

A Handbook of
CLASSICAL
DRAMA

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1. ***ALCESTIS*

(438 B.C.)

At this competition Sophocles won first prize; Euripides won second with the *Cretan Women (Kressai)*, the *Alcmaeon at Psophis*, the *Telephus* (a play repeatedly satirized by Aristophanes), and the

Alcestis. Only the last of the four has survived. It took the place of the frolicking satyr-play which usually came after the three tragedies.

The presentation of the *Alcestis* probably required only two actors.

Legend.—According to an old tradition, it seems, Admetus was about to die on his wedding day when his bride Alcestis offered to sacrifice herself for him. She died; but, perhaps by the favor of Persephone, she returned to life.¹⁴ In the play of Euripides, however, her death has significantly been placed long after her original decision, and to increase its pathos Euripides has included two small children. The supernatural elements of the story have here been minimized. In some versions Apollo aided Admetus in yoking lions and wild boars to the marriage wagon—a task prerequisite to the marriage. Again, Admetus was said to have incurred the wrath of Artemis by neglecting to sacrifice to her and therefore to have found a tangle of snakes in his bridal bed as an omen threatening his death.¹⁵

In every extant version of the legend Alcestis is brought back to life. This may possibly not have been the case in the original version, but such resurrection was essential to apotheosis. Euripides may refer to a cult in Alcestis' honor at Sparta and Athens (445–54, a disputed passage; 995–1005). It is often assumed that Alcestis and Admetus were originally Thessalian chthonic deities.

Source and influence.—The story of Alcestis had been the subject of a play by Phrynichus, the older contemporary of Aeschylus. Only one fragment and one important reference to this earlier play have been preserved. From these we may conjecture that Heracles appeared in the play, and we know that Death did so. The subject was not, we are told, treated by either Aeschylus or Sophocles; and no record of any other ancient tragedy with this title has been preserved except the *Alcestis* of the Roman dramatist Accius.¹⁶ Several comedies on the subject, however, are known to have been written, one by an obscure Aristomenes, which was produced in competition with Aristophanes' *Plutus* (388 B.C., entitled *Admetus*), another by the contemporary comic writer Theopompus (not the famous later historian). Still another comedy, an *Alcestis*, was produced by Antiphanes, one of the leading writers of Middle Comedy (roughly about 350 B.C.).

The Roman satirist Juvenal (6. 652–53) refers to the presentation of an *Alcestis* in his own day, and a pantomime on this subject is mentioned by Lucian (*On Dancing* 52). Both these writers lived in the second century A.D.

In modern times the *Alcestis* of Euripides has inspired a vast number of adaptations and imitations.¹⁷ Trissino's *Sofonisba* (1515), the first modern attempt at tragedy in the ancient style, was strongly

influenced by it. Of the many later plays, special mention may be made of those of Alexandre Hardy (lived 1570–1631), Wieland (1773), Herder (1803), and Alfieri (1799). Operas have been written by Händel (1727) and Gluck (1767). James Thomson's poem, *Edward and Eleonora*, was influenced by Euripides' play.¹⁸ Perhaps the best adaptation is found in Robert Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure*.

The subject of Alcestis was a favorite one in ancient art and is not unknown in modern art. In the Boston Museum of Fine Arts is a bronze statuette by Rodin entitled "The Death of Alcestis."

Theme.—Most modern adapters and critics have failed to realize how nicely articulated is the plot of Euripides' play and how thoroughgoing is the dependence of its action upon the characterization of the leading roles. This dependence will become clear in the subsequent consideration of the various characters, and a sound interpretation of the play can be made only on this basis.

Primarily, the weaknesses of the characters prove their salvation; and so the *Alcestis*, like many a Greek tragedy, illustrates the irony of fate. Since it is the softhearted kindness of Admetus to his slaves that has won him the favor of Apollo, and since it is his excessive hospitality that wins him the favor of Heracles, the virtue of these particular vices might be called the theme of the play. Perhaps the poet was more keenly interested, however, in the characterizations themselves and in studying the effect of Alcestis' sacrifice upon Admetus.

Discussion.—During the eerie scene with Death, Apollo foretells the coming of Heracles and the resurrection of Alcestis. Doubtless most if not all the audience knew that her resurrection was an essential feature of the myth, and knew also that the play must presumably have a happy solution, since it came after three tragedies and was substituted for the usual satyr-play. This foreknowledge removes any hint of surprise at the event, and it therefore removes any possible objection to a solution which inevitably contained this element of the supernatural. Foreknowledge also makes possible dramatic irony throughout the play. For the audience, the scene of farewell does not have the same tragic finality which it has for Alcestis and Admetus. Although this scene is full of the eternal sadness of human life, the poignancy of its sadness has been removed by the feeling that we are viewing a romantic reverie. The same is true of the later scenes depicting the grief and remorse of Admetus. In the scene with Pheres, however, dramatic irony is of little consequence. It regains its importance in the following scenes with Heracles, where ambiguity facilitates Admetus' deception of Heracles. For the audience, the mood and effect of the whole play are determined by their fore-

knowledge of the ending. This is an important point; many critics, overlooking it, have claimed that the play disconcertingly varies from the tragic to the comic.

Undeniable comic elements, however, are found in the play, especially in the swaggering figure of Heracles. With his boisterous exuberance he stands out in sharp contrast from the other characters. Though found in genuine tragedy, Heracles was a favorite character in satyr-plays and comedies, where he was famous not only for his strength and violence but also for his appetite. His propensity toward feasting and carousing is brought out in the *Alcestis*, and the grossness of his other natural desires is suggested.

The irony of the final scene, also, is essentially comic: Heracles obviously enjoys deceiving Admetus and testing his faithfulness to Alcestis; but it is not an altogether fair return, for Admetus' earlier deception of Heracles in welcoming him was a pathetic deception.

The comic elements of this play are strictly pertinent to the plot and are proper to a play which took the place of a satyr-play—though comic elements, not wholly unknown in Greek tragedy,¹⁹ should not offend a modern audience accustomed to the practice of Shakespeare. But the prevailing tone is heavy with the prolonged contemplation of death. This is especially true of the choral songs and should be a warning to those who search for the comic throughout or for the diabolical laugh of the iconoclast.²⁰ The final note of Heracles himself is serious: he must be off to his unending labors.

