

<sup>22</sup> Ferguson (1987) 15.

<sup>23</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 163.

<sup>24</sup> Kitto (1961) 333.

<sup>25</sup> Bates (1961) 89.

<sup>26</sup> Lesky (1983) 296.

<sup>27</sup> Ronnet (1975) 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ferguson (1987) 18.

<sup>29</sup> Vermeule (1959) 3.

## Psychiatric

### (a) The Oedipus Complex

The concept of the Oedipus complex is due to Freud. It developed gradually and underwent considerable modification. In this chapter I follow largely the particularly lucid account of Mächtlinger.<sup>30</sup> Freud's ideas arose from his experience with neurotics, particularly hysterical patients, and were reinforced by elements of dream analysis. Early ideas on infantile sexuality can already be found in some of his letters of the late 19th century but were not clearly stated until 1905.<sup>31</sup> He introduced the term Oedipus Complex in 1910.<sup>32</sup> By that time he had come to consider it as the cornerstone of all neuroses. Basically he postulated that every male infant is at first (sexually) attracted to his mother and resents his father as a rival. In normal development this instinct is repressed by a "castration complex". If the repression is not fully effective neuroses develop. Even in normal men the suppressed thought is liable to turn up again in dreams and slips of the tongue. The sequence of events in female infants was at first believed to be entirely analogous, with the female infant loving the father (sexually) and hating the mother as a rival. Jung coined the term Elektra Complex for this.

In his later development<sup>33</sup> Freud came to reject the idea of the Elektra Complex as being incompatible with the facts and described a more complex mechanism for the female. She is at first attached to her mother, then represses this love (under the influence of the castration complex) and becomes attached to the father. Later still this attachment, also, is repressed. It is in the course of the repression of these primary desires that our concept of the super-ego (moral standards, conscience) arises. The mechanism of this secondary phase is, according to him, much more obscure and less complete, hence the well-known fact that moral standards in women are much less pronounced than in men (Sic!).<sup>34</sup> I mention this little tidbit here because of its similarity to Euripides' views. Later still Freud found the situation even more complicated by the recognition of the bivalence of infantile sexuality.<sup>35</sup> This idea

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<sup>30</sup> Mächtlinger (1970) 277ff.

<sup>31</sup> Freud (1905).

<sup>32</sup> Freud (1910).

<sup>33</sup> Freud (1923) a.

<sup>34</sup> Freud (1933).

<sup>35</sup> Freud (1923) b.

was elaborated by his followers into a theory of a positive or a negative Oedipus complex in either sex.

In popular psychology: The concept of the Oedipus complex at first roused bitter hostility. Freud regarded the intensity of the acrimony as proof of the truth of his ideas. Gradually some people accepted the concept and it has slowly crept into popular thinking. Most educated people nowadays have heard of the Oedipus complex and use the term in their daily conversation. The majority, however, are aware only of the early formulation of the idea and unaware of the later developments. The term Elektra Complex has found less wide recognition.

In modern psychiatry: Psychiatrists, too, are divided in their attitude to the theory. Almost all modern textbooks devote a chapter to these ideas, but the writers do not necessarily agree. Some stick closely to the tenets of the psychoanalytic school, others reject them. Still others would see a certain merit in these ideas but would deny their absolutely fundamental nature.

Summary: There is, thus, still considerable controversy about the ideas of infantile sexuality and its effect on adult behaviour. In view of this, whatever evidence we find in Euripides of such thoughts, we cannot judge him as being either right or wrong. We can only try to elucidate how far such ideas can be found in the *Elektra*.

(b) Transactional Analysis

Transactional analysis attempts to explain human behaviour in terms of its effects on society rather than of the patient in isolation and culminates in Games Theory. It is a fairly new branch of psychiatry and Berne is one of its chief protagonists. He describes a number of common situations of personal relationship and elucidates their purpose for the individual.<sup>36</sup> Games Theory makes free use of popular and slang expressions, an attitude which Berne defends ably.<sup>37</sup> The reader should not be put off by what seem to be superficial and flippant expressions. Transactional analysis, with its stress on interpersonal relationships, is in some ways nearer to Euripides' thinking than the clinically orientated DSM III.

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<sup>36</sup> Berne (1964) *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> Berne (1964) 56.



(c) The Martyr Gambit

I introduce this term of my own coining because it represents a common situation and is well described in the *Elektra*.

A person undertakes a task which is very much to his own discomfort. He puts up with the discomfort for the sake of being able to say: "Look how wickedly you are behaving towards me, making me suffer so!". The greater the suffering the more strongly the message comes through. By this means the person can give vent to partially suppressed feelings of aggression against the other. That this is so, and fully appreciated by the recipient, is shown by the fact that the latter invariably reacts with anger and a feeling of having been accused unjustly: "I didn't ask you to do it!".

## THE CHARACTER OF ELEKTRA

### Part 1

#### Scenelet 1 (1-53): Farmer - the prologue

As usual the prologue states the position before we start. Agamemnon was killed by his wife Klytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos who are now reigning in his stead and disporting themselves in his bed. The male child, Orestes was snatched away by a servant. The female child, Elektra was also in danger, particularly when she became marriageable. In this case it was her mother who saved her. But to prevent her from breeding any possible avenger she was married off to the farmer. He, in awe of royal blood, has not touched her and she is a virgin still. (The name Elektra means "unwed".)

These are the external facts, told in plain language, without a hint of the emotional implications, though we note that Klytemnestra has saved her daughter's life (27-28) and that the girl at one time had a lot of suitors (21). The audience will still have remembered Aischylos' trilogy and appreciated the problems entailed.

#### Scenelet 2 (54-63): Elektra - soliloquy

As usual the heroine's entrance is a vignette of the character to be unfolded. She is healthy, but dressed in rags, carrying a pitcher on her head, just like a slave girl.<sup>38</sup> She begins straightaway to expound on it. She is not forced (57), she has

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<sup>38</sup> Aristophanes in his *Acharnians* and *Frogs* tells us what the Athenian audience thought of Euripides and his raggedy characters.

chosen slave's work herself to show up Aigisthos' ὕβρις before the gods (58-59). In Sophokles' *Elektra* this is accepted, here we shall go more deeply into the motivation. She goes on: my wailing cries for my father I send up to heaven (59); that female disaster, my mother, has thrown me out of my home (60-61); she is busy breeding more brats for Aigisthos (62); she has made Orestes and me into πάρεργα (things of no consequence).

Here Euripides has succinctly set out the four sets of facts which Elektra claims to be the reason for her behaviour. Being a soliloquy we can trust this to reflect her conscious thoughts, though it may fail at a subconscious level. Let us summarise the four grievances again as they will go right through the play:

1. Just revenge for father.
2. Mother is rejecting me.
3. They are having sex.
4. Orestes and I have become πάρεργα.

Already Euripides' *Elektra* is much more complex than Aischylos', who is activated only by grievance 1.

#### Scenelet 3 (64-81): Elektra, Farmer

The farmer in his commonsense way cannot understand her behaviour. Elektra gives him her reasons. But now (she is no longer talking to herself) the reasons are different. She is doing it for the farmer, as any good wife should. For public consumption she puts on a facade. The farmer, a wise man, allows her her way.

#### Scenelet 5 (112-165): Elektra - lyric interlude

Again a soliloquy, or perhaps spoken to a slave attendant, the matter is well discussed by Denniston.<sup>39</sup> This being a lyric ode, the arguments are on an emotional rather than an intellectual level.

115-17: I am both Agamemnon's and Klytemnestra's daughter but she is hateful. (Ambivalent feeling.)

119-20: With truth do they call me Elektra, i.e. without a mate. The farmer husband obviously counts for nothing.

122-24: Father, you are dead, slaughtered by your wife and Aigisthos.

130-34: Where are you, Orestes? Why do you leave your sister in her wretchedness?

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<sup>39</sup> Denniston (1939) 64-65.

137-39: Come and deliver us, Zeus; bring him back home.

150-60: Father, I wail for your death like a swan caught in a net.

160-66: Alas for the stroke! Alas for the axe! The victor was bedecked with ribbons and cut down. The work of a woman and her wily lover.

All these vivid pictures are a direct reminiscence of Aischylos. But we see three of the four grievances again, this time on an emotional level. Elektra's attitude to Orestes is here touched upon for the first time. Although she has absolutely nothing to go on she imagines him roaming sadly through hostile lands. Her view of her husband as a non-entity is noteworthy.

Scenelet 6 (166-214): Chorus, Elektra - the parodos

The chorus have come to invite her to a festival. She declines. Her reasons for persisting in her slave-like state are again different from what she has stated before: she has no decent clothes (185) ... the chorus will lend her some (190-94). She is too sad (178-80) ... the chorus point out that tears will not improve her fate. Thus they demolish all the logic in her argument and she is forced back on her emotions: my father is murdered (201-202); my brother a slave abroad (202-6); I am an exile from my own home (206-10); mother has sex with another man (211-12). Thus, once again, her four grievances are aired. Even the credulous must by now start wondering how seriously they should take Elektra's explanations for her attitude, seeing how she has already given several different ones, most of which have been clearly refuted by farmer or chorus. It is beginning to look as if Elektra **wanted** to be miserable. This is the typical martyr gambit (page 212). Asking whether Euripides could have had such notions we must first note that Sophokles' Elektra behaves in exactly the same way. Indeed, the point is brought out even more strongly in that play and the royal couple's violent reactions are typical. So close is the similarity between the two plays in this respect (and quite different from Aischylos) that one must conclude that either both playwrights have observed human behaviour closely, or else one is copying the other. In view of the uncertain dates of the two plays it is impossible to say who has prior claim. In Sophokles' play this behaviour is the main topic. In Euripides' it forms only a part of the characterisation of Elektra. Her first soliloquy (58) show her aggressiveness. Her main purpose, according to herself, is to show up the couple's wickedness.

At the end of the scene (213-214) the chorus enunciates yet another suggestive thought: Klytemnestra is very much like her sister Helene in putting her sexual desires before decency. The further suggestion is not explicitly made here, but may just be suspected: is Elektra perhaps acting in the same way? This would be the first, very tentative, suspicion that possibly Elektra, too, may be activated by sexual motives and it is the first time that Helene is introduced as a symbol of unbridled female sexuality.

Scenelet 7 (215-338): Elektra, Orestes

Episode 1 (215-227): At the sight of a strange young man Elektra flees in fear, a new facet of her character: this woman, shown so unbending in her hate so far, turns out to be as timid as social conventions demand. She says there is time to escape into the house, but she does not escape like the chorus. She is easily caught and when she addresses her young, male captor she uses odd wordings: "προσπίτνω" (221) lit. I fall at your feet. "Μὴ ψαύε" (223) do not touch where it is not decent to touch. "I am standing still. I am altogether yours, for you are stronger" (227). The sexual invitation could not have been put much more strongly. A seeming reluctance, but real desire for sex in a woman is the subject of innumerable bar-room tales. It would be surprising if similar stories were not making the rounds of drinking places in 5th cent. Athens as well. Aristophanes' works are full of it.<sup>40</sup> The message that comes through is that Elektra, for all her airs and heroic stance, is only a female after all, with all the foibles of her sex.

Episode 2 (228-238): News from Orestes: Elektra does not wait to be told. She has built up a picture of a hunted brother and only looks for confirmation. Orestes' ambiguous answers do nothing to dispel her illusion.

Episode 3 (239-246): Orestes asks after her life and all her self-pity comes pouring out. Her aggression can be used against Orestes as well (245): he is away, he is not here to be my friend. This is Berne's game of Now look what you made me do!<sup>41</sup>

Episode 4 (247-263): Her attitude to her farmer-husband: she is honest enough to acknowledge his kindness and consideration, but makes it quite clear that she considers him and his possessions quite unworthy of her. So our Elektra is a snob as well. Orestes finds the preservation of her virginity somewhat puzzling. He can only assume

<sup>40</sup> Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 706-780, *Thesmophoriazusai* 395-404.

<sup>41</sup> Berne (1964) 127.

that fear of retribution prevented violation and Elektra is ready to accept this explanation as readily as her husband's decent nature (261). They both agree that he should be rewarded like any other lackey.

Episode 5 (264-281): In these lines Elektra delineates the way she sees all the other characters: Klytemnestra: women are the friends of their men, not of their children (265). Aigisthos: he knows nothing (271). The chorus: they are reliable to the extent of not blabbing (273). Orestes: he will come (275). He will act daringly (τολμᾶν) (277). This is the emergence of Elektra's picture of her brother as the parfait knight.<sup>42</sup> Herself: I am bold and imbued with justice. Let mother die by the very axe which slew her husband (279). I should be happy to die having spilt mother's blood in sacrifice(281). Elektra sees herself in a heroic role.

Episode 6 (282-288): How is Orestes to be recognised? This prepares for scenelet 10.

Episode 7 (300-338): So far this scene has proceeded in rapid stichomythia. Now Elektra breaks forth into lyric song. Once again she rehearses her four grievances, but by now none but the most credulous will be taken in by her vehemence. She describes how she is being kept in a slave-like state, which the farmer has already disproved. She has no friends at all, which the chorus have already shown to be untrue. Klytemnestra rules regally with Agamemnon's blood still rotting in the corners, hardly likely after what must be at least 8 years. Aigisthos dances on the king's tomb and hurls insults at Orestes in his absence; this also is highly unlikely after all these years and will certainly not be borne out by Aigisthos when we meet him later. We cannot but view these tirades as, at least, gross exaggerations by an unbalanced woman. In the process of these accusations she lets slip two rather interesting bits of information:

1. (312-313): I am ashamed to think of Kastor, who wooed me before he became a god, being a blood relative. Accurate translation of these lines is difficult in view of the critics' arguments about the meanings of ἀναίνομαι, ἐμνήστειον and ἐγγενῆ.<sup>43</sup> However, the gist is clear. She was once betrothed to Kastor. No other ancient source hints at such a relationship. Nor does Kastor, when he appears in the epilogue, give any sign of having any sort of special relation to the girl. It seems that Euripides

<sup>42</sup> I use this modern phrase to express whatever image a Greek girl would have formed in her mind, something like Perseus or Bellerophon.

<sup>43</sup> See Denniston (1939) 87.

has invented this story, possibly suggesting that it existed only in Elektra's mind. With modern understanding it is easy to see this as a phantasy based on subconscious wishes, a common enough experience. Note that in this passage Elektra adds a further grievance: she has been deprived of sex.

2. (336-338): "How shameful if he, whose father conquered Troy, cannot in single courage kill a single man"! This puts the finishing touches to Elektra's vision of her brother: he must come, a parfait knight, and heroically kill in single combat. All else would be shameful.

Let us stop for a moment and consider the purpose of this long scene. The plot has not advanced one jot, no weighty moral problems have been discussed, religion forms no part of it. If any of these are the main reasons for the play's existence (as they undoubtedly are in Aischylos and Sophokles) this scenelet is irrelevant. If, however, the play is primarily meant to be a study of Elektra's character and motivation then it admirably fulfils a vital purpose. Throughout its length our insight into the girl gets deeper and deeper.

Scenelet 8 (339-431): Farmer, Elektra, Orestes

The farmer frowns at finding his wife with a young man and she agrees that he has reason (her conventional side). The situation is soon cleared up and the farmer invites the strangers to his humble abode. This allows Orestes to break into a 33 line lecture on "true nobility". This will be discussed in connection with Orestes. For the present the last part of the scene is the most instructive (404-431). It is a bourgeois family squabble between husband and wife, and Elektra reveals some facets of herself which we have already seen hinted at: in spite of her protestations she has no real love or regard for her husband: "you wretch, can't you see?" (404) "You've made a major blunder" (408). She is a snob: "They are better-born than you are" (405). "The house is bare" (406). "We live in straightened circumstances" (408). "Go and borrow victuals and the necessaries for a party" (409-414). Even at this time, when she has just had news of her long lost brother, her main concern is to keep up social appearances. Coming immediately after Orestes' harangue on true nobility the contrast is marked. Elektra, for all her pretences, is not basically a noble character.



Scenelet 10 (486-548): Old man, Elektra - the *anagnorisis*

The old man has made certain surprising findings at the tomb of Agamemnon: a freshly cut lock of hair, mysterious footprints and a piece of cloth. From the resemblance to Elektra's he concludes that Orestes has arrived. Elektra pours scorn on what he says: such signs are utterly useless for the purpose of identification. She is, of course, logically absolutely right. The interest of this exchange lies in the fact that these three signs are exactly the same as Aischylos used in his parallel scene and in exactly the same order. No critic has ever doubted that this scene refers directly to Aischylos' play but their assessment has varied:

1. It should be excised.<sup>44</sup>
2. It is only a little joke<sup>45</sup> or it just signals a change of attitude.<sup>46</sup>
3. It is biting sarcasm directed against Aischylos.<sup>47</sup> That would be utterly irrelevant to the aim of this play.
4. It represents the contrast of faith and sophistry: Elektra, though clever, is in fact wrong.<sup>48</sup>
5. The purpose of the scene is to throw further light on the character of Elektra. She has formed a mental image of her brother as the parfait knight. To have him come back stealthily, like a coward, does not suit her. Elektra's violence in refuting the argument stems from her desire to preserve her image of Orestes.<sup>49</sup> We have already noted the emergence of this image in previous sections and shall see plenty more of it in later ones. If we see Euripides' *Elektra* as a study of character and motivation the scene is excellent and plays a vital part in the tragedy. It is not Euripides attacking Aischylos, but Elektra fighting for her romantic visions.

Scenelet 11 (547-595): Old Man, Elektra, Orestes

The old man definitely identifies Orestes at last using an old scar as final proof. Now the longed for event has happened and we can expect an expression of jubilant joy. In fact, the scene is a damp squib.<sup>50</sup> Only the chorus, who have believed Elektra's

<sup>44</sup> Halporn (1983) 101; Lesky (1983) 300.

<sup>45</sup> Parmentier (1968) 184.

<sup>46</sup> Webster (1971) 34.

<sup>47</sup> Grube (1973) 305 n.2; Vermeule (1959) 2; Lesky (1983) 300; Bates (1961) 85; Adams (1935) 120.

<sup>48</sup> Ronnet (1975) 67; Gellie (1981) 4.

<sup>49</sup> O'Brien (1964) 37ff; Arnott (1981) 185ff; Adams (1935) 120.

<sup>50</sup> Euripides used this device many times; compare, for instance the lack of real effect of Menoikeus' (*Phoinissai*) and Makaria's (*Herakleidai*) self sacrifice; or the flatness of Menelaos' decision

words implicitly do the expected. In 585-595 they sing the expected hymn of joy. But should this not have been sung by Elektra? She is far less enthusiastic. Her vision of the parfait knight is shattered. To begin with she attempts to disbelieve even the final proof: "All right, I admit I see a scar" (575). The old man is almost indignant (576): "Well then (ἔπειτα), why do you hesitate to greet what is dearest to you?" The word used is μέλλω (be about to, plan, consider, hesitate, postpone). Whichever meaning we apply, her action is the very antithesis of spontaneous jubilation. Several critics have commented on this.<sup>51</sup> Elektra replies to the implied criticism still cerebrally rather than emotionally: "All right, old man, I shall do so no more" (577). Thereafter brother and sister say all the words they ought to, but it is all very flat. Elektra still has to make an effort to convince herself in line 583: "Πέποιθα δ'" (but I **do** believe). From Orestes' side the reaction is equally flat. We have not yet been given sufficient insight into his character to know why this should be so. He, very sensibly, breaks off this awkward scene and suggests that there are plans to be made (596-597). The pair gratefully stop trying to portray an emotion they do not feel and take refuge in practical considerations.

Scenelet 12 (596-646): Old Man, Orestes, Elektra (silent)

They plan Aigisthos' murder. Elektra listens but dissociates herself from them. This is an interesting point. Is she still sulking from the last scene? Or is it because this is men's talk? The next scene will show that this is not so. Or because she is not basically interested in Aigisthos? This, too, we shall see.

Scenelet 13 (647-698): Old Man, Orestes, Elektra

Now the planning comes to Klytemnestra's fate and immediately Elektra takes a part. In this she is interested and, indeed, not satisfied with her mother's death, she insists on having an active hand in it: "I shall prepare mother's killing" with the stress on ἐγώ in the first position (647). She will pretend to have just been delivered of a baby and ask her mother to come to help. This assumes that Klytemnestra has motherly feelings. The old man is struck by the discrepancy between this plan and Elektra's previous accusations of maternal desertion: "How can this be? (πόθεν). Do you think, child, she cares enough about you?" (657) But Elektra is quite confident:

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(Troades); or Adrastus' funeral oration (*Hiketides*). In each case an event which could be expected to be of great moment turns out to be otherwise, thereby casting doubt on the validity of the action.

<sup>51</sup> Halporn (1983) 109-113; Grube (1973) 305; Blaiklock (1952) 171.



"She will shed crocodile tears over the ignoble birth" (658). What is the truth? Is Klytemnestra a fiend or a caring mother?

When the planning is over Elektra orders her brother to proceed: "You have drawn the lot for the first murder!" (668). No longer does she have a vision of herself as a gentle maiden being rescued by a parfait knight. She and Orestes have become partners. Before proceeding, the three conspirators pray for help, first to the gods, then to the shade of Agamemnon. This, again, is unmistakably following Aischylos.<sup>52</sup> But here there is no suggestion of making fun of him. The near- quotation is more like paying deliberate homage to the old master. Elektra finishes the scene in truly heroic style. If Orestes should fail I shall strike my liver with a sword (688). This is the time-honoured method of heroic suicide. Elektra is beginning to build up a new romantic view of herself. Now she sees herself as a heroic partner in a male enterprise.

Scenelet 15 (751-760): Elektra, Chorus

They wait for news about Orestes' venture. In spite of her heroic vision of herself Elektra is full of fear, starting at every noise. She talks about committing heroic suicide (688), but does nothing. She is not really heroic material.

Scenelet 16 (761-879): Elektra, Messenger

A long and vivid description of how Orestes killed Aigisthos. For our present purpose the importance of this section lies in the contrast between Elektra's vision of her brother, already somewhat shaken, and reality. It also gives us a new viewpoint on Aigisthos. As we saw in scenelet 7 (336-8) she saw Orestes as defeating Aigisthos in single-handed heroic combat. The truth is very different. He lies, deceives and stabs in the back. Hardly the action of a parfait knight. And that arch-fiend Aigisthos comes out well in this scene.

The great, longed-for deed is done but how will Elektra take to the manner of its doing? The chorus exults over the outcome (859-865) and, surprisingly, Elektra does, too (866-872). We shall see how she deals with her heroic vision.

Scenelet 17 (880-906): Elektra, Orestes - the victory ode

Elektra sings an ode of victory (880-889). This is very much in the style of Pindar's odes for the winners of athletic contests. Compare these lines, for instance,

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<sup>52</sup> Aischylos, *Libation Bearers* 456-509.

with Pindar's ode for Ergoteles of Himera,<sup>53</sup> who won the footrace at Olympia in 472 B.C. The general lay-out and considerations are very similar. Then Elektra formally pronounces her brother winner and crowns him with a wreath. The resemblance to a Pindaric ode is enhanced by the fact that both passages are written in dactylic metres with epitritic elements. Some, at least, of the Athenian audience must have perceived the similarity. It comes as a severe shock following so closely after the description of Orestes' cowardly action of assassination. One can see this as a skit on Pindar just as the *anagnorisis* could be seen as a skit on Aischylos. Both would be tasteless and irrelevant. If, on the other hand, we see this as part of the characterisation of Elektra, the passage becomes entirely apt. Elektra, having seen her vision of Orestes as a parfait knight destroyed, is building up a new one of a winner at Olympia and again completely ignores reality in the process. Elektra is a highly unbalanced young woman. Orestes has brought Aigisthos' body (or head) for Elektra to dispose of. With this we come to what one must surely expect to be the climax. At last, after years of waiting, hating and hoping she has her enemy in her power. This sense of expectation is further enhanced by lines 900-906 before she starts. In these she voices fears that people may think ill of her for abusing the dead (the conventional outlook). She is assured she can speak absolutely freely, whatever is utmost in her mind.

Scenelet 18 (907-961): Elektra - the song of triumph

Once again there is an anticlimax. Critics have almost unanimously condemned this scene. Thus, for instance, Denniston<sup>54</sup> calls it a weak speech, Lesky:<sup>55</sup> "Among the most unpleasant passages Euripides ever wrote, like an unsuccessful effort in rhetoric, difficult to understand"; Haigh:<sup>56</sup> "No passion, a purely rhetorical piece"; Kitto:<sup>57</sup> "No transports of joy are allowed"; Conacher:<sup>58</sup> "discussion of a weak man - strong woman marriage which is not really relevant." Instead of her pent-up emotions bubbling out, Elektra projects a dry, pedantic speech. "Where shall I start, where end and what say in the middle?" (907-908). "I have rehearsed this speech nightly for years (909-11). Well, here we go! I shall recount all the evils you have

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<sup>53</sup> Pindar *Olympian* XII.

<sup>54</sup> Denniston (1939) 159.

<sup>55</sup> Lesky (1983) 296.

<sup>56</sup> Haigh (1896) 234.

<sup>57</sup> Kitto (1961) 335.

<sup>58</sup> Conacher (1967) 207.

done (913)". Then she proceeds: she renews her four grievances, but points 1, 2 and 4 only occupy 4 lines. The remaining 34 lines concentrate on point 3, Aigisthos' sex life. Now, at last, we are really getting down to what has been upsetting Elektra so much:

1. In his stupidity he did not realise that a woman like Klytemnestra changing from husband to lover meant his changing from lover to cuckold. The message is: Aigisthos was just a pitiful tool. The real object of hatred is Klytemnestra and her unquenchable sexuality (918-924).
2. The poor fool had thought to make himself king, when he had only become a queen's consort (925-931). This is followed up by a general reflection on the pitiable state of a man dominated by a woman (932-937). Elektra's general attitude is understandable in view of the conventionality she has shown before, but her venom needs more explanation. The real object of her hatred is Klytemnestra and her domineering ways.
3. The misguided man had thought to gain power through money, but this is a very evanescent prop (938-944). She has temporarily gone off sex to discuss wealth. This is an entirely new point, but we shall encounter it again. Her condemnation of wealth does not ring true in view of her snobbish attitude in scenelet 8.
4. Back to sex. Aigisthos has been having fun with the girls himself and regarded himself as a ladykiller, but he was just a fop (945-951).

Although a dramatic anticlimax, if we have so far believed Elektra's expression of hate for Aigisthos, the speech is, in fact, an extremely powerful one for understanding the girl's motivation. The first point that emerges clearly is that Elektra did not really hate Aigisthos all that much; most of it was front. Her real hatred is, and has always been, for Klytemnestra and she is beginning to focus on two aspects of the queen's mental make-up: her sexuality and her domineering. No other classical author mentions Klytemnestra being unfaithful to Aigisthos, nor the latter being a ladies' man. Euripides invented these features. It does not matter whether it is true that the queen and her lover were unfaithful to each other or not; all that matters is that Elektra thinks so. Why did Euripides invent these matters and bring them in here, a place which has been built up dramatically to be a climax? They are not relevant to the plot, to the moral principles involved in murder, revenge and matricide. They are understandable only in as far as they shed light on Elektra's motivation. What had

really been upsetting her has been Klytemnestra's domineering and sexuality and Aigisthos' philandering. Seen in this light, the speech, far from being weak and artificial, is of the utmost importance and extremely cleverly constructed. Elektra's subconscious thoughts are bubbling up through her facade of moral righteousness and cool rhetoric. And now we need to consider why these matters mean so much to Elektra. The answer is at least hinted at in 945-955.

Lines 945-6 (in Vermeule's translation): "The women in your life I will not mention - a maiden ought not - but only hint that I know all about them." The word translated as "maiden" is *πάρθενος*, generally translated as virgin, but sometimes applied with little sexual meaning to young girls in general and sometimes even to unmarried girls who are not virgins. Elektra applies it to herself and conveniently cashes in on the discrepancy of meaning, because, of course, her status in the matter is quite unique, being married, no longer very young, and a virgin. Superficially she takes the "young girl" meaning: "young girls ought not to talk about sex" and tries to project such an image (the conventional side). But, quite clearly, this is false. The real point of the word lies in its contrast: here are Klytemnestra and Aigisthos enjoying a full sex-life and here am I, still a *πάρθενος*, put in this position by her domineering ways."

Lines 947-948: "You pride yourself on being handsome but I ... ". The words used are: *κάλλει ἀραρώς*, literally: (pleasantly) fitted together with a view to beauty. The phrase, as Denniston points out<sup>59</sup> is certainly strange. The word *ἀραρίσκω* is itself rare in Euripides, only 10 instances occur. It may just mean: fitted together, but frequently conveys a feeling of pleasure evoked by good craftsmanship. Its cognate *ἀρέσκω* simply means to please. The choice of this unusual phrase instead of plain "pretty" suggests the possibility that Elektra may have considered Aigisthos quite unusually handsome. This may colour our reading of the following passage.

Lines 948-949: "As for me, if I had a husband, he should be ... ". The word used is *εἴη*. This is the optative mood which primarily expresses a wish: "May I have a husband, who.... ". It may, however, be used to imply a condition, though in most cases it is then used in conjunction with the words *εἰ*, *ἐάν* or *ἄν*. It may be used ambivalently as in English: "Let me have a million pounds and I'll sort out the housing

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<sup>59</sup> Denniston (1939) 165.

problem." This is a wish grammatically, in meaning an unreal condition. This passage clearly suggests the possibility that Elektra is longing for a husband (her existing one is not even to be thought of). More than that, it suggests that Elektra has considered Aigisthos in this role.

Lines 949-951: Here she goes on to reject such an idea (which only goes to show that she must have considered it). Once again we may take her at her word, or not. It is possible that she considered Aigisthos but rejected him as not being her type. She regards him as being a fop, unmanly, whose children would not be warriors, but good only at dancing. "Fop" is my translation for *παρθενωπός*, commonly rendered as "girl-faced." The word is made up of *ὄψ*, eye, face or appearance, and *πάρθενος*, with its very special meaning to Elektra. She has considered not only marriage, but having children as well, a point to which we shall return in the epilogue. The main objection to taking Elektra literally is that it does not explain the vehemence of her anger against Aigisthos.

The alternative is to regard them as a case of sour grapes. She desired Aigisthos and either he repulsed her (hell hath no fury ...), or else Klytemnestra, as a rival in sex and through her domineering ways broke up the relation. This would certainly explain the virulence of her anger both towards Aigisthos and towards the queen. It is, of course, quite possible that such a relationship might have existed purely in Elektra's mind and never reached the physical sphere.

There are thus a number of odd features in the song of triumph which we may dismiss as due to Euripides' ineptitude. Else, we may assume that Euripides put them in purposely to make his audience and readers think. One of the possible thoughts so engendered is that Elektra's relation to Aigisthos was, partly at least, of a sexual nature. Her relation to Klytemnestra was actuated by a rejection of her mother's sexuality and domineering. Let the audience keep these possibilities in mind when hearing the rest of the play.

#### **Summary to date**

We have seen Elektra's character unfolding gradually. Beginning from her overt claim of being motivated by justice alone (the Aischylos approach) we soon learned that she herself was dimly aware of at least three grievances other than the murder of her father. Later we saw a number of other facets of her. Her sexual

motivation has been hinted at several times but has not yet been discussed openly in the play. She has been shown to be living in a make-believe world of her own, whose values are in the heroic-Homeric-Aischylean tradition and divorced from reality. She saw Aigisthos as a fiend, but the messenger showed him to be otherwise; she saw Orestes first as a fugitive slave, then as the parfait knight, but again events proved her wrong. She tenaciously clung to her ideas and eventually, when forced, converted her vision of him to one of Olympic victor. She similarly saw herself first in the role of wronged slave and reacted with the martyr gambit, then she was the heroic champion of justice, but her behaviour showed her to be a rather unintelligent, snobbish and conventional, quite unheroic person. Aigisthos' early role as the main villain has now been taken over by Klytemnestra. It has become clear that Elektra has very little insight into her own motives and we are waiting for a further uncovering of what really drives her.

## THE CHARACTER OF ELEKTRA

### Part 2

The Aigisthos episode is over. Not he, but Klytemnestra, was the real villain and must be faced.

Scenelet 19 (962-987): Orestes, Elektra

Orestes undertook the killing of Aigisthos happily enough, provided his personal safety was reasonably assured. When it comes to killing his mother he puts forward argument after argument against doing it. Elektra, since Aigisthos' death even more single-mindedly determined on revenge, counters each of her brother's arguments in turn, sometimes logically, sometimes with scorn, usually by the sheer weight of her personality. The final blow is an accusation of cowardice and Orestes capitulates. One of the arguments in this section is the question of Apollo's oracle. This is a major issue in Aischylos' play. In the *Elektra* the two sides of the argument are taken by brother and sister respectively (969-971). There are only 4 lines of it and no conclusion is attempted. Euripides is not concerned with that issue; he leaves it to Aischylos.

Elektra has won the day. She has shown herself to be as domineering as her mother. One can feel her contempt for her brother, who is once again failing to come up to her expectations.

Scenelet 20 (988-1010): Chorus, Klytemnestra, Elektra

Klytemnestra arrives in a splendid carriage, sumptuously dressed and attended by slaves. The chorus is visibly impressed by all the pomp and hails her as a great queen (988-996). Elektra sardonically pretends to even greater humility: "I am your complete slave, may I dare touch your royal hand?" (1004-1006) and "I am as much in your power as any slave, you have orphaned me as much as them (1008-10). She is playing games of KICK ME and NOW I'VE GOT YOU, YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH.<sup>60</sup> Klytemnestra refuses to play these games but insists on a discussion between equal adults, which does not suit Elektra at all.

Scenelet 21 (1011-1101): Klytemnestra, Elektra - the agon

The queen does not counter-attack her daughter (as Sophokles' Klytemnestra does) but speaks entirely defensively and reasonably. In fact, as Conacher<sup>61</sup> points out, both sides eschew the mythological, Aischylean approach and concentrate on personalities. This monster in human shape turns out to be an understanding mother, a dignified woman, with deep insight and much truth on her side<sup>62</sup>. By comparison Elektra is a twisted, unbalanced personality. This is clearly brought out in the first few verses (1011-1017). Accepting that she must try to justify herself Klytemnestra starts straight to the point, which is that Agamemnon deserved to die. This was a crucial fact in Aischylos but the queen checks herself. She realises that she is not talking to a fair judge, but one bitterly prejudiced. She urges that the facts should be considered impartially before judging (1015ff). Agamemnon killed their daughter Iphigeneia. Is this not cause enough to kill him? The obvious answer, not mentioned by Aischylos, but clear in every man's mind, is that he had to do it for the sake of the whole army.

Euripides' Klytemnestra deals with this. If that had been so, he might have been forgiven (1026), but who had asked him to assemble that army in the first place? It was Helene's sexual passion. Once again Helene, symbol of unbridled female sexuality turns up. We have seen it twice before with a hint that Klytemnestra herself was not so very different from her sister and this raised the query whether Elektra might not be similarly motivated. Even with all this provocation Klytemnestra would not have killed Agamemnon, but he brought that seer girl, Cassandra to share her

<sup>60</sup> Berne (1964) 73-74.

<sup>61</sup> Conacher (1967) 208.

<sup>62</sup> Only Kitto (1961) 337 regards her speech as insincere and rhetorical.

home and bed. Two brides in one house! (1030-1034). Now it is in the open. The real reason for Klytemnestra's murderous action was sexual rivalry. She is honest enough to admit it. Nor is this her weakness alone: "Women are fools for sex; deny it I shall not" (1035, Vermeule's translation). This being a general fact, ὑπόντος τοῦδ' (1036), does this general aphorism about women include Elektra?

Klytemnestra goes on from this: what is sauce for the goose ... if Agamemnon could bring home a mistress, why may not I take a lover? Yet society blames women for such behaviour, but not men. This is not fair and I feel morally justified in what I have done (1034-1048). Our modern Women's Lib movement would warmly applaud these sentiments (as would Euripides' own Medea and Aristophanes' Lysistrata). Euripides' male audience was presumably less convinced of their basic rightness.

The mother finishes: "Speak freely and without fear in response". These are virtually the same words as Sophokles' Klytemnestra's, but in Euripides' case she, being dignified, will stick to her bargain; Sophokles' irascible character will not. The chorus utter what probably most of the audience felt: this all sounds very reasonable, but I have a gut feeling that there is something wrong about it (1051-1054).

Elektra replies: (1060-1096 or 1101, the last five lines are generally believed to be an actor's interpolation.) "Mother, I wish you were of a sounder mind. You are beautiful, but by nature (ἔφυντε, 1063) as μάταιος (1064, empty, foolish, thoughtless, lying) as your sister Helene and a disgrace to Kastor (1061-1064)." Again Helene is brought in significantly. But why Kastor? He hardly fits in this connection. Like the word πάρθενος Kastor has a very special meaning for Elektra and keeps bubbling up out of her subconscious. The queen was primping and preening herself long before Agamemnon returned with Cassandra. Again we have no other ancient source for this. Does Euripides mean us to accept this as a fact, or is it Elektra's distorted view? Certainly, out of the 37 lines of Elektra's speech this part takes up 26. The gist of her argument is: you and your sister certainly acted from sexual motives, but that is your nature, do not attribute such thoughts to all women (including myself). The next argument (1086-1093) is somewhat complex: even if you were justified in killing father, why do you have to treat Orestes and myself in such a beastly fashion? Why, indeed? Neither Elektra, nor Klytemnestra attempt to explain the fact. Euripides is suggesting that there are yet other, deeper motives at work which neither woman fully



understands. Sex is the important issue and what Elektra is complaining of is that her life has been blighted: "You have killed me, alive, twice as much as my sister was ever killed" (1093-94). The whole problem is the relation between the two women. And Elektra finishes with relentless logic: "If Iphigeneia's murder justified you in killing Agamemnon, then his murder justifies me in killing you" (1094-96).

Scenelet 22 (1102-1145): Klytemnestra, Elektra

This scenelet begins with the lines 1102-1104 in which Klytemnestra states her view on the matter which differs radically from Elektra's. Whilst the problem has been hinted at before, this is the first time it is brought out into the open. The lines in Greek read:

Ἦ παῖ, πέφυκας πατέρα σὸν στέργειν αἰεὶ.  
Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ τόδ'. οἱ μὲν εἰσιν ἀρσένων,  
οἱ δ' ἀδ' φιλοῦσιν μητέρας μᾶλλον πατρός.

Their interpretation is heavily influenced by the way we translate them. I shall therefore propose two (very free) translations, not because I think either satisfactory, but to bring out two extreme possibilities.

1. You have always been fond of your father. That's all right; children always prefer either mummy or daddy.
2. You have naturally always been in love with your father. That is a general phenomenon: little boys love their mothers and girls their fathers.

Either version brings out the main point that Klytemnestra sees the whole basis of Elektra's behaviour as being rooted in her relationship to her parents. But beyond this the difference is marked. The first version plays the situation down as an amusing, but minor matter. It would be in keeping with Klytemnestra's conciliatory attitude at this point of the play, but it fails to bring out how Klytemnestra could regard this minor oddity of human behaviour as a mainspring for her daughter's unusual behaviour. The second version would suggest that Euripides had a fair conception of the human drives which Freud enunciated in his Oedipus complex. This would well explain the violence of the girl's reactions, but can we attribute such knowledge to Euripides or Klytemnestra?

The word *πέφυκας* (you are of such a nature) suggests that Elektra cannot help herself; she acts according to her basic nature. It avoids the question whether Klytemnestra considers her daughter to be acting like any girl or very unusually. The

contrasting points of view of the two translations are easily smudged over in English by using the word "love", which can have both sexual and non-sexual connotations. Most standard translations do this. The situation is more complicated in Greek. Euripides had the choice of four words, all translatable by "love": ἀγαπάω tends to convey a feeling of general benevolence and has no sexual overtones; ἔραμαι basically conveys sexual desire; στέργω usually denotes the love between parents and children, though occasionally also sexual love; φιλέω conveys "regard with affection". But some authors, from Homer onwards, have used the word in the sense of sexual love. Plato, in his *Phaedrus*<sup>63</sup> and Xenophon in his *Symposion* and his *Hiero*<sup>64</sup> deliberately treat φιλέω and ἔραμαι as opposites, though in the last named work it is not made clear what constitutes the difference. Euripides uses στέργω in 1102 and φιλέω in 1104. The change probably signifies little more than "*variatio*", common in drama. It cannot be decided on the basis of these words whether Euripides did or did not mean to hint at a sexual relationship between daughter and father. One point, however, is worth making in this connection. Even had Euripides been a confirmed Freudian, he could not possibly have used such a sense here. When Freud first proposed his theory of infantile sexuality it unleashed a storm of angry condemnation, which, even now, innumerable discussions later, has by no means disappeared. For Euripides to hint at such thoughts in a single line would be unthinkable. The only conclusion the audience could have come to would have been that Klytemnestra, or Euripides, had a filthy mind!

The last sentence may mean no more than that children vary in their preference. Conversely, it may mean that girls love fathers (with or without sexual connotations). This idea may be Euripides' own or may reflect a belief possibly as common then as now.

There can be no doubt that Klytemnestra regards Elektra's relationship to her father as a major factor in her motivation. We must conclude that Euripides must have thought that such a theory was tenable, whether or not he believed it himself.

To sum up the role of sexuality in the *Elektra*:

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<sup>63</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 231c.

<sup>64</sup> Xenophon, *Symposion* 8 21; *Hiero* 11 11.

The sexual relationship between Klytemnestra and Aigisthos was one of Elektra's main grievances (scenelet 2). In scenelet 7 her behaviour towards the stranger (Orestes) carries evident sexual overtones. From this scene onwards the motifs of Helene (symbol of female sexuality) and Kastor (symbol for Elektra's love life) keep on recurring. In scenelet 18 Klytemnestra emerges as the chief villain. At the same time there are hints that Elektra may have had a sexual interest in her stepfather. What annoys her most about her mother is the latter's sexuality and domineering. In scenelet 19 the girl showed herself to be just as domineering. The gist of scenelet 21 was this: Klytemnestra: all women are activated by sexual motives; Elektra: not so, I am not. Klytemnestra replies to this in lines 1102-4. This is a complete *non sequitur* if we take the milder translation, but the stronger fits beautifully. Elektra, too, is sexually motivated.

The scene continues by drawing a vivid contrast between the two women. Klytemnestra is conciliatory, ready to admit that she has done wrong (1105-1106), concerned for her daughter (1107-1108) and remorseful about her handling of her children (1109-1110). She will try to make amends (1119). Elektra is completely unbending, filled with hate and spoiling for a fight. Klytemnestra shrewdly observes: "You see? You want to blow the quarrel into new flames!" (1121). In the end Klytemnestra agrees to perform the lowly midwife services for her daughter. Elektra, far from grateful, heaps scorn on her: "Take care our sooty walls do not soil your precious finery!" (1139-1140). She continues playing the game NOW I'VE GOT YOU, YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH.<sup>65</sup> In the final five lines (1142-1146) Elektra plays her last role in the time-honoured heroic style: as high priestess she formally consecrates her mother for sacrifice.

Scenelet 24 (1177-1237): Orestes, Elektra

The deed is done. Now should be the time for rejoicing. Instead, everything crumbles. Both Lesky and Parmentier<sup>66</sup> believe that the change to repentance is too abrupt. An exact analysis of this scene is difficult as the distribution of the lines between Orestes, Elektra and the chorus is controversial. However, the following conclusions can be drawn with fair certainty. Now that her mother is gone all the

<sup>65</sup> Berne (1967) 74.

<sup>66</sup> Lesky (1983) 297; Parmentier (1968) 181.

reasons for Elektra's complex love/hate reaction have disappeared. She has always seen Klytemnestra as a rival (for Agamemnon?, for Aigisthos?) and as an obstacle to her sex life (Kastor). Now there is no more rivalry. Elektra drops her various roles and games (in Berne's sense) and for the first time sees herself as she really is: a middle-aged spinster, full of self-pity, riddled with guilt and without hope for sex in the future: "Alas, where am I heading? What wedding festivities can there be for me? Who would take me as my husband?" (1198-1199). Now she sees her relationship to her mother clearly: "Behold! I wrap these garments around her who was dear to me and yet not dear" (1230-1231). Orestes, too, is full of misgivings. He has never been in favour of matricide, but was carried along by Elektra's determination. With this collapsed he is horrified at what he has done (1206-1209 and 1214-1217).

Scenelet 25 (1233-1291): Kastor - the epilogue, part 1

The epilogue has been subjected to severe criticism. There have been two main ways of viewing it:

1. Euripides added a happy ending to please the masses.<sup>67</sup>
2. Euripides tried to point out that the situation was insoluble at the human level. It needed divine intervention (if you believe in such) to straighten it out.<sup>68</sup> A number of critics read the epilogue as a rejection of Apollo.<sup>69</sup> But if Euripides wanted to show that the situation was insoluble, why not just leave it here rather than drag in the question of religion at this stage, when it has not been a problem of the play before?

I believe that most critics have failed to realise that the epilogue consists of two entirely separate parts with different functions. Their criticism is levelled only against the first, the second is generally ignored. Kastor says (in paraphrase): All is well. Orestes acted under compulsion of Apollo ... it is not my business to criticise a god (1245-46). Note that the religious argument is quite deliberately excluded. He continues: Elektra will marry Pylades (one line only, 1249). As for Orestes ... and Kastor goes into 34 lines of foretelling his redemption just as it is set out in Aischylos' *Eumenides*. He finishes (1290-91): "When you have done due penance for the murder, you will be happy and rid of your troubles". This seems a very unsatisfactory ending to this dramatic play. The clue to it is the realisation of the influence of

<sup>67</sup> Gellie (1981) 9; Conacher (1967) 210; Parmentier (1968) 178 says the play finishes as comedy.

<sup>68</sup> Vermeule (1959) 5.

<sup>69</sup> Gellie (1981) 8; Grube (1973) 314; Conacher (1967) 210.

Aischylos. Euripides is, in effect, saying: "Here is my play. If you are interested in the moral and religious problems of revenge and matricide, consult Aischylos. You'll remember he says that ... etc." Far from writing his *Elektra* as a parody on Aischylos' Euripides, in the epilogue as well as in previous passages, defers to the older master and his monumental *Oresteia*.

This leaves another problem. Throughout this chapter I have stressed that the *real* concern of the *Elektra* is a study of the character of Elektra. From this point of view this first epilogue is even more inept. Elektra is dismissed in one line, all the rest deals with Orestes' moral problems. This is where the second part of the epilogue comes in.

Scenelet 26 (1292-1359): Kastor, Elektra, Orestes, Chorus - [the epilogue, part 2](#)

The chorus want to know why Kastor, a god and brother to Klytemnestra, has not stopped the slaughter. Kastor again refuses to discuss religion: "The necessity of fate and the unintelligible prophecy of Apollo" (1301-1302). Thereafter Elektra: (1303-1304): "But what sort of Apollo is responsible for **me**? What sort of prophecies have made **me** into mother's slayer?" Exactly! This has been the subject of the whole drama. When Orestes reiterates the question Kastor answers (1311-1313): "Do not pity her; she has a husband and a home. She is suffering nothing that needs pity except having to leave Argos." Here we have Kastor's solution and it is one that we have been led to consider throughout the play. Elektra's main grievance has been sexual deprivation (the unwed one). This is what made her detest her mother as a rival, what caused her mixed up feelings for Aigisthos, what activated her attitude to her farmer-husband. This is what made her play-act in the way she did throughout the play. Like all women, as Klytemnestra said, Elektra only wanted a real husband of her own. Giving her to Pylades has settled the matter. No more is needed.