The chorus furnish the social background for the action and nicely reflect the attitude of the common man toward Alcestis and her death. They very appropriately become the funeral procession and leave the stage, although such withdrawal is rare in Greek tragedy. The following scene between Heracles and the Servant, of course, is much more effective without their presence.

Metrical effects, though lost in translation, are skillfully employed in the original. The funeral song after the death of Alcestis is thought to have echoed well-known ritual melodies.²¹ The return of the chorus and Admetus from the grave, furthermore, is solemn and impressive. After they have reached the palace, Admetus cannot bring himself to enter; and perhaps the continuing anapestic meter indicates that he paces up and down distracted with grief. Some have thought that the last complete choral song on "Necessity" as the supreme deity expresses the philosophy of the poet himself.²²

Certain ideas recur in the manner of a leitmotif throughout the play. One, which adds pathos to Alcestis' sacrifice, is the fact that it is more natural and fitting for the old (the parents of Admetus) to

die than for the young, and this conception has sometimes been considered the main theme of the play.²³ Again, the phrase, "you have lost a goodly wife," is spoken by the chorus (418; cf. 200), echoed by Pheres (615-16), and repeated verbatim by Heracles in the final scene (1083). Thus all join in the same generous praise of Alcestis. Other less striking repetitions occur.

There is also a delicate play upon words in the scene wherein Admetus deceives Heracles into accepting his hospitality. The ordinary Greek word for "wife" is the same as that for "woman," as in French, although in Greek the wordplay is more effective than it could be in French because of the naturalness of the omission of any pronominal adjective or indefinite article. Thus this deception, essential to the plot of the play, is much more subtle and ironic in Greek than in English; and this same ambiguity is used by Heracles in the final scene where he deceives Admetus just as Admetus has earlier deceived him.

Other subtleties usually lost in translation are the use of assonance to lend a tone of unpleasant insistence to a passage (722-24; 782-85), and the division of a single iambic verse between two speakers. Such a division (*antilabe*) occurs only four times in this play, and its effect is to jolt the hearer and emphasize the importance of the interruption. It is used for the last weak words of the dying Alcestis (390-91) and for Heracles' final loss of all patience with the evasions of his host and the servants (819). It is used again at the climax of the final scene where Admetus receives Alcestis into his hands (1119).

The reason for the silence of Alcestis in the final scene has long been a subject for discussion. The prevailing opinion seems to be that any words which she might speak would inevitably be anticlimactic and spoil the effect of the scene.²⁴

The most appealing character of the play is Alcestis herself.²⁵ Still, there is no unnatural heroism attributed to her. She sees very clearly that by her sacrifice the best interests of both her children and her husband are served. Once her decision is made—and of course we assume that, once made, it is irrevocable—she does not regret it, and she does not blame Admetus for accepting her sacrifice. If the best interests of her family obligated her to offer herself, she may have reasoned, then these same considerations obligate Admetus to accept her sacrifice. She acts of her own free will, conscious and proud of her virtue in doing so (324). Like Hippolytus, perhaps she has the assured conceit proper to a divinity. But she expects a sacrifice from Admetus in return, namely, that he, too, place the best interests of their family before all else and not jeopardize the happiness of their children by marrying again.²⁶ This demand is not motivated

by mere feminine jealousy; for the crimes of stepmothers against children by a former wife, especially in royal families, were notorious in both legend and history.

Alcestis is not motivated by the thought that she is a mere woman and that any wife should sacrifice herself for her husband. This may have been a motive in the primitive legend (compare lines 180-81), in which, apparently, fate was to overtake Admetus on his wedding day. But in the play of Euripides, Alcestis and Admetus have lived together many years; they have had two children; and Alcestis has made her decision, based on calm and well-pondered reasoning, long before the fatal day arrives (524). By placing this decision in the past, Euripides obviously gave up that part of the myth which might at first glance seem to offer the greatest dramatic possibilities—the inner struggle of Alcestis over the decision. He gave up, also, the opportunity of making Alcestis the leading role throughout the play and attaining a character with the dramatic stature of an Antigone. Indeed, the play is not primarily concerned with the character of Alcestis, who, though essentially human, does not have the fatal weakness necessary for the most effective tragic character. There is only one character of the play who conforms to Aristotle's pattern (*Poetics* 1453 a), Admetus; and the real theme of the play appears to be the effect of Alcestis' magnanimous sacrifice upon Admetus. If the play bears the name of the wife, perhaps it is because of her unusual experience,²⁷ or possibly because the name Admetus seemed less appropriate to a tragedy, or merely because the play of Phrynichus was called the *Alkestis*. The chorus, we may note, is composed of men and is designed primarily as a background for Admetus.

The characterization of Admetus is the most difficult artistic problem which the material presents. Various modern dramatists and poets have attempted to draw him on more heroic lines by having Alcestis offer herself unasked and even without the knowledge of her husband.²⁸ These plays, however, usually fall deep into sentimentalism and substitute saccharine perfection for the pathos and simple humanity of the characters as drawn by Euripides. Nor can the issue of the characterization of Admetus be avoided by the device of Goethe, who contended that Euripides' Admetus was altogether admirable in his acceptance of the sacrifice of Alcestis because he was acting according to nature.²⁹ Admetus' own father certainly did not think that he was so acting. The indecent quarrel between Pheres and Admetus, also, has been eliminated by some modern adaptors. Likewise modern scholars are unfortunate in their efforts to prove Admetus an entirely admirable and noble character who does not change within the play.³⁰

The more thoroughly the play is studied and compared with modern efforts on the same theme, the more obvious the skill of Euripides becomes: If Alcestis had not taken pride in her devotion to her husband, she would not have offered to sacrifice herself. If Heracles had not been callous and crude, he would not have entered a house of mourning. If Admetus had not been selfish and unimaginative, he would not have accepted his wife's sacrifice; if he had not been weak, he might not have received Heracles, and he certainly would not have finally agreed to take the woman whom Heracles forces upon him at the end of the play.³¹ Euripides' characterization of Admetus, in short, is essentially the only satisfactory one possible. So Browning wrote:

When King Admetos went his rounds, poor soul,
A-begging somebody to be so brave
As die for one afraid to die himself. . . .