And it works: from this moment onwards Elektra can act normally and shed all her play-acting and games. She and her brother can now express real love for each other. Compare this touching farewell scene (1314-1340) to the stilted welcoming of scenelet 11. Even Kastor is touched but he re-iterates: (1342) "Enough of them, marriage is their future!" The epilogue is not inept. It rounds off the message of the play. Elektra was not, after all, a great heroic personage, but an ordinary woman, urged on by unfulfilled sexual drives.

Why did Euripides choose the minor godling Kastor to speak the epilogue? We have seen how in Elektra's mind he loomed large as a symbol for all she wanted. It is fitting that he should have the final word. Martina<sup>70</sup> appears to have been the only commentator to have appreciated the symbolic role of Kastor. Nowhere does the god give any hint of any special relation to his niece. Her story of his wooing was probably a phantasy. That is all right. The play is not about facts but about events in Elektra's mind. She longed for Kastor, or rather what he stood for, and he has given it to her.

### OTHER CHARACTERS

I shall deal with these only cursorily. Some of them, too, are drawn very competently and with considerable psychological insight, but they exist only for the impact they have on Elektra's thoughts and feelings. Much of this has already been discussed in the previous sections.

#### Klytemnestra

At first we see the queen purely through her daughter's eyes: proud, domineering, lustful, selfish, filled with hate for her children, greedy and snobbish. When we meet her on stage she presents a very different picture: humble enough to confess herself guilty; willing to defer to her daughter; aware of her sexual drives which she regards as normal for women; willing to give up her time to help her daughter and talking as if she loved her. She is very much a queen but no snob.

These two pictures are largely incompatible. Undoubtedly much of the former is projection on Elektra's part: she projects her own hate onto her mother, and perhaps partly her own sexuality. All this Euripides makes abundantly clear, as discussed in the previous sections. But Klytemnestra is not blameless either; she did take a lover before murdering her husband; she did not stand up for Orestes; she did not prevent Elektra's humiliation. Some of these accusations must be regarded as justified. Klytemnestra's character is thus shown to be multifaceted. She is well observed.

#### Aigisthos

Aigisthos never appears in the play but he is much talked about. Once again we see him at first only through Elektra's eyes, when he appears a veritable demon, a murderer, an adulterer, a tyrant, a coward and a drunkard. In the messenger's tale he

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<sup>70</sup> Martina (1979) *passim*.

appears very different: bluff, genial, hospitable and deeply religious. In the song of triumph we again see him through Elektra's eyes, but different now: he is a fool and weakling to be pitied and despised. We must therefore discount much of Elektra's evidence as emanating largely from her own twisted mind. Yet we cannot get over the facts that he had committed adultery and murder and that he persecuted his victim's children. Aigisthos, therefore, is also a complex character, not to be summed up in a phrase like villain or tyrant.

### Orestes

Orestes, too, is seen partly through Elektra's eyes and partly in his own person. In his case the discrepancy between the two is one of the leading motifs of the play. Each time Elektra builds up a mental image of him it is destroyed by his appearance. She sees him first as a lonely exile, then a parfait knight, then a heroic avenger, then an Olympic victor, then a spineless coward and finally a beloved brother.

In his own person he appears in scenelets 4, 7, 8, 12, 16, 19 and 24. I have discussed some of these, but only from Elektra's point of view. In them Orestes shows himself cautious, unheroic but with good common sense; a snob, but unlike Elektra, open-minded enough to accept some merit in inferiors. This is the gist of his long speech on φύσις and νόμος (367-390<sup>71</sup>). He realises that he cannot live up to his sister's expectations, hence his awkward behaviour in the *anagnorisis* scene. Very ambivalent towards his mother he allows himself to be carried along by his sister's fanatic determination.

He, too, is a complex character not to be summed up as a coward or indecisive weakling.

Blaiklock suggests that in Orestes Euripides drew a self portrait.<sup>72</sup> There is little evidence but the idea is intriguing. Certainly, in play after play, Euripides shows himself as a man capable of seeing both sides of a question and much of his cynicism stems from the fact that he realises his limitations.

### Pylades

Pylades is just a "good friend", nothing more.

<sup>71</sup> There is an argument for rejecting 373-379: Diggle, editing the Oxford Text, brackets these lines; a previous author wanted to expunge them altogether. The matter is well discussed by Denniston (1939) 94-95.

<sup>72</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 163.

### The Farmer

The farmer is almost too good to be true. Many critics regard him as an excellent character precisely because he poses no psychological problems.<sup>73</sup> Only Haigh has some reservations:<sup>74</sup> "He is too conscious of his own virtue". He is kind, understanding, tolerant, with a clear insight into his own worth and social limitations and determined to do "right", whatever other people may think. When one meets such an outstanding character in Euripides he is usually riding for a fall. He will soon be shown to be ridiculous, shamming, or plain impossible. There is no sign of this here. The farmer fulfils a useful role by showing up, by his reasonable approach, the unreasonableness of the other characters, Elektra's martyr gambit, her and Orestes' snobbery. As a character study in himself he is feeble. Perhaps there is another point to him. Although married to Elektra he has not made love to her. He realises himself that in the eyes of some people this makes him decidedly peculiar, if not ridiculous (50-54). Orestes, in scenelet 7, finds this attitude difficult to believe. When we gradually realise, as the play unfolds, how much of Elektra's motivation is sexual in nature, we may begin to wonder whether the farmer's high-minded attitude was what Elektra needed. It appeals to her snobbery, but it fails to relieve her sexual frustration. What, one wonders, if he had bedded her? Perhaps she would never have turned into the formidable creature we meet in the play. This could be the debunking of that impossibly fine character. It must be admitted, however, that the point is somewhat subtle. If Euripides meant it, he was being rather cryptic.

### The Chorus

This is a group of faceless women, who mostly just underline what another character has said and do all the expected things. They sing only two stasima, together with an extended lyrical song (1147-1170), which fulfils a similar function. Many critics have remarked that these stasima have remarkably little to do with the plot<sup>75</sup> and often called them "embolima". Others have called them "escape odes"<sup>76</sup> the tenor of which is: "I wish I were elsewhere, where things are (or were) beautiful, unlike the

<sup>73</sup> Grube (1973) 298; Ferguson (1987) 30.

<sup>74</sup> Haigh (1896) 301-303.

<sup>75</sup> Grube (1973) 304; Kitto (1961) 340; Conacher (1967) 210; Haigh (1896) 254; O'Brien (1964) 15; Vermeule (1959) 2.

<sup>76</sup> Walsh (1977) 277.



present unpleasant reality." I have shown in other Euripidean plays that such lack of relevance is only apparent. This can again be shown in the *Elektra*.

A number of commentators have seen more than this in the stasima. Ferguson<sup>77</sup> considers them filled with ugliness and Parmentier<sup>78</sup> as charming and virtuoso, but both recognise them as a series of vivid pictures, the mood of which is apposite to what is happening in the play. O'Brien<sup>79</sup> points out the very many references to the plot contained in the lyrics, the aptness of the pictures and the similarity of the scenes. Walsh,<sup>80</sup> in a similarly long discussion, shows how these odes contrast the heroic approach (of Elektra and Aischylos) with the sober reality. In the following discussion I shall lean heavily on the last two of these articles.

Scenelet 9 (432-485): Chorus - *stasimon* 1

The setting is important. The audience is already aware of the fact that Orestes has arrived and that he has come furtively when Elektra wants him to arrive in heroic splendour. The chorus reflects this tension in vivid images. Interspersed are a number of allusions to the present and future situation. The first strophe describes the splendid arrival of another hero, Achilles. The scene is exactly what Elektra would wish for Orestes' homecoming: Nereids dance, dolphins leap, white sails plough across the deep. The first antistrophe similarly describes the splendid arrival of his golden arms. Their progress across the Aegean reads like a travel agent's brochure and is very reminiscent of Klytemnestra's famous speech in Aischylos' *Agamemnon* (281ff). The second strophe describes the shield. This is very different from Homer's description of the same object.<sup>81</sup> The splendid beauty is still there but now it is mixed with pictures of violence and dread: (δείματα means things to be feared): Perseus cutting off the Gorgon's head; among the words used are λαίμοτόμων and φῶαν, cutting the throat and beautiful body. The reference to Orestes' coming matricide is clear. The second antistrophe continues with the shield. The sun chariot drives along, accompanied by Pleiades and Hyades. As, in the first strophe, the ship was accompanied by luck-bringing Nereids and dolphins so here the companions are the doom-bringing Pleiades

<sup>77</sup> Ferguson (1987) 20.

<sup>78</sup> Parmentier (1968) 187.

<sup>79</sup> O'Brien (1964) *passim*.

<sup>80</sup> Walsh (1977) *passim*.

<sup>81</sup> Homer *Iliad* XVIII, 478-607.

and Hyades.<sup>82</sup> These stars bring the rain and the tears. On the splendid helmet there were sphinxes tearing with crooked talons the pray they had enticed with song. Once again, the analogy to Elektra's future behaviour is very close. On the greaves we have Bellerophon coming in to kill the fire breathing Chimaera, yet another vision of killing a dangerous female. In the epode we again see "leaping" creatures. The word ἔπικλον is used in both strophe 1 and the epode. But now they are not luck-bringing dolphins, nor tear-bringing Hyades but black horses, symbols of death. And then the chorus go on to point the connection: this was the splendid Achilles, who owed his death to the wiles of Helene (480). We have seen the symbolic value of this: Helene = female sexuality = Klytemnestra = Elektra?.

Scenelet 14 (699-746): Chorus - stasimon 2

The setting is this: Elektra and Orestes have gradually revealed their characters to the audience and to each other and from these characters inevitably springs the decision to kill. The more attentive members of the audience have already accepted this. The more conservative are somewhat unhappy: "This is not what Aischylos told us to be the cause of the murder". And so the chorus rehearse the well-known Aischylean progression of events: the stolen lamb, the seduction of Atreus' wife, the cannibal feast, the changing of the course of the sun. Aischylos' point was that the coming murder will be only the last of a series of crimes, all deriving from a curse on the house of Pelops and therefore fore-ordained and inevitable as far as humans are concerned, though the attitude and power of the gods remains to be investigated. Euripides here clearly points out the difference between his approach and that of Aischylos. Is crime due to personal character or to external fate? He does not make fun of Aischylos. He puts both views before the audience and lets them choose. The choice will not be entirely spontaneous. The chorus starts off: "There is an old tale, that ... " (700). The text is suspect at this point, but this much seems clear. They finish off by saying that is what they are told. They attach little credence to it. Would the sun really change its course in response to human sin? But myths are the gods' gift to mankind. We ignore them to our peril (736-746). From this moment on the audience must decide what to look for in the play. Some will continue to look for Aischylean fate, morality and religion. For them the first part of the epilogue will apply. Others

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<sup>82</sup> On these constellations and their meanings in Greece see Pausanias, Vol 2 1251.

will attempt to look more deeply into the character of Elektra and they will find satisfaction only in the second part of the epilogue.

Scenelet 23 (1147-1170): Chorus - choral interlude

In a similar way to the second stasimon, during the killing of Klytemnestra, the chorus cling to the conventional approach. Klytemnestra killed her husband for love of another and must now pay the penalty. The conservative audience are appeased. The more thoughtful audience will realise that we are by now far beyond such simplistic explanations.

In these three songs the chorus, therefore, perform a vital function in pointing out the difference between the traditional Aischylean and the new Euripidean approach. These are certainly not embolima.

## TWO CONCLUSIONS

### **How penetrating is Euripides' psychological insight in the *Elektra*?**

First of all it is very clear that Euripides had understanding well beyond granny psychology with a good grasp of subconscious motives. Very unimportant characters show minimal insight. Thus Pylades can be summed up by the phrase "a good friend". Slightly more active characters are shown to be considerably more complex than this, but no attempt is made to introduce puzzling or contradictory features. The farmer is kind, thoughtful and has many other qualities. It needs several sentences to define his characteristics. But at no stage do we feel the urge to enquire why he should be like this. The major characters, apart from Elektra, particularly Klytemnestra, Orestes and Aigisthos, are very complex. Many facets of their behaviour seem quite irreconcilable. Various hints are thrown out how these might be approached. For instance, we wonder whether the picture of Aigisthos as a blood-thirsty tyrant is simply a figment of Elektra's imagination or whether there is corroborating evidence for this. This is an interesting point, and one tempting to pursue. Euripides does not stop us from doing it, but he declines to pursue the matter himself in this play. He might do so in a later play. Thus, some of the puzzling features of Orestes' character will be taken up again in the *Orestes*. Finally Elektra, herself. She is complex and many motives are put forward, suggested, compared and discussed. There is a gradual unfolding of deeper and deeper understanding throughout the play and Euripides himself pursues the

matter energetically. There is no clear conclusion, but various possibilities are discussed and it is suggested that some of them may not be applicable to Elektra alone, but to women in general. They foreshadow modern research into psychological mechanisms. This also is the answer to those critics, from Aristotle onwards, who have condemned the Elektra as being concerned with specifics and not principles. An understanding of the working of the human mind is very much a general principle.

### **Euripides and the Oedipus Complex**

He certainly came close to it. Elektra's openly expressed views are soon shown up not to explain her actions sufficiently. Hints as to a possible sexual motivation are scattered throughout the earlier scenes. Elektra herself rejects them, but the audience is invited to regard them as possibly true. Klytemnestra states the view that all women are sexually motivated and immediately thereafter explains all Elektra's actions on the basis of her attachment to her father. The abrupt juxtaposition of these two thoughts makes very tempting the final step: "It is your (sexual) love for your father which has brought this about." But Euripides does not, in fact, take that last step. As I have pointed out, he may not have dared to put forward so radical a thought in a single line. Or he may not have taken that last step in his own mind. Or else, again, he may have considered, but rejected it.<sup>83</sup> As I pointed out in the psychiatric section not all modern psychologists are convinced of the truth of the Oedipus complex. The evidence from the second part of the epilogue may throw some light. Kastor unhesitatingly pronounces that Elektra was sexually motivated, but the sort of sexuality he has in mind is more the desire for a husband and home than for the actual sex act. On the whole, therefore, I should suggest that Euripides came very close to an Oedipus-like concept, but did not take the final step towards it.

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<sup>83</sup> Plato, some 40 years later appears to have taken that last, final step. In the *Republic* Book IX 571b-d he writes: ... our basic desires ... But what are the desires you mean? The sort that wake while we sleep, when the reasonable and humane part of us is asleep and its control relaxed, and our fierce bestial nature, full of food and drink, rouses itself and has its fling and tries to secure its own kind of satisfaction. As you know, there is nothing that is too bad for it and it is completely lost to all sense and shame. It does not shrink from attempting intercourse (as it supposes) with a mother or anyone else, man beast or god, or from murder or eating forbidden food. There is, in fact, no folly nor shamelessness it will not commit.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE *HIPPOLYTOS*

#### Classical

Like so many other Euripidean plays the *Hippolytos* has a triptych structure, the first part dealing with Phaidra's problem, the second with Hippolytos' and the third with Theseus'. The three parts, however, are so closely integrated that one is not aware of any violent breaks.

Euripides wrote an earlier version of the *Hippolytos*, which did not find favour with the public.<sup>1</sup> We know too little of it to help us with the present play. This work of Euripides has enjoyed a greater popularity throughout the ages than most of his others. It won first prize at its first performance, few critics have ever judged it harshly and there is probably a wider critical literature on it than on any of the others, with the possible exception of the *Bakchai*.

Few critics, I should imagine, will object to the following skeleton outline: Hippolytos lives in a world of his own, characterised by his perception of the goddess Artemis,<sup>2</sup> a world from which all evil thoughts and deeds are excluded and where sexuality, in particular, is denied.

In Phaidra's world sexuality is of paramount importance, characterised by her view of the goddess Aphrodite. She cannot ignore it but must make an attempt to fit it in with the claims of morality.

Theseus' world is that of the popular statesman. There is no place for brooding about moral problems; morality is what the majority have always accepted and must be enforced vigorously and energetically.

The drama arises from a clash of these worlds, none of the three main characters being able to understand the point of view of the others.

This outline structure has perhaps been put most clearly by Sale,<sup>3</sup> but is implicit in the writings of many other critics. Within this framework there is much room for disagreement. These are the main areas:

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<sup>1</sup> The matter is discussed by Craik (1987) 137-139; Orban (1981b).

<sup>2</sup> Note that his perception is not necessarily that of the majority of Athenians. Thus he completely ignores her role as goddess of women's diseases and childbirth, which the nurse and the chorus stress. See Sale (1977) 40-42; Goldhill (1986) 122.

<sup>3</sup> Sale (1977) 38-70.

### The role of the divinities

Aphrodite and Artemis may be regarded as divine entities, the prime movers in the tragedy. If so, the question of their morality becomes important. Both behave immorally by human standards.

The play could, in fact, proceed very well without the gods at all. The tragedy can be seen as arising entirely out of the characters of the human participants. The divinities can be regarded as symbols of external forces with which humans have to grapple, or even as representations of inborn human drives, presented in an anthropomorphic form.<sup>4</sup> In that case, however, why did Euripides feel it necessary to include them at all?<sup>5</sup> I suggest that this is typical Euripidean double level writing: let those in the audience who see the work of the gods in all that happens take the former view, those who prefer human self determination the latter.

### The significance of the oaths

Barrett<sup>6</sup> regards these oaths as of the utmost significance. Others have pointed out that the evidence is rather against this view. Not only does Hippolytos consider breaking his oath - the famous line 612: "It was my tongue that swore, not my mind", which Aristophanes never let Euripides forget.<sup>7</sup> Later he makes his view even clearer (1060-64). He firmly believes that even if he did reveal the great secret, it would not alter the situation. Others<sup>8</sup> see oaths symbolically to demonstrate the contrast between male silence and female talking.

### Hybris and hamartia

This is the Aristotelian approach.<sup>9</sup>

### Religion

Verrall<sup>10</sup> put forward the idea that Euripides was fighting against popular religion and making fun of the gods. Most modern critics agree that this is too simple an approach to the *Hippolytos*.<sup>11</sup> Yet there is no denying that the three gods behave in

<sup>4</sup> So Lesky (1983) 236.

<sup>5</sup> The matter is well discussed by Luschnig (1980) 89; Segal (1965) 117.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett (1964) 274.

<sup>7</sup> Aristophanes *Frogs* 101 and 1417 and *Thesmophoriazousai* 275.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly Goff (1990).

<sup>9</sup> Lindsay (1984) *passim*; similarly Kovacs (1987) 71 thinks that the audience would have regarded the tragedy as being due to a fault in the characters.

<sup>10</sup> Verrall (1895) *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Greenwood (1953) *passim*; Lawall (1986) 24-25; though Granero (1982) *passim* still argues along similar lines.

a way which, in humans, would be regarded as distinctly immoral. A common solution of this conundrum is that Euripides is trying to show that the gods exist, but are different from humans.<sup>12</sup> Their morality cannot be measured in human terms. To try to model oneself on the gods, as Hippolytos does can only lead to catastrophe.<sup>13</sup>

An offshoot of this theory is the idea that Euripides wants to demonstrate how all human behaviour is doomed to fail; man is led on by external forces greater than himself, which he does not understand, or, understanding, could not influence. Another variant is that the gods themselves are limited, and even inferior to humans, in that they lack the capability for humanity and forgiveness, which humans can and should show.<sup>14</sup>

### Sexuality

It is clear that the different attitudes to sex shown by the four major characters are a fundamental part of the play. The *Hippolytos* has been viewed from a feminist angle,<sup>15</sup> as an acknowledgement by Euripides that "a woman's place is in the home",<sup>16</sup> as a plea to maintain the status between men and women,<sup>17</sup> or as the clash between "male silence and female speech".<sup>18</sup>

### Understanding

This is a popular theory. All the characters try to understand what is true and good; all fail to understand each other's point of view<sup>19</sup> and it is this lack of understanding which causes the tragedy. Some critics have Euripides arguing against Sokrates' teaching in this.<sup>20</sup>

The lack of understanding may arise from the inherent contrast between appearance and reality.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Luschnig (1988) 56-57.

<sup>13</sup> As suggested by Kovacs (1987) 72-77; Bagg (1974) 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> As noted by Orban (1981a) 212; Lombard (1988) 25-27; Luschnig (1988) 48-52; Kovacs (1987) 77; Knox (1968) 114; Goff (1990) 83.

<sup>15</sup> Rabinowiz (1986) *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Goldhill (1986) 113; Rabinowitz (1985) *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Goldhill (1986) 131.

<sup>18</sup> Goff (1990) ix.

<sup>19</sup> This is the main idea of Luschnig (1983) *passim*, Luschnig (1988) 11 and also Fitzgerald (1973) 34.

<sup>20</sup> Manuwald (1979) *passim*; Pigeaud (1976) 7-13; Dodds (1925) 103; but Buccolo (1987) *passim* believes that the disagreement is rather with the sophists and particularly Protagoras.

<sup>21</sup> Segal (1988) 52; Lawall (1986) 12; Luschnig (1988) mainly xii but also elsewhere.

### The characters

Who is the main hero of the play? Some would say Hippolytos and point to the name of the play. Others, however, regard Phaidra as the real heroine.<sup>22</sup> Knox even goes so far, somewhat tongue in cheek, as to suggest the nurse for the role. As he points out<sup>23</sup> Hippolytos speaks 271 lines, Phaidra and Theseus 187 each and the nurse 216. No one, to my knowledge, has chosen Theseus for that role, though I am hoping to show that in some ways he is indeed the central point of the action. Most critics agree that there is no main character; the tragedy arises from a clash of all these personalities.<sup>24</sup>

On the interpretation of these characters there has been much disagreement. Hippolytos is seen by some in the way he sees himself, as a shining idealist and mystic<sup>25</sup> who will not compromise with the claims of morality.<sup>26</sup> Others see him in the way his father sees him, as a prig, a hypocrite, a person with antisocial tendencies.<sup>27</sup> Some see him as a male tending towards becoming more and more feminine.<sup>28</sup>

Phaidra, similarly, is regarded by some as an immoral bourgeoisie, concerned only with her social reputation,<sup>29</sup> by others as an outstandingly moral person fighting against her lower impulses to the point of killing herself rather than succumbing. Others see Phaidra as an aristocrat of the heroic age,<sup>30</sup> or a woman beset by irresolution.<sup>31</sup>

There is ample proof in the play for any of these points of view, but these simple explanations are granny psychology. Euripides' characters are much more complex. The characters of Theseus and the Nurse seem easier to understand and have received less attention.

### The Imagery

The *Hippolytos* is full of vivid imagery, suggestive phrases and recurrent key words. Many commentators, particularly the psychoanalyticians, existentialists and

<sup>22</sup> Grene (1955) 159; Bates calls her the really tragic character (1961) 116.

<sup>23</sup> Knox (1968) 90.

<sup>24</sup> For instance Frischer (1970) *passim*; Knox (1968) 90.

<sup>25</sup> Guzzo (1973) 259; Segal (1965) 160; Knox (1968) 105; Blaiklock (1952); Méridier (1973) 19.

<sup>26</sup> Winnington-Ingram (1960) *passim*; Lawall (1986) 14.

<sup>27</sup> Blomquist (1982) 414; Segal (1988) 68.

<sup>28</sup> Goff (1990) 65; Luschnig (1988) 25.

<sup>29</sup> Lawall (1986) 16.

<sup>30</sup> Longo (1989) *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> Sale (1977) 56-58; Barrett (1964) 230; but Kovacs (1980a) 300 disagrees.



structuralists, have studied this in detail and come to weighty, if sometimes contradictory, conclusions. Some of the images discussed particularly earnestly are these:

The meadow: generally regarded as a symbol of whatever Hippolytos' Artemis stands for (purity, separation from humanity,<sup>32</sup> the wild outdoors as distinct from the οἶκος;<sup>33</sup> failure to grow up).<sup>34</sup> But as pointed out by Bremer<sup>35</sup> it also has sexual connotations and can therefore stand for Aphrodite.

The bees: they inhabit the meadow, but again their hard work puts them in the camp of Artemis, their sting in that of Aphrodite.<sup>36</sup>

The bull: this is agreed by all to be a symbol of male sexuality and of Poseidon (and perhaps Theseus).

The horses: are similarly regarded as symbolic of sexuality; Hippolytos is destroyed by them,<sup>37</sup> Phaidra tries to ride them unsuccessfully.<sup>38</sup> But here again they have also been taken as symbolic for marriage and restraint (the yoked filly).<sup>39</sup>

Sea and sky: these form the major symbols for Segal,<sup>40</sup> standing for Aphrodite and Artemis respectively, and encompassing all the other symbols. Yet, as he points out, Artemis also partakes of the qualities of water, Aphrodite of the sky. Some commentators have ignored these contradictions, others have emphasised them, claiming that Artemis and Aphrodite (or whatever external forces they stand for) are polar opposites and yet in many ways very much alike.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly the ambiguity of a number of key words has been stressed by many, particularly σεμνός, σωφροσύνη, λόγος, ὀμιλία and ἡδονή.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Sale (1977) 45-53.

<sup>33</sup> Goldhill (1986) 118; Segal (1965) 125; Goff (1990) 1-12.

<sup>34</sup> Goff (1990) 55-65.

<sup>35</sup> Bremer (1975) *passim*; also Rankin (1974) 84 and Segal (1965) 124.

<sup>36</sup> Pigeaud (1976) 4-6; Rankin (1974) 84.

<sup>37</sup> Kovacs (1980b) 130.

<sup>38</sup> Brenk (1986) 385-388; Larmour (1988) 25-30.

<sup>39</sup> Segal (1965) 146.

<sup>40</sup> Segal (1965) *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> Segal (1965) 157-159; Knox (1968) 112.

<sup>42</sup> Kovacs (1980b) 132-133; (1987) 36; Dimock (1989) 246; Luschnig (1988) 35, 41 and 399; Goff (1990) 86-90 and 39-48; Lombard (1988) 18-19; Bagg (1974) 6; Knox (1968) 103; (1952) 9-11; Sale (1977) 35-38, and 102; Willink (1968) 14-15; Dodds (1925) 104-104.

## Psychiatric

### (a) Psychosomatic disease

It has always been common knowledge that emotional events can produce bodily changes such as the sweating of fear, the rapid heart beat of anger or the blushing of embarrassment. These are accepted and, when they occur, are not regarded as a "disease". If the emotional basis is not appreciated such symptoms appear mysterious and are regarded as signs of physical disease.

George Miller Beard, in 1869, introduced the concept of neurasthenia which he saw as an exhaustion of the energy of the nervous system. The term became very popular as it neatly explained a large number of patients who complained bitterly of a variety of symptoms, for none of which a physical cause could be found, whilst emotional disturbances were common. One of the commonest is the ubiquitous complaint of "always feeling tired".<sup>43</sup>

Under the influence of Freud<sup>44</sup> the term neurasthenia was slowly abandoned and replaced by anxiety neurosis.<sup>45</sup> This term, too, lost popularity eventually, partly because of the pejorative meaning it had acquired in popular parlance, partly because of the difficulty of defining a "neurosis". In the middle of this century the term anxiety state was most commonly used to describe such patients. In latter years, with the realisation that anxiety is a widespread phenomenon in all sorts of psychiatric conditions, there came considerable doubt whether we are dealing with a specific entity or are lumping together a variety of different conditions.<sup>46</sup> In the latest authoritative nomenclature, the symptoms are classified under a variety of different headings, particularly:<sup>47</sup> Panic Disorder (230), Generalised Anxiety Disorder (232), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (236), Atypical Anxiety Disorder (239).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In the following paragraphs I largely follow the account of "neurasthenia" by Chrzanowski (1967) 1163.

<sup>44</sup> Even Freud was at first not ready to discard the established theory. He distinguished between actual neurosis and psychoneurosis, the former of which he still regarded as a "running down" of the nervous system.

<sup>45</sup> Freud (1959a) and (1959b).

<sup>46</sup> The matter is discussed in more detail by Clum & Pickett (1984) 202.

<sup>47</sup> DSM III 1980, the numbers in brackets refer to page numbers.

<sup>48</sup> Professor Wessels pointed out to me that Phaidra's symptoms would equally allow the diagnosis of a major psychotic depression. This has been discussed in the chapter on the *Hekabe*. The physical manifestations of this disorder were stressed there. A distinction between these conditions is not easily drawn. For our purposes the distinction does not matter much. Either way Euripides is drawing a very lifelike portrait of a mentally disturbed patient.

Whatever the proper classification and explanation may turn out to be (and one can hardly expect Euripides to discuss the pros and cons), this sort of patient is very frequently seen by physicians. Apart from the originally described feeling of eternal tiredness the number of possible symptoms is legion<sup>49</sup> and there is often considerable difficulty in excluding physical disease. The form of the symptoms is often explicable by hormonal mechanisms (such as adrenaline); the cultural background, different societies producing different sets of events; past experience, such as when a person whose father died of angina develops pain in the chest; possibly symbolic: vomiting may be used to symbolise rejection; a vicious circle mechanism of emotion causing symptoms which cause fear which causes further symptoms and so on.

The psychological causes of the condition are equally various, usually due to faulty personal relationships with members of the family, less commonly neighbours, work mates or other closely connected people.

If the patient is fully conscious of the underlying problem he usually does not regard it as an illness; if he is only marginally conscious of it he may be in considerable doubt whether he is really ill or not. His family usually regard him as physically ill. (This is the state of Phaidra in our play.)

(b) Repression

This concept is discussed on page 37. It is worth while to add a further facet here, basic to an understanding of the *Hippolytos*: the original desire is usually rendered unpalatable by the attitude of society. The forbidding agent is sometimes visualised as society as a whole, but more frequently one person is chosen (subconsciously) to represent the oppressor. This is frequently the person who most strongly forbade the desired action, commonly a parent, but the resentment may be transferred onto another person, sometimes quite innocent of the matter, but chosen symbolically. Thus the godhead is often regarded as the forbidding agent. This attitude is reinforced by society who gladly seek divine sanction for their moral attitudes.

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<sup>49</sup> A list is given by Clum & Pickett (1984) 202.

## OVERVIEW

There are four facets which are not dealt with in the literature on the *Hippolytos* as fully as some others and I shall concentrate on those. They are the nature of Phaidra's illness; the reason for Hippolytos' creating a world of his own; the character and significance of Theseus and the significance of the final reconciliation.

## PHAIDRA'S ILLNESS

In the prologue Aphrodite assumes responsibility; i.e. illness is due to divine visitation. As in the *Herakles* further events will cast doubt on this idea.

The symptoms are: marked loss of appetite (135-138) and hence great loss of weight (274); weakness (199); hyperaesthesia (201-202); capriciousness (181-182); speech which makes no apparent sense (208-231); great unhappiness (239) to the point of regarding death as a release (248-249).

In the first part of the parodos (121-175) the chorus stress how bewildered they are. In the second strophe they begin to consider the cause, beginning, as expected, by looking for a divine agent (Pan, Hekate, the Korybantēs, i.e. Dionysos, Demeter?). To this they add Diktynna (the Cretan form of Artemis as goddess of wild beasts) for the sake of the drama, bringing in the motifs of Artemis, hunting, the sea shore, the Cretan ancestry.

In the second antistrophe they show themselves well aware of the fact that emotional stress can cause physical illness, a fact almost forgotten in the "enlightened" 18th and 19th centuries, but which Hippokrates certainly considered.<sup>50</sup> They speculate whether Theseus might have been unfaithful to his wife or a messenger have brought bad news from Crete. Euripides manages to combine reasonable speculation with veiled hints. Theseus' amatory exploits were legend and it is likely that much was made of this point in the first *Hippolytos*.<sup>51</sup> We must keep this suggestion in mind, it will recur. The allusion to Crete brings in the motifs of sea travel and Phaidra's family history: her mother had indulged in sexual intercourse with a bull, her sister eloped

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<sup>50</sup> In a number of his case histories he ascribes the onset of the illness to an emotional trauma.

<sup>51</sup> Craik (1987) *passim*; Orban (1981b) *passim*; Reckford (1974) 311; Ferguson (1984) xxiv; Lawall (1986) 9; Murray (1961) 42.

with Theseus and then either abandoned him for Dionysos, or else been abandoned by him. It is likely that this theme occurred in Euripides' *Cretan Women*.<sup>52</sup>

In the epode they consider purely physical disease as the cause. Pregnancy is known to be associated with mental changes (161-164). And once again they manage to drag in Artemis, this time in her role as goddess of childbirth and of women's diseases, a role which Hippolytos has completely neglected.<sup>53</sup>

Euripides has split the audience into those who cling to traditional ideas on illness and view the goddesses of the prologue as real and those who take the Hippocratic view and will therefore take the goddesses as personifications of human desires.<sup>54</sup>

In the next scenelet between Phaidra and the nurse we can see the patient for ourselves. We note Phaidra's weakness, her capriciousness and her sadness. The nurse is at a loss to understand these symptoms, nor can she make head or tail of her patient's talk about springs, hounds, hunting and suchlike. She can only ascribe them to the rambling of a diseased mind. To us the words make perfectly good sense as we realise that all Phaidra wants is to be where Hippolytos is.<sup>55</sup>

There are two aspects where, in my opinion, some critics have gone wrong:

a. Grene, in lines 133 and 180, translates the Greek by the English word: fever. Other critics give the impression that they might agree with his way of thinking.<sup>56</sup> This, however, is a mistake. The Greek word in either case is νοσῆρός simply meaning sick. This is important when we compare Phaidra's "mad" scene with Orestes' in the *Orestes*. The latter is suffering from delirium,<sup>57</sup> really has a fever and is quite clearly suffering from visual hallucinations. These features are missing in the present description. We

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<sup>52</sup> Reckford (1974) 309.

<sup>53</sup> Goldhill (1986) 122 makes much of this.

<sup>54</sup> The *Herakles* was written some 20 years later than the *Hippolytos*. Euripides could have changed his mind in the interval, but the present passage suggests that he has not.

<sup>55</sup> Some critics have interpreted these desires of Phaidra's in different ways. Thus Goldhill (1986) 124 and Goff (1990) 67 see them as her desire to play a masculine role and live "outside" rather than in the οἶκος. Bremer (1975) 268 and Rankin (1974) *passim* see the meadow as an erotic place for which she is longing. Frischer points out the similarity between Artemis and Aphrodite and sees Phaidra as being torn between them, though Segal (1965) 134 takes the opposite view and points to their differences. Whatever the interpretation, no critic has ever doubted that Phaidra is talking good sense, a fact which the nurse completely fails to appreciate.

<sup>56</sup> Lattimore (1962) 11; Kovacs (1987) 22; Knox (1952) 6.

<sup>57</sup> Page 102.

must therefore not regard the two scenes as two standard descriptions by Euripides of "illness". He describes two separate syndromes with great clinical accuracy.

(b) Some commentators<sup>58</sup> have assumed that Phaidra's refusal to eat is a conscious suicidal attempt, the "inedition" of classical literature. Grene translates 135-140: "This is the third day she has eaten no bread and her body is pure and fasting. **For** she would willingly bring her life to anchor at the end of its voyage the gloomy harbour of death" and 274-278: "Yes, she has eaten nothing for two days now ... Is this the scourge of madness? Or can it be that death is what she seeks? Aye death, she is starving herself to death".

In the first passage there is no word in the Greek for "For"; in other words her fasting and her death are not related on a basis of purpose. In the second passage Grene's "she is starving herself to death" suggests suicide, whilst the Greek simply says: "But she is fasting towards an end of life". This is as compatible with a causal as with an intentional connection.<sup>59</sup>

In fact the voluntary starvation theory is untenable. Purely on the physical evidence we hear from the nurse that she has not eaten a morsel for two days (135 and 275). This is far too short a time for Phaidra to have become as emaciated as she is claimed to be (274 and 280). She must have subsisted on an inadequate diet for a much longer period. Either Euripides has slipped up badly, or else he does not mean this. Dramatically the idea is even more preposterous. Over many lines (128-524) Phaidra will wrestle with her problem trying to find a way out without having recourse to suicide. She cannot yet have embarked on a course of suicide.

Lines 240-241 are curious: "Where have I strayed from the path of reasonable thought? I was mad! I fell because of the ἄτη (misguidance? blinding? punishment? suffering?) of a god." Whilst the chorus and the nurse have up to now regarded her state as an illness, possibly sent by some god, Phaidra has been quite clear that hers is an emotional disturbance. Now she uses exactly the same expressions as the chorus and nurse. The lines could therefore be read as meaning that she herself is beginning to think that she has some physical illness.

<sup>58</sup> For instance Kovacs (1987) 46.

<sup>59</sup> There is a textual problem here: the transmitted text begins line 277 with θανεῖν. Wilamowitz amended this to οὐκ οἶδ'. The matter is discussed by Barrett (1964) 212 whose argument I follow here.

But we may also read this as meaning that Aphrodite is no more than a personification of sexual desire. Perhaps Euripides, as he does not infrequently, uses ambiguous wording in an ambiguous situation and lets the audience choose what they want to understand.

### Summary

Phaidra's illness has all the hallmarks of a psychosomatic disorder. She herself is aware of this most of the time (except perhaps 240-241). But the nurse and the chorus have all the usual attitudes to an anxiety state: worry, indecision and lack of understanding.

### THE WORLD OF HIPPOLYTOS

Most commentators will agree that Hippolytos lives in a world of his own making, a world from which sexuality is completely excluded. There are a number of responses to the question of why he should do so.

The greater part of commentators ignore this question completely. A small number of critics<sup>60</sup> assume that Hippolytos has no sexual impulses at all. This, as we shall see, is untenable. A very popular point of view, perhaps implied more often than openly stated, is that he acts from moral or religious principles.<sup>61</sup>

Several commentators take the line that the play is about the relationship of the sexes,<sup>62</sup> Hippolytos' attitude representing the male point of view, Phaidra's the female. This may be all intermingled with male silence and female garrulity; concentration of interest outside or inside the home or community and such like.

A very few commentators throw out an occasional hint that they consider Hippolytos may be activated by psychological forces, but only two accounts face this problem squarely.<sup>63</sup> These are discussed below.

### Psychological analysis

There has never been a conscious human being without sexual impulses. Even such intersex states as Turner's syndrome, even hermaphrodites and eunuchs have

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<sup>60</sup> e.g. Méridier (1973) 19.

<sup>61</sup> Segal (1965) 160; Knox (1968) 105; though Fitzgerald (1973) calls him neurotic and fanatic rather than religious.

<sup>62</sup> I do not give references to my statements here, as they have, for the most part, already been given in the classical section.

<sup>63</sup> Rankin (1974); Smoot (1976).

sexual drives. This completely rules out Méridier's attitude. If this had been Euripides' (mistaken) belief he should have shown Hippolytos reacting with mild disdain to Phaidra's sexual advances. The violence of his reaction would be inexplicable (the rope and stop watch page 9).

If a person shows no outward sign of sexuality the reason is invariably that the innate sexuality has been repressed. The greater it is, the greater the repression and the more violent the person's reaction to anything that threatens to bring it into the open. The fact that Euripides goes to great lengths to stress the violence of Hippolytos' reaction is not compatible with any belief other than that the playwright wanted to present a person who had very strong, but repressed sexual desires.<sup>64</sup>

As we have seen (page 246) a desire is suppressed if it is socially unacceptable. There are two conditions under which sexuality is socially unacceptable:<sup>65</sup> if it is incestuous, or if it is homosexual.

This gives us two possible theories:

1. Incestuous: As Hippolytos has neither sisters nor daughters any incestuous desire can be related only to (a) his mother or (b) his stepmother.
2. Homosexual: If Hippolytos is homosexual but has completely repressed his urges his attitude is entirely understandable.

The theory that Hippolytos is activated by moral or religious principles is really only a subsection of the psychological approach. As I pointed out in the psychiatric section we tend to choose a symbol for our repressing forces and this is frequently a divinity, or else our "conscience". The content of the repression, however, still lies in a person's own psyche and is ultimately dictated by society.

(a) Incestuous wishes towards his mother

Hippolytos' mother was an Amazon queen whom Theseus used as a concubine. Rankin takes the attitude that it is Hippolytos' love for his mother and hatred for the father who forced her, which is the basis of his actions. In an extremely

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<sup>64</sup> This, of course, does not mean that he was thinking in such modern Freudian terms, but simply that he was aware of the underlying facts, whatever words he might have used conversationally to denote them.

<sup>65</sup> I am talking here about total rejection of all sexuality, not the *ad hoc* rejection in individual cases and circumstances, which is, of course, very common. Hippolytos in his impassioned monologue (616-668) decries the existence of women and their sexuality *in toto*.



well documented article<sup>66</sup> she assembles a goodly array of evidence to support her contention.

The woman is referred to many times in the play, even though on the surface she seems irrelevant (except for the bastard theory, see below). Rankin traces a number of resemblances between the hero's character and his mother's, as known from mythology, and considers that the figure of Artemis, as seen by Hippolytos, is a substitute for his mother, both virginal and desired. She points to the frequent use of words like *συνεῖναι*, *προσπίτνειν* and *ὀμιλία*, all with a strong sexual flavour. According to her the word *λειμών* (meadow) was a current euphemism for the vulva. Similarly she points to the frequent use of imagery with a sexual flavour (woods, rocks, seashore). Hippolytos, like Ion, was deprived of the breast (the breastless Amazon). Whilst one may regard some of these propositions as somewhat far fetched, there is no doubt that this approach explains a number of facts in the play, which are otherwise very difficult to explain, particularly Hippolytos' violent rejection of sex; his attitude to Artemis, whom he adores for her virginity, whose attributes as goddess of childbirth he ignores and whom he worships in sexually flavoured terms;<sup>67</sup> his quarrel with his father and their eventual reconciliation; his dissociating himself from society; his Eleusinian tendencies (the worship of the Great Mother).<sup>68</sup>

This theory, therefore, in many ways fulfils the criteria I laid down for the acceptance of a new approach (page 8). It is, though Rankin does not use the words, an expression of the Oedipus complex and we have already seen in the *Elektra* that Euripides went a considerable way towards accepting this concept.

Smoot's article<sup>69</sup> is rather less clear. She begins by agreeing with Rankin, but wishes to amplify. She then comes to entirely different conclusions: Hippolytos is narcissistic because of his bastardy and therefore unable to love anyone; he is fixed at an autoerotic level; he is only the idealised masculine version of his mother; homosexuality and narcissism are allied and this may be important. A number of hints have been thrown out, but it is difficult to see exactly what the author is getting at.

<sup>66</sup> Rankin (1974); note that Segal (1978) 136 comes to very similar conclusions, though speaking from a structuralist rather than a psychoanalytic point of view.

<sup>67</sup> Compare also Segal (1965) 24 and other places.

<sup>68</sup> Stressed by Méridier (1973) 22; Orban (1981a) 204.

<sup>69</sup> Smoot (1976); Orban (1981a) 199 and Luschnig (1988) 101 also point to narcissistic tendencies and inability to love.

(b) The stepmother as love object

It would make for a very interesting drama if Hippolytos turned out to be in love with Phaidra himself and only hiding his emotion. The nurse might seem to have this possibility in mind. Her whole strategy in telling the young man his step mother's secret has little justification except on this assumption. In lines 462-66 she argues that among men of the world such affairs are not uncommon. As we see, her advances to the young man meet with a violent rebuff. Euripides, obviously had considered this possibility, but rejected it out of hand.

2. Homosexuality

To a modern psychiatrist the homosexuality theory would be the first to come to mind on observing the young man. Other critics have hinted at this possibility, though no one has examined it in detail.<sup>70</sup> It would well explain his rejection of all sexuality; his particular aversion to women's sexuality; his surrounding himself with a group of young men (provided all hints of sexuality are excluded); his great insistence on "manly" sports like hunting (18-19) and athletic contests (1015-1016) (but note the exclusion of any warlike activities). The keenly athletic, but violently pacifist homosexual is a well known phenomenon.<sup>71</sup> One of the strongest supports for this theory is his snobbish behaviour towards society. He regards himself as superior to the common mob and will admit very few to his company (986-988 and 996-1002).<sup>72</sup> This is a very common reaction in homosexuals.

It may be objected that homosexuality was rife in the Athens of the time and would therefore not lead to repression. But Aristophanes, Xenophon and Herodotos make it clear that they disapprove of the practice. There must therefore have been a strong body of opinion against homosexuality in contemporary Athens. In such a subculture repression would still be an important factor.

When, however, we come to look for hints that Euripides had this possibility in mind (the rope and stop watch, page 9) there are none. By our criteria we must exclude the possibility that this was the playwright's intention.

3. The bastard theory

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<sup>70</sup> Smoot (1976) *passim*.

<sup>71</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 38.

<sup>72</sup> See the more ample discussion by Luschnig (1988) 14.

Hippolytos is the son of a concubine, Phaidra the legitimate wife and her children the legitimate heirs. This is a situation which could lead to resentment and psychological disturbances. A good number of critics have pointed this out, some have made much of it.<sup>73</sup> Psychologically, however, this will not do as an explanation for the hero's behaviour. In the first place the resentment would be against society as a whole. It could explain Hippolytos' disdainful attitude to people; this would be projection (page 38). But the vitriolic diatribe against sexuality and women makes no sense.

In the second place, Hippolytos (1011-1020) frankly acknowledges his position and explains why this is not important to him. This is not the behaviour of a man with severely repressed emotions. On the contrary, as several critics have pointed out, he is surprisingly detached in his argument,<sup>74</sup> no signs of boiling emotion.

Psychologically the bastard theory is not tenable as an explanation of Hippolytos' behaviour.

Yet it fulfils the criteria I have laid down for accepting a theory about the author's intentions. The word νόθος (bastard) occurs three times.<sup>75</sup> The fact of his bastard status is pointed out a number of times throughout the play, by the nurse, the chorus and Hippolytos himself and Phaidra is clearly swayed by it in her decision. A surprising number of times he is referred to not by his name but as "the Amazon's son".<sup>76</sup> Theseus is aware that the bastardy must be rankling and expects his son to use this excuse (962-963).

The play could proceed very well without the bastard motif. It is either dragged in unnecessarily, or else the playwright included it with a definite purpose in mind. We have here the opposite problem to the homosexuality theory: In the latter we have a psychologically sound theory, but no evidence that Euripides considered it. In the former, the theory is unsound, but Euripides seems to stress it as if he meant to point to its importance. I am forced to the conclusion that Euripides did regard Hippolytos' bastard status as important for his behaviour, even though this would be regarded as false nowadays.

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<sup>73</sup> See particularly Lattimore (1962) 16; Blomquist (1982) 410; Orban (1981) 15; Lawall (1986) 14.

<sup>74</sup> e.g. Kovacs (1987) 63-65; Lattimore (1963) 15.

<sup>75</sup> See Fitzgerald (1973) 28.

<sup>76</sup> Kovacs (1987) 31 also points out the interesting fact that neither Hippolytos nor Phaidra are native Athenians and might feel rejected on this count also.

### Conclusions

We must accept that Euripides was fully aware of the fact that society's attitude in condemning both Phaidra's and Hippolytos' desires, i.e. suppression, is an important factor in the development of the tragedy.<sup>77</sup> As to the question of what is being repressed he is wrong by modern standards. He adopts the bastard theory, unless, with Rankin, we assume that he is aware of the Oedipus complex. Possibly he hints at both. The best way to explain the dilemma is to conclude that, as usual, Euripides has carefully and extremely accurately observed people with repressed feelings and has brilliantly portrayed them on the stage. But his theory as to the cause of the repression is unsound in the light of modern views.

### THESEUS AND THE RECONCILIATION

The reconciliation scene is the crux of this section.<sup>78</sup> It is very satisfying emotionally, but how does it fit into the play? Whatever we regard as the main theme of the play (page 240ff.), a reconciliation between father and son does not seem to resolve anything. The only situation where it would be apt would be if the gist of the drama had been enmity between father and son. As the reconciliation includes Phaidra (1428-1430), we must look for tension between husband and wife as well.