Just as the original decision of Alcestis does not take place within the play, so there is no consideration of Admetus' original acceptance of her sacrifice. Indeed, Admetus here seems to sympathize more with himself than with her. Similarly the chorus repeatedly, the servants, and the children appear to pour out more sympathy upon Admetus and themselves than upon the dying queen. Alcestis herself sympathizes with them (295-97). Since Admetus is practically causing her death, some critics have found his laments ambiguous and repulsive. Especially repulsive to many is Admetus' declaration that he will have a statue of Alcestis made to take her place when she is gone. But here perhaps Admetus is really promising to establish a cult of Alcestis in his house to do the greatest honor to her memory.³² Certain it is that the grief of Admetus is very sincere. Even before his wife's death he insists that her death is worse than any death to him, and finally he begs Alcestis to take him with her to the underworld.

It is in regard to his parents that the character of Admetus appears in its worst light. Alcestis herself first condemns them (290-98), and so convincingly that one cannot fail to see that she is justified. In her condemnation, however, there is none of the bitterness which we find in the words of Admetus (338-39), and he has much less moral right to condemn others for refusing to die.

In the scene with Pheres, Admetus is seen to be an ungrateful son and a selfish and unimaginative man. It is apparent that he has always assumed that, just as his power is over all men, so his happiness and welfare are the supreme considerations before which all must yield. Pheres is precisely the same type of character, though age has taken away his power. (Here, as in the *Hippolytus*, we may observe Euripi-

des' keen perception of the influence of heredity upon character.) This scene is of primary importance in the structure of the play, for it brings out a side of Admetus which we see only here, and it determines the subsequent development of his character. To omit this quarrel between father and son would be to change the whole import of the play. Although the immediate cause of the quarrel is a part of the romantic reverie, the quarrel itself is very real. It is symbolic of the basic hostility between the parental and the marital ties: the contrast of their obligations, the antagonism of their loyalties and affections. Here, where compromise would be loathsome, the outcome is stark and tragic and irremediable. Heracles and Apollo can resurrect the dead, but they can never restore the affection between father and son. There is no comic element in this scene. The bitter earnestness of the antagonists makes it one of awful seriousness, as does also the presence of the dead Alcestis.³³

The motives of Alcestis' sacrifice have previously been explained so simply and so plausibly that her willingness to die has seemed entirely natural and justified. But these motives are based upon such intimate unselfishness that others could hardly be expected to appreciate them, and, in fact, Admetus himself never brings them to his own defense. Heracles seems to assume that Admetus' acceptance of the sacrifice of his wife is entirely natural (524), but Heracles is no person to draw fine distinctions or weigh nice moral problems. The attitude of Pheres, however, is quite different. Having been compelled to face the dilemma himself and still, no doubt, mindful of his fearful reluctance at choosing either alternative, he stands in humble admiration of Alcestis; but toward his son he feels a hatred born of fear and humiliation. This hatred, so far repressed, now at the taunts of his son breaks forth with bitter ferocity. For the first time, Admetus is plainly told that his action has been base and cowardly. Admetus replies to his father by accusing him of precisely the same disgraceful weakness—an altogether natural reaction but, in point of fact, a desperate evasion rather than a defense. The charges of both father and son are essentially true.³⁴

Admetus' realization of the manner in which others will view his acceptance of Alcestis' sacrifice—the result intended in the scene with Pheres—is largely responsible for the change which comes over him in the last scenes of the play. Most of the emotions which Admetus here reveals, it is true, are evident also in the earlier scenes. From the first he appreciates the sacrifice which Alcestis is making, and his reluctance to survive her is found throughout the play.³⁵ His effort to commit suicide (897–99), therefore, and his longing for death do not come as a surprise. But in these final scenes he regrets his

acceptance of Alcestis' sacrifice with profound remorse; and the realization that she has chosen the better alternative and that his own hateful life will now be worse than death, although suggested in the earlier sections of the play,³⁶ comes upon Admetus with all its poignant force only after the burial.

The modern romanticist is offended by the fact that Heracles finally persuades Admetus to accept the veiled woman before she has been recognized as Alcestis. It must be admitted that Admetus here again betrays a weakness of character in his reluctance to offend Heracles, but this is the same weakness which caused Admetus to receive Heracles into his house. It is a noble rather than a base weakness, however, for it is due to the exaggeration of a virtue, the hospitality and generous friendship of Admetus, those very qualities which Heracles has already cited as the cause of his undertaking to rescue Alcestis; and, as his parting injunction to Admetus, Heracles bids Admetus practice justice in future time and show reverence to his guest-friends. That this characteristic of Admetus, at once his weakness and his salvation, is one of the moral motivations of the play seems undeniable, and it can be minimized only at the cost of misinterpreting this final scene.³⁷

Such is Admetus in the final scene of the play. A certain critic has said that Admetus as we see him here would not accept the sacrifice of Alcestis a second time.³⁸ If this is true, then the character of Admetus has changed for the better, and we may assume that the chief concern of Euripides in writing this play was to portray the ennobling effect which the sacrifice of Alcestis had upon Admetus.

2. **MEDEA

(431 B.C.)

The *Medea* was the first of the usual series of four plays. The other three, no longer extant, were the *Philoctetes* (compare the extant play of Sophocles, produced in 409), the *Dictys* (the protector of Danaë and her child Perseus), and a satyr-play, the *Reapers* (*Theristai*; subject unknown). The plays of Euphorion, the son of Aeschylus, were awarded first prize in this contest, those of Sophocles second, and those of Euripides third and last.

The play was produced in the first year of the Peloponnesian War. Since a bitter hatred existed between Corinth and Athens and since Corinth played a major role in the events which led to the opening of hostilities, this was an auspicious time to present any enemy of Corinth, such as Medea, in a favorable light. The main theme of the *Philoctetes*, furthermore, seems to have been that of patriotism.

Legend.³⁹—There were many variations in the stories told about the later history of Jason and Medea at Corinth. In all versions, however, one point is certain: their children died at Corinth. A cult in honor of them was practiced there in the sacred precinct of Hera Acraea during the time of Euripides and later. The audience, therefore, doubtless expected the death of the children and their burial at Corinth. But the manner and cause of their death was a matter of great uncertainty. There is some evidence which seems to indicate that Euripides was the first to represent Medea as deliberately murdering them.⁴⁰ If this is true, then Euripides created the most important element of the plot. The rest of his play consists of details either chosen from the several and often contradictory versions of the story or created by the poet.

Source and influence.—Euripides wrote at least two other plays concerning Medea: the *Daughters of Pelias* (his first play, 455 B.C., third prize), and the *Aegeus*. The subject of the present play was treated by neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles. It was the opinion of certain ancient critics that Euripides was appropriating the treatment of an obscure dramatist named Neophron. The few fragments of this play of Neophron indicate similarity of treatment, but for various reasons it seems likely that Neophron followed rather than preceded Euripides. One of these reasons is interesting as a matter of dramatic technique. Euripides' introduction of Aegeus was criticized as extraneous by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1461 b). It probably had been criticized before, and it certainly has been since then.⁴¹ Neophron, however, motivated the appearance of Aegeus very cleverly, for he had Aegeus come to Medea to consult her on the interpretation of the obscure oracle which he had received. Thus it appears that Neophron was improving upon Euripides.⁴²

The *Medea* of Euripides has always been one of the most famous Greek tragedies. The story exerted tremendous influence on both literature and art, and it was one of the most popular in Athenian drama. Some six other Greek plays and a similar number of Latin plays with this title are cited.⁴³ Among these Latin plays, the extant tragedy of Seneca is obviously based directly or indirectly upon the play of Euripides. Several Greek comedies, also, are cited by the title *Medea*.

There are many modern adaptations, including those of Corneille in French (1634), Grillparzer in German (1822), and Glover in English.⁴⁴ The theme is treated also in *The Life and Death of Jason* by William Morris (1867).

Several Italiote Greek vases depict scenes connected with the theme of this play. Similar scenes are found in bas-reliefs on sarcophagi, in statuary, and on funerary urns, terra cottas, and gems.⁴⁵ Julius Caesar

paid a vast sum for two pictures by a famous contemporary painter, one of Medea and the other of Ajax (compare the extant play of Sophocles), in order to dedicate them in the temple of Venus Genetrix which he built in his forum in Rome.⁴⁶ Wall paintings of Medea have been found in both Herculaneum and Pompeii.

Theme.—The theme of the *Medea* seems to be that passion may so overwhelm reason as to lead one to a course of action inhumanly cruel and disastrous. In later writers Medea's wrath and jealousy become proverbial.⁴⁷

The essential nature of the problem of the play has not always been grasped. No less a critic than Aristotle himself (*Poetics* 1454 b) apparently failed to grasp it, for he cites the *Medea* as an example of a play wherein the solution is brought about by the machine. Likewise, the most recent editor of the play says that the poet does not attempt to solve the problem which Medea and Jason propound, and that the "fantastic conclusion of his play—child-murder, dragon-chariot—is an end and not an answer."⁴⁸ But the problem of the play, of course, is not the unsolvable one of desertion or marital compatibility, although family obligations are interestingly discussed during the play. The problem of the *Medea* is the same as that of so many other great tragedies: revenge. This revenge must be of such a nature that it is final and complete; the price which Medea is willing to pay for such revenge may be great; but it must be freely paid and not exacted by her enemies, and she must survive her enemies. Such revenge is her purpose and her achievement. The most intense drama of the play is the titanic struggle within Medea's own soul. When she has steeled herself to murder her children and to destroy her happiness, and when the deed is actually committed, the main complication of the play is solved, since the other difficulties, an asylum and a device for killing Creon and his daughter, have already been overcome. Medea has never considered mere physical escape a problem. Though it might have been a problem in real life, there is no slavish realism in Greek drama which requires the poet to concern himself overmuch with mechanical details. But there must be a semblance of realism, and in order to have the final scene between Medea and Jason the magic chariot is introduced. The end of the play would have been anticlimactic if Medea after slaying her children had run out the back door and off to Athens, as she would have done in real life, just as it would have distinctly weakened the dramatic structure of the play if Jason had died, as he did in some versions of the story, along with Creon and his bride. If Medea faces Jason—and the dramatic desirability of her doing so is obvious—then she must have a means of escape, although it is true that even with the magic chariot, her

children must still be buried in the sacred precinct of Hera Acraea. This is historically necessary. It is dramatically necessary—in order to maintain the characterization of Medea—that she bury them herself and not allow Jason to touch them. Thus, even granting the magic chariot, we cannot consider her escape a realistic one. An element of magic, furthermore, is not out of place here just as it is not objectionable in connection with the death of Creon and the bride; for, in both instances, this element of magic is entirely external and in keeping with Medea's reputation as a sorceress. In fact, there is scarcely an instance of the use of the machine in Greek tragedy that is more justified. Here it makes possible the final encounter between Medea and Jason, which in turn allows Medea like a *deus ex machina* to prophesy the mean death of Jason, and it furnishes a marvelous and spectacular finale.

The play is essentially a duel between Medea and the world. Her adversary is now Creon, now Jason, now Aegeus. Indeed not more than two speaking characters are on scene at any one time, and this of course is due not to the comparatively early date of the play but to deliberate artistic design. A third party on scene would confuse the stark simplicity of the composition.⁴⁹

Discussion.—The *Medea* contains the most skillful and effective scenes of exposition found in the extant plays of Euripides. The Nurse, as she later explains (56–58), has been overwhelmed by an irresistible longing to come forth and cry the misfortunes of Medea to heaven and earth. Such vocal expression of strong emotions is common in Greek literature, beginning with Homer, and it was not unnatural for the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean basin.⁵⁰

The story of the Argonauts was well known. A few words suffice to relate it and to remind the audience that Jason and the Corinthians were deeply obligated to Medea. The present situation of Jason and Medea at Corinth, however, receives much more careful explanation. The Nurse's emotions are no less important than her information. Her regret concerning Medea's wild career, her resentment of Jason's treachery, and her forebodings of violence to come—all are charged with profound significance.