I have argued that Hippolytos strongly repressed his sexual desires. This presupposes that he felt that society would condemn them and it is likely that he would symbolise this suppressing agent in the form of one person (page 246). Such a person must have certain characteristics which would make him suitable for the role. Theseus has these characteristics in abundance.

The character of Theseus has been given little prominence by most critics. It seems so simple.

He is an extrovert, not given to pondering moral questions. He accepts popular morality as he finds it and acts upon it without question. As a king he is benign, but autocratic (841-843); as a husband loving (836-851), but very much the

<sup>77</sup> This point was also stressed by Winnington-Ingram (1960) *passim* and Fitzgerald (1973) 28, though from a different point of view.

<sup>78</sup> Rabinowitz (1986) 171 stresses its oddity.

superior male (720-721). He regards male marital infidelity as a minor peccadillo,<sup>79</sup> but could be expected to regard female infidelity as a horrendous crime. Aphrodite's plan is based on this understanding of his character. She knows that she need do no more than reveal Phaidra's love to him and events will progress relentlessly from there on (lines 43-46).<sup>80</sup> As a father Theseus shows himself outwardly tolerant and amiable, but his outburst in the agon shows how his son's attitude has rankled with him.<sup>81</sup> He has no understanding of other people's motives. Such a person would equally share any popular prejudice against homosexuality, the Oedipus situation, or perhaps bastardy, whatever we regard as the driving force in his son's character. In his long speech in the agon he clearly reveals all these characteristics, as well as his long suppressed dislike of his son and his own motivation. Here is a list of his utterances (in paraphrase) with my comments on them:

924-931: If only there were a way of distinguishing clearly the good from the bad. He simplistically divides mankind into the good and the bad and acknowledges that he cannot see through people's motives.

936-941: Modern youth seems to get progressively worse than their elders. The typical conservative outlook; he will not adapt to change.

943-945: My son! ... My bed! What really riles him is not that such things should happen but that they should happen to him. The relation between father and son and the inviolability of one's marriage bed are fixed features in his universe and brook no argument.

945-946: Her death proves you a villain. There is no need to investigate or try to understand. Everything is perfectly clear to him without all that.

947-949: You are the veritable holy man! You walked with gods in chastity immaculate. Here we see how his son's "holier than thou" attitude (clearly shown in the young man's speech) has rankled with him all these years. He has not said anything before, but now it comes out.

<sup>79</sup> In contrast to Seneca Euripides is careful not to stress this in this play, but the audience must have been aware of the many myths expounding his sexual exploits. Many critics have pointed this out and suggest that it was probably stressed in the first *Hippolytos*. Among them are: Méridier (1973) 14; Segal (1965) 146; Reckford (1974) 311; Murray (1961) 42; Barrett (1964) 10ff.

<sup>80</sup> As Luschnig (1988) 93ff correctly asks: What could Aphrodite in fact reveal to Theseus to destroy *Hippolytos*? The possibility for mischief is inherent in the man's character.

<sup>81</sup> Karsai (1982) *passim* points out how Theseus sets himself up as accuser, judge and executioner of his son.

952-954: A vegetarian, an Orphic, a bookworm. All these things have upset him no end in the past. This is not how he lives, therefore it is despicable.

962-965: A bastard! Now Theseus has said it. I suspect that to Euripides this is a momentous line (see discussion in previous section page 253).

966-970: I know that where sex is concerned young men are no more to be trusted than women. His argument wavers. On the one hand he defends his own past deeds, on the other he tries to blame his son. The argument is futile but quite in keeping with Theseus' character.

971: Why do I bandy words with you? The typical extrovert's attitude. Argument is futile and despicable. He knows the truth instinctively.

973-975: You are exiled from Troizen as well as from Athens! Several critics<sup>82</sup> have pointed out the significance of this. He has already invoked Poseidon's curse, but clearly has no faith in gods. So he imposes his own punishment on top of it to make sure.

976-980: What would happen to my reputation as a hero if I allowed this to go unpunished? Now the truth is out. What he fears most is loss of face. It is this which has kept his unreasonable anger burning.

It is clear that Theseus is the obvious choice for a symbol representing the repressing forces of society. His attitude goes back a long time. But, as we have seen, Hippolytos resents not only him but the rest of society as well. Hence his superior attitude to people, as indicated in the previous section.

Phaidra, too, has desires which she knows society would condemn. In her case she does not repress them, but tries to deal with them in two ways: she keeps them locked in her own mind and she tries to fight them. In both she is unsuccessful. She, like Hippolytos, reacts against society and symbolises it partly as Theseus. Her fear of censure by society is very clearly brought out and many critics have seen this as her only motivation, calling her shallow and immoral. Others, impressed by her inner fight have seen her as a highly moral person.<sup>83</sup> Her attitude to Theseus is easily discernible.

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<sup>82</sup> Segal (1972) 173; Luschign (1988) 60; Kovacs (1987) 61.

<sup>83</sup> There are too many references to these opinions to quote here.



Both attitudes can be found in her great speech (373-430), which has caused much critical discussion.<sup>84</sup>

385-388: And then there is shame; it is of two kinds, one good and one bad. The word used is αἰδώς (shame, decency, shyness, adoration, disgrace). The general impression is of: refraining from doing what is not proper. Of the two kinds one refers to what is not proper according to one's own conscience, the other what is not proper in the eyes of society. Accordingly she tried two ways of dealing with her problem. She first attempted to keep it secret (389-397) and escape from the censure of society. Then she thought she could conquer love with good sense (398-399), that is, acting according to her conscience. Both failed and she considered death.

In the second part she imagines the consequences of failure. She could not bear the public disgrace (401-407). She, herself, would have to agree with such a condemnation (407-415). Then she imagines the reaction of Theseus (415-418) the exact words being: "Oh Kypris, great mistress of the sea, how could they (unfaithful women) look into their husbands' face and not shiver at the thought that their accomplices, darkness and the silent rafters of their home, would speak out against them". "May I never bring shame to my man." (420)

This fear of her husband's reaction is also what drives her to write the accusing letter. This is a facet which, I think, has not received sufficient attention in the literature. She could have killed herself and said nothing, having as yet not done anything wrong. Her real reason must be that she is terrified of Theseus' reaction and knowing him for the man he is she can have no illusions about the way he would react to the truth.

For Phaidra, too, then, her secret fears are of the reaction of society as a whole and particularly of Theseus as the symbol of that society.

It would seem, therefore, that in a way Theseus is the central pivot of the whole play.<sup>85</sup> It is the fear of rejection by society, for which he is the major symbol, which activates both Phaidra and Hippolytos to behave in the way they do. From this stems all the tragedy.

<sup>84</sup> Among the more exhaustive studies of this speech I refer to: Kovacs (1980) *passim*; Manuwald (1979) *passim*; Dimock (1977) 251; Claus (1972) *passim*; Willink (1968) *passim*; Pigeaud (1976) 10ff; Dodds (1925) *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> As Kovacs (1987) 25 correctly asks: Why is so much blame laid on Theseus, if he is only a minor character?

With this in mind the reconciliation scene assumes a new meaning. Throughout the play there has been tension between father and son and husband and wife. It has been the main spring of all the tragedy. When Theseus finally acknowledges his guilt and Hippolytos forgives him the tension is resolved and it is the easing of this tension which gives the scene its emotional appeal.

There remains another tension to be resolved, that between society and the two main characters. This is similarly dealt with in the epilogue. Artemis promises Hippolytos that a yearly festival will be held in his honour at Troizen, where brides, about to be married, will shear off their hair in his honour (1422-1429) and Phaidra's love for him will not remain unsung (1430). To a modern mind that seems rather cold comfort for all the unhappiness and death, but it, too, resolves the main tension. Society will be reconciled, neither Hippolytos nor Phaidra will be blamed by future society, but honoured instead. With that they can rest in death.

### SUMMARY

We have established that Phaidra and Hippolytos are both activated by impulses of which they are ashamed and which they repress, Phaidra only very superficially, Hippolytos very deeply. Euripides appears to have been conscious of these facts, though what he believes that Hippolytos is hiding is a difficult question to answer.

This gives us a new way of looking at the tragedy, not necessarily replacing, but adding to what other commentators have seen in it.

The play is about the effects of social condemnation. Phaidra is aware of her "wicked" thoughts, tries to hide them from other people and to fight them in herself. This leads to psychosomatic disease in the first place and eventually to suicide. Hippolytos represses his feelings of shame deeply and this leads to his developing a very strange personality, earns him the dislike of his father and eventually leads to his own death.

The conflict is resolved only at the end of the play by mutual forgiveness of the main actors and by forgiveness by society.



## CHAPTER 11

### HOMO SAPIENS ?

#### THE *ALKESTIS* AND *IPHIGENEIA AMONG THE TAURIANS*

In this chapter and the following I shall be able to give only an outline of each play to show how it appears from a psychiatric point of view and how this explains the various difficulties encountered with the play. There is no space here for a more detailed account.

Both these plays, on the surface at least, appear lighthearted, humorous and capped by a happy ending. They were included by Kitto<sup>1</sup> with the *Ion* and the *Helene* under the heading "tragicomedies." In both it has been found difficult to discern a serious "message". Yet both make excellent sense when viewed as comments on human folly. Their characters behave irrationally, choruses and audience are swept along on this irrational tide until Euripides brings the more thoughtful among them up sharply. Such is the power of the poet.

#### Classical

The *Alkestis* is the fourth play of a tetralogy and could therefore be expected to be a satyr play. There are, indeed, a number of prosatyr elements in it, particularly the boisterous drunken scene and the many heavily ironic passages, but there are others which suggest serious human drama. Arguments about its status as tragedy or comedy abound.<sup>2</sup>

There are also religious/mythical, folktale and realistic human elements in it, inextricably mixed and clashing vehemently at times. The play has always been popular, but disagreement abounds about its meaning.

Over the last 80 years a serious view of the play has been slowly worked out, based on the work of many commentators. There are a number of variations in detail but the general skeleton is as follows: fate (ἀνάγκη or τύχη) reigns supreme,<sup>3</sup> gods and men are subject to it. But the divine attitude is not the human. Admetos tries to

<sup>1</sup> Kitto (1961) 311.

<sup>2</sup> See: Sutton (1974) *passim*; des Bouvrie (1990) 194-196; but in contrast: Lesky (1983) 209; Méridier (1970) 50.

<sup>3</sup> Bell (1980); des Bouvrie (1990); Erbse (1972); Gregory (1979).

ignore this. The play consists in his education through suffering to the realisation that trying to cheat *ἀνάγκη*, particularly death, is useless for humans, only leading to further grief. Eventually he learns this vital message: “Ἄρτι μανθάνω,” (“Now I understand” 940) is the climax. Accepting the veiled woman he acts accordingly and the problem is satisfactorily resolved, whatever other odd features may remain unexplained.<sup>4</sup>

Arising from this or additional to it are such further motifs as: the problem of life, death and resurrection,<sup>5</sup> the importance of *φιλία* (friendship),<sup>6</sup> *χάρις* (human caring, sometimes regarded as opposed to divine indifference),<sup>7</sup> *ξενία* (guest friendship).<sup>8</sup>

Another approach, sometimes linked with these, is the question of male/female relationship. Admetos has the Athenian attitude of unquestioned male predominance. He is gradually educated to see that this is wrong.<sup>9</sup>

Taking a wide view of the play these explanations appear very satisfactory, but falter over the folktale and comic passages. Why should Euripides have chosen such an odd way of expressing this serious material?

Verrall first suggested an ironic approach. He took his theory to the extreme of claiming that Alkestis never really died but underwent a mock funeral.<sup>10</sup> More recently Ebener suggested that the veiled woman never was Alkestis but a substitute.<sup>11</sup> No other critic has accepted these views, which went some way towards bringing the whole of the ironic approach into disrepute. Von Fritz' view<sup>12</sup> that there is no real happy ending, as the re-united couple could hardly have lived happily afterwards, has found a little more response from other critics. Yet, an ironic approach is tempting in that it succeeds much better in explaining the anomalies of this puzzling play than a serious face-value approach.

An assessment of the characters is intimately bound up with the foregoing. Commentators differ on whether we should try to look for character studies in the

<sup>4</sup> Albin (1961); Arrowsmith (1974); Jones (1968); Lesky (1983).

<sup>5</sup> Bradley (1980); Burnett (1971); Gregory (1979); Nielsen (1976).

<sup>6</sup> Schein (1988).

<sup>7</sup> Bergson (1985); Burnett (1968); Conacher (1988); Reckford (1968).

<sup>8</sup> Des Bouvrie (1990); Lattimore (1968b); Lloyd (1985).

<sup>9</sup> Amoroso (1976); Blaiklock (1952); Dyson (1988); Lattimore (1955); Rosenmeyer (1968a).

<sup>10</sup> Verrall (1895) 75ff.

<sup>11</sup> Ebener (1986) *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> von Fritz (1962) 305ff.

modern sense at all;<sup>13</sup> whether the characters are lifelike or stock; whether they are individuals or represent types. There is also much disagreement on their worthiness, particularly of Admetos.

In the *IT* the folktale element is much less pronounced, the religious one more so. But again human drama and comedy alternate. The opinion of critics has varied from "a play of very little depth"<sup>14</sup> to "one of the most beautiful"<sup>15</sup> and all shades in between. In fact it is a tissue of absurdities, which I shall discuss presently. Many of these were spotted by commentators who tried to emend the text to relieve them.<sup>16</sup> Goethe rewrote the play entirely and managed to get rid of most (not all) of these absurdities, but in the process produced an entirely different play.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of metatragedy has been discussed (see page 25). It is of vital importance for an understanding of both plays, particularly the *Alkestis*.

### Psychiatric

The concepts of automatic behaviour and role playing, both in normal life and in literature have been discussed (see page 37). They are the key for an understanding of the *Alkestis*. In the *IT* they are equally important, but in addition there is in this play more stress on the religious problem and a penetrating analysis of ambivalence.

### Ambivalence

From the very dawn of mankind it must have been obvious that it is often difficult to determine what is the "real" reason for a person's behaviour. Very frequently it is possible to attribute an action to two entirely different motives; love and hate do not appear to be all that different.

Bleuler was the first modern psychiatrist to study the phenomenon seriously. In 1911 in his monograph on schizophrenia he coined the term "ambivalence" and defined it as "the tendency of the schizophrenic psyche to endow the most diverse psychisms with both a positive and a negative indicator at one and the same time".

<sup>13</sup> Cervelli (1977-78); Dale (1968); Fernandez-Galiano (1977).

<sup>14</sup> Conacher (1967) 305.

<sup>15</sup> Murray (1961) 72.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Platnauer's (1938) 149 discussion on line 1046. A number of editors tried to emend the textual φόνου to πόνου, δόλου, τόπου or χόρου so as to fit in with the sense they wished the passage to have.

<sup>17</sup> Goethe, J.W. *Iphigenie in Tauris*. For a good discussion see Brendel (1981) *passim*.

In his publication *Totem and Taboo* Freud accepted Bleuler's concept of ambivalence.<sup>18</sup> He dissociated it from schizophrenia and regarded it as a normal mechanism. His explanation is as follows: a strong wish with pleasurable connotations is balked by external edict (parents, society, religion etc.). If the conflict cannot be resolved the wish is repressed into the subconscious. Hence the patient is unaware of it and his violent reaction to the subject seems mysterious. The more powerful the wish, the more strong the repression, the more violent is the reaction.<sup>19</sup>

The wish, unable to escape, tends to become displaced onto other areas and the opposition follows it there. Thus a woman with incestuous wishes represses them. After a while she starts objecting to all sex, later still to the mention of bedrooms, later still to green curtains, because her bedroom as a child had such. In order to avoid conflict the person establishes often complicated rituals which may, in severe cases make life very difficult.

The process of repression is never complete. Every now and then the wish breaks through in an altered form. Hence the person's behaviour is explicable partly on the basis of the wish, partly of its opposing repression. Hence the ambivalent attitude.

In Freud's view the complicated taboo rituals which govern the behaviour of primitive societies are directly referable to this mechanism, as is the weird behaviour of patients suffering from obsessive-compulsive neurosis.

In modern psychiatric practice Freud's basic views are widely accepted and the mechanism of repression forms part of the stock-in-trade of the psychiatrist. Opinion, however, is more divided on his theory of the causation of obsessive-compulsive neurosis. Plain ambivalence is no longer regarded as within the ambit of psychiatry; it is accepted as a normal mechanism, though it is recognised that it is commoner in certain personality types, particularly what is nowadays generally referred to as the anankastic personality.<sup>20</sup>

The word ambivalence and its associated ideas have passed into common parlance and many educated people nowadays talk freely about ambivalent feelings and love-hate relationships without realising that they are quoting Bleuler and Freud and tacitly subscribing to their theories.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, in Brill (1938) footnote to page 830.

<sup>19</sup> Compare Kolb (1973) 113 and Freud (op. cit.) 830.

<sup>20</sup> Trethowan (1983) 232; compare Andromache in the *Troades* p.140.

## THE *ALKESTIS*

The *Alkestis* is a study of role playing. Every one of its main characters, particularly Admetos, plays roles, changing nimbly from one to the other, which makes their overall behaviour inconsistent. At other times Admetos persists in an inappropriate role and ends up being either tragic or ridiculous. Nor is there always much difference between the two. One spectator (or critic) who identifies with Admetos will regard his position as tragic and his words as pathetic. Another, who does not, may regard the situation as ridiculous and Admetos' words as tasteless nonsense. The chorus play a vital part in the *Alkestis* by completely accepting the roles enacted on stage and thereby inducing the audience, too, to adopt these roles.

The main target of this highly satirical play is the audience, including the majority of latter day critics. They, too are invited to identify with the characters, change roles with them or stick to them in the face of ridicule and loss of commonsense. Euripides could certainly expect some of the audience to do all this. He could equally expect others to revolt at some stage and either laugh at the antics on the stage or get angry with them. This is exactly what so many critics have done. Euripides writes most ingenuously so as to invite either reaction, often using ambiguous language so as not to spoil the fun. Among the roles the audience is asked to accept are mythical and folktale ones. Once the spectator adopts even one of them, as one naturally would when viewing a drama (see page 37), he is fair game for the humour of the playwright who will then introduce a realistic role. The unfortunate victim must now change roles, often at bewildering speed, or else persist and become ridiculous. This conscious playing with the audience by the author, his awareness of his own power as a poet, is what I call metatragedy.

The whole of the *Alkestis* when viewed in this light makes complete sense. The mythical and folktale elements, the comedy and tragedy, the tasteless remarks as well as the immature pseudo-philosophy are necessary parts of the whole. "My dear audience" says Euripides "look how foolishly **you** behave! Can you honestly blame poor Admetos?" And therefore the happy end.

There is not room in this thesis to go through the whole of this cunningly designed play. All I can do is to give some of the more obvious examples of what I have been saying.

### The prologue (1-76)

Apollo appears on stage recognisable by his bow.<sup>21</sup> The audience settle for their role: "Audience at a mythological play." Then comes Thanatos (Death). He is not an Olympian god but a folktale figure, "The Grim Reaper". Some of the audience change to: "Audience at a Folktale Play". Thanatos is, as Bradley says<sup>22</sup> "a shabby bureaucrat" and Apollo is not much better: sly, deceitful and underhand. Both of them play the roles of "Clever Lawyer" in a courtroom. This is obviously not a very reverent atmosphere.

### The Farewell Scene (244-434)

This induces in the audience the view that we are dealing with human tragedy, not folktales. Alkestis' first role is "The Dying Heroine" (244-279); she sinks to the ground and sees visions of horrid Death.<sup>23</sup> She then rallies<sup>24</sup> and plays "The Woman without false Modesty" (281-299). She states in clear words how much more splendid her behaviour is than other people's. Some of the audience (like some critics) may be put off by this, the remainder will lap it up. She then becomes "The Shrewd Bargainer" (299-310) and exacts Admetos' promise not to remarry in return.<sup>25</sup> Finally she ends as "The Sophist", cleverly (and purely cerebrally) discussing the general role of stepmothers. Many, no doubt, agree, others wonder why a "nanny" or no female at all instead of a stepmother would be better for the children.

Admetos, in the meantime has been playing "The Distraught Relative" unable to face the loved one's death. He, the chorus and the audience must here conveniently forget who caused Alkestis' death in the first place. To think of it would make a mockery of his fine speech. There is much talk of *προδοῦναι* (betraying) on Alkestis' part, a perfectly acceptable notion in the "Distraught Relative" role but hardly consonant with the facts.

After Alkestis' appeal he changes to "The Romantic Lover" (328-368). Not only will he remain unmarried (he gloriously envisages all the Thessalian beauties (331-

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<sup>21</sup> As a farm hand he should not carry one. He says: "I always carry my bow" (40). A sly dig at theatrical convention.

<sup>22</sup> Bradley (1980) 114.

<sup>23</sup> Not folktale Thanatos this time, but religious Hades and Charon.

<sup>24</sup> Several critics point out that she, in fact, dies twice.

<sup>25</sup> Well discussed by des Bouvrie (1990) among others. This may be a bigger demand on her husband than we realise nowadays. Amoroso (1976) *passim* sees it as a shrewd blow for women's emancipation.

333) that could be his), he will go further. He will also give up music and everything that is joyful in life forever. He will have an image made of Alkestis and have it in his bed every night henceforth to act as a substitute for her.<sup>26</sup> Here we have come to a crux for an understanding of the play. Some of the audience will swallow this astounding declaration wholesale.<sup>27</sup> Others, probably the majority of modern critics, may tolerate it as a poetic fanciful exaggeration. Yet others are put off by this impossible, tasteless and even revolting picture.<sup>28</sup> It all depends on how far we are able to identify with Admetos the "Romantic Lover" and at which stage our commonsense cries: "enough!"

He finally becomes "Orpheus" (356-359); then he sees himself dying romantically next to his wife's (burned<sup>29</sup>) corpse (365-368). The chorus fully enter into the spirit of this role playing (369-371).

In the final stichomythy (371-392) the two of them enact yet another role which some may accept as great pathos and others as sentimental trash. They become "The Devoted Parents". She hands over the children to him to guard in place of their mother. Then she proceeds to die again accompanied by his lamentations.

If the audience were divided about how to take the last scenelet the next is even worse. Is it genuine pathos or pure "schmaltz"? The impossibly precocious child's speech drips with sentimentality in words that could simply not come from a child's lips. Maybe Euripides, who was the first of the Greek dramatists to introduce speaking roles for children, was as yet not adept enough to portray them realistically.<sup>30</sup> But it is equally possible to assume that he knew perfectly well what he was about and deliberately wrote in such a way that some of his audience would lap it all up and the rest be revolted. This would show his power as a poet.

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<sup>26</sup> This romantic vision seems to be based on the myth of Protesilaos and Laodameia, as pointed out by Méridier (1970) 45; Dale (1954) 79.

<sup>27</sup> Thus Franco (1984) *passim* regards this exaggerated response as a sign of Admetos' overwhelming love. See also Erbse (1972) 37; Méridier (1970) 52.

<sup>28</sup> Lesky (1983) 211; des Bouvrie (1990) 205; Arnott (1977) *passim*; Bates (1961) 62; Ritoók (1977) *passim*; Wilson (1968) 11; Albin (1961) 9; Erbse (1972) 46; Lloyd (1985) 126; Conacher (1988) 45.

<sup>29</sup> Several critics point out that in some passages Admetos refers to her πῦρ (funeral pyre), which would be the normal method of burial in heroic times, at others to her burial in a coffin. Whilst it is possible that Euripides has slipped, it seems more likely that he depicted Admetos as being carried away by his romantic visions.

<sup>30</sup> In the same way that children portrayed in archaic and early vase painting were but small adults.

Admetos at first plays along in the role of "Bereaved Man" (404-405), then he suddenly slips into an entirely new role, that of "Efficient Ruler" (420-434); no more sorrow, but an efficient handling of a difficult situation. He makes arrangements for burial in the approved standard manner with all the proper mourning ceremonies by the people of his realm.<sup>31</sup>

### The first deception

Dry your tears, audience! We are back in myth and folktale, and, worse, in comedy. Herakles appears, that outstanding mythical figure, on his way to catch Diomedes' man-eating horses.

The plot is simple enough. Herakles has come to visit and Admetos must either receive him or send him away. But it takes almost 50 lines to do it, all of it comedy. It is a string of irony where the audience know perfectly well what is going on, but one of the characters does not and is bamboozled.<sup>32</sup> Euripides often employed the method,<sup>33</sup> sometimes to undercut the credibility of the dupe, sometimes to show up the lack of morality of the deceiver, frequently in quite a savage manner. Here it serves both purposes but in a gentle way. One only smiles at Herakles and is not tempted to regard him as a complete fool. And is Admetos to blame for deceiving his friend? This has been a major point of disagreement among commentators. Most agree that the problem arises from a conflict of the king's ξενία (guest-friendship) and his δσιότης (reverence). True enough, but why so long drawn out and containing so many amusing quips if this is a serious problem?

The fact is that Admetos has once again thrown himself wholeheartedly into playing a new role, that of "The Prince of Hospitality". This would under ordinary circumstances be wholly admirable and apposite, but these are not ordinary circumstances. Yet Admetos continues in his role long after it has ceased to be credible or defensible. He refuses to tell outright lies, a "Prince of Hospitality" does

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<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Verrall (1895) 44-57 suggests that these preparations are being made with quite indecent haste, before the body is even cold. We cannot deny that there is something to this, even though we may not agree with the conclusions Verrall draws from it. The point is that the audience is now being asked to accept Admetos in a new and different role and to hell with any inconsistencies.

<sup>32</sup> It is quite possible that this was a common feature of the satyr play; cf Sutton (1974) *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> Thoas is deceived in the *IT*, Theoklymenos in the *Helene*, all the male characters in turn in the *Medeia*, Klytemnestra and Achilles in the *IA*.



not lie, but hides behind ambiguous wordings and prevarications. He is, in fact, quite brilliant at it.<sup>34</sup>

Even the chorus, generally so ready to fall in with the various roles of the main characters, cannot accept this lightly. They upbraid Admetos for accepting a guest at such a time. But the king defends his position with a somewhat sophistic argument and the chorus subside.

#### The Pheres Scene (606-745)

Euripides presents us with a new shock. What about the morality of the whole transaction? It is the function of this scene to begin asking this question which we have so far blithely ignored.

Basically Admetos accuses his father of cowardice and selfishness in having refused to offer his life in exchange for his son's. Pheres correctly points out that his son is equally liable to these charges for having accepted Alkestis' offer. Few critics have been able to gainsay either accusation; yet most agree that Admetos is likeable whilst Pheres is a wicked scoundrel. Why this partisanship?

The answer is that we are swayed by the way they defend their respective stances. Both assume standard roles to which we may thrill or shudder, but which we know well. At the opening Admetos is the "Master of Ceremonies" who organises the (over-precipitate?) funeral, a model of seriousness and pomp (606-610). He becomes the "Poor Orphan" deserted by his parents (628-661). Then the "Flaming Angel of Retribution" fearlessly fighting cowardice and selfishness (661-670). When Pheres introduces a suggestion of courtroom rhetoric into the proceedings Admetos happily enters into this new role of "Skilful Lawyer" (708-728). Finally he ends up as the "Old Testament Prophet" hurling curses at evil-doers (734-770). Each of these roles he plays with great gusto so that the audience can easily identify with his sentiments giving him admiration, sympathy or wholehearted approval in turn.

Pheres begins as "The Sympathetic Mourner" and "The Man who gives Everyone his Due" (614-629). But so transparent is his role playing that neither his son, nor the chorus, nor the critics are taken in by it. He is obviously a "hypocrite". Stung by his son's attack he changes to "Heavy Father" (675-684). Here he is on safer

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<sup>34</sup> Possibly even with a hint that Euripides might be making fun of his own method, or perhaps of a tendency in his predecessors. Aristophanes later mocked Euripides' habit of using phrases like "dead but not dead" (521) "inside and yet outside the family" (533).

ground, but as the audience already suspect his motives they can easily see through the unworthiness of this role too. He then becomes "The Realist": forget about sentimentality; money and power are what counts and these are what I gave you (685-691). This is what many of us secretly feel but we hate anybody to point it out so bluntly. Hence the audience can be expected to react with anger to this exposure of their own wicked feelings.

Pheres continues as "The Brilliant Lawyer" skilfully turning defence into attack, using rhetoric, sarcasm and telling evidence (691-704). The audience must by now reluctantly feel that he has a point but are likely to dislike being manipulated by such a scoundrel.

By this time the chorus are badly shaken. It is no longer easy to see which side is right. Both men avoid the real issue by resorting to angry vituperation. They are playing the "Undefeated Debater". And between them the bier of the "Dearly Beloved" totters on its pedestal. They are in danger of turning serious debate into farce.

The only difference between these two is that Pheres is well aware of playing roles to manipulate the audience and they resent it. Admetos believes in his own roles implicitly and, partly at least, manages to carry the audience with him.

With an effort Admetos breaks off and resumes his, by now somewhat tarnished, role of "Master of Ceremonies" (739-740).

### Herakles

Herakles comes in as the mythological hero. He then becomes the folktale/satyr play drunken reveller with his trite maudlin philosophy. Here is another scene full of irony. The attendant knows the truth, Herakles does not, the attendant does not know that he does not, Herakles does not, and so on. The audience have a splendid time of fun larded with ambiguous phrases and multiple *double-entendres*. Then Herakles becomes the folktale hero again, ready to defeat death. Finally he becomes "The Wise, Devoted Friend". The audience must adjust to these rapid changes or fail to understand completely. There is no point in trying to see Herakles as a real character.

### The kommos (861-961)<sup>35</sup>

Once again we hover between real human drama and role playing. To begin with Admetos is dripping with self-pity playing "The Lone Sufferer". The chorus' αἰαί's are part of the traditional kommos. His wish never to have married at all (878-8) may still be tradition.<sup>36</sup> The desire to hurl himself into the tomb next to her (895-902) is excessive, but also occurs elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

But his vision of the empty house with dirty floors (946) and the weeping children clinging to him sound like real human grief, well observed, as does his reluctance to go into society again and meet young women who will remind him of his wife, look like true human suffering.

This is not to deny that Euripides is being very clever in choosing these examples. Relief from the empty house and from being deprived of young women is exactly what Admetos will presently be offered and accept. There is therefore marked irony in this, but as the audience could not foresee the end of the play they could not have appreciated it. Euripides is quietly chuckling to himself waiting for the audience to catch up with him. This is metatragedy. The audience is again left floating between disgust at Admetos' role playing and sympathy for his real grief.

### The second deception (1008-1153)

Herakles gently chides Admetos for persisting too long in the "Prince of Hospitality" role. But then he proceeds to deceit himself. He plays the "Practical Joker" with great gusto. Nine lines (1025-1033) are spent on spinning his yarn about winning the veiled woman in a contest.<sup>38</sup>

Poor Admetos is now in a cleft stick. On the one hand he has to continue his role of "Prince of Hospitality" on the other he would like to play "The Man of his Word". But the two are incompatible. The chorus realise his predicament and sympathise (1070-1071).

<sup>35</sup> The kommos is generally a lament for one recently dead. This one is about a living person. There is hardly a word about Alkestis, all the sympathy is for Admetos.

<sup>36</sup> It recurs in the *Hiketides*, *Troades* and *Hekabe*.

<sup>37</sup> Particularly Euadne in the *Hiketides* and Hermione in the *Andromache*, of which the former means it, the latter is role playing.

<sup>38</sup> I find line 1032 interesting: the main prize were some oxen. The woman "εἴπετο" (followed as an afterthought). If the play is all about the equal status of women in society (see p.261) then this is a curious slip. Is this valuation of women as inferior to oxen the opinion of Herakles or society in general? Does Euripides expect the audience to agree with this valuation?

Then again a typical Euripidean (or satyr play) ironic scene. Its flavour is enhanced by being doubly ironic:

1. Herakles and the audience know who the veiled woman is; the king does not.
2. Herakles is, in fact, a folktale figure able to restore the dead to life; Admetos does not know this; the audience did know at one stage, but have by now forgotten and are trying to play at a realistic level. Admetos is bound to be the dupe, one way or the other; the audience is similarly bound to be duped. Neither of them can play a double role. The playwright has neatly manoeuvred them into a corner and they are going to look foolish.

First Herakles pretends he is just an ordinary human: "I wish I could bring her back to life" (1072-1074). Admetos falls into the trap and agrees.

Herakles then offers sympathy and consolation at a strictly human level, in exactly the way the chorus had done earlier (1077-1080). Thereby he induces the king to slip back into his "Lone Sufferer" role. He agrees that Alkestis was a wonderful wife (1083) and Admetos resumes his "Romantic Lover" role. Herakles proposes a new marriage to cure the grief (1087) which pushes Admetos back into his "Man of his Word" role. The hero pretends to admire his friend's romantic stance but calls it foolish, the same attitude Pheres took so long ago. Admetos responds by refusing to betray (προδοῦναι again).

Having thus led the king back through all his previous roles and shown them to be quite inappropriate Herakles now tightens the screw and demands ξενία when Admetos would rather give ὀσιότης. The comedy turns more and more to farce with Admetos treating the veiled woman, who is after all his beloved wife, as if she were a leper. He refuses to have her in the house; he refuses to have her near him; he refuses to look at her; he cannot bear to touch her, it seems like touching the Gorgon's head to him (1118). But step by step he has to give way if he wants to continue to be the "Prince of Hospitality". Eventually he touches the dreadful object.

With that Herakles reveals himself for what he really is: a folktale hero and the veiled woman for Alkestis. The impossible double role playing is resolved. Confess it, you, too, have been duped by that arch-puppeteer, the playwright.

Throughout this scenelet Alkestis has remained silent. Commentators have argued learnedly about this.<sup>39</sup> The fact is that had she spoken she would have given the game away prematurely and spoilt the joke on Admetos and the audience. The play, after all, was not about her, nor even, really about Admetos but about the audience.

### IPHIGENEIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

As in the *Alkestis* role playing plays a considerable part in this play. It is, however, no longer the main butt of Euripides' wit. In the *IT* he shows up other causes for irrational behaviour as well, particularly lack of understanding, conformity (especially to literary conventions), automatic behaviour, pigeonholing, xenophobia,<sup>40</sup> the effect of powerful emotions. It shows the playwright's understanding of subconscious events, which he will emphasise so much more in the *Elektra*. This play is, if anything, even more lighthearted than the *Alkestis*, but the target of the playwright's humour is again the audience. He leads them to believe all sorts of foolish things but at the same time provides them with sufficient evidence to make the more thoughtful think again and realise how they have been duped. It is noteworthy how often Euripides himself points out the absurdities in the play. Metatragedy is again a feature.

Here is a list of the major bits of foolishness which the audience is expected to swallow. There are others.

#### 1. The recognition scene (471-827)

Greatly praised by Aristotle it is yet entirely artificial, being based on Orestes' and Iphigeneia's reluctance to say what they mean. In 471-2 Iphigeneia asks Orestes who he is but he prevaricates and refuses to tell. In 496 he asks her why she should be so interested. She will not say. Mankind, haunted by archaic fears and superstitions, is in a muddle, but the light of Apollo (Reason) could have prevented it.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Elmsley (1912) 434 believed that Alkestis had to be silent as Euripides had only two actors available. Verrall (1895) 69 regarded her silence as a dig at Aischylos' silent characters. Other commentators have accepted Herakles' explanation and believe that such silence was in line with Greek funerary practices. See Betts (1965) *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Most of these have been discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>41</sup> A point stressed by Burnett (1971) 62-63.

2. The family gossip (826-958)

Having eventually managed to recognise each other the sibs proceed to reminisce about their experiences whilst they are in mortal danger and urgent action is needed. Pylades points out the absurdity of this behaviour (902-907). The sibs completely ignore him and carry on. It is not until 995 that they get down to planning. (Dramatic Convention, nowadays common in Grand Opera).

3. Signing the contract (577-595 and 727-795)

In the first part Iphigeneia very sensibly asks the two friends to take a letter for her, taking time off only to recount how it came to be written, which is, of course, irrelevant. The friends readily agree. That is reasonable, common sense behaviour.

In the second part they proceed as if they were signing a legal document before a magistrate, envisaging all sorts of improbable contingencies and swearing useless oaths. I should propose that a playwright of Euripides' calibre would have been quite capable of introducing the letter without all this nonsense. This is persiflage of the litigious Athenians and their sophist advisers.<sup>42</sup>

4. How many Greeks?

The letter was presumably written by a Greek who was later sacrificed (by Iphigeneia?). But elsewhere she says that Orestes is the first Greek ever to come to Tauris (256-9). This contradiction has greatly worried critics.<sup>43</sup> The audience can be relied upon not to notice.

5. Unwanted heroism (578-622)

Iphigeneia, Orestes and Pylades all in turn offer their lives for the sake of the others. All of it is unnecessary as later events show. This is the heroic tradition. Which of us can say that he has never cast himself in the role of martyr? This is exactly why we laugh at Lamachos' heroic antics in the *Acharnians*.

6. The conundrum of Artemis

Euripides sums up this puzzle himself in the words of Iphigeneia (380-391). Paraphrased, their gist is: How can this delicate and fastidious goddess who cannot bear the presence of blood near her altar rejoice in human sacrifice? I cannot believe this whole tale of the house of Tantalos and their cannibalistic orgies. I do not believe

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<sup>42</sup> Compare Aristophanes in the *Wasps* and *Clouds*.

<sup>43</sup> The evidence is reviewed by Strachan (1976).

that a god can be evil. People project their own bloodthirsty thoughts onto the gods.<sup>44</sup> The resemblance to the *Herakles* ("A wretched tale of poets" (see page 64) is very strong.

#### 7. The puzzle of Apollo

Apollo was responsible for the matricide and all the tribulations that followed; he sent Orestes on this Taurian quest. Yet he never helped the poor man. What sort of a god is this? Even as a giver of oracles he has deceived him twice (570-575). In paraphrase: "All dreams and oracles are untrue. Gods, as well as men, are deceived by them. Only fools believe in them. They can only lead to grief." In the end, of course, Apollo is vindicated by events; all turns out well. But is this just Euripides imposing an impossible happy ending? Many critics take this view. Verrall<sup>45</sup> put forward the idea that Delphi is looking after itself and has sent Orestes away in order to get rid of an uncomfortable customer.

Here we must consider the third stasimon (1234ff). Shorn of its superb poetic character its message is this: Prophecy used to be in the hands of chthonic powers (Gaia, Python, Themis and their ilk). Their oracles and dream messages were obscure and misleading. But Apollo, i.e. Reason, was born and asked Zeus to send away the dreams. Zeus agreed and now Apollo/Reason enables men to face problems confidently. Brendel<sup>46</sup> comes to similar conclusions. Implied in this is the corollary: "But we in our ignorance go on attributing our dark fears and chthonic superstitions to Apollo and then he seems illogical and wicked." Orestes does not say this, but Iphigeneia has already said it for him (see above.)

#### 8. Morality and Xenophobia

Thoas, as portrayed on the stage is kindly, well meaning, with strong religious feelings. Yet the conspirators slaughter his cattle, beat his oxherds, steal his statue and priestess and propose to kill him. What is worse, he is made a laughing stock in that savagely ironic scene where Iphigeneia knows what is going on and he does not. But then Thoas and his Taurians are barbarians, as is frequently pointed out. This, of course, makes them fair game for any sort of treatment. Some of the audience no

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<sup>44</sup> Verrall (1895) sees a bitter attack on religion in this. I should rather regard it as making mild fun of religious credulity.

<sup>45</sup> Verrall (1895).

<sup>46</sup> Brendel (1981) 81.

doubt laughed heartily at his discomfiture, but, surely, some must have been revolted, as many later critics were. And Euripides is not slow in pointing out that Greek moral superiority is by no means so obvious (1173-74):

Iph: They killed his mother, partners in their swords.

Thoas: Apollo! No barbarian would dare to do a thing like that!

And this, after we have heard three times already of the horrors perpetrated by the house of Tantalos.

#### 9. Iphigeneia's dream

Iphigeneia completely misinterprets her dream (45-54) as Euripides carefully points out. Yet she lets it colour her whole outlook and actions and it becomes a major element in the play.<sup>47</sup> Orestes (570-5) expostulates on the treachery of dreams. The chorus, in its third stasimon, ascribe dreams to chthonic powers. Some of the audience will take the dream seriously, others not.

#### 10. The oxherds' reaction

When they first came upon Orestes and Pylades, they took them for gods, apparently only because they were handsome and it was not clear where they had come from. Such is human credulity. Only one man, an independent thinker, suggested what was surely much more likely, that they were shipwrecked sailors. He was regarded as μάρτυρος (foolish) and θρασύς (impious) but eventually persuaded the company to try to catch the strangers. But only when they saw their oxen being killed did they go into action. Even then they had to wait for reinforcements before daring to attack the two lonely men. Euripides seems to be piling on the absurdities rather thickly.

#### 11. The first battle scene (322-332)

Only after reinforcements had arrived did the Taurians attack. The ensuing battle is told with all the gusto of great derring-do and subtle strategy. The crowd, armed with sticks and stones, could not prevail against two swordsmen. Could the Athenian audience really believe this? The Taurians then resorted to the brilliant strategy of alternate attack and retreat,<sup>48</sup> relying on the longer range of their weapons. They managed to manoeuvre the Greeks into an untenable position in a hollow, but

<sup>47</sup> Well discussed by Brendel (1981).

<sup>48</sup> This is very reminiscent of the Persians' technique as described by Xenophon *Anabasis* III 3, but surely well known to the Greeks before his account.



even then could not prevail until exhaustion forced the two to surrender. To make sure of the absurdity of the situation the messenger declares that in all this long struggle no one was hit by a stone. The audience are expected to conform to the epic/heroic tradition and swallow all this nonsense.

12. The second battle scene (1345-1419)

On the Taurian side we have a detachment of the army, trained fighting men, on the Greek side two heroes and fifty rowers on the alert. Yet it appears that neither side was armed: "They had no steel, neither had we" (1367-68). There were only punches and kicks and a few bruises (1373-74). The story is told in the language of high epic with vivid descriptions of heroic effort and dauntless courage. Yet, nearer the end, the Greeks appear to have bows and arrows after all and the Taurians have knives with which to slash the ropes. Halfway through the battle a shout was heard encouraging the Greeks. It is not made clear whether this came from Orestes or some divine source. Let each member of the audience see it as he wishes. The final outcome of the battle is not mentioned. It seems that the Greeks were not captured, but did not get away either, thus making all their fate dependent on Thoas' decision. Once again this is epic or folk-tale tradition with no resemblance to real life.

13. The mystery of the fifty rowers

These stalwart men are not mentioned at all for the first two thirds of the play. One almost gets the impression that Orestes and Pylades paddled across the Black Sea in a two-man canoe. All plans to be made, all deeds to be performed must depend on the unaided efforts of the two friends. Only in 1043 are the rowers mentioned<sup>49</sup> but even then the availability of this striking force for anything but escape does not occur to the sibs. All actions must be performed by them alone. This is the Homeric view of war, where only the chieftains' deeds are of significance, the common soldiers do nothing significant. But, surely, 5th century Athenians ought to have had a different view of the realities of war. In the second battle these rowers showed their power as an effective force.

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<sup>49</sup> The ship is called *πολύκοπος* (many-oared) in 981 but the audience could be relied upon to miss the hint.

#### 14. The Divine Communication (1446-74)

In the epilogue Athene turns to Orestes and Iphigeneia to give them their instructions. But these two are well out of earshot. Euripides, himself, has to justify so glaring an anomaly and he puts in a line (1447): "People can hear gods at a distance." The audience, by now in the dramatic tradition, may be expected to swallow this too.<sup>50</sup>

#### Iphigeneia's ambivalent attitude to her father

The facts are uncontested: Agamemnon attempted to kill his daughter at Aulis. The first mention is in the prologue (6ff). This is a factual, unemotional recital.<sup>51</sup> The person with ambivalent feelings usually keeps them under tight control and appears inordinately calm, but now and then the pent-up energy breaks through. Thus: "ὄβρισθέντας γάμους Ἑλένης" (13, "Helene's outraged bed" in Way's translation) is a very emotional phrase and the detailed description of the physical background of the scene at Aulis (6-7) suggests more than a passing interest.

Euripides keeps Iphigeneia's judgement on her father very ambiguous. "Ὡς δοκεῖ" (8) has been translated "as people believe",<sup>52</sup> suggesting that Agamemnon is innocent; "as he thought then",<sup>53</sup> the implication being he was guilty but it all happened a long time ago; or "as he thinks to this very day",<sup>54</sup> meaning that his guilt persists. Any of these versions would be compatible with an ambivalent attitude. It is likely that these are not mistranslations, but due to an inherent ambiguity in the Greek. Euripides is being consciously ambiguous in describing the ambiguity in Iphigeneia's mind. He uses three words for "killing": σφάττειν (slaughter); θύειν (sacrifice) and κáινειν (slay). Whilst their overall meaning is the same the emotional aura of each is different. I suggest that Euripides chose these words very carefully to fit in with the various subconscious feelings activating Iphigeneia's mind at the time.

The whole section tends to whitewash Agamemnon. He only promised to sacrifice the most beautiful thing in his house. It was Artemis who decided that Iphigeneia should be the victim, Kalchas who urged the sacrifice (16), Odysseus who was the main mover (24) and Achilles' role was at least suspect. These matters will be

<sup>50</sup> As Kitto (1961) 317 points out.

<sup>51</sup> As pointed out by Grube (1941) 315.

<sup>52</sup> Lattimore (1974).

<sup>53</sup> Platnauer (1938) 59.

<sup>54</sup> England (1911).

a major theme in the *IA*. Here they are only hinted at. A good example of displacement in the Freudian sense.

Lines 48-62 describe Iphigeneia's dream. Grube<sup>55</sup> calls it a psychological masterpiece. We may give it a modern Freudian interpretation, but long before him people had realised the relevance of dreams to waking life. Indeed, Euripides discusses their significance in this play (568-575). There can be no doubt that he meant the dream to be symbolic and that his audience would take it as such. The splendid building stands for Agamemnon and "his house"; the earthquake for their downfall; the central pillar for Orestes; Iphigeneia's sprinkling for her part in destroying it. We are left with a clear expression of an ambivalent feeling. Agamemnon is presented as a picture of grandeur and strength and yet he must succumb and Iphigeneia cannot avoid being part of his downfall.

In lines 211ff Iphigeneia's mind returns to Aulis and she describes herself as "born to be a sacrificial victim, not an enjoyable fate, to my father's dishonour". Her father is now definitely guilty.

Gradually the realm of the ambivalent feeling has extended. From Agamemnon it has spread to Kalchas, Odysseus, Achilles, Helene and Menelaos and now threatens to engulf all the Greeks. She has always been compassionate with Greeks before, now she will be so no longer (345ff). She tries to rationalise: it was Helene and Menelaos who caused it all. She wishes that they might come to Tauris so that she might sacrifice them at the altar and wreak her vengeance. But this outburst fails to relieve the tension as, of course, it is misdirected. It only serves to bring the scene at Aulis back into vivid memory again. In 358-377 we get another recital of the scene. Where the one in the prologue was superficially calm and tended to exonerate Agamemnon this one is wildly emotional and brings out the full horror of her father's deed. She tells how she was tricked into coming, how her father wielded the knife, how she implored him and reminded him that he was her father, but all to no avail. "I cannot forget these evil things." (361) We are getting close to the obsessional thinking of an obsessional anxiety state.

The scene between Orestes and his sister contains some superb material from the point of view of studying Iphigeneia's (and, to a lesser extent, Orestes') reactions.