The Nurse is a human being, and so her speech has no omniscient revelations and does not jeopardize suspense or surprise. In very natural fashion, furthermore, the Nurse suggests not only those events which actually take place during the play but also possibilities which do not materialize. The picture which she presents of the rage and grief of Medea, for instance, suggests the likelihood of suicide: she lies without food, abandoning herself to grief, and wastes away from continuous weeping; she refuses to lift up her eyes and is as deaf as stone to

the pleas of her friends; she loathes the sight of her children. Then the Nurse explicitly voices the fear that Medea will commit suicide or slay Creon and Jason.⁵¹

No less ominous than these forebodings is the reluctance of the Paedagogus to reveal the new misfortune of exile. Indeed there is a subtle irony in the first appearance of Medea; for her wrath, however great it may now be, will be far greater when she learns the news which the audience knows to be in store for her. Meanwhile, the forebodings of the prologue become more definite and ominously recur like leit-motifs in the ensuing scenes.

The entrance of Medea is perhaps as effective as that of any character in Greek tragedy. In general, this scene dramatizes what the Nurse has described. Medea curses her children (112–14), whose appearance here at the beginning of the play has effectively emphasized their peril and the importance of their fate. She also invokes her father and her native land and recalls the foul murder of her brother with bitter remorse, galled by the realization that her base deeds are not appreciated or rewarded even by the man who caused them and profited by them. When she learns of her final disgrace and exile in the subsequent scene with Creon, however, all other considerations are lost in the crescendo of her desire for revenge.

The scene with Aegeus has been criticized as unmotivated and abrupt from the time of Neophron and Aristotle.⁵² It is easy to assume that the scene was inserted mainly for its connection with Athens, especially because of the beautiful ode to Athens which follows the departure of Aegeus. But this ode, as an ancient commentator remarks (on line 824), is designed to deter Medea from her dreadful purpose by pointing out that if she persists, she will be wholly unworthy to be received in such a city. The praise of Athens, therefore, is strictly pertinent to the dramatic action. Another possible external reason for the scene may lie in a desire to connect the action of the *Medea* with that of a play entitled the *Aegeus*, which Euripides had written or was to write concerning Medea after she had come to Athens and married Aegeus. (Thus she fulfilled her promise to cause him to beget children!) References to the subjects of his other plays are common in Euripides. But this scene with Aegeus, though its introduction is undeniably abrupt,⁵³ has an importance and an effectiveness in the *Medea* itself which are quite sufficient to justify its presence.

The desperate loneliness of Medea has been stressed from the opening lines of the play, and if her triumph over her enemies is to be complete she must make them suffer in such a way that they cannot themselves be revenged upon her.⁵⁴ Thus a secure refuge after she has

destroyed her enemies is absolutely essential. This is the thought of Medea before the appearance of Aegeus (386-92); after his departure she cites the refuge which he has offered as the solution of her greatest difficulty (769). Medea has been careful to bind Aegeus with an inviolable oath in order that he may not be able to refuse her asylum, regardless of the crimes which she may commit before leaving Corinth.⁶⁵ To provide such a refuge, therefore, is the primary purpose of introducing Aegeus.

But the poet has a secondary purpose as keen and subtle in its psychology as any effect in Greek tragedy: Aegeus is a childless king. He is an object of special pity; for sterility of earth or of living creature was always considered a curse, and the higher the station of the one afflicted the more pitiful his misfortune. Throughout the scene, Aegeus' desire for offspring is stressed. He grants Medea's request, first, because it is his sacred duty to do so and, secondly, because she has promised, somewhat ambiguously, to cause him to beget children.

Immediately after Aegeus departs, Medea delivers a speech resembling a prologue for the second half of the play. Here she forms her plan to slay the bride by sending the children to her with poisoned gifts. This plan, Medea realizes, will necessitate the slaying of her children by her own hand to save them from the vengeance of Creon's kinsmen. But, with their slaughter, she will confound the whole house of Jason; for he will never again see his children alive, nor will he have his bride to bear him others. Thus will he suffer most (817). Like Aegeus he will be childless and miserable.

The presence of the chorus is most embarrassing in a drama of intrigue where a murderous plot must be conceived and executed with their connivance. In this play, to be sure, the chorus are women favorably disposed toward Medea, and a promise of silence has been exacted from them according to the usual convention (259-68); but the damage to verisimilitude is inevitable. In general, however, the chorus of the *Medea* is well handled. In the first three stasima the opening verses are devoted to contemplative generalizations on some theme having a bearing on the action of the play; the final verses are addressed to Medea and point the specific application of the generalizations expressed. It is especially effective, therefore, that the fourth stasimon (976-1001), though of similar metrical structure, is wholly concerned with the immediate action at the climactic point. Medea has just sent her children with the fatal gifts, thus dooming them to certain destruction. The chorus can no longer think in generalizations, but break forth in a song bemoaning the fate of the children and anticipating the death that will soon overtake the bride. In the following stanzas, they condemn Jason

and sympathize with Medea. Thus the chorus, having lost their previous detachment and calm and being wholly overcome by the pathos of Medea's fatal action, heighten the excitement at the climax of the play.

Later, when Medea enters the palace to slay her children (1250), the chorus in very excited measure (dochmiacs) deprecate her purpose. When the shouts of the children are heard from within, the chorus beat at the doors; but, like the chorus in the *Agamemnon*, they are futile and helpless. After the fatal deed has been done, they sing that they have heard of only one other mother's "raising her hand against her dear children"—Ino, who had been driven mad by Heaven. Since actually similar cases were well known in Greek legend, Ino alone may be named because the poet perhaps wished to suggest that Medea, like Ino, has committed her deed in madness. Still, these two women were conventionally represented as entirely different types, and Medea, unlike Ino, does not commit suicide.⁶⁶

One of the chief difficulties which Euripides faced in writing this play was in the humanization of Medea, for the *Medea* of popular legend was both the most famous witch of antiquity and the cold perpetrator of barbaric murders. A fair picture of this Medea may be found in the play of Seneca. Indeed a comparison with that play illustrates most clearly the genius with which Euripides achieved his purpose of making Medea entirely human. The excessive grief of Medea, her hatred of her children, and her dreadful cleverness in taking revenge upon her enemies are directly described by the Nurse in the prologue. Indirectly these same qualities are portrayed in the speeches of Medea herself,⁶⁷ and her character is even more effectively brought out in the scenes where she is contrasted with her several adversaries. We cannot but admire the astuteness with which she contrives to win her request from the naïve Creon. Especially clever is her denunciation of Creon's distrust of her cleverness, in which just enough truth is mixed with the false to make the whole credible. With an ironic smile, we are quite ready at the end of the scene to agree with Creon. "My will," he says (348-51), "has never been in the least like that of a tyrant, and in respecting others I have often made mistakes. Even now I see that I am wholly erring, woman, and yet I grant you this request."

In her first scene with Jason, Medea, despite all her shortcomings, is revealed as a character commanding some respect and admiration, whereas Jason appears utterly contemptible. He is insultingly abrupt and dins the hateful idea of exile into the ears of Medea. Then comes the "debate," which is almost as formal in its structure as the debate characteristic of Old Comedy.⁶⁸ The speech of Jason, especially, is filled with the sophistic cleverness which was so highly esteemed in this

period and for which Euripides was famous for centuries. From the dramatic standpoint, however, there can be no objection to the use of such sophistry here, for it splendidly characterizes Jason. In his conceited haste to deny that he owes his success to a woman, he is all too glib in his answer to the charges of broken faith and lack of gratitude. He intimates that Medea saved his life only to satisfy her own lust. Granted that he has a debt of gratitude, he has more than repaid it by bringing her from an uncivilized land to Hellas and fame. As for his recent marriage, he boldly contends that here he has been wise, modest, and proper, and, finally, a great benefactor to Medea and their children. At this point (550) Medea restrains herself with difficulty. Under the pretext of such admirable virtues, Jason proceeds to reveal his fatal and most damning vice: desire for wealth and power. He is "a man entirely set upon building up a great career," says Murray,⁵⁹ "to whom love and all its works . . . are for the most part only irrational and disturbing elements in a world which he can otherwise mould to his will." Jason reaches his lowest depth with the words (600-602): "Do you know how you should change your prayer in order to appear wiser? Pray that wealth may never seem grievous to you and that if you possess a fortune, you may never think yourself unfortunate." In sharp contrast to this cupidity is Medea's reply to Jason's condescending offer to give her money for her exile. "The gifts of a base man," she replies (618), "bring no gain." In an adieu which strikes the final ominous note of the scene Medea taunts Jason with his lust for his newly won bride,⁶⁰ but one feels that Jason's is a lust of a different sort. Sincere amorous passion is ennobling; but Jason's love is all for gold and power.

The second scene between Medea and Jason resembles the scene with Creon, for Medea shows the same cleverness in pretending to yield, subtly repeating Jason's own sophistic arguments. Little is added here to the character of Jason. His base niggardliness is brought out again when he protests the richness of the gifts which Medea has prepared for the bride. Though he prays that his sons may grow to manhood—the irony is effective—he shows no tenderness for them as Medea does.

The obvious tenderness which Medea feels for her children is one of the chief means which the poet employs to prevent her from becoming a monster. Seneca has Jason show more affection for the children and Medea less, thus increasing the pity which the audience feels for Jason at the expense of the humanity of Medea. In Euripides, Medea has been presented in the first part of the play, it is true, as hating her children. Externally, so to speak, this foreshadows their death; but, internally, it does so only in part. As a characterization of Medea, the hatred for her children, like her desire to die, portrays the desperateness

of her grief and not any clearly defined intention of violence. When she first determines upon slaying her children, it is not primarily because she hates them. Her prime motivation is desire for revenge upon her enemies. Medea herself must slay her children in order to anticipate the partisans of her enemies and their revenge. This is her reasoning when she first determines to slay them (774-93); but there immediately follows the thought that thus Jason will be made utterly childless and forlorn. In the second scene with Jason she weeps as she sees her children in the arms of their father and as she darkly and distractedly hints at their destruction.⁶¹

The departure of the children with the fatal gifts dooms them irrevocably; but the real struggle in Medea's soul is yet to come. In the first half of the play, the gradual steps which lead up to Medea's mad desire for revenge seem quite natural. Her determination to exact this revenge even at the price of her children's life, however deplorable, is humanly understandable in the light of her mad fury. It is only when her revenge upon Creon and the bride is complete and when she takes her farewell of the children that this fury departs and she fully realizes the awfulness of her course. She falters and thinks of taking her children with her into exile. Then in a confusion of emotions between an angry desire to punish Jason and a wild fear of her children's falling into the hands of her enemies, she again resolves to slay them; for her wrath, as she confesses (1079), has overcome her better judgment. From her first thought of slaying the children, there has continually recurred the realization that such an act will make her the most miserable of mortals (818, 1036-37, 1245), and her last words before committing the deed give, as her final motivation, the desire to keep them from falling into the hands of her enemies: "In truth, even if you slay them, yet were they dear—and I a woman cursed of heaven."

Jason, like Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, is presented in a more sympathetic light in the final scene of the play. With effective dramatic irony, he says that he has come to save his children from the vindictive wrath of the kinsmen of Creon. When he learns of their death at Medea's hand, his first thought is to punish her. At this point Medea appears in her magic chariot on the "machine." It is a spectacular scene: Medea's appearance high above and far out of the reach of Jason, emphasizes the futility and helplessness of his position. Jason vents his wrath upon her in a brilliant speech, but he perceives that what he says has little effect upon her—all that he can charge her with, murdering her own children, betraying her fatherland, and killing her brother, she has long since confessed. As the scene progresses, almost degenerating into an indecent marital quarrel, Jason gradually realizes his utter ruin. Medea

remains adamant and refuses Jason's last request that he be allowed to bury his children. The scene closes with Jason's bitter wish that he had never begotten these children for her to destroy. Pitiful as Jason and cold as Medea may appear in this final scene, we cannot forget Jason's infidelity and baseness. Our contempt for Jason may have changed to pity, and our sympathy for Medea may have vanished; but we must still regard her, perhaps with a somewhat awful admiration, as the one great character of the play.

3. **HIPPOLYTUS

(428 B.C.)

Euripides was awarded first prize, an honor which his plays received only five times. Sophocles did not compete, but his son Iophon (see Aristophanes, *Frogs* 78-79) was second; and Ion of Chios was third. The titles of the other plays produced at this time are not known.