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<sup>55</sup> Grube (1941) 316.

It is obvious from the beginning that what Iphigeneia really wants to know is her father's fate. But her inhibitions are far too great to ask directly. She works her way to the central point by a circuitous route. Very significantly the route she takes is the exact reverse of the way in which her ambivalence extended: She starts off by asking after the Greeks in general (517), then about Helene and Menelaos (521) where she cannot abstain from commenting on how she hates the pair, then Kalchas (531), Odysseus (533) and again she curses him, then Achilles (537). Only then can she bring herself to touch the main subject but, even so, only by allusion: "The prosperous king" (543) so that Orestes fails to understand what she is getting at (and, indeed, goes off at a tangent riding his own hobby-horse). Finally she pronounces the dreaded name, but even now not clearly; she adds the indefinite word τῆς (546). This is difficult to render in English, the flavour of it would be: "Wasn't there some guy called Agamemnon?".

At this stage we are getting very close to Orestes' own ambivalence about his mother and he tries to back off: "Leave off this line of talk" (546), but Iphigeneia, having at last overcome her inhibitions, is not to be shaken off: "Tell me, I want to know" (547). The word used is εὐφροαίνειν "so that I may be gladdened". But what sort of a report would gladden her?

When she hears that Agamemnon is dead her response is: "Dead? What happened? Oh wretched me!" Vellacott<sup>56</sup> translates: "Dead? How? Oh, not dead!" (she weeps). This is very free, but it brings out the remarkable fact that in spite of her hate her first reaction is grief for her father. But she cannot condemn her mother either for killing him (563) nor Orestes for killing her (559). Poor Iphigeneia does not know what to think or feel.

Bringing in the matricide is to trample heavily on Orestes' own ambivalent feelings and it is his turn to squirm and talk in hints (554ff). But Iphigeneia returns to her problem: "Oh, unfortunate girl, she and the father who slew her!"

In 852ff we get yet a third account of the events at Aulis. Iphigeneia just cannot leave the subject alone. Platnauer<sup>57</sup> calls her a woman with an *idée fixe*. Once again she relives the horror of the mock wedding and the sacrifice and in 846 all her

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<sup>56</sup> Vellacott (1953) 90.

<sup>57</sup> Platnauer (1938) vi.

hatred is back. Literally it says: "I have obtained a fatherless (or unfatherly) doom." It is clearly strongly condemnatory of Agamemnon, whichever way we translate it.

In 989ff Iphigeneia sums up her attitude to her father: before Orestes came she wished she could restore her father's house and wished she could cease hating her father. The message could not be clearer.

What is the final outcome of the ambivalence? The epilogue leaves one with the general impression that, if they follow their instructions, they will obtain relief from their ambivalent obsessions. Nowhere, in fact, does it say so. Was Euripides aware of the difficulty in treating that condition?

Iphigeneia is almost as ambivalent about Artemis as about her father. She views her in turn as a pure divinity and helper in need as well as a bloodthirsty demon and cause of all her troubles.

### Summary

Get the audience into the right way of thinking, religious, heroic, epic, dramatic or whatever and they can be made to believe anything. This is the power of the poet.

### Other Plays

The tendency to play standard roles, often due to conformity with tradition, runs throughout Euripides' works. In some cases it is part of the psychosis described (Hekabe, Herakles, Orestes, Elektra, Euadne) or the histrionic personality (Helene and Kassandra (*Troades*), Hermione (*Andromache*)). In others it is more ordinary people who play roles and become ludicrous. This is particularly well shown in the *Helene*, where Helene and Menelaos play the roles of "innocent victim of calumny" and "Hero of Troy" throughout. Iolaos (*Herakleidae*) also falls into the trap at one stage.

In some of the later plays the tendency to play roles assumes more sinister aspects. In the *Herakleidae* and *Hiketides* the audience is constantly inveigled into thinking in slogans and political cliches, which are then shown to be misleading. In the *IA* each character in turn is trapped by the role he is trying to play, forced by popular opinion to stick to it and the tragedy arises therefrom. Only by recognising that the characters play roles and seeing through them can the audience appreciate the serious content of each play.

## CHAPTER 12

### THE *HERAKLEIDAI*

The *Herakleidai* stands at a crossroads in the work of Euripides. On the one hand it greatly resembles the lighthearted "tragicomedies" discussed in the last chapter. Here, too, there are folktale elements as well as realism, comedy as well as tragedy. Once again the play holds up a mirror to the audience to show them the foolishness of their automatic behaviour.

On the other hand the play looks forward to the "political" plays, the *Hiketides* and *IA*, discussed in chapter 14. The outcome of stock psychological behaviour is no longer merely laughable but leads to serious problems and tragic situations. The characters of Demophon in this play and Theseus in the *Hiketides* are very similar.<sup>1</sup>

#### Classical

The play has had a poor reputation since the days of Schlegel.<sup>2</sup> As recently as 1941 Grube could still condemn it as: not a great play nor a good one; without unity, too topical, its colours too rosy, with weak and inappropriate speeches.<sup>3</sup> Many regarded it as a melodrama;<sup>4</sup> a patriotic piece, an encomium of Athens like the *Hiketides*;<sup>5</sup> a skit on contemporary politics.<sup>6</sup>

So great was the disappointment in the play that a view became current that we are dealing with a badly mutilated work; either Euripides himself cut it down from an earlier and better structured work or, more likely, a later editor did so.<sup>7</sup>

More recently several commentators attempted to find a more serious and universal message in it such as εὐγένεια,<sup>8</sup> the credibility of old ἀρητή,<sup>9</sup> a discussion of the difference between customary and statute law.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Greenwood (1953) 110 drew attention to the need to compare these two. He recognised the shortcomings of Theseus, but failed to recognise the similar ones of Demophon. They will be discussed in detail in connection with the *Hiketides*.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief review see Burian (1977) 2.

<sup>3</sup> Grube (1941) 166ff.

<sup>4</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 55.

<sup>5</sup> Blaiklock (1952); Greenwood (1953); Méridier (1970); Murray (1979).

<sup>6</sup> Méridier (1970) 195; Vellacott (1975) 184ff.

<sup>7</sup> The argument is well reviewed by Lesky (1977) and Méridier (1970).

<sup>8</sup> Avery (1971).

<sup>9</sup> Arrowsmith (1981).

<sup>10</sup> Burnett (1976).

Zuntz' work was probably the most influential in re-establishing the play as a serious and worthwhile one.<sup>11</sup> To him χάρις is the crux; the play investigates the moral obligations of giver as well as of recipient. He was followed in this by Webster.<sup>12</sup>

### Psychiatric

The phenomena of automatic behaviour, role playing and rationalisation have been discussed (page 37). All three recur constantly in this play. Of particular importance here is their application in the political sphere. Mankind is ever prone to divide human beings into "goodies" and "baddies", especially so when viewing a play. We also tend to have preformed judgements on behaviour: self-sacrifice is admirable, fighting for one's own status bad, compromise despicable, even though in our daily lives we may not apply these precepts to ourselves. Political slogans tend to encapsulate such naive ideas.

### Overview

The *Herakleidae* is a prime example of Euripidean multiple level writing. One can take the play at face value, when it will indeed appear as a patriotic melodrama. Or one can begin to think about the implications and come to realise that there are many moral and realistic problems which face the characters and that they are by no means easy to resolve. This will make for a much more serious play as advocated by Zuntz and some of the other more recent commentators. Finally one can begin to apply these questions to one's own behaviour and acknowledge how prone we all are to make snap moral decisions which turn out to be highly arguable. The important point is to realise that Euripides goes out of his way to make us think in this latter way. This is the purpose of the many passages which earlier critics condemned as irrelevant or contradictory. Seen in this way the play is a splendid one, with complete unity and no jarring notes. It is a serious treatise on general human frailty.

### Level 0

A number of problems occur in the *Herakleidae*, which might well deserve serious discussion. Many of them are, indeed, so discussed in other Euripidean plays. But here all characters accept the traditional view and the playwright puts forward no

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<sup>11</sup> Zuntz (1963).

<sup>12</sup> Webster (1969).

evidence to generate doubt. We must therefore assume that Euripides did not want to discuss these matters in this play.

The main topics are:

1. The credibility of oracles.
2. The existence and morality of the gods.
3. Democracy versus Tyranny.
4. Geographical and strategic veracity.<sup>13</sup>

### Level 1

This is directed at people who do not use their critical sense, but are content to think in slogans.

The problem is clearly stated in the first five lines of Iolaos' prologue:<sup>14</sup>

"I have long held the opinion that an honest man  
Lives for his neighbours; while the man whose  
purpose drives  
Loose-reined for his own profit, is unprofitable  
To his city, harsh in dealings, and a valued friend  
Chiefly to himself. This is not theory. I know it."

These are excellent sentiments, but do we really believe them unchallenged? Iolaos and his Herakleidai range themselves on the side of the "good" people and the chorus<sup>15</sup> do likewise. There is strong pressure on the audience to identify with them. Against them stand Kopreus<sup>16</sup> and his master Eurystheus, who represent all that is bad in our proposition. They are Peloponnesians! Political prejudice is raising its head.

After a lively scene in which the two sides show their characters clearly in black and white the problem is handed to Demophon. The king, sensibly and impartially, listens to both sides of the argument and then there is a dramatic pause before he delivers his verdict. He declares himself unequivocally on the side of the goodies. Kopreus retires defeated, mouthing threats. Iolaos offers effusive thanks: the Athenians are wonderful; their deed will always be remembered. The audience are expected to forget that the descendants of the Herakleidai are at the moment ravaging

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<sup>13</sup> Zuntz (1963) 97ff carefully discusses the geographical anomalies which occur in the play. The setting at Marathon was probably chosen for the heroic associations of the place.

<sup>14</sup> Vellacott's translation.

<sup>15</sup> Composed of Marathonians, i.e. evoking all that is best and most heroic in Athenian history.

<sup>16</sup> If that is his name.



Attica. The first stasimon sums up in emotional terms what we are feeling: Athens will not surrender! We stand for right!

But then the oracle demands a human sacrifice. Can Athens undertake it? Can the suppliants<sup>17</sup> expect Athens to do so? No decent solution seems possible. Again a dramatic pause, and then comes Makaria, a shy, decent and utterly good girl. The problem is put to her and she immediately resolves it by offering herself as the victim. Goodness has again triumphed over difficulty. There is much praise for Makaria from all around, a golden opportunity for the girl to make a splendid speech.<sup>18</sup> The second stasimon again sums up the emotional status at this stage: the chorus sings of glory and honour and that such deeds will never be forgotten.

Such great virtue is rewarded immediately. Hyllos has arrived with a large relieving army and everybody marches off gloriously to the front, including even aged Iolaos. The third stasimon reflects the prevailing mood: there is patriotic fervour, a prayer to great Athene and constant reminders to the audience that what happened in Demophon's time is again happening in Athens now.

Then the battle report. After a dramatic build-up of preparations (but Makaria is totally forgotten) a final clear contrast between right and wrong: glorious Hyllos challenges Eurystheus to single combat which the latter, in his abject cowardice, refuses. Then the battle is joined and the side of goodness wins hands down. When necessary even the gods join in to procure a victory for the goodies. We have proved our original tenet that good will always triumph over evil and shown that we Athenians are always on the side of the good. The play is over. Admittedly, Euripides puts in another two scenes which have little meaning to our level 1 audience. All this is excellent melodrama and many critics have viewed the play in this light.

## Level 2

This is levelled at the more critical part of the audience. It is obvious that Euripides has put in a number of passages which do not fit at all into the smooth melodrama. In this section I am much influenced by Zuntz' masterly discussion of the play.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> They might have been identified by the audience as the people of Plataia.

<sup>18</sup> Which, like Kitto (1966) 254, I find conventional and cerebral rather than gloriously human.

<sup>19</sup> Zuntz (1963) *passim*.

We again assume that the first five lines sum up the problem of the play. But the villain Kopreus makes some very reasonable points.<sup>20</sup> The hitherto unswervingly "good" chorus can only say: "Let's hear the other side." The goodies do not have a monopoly on sense and truth.

Iolaos' speech remedies the situation but introduces further problems and Demophon's answer amplifies them: "Would it not be a disgrace for Demophon to give way?"

Is Demophon really acting from high principles or is he swayed by fear of popular opinion? This is a very common way of thinking, amply substantiated in modern politics and much elaborated in the *Hiketides*.

In the ensuing altercation Demophon loses his temper and almost strikes the herald. Why does Euripides put in this apparently unnecessary touch? There are two reasons. One is a hidden reference to the fact that glorious Athens had recently done just that by executing some Spartan heralds. So, what price the morality of Athens? The other, as Zuntz points out, is this: it is easy to declare oneself on the side of virtue, but the first feeling of self satisfaction this engenders may itself lead to error. Virtue needs watching carefully all the time, lest one falls by the way.

The oracle has spoken; a virgin has to be sacrificed. As Zuntz rightly points out: to declare oneself for virtue one must be prepared for the sacrifice this is liable to entail. Demophon is not; he will not sacrifice his own daughter nor that of any of his citizens. I feel that at this stage Iolaos' thoughts must have been: "These Athenians are full of fine promises, but when it comes to the crunch they do not perform." He is too polite (or perhaps politic) to say so but things are obviously at an impasse.

This is resolved by Makaria's glorious decision. As Zuntz points out, the moral is: virtue requires sacrifice not only from the protector, but from the protected as well. Makaria certainly makes this point very clearly.

She rationalises her decision: if she does not sacrifice herself her life will not be worth living anyhow. This is another point which will recur (Polyxena, Iphigeneia).

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<sup>20</sup> Some of these are only hinted at here but will become main problems in other plays: Has Demophon the right to involve his people in a war for his honour? As a democrat can he start war at all? (Two main points of the *Hiketides*). Will he have the moral right to accept Makaria's sacrifice? (A main point in the *IA*).

But have the others the moral right to accept such a sacrifice to get them out of a difficulty? Iolaos feels awful about it and proposes a compromise solution: to determine the victim by a drawing of lots, which Makaria rejects proudly.

A few words about compromise solutions in moral questions: the play is full of them. Kopreus proposes a legal quibble to absolve the Athenians from blame for handing over the suppliants. This is rejected. Iolaos' offer of self-sacrifice is rejected as obviously unrealistic. Here Makaria rejects the compromise as unworthy of her honour. But in the last scene we shall see Alkmene propose a compromise based on a legal quibble and that will be accepted.

Iolaos refuses to be present at the killing. Why did Euripides put this in? There are limits even to the hitherto blameless Iolaos' willingness to undergo punishment for the sake of virtue.

Now we come to the most mysterious problem. Makaria, by her bravery, has converted both physical and moral defeat into glorious victory. Yet she is never mentioned again. Some critics, particularly Wilamowitz, have found this so abhorrent that they postulated that a whole scene dealing with this must have dropped out of the play during transmission.<sup>21</sup> The reason remains unclear at level 2.

Everything is ready for the battle and now, for the first time, Alkmene comes on stage. By implication she has been seen as one of the goodies and we are full of sympathy for her. But when she appears she is very different from what we had expected. She reacts violently without first ascertaining the facts, she asks questions and interrupts before an answer can be given, she says she is not interested in the battle and does not understand such things. Eventually the messenger has to turn to Iolaos to deliver his report; she is quite incapable of receiving it. She is clearly a figure of ridicule.

Matters get worse. Our splendid Iolaos, too, is treated as a silly old man, wanting to join the army but tripping over his own feet and having to have his armour carried by an attendant, because he is too weak to do so. This is virtually slapstick. How can Euripides be so cruel? Again there is no solution to this at level 2.

Hyllos has challenged Eurystheus to single combat which that great coward has refused. But Eurystheus is Herakles' contemporary and therefore even older than the

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<sup>21</sup> This is fully discussed by Lesky (1977) who concludes it is an unlikely theory.

tottering Iolaos. Surely such a challenge is completely unrealistic. Eurystheus only shows plain common sense.

I finished level 1 when victory is won and everyone rejoices. But Euripides puts in two more scenes and here we get a nasty shock. The "good" Alkmene, however silly she may have appeared, turns out to be a proper she-wolf determined only on revenge. Eurystheus, the coward and bully, has tremendous dignity, bravery in face of disaster and a clear and incisive mind. He is fully aware of his own shortcomings, acknowledges his guilt in the past and explains convincingly that he behaved as most other humans would have done in his threatened situation. Indeed, he goes further. Our "good" characters sacrificed themselves for their friends; Eurystheus offers to sacrifice himself for his enemies. What a strange reversal. Zuntz gives a good moral explanation for Alkmene's behaviour. Virtue needs constant vigilance; it is so easy, having behaved well heretofore, to fall from grace unexpectedly. But about Eurystheus' role Zuntz is silent. This, too, is inexplicable at level 2.

Finally let us notice the close parallelism of the two parts of the play. In the first part the goodies have acted morally, have rejected compromise and sacrificed themselves for the good of others. In the last part, the goodies are out for revenge, accept compromise and gladly accept other people's sacrifice for themselves, whilst the baddies take on their previous moral role.

To sum up the message of level 2 (following Zuntz). Does virtue triumph over evil? Yes, it can, but it needs willingness to suffer and sacrifice oneself for the cause and it needs constant vigilance. The very consciousness of having been virtuous is liable to make us relapse into selfishness.

### Level 3

This is directed at the man who not only keeps his critical faculties about other people, but is willing to look critically at himself.

To get at the third level of understanding we have to look at those parts of the *Herakleidae* which, as I have attempted to point out in previous paragraphs, cannot be explained at levels 1, 2 or 3.

In the last two scenes nearly all the characters which have previously been shown to be good turn out to be bad, the villains become the heroes. This teaches us something which most of us know but have conveniently forgotten during the play (led

on by Euripides' fiendish ingenuity): there are no people who are wholly good or wholly bad. We fall into this trap all the time because it makes life so much easier. This is the message Euripides gives to the audience. You have judged: Eurystheus = bad, Alkmene = good. How about it?

But if we accept this about people, what about actions and attitudes? Are there not some which are wholly good at all times and in all circumstances and others which are wholly bad? Is not cowardice always despicable? Well, look at Eurystheus. He is too old to fight and too frightened to surrender. Can we really blame him?

Demophon does a splendid thing by adopting the cause of the fugitives. But in the process he sacrifices the lives not only of Makaria but of many of his Athenian soldiers. Can we really call this a good action? If we persist in having preconceived principles as to good or bad attitudes we land ourselves in exactly the same dilemma as when we classify people into good or bad.

Now we are ready to look at Makaria's sacrifice. Of course we all feel that this is a wholly good action. But to be really good it ought to benefit not the hero, but people at large and Makaria's does not. Hyllos' army arrives immediately after her decision, but before her death. Is there any logical causal connection between the two events? And as to the question whether virtue brought the gods in on the side of Athens Euripides takes leave to doubt: "As to this I speak what I heard from others, not what I saw myself." (847) Makaria may have done a whole lot of good to her own soul, but other people have not really benefited. Hence the great silence. If Euripides could have pointed to a clear cause and effect connection between Makaria's death and following events he ought to have done so in order to make this point. But there was none.<sup>22</sup> We cannot accept self sacrifice as an inherently good act. If we do so, we shall often be wrong. This is also the meaning of Iolaos' discomfiture when he appears in his borrowed armour. He has assumed that self sacrifice is always good and is offering his life in the cause of justice. But he only succeeds in making himself ridiculous. His rejuvenation in battle will be a personal bonus for being good, but will not affect the outcome.

Alkmene is full of concern for her loved ones, a very fine attribute, but unaccompanied by understanding and purposeful action it is also ridiculous and

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<sup>22</sup> This problem, too will recur in many Euripidean plays.

Euripides pokes fun at her for being like that. In the final scene her concern for her people actually makes her behave wrongly and causes harm rather than good.

And now for the audience. You, my good people of Athens, and you, my later readers and critics, have badly fallen into this trap. You have tried to classify people into good and bad and been shown up as being wrong. You have tacitly assumed that self sacrifice is always good and cowardice bad. At the best you are ridiculous, at the worst plain wrong.

### **Summary**

Euripides' message is very much that of Sokrates (or Plato) in the dialogues: do not get carried away by fine sounding words, phrases and slogans. Think about what these things really mean.

**CHAPTER 13**  
**HOMO SOCIALIS**  
**THE *ANDROMACHE* AND *PHOINISSAI***

The plays discussed in the last two chapters created a general feeling of tolerant amusement about the strange antics of mankind. The two in this chapter (and many later ones) still deal with these antics, but now they have to be taken seriously. Euripides poses the question: "What makes ordinary people behave in such abominable ways?" The answer he provides in the *Andromache* is: status; in the *Phoinissai*: guilt.

**Classical**

Both plays have had a bad press. The *Andromache* was already described as second rate (δρᾶμα τῶν δευτέρων) in the second hypothesis<sup>1</sup> and has rarely fared better since. One critic<sup>2</sup> goes so far as to say: "the play falls feebly and miserably to pieces ... there must be missing clues which would show the play less inept than it seems ... perhaps the poet was temporarily out of his mind."

The structure of both plays has been castigated: the *Andromache* falls into two distinct parts with no connection whatsoever.<sup>3</sup> Some commentators point out that many passages in one part find echoes in the other.<sup>4</sup> This is convincing, but only proves good craftsmanship on Euripides' part. It does not provide an overall sense to the play. The *Phoinissai* has been deemed totally disconnected.<sup>5</sup>

In both plays a number of commentators tried hard to find some connecting threads. There are several for the *Andromache*.<sup>6</sup> Among them are attempts to make the tragedy into anti-Spartan propaganda<sup>7</sup> or a religious discussion.<sup>8</sup> For the *Phoinissai* some give up all attempts at finding an overall meaning,<sup>9</sup> others again try

<sup>1</sup> Aristophanes of Byzantium *Second hypothesis to Andromache*.

<sup>2</sup> Nims (1958) 70.

<sup>3</sup> Verrall (1905) 8; Burnett (1971) 130-156 talks of three parts and I shall follow her in this.

<sup>4</sup> Norwood (1906) 46; Ferrari (1971) *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> See Burian & Swann (1981) 3.

<sup>6</sup> Boulter (1966) *passim*; Sommerstein (1988) 244; Kamerbeek (1973) xx.

<sup>7</sup> Kitto (1961) 230; Blaiklock (1952) 76; Haigh (1925) 298; Lesky (1983) 256.

<sup>8</sup> Burnett (1971) 155.

<sup>9</sup> Kitto (1961) 352; Baldry (1956); Haslam (1976); Conacher (1967) 230.

hard.<sup>10</sup> All these attempts founder on the fact that they can explain certain parts but leave many others inconsequential.

I should like to single out Ferrari's view on the *Phoinissai*.<sup>11</sup> According to him the play is about the influence of ἔρις (hatred, injustice, war) in the familial, national and divine spheres. This comes fairly close to the attitude I shall adopt in what follows.

There is much disagreement about the characters in both plays, stemming mostly from the fact that the majority of critics fail to distinguish between Euripides' skill in drawing a character and the question of whether they like that character. Each commentator appears to have his own pets or pet aversions and comments on them.

Both plays have been claimed to be full of irrelevant passages, mere padding by an incompetent playwright. As in many other Euripidean plays the choral odes are often regarded as being completely detached from the plot, not adding anything to it.

Two authors, Verrall and Kovacs, had the courage to face the problem openly. They make out a list of all the apparent faults in the *Andromache*.<sup>12</sup> As pointed out on page 9 (the rope and stopwatch) this could be an important step in getting at Euripides' meaning. Both authors attempted this. Both failed, but this does not invalidate the correctness of their approach.

Verrall's<sup>13</sup> explanation is that there must have been another play, known to the audience, but now lost to us, which explained all the uncertainties. The theory is perfectly tenable, but fails for a complete lack of any supporting evidence for such a supposition. Kovacs<sup>14</sup> goes into great detail and provides many interesting insights, but he fails to provide a satisfactory overall view of the play.

The position is aggravated in the *Phoinissai* by the suspicion that many parts, particularly the whole of the end section, were not written by Euripides but are later interpolations.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Burian & Swann (1981); Riemschneider (1940); Pearson (1909); Craik discusses these attempts at length.

<sup>11</sup> Ferrari (1971) 229.

<sup>12</sup> Verrall (1905) 9-20; Kovacs (1980) 5-8.

<sup>13</sup> Verrall (1905) *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Kovacs (1980) *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Kitto (1961) 359; Meredith (1937); Pearson (1909); Conacher (1967) 249 all write on this matter but come to conclusions ranging from complete acceptance of the transmitted text to rejection of the whole of the end section and more beside.



## Psychiatric

It must be obvious to any thinking person that man's behaviour is influenced by the society around him. Yet the general trend in psychology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was to try to find the basic motives for human action within the individual himself.

### Trotter

From 1908 onwards Wilfred Trotter began pointing to the continued influence of people around us. Brought up in the era of William James, where a study of instincts was regarded as basic to psychology, he introduced the concept of the "herd instinct".<sup>16</sup> This, together with the whole "instinctual" approach has long been abandoned, but his vision of man as a "gregarious animal" has had a useful impact and has been greatly extended by anthropologists since his time. The concept of the "pecking order" has found its way into common parlance and certainly finds many useful applications.

### Adler

Alfred Adler<sup>17</sup> disagreed with his erstwhile teacher, Freud. He saw the origin of human drives in what the person is trying to achieve, whilst Freud saw it in terms of past events. Adler later extended his ideas. To him the main psychological drive is a person's constant attempt to fit himself into society around him. As an infant he is born completely at society's mercy; as he grows up he has to find his rightful place in it. If he does so successfully he becomes a normal individual. If he fails, various neuroses and psychoses result.

Much of Adler's work has fallen into disrepute and is no longer believed, but his stress on feelings of inferiority and the attempted compensation therefor,<sup>18</sup> the so called "inferiority complex", developed a wide following and has found its way into everyday speech, if only in a somewhat oversimplified version. There can be no doubt, however, that this sort of explanation can go a long way towards explaining certain behavioural characteristics, which are much more difficult to explain in other ways. In the *Andromache* Euripides appears to be thinking along similar lines.

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<sup>16</sup> Trotter (1947) *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> For a brief review of Adler's work see Papanek (1967) 320-326.

<sup>18</sup> Adler (1964) *passim*.

## THE *ANDROMACHE*

Hermione has already been discussed in Chapter 7 as a superb study of a histrionic personality proceeding to parasuicide. It now remains to consider her and the other characters in their relationship to each other.<sup>19</sup>

### (a) Hermione and Andromache

The prologue sets out in unemotional terms what the problems are: Andromache was used to an exalted social status, but has now fallen into slavery (1-15). She has learned to tolerate Neoptolemos, particularly since she had a child, Molossos, by him (16-29). Hermione accuses her of wanting to usurp her bed (λέκτρα) and using drugs for that purpose; Andromache denies any such intention. Who is lying? (30-39).

Menelaos sides with his daughter and threatens the child. Neoptolemos is away but Andromache gives the impression that she relies on him for help, defends him against accusations of impiety and praises his attitude towards his father (40-55). This is not the attitude of a woman who hates her ravisher. She has sent to Peleus for help but he has not come (56-91).

Andromache muses (113): "How can I go on living, a slave to Hermione?" It is not so much slavery itself to which she objects (as we have seen she does not object too much to Neoptolemos) but mostly to being slave to the other woman.

In the first agon (146-233) the two women face each other. As far as the plot is concerned there was no need for Hermione to come at all; Menelaos will deal with the sordid business. We could well have jumped from here straight to line 425. 280 wasted lines! But if Hermione's real intention is to have Andromache acknowledge her superiority, then a personal confrontation is absolutely essential. What she would like is to see Andromache grovelling and asking for mercy. Then she might well not kill anybody.

Hermione arrives in all her young beauty and finery and immediately proceeds to point this out: she is beautiful, aristocratic, daughter of a mighty father, rich; she does not need Neoptolemos, she did him a favour by marrying him (146-154). By contrast Andromache is a slave. How dare she contend for the mastery of the house

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<sup>19</sup> As in the *Herakleidae* there are several levels of writing; a melodramatic, xenophobic and patriotic one as well as a challenge to the audience to see through the characters' words and watch the folly of their actions.

(δόμους)? (155-156). She is a foreign witch using drugs to make her, the legal Greek wife, barren (157-160). But in her the slave has met her match (160-164).

Lines 165-167 (in Nims' translation<sup>20</sup>):

"Eat humble pie and grovel at my knee,  
Sweep out the house, **my** house, your fingers  
sprinkling  
Brook water from the pails of beaten gold!"

It is not the love of Neoptolemos, but mastery which Hermione seeks.

"You are a nobody, using your femininity to cuddle up to your husband's murderer (168-173). Just like all Asian foreigners!" (173-180).

Xenophobia is a convenient tool to put another person in his place. The chorus can see through this clearly: "Jealousy rules the female mind" (181-182).

In her rebuttal Andromache is at a distinct disadvantage. Of course she is socially inferior to Hermione. Her tactics will be that social position is unimportant. What matters is character and in that she is the superior.

Therefore she starts: Certainly, I am slave, a foreigner, an ex-enemy, disliked by all (an exaggeration: the chorus, Peleus, Neoptolemos are on her side). I lack your fullbreasted (σφρυγῶντι) beauty. And then two very catty remarks: You are much younger (implication: too young to have sense) and children are only a burden (implication: and you do not even have that; a remark designed to infuriate the barren girl) (184-204).

However: social "inferiors" may know the truth better than the "superiors", but their masters dislike that (189-191). Don't give me your nonsense about drugs. The fact is you are a bitch and that is why your husband will have nothing to do with you (207-221). In contrast, I was a model wife to Hektor (222-226). So secure was my status that I could afford to nurse his bastards at my breast without loss of position. If anyone is oversexed and a bitch it is you and your mother, Helene (227-231).

There is no doubt that Andromache has won a moral victory over her opponent. But is this sensible in view of the fact that the only possible outcome of this is her and her son's death? The wise chorus will point this out. People get carried away by their desire for superiority, whatever the consequences.

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<sup>20</sup> Nims (1958) 80.

The scenelet ends in a spirited stichomythy between the two women (234-260). There is brilliant repartee, each side scores excellent debating points, but nothing new or significant is said.

(b) Andromache and Menelaos

Menelaos has come to boast of his clever victory; he has got hold of Molossos. It is the superiority of his "house" which concerns him (309-313). "Get away from the altar or see your son die!". So far he is perfectly rational, if unscrupulous. This will not last.

Andromache responds as we might expect by now, fighting against being thought inferior: "Politicians and generals are all impostors; others do the work, they garner the glory (319-323)". This hits Menelaos where he is most sensitive: his glorious Trojan campaign.

And Andromache piles it on: (324-332) "You did nothing at Troy! You try to cut a fine heroic figure when you confront a slave woman, but in war you are a nobody. Having thus demolished his military fame she proceeds to point out his irrationality and that, naturally, is easy, because it is true: what will public opinion be? (334-337). Will Neoptolemos stand by to see his son murdered? (339-343). He will send Hermione packing, what good will that do her? Whom will she then marry? Andromache delights in this lovely phantasy of her enemy growing old and bitter (344-351). Now she suddenly discovers, with regard to the opposition, what she failed to see in her own case: "One should not make big issues out of little provocation, nor should men meddle in women's quarrels" (352-354). If there were any truth in the drug story a court of law could decide it easily. (355-360). And a final personal invective: "But you have always been brawling over women!" (361-363).

This is all perfectly reasonable and, of course, Menelaos would have seen it all, if he had stopped to think before starting to fight for the status of his "house".

Menelaos replies. Whatever one may think of his morals, he is not the dumb ox so many critics take him to be. He has, in fact, considerably more insight than the other characters: "Woman" he says "I agree these are minor matters, hardly worthy of me and Greece, but..." and then he launches into lines 368-369 which are virtually a summing up of the whole play: "Know this! Whatever a man happens to have set his heart on at the time, that is, for him, a greater thing than the taking of Troy itself."

" Leave the altar and get ready for death" (379-382).

Only then does Andromache come to her senses and realise to what her jockeying for superiority has led. She pleads for her and her son's life (384-424). But Menelaos' unyielding attitude makes her realise the hopelessness of the situation and she decides to sacrifice her life for her son's and leaves the altar (411-420).<sup>21</sup>

But soon we are back in the status quarrel. At first there is a stichomythy again full of clever repartee and good scoring points, but no new message (435-444). This is followed by the great anti-Sparta speech (445-453) and finally the crowning insult (454-464): "My Hektor used to chase you before Troy. Now you lord it over a woman. You are nothing. I shall tell what I think of you and your daughter." The level 1 audience will lap up all this harangue on Spartan inferiority, but it is just a means towards gaining superiority.

We end with good melodramatic "schmaltz": Menelaos is villainously villainous, Andromache heartrendingly devoted, Molossos nauseatingly precocious like others of his ilk.<sup>22</sup> Let the level 1 audience enjoy it.

(c) Peleus and Menelaos

Peleus arrives in the nick of time, but not, as one might expect, out of love for Andromache: "What's going on in **my house**? By what right is Menelaos giving orders and behaving as if he owned it? (547-550). Who dared put fetters on you in **my** and Neoptolemos' absence? (555-558). What is really irking him is Menelaos' trying to usurp **his** rights as owner and king. It is loss of status, again, which sets him off.

His righteous anger is undercut by his appearance: tottery, leaning on a stick and supported by an attendant. No fine strapping hero, this.

Andromache plays on his feelings with a pathetic plea for rescue and a formal supplication, which, no doubt, flatters the old man's ego. Her last lines are shrewd (575-576): "If we die, that is not only unfortunate for us, but a discredit for you." Exactly! That is what is worrying Peleus.

The third agon (577-746) is a quarrel between the two men, no more dignified than that between the women. One is villainous, the other decrepit.<sup>23</sup> The Phthian

<sup>21</sup> A typical Euripidean "romantic" suicide; see p.160. As usual it is abortive.

<sup>22</sup> Compare the child in the *Alkestis*.

<sup>23</sup> Note the similarity to Iolaos (*Herakleidae*), whose heroism is similarly undercut, underlining the folly of their pseudo-heroic stances.

insists on his right as the owner and king, the Spartan on his right as the Trojan conqueror. Tempers rise rapidly, the old man threatens the other with his stick and is defied.

Peleus begins his speech and it is all irrelevant abuse designed to make the other feel inferior.

You unmanly creature! You could not even keep your own wife, Helene (590-595). But then all Spartan women are immodest, running around half naked (595-601). It's for such a slut that you started the whole Trojan War (602-606). You should have paid the Trojans to keep her (609). This whole war was a ghastly mistake (610-613). It even cost me **my** son (614-615). But you, you coward, returned unmarked from the fray (616-618). You got your brother to sacrifice his daughter for you, but when Helene uncovered her bosom you capitulated. That's the sort of person you are (620-631).

Peleus has by now admirably succeeded in hurting Menelaos through everything he holds dear: His manliness, his nation, his house, his wife, his beloved Trojan War and his own conduct in it, his attitude to women. None of it has anything to do with the fate of Andromache.

"Being like this, how dare you come here and try to run **my** house? (632-634). Get your daughter out of here and keep your dowry and your noble connections (639-641). This is a fine gesture, but is it sensible? Menelaos replies (645-692): What folly to stand up for a slave, a Trojan. Presently the enemy brood will be ruling your country! If this happened to your daughter, would you stand idly by? Then he feels constrained to defend himself against the old man's accusations (677-690).<sup>24</sup> He claims he was a good general, Helene could not help herself, the Trojan War, far from being a disaster was a boon to Greece because of the military experience.

But Peleus has the bit between his teeth (633-726): "All generals and politicians are a lousy lot. You were the most vainglorious and undeserving of them all. Just because your daughter is barren, there is no need for other people to go without children." This is the final blow to Menelaos' pride and he retires defeated with just an attempt to save face (729-746), threatening war.

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<sup>24</sup> This is fatal. In this sort of contest, once you stop attacking and defend yourself, you lose. In a cat fight the opponents sit and yowl at each other until one has to lower his eyes. He then attacks or flees.

(d) Orestes and Neoptolemos

We now come to the second part of the play, which, according to many critics, is disjointed from the first. The facts are these:

1. Hermione was promised to Orestes, but later given to Neoptolemos as a wife.
2. Orestes takes Hermione away from Phthia.
3. Orestes kills Neoptolemos in conjunction with Apollo and the Delphians.

At level 1 it looks as if love were his motive, at level 2 jealousy; these are concepts of granny psychology. At level 3 we shall see that it is a question of status.

Hermione's parasuicide has already been discussed. Noteworthy are lines 860: "Should I fall like a slave at a slave's knee?" and 927: "Or I shall be a slave in the very rooms where she conceived her bastard and where once I reigned as mistress?" Again we see that it is inferiority to Andromache which she abhors more than anything else.<sup>25</sup>

This prepares us for her ready acceptance of Orestes' rather shabby rescue.<sup>26</sup> This crafty gentleman introduces himself with a whole web of lies designed to protect himself against possible mischance (879-919). As to Hermione's troubles he is very cool.<sup>27</sup> He wants only factual information, which he will be able to use. There is no word of sympathy for his distraught cousin. But his real motivation gradually comes out (957-986).

Hermione had been promised to him, but then given to Neoptolemos. If this outraged his sense of justice or his love he ought to have hated Menelaos but: "I forgave your father" (972). In that case anger should now be gone.

He then approached Neoptolemos and, according to him, argued with him in very sensible terms: he, Orestes, had already had a lot of bad luck and would now find it difficult to find himself a wife. Would not Neoptolemos give up Hermione? (968-976). One wonders whether he was really as cool and sensible as he makes out?

<sup>25</sup> There is in this scene also an extended and virulent attack on women and their evil and petty ways (930-935 and again 943-953). Very likely Euripides' reputation as a misogynist was largely influenced by this passage. Even the chorus is shocked: "Tut, tut, aren't you a bit hard on your sex?" (954-956). If, at level 1, we have taken all this at face value, then we gather that such irrational and petty behaviour is typical of women. Orestes' response will soon disabuse us.

<sup>26</sup> As Burnett (1971) 144 says: "this rescue is neither sublime nor romantic".

<sup>27</sup> There has been much discussion on line 964 (Norwood (1906) 40-42; Méridier (1970) p.148, n.1; Stevens (1971) 206). Did Hermione write any letters to Orestes and did he receive them? The line can easily be interpreted as saying he received her letters, but they did not sway him. He came for another purpose.

Neoptolemos (977-978) not only refused, but was most insulting (ὕβριστής), kept referring to Orestes' matricide, that is caught him on a really raw patch and made him feel inferior. Finally he heaped shame upon him (ὀνειδύζων) about the furies' persecuting the murderer.

This really hurt Orestes bitterly (ἤλγουν μὲν, ἤλγουν 980) and he walked away with a heavy heart (ἄκων) and a sense of having been robbed (στερηθεὶς) (979-981). Here we have the real reason for Orestes' grudge and why it is directed against Neoptolemos, which is otherwise inexplicable. What has upset him is having been placed in an inferior position.

And therefore (the particle οὖν refers the sentence to a summary of the previous passage) he will take Hermione away "because relatives must stick together" (982-986). This is an illogical argument, his duty as a relative does not follow from what he has just said. It is rationalisation. His real reason is that he now has a chance to show his superiority over Neoptolemos. He will carry away the prize over which they have quarrelled.

And he lets another cat out of the bag. He has already made all the necessary arrangements to have Neoptolemos murdered. In fact, if his plot has not miscarried, Apollo and the Delphians between them should by now have acted and Neoptolemos be dead.

Once again this proves that pity for Hermione had nothing to do with his decision. The plot was already a *fait accompli* before the two ever met.

Exaggerating minor blows to one's pride into major affairs worthy of death, suicide and war is thus not a purely feminine trait. Men behave just as foolishly.

Peleus arrives (1047-1069) and informs us that Orestes could have had the girl for the asking. There was no need for any "heroic" rescue.

Then a messenger tells of Neoptolemos' murder (1070-1165) and Peleus collapses. We originally saw him as a tottery old man. Then he became buoyed up by his fight for supremacy with Menelaos and turned into a vigorous, if perhaps slightly ridiculous, hero. Now, having been defeated, he returns to what he was, a feeble old man. Just as Menelaos collapsed, when defeated, as Andromache and Hermione collapsed once they realised what their actions had led to, so he is suddenly sobered up.



The messenger relates what happened at Delphi. This is a standard Messenger speech, full of heroics, and Neoptolemos emerges as a standard Homeric hero. For our purpose we need to note the following points. Orestes was the main mover in the plot (1090-1095). The Delphians acted precipitately on the basis of rumours. They, too, therefore acted thoughtlessly, producing dire results on minimal evidence. They behaved just like all the other characters in the play, though in their case it was less a fight for superiority and more a fear for their possessions. The position of Apollo is ambiguous.

Neoptolemos had put Orestes in an inferior position; now, when confronted with the results he pleaded innocence: "What harm have I ever done you?" (1125-1126) just as Andromache had pleaded with Menelaos and Hermione tried to plead. The analogy of the three cases is complete. Basically the house of Phthia has put the house of Sparta into an inferior position and the latter has now got its own back.

The epilogue (1226-1285) has been much criticised.

It caps a tragic tale of woe with a happy ending, which does not fit and does not appear to solve any of the problems of the play in a meaningful way. In fact, it solves the real underlying problems perfectly, just as the epilogues in *The Elektra* and the *Orestes* do.

Thetis puts everything right. Hermione and Orestes are not even mentioned. They have gone off happily to be married and their problem is already solved, they no longer need to fight for their superiority. Neoptolemos has been killed in a glorious fight, as befits a Homeric hero. He will be buried at Delphi with a commemorative stone and let the Delphians blush to see it. So he will get his superiority over the Delphians. Andromache will be sent to Molossia to start a long line of kings. This solves her feelings of inferiority which were basic to the whole play.

It will also solve one of Peleus' problems. His line will continue in Molossos; Troy and Phthia united at last in a glorious succession.

As for his personal troubles, he will be deified and live happily among the gods thereafter, so he has got his superiority too.

Let there be no more tears; the whole story was really a storm in a teacup and could so easily have been avoided, if only people had been a little more sensible.

### **THE PHOINISSAI**

The modern psychiatric approach to guilt feelings has already been discussed on page 35, where it was pointed out how Christian theology comes to very similar conclusions, though based on a different vocabulary and symbolism. It is therefore by no means unlikely that Euripides, too, could have come to such conclusions independently. It would be useful to review this section here as the play is closely concerned with this subject.

(a) The Symbolism

A snake may be a snake as well as a phallic symbol. In the same way many of Euripides' images may have a real as well as a symbolic value.

Kadmos and the dragon stand for archetypal guilt. None of the characters can be personally blamed for it, as these events occurred long before the present generation, but all accept it as guilt, even the foreign chorus.

The Sphinx is again an archetypal guilt for most characters, but for Oidipous it represents both personal triumph and personal guilt.

Parricide and Incest similarly are archetypal for most characters, but personal guilt for Oidipous and Iokasta.

Oidipous' Curse represents the secondary guilt caused by Oidipous' own efforts to deal with his primary guilt. It again takes on the form of archetypal guilt (e.g. for Iokasta and the chorus) but personal for the brothers. It is a form of projection; Oidipous reacts to being ostracised by cursing others.

Shields represent the facade put up to hide guilt.

Wild beasts, lions, bulls and boars represent the wild and dangerous energy of suppressed emotions.

Oidipous, himself has largely a symbolic value at first, but becomes a character later.

The dance represents efforts at sublimation. Successful when done for Apollo, Artemis or Demeter, successful but dangerous when done for Dionysos, unsuccessful and deadly when done for Ares or Pluto.

Body contact, looking at, touching, kissing, neck, hair, breasts represents efforts to relieve guilt by social contact and love.

Blinding, military operations, self destruction are failed attempts at atonement by personal effort.

Blindness represents inability to cope with the evil.

Exile represents social disapproval and its harmful consequences.

Imprisonment stands for repression into the subconscious.

Killing has both real and symbolic value. People are killed as the effect of guilt, but as applied to the dragon and the sphinx killing symbolises repression.

Erinys, Alastor are personifications of the driving energy of suppressed feelings.

The gods in the *Phoinissai* are both ineffectual and morally ambivalent. They represent the failure of institutionalised Greek religion to cope with the problem of guilt.

(b) Scenelet by scenelet

Scenelet 1 (1-87): Iokasta - prologue

Apart from putting the audience into the picture this prologue has much to say. It begins with an appeal to Helios, the light of reason. May it prevail! Iokasta then rehearses the history of the guilt so far: Kadmos and the dragon (archetypal); Laios warned by oracle, yet procreated (personal); he tried to repress (exposure of Oidipous), failed and was led to further guilt (mutilation); the child was deprived of the breast (social support) and had to find it elsewhere; there followed further guilt (parricide). The Sphinx tried to prevent more guilt, but Oidipous killed (repressed) her and incest took place. Oidipous blinded himself (ineffectual atonement, he is now even less able to cope). His children incarcerated him (repression) and built up a facade before society. He cursed them (the repressed feelings become an independent drive).

The brothers, who, in spite of their superficial differences, should be seen as one character<sup>28</sup> made a reasonable compromise (logical solution) but this failed as both were driven beyond logic. Eteokles stuck to his power (guilt begets guilt), Polyneikes married a foreigner and plotted revenge. Society punished him for this (exile). Iokasta proposes to cure the ills by love.

Scenelet 2 (88-201): Antigone, Tutor - the teichoskopia

To begin with everyone accepts the facade. There is a description of the splendour of the army, much play on shields. All this is seen through the eyes of a naive young girl who cannot, as yet, see through the facade.<sup>29</sup> She, too, hopes to

<sup>28</sup> Hence the frequent use of the dual and words like δίσσα, δίχα and σύνορις.

<sup>29</sup> The character of Antigone is not static as in many Greek plays but develops throughout the play, as do the main characters of the *Ion*, the *IA*, and the *Bakchai*.

make everything right through love. Like Iokasta she appeals for light (sun and moon), but already she is disquieted by the appearance of Kapaneus.

Scenelet 3 (202-260): Chorus - the parados

The chorus explains that they are foreigners, that is not personally involved, but through relation (that is being human) they share the archetypal guilt and to a certain extent even the personal. They hope to prevent a violent outbreak by sublimation (dance of Apollo) but fear it may turn into a dance of Ares. They thus remind us that in spite of the facade all is not well.

Scenelet 4 (261-300): Polyneikes, Chorus

Polyneikes enters full of fear and suspicion (guilt causes fear and anxiety). The chorus try to befriend him and accept his facade, but this is quite useless.

Scenelet 5 (301-445): Iokasta, Polyneikes

Iokasta is full of love. Much reference to face, neck, hair and breasts. She would like to sublimate her tension by dancing, but instead has to wear the garb of darkness (uncertainty). She expounds on Oidipous, dark, blind; that is, she is aware of the guilt repressed by the brothers. She expatiates on the foreign marriage, i.e. social crime, and there is a long section on the evils of exile (social rejection) and how this leads to further crimes. The telling phrase on her attitude to her crime of incest is: "One must endure" (382).

Polyneikes, in his turn, enlarges on the suffering caused by exile. The fight with Tydeus (lion and boar) shows the suppressed guilt trying to break out. But, as yet, he is still in control: "How terrible is enmity between relatives! (374) against my will." (432) He is rationalising his feelings and building his facade.

Scenelet 6 (446-637): Eteokles, Polyneikes, Iokasta - the agon

Both brothers begin by trying to control their emotions, gradually lose control and end up completely out of control. This is a brilliant piece of writing showing what happens in such cases. Iokasta tries logical reasoning, love, appeals to pity and decency, but all fail: a most dramatic and convincing scene.