Legend.—Hippolytus was worshiped as a god and hero in Troezen. This town, the scene of the play, is situated in the Peloponnesus across the Saronic Gulf from Athens, and in legendary times it was ruled by Pittheus, father of Aethra, the mother of Theseus. Here a temple and sacred precinct were dedicated to Hippolytus; yearly offerings were made to him; and every bride, as Artemis directs at the end of Euripides' play (1423-30), dedicated a lock of hair to him.⁶² A stadium, also, was built in honor of Hippolytus, and a gymnasium, according to an inscription, was called the "Hippolyteion."⁶³ In this play, Hippolytus is characterized as being keenly interested in athletics (1016). At Athens and Sparta, as well as at Troezen, Hippolytus was honored as a hero. According to certain versions of the myth, Hippolytus was brought back to life by Asclepius.⁶⁴ Some such resurrection would be prerequisite, of course, to apotheosis.

The mother of Hippolytus was an Amazon, named either Antiope or Hippolyte, whose union with Theseus, according to some versions, was one of violence. The name Hippolytus was usually interpreted by the ancients to mean "he who was destroyed (or torn limb from limb) by his horses."⁶⁵ The love of Phaedra for Hippolytus and the character of Hippolytus remain essentially the same in all versions, and it is obvious from what Aristophanes makes his Aeschylus say in the *Frogs* (1052-53) that the legend was accepted as essentially true.

Source.—An ancient commentator informs us that this play was the second *Hippolytus* which Euripides wrote and that it was called the

Hippolytus Crowned, to distinguish it from the earlier play, which was known as the *Hippolytus Veiled*. All that was unseemly and worthy of censure, he continues, has been corrected in the present play. He adds that this play is one of the first rank.

The same events constituted the subject of both these plays; but important differences in detail occurred, and there was doubtless little or no literal repetition. In the earlier play, Phaedra resorted to magic rites in an effort to secure the love of Hippolytus;⁶⁶ Phaedra claimed that she had fallen in love with Hippolytus because of the faithlessness of Theseus;⁶⁷ Theseus probably was thought to be in the underworld and, as in Seneca, he returned in the course of the play (frag. 440, Nauck²); Hippolytus, as in Euripides' extant play, appeared before his angry father and tried in vain to defend himself (frag. 439, 441); Phaedra may possibly have confessed to Theseus directly, as in Seneca, and then have committed suicide; and it is probable that at the end of the play Artemis appeared and commanded the foundation of the cult of Hippolytus as a late but good reward of his virtue and piety (frag. 446; cf. *Hippolytus* 1419-25). It is often assumed, also, that Phaedra declared her love to Hippolytus in person, as in Seneca, where the scene is so brilliantly conceived and written that one would like to attribute it to the genius of Euripides. Such a scene, from the moral point of view, may have constituted the most objectionable feature of the play. Aristophanes never tired of satirizing the Phaedra of Euripides, and it is assumed that this was the objectionable Phaedra of the earlier, lost play.⁶⁸

Sophocles, also, wrote a tragedy on these events, entitled *Phaedra*; but its date and the details of his treatment are unknown. It is certain, however, that Theseus returned from his expedition to the underworld in the course of the action, and that Sophocles' chorus consisted of women and were enjoined to silence as in Euripides (*Hippolytus* 713-14).⁶⁹

Influence.—Throughout antiquity this extant play of Euripides was famous, and it exerted important influence on literature and art. Only one later Greek tragedy on this subject, however, is mentioned. A comic writer of the fourth century is known to have parodied the legend. Euripides' earlier treatment seems to have been the main source for Ovid, who wrote a charming letter of Phaedra to Hippolytus (*Heroides* 4), and for Seneca, whose tragedy *Phaedra* is still extant.⁷⁰

In his masterpiece *Phèdre* (1677), Racine skillfully combines the treatment of Euripides' extant play with that of Seneca. Certain original elements, especially a love affair between Hippolytus and a character named Aricie, are added. This makes a more complex and

theatrical play, but it also robs the story of the moral significance with which Euripides endowed it.

Various other modern adaptations have been made, including one by Gabriel d'Annunzio (*Fedra*, 1909).⁷¹

Theme.—This story is an example of that plot of which the most widely known version is the story of Potiphar's wife in Genesis (chap. 39). Somewhat the same plot was employed by Euripides in his dramatization of the story of Bellerophon and Sthenoboea (two plays, before 425 and 423 B.C.) and in his *Phoenix* (before 425 B.C.).

Although critics still debate the relative importance of Phaedra and Hippolytus in this play, there can be no real doubt that the center of interest is Hippolytus. At the precise middle of the play Phaedra dies, and Hippolytus, who has been an important character in the first half of the play, is the main concern of the second half. The fate of Hippolytus is almost the exclusive concern of both Aphrodite in the prologue and Artemis in the finale. The etiological explanation of his cult, furthermore, is an important element of the play (1423–30). Debate concerning Euripides' earlier play and the extant play of Seneca is justified, but there can be no doubt concerning the present play.

This play, like many other Greek tragedies, seems primarily designed to illustrate the wisdom of "Nothing too much." "Mortals who flee Aphrodite too much," runs a fragment of Euripides' earlier play (frag. 428), "suffer a malady no less than those who too much pursue her." The folly and injustice of Theseus, too, are important moral elements in the play.

Character of Hippolytus.—Hippolytus is a young man, somewhat beyond the age at which young men normally become interested in women; but he is still perhaps an adolescent (118) and is idealistic to the point of being a fanatic. Though proud and imperious (1086–87), he seems to feel the disgrace of illegitimacy keenly (1082–83). It would be easy to assume that this cold son of a cold Amazon mother has an aversion to women because of the stain of his birth and because the union of Theseus with his mother was perhaps one of violence;⁷² but such an explanation is not explicitly given by Euripides.

In the prologue Aphrodite describes Hippolytus briefly as the only citizen of Troezen who says that she is the basest of divinities, who refuses wedlock, and who considers Artemis the noblest of divinities. With Artemis and his swift hounds he prefers hunting wild beasts to association with human beings. There follows a colorful scene designed primarily to illustrate and emphasize this direct description by indirect dramatic portrayal. Hippolytus enters with a supplementary

chorus of hunting attendants and doubtless with his hounds and hunting equipment. His words to Artemis reveal his love of virtue, his conceited opinion of his own attainment of virtue, and his wish to finish his life as he has begun it.