Scenelet 7 (638-689): Chorus - the first stasimon

Just in case the audience has missed the point and thinks that this is just a quarrel between two individuals the chorus reminds us of what lies underneath all this: Io, Kadmos, the dragon, the killing of the dragon (repression). A beautiful and devout prayer to Io, Persephone and Demeter which is obviously going to be of no avail (failure of organised religion).

Scenelet 8 (690-783): Kreon, Eteokles

Kreon is the unimaginative man who clings to the facade and tries to pretend nothing is amiss. Both men try to deal with the situation by making great resolutions (strategy). Kreon, at least, is reasonable, however puerile his strategy; Eteokles' reason is swamped by emotion: "May it be my fate to take my brother by spear in battle" (745-5). Both realise that their arrangements are quite likely to fail: "If I am unfortunate in the outcome" (758) and make further contingency plans (marriage and future kingship). As a last resort, can they enlist outside help? Should Teireisias be called? "He will not listen to me." This is typical projection; Kreon substitutes "he will not listen to me" for "I will not listen to him".

Scenelet 9 (784-832): Chorus - the second stasimon

Again the chorus reminds us that all these efforts by the characters themselves will be futile. If only the great energy could be released harmlessly by sublimation (the dance). Note that here Apollo (that is controlled emotional release) is no longer mentioned. Will it be a dance of Dionysos (partially controlled) or of Ares (uncontrolled)? Again the insistence that the roots of the evil lie very deep: Io, Harmonia, sphinx, Oidipous' exposure, incest. Human action will not suffice: "What is not good never gave rise to good." (814)

Scenelet 10 (834-975): Teireisias, Kreon, Menoikeus

In a modern play Teireisias would be the psychiatrist. He fully understands what is happening (prophet) but has no solution to offer (blind), led by a young virgin. (This is the Parsifal symbolism: the wise need to be guided by the pure in heart). He comes from a triumph in Athens, that is he can deal with some problems, but not with this one. He explains the whole sequence from the unlawful action of Laios to the blinding of Oidipous, but his two listeners cannot or will not understand. Very hesitatingly he advises self-immolation (dramatic re-enactment of the guilt) as a cure,

but again the two fail to understand. Kreon refuses to face reality: οὐκ εἶδον, οὐκ ἤκουσα. (I cannot see, I cannot hear) (919) and tries to make his own plans. Teireisias unerringly points out the dragon and Ares and that the trouble will persist as long as the house of Oidipous (the repressed guilt) persists; but Kreon only tries to save himself and his family and misunderstands the seer to mean that by exiling (repressing) Oidipous he can save the situation. Note how Kreon and Eteokles act basically in the same way but superficially seem to differ as their basic characters are different: Eteokles tends to violence, hate, killing; Kreon to legal action, providing money. This scene, therefore, is not just a repetition of previous material, but an amplification of how the same basic instincts may produce different reactions in different people.

Scenelet 11 (976-1018): Menoikeus

This is not, I think, the central scene as some critics have suggested,<sup>30</sup> but nevertheless an important one. Iokasta's attempt at cure by logic and love has failed. Is heroic selfless self-immolation a more successful method? In a large number of myths and folktales the answer is "yes". Now Euripides studies the question again. First of all, is the suicide of Menoikeus really so selfless? "Shall I not be called a coward if I refuse?" (1004-5). Yet Menoikeus proceeds on his idealistic, almost nauseatingly heroic way.

It turns out to be a damp squib. Virtually no good comes of it; possibly an ephemeral victory for Thebes, but no solution to the problem. As in the *Herakleidae* hardly anybody ever refers to the great heroic deed again (except the chorus in a very brief passage) and the world goes on as if nothing had happened. Condemnation by silence. This has been much criticised in the past, but I think it is superb.

Scenelet 12 (1019-1066): Chorus - the third stasimon

A faint praise of Menoikeus as personally good, but only sandwiched in between reminders that the guilt persists. At first the dragon is left out, but the Sphinx and Oidipous are very much to the fore; later even the dragon re-appears. Nothing has been altered.

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<sup>30</sup> Burian and Swann (1981).

Scenelet 13 (1067-1216): The first messenger speech

There has been a temporary arrest in the progression of disaster; the city is still intact and the brothers alive. But the stress is very much on the temporary nature of the respite. Menoikeus' action is dismissed in two lines. All the participants have made competent arrangements. Now we get a review of the Argive army again. This has been severely criticised as unnecessary and repetitive. Note that the symbols of the shields are much to the fore again, but this time what is stressed is not the splendour but the violent designs on the shields (boars, snakes, stallions.) The cracks in the facade are beginning to appear as the repressed violence seeks an outlet. The splendid army is now likened to a pack of wolves. The message is clear: It is not just the brothers who behave in this manner through some personal fault in themselves. All these great heroes are behaving in the standard human way under the influence of guilt: from a splendid facade they are deteriorating to a cracked one and soon to wild animals. We are not told about each individual's guilt feelings, but their presence is evident in such behaviour. The scene is necessary; it is vital to show us that we are not dealing with two individuals but with mankind. Kapaneus is singled out to symbolise the universality of the message. Eventually the fury and mayhem are temporarily burnt out (abreaction), but the future looks grim.

Scenelet 14 (1217-1283): The second messenger speech

After this excursus to stress the universality of the phenomenon of guilt we return to our characters. They are making a last attempt at controlling their impulses (offer of single fight), to rationalise their actions (defender of the country, upholder of justice), and building up a public facade. Once again the shields are mentioned, this time as being put on them by their friends, that is society is desperately trying to uphold the facade in order to avert violence. Organised religion is called in to help (seers). "But" concludes the messenger "it will be of no use. If you can help, Iokasta, try to do something." And Iokasta does try, though it is obvious that she has no more to offer than her love, which has already failed. This time she takes Antigone with her and we are beginning to see the young girl change from a naive child to an adult who realises her personal commitment.

Scenelet 15 (1284-1309): Chorus - the fourth stasimon

The final violent eruption is now inevitable. Innocent bystanders ("foreign shrieks", 1301) only watch with horror and sympathy as the brothers are transformed into wild beasts. There is no longer hope of sublimation by dance, the blind driving force is now characterised as τὸ μελλόν (inevitable fate) and the Erinys, inevitable and not to be altered.

Scenelet 16 (1310-1334): Kreon

The dramatic lull before the storm. Kreon, as undiscerning as ever, is only sorry for himself. He has an idea that the dragon is involved in this ("taken from the dragon cliffs" (1315), but cannot see how.

Scenelet 17 (1335-1426): The third messenger speech

We start where we left off in scenelet 14 with the armour, the last facade, but soon turn to the contestants' prayers, meant to be religious but turning to blasphemy. The facade has crumpled for the onlookers and the messenger alike: "most shameful crown of glory, to kill his kinsman, tears came to many" (1369-1370). The explosion has occurred, the brothers are now completely bestialised and society rejects them. They fight implacably (wild boars). They attempt to hide behind their shields, but this facade is of no use to them. They use tricks when skill fails. Even when wounded to death Polyneikes has only one idea: to kill his brother. The long suppressed guilt complex has completely taken over from common sense and decency.

Scenelet 18 (1427-1484): The fourth messenger speech

Dying, the brothers realise their folly and are sorry (abreaction), but too late. Well meaning helpers (mother and sister) have become embroiled in the violence and Iokasta dies. One might think that with the death of the main characters the violence will now come to an end, but this is not so. The two armies rush upon each other with untold fury and bloodshed. Sin, indeed, begets sin!

Euripides might well have left the story there. It would have been a story of unrelieved gloom and hopelessness and Euripides is often accused of complete cynicism. I do not think that this is true and the *Phoinissai* shows it. He goes on with the story, searching for a possible ray of hope.



Scenelet 19 (1485-1538): Antigone's dirge

This scene is a formal *kommos*, but it is very much more. In it Antigone grows rapidly before our eyes towards a new and fuller understanding of the problems involved. She starts off by leaving behind her maidenly ways (naive acceptance of the facade), accepts that sublimation is not a final answer (the Bakchic dance of Hades), accepts that guilt lies at the bottom of it all (Oidipous, Erinys, the Sphinx). She admits that well meaning love has failed (tresses, breasts). She feels sorry for poor, blind Oidipous and so she.....

Scenelet 20 (1539-1582): Oidipous, Antigone

...brings Oidipous out from the subconscious into consciousness, from prison onto the stage. And, lo, the fearsome, foul, half mad beast is seen to be a pathetic old man. Whyever have we been so frightened of him? Had he been brought onto the stage much earlier could the cataclysm not have been avoided? He is, after all, only an αἰθεροφανὲς εἴδωλον (a flitting shadow image). Having brought the guilt feeling out of the subconscious mind and courageously faced it, what is Antigone going to do about it? Her answer is: she will not judge or blame, but act out of pity, not anger. The scene is full of the now well known symbols: blindness, the alastor, breasts, lions, all can now be ignored in the light of the new attitude: "Blame no man, but the God." (1580-1581)

Have we , at last, found the full answer to the problem of guilt? Alas, no, as the next scenelet will show. We are now coming to the much maligned, criticised and defended, and condemned to excision, end of the play.

Scenelet 21 (1584-1624): Kreon, Oidipous

Whatever insight Antigone may have gained, these two are no wiser than before. Kreon has not learned his lesson. He still tries to deal with the situation by personal action, trying to cure guilt by further wrongs. He refuses burial to Polyneikes and exiles Oidipous under cover of sophistic rationalisation, misunderstanding Teireisias' explanation and building yet another facade. Off we go again! Guilt upon guilt and sin upon sin.

Oidipous, too, is utterly bewildered. He rehearses the whole history of events again, from before his birth to the present, trying to find where he went wrong, where he can be blamed and why he should be punished like this. And he cannot find the

reason (he leaves out the dragon). In other words, Oidipous, unlike Kreon, but like Iokasta and Antigone, understands, but, like Teireisias he is blind. He cannot find a way towards salvation. He still tries to apportion blame and punishment, which Antigone has already rejected.

Scenelet 22 (1625-1682): Kreon, Antigone

Two more problems confront Antigone in her new found wisdom: her brother's denied burial and her father's exile. Both are injustices due to another man's guilt feelings. She clearly recognises both for what they are and which of them is the greater. Her duty lies more with the living father than the dead brother. "Father, I lament more for you than for the dead." (1640) She tackles the first one in the way of Iokasta by appeal to reason and love, and she fails like her mother. She then tries direct confrontation, if necessary with heroic self sacrifice, the way of Menoikeus, and again she fails. Indeed, she realises that this would lead to further guilt (killing Kreon's son, her bridegroom). She then lowers her demands<sup>31</sup> first to the strewing of ashes, then to bandaging, finally to kissing, and eventually she appears to abandon the attempt. This scenelet, therefore, sums up the previous attempts at salvation, reasonableness, love, heroic measures, only to find them all inadequate and comes to the conclusion that in the last resort it is better to tolerate injustice than to fight it, if this involves further guilt. In a way, therefore, this scenelet sums up the lessons from all the earlier parts of the play and is repetitious. If I were forced to accept any part of the play as a later addition, this could perhaps be most reasonably be left out. However, I think a brief resume of false ways, before we come to the true way, is probably not at all out of order. I am confirmed in this opinion by two lines in the next scenelet, where Antigone shows that she still intends to bury her brother (1745-1746), not by the way of confrontation, but in some other, unspecified way (which has exercised critics greatly). Euripides is saying that renouncing violence and heroics as a means of preventing injustice does not mean acquiescing in it.

Scenelet 23 (1683-1766): Antigone, Oidipous

Kreon has disappeared ignominiously, baffled, still threatening, but one feels his threats can no longer touch the heroes. Antigone and Oidipous are left alone to find

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<sup>31</sup> I am here following Conacher (1967a) 92-101, who recognised the gradual lessening of her demands.

the way to salvation. At first Oidipous still clings to the past and tries to rehearse his woes once again, but his daughter stops him: "Why talk of your suffering? Justice does not see evil men." (1726) It is no use being sorry for oneself and expecting punishment of one's enemies. That is the wrong way. The right way is to find strength within oneself: "Where now is the great Oidipous, reader of the sphinx' riddles?" (1688) Love remains (viewing the bodies of Iokasta and the brothers), comradeship remains (they will face the future together; the Parsifal symbolism again). The true way towards salvation is by renouncing the self, facing life honestly and being prepared to accept what it brings. There is in this way no promise of immediate happiness. There will be social rejection (exile), a giving up of much that we hold dear (her girl friends, the dance of Dionysos). But now that father and daughter have come to this conclusion a faint light of hope appears on the horizon. Now Oidipous recalls what he has always known but has suppressed, the oracle of Loxias telling that he will find peace in Attica, at Kolonos, by the shrine of Poseidon and the audience will remember his apotheosis there from their memory of Sophokles' *Oidipous Kolonos*.

### OTHER PLAYS

Both these motives, the drive for status and guilt feelings, are of course ubiquitous and turn up again in many other plays. But in most of them they play only a minor role; often they have to be read into the play rather than being emphasised by the tragedian. This is in contrast to the *Andromache* and *Phoinissai* where they permeate the play from beginning to end. Thus Orestes' paranoia is, in a way, a seeking for status, but there are other, more important facets to this. Again, Iphigeneia in the *IT* has some guilt feelings about performing human sacrifices, but these are not the major explanation of her behaviour.

There are, however, some other Euripidean plays where these are again very important motives.

Status: We have already seen in previous chapters how much Medeia (the laughter motif), Elektra (*parerga*) and Hippolytos (the Artemis attitude) are motivated by a desire not to lose face. The matter is even more crass in the *Hiketides*, where Theseus constantly plays to the gallery, the *IA*, where Agamemnon and, indeed, all the characters are driven by the fear of losing status if they give in; in the *Helene* both

Helene's and Menelaos' main concern is their status, the former as a lady of Sparta, the latter as a Trojan Hero. Similarly Ion's struggle is between his religious faith and his desire for acceptance into society, also a consideration in the *Bakchai*.

Guilt: Similarly we have seen Eurystheus (*Herakleidai*) and Medeia struggle with the knowledge that they have done wrong and explain how this has influenced their action. In the *IA* Agamemnon is only too aware of his guilt and his struggle to deal with it leads him ever deeper into further guilt. We have seen in the *Herakles* how the consciousness of having done wrong, together with the desire not to be rejected by society drives the hero to suicide, and Theseus has to undo the harm done by these feelings.

**CHAPTER 14**  
**HOMO POLITICUS**  
**THE *HIKETIDES* AND *IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS***

We continue with Euripides' investigation into human folly. All the old principles of role playing, slogans, granny psychology, status and guilt feelings turn up again. In these plays the playwright concentrates mainly on their effects in the political sphere. He produces a most penetrating analysis of political behaviour. The causes of war are mercilessly exposed. His observations are valid for all times and ages; I found it easy and amusing to identify the various characters with modern South African politicians: Mandela, de Klerk, Buthelezi are all there. The Athenian audience would have found it equally easy to see Perikles, Alkibiades, Kleon and their ilk in them. I am sure Euripides would not have been averse to such identifications and many modern critics have gone to great lengths to look for them. But it would be wrong to see these plays as pure local political propaganda. The basic facts are universal.

**Classical**

Both plays have received mostly adverse criticism until fairly recently. The chief objections were their poor construction, the complete lack of any overall serious meaning, the detached choral odes and the unheroic stature of most of the characters.<sup>1</sup>

An early editor characterised the *Hiketides* as "an encomium of the Athenians".<sup>2</sup> This, if true, would immediately reduce the work to the state of an *ad hoc* piece. This view persisted through all the succeeding centuries and is still very much with us today. But the problem with taking this view is that it is a thoroughly inept and unsatisfactory encomium with as much criticism as praise for what it sets out to praise.

There is a widespread belief that the IA was unfinished at the time of the author's death and that our present text contains passages added by other hands. The

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<sup>1</sup> Zuntz (1963) ix briefly rehearses the history of criticism of the *Hiketides*. For a typical mid 20th century estimate of the IA, see Kitto (1961) 362: "A melodrama, a second rate play because the whole idea is second rate, a West-End tragedy".

<sup>2</sup> Aristophanes of Byzantium: Argument to the *Hiketides*. This also implies an encomium of Theseus.

estimated extent of the inauthentic passages varies from virtually nothing of significance<sup>3</sup> to over one third.<sup>4</sup>

This has given rise to a curious psychological phenomenon among critics. Euripides' dramas have always been controversial. In particular, commentators who based their ideas of what constitutes tragedy on Aischylos, Sophokles and Aristotle have found many passages in them difficult to accept. Some, like Kitto, had the courage to declare them unworthy of a great playwright, others tortured themselves (and the texts) into producing some acceptable meaning. The unfinished state of the *IA* provided a heaven-sent opportunity to exclude everything the critic found difficult or contrary to his ideas. The literature on the problem is immense, based on evidence derived from ancient documents, format, contents, metre and style. I hope to show in this chapter that from the psychiatric point of view most of these suspect passages make perfect sense, suggesting that any textual errors are of a minor nature.

From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, commentators began to look for a more satisfactory explanation of these tragedies.

*The Hiketides*:<sup>5</sup> Greenwood<sup>6</sup> was the first to suggest that the tragedy should be assessed at two levels: a superficial one for the masses, which is pure nationalistic bombast, and a deeper one for the more thoughtful. He pointed out that, when one takes off the rose-tinted spectacles Theseus is not nearly as admirable a character as he would appear at first sight.<sup>7</sup> Although the play carries a contemporary political message its real meaning is that injustice arises more from human mistakenness than from wickedness. His lead was followed and his view amplified by later commentators.<sup>8</sup>

According to Kitto<sup>9</sup> the central theme was the contrast between reason and human folly. He thought that the tragedian praised a "just" war as distinct from a foolish one. Shaw went so far as to suggest that character (ἦθος) is the main idea of the tragedy.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Irrigoin (1988) 244; Knox (1972) *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Jouan (1983) 24.

<sup>5</sup> A useful survey is given by Smith (1966) 152.

<sup>6</sup> Greenwood (1953) *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Greenwood (1953) 109ff.

<sup>8</sup> Fitton (1961); Smith (1966).

<sup>9</sup> Kitto (1961), 223-230.

<sup>10</sup> Shaw (1982) *passim*.

Zuntz was the first to address himself seriously to the problem of the lack of unity.<sup>11</sup> He still saw the play as an encomium, but of "wholesome laws", disclaimed any character study and any trace of irony (as opposed to Greenwood), but suggested that the constant grief of the chorus was a unifying thread throughout. The whole play was an anti-war piece. One might query, however, whether grief is sufficient motif to write a whole play about and whether the Athenian audience, in the grip of war, really needed to be told that war brings grief. This view of the *Hiketides* as an anti-war play has had a considerable following right up to the present.

Blaiklock<sup>12</sup> added the important point that Theseus was seeing war as a source of glory, in contrast to the sordid reality. Burian<sup>13</sup> adds further important points: Right and wrong are not so easily distinguished; and words like "freedom, democracy, justice" are highly suspect in the mouths of politicians. Clearly, the ironic approach is gradually gaining ground.

There can be little doubt that war plays an important role in the tragedy, but how much of the Peloponnesian War and the general contemporary political situation should one read into it? Opinions have varied.

Burian<sup>14</sup> makes little of the idea. Gregoire<sup>15</sup> regarded the play as primarily political and contemporary, but refused to identify the characters with actual political figures of the day. Decharme<sup>16</sup> went further and tried to see such men as Nikias and Alkibiades in Adrastos and Theseus. Giles<sup>17</sup> took the idea to its ultimate limit by trying to identify each of the seven Argive leaders with a contemporary politician.

### The IA

Few critics have been able to see a clear, single, overall message in the play. A variety of motifs, however, have been stressed:

Moral-religious: The old heroic concepts are undermined.<sup>18</sup> The contrast is between private and public: one's duty to oneself and to society. Is the benefit of society itself a worthwhile goal? Does salvation lie in submission to the will of the gods?<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Zuntz (1963) *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Blaiklock (1952).

<sup>13</sup> Burian (1985) *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Burian (1985) *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Gregoire (1965) 92.

<sup>16</sup> Decharme (1968) 120

<sup>17</sup> Giles (1890) 96.

<sup>18</sup> Webster (1967) 264.

<sup>19</sup> Sequeiros (1984) *passim*; Walsh (1979) *passim*.

Tyche and Anagke: Do our problems arise from the action of gods, or blind fate (τύχη, ἀνάγκη) or from our own characters?<sup>20</sup>

Political: The state of the Argive army depicts the chaotic state of contemporary Athens (and Greece) with its incompetent politicians and generals.<sup>21</sup> The play derives its moral foundation from the concept of Panhellenism,<sup>22</sup> There are direct references to contemporary politics, such as Alkibiades or the Great King of Persia.<sup>23</sup>

Marriage and death: Critics point out how closely Euripides describes the resemblance between marriage and sacrifice/death ceremonies. There is much truth in this, though it may be doubted that this will explain the whole play.<sup>24</sup>

The status of women: The play depicts the changing status of women in Athens, from the completely subservient person in the epic/heroic tradition, the person honoured in the great Perikleian speech and the "modern", liberated woman who seeks (and can find) equality with men.<sup>25</sup>

### Psychiatric

The importance of automatic behaviour, slogans and role playing has already been discussed in previous chapters. In the *IA*, Euripides stresses one further aspect. Once a man has elected to play a role society expects him to continue in it and turns angry if he wishes to change. This exerts considerable pressure from which the subject may find it difficult to escape.

Self image: When a person plays a role he sees himself as his chosen hero, that is he has a vision of himself, which may be very different from the way others see him. This forms the basis of much of the psychology of Karen Horney,<sup>26</sup> which has found a number of modern followers. According to her the glorified image is initially conscious, limited and often experienced in day dreams. However, it progressively encompasses more of the personality, becomes more organised and partly or totally subconscious. The patient is driven compulsively to live up to and maintain it, in order to avoid anxiety.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Vretska (1961) 25ff; Ferguson (1968) 159ff.

<sup>21</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 115.

<sup>22</sup> Many critics discuss the problem; it is most clearly brought out by Mellert-Hoffman (1969) *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Jouan (1983) 40; Jouan (1966) 289.

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly well brought out by Borghini (1986) *passim*; Burnett (1971) *passim*; Foley (1985) *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Rabinowitz (1983) *passim*; Castellani (1985) *passim*; Ferguson (1968) 162ff.

<sup>26</sup> Quotations from Horney are taken from: Rubins (1967) 327-338.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*; precis of page 332.



Mob psychology is an important feature in both plays, particularly the *IA*, it will be discussed in connection with the *Bakchai*.

### THE HIKETIDES

In this play Euripides addresses one of the most puzzling problems of human existence. Most people would agree that violence and war are highly undesirable phenomena. Yet they are perennially with us. Who are these people who make us go to war and why do they do it?

In the early parts of the play Euripides denies what seems the obvious answer: the political leaders, whether elected or dictators.<sup>28</sup>

1. A demagogue wields as much real power in a democracy as any dictator.
2. Neither demagogue nor dictator can have any real power without the support of a sizeable section of the population. The fault lies in society as much as in the leaders.

In the second part, particularly the funeral oration he examines who the warmongers among us are: they are perfectly normal individuals like you and me, often admirable. At most we can say that young people tend to be more prone to rash, violent actions than older ones.<sup>29</sup>

In the third part, especially the Euadne episode, he examines what it is that drives humans thus: It is our desire for self-aggrandisement and glory.

In the epilogue he looks for ways of stopping war. There is none. As long as man seeks status above all else, and as long as war is seen as a source of glory, we shall have violence and war with us.

In the following sections I shall concentrate on the passages which will bring out this message. I have discussed Euadne as a schizophrenic in chapter 7. In what follows I shall lay no further stress on this but deal with the main theme of the *Hiketides*: the causes of war.

Lines 110-285 have the standard structure of an agon but the two contestants are not moral equals. Adrastos is physically as well as morally defeated from the beginning, Theseus at the height of his glory. If we have already accepted Theseus as

<sup>28</sup> I shall throughout translate τύραννος by the modern term dictator. The modern English "tyrant" carries overtones not present in the Greek.

<sup>29</sup> This point occurs at various stages of the play and is stressed particularly by Thury (1988) *passim*.

"the man who cannot do wrong" then the agon is one between right and wrong, wise and foolish, peaceful and bellicose, rational and emotional, Adrastos representing the objectionable part in each case. The majority of critics have taken this view and praised Theseus and condemned Adrastos for their attitudes.<sup>30</sup> But if we refrain from preconceived views about them, the scene turns out rather differently.

Theseus enjoys his superior status, wringing a confession from Adrastos' reluctant lips. The audience knows the facts already and so does Theseus.<sup>31</sup> He could hardly put his finger so unerringly on the sore spots, if he did not know beforehand what they were. He is completely devoid of human compassion.

Adrastos' reply, in spite of his reputation as a great orator,<sup>32</sup> is remarkably inept.<sup>33</sup> He grovels, agrees to Theseus' superiority, acknowledges his faults and appeals only to sympathy for himself and the mothers. In his misery he cannot rise to oratorical heights, his only plea can be for kindness in human relations.

But kindness is exactly what Theseus is not prepared to show. His speech in reply is equally inept, full of wise, if somewhat dubious, sententiae but with little logical connection and quite imbalanced.<sup>34</sup> It includes a long philosophical diatribe in the form of a myth about the creation of man. This was obviously current in sophistic circles at the time; we find very similar accounts in Plato and Xenophon,<sup>35</sup> which end up with νόμος (the unalterable divine law) being the crowning gift to mankind. This, if the myth has any purpose at all, should be Theseus' main point; it was what Adrastos had offended against.<sup>36</sup> Yet he leaves it out. It will have to be pointed out to him by Aithra. Then Theseus takes up his accusations against Adrastos in detail: he married off his daughters to foreigners (an appeal to popular xenophobia) and ignored the two prophecies. Adrastos had believed one but not the other. He stands accused on both counts. Euripides' sceptical attitude to oracles is well known. Finally Theseus blames

<sup>30</sup> For instance: Collard (1975) 90-91; Jones (1958) 52-53; Gregoire (1965) 87; Blaiklock (1952) 64; Burian (1985) 149.

<sup>31</sup> "Your passage through Greece was hardly silent" (117). "Polyneikes stayed with me as my ξένοϛ before seeking refuge in Argos" (930-31).

<sup>32</sup> See Gregoire (1965) 84ff for references.

<sup>33</sup> Zuntz (1963) 23: Adrastos' speech is bourgeois and rasps on the grandeur of the play. He expressed very different views in Aischylos' *Septem*.

<sup>34</sup> Collard (1975) 159 tries manfully to show that the speech is coherent and with a clear purpose, but his argument is not convincing.

<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 320d-323a; Xenophon *Memorabilia* IV 3.

<sup>36</sup> Collard (1965) 161 and Zuntz (1963) 7 discuss this in detail.

Adrastos for having started a war for the wrong reasons. He listened to the urging of glory-loving youngsters and the unthinking masses. But is this not exactly what is supposed to happen in a democracy?

It seems that Theseus is taking up all the popular prejudices to bolster himself up. He is acting like any other politician being carried away by his own oratory.

The decision is made. Adrastos sums up what the agon has been really about (253-256): "We looked for a healer, not for a judge!"

But then Aithra takes over and she knows her son well. She first appeals to his filial piety (which is a popularly approved trait), then makes him feel big by humbly asking his permission to speak: Theseus magnanimously agrees and shows his great liberality by allowing that a mere woman might have something wise to say. Then Aithra begins her great speech by gently casting doubt on his feeling of being absolutely and totally in the right. Lawful is what all Greece holds true.<sup>37</sup> This is the appeal to νόμος, which Theseus missed in his creation myth. Now she makes him see how the rest of Greece will view his action. Her trump card is: "People might say you refused help out of cowardice."

Now Theseus suddenly sees the matter in an entirely different light. He has been playing to an imaginary gallery of adoring Athenians and Greeks, now he senses that the gallery might be judging him very differently. His status is at stake and like any other politician, when he senses that one line of action is making him unpopular he quickly changes to the opposite, with equal fervour: "I have a reputation as a hero and this must be kept up. I shall do the great deed."

But caution, caution! This could go wrong. He will first put himself in the right by parleying (which the Thebans will, of course, refuse). He will then ask the Athenians for their approval. "After all, it is I who gave them the vote." Here is the appearance of Theseus, the great democrat. He will use the people to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. But then we come to what he really thinks of democracy (350): "They will approve all right, if I want it so." Democracy is a sham. The people will do exactly as their leaders wish. In what way does he differ from Adrastos or Kreon?

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<sup>37</sup> Fitton (1961) 431 points out that the phrase: the panhellenic laws (τὰ νόμιμα τῶν Ἑλληνῶν) was already a cliché. According to Thukydides 4, 97, 98 both sides in a dispute claimed that these laws were on their side.

The chorus are jubilant. All they know is that they have obtained what they wanted. They gladly swallow all the platitudes: piety, honour, glory, eternal gratitude. The mass of the people, when undertaking a war, do not bother to see all round the implications. All they consider is their own immediate benefit. The rest is up to the leaders. Line 394 confirms what we have suspected: "The city gave me *carte blanche* as soon as it perceived what I wanted." The demagogue has as much real power as the dictator.

The second agon (399-584) is the famous debate on democracy and dictatorship. Most commentators agree that it is completely irrelevant to the rest of the play.<sup>38</sup> Some regard it as a glowing defence of democracy,<sup>39</sup> but it contains no new points. All these arguments had been discussed at length before, throughout Athens and Greece, and usually rather better than this.<sup>40</sup> The whole scene is a re-hash of half-baked, stale ideas and a trotting out of hoary bugbears.

In the introduction Theseus uses all the usual emotion-laden political catchphrases: freedom, equality, democracy, the good of the people. He cleverly distinguishes between Kreon who rules (κράτει) and himself, the first of equals (ἄρχεται), though we have already seen that his will is law in Athens.

The Herald's first speech is not so much in praise of dictatorship as a denunciation of democracy. The Athenian audience would have found his arguments familiar. They were well used to Aristophanes' plays.

Theseus' first speech is meant as a defence of democracy but all his points are familiar and most of what he says has already been undercut by what was said before. He follows it with emotional exaggerations: the dictator will take away your personal possessions; he will have his will with your daughters. This approach must have been as familiar in Athens as nowadays.

Having done their grandstanding the two agonists then get down to real problems and it is, perhaps, surprising that it is the Theban herald who first starts talking good sense (465-510). He makes a number of very relevant points.

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<sup>38</sup> Except some who see this theme as the essence of the play. In that case most of the rest of the tragedy is irrelevant.

<sup>39</sup> For instance Blaiklock (1952) 69.

<sup>40</sup> See particularly Herodotos III 80-82, but also in many other works. For a list of the relevant literature see Collard (1965) 212ff.

In Theseus' second speech he, too, calms down and begins to view the matter sensibly. His utterances are, perhaps, less clear-cut than the herald's, but equally to the point with a fine summing up (555-557): "Do not let a very moderate (μετρία) injustice done to you goad you into damaging the whole state."

But then he spoils the whole of his sensible and moderate approach by reverting to: "I demand ... or else ... what will the Greeks think of me, if I give in?" (558-561). For a while it almost looked as if reason might prevail over political expediency and the warlike spirit. The last few lines of Theseus were a bitter blow to that hope and then the argument deteriorates into a slanging match between the two agonists, unworthy of either. There is much sabre-rattling and personal invective. War is obviously inevitable. Theseus' last line (584) sums up the whole process: Περαίνομεν οὐδέν (we achieve nothing).<sup>41</sup>

And so the glorious Athenian army marches to war. The ordinary people (the chorus) have been largely instrumental in bringing about the war, because they would only consider their own immediate feelings. Now that it is coming they are beset by doubt and fear (598-633, the second stasimon).

To sum up so far: politicians talk and posture; there is little to choose between democracy and dictatorship; but the real drive for war comes from the people themselves.

The battle is described in a messenger speech. But this is an unusual messenger; they are generally faceless, except when the author wishes to introduce the possibility of bias.<sup>42</sup> This one introduces his personal position in surprising detail. He was a follower of Kapaneus in the first war, taken prisoner and able to see the whole battle clearly from the walls. He was then released by the advancing Athenian army. Several critics have commented on this oddity.<sup>43</sup> There is a reason for this. Kapaneus, though never on stage, casts his influence over the whole play. He is the prime example of the man of war. The messenger's attitude to what happened is what Kapaneus' would probably have been. To him Theseus is the embodiment of what a leader should be like and many critics have swallowed this wholesale.

<sup>41</sup> Shaw (1982) sees the power (or impotence) of reason and dialogue (λόγος) as one of the main motifs of the play.

<sup>42</sup> As for instance in the *Orestes*, where the messenger is a loyal follower of the royal couple and we are invited to regard his account of the public hearing as somewhat slanted.

<sup>43</sup> Collard (1975) 273 discusses the matter.

But the more one studies the speech the more puzzling it becomes. It seems full of strange, irrelevant and contradictory statements. The (seemingly irrelevant) distribution of the army takes up a lot of space (650-667). This motif has a long and honoured history going back at least to the *Iliad*.<sup>44</sup> In two other plays Euripides has followed this tradition. In the *teichoskopia* of the *Phoinissai* and the *parodos* of the *IA* he used the same method. These scenes fulfil an important role there. In both they show the dazzling effect a military display has on people (in both the above immature young women). The same can be said here. The messenger (and therefore Kapaneus) would have been very impressed by all this military splendour. We need only look at army parades of our own day to appreciate their rousing effect on very many people.

Before beginning the battle Theseus offers a last parley. This is pure political eyewash. There could be no possible way for this to be taken seriously. Kreon does not even reply. This is another Euripidean trick: in the *Herakleidae* Eurystheus and in the *Helene* Theoklymenos similarly fail to respond to so absurd a challenge. None the less, in each instance it is slyly suggested that this somehow makes them morally inferior.

The actual battle (674-720) is the most amazingly inept part of the whole play, a ridiculous mixture of the methods of warfare of the 5th and the 13th centuries B.C. War chariots had long been out of fashion in the Greek army. Yet these chariots begin the battle. The flanks try to gain mastery over their opponents in order to encircle the centre whose function it is to hold steady. These are standard 5th century tactics. At the height of the battle, when his centre is wavering, Theseus intervenes personally and most effectively, swinging a mighty wooden club. This, again, is a completely out of date weapon in an hoplite army and can hardly have been effective against massed spears. As in the *Alkestis* and *IT* Euripides is playing with his audience, showing them how they indulge in pigeonholing. One may see war as a glorious venture, fit occupation for any redblooded male, full of opportunities for personal glory. Or one may look at war as it really is: little personal glory, full of mud, sweat, blood, a personal, social and economic catastrophe. We are able to look at war either way and repeatedly change our attitudes; this is classical pigeonholing. But as long as there are people willing to take the romantic view they will be only too willing to go to war.

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<sup>44</sup> Homer, *Iliad* II the catalogue of ships.

This is the point Euripides is making and it is virtually the crux of the whole play. The messenger (standing for Kapaneus) is certainly fully imbued with the glory of war.

About the only thing we can say for Theseus as a general is that he stopped his victorious right wing from pursuit and employed them in an enveloping movement. His only superiority lay in keeping discipline.

The Thebans flee but Theseus prevents his troops from entering the conquered city. If we take the cynical point of view we may once again see this as a political manoeuvre on Theseus' part to gain personal renown. Or we may take a more charitable view of the great leader and conclude that he was really acting in a very statesman-like and moral manner. Either way, as we shall see, it will have no effect on future events. War will recur all the same.

The chorus respond with shouts of joy at the news of Theseus' victory. Victory proves that the gods exist and are just. Wicked Thebes has been punished. A common human fallacy after a victory. They have one more anxiety: is his army safe? They are assured it is and rejoice. This is the only instance in the play where the casualties of the second war are even thought of and they are here brushed aside very casually. The messenger's tale can leave us in no doubt that there must have been very many dead. Why do we not take those into account when reckoning up the gains and losses of the second war?

Adrastos (734ff) muses about the cause of the two wars so far. Man seems to have no say in the matter. We are like puppets manipulated by something stronger than our wills.<sup>45</sup> If only man could learn to settle his differences by dialogue instead of violence! But he seems unable to do this.

Theseus personally undertook the task of preparing the corpses for the last rites. Once again, we can see this cynically as an attempt at gaining popularity, but it seems too severe a task for that. More likely Theseus is acting here out of true devotion and from moral principles. I have in all the foregoing been rather rough on him, largely to dispel the aura of the encomium theory. But this does not mean that Euripides portrayed him as an out and out villain. That would be the very opposite of

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<sup>45</sup> Smith (1966) 161 regards this as almost a summing up of what the play is all about: We are all puppets.

his general message. Theseus, like everyone else, is a decent enough fellow when not carried away by the search for glory.

The third stasimon (778-794) sums up the situation: we have won and some have gained glory, but others are left with nothing but grief. Our sons are dead and nothing will bring them back. When the first flush of victory is over people come to realise that nothing has been gained by war.

#### The Funeral Oration (857-931)

There has been much discussion on this section of the play. Does it serve any purpose whatsoever in the tragedy? Is it not rather feeble? Is it perhaps a skit on such popular orations?<sup>46</sup>

In form it is a typical λόγος ἐπιτάφιος.<sup>47</sup> In contents, however, it differs markedly.<sup>48</sup> In the preamble to it Theseus asks Adrastos not to mention what each man did (846-856). That would be odious. Critics have been very unhappy about these eleven lines, which seem like unnecessary philosophising.<sup>49</sup> In fact they are apposite. Euripides wants to show us what sort of people these are who gladly march to war. That is the purpose of the whole oration. To relate their brave deeds would indeed be odious as would any attempt to extol such principles as liberty, democracy, justice which have already been shown to be hollow politicians' slogans in previous sections. On this view the funeral oration is a vital part of the play and serves its function well.

One might have expected Polyneikes to be the main subject. He was the one man among the seven who had a legitimate grievance, but no mention is made of this.<sup>50</sup> A legitimate complaint is mere rationalisation. We go to war for entirely different reasons.

Kapaneus has the lion's share of the oration. He represents the very essence of the warlike spirit. The messenger is his devoted follower; Euadne his wife; Iphis his father; he died the most flamboyant death. His spectre looms over all sections of the

<sup>46</sup> See the discussion by Collard (1972) 39ff.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the genre see Collard (1975) 323-324.

<sup>48</sup> The matter is discussed by Zuntz (1963) 13ff.

<sup>49</sup> Zuntz (1963) 25; Gregoire (1965) 83; Smith (1966) 162; Collard (1975) 321; Finley (1938) 29-31.

<sup>50</sup> Aischylos in the *Septem* and Euripides in the *Phoinissai* deal with this. Sophokles in the *Antigone* avoids discussion of the question of his guilt. It has no bearing on the problem he discusses. Similarly here.



play. In Greek tradition he was always regarded as the epitome of the violent man.<sup>51</sup> His characterisation by Adrastus comes as a shock: He was gentle,<sup>52</sup> wealthy, yet frugal in his habits and never proud, moderate in speech and comportment; he always aimed at being a useful member of society. He was a true and dependable friend to all and always courteous to mighty and humble alike. His word was his bond. In other words, he was a wholly admirable man, one that people would rightly look up to.

The others were different from him, yet all equally admirable in their own ways. Adrastus concludes: These were people whom we may admire. Children ought to be brought up to be like them; these values can be taught.

So there we have it. These were admirable men, there was nothing to mark them out as villains. They are what you and I are, or should like to be. War arises not from villainy but from something within all of us, even the best.

Then Euripides appears to break off his play and begin an entirely new melodrama with new characters, a new plot, new problems. Almost every commentator has noticed this strange fact. A few have tried to find sense in it, but their efforts are not very convincing.<sup>53</sup> If, however, we have followed the dramatist's argument so far, these scenes form a vital link in his thought. He will now examine what it is in us that drives us to war.

For that purpose he chooses one individual to bring out the relevant facts most clearly, Euadne. The fact that she is a schizophrenic is very probably not a coincidence. The schizophrenic has all the basic human instincts, drives and manners, but his difficulty in separating reality from the workings of his own mind often causes him to exhibit very clearly human traits which are normally deeply hidden. This may be why schizophrenics often make outstanding artists.<sup>54</sup>

Her first appearance is startling: a young woman, in wedding attire, perched on top of a rock, uttering strange words, quite out of keeping with the mood so far.

First (990-995) she talks in a transport of glory about sun and moon. Later we are told that this refers to her wedding day. Kapaneus (who in mythology was a

<sup>51</sup> Gregoire (1965) 135 n.3; Collard (1942) 44.

<sup>52</sup> There is some divergence of opinions whether the text should read *λόβρον* or *ἄβρον* in line 860 (see Collard (1975) 325).

<sup>53</sup> Zuntz (1963) 12; Collard (1975) 26; Kitto (1950) 227; Gregoire (1965) 143 n.1 Collard (1942) 48.

<sup>54</sup> Euripides was probably unaware that he was describing a mentally ill person. He would, most likely, regard her as an odd character rather than an ill one.

quarrelsome bully and whom Euripides has now characterised as a decent man) to her is χαλκεοτευχοῦς (decked in brazen armour), that is military glory.

She is, she says, a veritable bacchant.<sup>55</sup> She seeks not death but an "entering of the fiery light of the tomb". Τύχη (Fate, God, the Unknowable?) has guided her here. For the sake of glory (εὐκλεία, the word originally means having a good name among one's peers and stands at the beginning of her sentence here for maximum stress) she will launch herself into the flames.<sup>56</sup> She will not be a traitress to Kapaneus' spirit.

The next few lines (1026-1030) are virtually incomprehensible. Most commentators have decided that the text is corrupt beyond repair. This may be so, though I have pointed out before that the schizophrenic's speech is often incomprehensible to bystanders. I should suggest that the wording was probably difficult even before scribes corrupted it and perhaps that is precisely why they did. The general gist seems to be that her glorious death will be a shining example of a noble marriage to all Argos.

In summary: she is driven by incredibly strong inner forces and basically these amount to an overwhelming desire for glory. We can thrill to this, because we all have such feelings, though we generally control them.

Iphis, her father, has come to look for her. There follows another typically Euripidean ironic scene: Euadne (and the audience) know what is going to happen, Iphis does not and his daughter plays cruelly on his ignorance, so that he appears foolish, almost comic. Euripides has done this often before.<sup>57</sup> In this play it shows the utter rift between the person who relies on reason, and him who is actuated by subconscious psychological drives. They cannot understand each other. In vain does Iphis point to the miserable, bereft life to which her death would condemn him. This cannot influence her and in her overpowering need for glory Euadne flings herself into the flames which will destroy both herself and others. It is the same reason which also

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<sup>55</sup> The exact flavour of βακχεύουσα is almost impossible to reproduce in English. It suggests one carried by spiritual forces beyond the realm of normal behaviour and communion with the Unknowable.

<sup>56</sup> It is difficult, in English, to render the unusual words πῦρ, αἰθωπός and φλόγμος. They all mean fire, but carry all sorts of connotations of splendour and glory.

<sup>57</sup> Iphigeneia plays with Thoas in the *IT*, Helene with Theoklymenos in the *Helene*, Elektra with her mother in the *Elektra*, Dionysos with Pentheus in the *Bakchai*. Although the dramatic purpose of these various scenes is widely different the method is the same in each.

activated Kapaneus and all the other actors in our play. This is the basic cause of human violence and war.

There follows a second *kommos* (1114-1182), unusual in Greek tragedy, especially so by having a double chorus.<sup>58</sup> Why do we need another *kommos*? Have we not had enough of wailing and gnashing of teeth? We begin to face the question of the future. There is a double chorus because we are being shown two different reactions, one by the main chorus (the older people), the other by the youngsters (boys' chorus). This distinction between old and young has already been hinted at several times during the play. I shall now give the gist of what is being said, set out in parallel columns to show the difference between the two:

### Part 1

#### Women

1. I am old and full of woe. Dust out of glory.
2. Reward for mothers' care.
3. They are gone.

#### Boys

- Out of fire - grief.  
You have lost children, I am an orphan.  
All is gone.

### Part 2

#### Boys

1. Revenge, justice, shields of war.
2. Bronze weapons, glorious revenge.

#### Women

- The evil is raising its head again.  
He has left nothing but woe.

### Part 3

Both together.  
This evil has destroyed me.

The older people have learned the uselessness of violence and war, the younger generation is again dreaming of the glory of war. This augurs badly for the future.<sup>59</sup>

After this the play fizzles out badly. I know of no other tragedy that ends on such a note of bathos: in colloquial English it amounts to: "Well, bye-bye, old chap!"<sup>60</sup> One can almost feel that Theseus would like to make a profound statement at this

<sup>58</sup> The matter is discussed by Collard (1975) 19 and 391.

<sup>59</sup> It must be conceded that the distribution of parts between the two choruses is not universally agreed upon. I here follow the Budé text.

<sup>60</sup> The formula : "If there is nothing else I can do for you .... farewell" regularly recurs in Plautus' plays when a slave takes leave from another.

stage. But what is there to say? We must brace ourselves for the shock of the epilogue (1183-1234).

This is spoken by Athene and seems to contradict all the conclusions reached in the play, if we regarded it as an *encomium* of Theseus and Athens. To understand it we need to look at a point of grammar. Athene uses many verbs and these in one of three forms:

1. The imperative or aorist subjunctive to express a command.
2. The future indicative to denote a future fact.
3. A construction with *χρή* (or *χρεών*) which hovers between expressing something which should be done (on moral grounds), something which needs to be done (on practical grounds) and something which will undoubtedly be done (on matter of fact grounds). The whole meaning of the epilogue revolves round these differences. Commentators who have felt them all to have the force of imperatives have necessarily come to the conclusion that Athene's speech countermands the message of moral behaviour they saw in Theseus before.

The epilogue is introduced by *χρή* (leaving us in doubt whether we are dealing with a command or a prophecy). Then follows a part addressed to Theseus, all in imperatives or aorist subjunctives: do not let Adrastus and his gang off so easily. Make him swear a solemn oath. And this shall (or will) be the oath. Here Athene changes for one instance into the future tense.<sup>61</sup> Commentators have picked this up and suggested a faulty textual transmission.<sup>62</sup> But there could be meaning in the change: having pointed out that it would be practical politics to enjoin an oath Athene now envisages the ham-handed way Theseus/Athens will almost certainly do it. For the oath, as it is set out, is a very harsh one, such as one might enforce from a defeated enemy, not a friend. Let no Argive army ever invade this land. On the contrary, if anybody ever invades us, let them come, armed to our assistance. If they should ever break this oath, let them perish miserably! No corresponding obligations are laid on Athens.<sup>63</sup>

After a digression on the logistics of the oath (1196-1212) Athene turns to the Argive youngsters and the tense now is invariably the future, with the occasional *χρή*.

<sup>61</sup> ἔσται instead of ἔστω (1191).

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion see Collard (1975) 412.

<sup>63</sup> The matter is exhaustively discussed by Zuntz (1963) 73ff.

This is not command but prophecy and Gregoire is wrong in translating it as a command. Athene says, not what she thinks ought to happen, but what undoubtedly will happen.

As soon as they are fully grown they will march on Thebes for revenge and conquer it. The sons of the seven casualties of the last war will take the places of their fathers in the next (two are mentioned by name). They will march against the enemy, lion whelps grown into lions, and be gloriously victorious. They will be known as the *epigonoï* and celebrated in poetry. And then she puts the seal on this reading: "And it cannot be otherwise" (1224). Athene does not say whether or not she approves, but only that this must inevitably happen.

As long as human beings are motivated by a desire for self-aggrandisement, and as long as war is perceived as a source of glory, so long shall we have violence and war with us. And don't blame the gods for it.

Once again Theseus changes his attitude to the diametrically opposite. He now fully agrees with Athene that a harsh peace must be imposed. Theseus, as we have suspected all along, has no fixed moral standards. He adopts whatever attitude seems to be the most popular at the time and likely to bring him renown. He is motivated by self-aggrandisement, just as much as all the others. He finishes off on a note of traditional (and suspect) piety:<sup>64</sup> I am your devoted follower, for your benevolence ensures the well-being of the city (1227-1232).

The chorus shuffle off to take their oath. They, too, have learned nothing from what has happened.

### **THE *IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS***

There is little that is entirely new in the *IA*. Most of the themes can already be found in earlier plays. But some of them are chosen to be more fully emphasised here.

(a) The characters

Most of the characters are "unheroic" and "weak" and have been condemned for that reason as unsuitable subjects for Greek tragedy. They continually change their minds. Only Klytemnestra is "strong" and determinedly goes for what she wants. But

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<sup>64</sup> A stance of orthodox religion has ever been a stock in trade of politicians.

if we do not seek to apply Aristotle's dictum that a character should be "heroic"<sup>65</sup> they emerge as outstandingly fine representations of real people. They are aware of conflicting drives within themselves and adopt roles suitable for these drives; time and again they attempt to change roles becoming, like Admetos in the *Alkestis*, ridiculous, despicable or tragic in the process. This is how most humans behave.

(b) Roles becoming dominant

So far this does not differ materially from what we saw in the *Alkestis*. But there is a great difference. As Horney (see page 315) claimed such roles tend to take over more and more of the personality until the patient is driven compulsively to live up to them. Euripides comes to the same conclusion, though he stresses a somewhat different aspect of the problem. According to him once a man has elected to play a role society expects him to continue in this and turns angry if he wishes to change. This exerts considerable pressure from which a man finds it difficult to escape.

This phenomenon is very clearly shown in the *IA* and forms one of its major points. Agamemnon at first plays "Fond Father" and wants the army disbanded (94-95). Persuaded by his brother he then slips into the "Conscientious Army Leader" role (57-58) and this he is allowed to do as he has not played the first role for very long. When, however he tries to change roles again this leads to a scene full of acerbity with his brother (320ff). Eventually it just looks as if he might succeed (Menelaos' change of heart 473ff), but with the arrival of the women the whole army has now been informed of his "Conscientious Army Leader" stance and expects him to continue in it (511-542). It is of no importance whether Odysseus and the army really threatened him, or whether he only thought they might.<sup>66</sup> Agamemnon finds it impossible to slip out of his role again before the army.

Before Iphigeneia and Klytemnestra, however, he cannot reverse his "Fond Father" role for fear of their wrath. Hence his prevarications and weak-kneed stance. He is now caught in both roles and they are incompatible. Only Iphigeneia's self-immolation can let him combine the two and save him from total collapse.

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<sup>65</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454b (Hutton's translation): "Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are better than the average".

<sup>66</sup> When expounding the danger to his wife (1259-1275) he will use rationalisation and gross exaggeration. There cannot have been any danger of the army marching on Argos to destroy them all.

Menelaos has been hurt in his manhood: his wife has run off with another man and his brother, not he, leads the army. He desperately tries to regain the role of "Proper Man and King". He also wants to be "the Loyal Brother" (471ff). Again the roles clash and he vacillates which has earned him the reputation of a dumb ox among critics.<sup>67</sup>

Achilles too is a very complex character, not just a "spoilt brat"<sup>68</sup> or a "hypocrite".<sup>69</sup> Like Iphigeneia, whom we shall meet presently, and Ion, he is an adolescent with all the adolescent's naivety and capacity for espousing causes with more enthusiasm than wisdom. He plays the "Defender of Wronged Women" role so well (919ff) that it becomes very difficult for him to change. But his self image is also that of "epic hero" and "conscientious army leader". These roles clash and he becomes ludicrous (his meeting with Klytemnestra 819ff) or tragic (should he defy the army? 948ff). When he realises what he is up against he tries to compromise (supplication of Agamemnon (1011ff)), not a very heroic attitude. This fails. He has to play his role before his Myrmidons and there he again cuts a somewhat unheroic figure ("I implored them not to kill my promised bride, but their cries drowned mine" 1354-1356). Before the women he must continue with his role, though he can see its futility (1358-1368). His predicament, too, is resolved by the girl's self-sacrifice and he can save face by pretending he will still stand by her (1425ff), if she should change her mind, knowing that this is an easy promise to make.

Klytemnestra successively plays "the Loving Mother", the "Paragon of Wifely Virtues", the "Oppressed Female". In her case all these roles lead to the same goal: the prevention of the sacrifice. Hence she never wavers and appears "strong". Agamemnon sees her as a veritable "Battle Axe". In the end Klytemnestra is the only one to throw doubt on the reported miracle. Everyone else accepts it because it suits their various purposes; she does not and it enables her to cling to her grievances.

Iphigeneia at first does not play roles. She acts exactly as she feels. At her first appearance she is a naive adolescent like Ion (*Ion*), Antigone (*Phoinissai*) and Makaria (*Herakleidai*). She, like them, develops towards responsible adulthood. She goes through the stages of "Loving Daughter", "Rejected Daughter", "Innocent Victim".

<sup>67</sup> Or, according to Blaiklock (1952) 98 "Hypersubtle Schemer".

<sup>68</sup> Blaiklock (1952) 118.

<sup>69</sup> Chant (1986) 83; Masarachio (1983) *passim*.

All these are not roles but sincere convictions. But they clash with the ugly reality and Iphigeneia is forced to adopt a role that will enable her to deal with what is happening. She first copies her mother's "Oppressed Female" (1320ff) and, after much soul searching, finally wins through to the role of "Virgin Sacrificed for the Good of the People"<sup>70</sup> thereby solving her moral dilemma. But society will never let her get out of this role, which suits all of them for various reasons, and she has to die to satisfy them. Only the goddess in the epilogue can undo the harm of this role.

Odysseus, like many other characters of Euripides is a prime mover without ever appearing on stage.<sup>71</sup> He is either the leader or the tool of the army. What matters in the *IA* is not what Odysseus did, but what people thought he might be doing. This is very much in line with the outlook of this play where one of the main stresses is that it does not matter what people do, but what they are expected to do.

The army is a corporate body without any fixed opinion at first. They are perfectly happy to disband (814-818). But once they see Agamemnon and Achilles defaulting from their roles as army leaders they turn ugly and demand the sacrifice. Again, it is unimportant whether they were stirred up by Odysseus or thought of it themselves, whether they indeed threatened or were only believed to do so.<sup>72</sup> The fact is that popular opinion prevents a change of attitude by the leaders.

This is, perhaps, the major message conveyed by the *Iphigeneia*. It is not entirely new; we can see elements of it already in the *Phoinissai*, *Orestes* and *Bakchai*. But it is brought out most clearly here.

(c) Status

As in the *Andromache* this is a major motif here. Agamemnon fights for his status as leader of the army, for his status as head of his household, for his moral status as a loving father.

Menelaos' main preoccupation is that he has lost face before the whole of Greece as being unable to keep his woman and he strives to regain his position.

Achilles is more concerned about what people will think of him if he allows the

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454b) objected to this change of attitude as too abrupt, but her development inevitably leads to it.

<sup>71</sup> Compare Apollo in the *Ion*, Oidipous in the *Phoinissai*, Kapaneus in the *Hiketides*.

<sup>72</sup> I have mentioned before that Agamemnon greatly exaggerates the danger from the army and Achilles does so too, visualising Iphigeneia being dragged along by her long hair (1365-66). There was no likelihood of this.



king to use his name in vain, than of Iphigeneia's, or even his own welfare. When his status as leader of the Myrmidons comes to be at stake he quickly reviews his epic-heroic stance.

Klytemnestra's main motivation is to keep up her independence as a woman in a male orientated society. This overshadows all other considerations.

The army has little interest in the whole matter until it is pointed out to them that the barbarians would laugh at them if allowed to get away with the rape. This stings the army into action (or, at least, Agamemnon considers it might).

Iphigeneia in the earlier part has no social pretensions. She accepts her role as the king's daughter naturally and does not have to fight for it. Her status is assured. But, when faced with the inevitability of her death, particularly if this should be ignominious (being dragged by the hair) she, like Polyxena, finds consolation in the fact that she can still retain status by going to her death willingly. Indeed, Polyxena makes more of the motif of "not being dragged", but it is in the *IA* as well (1365-1366).

(d) Role of Women

The position of women within society was a major preoccupation of Euripides'. Both the women in this play come up against the problem of women's status and deal with it in different ways. Iphigeneia has no pronounced opinions at first. She plays her role of "Spoilt Young Princess" very prettily (613-616). But when confronted with the ugly reality she develops. At first she is puzzled by her father's cool attitude (631-681). She is present at the confrontation of mother and father but remains silent throughout the long first part (1106-1210). She has as yet nothing to contribute. When she eventually speaks (1211-1252) it is at a purely emotional level. Unlike her mother she tries to influence her father by submission. She has tacitly accepted woman's inferiority. Her long lament (1284-1335) further amplifies this thought. She muses on Paris and Helene, examples of the evil caused by ambitious women. Throughout the exchange of Achilles and Klytemnestra (1344-1368) she is again silent. From 1368 onwards she finally forms her opinion. "It is better that a single man should stay alive, than ten thousand women." (1394) This is spoken by Iphigeneia at the time when she is desperately clutching at slogans to bolster up her courage to accept sacrifice. She has already appealed to: personal glory (1374-1376),

panhellenism (1378-1379), xenophobia (1380-1384), fairness to the soldiers who are about to die (1387-1390). Now she appeals to the creed of the inferiority of women. She will go on to the creed of submission to the gods (1395-1397). Iphigeneia's final answer to the feminine question is complete submission to the male. But in this very submission she finds a glory, equal to that of the male.<sup>73</sup>

Klytemnestra takes the opposite line. Knowing what the general opinion is, she pretends to submit to the male. The whole of her self-picture as a wifely paragon is designed towards that effect.<sup>74</sup> But she also points out how the male takes advantage of it (1148-1163). Her whole attitude to her husband is not that of a submissive woman, but of a determined one, speaking from a level at least equal to her husband's. And the latter has no refuge but flight. Klytemnestra is certainly much less likeable than Iphigeneia, but does that make her wrong?

(e) Other Motifs

Sexuality is less stressed than in the *Elektra* and the *Hippolytos*. Apart from a possible sexual element in Iphigeneia's feeling for her father<sup>75</sup> which might hint at the Oedipus Complex, there is the possibility of sexual attraction between her and Achilles.<sup>76</sup> But it hardly seems a major feature, and their relationship is more of the adolescent "calf love" type and spiritual rather than frankly sexual. The adolescent attitudes of both Iphigeneia and Achilles are certainly very important and pronounced (compare the *Ion*).

Crowd personality turns up again, as it does in the *Ion* and particularly in the *Bakchai*. The army is a collection of individuals in the parodos (164-302). Later they develop a unified mind and, possibly because they have found a leader in Odysseus, behave in true, violent mob fashion. It is impossible to argue with them (1351-1357) and they turn out to be the most powerful force of all those attempting to guide events. Once they have ceased to be a lynching mob, their demands satisfied, they return to a

<sup>73</sup> As Ferguson (1968) 162 points out this was very much the attitude advocated by Perikles (Thukydides, *The Peloponnesian War* II XLV 2.)

<sup>74</sup> In this she resembles Andromache, both in the *Andromache* and the *Troades*. The latter might have been credible to the Athenian audience. But could they have taken Klytemnestra seriously in view of the, to them, well known fact that she was about to take a lover and murder her husband? But Euripides goes all out to make her credible to the extent of introducing an entirely new myth of a previous marriage to Tantalos and murder of her son. For a discussion of this myth see Jouan (1983) note to 105.

<sup>75</sup> Lines 635-636; 681; 1220-1222 seem to have a pronounced sexual flavour.

<sup>76</sup> This is stressed by Rabinowitz (1983) *passim* and Castellani (1985) 2.

collection of individuals with all the normal human moral instincts (1545, 1561-1562, 1577) until again overtaken by a mass reaction, this time religious in nature, at the sight of the miracle and led by Kalchas (1584).

(f) Panhellenism

As in the *Herakleidai*, *Hiketides*, *Bakkhai* and other plays, we are shown that moral motives, very fine in themselves, can lead to the most disastrous results. All the characters in the *IA* profess such high motives and we are usually left in doubt whether this is pretence; but the end results are certainly unpleasant. I should here like to single out the idea of panhellenism for special discussion. Many commentators have regarded this political idea as very important in the play and Mellert-Hoffman<sup>77</sup> has made it the linchpin of the whole tragedy.

From the 8th century onwards the Olympic Games had fostered such an ideal. During the course of the fifth century it gradually acquired a political connotation but did not become a serious force until the following century, when it found its most vociferous proponent in Isokrates. It is therefore perfectly possible that Euripides, that *avant-garde* thinker, might have been imbued with such ideas and put them forward in his play. Yet, in spite of Mellert-Hoffman, it is difficult to see the *IA* as a piece of political propaganda.

The idea turns up first in the prologue in the form of the suitors' oath (49-65), the first attempt at uniting Greek princes in a common cause. It was an old myth,<sup>78</sup> but critics have objected that it has no place here, one of their objections to the authenticity of the prologue.<sup>79</sup> There is, however, one very intriguing line put in, apparently quite unnecessarily: "They would destroy any city with their arms, be it Greek or Barbarian" (65). Tyndareos' idea was to unite the princes in a common campaign against injustice, not against a foreign enemy. A very important distinction. In a later section Agamemnon is much more scathing about the oath (391-395).

The idea of a political panhellenism is first brought up by Menelaos as a rationalisation for his own private desires. The chorus rehearses its implications emotionally in its first stasimon (543-589).<sup>80</sup> emotional forces (Aphrodite) should be

<sup>77</sup> Mellert-Hoffman (1969) *passim*.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion see Jouan (1983) 128 n.9.

<sup>79</sup> The matter is discussed by Jouan (1966) 157-164.

<sup>80</sup> As so often, this stasimon has been viewed as an *embolimon* disconnected from the play, but it is far from that.

kept in check, quoting the consequences of Paris' judgement as an example and ending with: "Eris (strife) leads Greece with ship and spear against the Trojan citadel" (588-589). The second stasimon (751-800) will stress the ensuing plight of civilians. Nothing further is heard about panhellenism until Agamemnon finds himself morally destitute and suddenly trots out his brother's idea as his own (1259-1275). If he had had such a highly moral motive before, why has he never said so? And even now, he almost apologises for this panhellenic attitude. It is the army who are driven by it (1264ff). We must ask ourselves where the army suddenly got this idea from. Menelaos? Odysseus? It is even possible that Agamemnon has told them himself in order to get out of his moral dilemma. It seems that some political leader is using the army as a cat's paw. The manoeuvre is successful; the army will henceforth be inflexibly in favour of the sacrifice.

Klytemnestra is completely unmoved by the panhellenic argument, it is not even worthy of comment. Iphigeneia's reaction is more poignant; it is contained in her lament (1284-1335): if sacrificing me is the price to be paid for this panhellenic war, then the war should never have happened. The gods should not have allowed it. The glory is not worth the pain.

Only when she is groping for a new attitude (1369-1370) and looking around for reasons to accept her death she finds it in the very panhellenic idea, which she rejected before. She puts forward its tenets more enthusiastically than either Menelaos or Agamemnon had done (1374-1384). She has to convince herself above all.

In summary, therefore, Euripides leaves open the question whether panhellenism is a good ideal or not. It may be viewed as a glorious undertaking or as the cause of much grief to come. Different characters adopt or reject it according to their own psychological needs. In the hands of the mob it becomes a threatening phenomenon.

(g) Politics and War

The majority of people (the army) have little interest in politics (see the parodos where the splendid Greek array is depicted almost as if it were a Sunday School Picnic) until they find a leader (Odysseus or whoever it was). Their imagination is captured by the leader's clever use of slogans and emotional appeals (panhellenism, Greek glory, protect the chastity of our women against those vile

foreigners!). These appeals must be couched in simple moral terms (granny psychology) as each member of the crowd has a definite moral sense which must be appeased. All general principles can be seen in more than one way, but it is the task of a successful political leader to be able to present only one moral side and make it easy for the masses to believe. He who would honestly try to present both sides of a question is lost as a leader. He is a "weak" man (Agamemnon, Menelaos, even in part Achilles).

Once such an idea or slogan has taken root in the masses it spreads with incredible speed and the previously individualistic crowd is rapidly converted into a unified mob with a an absolutely set mind.<sup>81</sup> No amount of reason or threat, even by a charismatic leader, will sway it any longer: Achilles is first shouted down, then stoned by his own Myrmidons. Such a mob is a most powerful political force and its will must prevail until its emotional needs are satisfied.

The attitude of the leaders themselves to their own slogans is variable. Some, quite cynically, use moral and idealistic approaches as counters in the game of politics, without believing them themselves. Menelaos accuses Agamemnon of such a cynical approach (337-349). Others have fully persuaded themselves that they are acting from moral motives only (Achilles 919-932). The majority are half aware that some of this may be only pretence and try hard to convince themselves and others that this is not so (Menelaos, Agamemnon). The truth is that they are all driven by their own psychological hang-ups (search for status, fear, seeking of power etc.); the moral and idealistic facets are but very minor components of this.

In this way the would-be leaders jockey for position, each trying to sway the crowd to his way of thinking. But once they succeed in this they have created a Frankenstein monster, which they can no longer control and which threatens them as well as others. In spite of all their posturing the leaders have little control over events. These are actuated by the deep human drives that are in all of us and of which we are largely unaware. The leaders themselves are little but puppets.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Note the resemblance to the events in the *Bakkhai*.

<sup>82</sup> Basically the same conclusion as in the *Hiketides*.

(h) Sacrifice

One of the commonest problems to be found in Euripides is the question whether it is right to sacrifice a human being for the sake of an ideal. It can be found in every one of his works, sometimes as a peripheral issue, sometimes an important one. In the *IA* it is at the very centre of the tragedy.

There is no time to discuss the whole problem here; suffice it to say that in the *IA* Iphigeneia gains in moral stature by her self-sacrifice and reduces the psychological tension in herself and others, but it may be doubted whether she produces any material benefit.

(i) Religion

This is a less pronounced motif in the *IA* than in many other Euripidean plays, but it is there. We note that Artemis did not demand the sacrifice; she gave Agamemnon the choice: sacrifice and have your War, or do not and go home!<sup>83</sup> The choice is his alone. This is in keeping with Euripides' attitude in other plays: Man creates his own problems and then tries to blame the gods for them. In the end the goddess can only try to undo the harm that men have wrought.

When the play is approached in this way it has complete unity and an important universal message. The various parts which have been ascribed to (inferior) additions by later revisers all fit in well. The play would be poorer without them. This suggests that any revisions are probably of a minor nature only.

### OTHER PLAYS

Political motifs and contemporary allusions occur in many other Euripidean plays. We have already seen their role in the *Herakleidae* and the *Orestes* (the debate at Argos). Here I should like to point out particularly their importance in the *Helene*.

If we equate Helene with Athens and Menelaos with Alkibiades we get a very topical play. Helene, like Athens, was beautiful, greatly admired and envied throughout Greece. But she has fallen on bad times and is now universally detested. She tries desperately to regain status and security by rationalisations, tricks, lies and

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<sup>83</sup> Neitzel 1987 203-207 and Vretska 1961 22-24 discuss the different attitudes of Homer, Aischylos and Euripides in this respect.

military endeavours. She fails to see that what is really needed is a spiritual reformation.

Menelaos, like Alkibiades, was a revered war leader. He has fallen from grace, has become an exile, has to seek refuge at the court of the enemy whom he promptly deceives. Helene (Athens) has set all her hopes on his return, but when he does return he is found wanting.

These are only some of the political allusions which can be read into the play and, as I pointed out before, allusions to their own contemporary events can be read into the play by every generation, giving it universal, not just local value.

**CHAPTER 15**  
**HOMO RELIGIOSUS**  
**THE *HELENE* AND THE *ION***

Religion plays a part in virtually all Euripidean tragedies. There is a general trend of development in the playwright's work. In the earlier plays he tends to treat myths as ridiculous (*Kyklops*, *Alkestis*). Some of this attitude persists in later works too, but he favours the view that men tend to blame the gods for the ill effects of their own folly (*IT*, *Andromache*, *Hippolytos*, *Herakles*). Still later he tackles the problem of religion more seriously. The *Troades* forms a watershed: Hekabe tries to adapt to changing circumstances throughout the play and time and again she attempts to find a religious explanation for what is happening to her. With each new catastrophe she has to start afresh. Eventually she is left utterly bereft of anything in which to put her faith. In the two plays discussed in this chapter Euripides comes to realise that without some sort of faith man is nothing. He will finally tackle the problem of religious faith in depth in the *Bakchai*.

**Classical**

Both plays tended not to be taken seriously in the older literature, being seen as charming but very light, and this tendency still persists with some of the more recent authors. Kitto includes both among his "tragicomedies" and says: "When a poet has nothing particular to say, that is when he must be at his most elegant and attractive."<sup>1</sup> Their religious content also tended to be played down.<sup>2</sup> The topical political aspects of both plays were particularly emphasised by Gregoire.<sup>3</sup> Verrall's contributions<sup>4</sup> were crucial in both plays; though no critic nowadays believes his more outrageous conclusions he clearly showed that an ironic approach gave both plays a different and more serious aspect. From the 1960s onwards interest in both plays revived and a fair

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<sup>1</sup> Kitto (1961) 314.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Lesky (1983) 315 believed that in the *Helene* religion receded into the background, part of a general tendency to secularise tragedy; criticism of the religious aspect of the *Ion* will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>3</sup> Gregoire (1973) 11-17 and (1965) 164-172.

<sup>4</sup> Verrall (1895) 129-165 and (1905) 43-133.



number of articles have appeared, most of them finding unsuspected depth and seriousness in them.

In putting forward my views in this chapter I shall have little to say that is entirely new: most of the ideas can already be seen in one or other of the extant articles, though sometimes hinted at rather than stated explicitly. What I hope to show is that all these different views are not mutually exclusive, but may all be true simultaneously, and the more contradictory they are (like Verrall's and Dodds' attitudes) the more they reinforce each other.

### The *Helene*

One of the most significant advances was made by Segal<sup>5</sup> who showed that the contrast between seeming and reality permeates the whole play. Euripides, like Plato later, claimed that reality is beautiful but man cannot attain it except through shadows and lies. No later critic could afford to ignore Segal's interpretation; many took it up and amplified it.<sup>6</sup> Gregoire's political ideas were also taken up by others.<sup>7</sup>

The character of Helene has been controversial since the days of Homer and later Stesichoros. Many critics believe that Euripides dealt harshly with Helene in previous plays, but rehabilitated her in this one. I must point out, however, that in other plays where she is a major character (*Troades*, *Orestes*) or just talked about (*IT*, *Elektra*, *Hekabe*, *Andromache*) her bad image arises invariably from what her various enemies say about her. If we judge her only on what she actually says or does on stage she fares much better. In contrast, her sympathetic appearance in the *Helene* arises from what she says about herself, her actions on stage utterly contradict it.

The situation is similar with Menelaos; I hope to show this in the later parts of this chapter. Several other commentators have come to conclusions similar to mine.<sup>8</sup>

Verrall<sup>9</sup> first emphasised the religious aspects of the *Helene* and drew attention to Eleusinian features. Burnett<sup>10</sup> also stresses the central role of Theonoe. The religious aspect is further discussed by others.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Segal (1971) *passim*; Segal (1972) *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Zuntz (1960) *passim*; Drew (1930) 187-189 had already hinted at similar thoughts; Hartigan (1981) 23-31 and Dirat (1976a) 3-17 amplify them.

<sup>7</sup> Gregoire (1973) 11-17; Hanson (1973) 11-23; Blaiklock (1952) 91; Lesky (1983) 316 stressed the similarity to Gorgias' δίσσοι λέγοι.

<sup>8</sup> Podlecki (1970) 401-418; Schmiel (1972) 274ff; Alt (1962) 24; Kannicht (1969) I 21-100.

<sup>9</sup> Verrall (1905) 51-60.

<sup>10</sup> Burnett (1960) published under her maiden name of Pippin *passim*; (1971) 76-100.

<sup>11</sup> Sansone (1985) 17-36; Matthiessen (1960) 699.

### The *Ion*

Few critics have ever missed the religious aspect of the *Ion*. Some see a defence of orthodox religion in it and defend Apollo.<sup>12</sup> Verrall regarded the play as a condemnation of religion and he too found his followers.<sup>13</sup> Others tried to take up a compromise attitude.<sup>14</sup> Willetts<sup>15</sup> clearly points out the basic differences between Verrall's rationalist and Dodds' irrationalist attitudes and suggests the possibility that the main message of the *Ion* may be that trust in a god is the ultimate goodness.

Gregoire's political approach was also taken up by others.<sup>16</sup> There can be no doubt that it explains many previously puzzling parts of the *Ion* but, taken by itself, it also leaves many gaps. As in the case of religion the political message can be read two ways; either a defence of or an attack on Athenian ways.

In recent years a number of articles have appeared stressing the rich symbolism of the play.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of the *Ion* as a character study was first suggested by Webster and has more recently found many adherents.<sup>18</sup> Ion's youth is frequently stressed, a number of authors mention the word "adolescence".

### **Psychiatric**

There is little new in the *Helene* in this respect: automatic behaviour, role playing and rationalisation are again a major feature of the play. The *Ion* brilliantly portrays the psychiatric problems of adolescence.

### Adolescence

This is a period of rapid change during which many psychological problems tend to occur. Yet it is only fairly recently that psychiatry has studied it seriously.

Freud<sup>19</sup> was not unaware of it, but was inclined to regard adolescence as only the tail end of infantile sexual development. His pupil Rank<sup>20</sup> broke with him basically

<sup>12</sup> Haigh (1896) 305; Grube (1973) 261-279; Sinos (1982) 129ff.

<sup>13</sup> Murray (1965) 60; Bartosiewiczova (1979) *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Owen (1939); Burnett (1962); Wolff (1965); Imhof (1966); Strohm (1976).

<sup>15</sup> Willetts (1973) *passim* and particularly 209.

<sup>16</sup> Delebecque (1951); Bates (1961); Walsh (1978).

<sup>17</sup> Barlow (1971) *passim*; Giraud (1987) 14 stresses the symbolic value of birds; Mastronarde (1975) *passim* and Goff (1988) 422 discuss the symbolism of the tent.

<sup>18</sup> Webster (1967); The following all adopt a psychological approach: Owen (1939); Blaiklock (1952); Vellacott (1954); Hanson (1975); Forehand (1979); Lowry (1988); Zeitlin (1989).

<sup>19</sup> Freud (1905) *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> For a summary of Rank's work and significance see Nagler (1967) 372.

on the issue whether psychology should be determinative or teleological (that is: do previous events automatically make us behave in certain ways or do we act out of a desire to achieve certain things in the future). One of the main specific issues between them was that Rank saw the trauma of birth as the most fundamental time for human development, more important than the Oedipus complex.<sup>21</sup> To him we owe the popularly well known concept of the "return to the womb". In Jung's view<sup>22</sup> many basic drives arise even before birth. They are inborn in the "collective unconscious", later renamed the "objective psyche". New interest in the psychiatry of adolescence was kindled by the work of Anna Freud.<sup>23</sup> Since then there has been a spate of publications on the subject, but it can hardly be claimed that unanimity has been reached and it largely remains a topic for the superspecialist. Thus DSM III has no special chapter on it, but includes what little discussion there is with the diseases of childhood.<sup>24</sup> The following outline represents a collection of thoughts on the subject derived from many different sources.

The changes from childish to adult attitudes begin in early childhood and continue well into adult life. They occur at varying speeds in different individuals and may become arrested on the way. Probably every one of us retains childish or adolescent attitudes throughout his life in some sphere or other. This is so important a principle that I shall stress it again in some of the sections below.

The physical changes are well known. There occurs a "growth spurt" during adolescence; arms and legs tend to grow disproportionately faster giving the adolescent his common "gangling" look and awkward posture. The sex organs grow and secondary sex characteristics develop. The periods begin in the female and sperm ejaculation in the male. Hormonal changes are marked and affect the physical changes as well as the emotional state of the individual. The time of onset of these changes varies; there are early and late developers and this may in itself produce psychological problems. Thus the late developing boy may for a while feel inferior in masculinity to his peers, the early developing girl may be physically ready for intercourse but emotionally unready, leading to the common problems of teenage pregnancy.

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<sup>21</sup> Rank (1952) *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> For a review of Jung's ideas see Whitmont (1967) 366-372.

<sup>23</sup> Freud, A. (1958) *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> DSM III (1980) 35-99.

Reasoning power becomes greater in the adolescent compared with the child. This has been called *formal operational thinking*. The adolescent tends to think more abstractly, to be more reflective and self-critical, to think about past and future as well as the present, to become more introspective and to think seriously about philosophical and religious issues.<sup>25</sup> This new capacity, together with the fact that the adolescent is at this stage confronted with a welter of new problems of which he has had little experience, leads to the well known phenomenon of adolescent debates in which older school boys and university students tend to indulge. We shall see this well in the *Ion*.

A minor point, but of importance to us in this investigation, is that clinical experience has shown that at this stage adopted children are most likely to want to seek out their biological parents.<sup>26</sup>

Horney first stressed the importance of the image of the self in human psychology and introduced the concept of alienation from the self.<sup>27</sup> Erikson applied this consistently to late adolescence and introduced the concepts of "ego identity", "identity crisis" and "identity confusion".<sup>28</sup> the child is secure in his knowledge of who he is and what his position is in regard to the universe around him. In adolescence his new cognitive faculty makes him query the certainties of his beliefs and he is confronted with a new world of problems which he has not, as yet, had time to think through. During this period he goes through a stage of self-doubt and works his way towards a new image of himself.

#### Attitude to Parents

The child is utterly dependent on his parents. To him they are the source of all power, knowledge and morality. Attempts at defiance by children are more in the nature of attempts to define the limits to which they will be allowed to go.<sup>29</sup> If a parent is unavailable the child tends to set up an image of an idealised parent, below the standards of which the people actually tending him may fall badly. The adolescent with his increased physical powers and more cognitive mind gradually comes to realise the limitations of his parents. This introduces an element of uncertainty; depression

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<sup>25</sup> Elkind (1968) *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Graham & Rutter (1985) 351-367.

<sup>27</sup> Horney (1950) *passim*.

<sup>28</sup> Erikson (1968) *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholi (1978) 519.

and anxiety are common at this stage.<sup>30</sup> The parents in their turn may feel threatened and overreact. This is the well known "youth revolt" which, however, should not be overemphasised. The majority of families go through this stage with only minor clashes.<sup>31</sup> The criticism of the parents may also extend to other adults, such as teachers, priests, youth leaders.

### Peer groups

Faced with a bewildering variety of new problems and unwilling to approach his parents about them the adolescent is inclined to form "peer groups" with others of his age. There may be only one special "chum" or a group, often jocularly known as the "gang" (which may indeed become a street gang). It is mostly within this peer group that the prolonged discussions of adolescence are carried out; they learn their attitudes from each other. There is often a strict code of conduct within the group as to dress, language, drug taking and such like. Deviation from this code may lead to ostracism from the group. These peer groups tend, at first, to be between members of the same sex, but, with the gradual development of the new sexual attitudes in adolescence, they are widened to include members of the other sex and gradually lead to a change towards the adult attitude towards relationships. In the absence of a peer group the adolescent may form close attachments to adults, usually not the parents. These "crushes" on another person, generally regarded by adult society with tolerant amusement, are highly emotion laden and their breaking up can cause severe emotional disturbances; murder and suicide are not uncommon.

### Psychosexual changes

Whilst not denying Freud's claim that sexuality is already active in children, this must, of necessity, change with the onset of puberty. Not only is the sexual drive greatly increased but it now becomes a real practical problem. Most children, under parental influence, regard sex as something wrong and forbidden and tend to eschew discussions on the matter. As adolescents they tend to query the old shibboleths and experiment for themselves, at first in a theoretical way and later practically.

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<sup>30</sup> Hornick (1967) 1367.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholi (1978) 519.

## Overall

The development from certainty to doubt and certainty again is a necessary stage in human development. The final conclusions may be the same as the original ones, but are now based on experience rather than blind acceptance. There remains the knotty philosophical problem of whether the final adult stage is, indeed, a better one than the original childish one. Much can be said for the happy, unquestioning and innocent attitude of childhood. This, too, we shall find seriously discussed in the *Ion*.

## **THE HELENE**

This play has a strong unity and clear purpose, though made up of many disparate elements. Most of these have already been discussed in previous chapters and will be mentioned only cursorily here. I shall concentrate on the new religious element which gives the play its unity.

### Role playing and self-image

Menelaos has a self-image of "The Great Hero of Troy". Everything he does and says, all his plans and his morality are based on this. But it clashes with reality. Apart from the fact that Euripides has already shown in play after play that the Homeric Heroic Attitude is out of place in 5th century Athens,<sup>32</sup> Menelaos does not measure up at his own level either: he was a subordinate before Troy, he is now powerless and a fugitive, middle aged and above all dressed in the most ridiculous clothes.<sup>33</sup> This is the origin of many of the comedy elements, though, in a way, it lends him a certain pathos too; he so obviously cannot help himself.

Helene, similarly, has a vision of herself as "the Unjustly Persecuted Girl" who is being kept from her rightful place at home. This role, too, does not fit: she is middle aged, married and a mother; Theoklymenos shows no sign of persecuting her unfairly. She has adopted the Stesichorean *eidolon* story to fit her self-image but this only leads to further comedy situations.<sup>34</sup> Again one cannot help but feel sorry for her; she so obviously believes her own stories.

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<sup>32</sup> For instance in the *Alkestis*, *Herakleidai*, *Elektra*, *Hiketides*.

<sup>33</sup> This theme of the incongruous dress is stressed over and over again as the very symbol of Menelaos' fall from heroic status. Aristophanes made fun of it in his *Thesmophoriazousai*.

<sup>34</sup> Particularly Menelaos' ruminations (470-514) and the old servant's reactions (597-624) show the ridiculous nature of this assumption.

### Political

Athens (like Helene) was beautiful and widely admired but has fallen on bad times. Everyone detests her (out of jealousy?) and blames her for the War. She longs for a Menelaos (Alkibiades?) to come and vindicate her, but he is far away; it is doubtful whether he will ever return or that he would really make a difference. Menelaos (like Alkibiades) had been a successful war leader (perhaps not as great as he thought) but now lives in exile, has to beg from the enemy and put up with insults from underlings. He is more interested in his own status than the fate of Athens. He could be persuaded to return and lead a new campaign. The two of them spin plot after plot to get themselves out of trouble. Both completely miss the spiritual message of Theonoe and look for salvation in violence.<sup>35</sup>

### The religious element

Without this the play is indeed the light comedy many critics believe it to be. But Theonoe occupies the central position in the play. One should note that whenever she is on stage all comedy ceases and a reverential tone prevails. Her name is introduced in the prologue (12-15). She (and Theoklymenos) are inventions of Euripides, though made up of existing mythological figures.<sup>36</sup> Her name means "Knowing the Gods" and is thus suggestive of her future role.

Teuker regards her as an ordinary seer (144ff) and goes away without seeing her, but will be proved wrong. The rich imagery of the parodos has an Eleusinian flavour: sirens = winged maidens = soul birds = guides and singers of Persephone; several critics discuss this.<sup>37</sup> There is also a direct invocation of Persephone (175).

The chorus recommend a visit to the priestess; she will know the truth in this difficult situation (317ff). Helene agrees but without real faith (330ff). People think of religion only when matters are bad.

After the Menelaos episode Theonoe is described in reverent terms: θεσπιφδοῦ κόρας κρήζουσα (hearing the prophecy of the holy-singing virgin (515). There is some argument about the latter word: κρήζουσα can be translated as either

<sup>35</sup> Note the similarity to the lesson of the *Hiketides* and the *IA*. Euripides' argument is for all times and societies. What I am stressing in this chapter is the way some of his contemporaries may have been tempted to read the political allusions. We can just as easily interpret them otherwise nowadays.

<sup>36</sup> Kannicht (1969) I 50.

<sup>37</sup> Gregoire (1971) 56ff; Pauly (1975) V 79; Kannicht (1969) II 67.

prophesying or supplying a need.<sup>38</sup> Either reading gives a laudatory message about the prophetess. We know that her prophecy is, in fact, absolutely correct. Note that instead of saying "Menelaos is alive" she says: "in no way does he wander the dark and gloomy land of Erebus, buried under the sword" (518-519). This, again, is Eleusinian (or Orphic) language. Both Persephone and Orpheus did so wander. It may even have been liturgical language.

Menelaos' servant characterises soothsaying and oracles as a plain economic rip-off (744-760) and the chorus agree. This is the instinctive common sense in an uneducated man, a step towards Theonoe's attitude; many of his conclusions will also be shared by her. Note that he uses ὁ θεός (the godhead) rather than any individual god's name (711). But his views are based on lack of understanding and logic (701). He does not even try to handle the question of the morality of the gods; he does not question whether **all** oracles are necessarily false. He misses the point of Menelaos' and Helene's problems and naively assumes that all will be well now. His views are based not on faith but on a desire to be optimistic.

Helene and Menelaos begin making plans for survival. It is beginning to be clear that they can do nothing by themselves. Only with the help of Theonoe can they have any hope at all (818-29). They will try to manipulate her (830-31). But when she appears she inspires only terror in them (857-64). They have no real faith in her.

The priestesses appear in a solemn religious procession (865-93). In the light of the popular outrage, the year before, over the revelation or mocking of the Eleusinian Mysteries<sup>39</sup> it is inconceivable that Euripides could here be making fun of the mysteries or even reveal on stage its secret rites. But he might well put on some of the ritual which was already common knowledge. In the Ninnion tablet<sup>40</sup> we have a picture of torch bearing women taking part in an Eleusinian procession. One torch is held downwards as if to sanctify the ground, another upwards as if to sanctify the air. This tallies well with the account in the play. Theonoe appears to be a figure of more than human stature: aloof, holy, virginal, impressively garbed and accompanied, so pure that the very air she breathes and the ground she touches need to be purified (865-72). She has shown herself a true prophet (873-5). The servant's and chorus'

<sup>38</sup> See Kannicht (1969) II 148.

<sup>39</sup> Thukydides VI 27-29.

<sup>40</sup> Athens Nat. Mus. 11036.



condemnation of prophecy are contradicted in her. She even has knowledge of what the gods are thinking and doing (880-6). And yet she is human, too. She feels genuine pity for Menelaos, the plaything of forces beyond his ken (876-7). She knows about the gods' council but not its outcome. Her first reaction is the very human one of looking after her own safety and sacrificing the couple (892-3).

And yet again, in some as yet mysterious fashion, it seems that her personal decision will determine the outcome of the council of the gods (886-7). Having these things put to us with such authority we must accept them even though we do not understand them.

There follows the agon (894-1031). Helene and Menelaos argue separately but both represent the human approach, Theonoe the spiritual. Helene begins with a formal supplication (894-6). In best rhetorical style she then plays on the audience's pity (896-7). After that she puts in a little veneer of morality: you have a duty to father as well as brother; gods hate violence (900-5). Her main argument is: property is sacred. No one has the right to take from me what I own (905-8). She concludes with a summary.

Menelaos talks in heroic language: he will not supplicate and ask for pity (947-53) - this would be unbecoming for a Trojan Hero - but asks for his right as a ξένος (954-6). He is already demeaning himself by arguing with a woman, so he turns and addresses her dead father (959-61) threatening to cause trouble if denied: he will (Homericly, but fatuously<sup>41</sup>) challenge Theoklymenos to single combat or else kill Helene and himself in a glorious suicide (977-85).

Theonoe, though influenced by their pleas, judges on entirely different criteria. The message is: you are both wrong. Your arguments are based on irrelevant principles. She states her attitude in the first line: Πέφυκα εὐσεβεῖν καὶ βούλομαι (I am by birth of such a nature as to practise righteousness and that is what I wish to do 998). She acknowledges the moral arguments of the two: "I revere my father and shall not place undue weight on my duty to my brother." To the other two this was a small veneer of morality to sugar the pill of selfish desires, to her it is the crux of the whole matter: "I have δίκη (righteousness) in me." (1002-4). And so she announces

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<sup>41</sup> Compare the equally fatuous invitation to single combat of Eurystheus by Hyllos in the *Herakleidae* and Theseus' offer at parley in the *Hiketides*.

that she will save the two and conceal their presence from her brother. On the divine level (this is important to her) she will range herself with Hera and against Aphrodite;<sup>42</sup> she has renounced the way of fleshly lust (1004-6). And once again she stresses what is important: "I and my father abide by δίκη. Δίκη remains even after death." (1013-16)

The chorus underlines this crucial message: our only hope lies in practising righteousness (1030-31). Theonoe adheres to her moral decision in spite of being fully aware of the personal danger this entails.

The play has really come to an end. Menelaos' and Helene's (in political terms Athens') attempts at solving their problems by scheming and violence are doomed to failure. But a new morality, a new faith in something outside themselves offers rich hope.

What they will, in fact, do is to rejoice at having obtained the material benefit they had desired and ignore the spiritual advice completely, if they ever understood it at all. They will continue their materialistic schemes and the play will revert to comedy, comedy which should now bring tears to our eyes. Mankind is blind to spiritual values.

Plans are laid for escape involving lying, deceit, theft, violence and xenophobia. They include playing on the victim's better nature and despising him for having it. After all, he is a villain and a barbarian to boot. The death of innocent bystanders is shrugged off lightly; they, too, are barbarians. No thought is given to Theonoe and the danger she is incurring in their cause, Menelaos, the dumb heroic ox, plans only immediate violent action. He plays the "straight guy" in the distichomythia to Helene's cleverness, who points out his absurdity. But her subtle plans are equally underhand.

The chorus sing the first stasimon (the nightingale ode 1107-1164). Often called an embolimon, this ode continues to hammer home Euripides' point. The chorus of simple women instinctively appreciate Theonoe's position, which their "betters" ignore. They sing of the evils of treachery and violence in the stories of Tereus, Itys and Philomene and the Trojan War which ended in catastrophe for victor and

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<sup>42</sup> The transmitted text has Charis instead of Kypris = Aphrodite. See the discussion by Kannicht (1969) 257.

vanquished alike (the disaster at Euboia is stressed). They have always found the ways of the gods right (1149-50), even if man cannot understand them.

Then the play reverts to comedy. The unscrupulous, if clever, Greek pair bamboozle the honest, loving and decent barbarian. The drama, for the discerning, lies in the stark contrast between what Theonoe and the chorus have advised and what the Greeks do.

They receive yet another reminder from the chorus that they are acting foolishly. This is the second stasimon (1301-1368), also often decried as an embolimon, but, in fact, completely apposite. As so often in Greek tragedy the chorus repeat in poetic and emotional terms what the characters have put in intellectual ones. It is basically the story of Demeter and Persephone, that is the basic Eleusinian myth, though somewhat conflated with elements of the Dionysiac and Kybele cults.<sup>43</sup> There is room here for only the briefest outline of its purport: Demeter who supplies all that is beneficial to man has been grieved by the violent rape of her daughter. All the good things of life cease. Clever efforts at undoing the damage fail. Eventually it is Aphrodite (Love) and her Charites (Poetry) which succeed in restoring all that is worth while. Translated into terms of the play: Helene and Menelaos by their violent actions can only make matters worse. Only Theonoe's message of δίκη has a hope of succeeding. Translated into political terms: Athens by violent political and military action will make matters worse. Only by doing the righteous thing and coming to decent terms with her enemies can she hope for a better future.<sup>44</sup>

But it will not happen. The couple proceed with their plan of deceit and violence (1369-1450). The chorus have one more try in the third stasimon (1451-1511). This is a hymn of hope and faith. But what the chorus are hoping for is something quite different from the expectation of the couple; not victory and heroic success, but peace, the enjoyment of peaceful activities and reunion with their loved ones.<sup>45</sup> It ends with an invocation of the Dioskouroi; they should be able to take the shame from Helene (as they will in the epilogue).

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<sup>43</sup> The matter is well discussed by Kannicht (1969) 328-333.

<sup>44</sup> This is also Aristophanes' contention, both in the *Acharnians* and the *Lysistrata*.

<sup>45</sup> Many Athenians at that time were separated from their dear ones who had been caught in Sicily and enslaved there.

It is no good. Helene and Menelaos put their plan into action. They lie, steal, murder and escape (1512-1620). Temporarily they have achieved their goal. Euripides does not stop on this cynical note; the claims of righteousness are not so easily dismissed. In the next scene (1621-41) these claims reappear. Theoklymenos, shamefully treated, is furious and will take revenge on Theonoe. But the incredible happens, a mere slave turns against the powerful king and defies him. He will risk death rather than take part in violence. He will not hurt Theonoe or stop from upholding her righteousness. Theoklymenos is willing to listen.

There follows another startling Euripidean epilogue; a happy ending to a sordid story. It shows how easily the ravages of violence could be averted,<sup>46</sup> if only man were not so foolish. The Dioskouroi order Theoklymenos to abstain from punishment and revenge and he agrees readily. Immediately Theonoe and her δίκη are saved. Helene too can now look forward to a return to her former status and will achieve her apotheosis (this could also apply to Athens). Menelaos can again become a great hero and look forward to the Elysian Fields.

The moral of the story: if only man could stop himself from trying to solve his problems by deceit and violence and follow the path of righteousness, such as advocated by Eleusis or similar cults, he could easily find his salvation.

A note on Eleusis: I have stressed the many resemblances of Theonoe's attitude to the Eleusinian cult, as originally stressed by Verrall but largely ignored thereafter. We know very little of this widespread religion.<sup>47</sup> It probably arose as a death and resurrection vegetation myth, was already in existence in Mycenaean times and lasted until the time of Theodosius (5th century A.D.). During this long existence it assimilated many other cultic elements and almost certainly developed a moral content. The fact that Cicero and Marcus Aurelius were initiates in later times speaks strongly for this supposition. Neither of them is likely to have been impressed by a purely ceremonial cult. It must be stated, however, that there were other mystery cults in Greece, some of them only slightly less revered than Eleusis, particularly those of the Kabeiroi in Lemnos and Thebes, the unnamed gods in Samothrace, the Bakchic and Orphic traditions. It is quite possible therefore that Euripides is not advocating Eleusis

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<sup>46</sup> Similar to the endings of the *Orestes*, *Elektra* and *Hiketides*.

<sup>47</sup> It is discussed at length by Burkert (1985) *passim* and Mylonas (1961) *passim*.

as such but saying: the answer is contained in a stress on moral principles, such as can be found in some of the mystery religions. For what it is worth I should suspect that Euripides would not have been very impressed by the ritual parts of these cults, but could well have been so by their moral content. We shall see his attitude to the Dionysiac religion in particular in the *Bakchai*.

### THE ION

The *Ion* is a study of the psychological problems of adolescence. In order to dramatise this rather diffuse period Euripides concentrates the changes, which normally occur through a period of years, into a single day. He makes Ion an orphan, who has idealised Apollo into a father image thereby combining the adolescent revolt against parents and religion.<sup>48</sup> By depriving him of a peer group he enables his earnest discussions to be held with a few adult characters. This approach explains the multiplicity of problems which run through the *Ion* and which has bewildered the critics.<sup>49</sup> At the same time it explains the recurring ambiguity or "double edged" attitude to these problems stressed in the Classical section. Ion has to learn that there are two sides to every question and has to try to find a way out of the ensuing dilemmas.

There is room here only for stressing some of the main facets out of many interesting ones.

Ion's monody begins with a lyrical description of morning at Delphi (82-101). The symbolism is very pronounced (sun, light, order, tradition, sacredness) and leaves a strong impression of a beautiful, ordered world (the world of childhood). This is followed by Ion's vision of himself before his identity crisis (102-153). Apollo is his god and his parents. Ion is deliriously happy in the god's service. He also utters the significant phrase: ὄσιος ἄπ' εὐνῶς (free from sexual desire, and may I ever stay so 150). Then a superficially charming but highly symbolic passage (154-183). The birds are companions of the gods flying in the bright αἴθρη. They symbolise freedom, divinity and joy. But they also threaten to defile the temple with their excreta and their

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<sup>48</sup> It may be claimed that every man's perception of God is but an idealisation of a parent figure. If Euripides meant to convey this, all credit to him. But he goes to no great trouble to make this point clear.

<sup>49</sup> Zeitlin (1989) uses a somewhat similar approach.

sexual habits.<sup>50</sup> For the first time Ion's simple faith in the divine order is being tested against his developing cognitive powers.

The parodos (184-237) is again full of symbols. The Athenian girls of the chorus admire the art treasures of Delphi. All the works described depict order arising out of chaos, semi-divine man defeating the beast. The chorus relish traditional Athenian mythology. They are adults, but they have never yet grown to question tradition. Ion is friendly but firm in his official capacity as warden of the shrine.

The long stichomythy which follows (237-400) is one of the most tender love scenes ever written, sensitively describing the meeting of a young man and a woman, shy at first, and gradually exploring each other's minds and souls. The sexual element (which must be present) is carefully avoided: he is too naive, she too well brought up to acknowledge it. This is more in the nature of the adolescent "crush" with its high emotional content.

Ion is immediately impressed (237-246) by Kreousa's noble bearing and ancestry (εὐγένεια and autochthony, which still seem very important to him). She recalls his ideal mother figure. Kreousa is equally impressed by his decent bearing (248-254). He reminds her of her lost son. At first (255-282) she is very much the royal lady, but gradually her defences weaken (283-300). She begins to talk of the long rocks (where the rape and exposure occurred). Xouthos is mentioned as brave, but a "foreigner". Then she becomes even more trusting (301-307); she comes close to revealing her love/hate relationship to Apollo. After that it is Ion's turn to reveal his inner feelings (308-329), his orphanhood, his fear of the possibility of a low birth and his longing for his mother. Kreousa listens with obvious interest and sympathy. She points out their similar status. Both are longing for a lost dear one. They come very close.

Kreousa's defences almost break (330-368). She tells her story, though still pretending it happened to another. This brings Ion up against a disturbing new view of his adored Apollo: he is unjust (355). The adolescent tries to defend his god and father (369-383) but is badly shaken. Sympathy and love for Kreousa and faith in his god war in his breast.

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<sup>50</sup> For an excellent discussion of this symbolic approach see Giraud (1987) 86ff.

Finally (384-400) Kreousa lets herself go. She directly accuses Apollo: he has done wrong; he has failed to save his child; he refuses to give an oracle if this does not suit him; he has destroyed hope.

Ion has for the first time met the adult, real outside world and his childish faith is badly shaken. He and Kreousa, by allowing the other a glimpse of their inmost feelings, have become very close.

We meet Xouthos (510-562), the adult, a pleasant enough fellow, kind to his wife, but without any idealism. Oracles and religion are something to use for one's purpose, not a matter of ideals. He will treat Ion's heartsearchings with tolerant amusement as something he will eventually outgrow. Problems can always be solved with little white lies and compromises.

When he is alone Ion's doubts come out (429-452). He has met the outside world and his childish ideas have been shaken. He instinctively dislikes Xouthos, but Kreousa worries him much more. He tries to put her out of his mind (434-5) but the problem of Apollo remains. His god and father has committed rape, then betrayed the girl. He conceives of the possibility of religion being given up altogether (445-447).

The first stasimon (453-509) as usual rehearses the problem in an emotional form: the virginity of Artemis and Athene contrasted with the need for legitimate heirs; the joys of a stable family life and children; the long cliffs, dark haunts of wild ecstasy. The meeting of man and gods will always cause grief (507-9). The chorus are aware of the dichotomy between ideal and real life, but have never tried to come to terms with it.

The anagnorisis (510-62) is a comedy scene. Bluff, unimaginative Xouthos has no sensitivity and causes trouble when he wants to sow love. Ion, still with his childish ideas that "sex is wrong" overreacts grossly in imagining a homosexual assault and defends his virginal purity heroically. But Apollo's oracle has spoken and the young man is in a dilemma: must he doubt the oracle or accept this uncouth man as father? He tries to wriggle out in various ways: you are lying, you have misheard, the oracle may have been ambiguous. Eventually he has to accept. This raises the question as to who is his mother. Apparently neither Xouthos nor Apollo can say. Ion considers possibilities: was he born of earth?<sup>51</sup> Could he be the offspring of Xouthos

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<sup>51</sup> Mastronarde (1975) discusses the allusion to earth born Erichthonios, the Athenian forebear.

and a bacchante in an illegitimate union?<sup>52</sup> Xouthos talks him out of it (the adult influence on adolescent doubts). Reluctantly Ion accepts Xouthos as his father. He is so different from his ideal father image.

The agon (563-675) is a typical adolescent discussion. Ion is dealing with problems which have had no real meaning for him up to now, but have become urgent. To the adult Xouthos they are purely academic. These problems are: finding his mother (563-584); his status in society (586-606), i.e. the identity crisis;<sup>53</sup> are the advantages of power and wealth illusory? (624-32). He has been so happy in the service of Apollo (633-649).

Xouthos' very adult reply (650-668) is that one should not take these problems so seriously. One can always adapt with a little compromise. Accordingly he devises a plan including deceit and subterfuges and, riding roughshod over these adolescent doubts he arranges a banquet and swears the chorus to silence. Ion is overpowered by this adult *savoir-faire* and agrees reluctantly (667-675).

The chorus in their second stasimon (676-724) point out the dangers of this course: the question of autochthony will not be settled; Kreousa is once again being cheated by those on whom she relies. They darkly hint at a political intrigue (690-94).

Enter the paidogogos. In a brief passage (725-46) he and Kreousa are characterised as eminently likeable people and very devoted to each other.

Xouthos' plot is revealed and Kreousa is shattered. Ion is deceiving her as Apollo did before. She first reacts only by grief and the typical Euripidean desire to fly away (796-799).

It is the paidagogos who puts forward the more sinister interpretation. This is a plot by the foreigner Xouthos to secure his throne. He had a secret liaison, produced a child and is now smuggling him in to secure the line of succession using Apollo as a shield. The chorus fully support him in this view.

Note how the chorus and paidagogos see everything in terms of *autochthony*, εὐγένεια and political manoeuvres. Their adult outlook ignores idealistic and personal motives.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> This is one of the main points of Verrall's argument and it cannot be ignored as a possibility.

<sup>53</sup> As Owen (1939) xxii points out we have here an almost Aristophanic satire on Athenian political life; Athens may be glorious, but there is a lot that is unsavoury in the political setup.

<sup>54</sup> Note how the paidagogos, a slave, upholds the establishment. He is a precursor of so many New Comedy slaves.



Kreousa, betrayed, flies into a rage clearly expressed in her great monody (859-922). In shape it is a formal hymn, but instead of ending with a request for help it ends with a curse on Apollo. The audience must have been shocked.<sup>55</sup> She again rehearses the story of the rape.<sup>56</sup> And yet her love for Apollo is not dead. She calls him χρυσῶ χαίταν, μαρμαίρων, χρυσαυταυγῆ (with shining face and golden locks, in most poetic language (888-90). She is clearly highly ambivalent about the god, as she will be about Ion. Kreousa is an adult who has never yet completely given up the emotional and idealistic ways of childhood.

The old man is shocked at her revelation, Kreousa quite unashamed (925-69). He proposes three courses of action (970-84):

1. Burn Apollo's temple, possible to the irreligious paidagogos and with political advantages;<sup>57</sup> unacceptable to Kreousa who is still in the throes of making up her mind about Apollo.
2. Kill Xouthos, again politically reasonable. The foreigner is threatening to replace the autochthonous line. It has no bearing on Kreousa's problem.
3. Kill the bastard and prevent him from inheriting the throne. The political consideration is again to the fore, but it also fits Kreousa's feelings: revenge for the betrayal. She produces a bracelet containing both poison and antidote. There is a long section about the provenance of this bracelet (985-1021) which seems quite unnecessary (the antidote will never be used), but is full of symbols, all ambivalent between chthonic and aetherial: the Gorgon, Athene, Kekrops, Erichthonios. And so the final plan is laid (1022-47).

In the third stasimon (1048-1105) the chorus again rehearse the problems in emotional terms: there is an invocation of Hekate (a chthonic power), an ecstatic description of the Eleusinian rites (the aetherial element), but only to say: let no foreigners share them (the autochthonous political angle). It ends with a piece of female propaganda (1090-1104): we women are religious (in the conservative sense), man uses us shamelessly. Look at what Apollo did.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> This was first pointed out by Larue (1963) *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> This is done five times in the play: Hermes' account in the prologue was clinical, Kreousa's fictitious one legalistic; here she gives full rein to her emotions.

<sup>57</sup> Delphi was supporting the Peloponnesians at the time of the play.

<sup>58</sup> Vellacott (1975) 88-89 bases much of his interpretation on this.

A messenger relates the failure of the plot. At first there is a gloomy relation of facts. Then the sombre tone changes abruptly. We get a lighthearted description of the building of the tent (1122-1165). Many critics regard this as irrelevant. Goff has excellently elucidated the purpose of this section in a symbolic way and others have followed her.<sup>59</sup> My account is largely based on his. First the solemn, careful ritual erection of the tent represents the preordained order of childhood. Then the multiple tapestry coverings showing the tension: the roof depicts the immutable course of celestial bodies, that is: order, a god-arranged plan, faith, stable government, wise adulthood.<sup>60</sup> The last scene on it is dawn (light) chasing night (darkness). The light of reason disperses the dark, comfortable order of childhood.

The walls depict scenes of violence between men and beasts: this is Man, Greece, Athens, Adolescence, fighting the forces of ignorance but employing violence which is itself of doubtful morality.

The entrance depicts Kekrops (himself half serpent half man). Thus Athens is itself partly conservative, chthonic, earthbound, childish, but also humane, enlightened, adult. The roots of adolescence lie in traditional earthbound childhood; but it also points forward to humane adulthood and, perhaps, godliness. A period of violence, the youthful revolt, is inevitable in this situation.

The happy mood is being secretly eroded (1165-1189). The adolescent Ion is being accepted into adult society as long as he does not revolt but sticks to protocol.

At the same time the paidagogos changes the cups and introduces the poison. When adolescent youth introduces novelty, conservative society reacts violently.

Ion has spilled his wine, a dove descends, drinks and dies of the poison. The old man is caught, tortured and the plot uncovered and Ion leads the Delphians to kill Kreousa.

Here the symbols all come together. The dove, the bird of Apollo (wisdom and order) and Aphrodite (love) prevents the murder, i.e. Ion has been saved by his faith and his love. Religion is vindicated. The dove itself has died: order and love are killed by adult society's sticking to outmoded rules. It is the poison of the Gorgon, the

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<sup>59</sup> Goff 1988 *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> Mastronarde (1975) 169 sees some disturbing features even in this picture, but they are certainly not at all marked.

chthonic, conservative element in man, which has killed it. Love turns to hate and Ion leads the Delphians towards revenge.

Another choral song underlines this (1229-1249). The chorus acknowledge their guilt and what caused it. It is the poison of the serpent, the chthonic element in man, which caused it all (1234-35). There can be no escape<sup>61</sup> unless a god intervenes. (1244-1245).

Kreousa clings to the altar for refuge as Ion storms in intent on killing her. There is a heated altercation in stichomythy, both sides use words and ideas which in a calmer moment they would have eschewed, as sticks to hurt the other. Thus he brings up her childless state (1301); she says: "you'd better go and find your precious mother" (implying "you bastard" 1307). They know each other well enough to know what will hurt. But, significantly, nothing happens. His marked ambivalence towards her is evident: "Let the rocks of Parnassos destroy those ἀκηράτους πλόκους κόμης (1266). ἀκήρατος originally means unharmed, later faultless, untouched, pure. Πλόκος was originally a tuft of wool, later an artistic production made out of wool such as tapestry or an exquisite hairstyle. These are unusual words, he could just as easily have said τρίχη or χαίτα, without a flavour of admiration. Both feel the need to justify themselves before the other and so there is much talk, but little action. When the Pythia enters they simmer down rapidly, almost glad of the interruption.

The Pythia brushes aside the present quarrel as unimportant (1320ff). She has come to show Ion a way to find his mother. This would be quite irrelevant if the problem were a political one, as chorus and paidagogos believed. The relief brings tears to the young man's eyes (1369). Now he realises that his identity has been a major problem all along. Service to Apollo had kept him happy (1371-1373). Now he longs to know. But he is afraid. What if he were unworthy, a slave girl's offspring? Having been brought up in conservative Delphic circles, he treasures εὐγένεια as much as the chorus and the paidagogos. He wants to put away the casket unopened (1380-1384). But then he realises that this problem must be faced, whatever the outcome, i.e. the adolescent must face the new problems, or else stay a child. He unwraps the casket.

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<sup>61</sup> The usual Euripidean dilemma: should I fly into the air, should I cross the ocean, should I crawl into the earth?

The second anagnorisis (1395-1467) resembles the one in the *Elektra*. Ion is at first very reluctant to accept Kreousa as his mother, the change from what he thought is too abrupt. He devises tests to make sure (1411-1437).<sup>62</sup> Eventually he accepts the tokens and their symbolism: the Gorgon picture, a chthonic monster related to Athens; the snake necklace, reference to the chthonic origin of Kekrops; the olive twig, symbol for the glory and spirituality of Athens. There follows the traditional hymn of joy (1437-1467) which here is a beautiful love scene.

In summary: Ion has not just found a mother, he has been accepted into Athenian society, both its spiritual life (the olive branch) and its autochthonous, traditional life (the serpents). As Goff<sup>63</sup> says this is very much like an initiation ceremony. And it gives Ion his adult identity. He has been admitted to adult (Athenian) society, but at a price. He has to accept its chthonic elements as well as the idealistic ones.

Now Ion has to define his attitude to his parents (1468-1517). He does not like Xouthos, yet he is his son. How can this be resolved? At last Kreousa confesses: the father is Apollo. This is Ion's best news yet; Apollo was his idealised father figure, he is most acceptable. As for his mother, she has done wrong, but this can be forgiven. Love finally overcomes the parents' shortcomings. It is, after all, possible to live in harmony with one's parents. But again at a cost: one must learn to accept one's parents with all their blemishes.

But now Ion has to take a stand on the religious issue (1523-1552). Apollo, too, has done wrong. He has committed rape, allowed his child to be exposed and, perhaps worst of all for one brought up at Delphi, has given a lying oracle. Can one accept such a blemished god or such a blemished ideal spiritual father?

Ion fights against having to give up his idealism. He tries to find all sorts of extenuating circumstances. Some of them reflect badly on his mother and here, too he tries to find kindly explanations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Verrall (1895) 147-152 made a lot of this scene showing how unconvincing the proof could be. To him it is a plot put up by Delphi. This expects too much of the ingenuity of the Athenian audience to grasp.

<sup>63</sup> Goff (1988) 45.

<sup>64</sup> It is interesting to compare Willett's (1958) 251 and Burnett's (1970) 123-4 translations of lines 1524-1526. They reflect opposite stances on the relative culpability of Apollo and Kreousa. Euripides, as so often, uses ambiguous words in an ambiguous situation.

Kreousa swears by Athene that it was Apollo. Athene is her adored city goddess, but if Apollo does not exist, what use swearing by Athene?<sup>65</sup>

Ion is not satisfied. Even granting that the divine rape is not a crime (there are, after all, many precedents), Apollo's oracle has still been a lie. Kreousa's answer is that it was done for Ion's benefit to fit him into Athenian society. A pragmatic argument which still leaves the Delphic oracle tainted.

Ion's religious and, in general, his whole idealistic approach has been thrown into turmoil and Kreousa's answer does not satisfy him. He will go to the temple and ask Apollo directly what the truth is. He will confront his god face to face (1546-1548). This, incidentally, is just what he advised Kreousa not to do in an earlier scene. The religious and idealistic question is not resolved.

In the epilogue (1553-1622) Athene gives her opinion. She pronounces unequivocally in favour of Kreousa's point of view. Apollo is the real father. He has ordered everything for the best. His plan went much further than any of the characters could realise. Ion is half Athenian and half divine. He will be the forebear of the Ionians. The political implications, so much stressed by Gregoire and others,<sup>66</sup> can hardly be denied. Without them lines 1571-1593 would be a completely meaningless interpolation.

Athene's argument is the pragmatic adult one. It suggests that to be adult and to be accepted into adult society means that one must forego one's childish idealism, faith and belief in a perfect world. One must view the world realistically and close one's mind to the possibility of perfection. Kreousa accepts the message fully and joyfully: I had lost my faith in Apollo, now I fully believe again. And this makes me very happy (paraphrase of 1609-1613). Athene approves of her decision (1614).

Xouthos and the chorus have long since come to the same conclusion and would, no doubt, agree, if they were asked.

This leaves us with the major question: how does Ion react to this? The answer is that we do not know. We need only compare the translations of the last few lines by Willetts and Burnett to see how either acceptance or rejection can be read into

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<sup>65</sup> As pointed out by Burnett (1962) 92.

<sup>66</sup> Gregoire 1965 *passim*.

them.<sup>67</sup> Euripides appears to be very obscure on the point. This may be ineptitude on his part, in that he failed to make his meaning clear in what is, after all, the major point of the play. Or else, and this seems much more likely to me, he refuses to give an opinion. His purpose is not to teach us the truth about religion and idealism, but to show the problems which mankind has in regard to them and how the adolescent has to cope with them.

#### Some further points

Apollo, though a major character, never appears on stage. His views are expounded by Hermes and Athene. To have put him on stage Euripides would have had to give him a likeable or unpleasant character thereby influencing the audience one way or the other instead of leaving him enigmatic. Similarly to the deities in the *Hippolytos* and other plays he can be taken as a person or as a personification of basic human attitudes, a symbol for an ordered universe.

Kreousa's character is beautifully drawn in many ways, but there are gaps. At no time does she exhibit any shame about having exposed her child. She blithely puts all the blame on Apollo. Kreousa is not the main character of the play, but acts (like all the other characters) as a foil to Ion's experiences.

#### What is Euripides' own view?

He is not trying to discuss the truth or fallacy of the various contentions. His purpose is to show how these contradictory points of view must, of necessity, impinge on the adolescent mind, cause doubt and problems and attempts at solutions. He very carefully refrains from suggesting the solutions himself.

Yet an overall message still emerges from the play. It is impossible to say whether Euripides consciously wanted to give it. It may be that an author's own view of life must inevitably colour his writing, even if he does not want to let it.

On taking such an overall view of the tragedy Ion and Kreousa emerge as extremely sympathetic and likeable characters. Xouthos, the paidagogos and the chorus do not. The difference between them is that the former two exhibit faith, idealism and love, to the latter these have no real meaning. In the change from childhood through adolescence into adulthood much is gained, but some very fine

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<sup>67</sup> In Willetts' version Ion says: "I shall accept the throne, it is a worthy prize" in a sarcastic way; Verrall and Vellacott agree with this. In Burnett's version these words imply full acceptance and Murray agrees with her.

things are in danger of being lost. To be a full human being one must get over blind acceptance and emotionalism, but one must try to retain some sort of faith, idealism and love. Else one will become a Xouthos, kindly and intelligent, no doubt, but lacking in something. At times, indeed, rather ridiculous.

Euripides will again tackle this problem, even more penetratingly, in the *Bakchai*.

## CHAPTER 16

### THE *BAKCHAI*

In the *Bakchai* Euripides squarely faces the problem of the clash between man's individuality and his social role, particularly in the field of religion<sup>1</sup>. The religion he uses to illustrate this is the Dionysiac one, admirably suited for the purpose, but it is important to realise that the basic problem is present in all religions; Euripides' message is for all times. If in this chapter I frequently use Christian terms, it is only that I know more about this than about other beliefs. The problem must also have existed in more orthodox and socialised Greek religion.<sup>2</sup>

#### Classical

Critics are unanimous in calling the *Bakchai* a superb play. Yet there is as much disagreement about its meaning as with any other Euripidean tragedy. The older critics were looking for a particular format: a hero, through his innate *hybris* (arrogant and violent pride) opposes the gods and is punished for it. The *Bakchai* can be made to fit this formula comfortably. Verrall<sup>3</sup> and Norwood<sup>4</sup> took their usual different line, regarding the play as pure irony; Dionysos is an amoral charlatan and the play is a virulent attack on religious bigotry. This, too, is a possible approach.

Since then virtually every commentator has realised that Euripides handles the evidence for these two points of view so impartially that it is impossible to accept either without ignoring large sections of the play.<sup>5</sup> Apart from this commentators have also seen other marked dichotomies: Rationality-Irrationality, Order-Chaos, Action-Inaction, Home-Nature, Male-Female, Tradition-Innovation, the Hunter-the Hunted, Νόμος-Φύσις, Peace-Violence, Being-Appearing.<sup>6</sup>

There have been three outstanding contributions.

<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of the word "religion" as used in this chapter see p.369.

<sup>2</sup> It is well brought out in Sokrates' attitude as depicted in Plato's *Apologia Sokratous*.

<sup>3</sup> Verrall (1910) *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Norwood (1908) *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> A number of articles have attempted to summarise the literature. Among them I single out Bremer (1976), Seidensticker (1972), Foley (1985). None of them, however, is very successful, because of the tremendous amount of overlap between authors. The same thought is liable to crop up over and over again in different publications in a bewildering array of combinations.

<sup>6</sup> A more complete list is given by Segal (1977).



Dodds<sup>7</sup> carefully discusses these various ambiguities whenever they occur. He had already hinted at them in a previous book.<sup>8</sup> He is almost as careful as Euripides in not taking sides. Winnington-Ingram<sup>9</sup> also stresses the fact that neither extreme can be ignored. Segal<sup>10</sup> goes into even more detail about the questions that arise from the play. He shows that there is a large variety of ways in which we can look at the action. We can use an anthropological approach: the play depicts rites of passage and religious rituals; a structuralist approach: the play tries to form a bridge between innate social polarities; a psychoanalytic approach: the action arises from the inborn drives in the various characters; and he adds an approach of his own: the play as metatragedy. Several of these approaches he had already foreshadowed in some of his earlier articles.<sup>11</sup>

The conclusion that emerges from these three is that there is no easy, obvious solution to the question of what Euripides meant to say. Obviously the *Bakchai* is a very complex play and there is sufficient evidence in the rest of Euripides' plays to show that he could very well have been interested in all these approaches.

Other critics tend to single out special topics for consideration. Here is a brief list of some of them: folklore, myth, religion and ritual;<sup>12</sup> versions of the Pentheus myth in literature<sup>13</sup> and art material;<sup>14</sup> the religious background, much of it based on Nilsson's monumental work<sup>15</sup> and how much resemblance there is to actual Athenian practice?;<sup>16</sup> the role of religious ritual in human society;<sup>17</sup> audience reaction;<sup>18</sup> political matters;<sup>19</sup> anti-feminine views;<sup>20</sup> the question of true σοφία;<sup>21</sup> man's

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<sup>7</sup> Dodds (1960).

<sup>8</sup> Dodds (1951).

<sup>9</sup> Winnington-Ingram (1969).

<sup>10</sup> Segal (1982).

<sup>11</sup> Segal (1977), (1978a), (1978b), (1985).

<sup>12</sup> This is particularly well done by Soyinka (1973) and Segal (1978a).

<sup>13</sup> For instance March (1989), Gregoire (1973).

<sup>14</sup> Van Straten (1976), Kirk (1970).

<sup>15</sup> Nilsson, M.P. (1955).

<sup>16</sup> These questions are discussed particularly by Versnel (1976), Seaford (1981), Dodds (1960), Gregoire (1973).

<sup>17</sup> The major exponents of this view are Segal (1982), Vellacott (1954), Foley (1985).

<sup>18</sup> The key publication here is Oranje's monograph (1984) *passim*, but Kitto (1966) 376-377, Kirk (1970) 3-6, Foley (1985) 220-221 and Fisher (1992) 179-183 have also tried this approach.

<sup>19</sup> Gregoire (1973) 237 considers that Euripides is hitting out at Athenian democracy and sophistry (as well as other things), Soyinka (1973) ix points to the position of the Helots and the question of land distribution, Carrière (1968) sees Dionysos as a portrait of Alkibiades, i.e. personal ambition rather than morality, and regards the play as an invective against the political blindness of the Athenian populace.

attempt to impose rationality and order on nature's irrationality and chaos?<sup>22</sup> Does Dionysos stand for anything but the dissolution of all such differences?<sup>23</sup>

Many critics have considered the psychology of the characters. This is usually of the granny variety: Pentheus and Agave are "mad".<sup>24</sup> Others use scientific terms loosely.<sup>25</sup> Yet others use a more sober psychiatric approach.<sup>26</sup> The psychoanalytic approach<sup>27</sup> has proved a very fruitful one and capable of explaining many of the actions of the characters, particularly Pentheus. From my previous studies I should say that such an attitude was by no means outside Euripides' scope. The possible influence of alcohol, and other drugs is also discussed.<sup>28</sup> Devereux<sup>29</sup> points out the astounding modernity of Kadmos' handling of his daughter, when compared to a modern psychiatric interview. I should like to single out here Rosenmeyer's views,<sup>30</sup> as they are related to the one I shall put forward in later sections. According to him Pentheus is a whole man who tries to understand both the rational and the irrational and is therefore particularly vulnerable to Dionysos.

### Psychiatric

Human action can hardly ever be attributed to a single cause. Various drives act on the mind simultaneously and the end result depends on the balance between them. When two such drives act in opposite directions a state of strain exists, which is liable to cause the unpleasant symptoms of anxiety.<sup>31</sup> The joint action of the opposed drives results in incomplete expression of either in decision or action.

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<sup>20</sup> Particularly Nancy (1984), but also Segal (1978b) 185 and 190.

<sup>21</sup> Arrowsmith (1959) 145; March (1989) 65; Rosenmeyer (1968) 159; Sale (1974) *passim*; Kitto (1961) 377-381.

<sup>22</sup> Dyer (1964) 21ff.

<sup>23</sup> Segal (1978a) 141ff; Segal (1977) 103.

<sup>24</sup> For instance March (1989) 54; Blaiklock (1952) 228.

<sup>25</sup> Thus Dyer (1964) 22 regards Pentheus as a hysteric, which he is not, in any modern accepted sense of the word (see my discussion in connection with the *Troades* and *Andromache*). Musitelli (1968) 104-106 talks about "Mass hysteria" and "autohypnosis" and classifies Pentheus as a "hystero-epileptic", Blaiklock (1952) 227 talks of the "hypnotic powers" of Dionysos. None of this needs to be taken very seriously.

<sup>26</sup> Glenn (1979) *passim* provides a useful review of psychological interpretations of the play.

<sup>27</sup> Particularly in the hands of Segal (1978a), Segal (1982) and Sale (1974), though many other critics also use psychoanalytic jargon.

<sup>28</sup> Thomson (1979) *passim*; Seaford (1987) 76.

<sup>29</sup> Devereux (1970) *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenmeyer (1983) 383.

<sup>31</sup> Linn (1967) 568 defines the word in the following way: "Anxiety may be defined as a disagreeable emotional state in which there are feelings of impending danger, characterised by uneasiness, tension or apprehension. The cause is usually unconscious or unrecognised intrapsychic conflict. Anxiety is associated with a characteristic pattern of autonomic nervous system discharge

Repression into the subconscious is the most common mechanism of dealing with this (see page 37). When successful, this mechanism not only causes lessening of anxiety, but, by altering the balance of the conflicting drives, allows a much more efficient expression of the remaining one. A person who has used it will feel, and indeed be, capable of feats quite impossible for him in his previous state.<sup>32</sup>

These are purely psychic phenomena. They can be greatly enhanced by external circumstances. I shall discuss some of these now, not claiming to give a complete account, but only as far as they apply to an understanding of the *Bakchai*.

### Drugs

A large number of drugs affect the nervous system and, hence, many of them, the mind. These are known as psychotropic drugs. If they thereby reduce anxiety they are called anxiolytics. By far the best known of these is alcohol. Its action in removing inhibitions has been known since antiquity (*in vino veritas*). A large variety of plants contain psychotropic substances (usually alkaloids). It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that the plants particularly associated with Dionysos were not only the vine, but also ivy and yew which contain such alkaloids.<sup>33</sup> Fungi may also be worth mentioning in passing in this connection. They are known to have been used in orgiastic rites by many cultures. They may have been used in this way in the Dionysiac rites, though the evidence for this is far from complete.<sup>34</sup>

### The Influence of Society

In very many cases the psychic conflict is between personal, usually selfish, drives and inhibitory drives due to the demands of society. This may, of course, vary between different societies and their subcultures. Conformity to such a sub-group will not only reduce a person's own anxiety, but add the weight of his opinion to the general feeling of the crowd and thereby, in turn, affect other individuals in the same way. There is thus a very strong impulse for most people to form such subgroups.

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involving altered rhythm of respiration, increased heart rate, pallor, dryness of the mouth, increased sweating and musculo-skeletal disturbance involving trembling and feelings of weakness.

<sup>32</sup> Hypnosis is one means of separating the effects of conflicting drives and a person under hypnosis may perform quite sensational feats.

<sup>33</sup> The leaves of both these plants, when chewed, have pronounced toxic effects including excitement, lessening of anxiety and hallucinations. Cooper (1958) 110 and 196.

<sup>34</sup> The active ingredient of the common European toadstool appears to be mainly muscarine, which can itself produce hallucinations, but several other species contain well recognised hallucinogens, such as psilocybin. Cooper (1974) 186.

Hence the frequent occurrence of gangs, clubs, religious splinter groups, political associations and suchlike.

This aspect of group behaviour is, on the whole, treated by psychiatry in a somewhat stepmotherly fashion.<sup>35</sup> We need to go to the sociological literature to find it discussed more extensively.

In the following I shall base myself mainly on two standard sociological works.<sup>36</sup> But in this field, too, there are many theories on crowd action and lamentably few established facts.<sup>37</sup>

### Rationality

Each group will regard its own behaviour as rational and everyone else' as irrational.<sup>38</sup> Such terms should therefore not be used in commenting on crowd behaviour. They only introduce the observer's own bias.<sup>39</sup>

### Group Mind

There is considerable argument whether it is useful to speak of a "group mind" as distinct from the minds of the individuals composing the group or collectivity.

There is much support for the idea that such group activities as festivals and rituals can act as a public safety valve releasing tension in individuals which could otherwise become disruptive. This has not been lost on some of the commentators on the *Bakkhai*.<sup>40</sup>

### Deprivation and Causation

Barber<sup>41</sup> proposed, particularly in connection with Messianic movements, that deprivation is a potent cause for the formation of splinter groups. A number of people feeling deprived join and find comfort in each other. This would fit well into the *Bakchai* where the Greek women, deprived of political rights, are the ones to take up the new Dionysiac movement avidly.

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<sup>35</sup> Though it is utilised to a partial extent in modern Group Therapy.

<sup>36</sup> Turner and Killian (1957) and Smelser (1962).

<sup>37</sup> Smelser (1962) 3.

<sup>38</sup> We shall find this expressed in the *Bakchai* as the problem of σοφία.

<sup>39</sup> Turner (1957) 13-14.

<sup>40</sup> See the classical section.

<sup>41</sup> Barber (1941) 663-669.

### Rumours

Rumours are readily believed by people with a particular axe to grind. In a closed group they spread rapidly and from frequent repetition come to be accepted as true. They often act as triggers for concerted action.<sup>42</sup>

### Conformity and Deviation

An individual before joining a group has to decide between these alternatives: will he conform to the rules of the group, deny them, or keep an open mind?<sup>43</sup>

### Identity

The more he conforms to the group the greater his reward will be in terms of relief from anxiety and efficiency of action. But this means submerging his identity in that of the group which is a very real stumbling block. Half-hearted conformity will at the best lead to mediocre gains or may even aggravate his personal doubts.

### The Outsider

The whole reason for the existence of the group is their shared belief. Anyone who challenges it threatens the group and will be regarded as an enemy. If he is a member of the group he will appear as a traitor and the utmost hostility will be shown to him. Such a hostile reaction will unite a group even further, its effects on individual members will be amplified and they may become prone to deeds of violence quite outside their normal personalities.

### The Lynching Mob

This is discussed in detail by Turner<sup>44</sup> with several examples given. It shows how the various factors mentioned above mutually interact to produce so startling a result. The crowd interacts, mutually encouraging each other and thus enabling each other to suppress their ordinary, conflicting attitudes more and more severely, until they are capable of the most horrendous actions.

### The Leader

Instead of finding relief from opposing psychic drives through the approval of a group, some people find similar relief from the approval of a special charismatic person, the leader. Such often arise within a group and reinforce its psychological benefits, as well as directing the activities of the group into efficient channels.

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<sup>42</sup> Peterson (1957), 68-79.

<sup>43</sup> Smelser (1960) 29.

<sup>44</sup> Turner (1957) 102-119.

## RELIGIOUS

### Religion

Religion is man's attitude to the Supernatural. It must of necessity have two aspects: the individual's personal attitude and that of the group to which he belongs with its dogmata and rituals. The relative stress on these two will vary in different religions, cults and sects as may the moral content but they must be present in all. It is for this reason that I feel free to compare certain aspects of religion as discussed in the *Bakchai* with problems encountered in Christian experience. I could just as well have used Islamic or Buddhist terms, but expect that both the reader and I will know more about the former.

### Faith

This word has acquired special and emotional connotations in Christian belief, which it would be wrong to apply to a pre-Christian play. For the purpose of this chapter I define it as: the willingness to believe something to be good and true, because based on higher authority, even if it appears to conflict with commonsense and one's own natural ideas of what is right.

### The Religious Group

A Christian congregation is made up of a number of individuals who attend church activities for a variety of reasons. Here is a list of some of them; their similarity to the characters of the *Bakchai* will become evident as the chapter proceeds.

(a) The Hypocrite

He attends church for social reasons. He does not believe a word he hears but pretends to do so.

(b) The Insurer

He, too, does not really believe anything he hears. However, just in case there should be some truth about the matter after all, he goes through the prescribed motions in order to avoid any possible Divine retribution later on.

(c) The Sunday Christian

He is capable of keeping his faith and his rational "common sense" in watertight compartments. On Sundays he follows the one, on weekdays the other.

(d) Rip van Winkle

He loves the atmosphere of his church, finds surcease of his problems in its fellowship, the predictability of its set ritual, the time-hallowed antiquity of the church, and he loves the tunes of the hymns.

(e) The Happy Clapper

He finds solace by submerging his own personality completely in group activities. When they clap, he claps, when they shout Hallelujah, he shouts with them and lustily at that.

(e) The Individualist

He has been brought up to treasure his individuality. Trying to merge with a religious group only causes acute embarrassment.

(f) The Synthetiser

He remains fully aware of the differences between a Christian and a worldly outlook and tries to reconcile the two by "explaining" the message of the church on rational grounds. This is a pursuit which is intellectually satisfying but emotionally sterile.

(g) The Satisfied

He has arrived at a satisfactory compromise. Very often he has reached a pleasant social status and is loathe to upset the applecart.

(h) The Blind Acceptor

When there is a conflict between dogma and his personal beliefs he accepts the former, ascribing his own feelings to personal incompetence or the devil.

(j) The Born Again Christian

Contrary to what his previous attitude had been he has suddenly learnt to appreciate the beauty of the Christian message and has thrown himself wholeheartedly into carrying it out. For a while he is buoyed up by tremendous energy and faith, but very frequently these sudden conversions do not last.

(k) The Faithful Plodder

Like the Born Again he has changed his attitude towards an acceptance of the Christian message. But in his case this has been a slow and prolonged process, with many advances and retreats. Faith gained in this fashion is much more lasting.

(l) The Seeker

To his intellect much of what he hears in church seems nonsensical. Yet he is impressed by the fact that many people, whom he admires, appear to find something in it. He is honest enough to appreciate that he could be missing something important. He therefore joins a church group trying to find out what it is that his friends see in it.

(m) The Trier

He is one of a large number of people who never reach a satisfactory solution. He goes on year after year battling and trying to understand. Eventually he comes to realise that intellectual exercise cannot give an answer to spiritual matters, but at the same time he is intellectually too honest to accept anything which seems definitely untrue to him. He longs for "faith" in the hope that all will be revealed to him eventually.

(n) The Experimenter

He begins as a trier but considers it insufficient to wait for faith to come to him. He immerses himself in church affairs in the hope that by giving freely of himself he will eventually receive in return.

(o) The Perfect Christian

He would have complete and perfect faith, never again to be shaken by doubts. I do not believe he can exist. Even the apostles in the Bible failed.<sup>45</sup> Christ himself, on the cross, said: "Oh Lord, why hast Thou forsaken me?"<sup>46</sup> The human frame is not made to be capable of such unshakeable faith at all times.

In analysing the *Bakchai* I shall frequently refer to these religious and sociological categories and shall then indicate them with an \*.

### Overview

As pointed out before there have been a wide variety of approaches to the *Bakchai*, many of them of great value. The approach adopted in this chapter is in line with most of them and yet differs greatly in its conclusions. Its basic tenet is that Euripides urges us, as he does in many of his plays, not to judge prematurely. The stranger can (and has been) seen as a god or an impostor, Semele's pregnancy by Zeus may be true or a fabrication, the palace miracle may or may not have happened, there

<sup>45</sup> "Oh ye of little faith!" Matthew 14 31.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 27 46.



may or may not have been sexual aspects to the cult of Dionysos, the various characters may be speaking with conviction or mistakenly or lying. I hope to point out in the following that Euripides is careful to leave open the possibility for either view in each case. In the end he has not made a single pronouncement but has put the facts fairly before the audience who are then invited to judge for themselves.

Pentheus has been seen as a rational hero, as a blind fool, as the victim of his own innate violence and sexual hang-ups. In the following analysis I shall attempt to portray him as an honest seeker after truth, intelligent and logical, but aware of the claims of religious faith and developing through a number of stages towards a deeper understanding.

On this view the play is a serious study of man's varying attitudes towards the Unknowable and Divine and his struggle towards a conclusion. The other characters depict other ways of undertaking this struggle, as outlined in the psychiatric and the religious sections, to both of which I shall frequently refer.

In discussing the play I shall lay only little stress on those facets which have already been discussed competently by others, but dwell on those which appear to justify my approach.

## **THE BAKCHAI**

### **Part 1 : 1-641**

In the prologue (1-63) the crucial contrast is outlined. The clue lies in the two versions of the Semele story, both of which are related with absolute fairness. From now on Euripides will refer to the actor in the smiling mask as "the stranger", leaving open the question whether he is a god or an impostor. This is necessary for the story of the play to proceed. If he were clearly a god to all the actors in the drama the problem would cease to exist. Agave has changed from a cynical unbeliever to an enthusiastic convert. She is the Born Again Christian\*.

The parodos (64-167) introduces the chorus, which in this play has a very definite point of view, in contrast to most other Greek choruses. They firmly believe in the god; serving him is a hard, but sweet labour; everyone should be converted to this view (65-71); blessed is the believer! (72-82); there is much beauty and ease in his worship (fawn skins, pipes, milk, wine and honey), wild beauty and ecstasy (135-167).

The chorus have completely embraced faith over intellectual doubts. They find relief by merging in the group mind\*; they are the Happy Clappers\* and Blind Acceptors\*.

Teiresias' and Kadmos' first appearance is undoubtedly a comedy scene (170-214). The two old men totter onto the stage, dressed in juvenile bacchantic garb. They mutually support each other, physically as well as emotionally. As so often in Euripides the comedy is used to undercut the credibility of the characters.<sup>47</sup> The audience is warned not to take their coming attitudes too seriously. Note here the first appearance of the word σοφός (178); this, together with its related σοφία, σόφρων, ἔμφρων will turn up over and over again throughout the play, with the general meaning: "of sound mind". It will be contrasted with another group of words, such as μανία, ἔκφρων, ἀλήτης suggesting "out of one's mind". Each character will describe his own actions as σοφία his opponent's as μανία (page 367), or sometimes he will use σοφία for his opponent as well, giving it then the flavour: "too clever for his own good", with a sly dig at sophists and philosophers as compared to "sound" religious people.

Pentheus defines his stance in a monologue (215-247). He has heard rumours of the women leaving their homes for feigned (πλάσταισιν) revels in honour of Dionysos, whoever he may be (ὅστις ἔστι). We note that he has not yet made up his mind about the god. But the women's activities certainly sound suspect: they drink to excess, creep off to the bushes and are said to indulge in fornication. If so, this must be stopped. As for their seducer, he appears to be a foreigner, a fop, a charlatan, ingratiating himself to women. The Semele story is an obvious fraud; common sense dictates that she must have lain with a man. Pentheus is, for the present, an agnostic.

The attitudes of the three men clash in the first agon (248-369). Pentheus is shocked by the undignified behaviour and dress of his elders. They attempt to convert him to religion: Teiresias' main effort is to make some of its outrageous claims more palatable. Thus he tries to explain away the baby in Zeus' thigh as a μέρος αἴθηρος (piece of the aether 292), using very sophistic language.<sup>48</sup> He is the Synthetiser\* and Satisfied\*. Kadmos is even more blatant: even if there is no god, let us pretend there is

<sup>47</sup> e.g. *Herakleidai*, *Orestes*, *Ion*, *Helene*, *Andromache*.

<sup>48</sup> The Athenian audience would recognise it as such and very likely find it offensive or ridiculous.

(καταψεύδομαι carries a clear connotation of lying deliberately). It will give our family political clout. He is the Hypocrite\* or, at best the Insurer\*.

Pentheus can only assume that Teiresias is acting with an eye to his comfortable income.<sup>49</sup> He is not impressed by either man's sham religion. The scene ends in comedy again: "it would be deplorable (αἰσχρὸν) for two old men to tumble down together" (365).

The chorus, in the first stasimon (370-433), resume the arguments of Teiresias and Kadmos. But in their case they speak not from "cleverness" but with utmost conviction. Their beautiful language is a haunting expression of the beauty religion can offer. They contrast the joy to be found in submission to the god with the evils of the unbridled tongue (386): cleverness is not wisdom (playing on the two meanings of σοφός). They will believe what the majority (τὸ πλῆθος 430) do. The chorus may be Happy Clappers\* but they are utterly sincere.

In contrast to the highly poetic language of the previous scene the henchman bringing in the stranger in fetters talks in everyday common language (434-452). But for all that his tale is disturbing. Throughout the arrest the villain has remained pleasant, courteous and utterly unafraid. This is not the attitude of an impostor. The simple henchman was so impressed that he was moved to apologise to his prisoner for having to carry out his duty. Pentheus too is impressed, much more so than by Teiresias' and Kadmos' specious arguments. He unties the prisoner's hands and studies him.

Now Pentheus has come up against the Spiritual face to face in the second agon (435-519). He looks the prisoner up and down and comments on his beauty.<sup>50</sup> He asks him a series of questions. Some commentators have taken this as proof of his cruelty - he is baiting the helpless prisoner, others of his common sense - he is appalled by the latter's gibberish. There is no evidence for either view in the text. Pentheus is a reasonable man who wishes to ascertain the facts of the matter before making a decision. He is the Seeker\*, the Man outside the Group\*, observing it.

<sup>49</sup> We note here the similarity to Sophokles' *Oidipous*, who similarly accused Teiresias of being venal.

<sup>50</sup> This has been seen as a violent denunciation of the stranger's foppishness; a proof of Pentheus' innate sexuality, perhaps even homosexuality; or his injured male pride. Mikalson (1991) considers that Pentheus mocks the god. There is, however, nothing in the text to support these views. If Euripides had such things in mind he did not make them clear. The scenelet may just as easily be read as a true appreciation of something beautiful about the stranger.

The stranger's answers are equally straightforward from a religious point of view.<sup>51</sup> In direct contrast to Teiresias' sophistic arguments, the stranger answers in two ways: when the question is factual he answers simply; when of a spiritual nature he refuses to answer, on the grounds that a non-believer simply cannot understand. These are matters not for the intellect, but for faith. Pentheus appreciates the way of these answers: "your enigmatic answers are well phrased to stimulate my interest" (475); "well avoided!" (479). But he is the king and must make a decision. He orders imprisonment in the stables and threatens the chorus with enslavement if they do not cease their nonsense. He is by now the Individualist\* who cannot allow himself to merge with the group. He is tempted, but cannot accept.

The chorus are terrified (the second stasimon 520-575). They feel rejected (533) and pray to their god to perform a miracle on their behalf (553-555). Their prayer is answered. A voice announces the coming event<sup>52</sup> and fire and earthquake gut the king's palace before the eyes of the frenzied women.

There is much argument about how much of this is seen on the stage. I firmly follow the school of thought which believes that nothing happens on stage, for the following reasons:

- (a) (a minor reason) there would have been considerable technical difficulty in simulating an earthquake on the primitive Greek stage.<sup>53</sup>
- (b) as in the very similar scene in the *Herakles*, characters come and go on the stage thereafter, but not one of them refers to the devastation. Pentheus will be upset only about the stranger's escape, not his own palace.
- (c) Euripides has shown in the *Orestes* that he is perfectly capable of letting a character enact on stage what only happens in his own mind.
- (d) To introduce an indubitable miracle would destroy the playwright's carefully arranged scheme of keeping both alternative implications open. If the quake and fire are seen to happen it surely follows that Dionysos is a god and Pentheus a blasphemer.

<sup>51</sup> Some critics have read sophistry into them, but this is very difficult to maintain.

<sup>52</sup> A common trick of Euripides': when he wishes to leave open the question of the divine provenance of a pronouncement he puts it in the way of a disembodied voice. Cf. *Andromache*, *IT*. It will also recur in the second messenger speech.

<sup>53</sup> Dodds (1960) 147-149 suggests that perhaps one or two stones fall off the parapet. This might have been technically feasible, but would surely be anticlimactic at such a tense and dramatic moment. The matter is discussed by Arnott (1962) 125.

If nothing happens on stage, the audience can still believe in a miracle or take it that these events happen only in the minds of these highly disturbed young women.

Miracles are a two-edged sword in religion. They are powerful tools in persuading a doubter of the existence and power of the deity. But if, by any chance, such a miracle is later shown to be capable of a perfectly natural explanation - and very many miracles are - then a faith based on them will crumble, and leave the person in a worse state than before.<sup>54</sup>

The stranger reappears (604-641). At first he gently chides the chorus for their lack of faith (610ff). Then he recounts what happened in the palace. What happened to the king may again seem a miracle. Taken at face value he was struck with "madness" by the god. Taken symbolically, and most modern critics take it as such, Pentheus was not fighting earthly events but inner desires. According to some these are his sexual obsessions, his fear of women, his injured male pride, his violence. I should suggest that it may quite as well be taken that he is fighting a burgeoning longing for the certainty of faith, when he is not yet ready to forego his individuality to achieve it. The rich symbolism does not suffer from taking it this way. He fights the god, first in the shape of a bull; that is he refuses to allow his repressed drives (sexual and otherwise) to come to the surface. We have seen in the *Elektra* and *Hippolytos* that Euripides was well aware of such problems. There is no need to blow this up into the main message of the play.<sup>55</sup> Then Pentheus fights Dionysos in the shape of fire, which both purifies and threatens to absorb and destroy the individual, and finally in the shape of a man; he is liable to lose his social position (his kingship, his manhood) if he surrenders.<sup>56</sup> Pentheus has failed to keep his inner longings under control.

## **THE BAKCHAI**

### **Part 2 : 642-1152**

In the third agon (642-659) Pentheus once again faces the stranger who embodies his longing for the spiritual life. It is notable here, in view of what many critics have said about Dionysos' burning for revenge, that he shows absolutely no

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<sup>54</sup> Jesus was well aware of this: "Now you believe because you have seen. Blessed is he who believes when he has not seen!" John 20: 29

<sup>55</sup> As done by those critics who want to make Pentheus a picture of frustrated sexuality.

<sup>56</sup> We have seen Euripides' awareness of social status in the *Andromache* and other plays.

evidence of anger. He is friendly, rational, listens attentively to Pentheus' questions and answers them simply.

"Oh clever, clever you!" explains the exasperated king "except where it really counts". And the stranger's answer: "On the contrary, my cleverness is exactly where it is needed". The question of "σοφία" is coming towards a climax.

The stranger realises that further argument would be useless. If the king will not believe him, perhaps he will learn from an honest, unbiased man. "Listen to this messenger!" (657)

In the messenger's tale (660-777) Pentheus' resolve is assailed not by intellectual argument but a series of vivid pictures; the mood of the music would have gone a long way towards reinforcing their varying moods. It begins with a lyrical (677-713) description of the beauty and peace of nature at sunrise. The messenger saw the bacchants, neither drunk nor dissolute, as had been claimed, but utterly relaxed and at peace with themselves and nature; they suckled fawns and wolf cubs at their breasts. All the necessities were provided for them: again, water, wine, milk and honey stand for everything one can wish for.

The crude world intruded upon this spiritual idyll (714-733). One man looked only for personal gain: "Let us catch them and the king will reward us handsomely!" He is the Sunday Christian\* who forgets all about religion when his personal advantage is at stake.

But the hunted became the hunter (734-763). An external attack unifies the group and leads to violent reprisals\*. The attackers were repulsed, but group violence, once started, does not stop there. The women became a Lynching Mob\* and invaded the neighbouring countryside, pillaging and looting. The villagers were powerless against them.

To sum up what the honest messenger has relayed to the king: do not fight religion, you can find incredible peace and beauty there; if you do you will unleash untold violence; you cannot win, one cannot fight a spiritual movement with an army. The two adversaries face each other yet again (778-846); Pentheus exasperated: "I no longer know how to wrestle with this man; whether he argues or stays silent, he will not leave me in peace" (800-801); the stranger still calm and smiling, giving good advice in spite of having been badly treated (787-790).

Many critics comment that there is a sudden break at line 810 with Pentheus collapsing and the stranger turning vicious. I do not agree. Their behaviour follows logically from what went on before. Pentheus at last gives up his determined struggle against losing his identity and merging with the religious group. The vital passage is 811-812: "Would you like to see the bacchants lying close together (συγκαθημένως)?" "I should give a wealth of gold, to do so!"

The crucial word is "see" (ἰδεῖν). The voyeurist school take it to mean he wants to be a peeping Tom. But after the messenger's tale he ought to know that there is nothing of that kind to be seen. Ἰδεῖν may easily mean "see", in the sense of: "Oh, I see." He wants to understand. He will join the group, but as an observer. He is turning from the Seeker\* to the Experimenter\*.

But to join the group fully would mean getting drunk<sup>57</sup> and dressing in their ridiculous clothes. This he still finds utterly repugnant and struggles against it.<sup>58</sup> But his desire to understand fully is too great. He storms out promising to think about it (843).

Left alone on stage with the chorus the stranger sums up what has happened so far and hints at the inevitable future. Pentheus is in his power (847-861).

For those critics who have all along taken the stranger to be a god he is avenging the slight on his divinity with "madness". Those who saw him as a personalised force of nature "madness" is only one of his many attributes. As he enters Pentheus, "madness" enters with him. To those who see him as a personification of Pentheus' long suppressed drives this is the breaking out of the repressed tendencies, which makes him liable to act in an unusual ("mad") way. If we regard him as the personification of Pentheus' longing for the peace and beauty of submerging his individuality in that of the group or divinity, this is the final take-over of this attitude. From now on the young king will act in a way different from his normal, rational, individualistic approach. He will utterly lack σοφία in its worldly sense, but have gained σοφία in its spiritual sense.

We should compare this "madness" to that of Herakles in the play of the same name, and to a lesser extent Orestes'. In those plays, too, the "madness" could be seen

<sup>57</sup> See p. 380.

<sup>58</sup> The term "transvestism" is used by a number of critics for this. This is an abuse of the term. There is no evidence whatsoever that Pentheus obtains any sort of sexual gratification from the act.



as the wilful act of a god, or as arising directly from the character's mental state or illness.

In their third stasimon (862-911) the chorus contrast the peace of merging with the god and the group with the folly of aiming only towards one's own advantage.<sup>59</sup>

No critic has ever doubted that the next scene (912-976) is comedy; Pentheus is ludicrous in his dress as well as his behaviour, but few have tried to explain why Euripides should have put a comedy scene in this most dramatic point of the play. Nor do many commentators worry very much about the cause of Pentheus' strange behaviour. The majority just call him "mad", either made so by the god or as a result of his psychological hang-ups. Yet the symptoms are perfectly clear-cut and recognisable:

- (a) Diplopia (double vision) (918-920)
- (b) Illusions and hallucinations (920-923)
- (c) Exhibitionism and consciously funny behaviour (sometimes known as "Witzelsucht") (925-926)
- (d) Loss of inhibitions (929-930)
- (e) Suggestibility (937-938)
- (f) A feeling of being able to do anything (945-950)
- (g) Uncovering of subconscious desires, normally repressed (962-963)
- (h) Illogical sense of achievement (962-963)
- (i) Difficulty in gait as implied by line 968: "Someone else will carry you out".

Any one of these symptoms can occur in a variety of abnormal mental states, but there is only one which will show them all and that is intoxication. The main suspect for an intoxicating agent is, of course, alcohol, though other intoxicants, such as cannabis, cocaine and fungal products (page 366) could also present this picture.

The symptoms of alcoholic intoxication are well known and were so in 5th century Athens, particularly the diplopia and hallucinations (the pink elephant of popular fame). A number of critics has picked this up and rather halfheartedly suggested that Pentheus may be drunk. But this was denied by the great majority.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The refrain (877-881 and 897-901) is, in fact very difficult to understand in this context. There is no room here to discuss it at length. I take it to mean that the devout but unintellectual chorus find it difficult to decide between the divine command to lose one's individuality and the worldly tendency to stand up for one's rights.

<sup>60</sup> See the discussion by Dodds (1960) 209, but later commentators have also taken up the argument.



Whether one defends the religious or the cynical approach to the tragedy, a drunken scene seems completely out of place. But there is perfect sense in this if we believe that Pentheus has by this stage become the Experimenter\*. He has dosed himself with wine (the gift of the god) and the audience are invited to realise this right from the beginning. They may and, indeed, should laugh at him. The comedy is essential, if brutal. Here is this previously dignified and rational king who has given up everything for the sake of finding the certainty of religious faith: he has lost his dignity, his kingship, his manhood, he has given up his intellect and critical faculties. The funnier his drunken antics on stage the more horrible the scene becomes.

The scenelet finishes by the stranger saying (975): " I am leading him towards a great ἀγών. I and Bromios (the god) shall be the victors". If he has already struck Pentheus with madness the battle is over. What further ἀγών is there to come? But if Pentheus is still struggling towards faith and acceptance into the group, then, indeed, the climax of the struggle is still to come.

In the fourth stasimon (978-1023) the strophe declares that the group will not accept Pentheus. In the antistrophe Pentheus is seen as a raving wild animal. The text is badly mutilated here, the general meaning appears to be: leave cleverness (σοφία) to the rationalist, my joy lies elsewhere, in behaving reverently and accepting the god. The epode is an invocation of the god, very similar to the one preceding the palace miracle. "Come as a bull or a dragon and cast your noose. Come with your ever-smiling countenance."

The second messenger speech (1024-1152) again begins with a lyrical description of nature, which, however, now lies in a brooding silence. The bacchants are still engaged in their innocent pursuits. They come into Pentheus' view, but the king complains he cannot see (ὄρᾶν). This has been variously interpreted: he is not close enough to see clearly, he has been magically blinded, he cannot see what he has come to see (the sexual misbehaviour). I should suggest the meaning: he can see, but, still outside the group, he cannot experience what they experience. He climbs a tree to observe more closely.

A loud voice commands the bacchants to attack the spy.<sup>61</sup> It is Agave who first accepts it as a divine command and leads the attack. The previously loose group

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<sup>61</sup> See p.375, n.52.

turns into a Lynching Mob\* (ἔμμανεῖς = raving) once they have found a Leader\*. In vain does Pentheus appeal to reason: "It is I, mother, your son" (1118). He acknowledges his ἄμαρτία (error). In line with the ambivalence of the whole play this can be taken that he repents either of having opposed the god<sup>62</sup> or of having got himself into this impossible situation. The lynching mob is beyond reason and tear him to pieces.

1122-1136 is a description of Agave: foaming at the mouth, roving eyes, οὐ φρονοῦσα (without rational thought), κατείχεται (driven on). This is a standard description of the "madman", derived mainly from the postepileptic state. Euripides has used it in the *Herakles*, *Orestes*, *IT* and *Phoinissai*. In each case the description was by a messenger, who would naturally interpret what he sees in terms of his own understanding.<sup>63</sup> We should refrain from concluding that this is Euripides' opinion. He is too accurate an observer to be content with such a generalised view of "madness". Her appearance when on stage will be quite different.

The messenger sums up his own view on what has happened (1148-1152): "It is best to be of sound mind (σώφρων) and revere the gods. To stick to this view is the wisest acquisition (σοφὸν κτήμα) a man can have". Not for us to judge a god's actions.

## **THE BAKCHAI**

### **Part 3 : 1153-1392**

Pentheus has run his course. From being an agnostic he has gradually become intrigued by the lure of religion, has fought against it, tried to understand, tried to experience its transports, but has failed. He is essentially an intellectual man and the religious experience cannot be comprehended intellectually. He has only succeeded in making himself ridiculous and has so upset the committed group that they have turned against him in a lynching episode and he has lost his life.

If the play were about Pentheus' character, it should end here. But the purpose of the tragedy is to investigate how religion affects different people. From here on we shall have a tragedy of Agave, Kadmos (and the chorus).

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<sup>62</sup> Dodds (1960) 216-217.

<sup>63</sup> He would, in fact, be too far off to see all these details.

The exodos begins (1153-1167) with the chorus' reaction to these events. At first they see them as a beautiful victory for their god (καλλινίκος), but soon realise that only grief can come of it (εἰς γόον). Their final stance is ambiguous: Καλὸς ἀγών (a fine contest 1163) may be taken literally or ironically. Their attitude to the still ecstatic Agave is at first sympathetic, but becomes progressively cooler as she shows herself more and more demented. They call her τλαμίων (unfortunate 1184) where she rejoices; agree that the head somewhat resembles a lion's, where she maintains it is; laconically say: "I praise" (ἐπαινῶ 1193), where she seeks adulation and eventually recoil in horror (1200-1201), when she invites them to a victory feast where Pentheus will provide the meat. There is a limit to the credulity of even the Blind Acceptor\*.

Agave is still in an ecstatic mood and utterly demented.<sup>64</sup> She successively views the object in her hand as a sprig of ivy (1170), a lion (1174) and a calf (1185); she feels almost at one with the god, her fellow hunter (1189-1191); even barehanded she, a female, is superior to armed male hunters. (This would have shocked the Athenian audience more than anything.) Agave has become an object of hatred, pity, ridicule and puzzlement to everybody, all at the same time.

In the following scenelet (1216-1301) Kadmos slowly and very gently talks her out of her ecstatic state. He is a very different man from the one we saw before. He has come face to face with the supernatural and been stripped of all the pomposity and prevarications; he laments the ruin of his house in simple, heartfelt language. This magnificently constructed scene employs completely modern psychiatric techniques for dealing with a patient such as Agave, as has been very competently pointed out by Devereux, whose article is well worth consulting.<sup>65</sup> At last Agave realises what she has done and she is shattered.

After line 1329 there is a gap in the transmitted text of about 50 lines. We can reasonably reconstruct the stage events, partly from what comes before and after it, partly from some surviving fragments, partly from the writing of Apsines (3rd century

<sup>64</sup> Dementia is defined as the mental state of a person no longer in contact with reality after having been so previously. It is nowadays regarded as occurring mostly in organic brain disease, but the differentiation from psychotic disorders may be difficult.

<sup>65</sup> Devereux (1970) *passim*.

A.D.) and partly from a comparison with the *Christus Patiens*, a 12th century Christian work, closely modelled on the *Bakchai*.<sup>66</sup>

The actor in the smiling mask reappears and ascends the *theologeion*. He is now clearly the god Dionysos and delivers the epilogue. It seems to me that, as in the *Elektra*, this falls into two parts. In the first the god explains what has happened in general terms. It is impossible to say with any certainty what attitude he took. In the second part he deals with the psychological and religious problems of the surviving characters. Some of this is extant (1330-1392).

We first saw Kadmos as the Hypocrite\* or Insurer\*. Now he has been brought face to face with the great mysteries of life and religion and is "converted". He admits he has acted out of ὕβρις; he has done wrong! (1344). "Like you and I, Pentheus erred in not revering the god. We have all incurred the same blame." (1302-1307)

But his belief is very different from the joyous (and sometimes violent) belief of the bacchants. His is based on a feeling of personal guilt and he has learned understanding, sorrow and forgiveness. Nor is his attitude to the god as uncritical as the bacchants'. He feels the punishment was deserved, but excessive (1249 and 1346). "A god should not liken himself to humans by giving way to anger." (1348)<sup>67</sup>

Dionysos prophesies what will happen to the old king.<sup>68</sup> He will return to be a great secular king and leader of nations. He will lead innumerable barbarian hordes victoriously. But when he comes up against Delphi, the spiritual, he will fail again.<sup>69</sup> The leopard cannot change its spots. Kadmos will remain what he has always been. In the end he will be admitted to the Isles of the Blessed (1339), not as a reward for his efforts, but as a gift of the gods.

Agave reacts differently. She had been an agnostic, later the Born Again Christian\*, now her faith has crumbled completely. She will go to where the holy mountain cannot see her and she cannot see it any more; where there is no knowledge

<sup>66</sup> The matter is well discussed by Dodds (1960) 234-235 and in his appendix 243-245.

<sup>67</sup> There is disagreement about the distribution of these lines. It is possible that some of them were spoken by Agave. They would fit the character of either.

<sup>68</sup> This is a favourite method in Euripides' epilogues. It occurs also in the *Hekabe*, *IT*, *Elektra*, *Orestes*, *Phoinissai*, *Hippolytos*, *Andromache* and *Hiketides*.

<sup>69</sup> Many commentators see in this prophecy references to actual historical events. They cannot be clearly identified from our own knowledge (Dodds (1960) 235-236), though it may well be so. However, if this were pure history, it would not fit into the play. It must be read with a symbolic meaning as well.

of bacchic rites (1381-87). Presumably Dionysos prophesies her future as well, but this is lost in the missing portion.

### Summary

In order to understand the *Bakchai* fully it is essential not to make up one's mind prematurely between the various contrasted attitudes presented in the tragedy. One can then appreciate the lengths to which Euripides goes to keep both sides of each question credible. This is not to deny the admissibility of the various interpretations of the *Bakchai* discussed in the classical section but to claim that most of them are valid, but insufficient in themselves to explain all that is happening on stage. The very contrast between their apparent irreconcilabilities gives the tragedy its greatness.

The play is about the fundamental problem of man who is both an individual and a social creature. These two aspects give rise to psychological drives which frequently clash. The matter is universal but comes out particularly clearly in religion: should the individual stick to his own beliefs or merge his individuality in that of the group or the godhead? It is a problem especially of the ecstatic religions which accounts for Euripides having chosen the Dionysiac one to illustrate the matter. But fundamentally the problem must occur in all religions, as my frequent references to Christian practice show.

The following conclusions emerge from the *Bakchai*:

1. Religion exists and cannot be ignored. If you try to ignore it you will, at best, become ridiculous (like the early Kadmos), at the worst you will be less than a full man (like the "city slicker" in the first messenger speech). This is also very much a message in the *Helene* and the *Ion*.
2. Religion carries within itself the possibility of great beauty, peace and self-fulfilment and enables you to perform at a much higher level of efficiency.
3. Religion, in the hands of the fanatic, also carries within itself the possibility of great violence and destruction.
4. The religious and the secular outlook often clash in their demands. Every person must try to resolve this conflict in his own way. Different personality types attempt to do this in different ways.
5. The religious outlook, being praeter-logical, cannot be attained by an intellectual effort, however sincerely meant.

How far does the *Bakchai* reflect Euripides' own opinions? He is scrupulously fair in the presentation of both the intellectual and the religious point of view, not as a detached observer, but as a passionate partisan of either. It would therefore be wrong to try and read his personal attitude into that of any one character or any particular pronouncement they make.

But at the same time it would be impossible for an artist to write with such intensity if he did not feel these various passions within himself. It is difficult to believe that in the *Bakchai* Euripides does not depict his own longings, doubts and musings on this very difficult and fundamental subject. In that sense the *Bakchai* should be read as an autobiographical work by this great thinker.

**CHAPTER 17**  
**APPENDIX**  
**THE KYKLOPS AND THE RHESOS**

Neither of these plays contains anything of psychiatric interest. They shed no light on human motivation. The former is perhaps an early satyr play, for the latter Euripides' authorship is controversial. Possibly the very lack of psychological interest, in contrast to all the other works of Euripides as pointed out in previous chapters, may shed some light on the dating and provenance of these plays.

**The *Kyklops***

The *Kyklops* is a satyr play and, as such, is widely regarded as just a little piece of pleasant nonsense.<sup>1</sup> What little psychology there is is of the most basic granny kind. Polyphemos' only motivation is his brutishness, Silenos' and the satyrs' their bibulousness and unbridled sexuality. Odysseus has virtually no discernible character. What few glimpses there are of a superior intelligence, such as the inebriation plan and the "Nobody" trick are borrowed from Homer.

The dating is controversial. Early commentators regarded it as an early play, perhaps contemporary with the *Hippolytos* (about 428 B.C.). Latterly the majority seem to opt for the period after the Sicilian campaign (perhaps about 410).<sup>2</sup> Only Conacher, of more recent authors, suggested a very early date, 434 or even earlier.<sup>3</sup>

The evidence for these various guesses is based on similarities to other Euripidean plays,<sup>4</sup> supposed skits on the play in the work of Aristophanes,<sup>5</sup> metrical considerations<sup>6</sup> and supposed references to contemporary historical events.<sup>7</sup> None of this is convincing.

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<sup>1</sup> Thus Grube (1941) 448 calls it a competent piece of foolery and Kassel (1973) claims that it has been widely neglected in both England and Germany. Arnott (1971) goes so far as to suggest that the play is so feeble because it was written in a great hurry, Euripides just jotting down a few lines.

<sup>2</sup> Discussed by Seaford (1984) 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> Conacher (1961) 320 n.5.

<sup>4</sup> Arrowsmith (1956) 2 n.1.

<sup>5</sup> Seaford (1984) 49.

<sup>6</sup> Arrowsmith (1956) 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ussher (1971) 166; Seaford (1984) 5-9; Arrowsmith (1956) 7.

If we assume that the fourth play of a tetralogy was originally a lighthearted piece about drinking and sex with a chorus of satyrs and gradually developed in the hands of Euripides through the lighthearted *Alkestis* with its drinking scene to the final *Orestes* with still some comic scenes but a very serious content, then the *Kyklops* should fit in before the *Alkestis*. I find it very difficult to believe that an author who has slowly brought about such a profound change in the fourth play would later in his career suddenly revert to the primitive manner of his youth. However, not everyone agrees with this argument and it would fall away if it could be shown that there is a serious intent below the humorous surface of the play.

There has been a number of attempts at finding such a serious intent. Hamilton<sup>8</sup> makes out a good case for reading a skit on symposia and wedding customs into it. Olson's<sup>9</sup> suggestion that we see here a discussion of attitudes to alcohol is perhaps a little more serious. Biehl<sup>10</sup> points out that most of the characters try to present their actions as part of a religious sacrifice and thus imbue their selfish desires with a religious veneer. This would be a more serious, Euripides-like, approach, but the evidence seems thin. Boano's<sup>11</sup> summing up that the play depicts the superiority of reason over brutish behaviour would seem to fit the Homeric handling of the theme better than the Euripidean one.<sup>12</sup> Polyphemos, apart from his brutish features, shows a considerable civilised veneer and some authors have read a serious import into this.<sup>13</sup> More recently this approach has been extended in a very convincing manner by Konstan.<sup>14</sup> The reader is referred to this author's article for a full discussion. On the whole I feel that it is difficult to see the play in such a serious light. The evidence for such views is so lightly scattered throughout masses of sheer fooling around that it would take a very perceptive audience to see its import.

There is a large number of gross inconsistencies in the play, which is unusual for Euripides. Thus the time seems morning in some passages, evening in others and night in yet others.<sup>15</sup> Odysseus' companions are helplessly imprisoned in the cave, yet

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton (1973) *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Olson (1988) *passim*; see also Rossi ((1971) 31.

<sup>10</sup> Biehl (1987) *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Boano (1983) 435.

<sup>12</sup> Wetzel (1965) *passim* discusses the differences between the Homeric and Euripidean handling in great detail.

<sup>13</sup> Arrowsmith (1956) 2; Seaford (1984) 56-59.

<sup>14</sup> Konstan (1981) *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Méridier (1970) 14 believes he can fit it all together, but most critics disagree.



he, himself, appears to be able to slip in and out at will and there appears to be a back entrance. Polyphemos' blinding with a heated pole is quite unnecessarily complicated for an escape plan. Yet, on the surface, it just **seems** right. The answer to this, which other critics do not seem to have picked up, is, I should suggest, that the whole thing is an elaborate sexual symbol: a long, hard and previously heated and stiffened object is used to pierce a round central opening, causing the abject surrender of its owner. Euripides did not invent this sexual symbol but used it happily to maintain both the folktale and the erotic atmosphere at which he was aiming.

Chalkia,<sup>16</sup> viewing the play from a structuralist point of view, pointed out the many folktale elements contained in it, some hidden, some very obvious. The erotic element is very obvious in many places of crude jokes, but also in more hidden places. Seaford and Rossi<sup>17</sup> have recently shown the presence of two further erotic puns, unsuspected until then.

All this adds up to suggest that Euripides did not mean this play to be taken very seriously.

### **The *Rhesos***

The first argument to the *Rhesos*, probably reflecting the views of Dikaiarchos (about 300 B.C.)<sup>18</sup> says that "some people regard this drama as illegitimate and not being by Euripides". This idea was taken up again from the end of the XIXth century onwards. From then, until 1964, criticism of the *Rhesos* consisted almost entirely of discussions on the authenticity of the play. The main claims are that it is the work of a mature Euripides (perhaps about 424 B.C.), a very early work of this author (perhaps about 450 B.C.), or a late imitation (written perhaps about 380 B.C., well after the tragedian's death).

In 1964 Ritchie published his monumental work on the authenticity of the *Rhesos*.<sup>19</sup> In it he assembled all the evidence for and against the various views in a most scholarly manner which has left very little room for others to add anything new to the discussion. The overall impression of his study is that none of the criteria used,

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<sup>16</sup> Chalkia (1979) *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Seaford (1987) *passim*; Rossi (1971) 19

<sup>18</sup> Ritchie (1964) 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ritchie (1964) *passim*.

such as external evidence, plot, dramatic technique, vocabulary and syntax, style, structural and metrical considerations exclude Euripidean authorship. Ritchie himself concludes that the *Rhesos* is probably an early work of this writer. Later authors have not all agreed with this conclusion, but have not been able to fault Ritchie's presentation of the facts. The doubt rests mainly on dramatic and aesthetic considerations: the *Rhesos* is such a feeble play, could so great a writer as Euripides possibly have perpetrated it?

About this feebleness there has been very little doubt until recently. The plot is episodic, the structure disjointed, there is no real main hero, characters are feebly drawn, no basic problem runs through the play. The general feeling is possibly best brought out by Lucas' description of the play as "intellectually null".<sup>20</sup>

In more recent years a new way of looking at the play has come forward. Already in 1941 Grube noted that the author was no mean playwright, though the work completely lacked tragic depth.<sup>21</sup> There is good craftsmanship; each isolated scene is well written and gripping; there is nothing wrong with the language and metres. I am particularly impressed with the clever use of recurring motifs, almost like Wagnerian *leitmotifs*, such as the wolf, horse and night motifs. It is apparent that the author did not write at random, but in every scene, however disconnected it appears, is aware of the whole story.

Kitto developed this approach further.<sup>22</sup> Time and time again he was led to consider whether individual scenes are not meant as burlesque of standard Greek tragedy. His evidence clearly pointed to a 4th century author using Euripidean techniques to develop the idea that all human ideas are nonsense, an attitude well suited to that century. But Kitto lacked the courage to regard it all as burlesque. This was followed by Burnett's article and for the first time since ancient days the *Rhesos* made sense.<sup>23</sup> In this long and convincing article Burnett used the method I have been using in all the other plays in this thesis. She went through the work scenelet by scenelet, pointed out all that seemed foolish, unnecessary and inappropriate and then went on to show that such idiocy (her word) cannot have occurred by chance or

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<sup>20</sup> Lucas (1950) 226.

<sup>21</sup> Grube (1941) 447.

<sup>22</sup> Kitto (1977) *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Burnett (1985) *passim*.

through incompetence. It must have been put in deliberately by a skilled playwright who wanted the play to be like this. The whole work is a deliberate burlesque on the Greek tragic manner and its heroic Homeric antecedents. When read in this way it fulfils its purpose admirably. It would be impossible for me to summarise Burnett's argument convincingly; let the interested reader consult the article for himself to get the full impact. In the very last page she concluded that the *Rhesos* must be a very early work of Euripides. It should be noted, however, that even accepting fully the truth of her point of view in other respects, her own evidence can be equally well interpreted as pointing to the work of a very craftsmanlike 4th century imitator who knew his Euripides well. I hope to show evidence for this in the following.

### **Psychiatric**

The most obvious feature of the play is the extreme flatness of all characters. Not one of them surmounts the limits of the most basic granny psychology. Most of the characters are ridiculously alike.

#### Hektor

His outstanding characteristic is his crass stupidity. Whatever happens he immediately jumps to false conclusions and his only solution is to bash somebody. He does, however, have one saving grace: he is aware of his own intellectual shortcomings and readily leaves the thinking to people better qualified. Aineias sums the matter up well (105-109):<sup>24</sup> "I wish you could make plans as well as you can fight. But so it is: the same man cannot well be skilled in everything; each has his special excellence, and yours is fighting, and it is for others to make good plans."

Hektor at first refuses Rhesos' help fearing that to do so would diminish his own glory. This could be the beginning of a more penetrating character study. If the playwright were to develop this theme we might yet obtain an interesting insight into the way Hektor's actions spring from such a basic and only half-understood desire for personal glory. But he does not. The chorus talk Hektor out of this attitude, it never appears again and has no influence whatsoever on the action of the play.

Similarly the charioteer's accusation that Hektor has murdered Rhesos himself (for money or glory or horses) could make an excellent psychological study. It would

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<sup>24</sup> Lattimore's translation.

have been completely consonant with the manner of Euripides to keep the audience guessing throughout the play whether to believe such an accusation or not.<sup>25</sup> But this possibility has already been ruled out by our having seen Athene, Odysseus and Diomedes in a previous scene and it has no effect on the course of the play.

### Aineias

This man has no character at all. His sole purpose in the play is to act as a foil to Hektor, his rational approach accentuating Hektor's irrationality.

### Dolon

He is a smaller and meaner edition of Hektor. Like the latter he is overbearing, absolutely satisfied with his own prowess, too unintelligent to see the dangers of his hare-brained schemes. In addition he has ideas above his station and an eye for the main chance. In spite of his words patriotism does not enter into his plans.

### Rhesos

He is yet another bombastic character. Even more than the other two he approaches the ἀλαζών or *miles gloriosus* type of new comedy. Utterly convinced of his own prowess he aims only at personal glory. He vaunts his (unproven) military achievements and forms even more harebrained schemes than Hektor or Dolon, which make him out even more stupid than the rest.

### Odysseus and Diomedes

They form a comic pair, reflecting the Aineias-Hektor couple. Diomedes is yet another man of action without a thought in his head, Odysseus is vaunted to be of superior intelligence though his actions hardly bear out this claim. His plans are made for him by Athene; when caught, he has at first forgotten the password so opportunely extracted from Dolon and tries to bluster his way out of trouble. At last he remembers it.

### Athene

Unlike other Euripidean deities she does not stand for any moral or divine principles. She is a thoroughly human personage, intent only on getting her own way and stoops to deceit and miracles to obtain it.

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<sup>25</sup> Similar doubtful situations arise in the *Bakchai*, *Orestes* and *IA*.

### Paris

As stupid as all the rest he scents trouble but his only solution is to ask Hektor to do something about it. He is easily bamboozled and swayed from his purpose.

### The Charioteer

He is a messenger, though not an eyewitness to what he relates. He worries more about his own wound than his chief's demise.

### The Muse

As the conventional *dea-ex-machina* she is expected to sum up the problems raised in the play, and suggest a solution. But as no problem has been raised there is nothing for her to resolve. She sings a pretty elegy for her dead son, a large part of which is taken up by an account of her miraculous (and irrelevant) pregnancy, and blames everybody in sight for what has happened: Helene, Odysseus, Thamyris, Strymon, Hektor, Athene. She will see to it that her son will live on as a semi-divine being. This is a common Euripidean trick to compensate a hero whom we have come to love for his grievous fate. But in this case we have never loved Rhesos and do not care a fig about what happens to him. It is a typical Euripidean *aitia* explaining the origin of some obscure Thracian myths and rituals.

### The Chorus

They afford a little flickering of psychological insight in the way they are less affected by the death of a hero and the fate of their fatherland than by the fear that Hektor will blame them (which they deserve). But this point, too, after having been raised, is promptly forgotten again and has no effect on the action.

### Summary

If we view the *Rhesos* as a tragedy the character studies are futile, all of a piece and of no consequence to the action of the play. Virtually everyone is a mindless fool.

But if we view the *Rhesos* as a burlesque on the heroic manner in the way Burnett brought out clearly, it is far from incompetent, a well constructed and effective piece of stagecraft. Every scene is vital and adds its quota to the whole. Such grossly overdrawn characters are perfectly permissible in a burlesque, to a certain extent even necessary, to let even the least perceptive members of the audience realise that they are not to be taken seriously. Where Burnett asks in her title: "Are smiles allowed?" I should say: "Guffaws are invited!" This approach would be perfectly in line with

Euripides' custom in many of his plays, particularly the *Alkestis*, *Herakleidae*, *IT* and *Helene*. All of these are lighthearted pieces, the characters of which are overdrawn and all contain straightforward comedy scenes. But a very important difference emerges when we consider the object of our laughter. In the four plays mentioned we are invited to laugh at ourselves, the audience and critics, who have been inveigled by the crafty playwright to accept much of the nonsense as true, at least for a while. The final laugh is at the folly of mankind, just as in more serious Euripidean plays the tears, too, are for the folly of mankind. When we view the *Rhesos* in this light we shall notice that the barb is directed elsewhere. Certainly, the characters are ridiculous and many of the scenes purely comic, but we are never invited to identify with the characters for long.

#### EVIDENCE FROM RESEMBLANCES TO OTHER PLAYS

There is a large number of features in the *Rhesos* which are found again in other Euripidean plays. This has often been adduced as evidence for a Euripidean authorship. If Euripides could think along such lines in one play, he may well have thought so again in another. I should suggest that an imitator would be even more likely to repeat features of his model than an original author. There will be room here for only a small number of selected examples of this; there are many more.

1. In the *Phoinissai* and, to a lesser extent, the *Troades* and the *IA* there are many characters but no main hero; these plays show how the impact of the same set of circumstances affects different character types in different ways. No such lesson can be read into the *Rhesos*, where there is virtually only one character type.
2. Characters jump to conclusions and later change their minds. This occurs frequently; it is particularly crass in the case of Theseus in the *Hiketides*. There it goes to show how the politician has no set standard of values but veers with public opinion on any issue. This is a vital fact in the play. In the *Rhesos* Hektor's frequent changes of mind prove only his lack of intelligence. Without them the plot would proceed just as well.
3. In the *Elektra*, the *Orestes* and the *Herakles* the chorus at one stage tip-toe fearfully, starting at the slightest hint of danger and creating an almost comic effect. In each of these tragedies this portrays the effect the abnormal emotional states of the

main characters has on ordinary people, an important point in these plays. In the *Rhesos* nothing is reflected other than the chorus' ineptitude.

4. Eteokles (*Phoinissai*), Orestes (*Orestes*), Medeia (*Medeia*) and Pentheus (*Bakchai*) are more upset by the idea of their enemy escaping retribution than by any danger to their overall plans. In each case this clearly illustrates how people are so driven by their emotions that they lose all common sense. It is difficult to ascribe any major emotion to Hektor, anything comparable to the guilt feeling of Eteokles, the paranoia of Orestes and the desperate fight to retain his individuality by Pentheus.

5. There are very many instances in Euripides where a character's action is put forward as being outstandingly noble, but at the same time a doubt is introduced as to whether it was not foolish or selfish in the final analysis. Prime examples occur in the *IA*, *Herakleidai*, *Hiketides*, *Phoinissai* with regard to self-immolation. But Admetos' noble bearing in the *Alkestis* also leaves one with the uncomfortable feeling that he is doing very well for himself and similarly Helene's and Menelaos' conversion to the Theonoic religion lasts only until they have obtained their goal. In each case Euripides does not finally pronounce whether the glorious or the cynical attitude are correct; the audience must decide. In the *Rhesos* Dolon makes it quite clear that he undertakes his glorious mission only for what reward he can expect.

6. In the *Herakleidai* Alkmene stops the messenger from telling his tale by constantly interrupting. This clearly brings out her crabby and narrow character which is important for the play. In the *Rhesos* Hektor's similar behaviour only produces a laugh and holds up the plot.

7. Rhesos has been built up as a shining hero. When he actually gets to speak he finds himself apologising - rather ineptly - for past misdeeds. The heroic status of Menelaos in the *Andromache* and Agamemnon in the *IA* are similarly undercut. In the latter two this is vital for an understanding of the character's possible motivations; no one will worry unduly about Rhesos' motivations. He openly brags about his past military exploits and promises quite impossible future achievements. There are many bragging characters in the works of Euripides, but none of them quite so blatant. In new comedy, however, the ἀλαζών or *miles gloriosus* will be a standard character and quite as blatant as Rhesos here.

8. The chorus comment on the stars and moon in the night sky. This is a common feature in many Greek tragedies, beginning with the watchman's speech in Aischylos' *Agamemnon*. It generally creates an atmosphere of expectant tension and hints at the likelihood that celestial events play a part in the affairs of men. This has no part in the *Rhesos*, a tragedy which is basically about horse theft.
9. A hero creeps onto the stage full of apprehension and starting at every noise. Examples are Eteokles in the *Phoinissai*; Orestes in the *Elektra*, much to his sister's disgust; Orestes in the *Andromache*; Orestes again in the *IT*; Menelaos in the *Helene*. In each case this is important to undercut the heroic stance of the character in the eyes of the audience or of other characters. Odysseus and Diomedes behave like this in the *Rhesos*, but they have never been heroic in this play.
10. Generally, in Greek tragedy, either the gods keep control of the action throughout, or else they are introduced only in prologue and epilogue. In the *Herakles* Iris and Lyssa make a brief and active appearance on stage in the middle of the play. There it is essential to show that such an apparent divine intervention in human affairs can only lead to nonsense and blasphemy. It is, in fact, impossible; a mere human fabrication. No such lesson emerges from the *Rhesos*, where Athene takes an active hand in the plot.
11. In the *IT* Iphigeneia bamboozles poor, honest, trusting and religious Thoas and in the *Helene* that other wily female, Helene, deals similarly with honourable and religious Theoklymenos, playing on his love for her. The situation is perhaps slightly different in the *Medeia*, where another crafty female outwits both Kreon and Aigeus by playing on their better feelings. In that case one feels somewhat less morally outraged as she is at least not repaying kindness with deceit. In the *Rhesos* poor, dumb Paris is completely bamboozled by that wily female, Athene. She plays on his religious feelings and his trust in the gods to attain her object. In the other plays these revolting scenes serve a definite purpose in showing the power latent in intelligent women, however much oppressed by male convention. No such message can be read into the *Rhesos*.
12. In Aischylos' *Eumenides* the furies pursue their victim to the striking trochaic rhythm of "λάβε, λάβε, λάβε!" (catch him, catch him, catch him!). In Aristophanes' *Acharnians* the coalminers similarly pursue Dikaiopolis to the tune of "βάλλε, βάλλε, βάλλε" (hit him, hit him, hit him!). In the *Rhesos* the chorus chase Odysseus again



with: “βάλλε, βάλλε, βάλλε”. It is possible that all three playwrights hit upon this striking rhythm independently, but seems more likely that somebody is imitating someone else, either as a sort of literary homage or, perhaps more likely, making fun of the others. In view of the uncertainty of the date of the *Rhesos* it is impossible to say where it fits, but it is at least as likely that its author imitated the other two, which would mean that the play was written after 425. An imitator is more likely to do this than a serious author.

13. It slowly dawns on Hektor and his guards that only one man could have done what was done: Odysseus. This is a ridiculous travesty of a recognition scene, based on far fetched and very feeble arguments, prolonged beyond the necessities of the play. The same occurs in the mutual recognition of Iphigeneia and Orestes in the *IT*; the mutual recognition of Menelaos and Helene in the *Helene*; the reluctant recognition of Orestes by Elektra in the *Elektra*. In the latter three the comedy element is a vital part of the play's message about human irrationality in general. In the *Rhesos* there is no such weighty consideration.

14. The Muse delivers the epilogue. It is difficult to compare this with other Euripidean epilogues as these are themselves rather variable and controversial. In pre-Euripidean drama the epilogue generally sums up the outcome of the problem from a detached, divine point of view. In very many Euripidean epilogues the solution, from the point of view of overt plot, seems highly unsatisfactory. Plays, which have been severely criticised on this score are: *Phoinissai*, *Herakles*, *IT*, *Helene*, *Elektra*, *Hippolytos*, *Orestes*, *Andromache*, *Bakchai*, *IA*, *Hiketides*. I have shown in previous chapters that these epilogues, whilst not solving the overt plot, make very significant statements about the psychological development that has permeated the play. In the *Rhesos* no problem has been posed, religious, moral, political or psychological. There is nothing for the epilogue to solve. This may have been an *aitia* explaining a rather obscure Thracian rite, such as many critics have regarded as significant in other Euripidean plays. It is impossible to believe that the *Rhesos* should have been written mainly for this purpose.

15. After the divine pronouncement has been made there is often a short passage describing the reaction of the various characters to it. Frequently, in Euripides, this shows that the human beings have learned nothing, but continue in their set ways as if

nothing had happened. This is, perhaps, particularly pronounced in the *Hiketides* and the *Bakchai*. A similar passage concludes the *Rhesos*: Hektor marches out to attack the Greeks, which is what he has been wanting to do throughout the play. The whole Rhesos episode might as well not have happened.

### Discussion

I wish to make three points:

1. Iliescu<sup>26</sup> points out that, if various allusions to Thracian affairs are meant to be contemporary references, they fit in better with the fourth than the fifth century political situation.
2. The writer of the *Rhesos* has absolutely no psychological understanding, or, at least, no interest in it. It is difficult to believe that Euripides, however young he may have been when he wrote the play, should show such utter lack of interest in human motivation, when in all his other plays this is the outstanding characteristic of his writing.
3. The author of the *Rhesos* shows himself extremely well acquainted with Euripides' manner of writing and with all his plays, not only some earlier ones, to have imitated them so often. It would be amazing if a juvenile Euripides had had all these ideas already within himself, as it were in embryo. The evidence from a psychiatric point of view fits in best with the idea that the *Rhesos* was written by a late author, an excellent craftsman and superb Euripidean scholar, who succeeded admirably in reproducing the master's manner, but did not share his interest in human motivation.

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<sup>26</sup> Iliescu (1976) *passim*.

## CHAPTER 18

### SUMMARY

It has been the aim of this thesis to investigate the validity of a psychiatric approach to the works of Euripides. The fundamental assumption throughout has been that the playwright's main interest lies in human motivation: why human beings behave in the (often irrational) manner in which they do. This basic approach differs widely from that of Aischylos and also from the ideas put forward by Aristotle and has therefore been missed or denied in much of the modern critical literature. The proof of the assumption is cumulative, resting on the success of the psychiatric approach in explaining a number of apparent difficulties, faults and weaknesses in the plays which are hard to explain on other assumptions. No single play could suffice for that; a review of all the extant works of Euripides was required.

The classical sections which begin each chapter taken together leave a clear impression that the overall meaning of most Euripidean plays is highly controversial. In many cases the existence of such an overall meaning is altogether denied in the literature. In others individual commentators claim to find it, but differ greatly in its nature. The opinions of critics are often diametrically opposed to each other. Furthermore the majority of these "explanations" succeed admirably in explaining some sections of the relevant plays, but leave other sections to appear irrelevant or inexplicable. The plays then seem inept or disjointed and lacking in unity. The psychiatric approach succeeds in almost every case in providing a clear overall meaning and demonstrating that each play is perfectly structured and has a strong unity.<sup>1</sup>

In the main body of each chapter individual passages have been pointed out to have been criticised as being irrelevant, unnecessary or contradictory. In particular, many stasima have been called disconnected embolima, epilogues assumed to be feeble attempts at pleasing the crowd and philosophical sections seen as sophistic. Here again the psychiatric approach has succeeded in imbuing each one with relevance in the context of the play as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The exceptions being the *Kyklops* and the *Rhesos* which are discussed separately in the appendix.

<sup>2</sup> There are only two sections in the whole corpus which I have difficulty in explaining. These are the description of Orestes' "fit of madness" in the *IT* which appears unnecessary for the purposes of

I hope to have shown that none of the stasima are disconnected. In every instance the chorus either amplify in lyrical, poetic and often mythological terms what the characters have been saying intellectually, or they represent the ordinary man's response to the unusual behaviour of the main characters. Occasionally a chorus may assume an independent point of view, opposed to that of some of the characters but equally needed to round off the psychological problem of the play.

The epilogues truly resolve the psychological problems raised in the tragedies though they may seem at variance with the overt plot. Frequently they point out how easy these problems could be of solution if only mankind were not so irrational.

The so-called "sophistic" discussions, as well as the many apparently patriotic or xenophobic passages are invariably put in the mouths of certain characters who could be expected to hold such views, generally driven by an inner compulsion to rationalise their actions.

The main characters have been shown to be superbly drawn and completely explicable in modern psychiatric terms. The clinical observations and descriptions of abnormal mental states are incredibly accurate by modern standards. The very occasional lapses from clinical accuracy have been pointed out in the thesis. Even the less abnormal characters are drawn very accurately. Minor characters may be drawn equally well, but occasionally are more sketchy when they serve mainly as foils for the unusual behaviour of the major personages. Very rarely a minor character is grossly overdrawn, again as a foil to the behaviour which is being investigated. Comparison with modern psychiatric ideas as outlined in the psychiatric section of each chapter bring this out very clearly.

The inevitable conclusion must be that Euripides was greatly interested in these matters, an extremely accurate observer of human nature and very skilled in putting it on stage. The remarkable similarity between some of his ideas and those of modern psychologists and psychiatrists has been stressed throughout. There are, of course differences in language, jargon, imagery and symbolism but the basic ideas are very similar. Where Euripides deviates from modern attitudes this has been pointed out.

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this play and the chorus' discussion on true *sophia* in the *Bakchai* which appears to contradict all that has been said before. It is, however, possible that in those instances the fault lies with me rather than the playwright.

If a character appears to behave in a contradictory fashion in different parts of the play this is often due to the fact that he is being actuated by contradictory impulses, which is what happens to all of us and is one of Euripides' great insights. In many cases, however, the contradictoriness is only apparent. It is a common trick of Euripides' to have the rest of the cast discuss a character at length before he appears. The contradiction then lies in the way a person sees himself, the image he wants to create of himself and how others see him, often actuated by their own psychological needs. It is therefore very important in understanding the tragedies of this playwright that the critic should not make up his mind prematurely as to what the character is "really" like. Both opposing points of view are always tenable, as, of course, happens in everyday life.

It has been shown that in his attempt to delineate characters and their motivation with all their contradictory features Euripides makes use of every means available. Sometimes he may discuss a problem seriously and intellectually in an agon; at other times he may put a certain point of view into the mouth of a generally sympathetic character thereby attempting to influence the audience into accepting it; more rarely he uses an unsavoury character for the opposite purpose; very commonly he uses humour to undercut a point of view.<sup>3</sup>

These humorous passages occur in almost every play and have often been regarded as unsuitable by critics. Their humorous aspect has been denied or played down, or else explained away as "comic relief" which is really a meaningless phrase. In every case examined in this thesis the humour has been clearly attributable to a definite purpose. Sometimes the humour takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*; a point of view is outlined and put on stage with apparently serious intent only to show as the play progresses, that it must inevitably lead to incongruity, blasphemy or catastrophe.

A general trend of development is discernible in the corpus of Euripides.<sup>4</sup> The earlier plays are generally more katabolic, that is they tend to decry human folly and credulity mercilessly. Later plays tend more towards anabolism, they engender pity for

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<sup>3</sup> In this context I use the word "humour" to denote any action which could be seen as "comic" either openly on stage or, more slyly, a situation which could be laughable in other circumstances but will not raise a laugh at this dramatic or pathetic moment. These are frequently pointed out in the thesis.

<sup>4</sup> In view of the uncertainty of dating of many of the plays this should not be looked at too closely. It is certainly no more useful towards dating a play than the "resolution of feet" method which also has limited uses. I have, however, tried to use it for the purpose with the *Kyklops* and the *Rhesos*.

poor mankind which tries so hard but is doomed to fail. Psychological insight into the effect of role playing, automatic behaviour and rationalisation is introduced in the early plays in a humorous way, but persists throughout the rest of the tragedies often taking on more deplorable aspects as in the political, social and religious spheres.

I have shown that Euripides' thinking in the religious sphere in particular shows a clear progression: myths and religious credulity are at first merely laughable; later it is claimed that these unsavoury stories are invented by man and falsely attributed to the gods who are really innocent of them. Later still Euripides comes to acknowledge the existence and importance of the idealistic, often religious aspects of the human psyche.<sup>5</sup> His early cynicism is later tempered by a much deeper understanding of the idealistic as well as the selfish motivation of mankind.

In all this it has been stressed that the audience is commonly the butt of Euripides' skill. Over and over again he succeeds in inveigling at least part of his audience (as well as later critics) into adopting a point of view which is then shown to be untenable, wicked or irrational.<sup>6</sup> This has given him the reputation of wanting to shock his audience above all. It has been shown that, whilst this is true in a manner of speaking, it also has a serious intent: it encourages the thinking man to realise that he is just as gullible and irrational as the characters on stage. The plays are about Man, not individual stage puppets.

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<sup>5</sup> What Freud calls the Superego.

<sup>6</sup> I have called this metatragedy.

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