But the most important incident of this scene is Hippolytus' impetuous and haughty refusal to follow the old servant's advice to pay some regard to Aphrodite: "I keep my distance—since I am pure—when I greet her!" (102) And as he leaves the scene his farewell to Aphrodite is so contemptuous that it is almost a curse: "I bid a long farewell to that Cypris of yours!"⁷³ This is one of the most important lines of the play. Hippolytus here exhibits such an insolent contempt for a divinity, or, perhaps more properly, for an elemental force of the natural world, that his downfall now from the Greek point of view seems not only justified and natural but almost inevitable. This impression is strengthened by the old servant's foreboding prayer to Aphrodite.

From the modern point of view Hippolytus appears at his worst in the scene in which he bursts from the house and denounces Phaedra. Although his denunciation is too violent—and of course the author has designed it to appear too violent and possibly a little ridiculous, as might be expected in a pretentious adolescent—still, we should not overlook the enormity of the crime that has been suggested. This is sufficient motivation for almost any anger, however excessive, especially in a pure youth so conscious and proud of his frigid virtue; but his anger and haughtiness lend Phaedra some excuse for her terror and her false indictment.

That a youth so pure should be the victim of such a foul intrigue is indeed tragic and ironic (cf. 1034–35); but all too often in life, as the Nurse points out (443–46), he who refuses to recognize the elemental forces of nature is in the end overwhelmed by a fate that is unnaturally severe. However excessive some of these lines of Hippolytus' denunciation may appear, there is no hint of sexual perversion anywhere in the play or in the legend. In fact, many passages prohibit such an interpretation, and to assume such would be to miss the point of the whole play. Since the Greek dramatists did not shrink from speaking frankly about perversion,⁷⁴ and since both natural and unnatural passion fell within the province of Aphrodite,⁷⁵ such an interpretation would never have suggested itself to a Greek audience. Hippolytus is a youthful hater of women, like the young Melanion who is described by Aristophanes in the *Lysistrata* (781–96).

In the scene between Hippolytus and his father our sympathies are all with the youth, although we realize that Theseus, returning

from a pilgrimage with a garland upon his head and in a joyful mood, has been driven almost mad by his sudden grief. But Theseus is by no means an innocent victim of circumstances (cf. 1316-27). Before seeing his son, Theseus has cursed him with a fatal curse. The chorus begs the father to rescind this curse, assuring him that he will discover that he is in error. The chorus would make the best witness to prove Hippolytus' innocence, but the chorus has given an oath of silence (713-14) and has already lied to Theseus concerning its previous whereabouts. It is precisely in such a situation as this that the presence of the chorus is most embarrassing to the dramatist. But here the protest of the chorus and Theseus' refusal to regard it are used to incriminate Theseus. When the son appears, he is accused of utter baseness by his father, charged with being an Orphic fanatic and a vegetarian⁷⁶ and one who becomes intoxicated on the shadowy writings of a mystic cult. All this haughty religious fervor, according to Theseus, is merely a shield for wickedness, and he advises all men to beware of such people.

Hippolytus' defense is artificial and sophistic. Since we should expect him to be carried away with emotion far beyond the point of indulging in commonplaces and rhetorical argument, we may assume that Euripides is here deliberately characterizing the pretentious seriousness and adolescent awkwardness of this strange young man. Hippolytus insists that no man is more virtuous than he in the sight of god and man, that he knows not love and has no desire to know it, that the charge against him is unlikely because, he intimates, Phaedra was not the most beautiful of women and he had no desire by union with her to acquire the rule of the land.⁷⁷ Finally, he solemnly swears that he has not violated his father's bed, and he curses himself if he is not telling the truth. His father returns this very curse, rejecting his son's plea for a fair trial or for the consultation of seers with the same contemptuous phrase which Hippolytus used at the first of the play to reject the worship of Aphrodite (113, 1059). For the Greek audience the repetition of these impious words sounds a fatal knell for Theseus: Like father, like son. Theseus will be punished for his insolent disregard of justice as Hippolytus is already being punished for his insolent disregard of Aphrodite.⁷⁸ Elsewhere both Theseus (831-33) and Hippolytus (1379-84) bemoan the visitation of the sins of the fathers upon the sons, and although these lines are pertinent in their obvious meaning, they are designed to carry a deeper ironic and tragic meaning. Hippolytus has all too surely inherited his father's vice of holding the established laws in contempt.

Hippolytus debates with himself the advisability of breaking the oath which he has been deceived into giving. The breaking of an oath

exact under false pretenses would seem justified in modern morality. It was justified by certain ancient philosophers; but in conventional Greek thought a very strict formality was maintained. By the mere suggestion of breaking such an oath the enlightened Euripides is here, as often in his plays, calling into question a basic tenet of Greek morality, and this caused him to be criticized severely by Aristophanes. But Hippolytus does not actually break his oath; he sees that in any event he would not succeed in convincing his father.⁷⁹

Theseus, like the old servant in the first scene, is galled by the pretentious righteousness of his son. This, perhaps, is the very thing which prevents Theseus from believing Hippolytus; for just as those who fanatically oppose natural forces are often overtaken by an unnatural fate, so we are prone to attribute to such people unnatural crimes, and the man who is ever dour and solemn in his self-righteousness, when faced with such a charge, finds himself at a greater disadvantage than the man of lighter character. Solemnity is more impressive when it stands out in sharp contrast to one's normal attitude. But Hippolytus is at least consistent, and in his last lines of the scene he again attests his own virtue.

In the powerful final scene, also, the character of Hippolytus remains the same. He calls upon Zeus to witness that he, the righteous worshiper of Deity, surpassing all men in virtue, now dies, and that his life of piety has been in vain (1363-69). With admirable generosity, he grieves more for his father than for himself, as Alcestis grieves for Admetus. But the last note of his character, like the first, is one of self-righteousness. Such conceit is proper to the semi-divinity which he has now become. The whole characterization of Hippolytus, indeed, has been designed to be compatible with his eventual status as a god or hero.

Character of Phaedra.—The story of Phaedra is essentially a sordid tale. In the *Phaedra* of Seneca and the *Phèdre* of Racine her love is the main concern of the play and Phaedra is the main character. It was doubtless more important in Euripides' earlier, severely criticized, version of the story. But in the present play the tragedy of Phaedra is subordinated to that of Hippolytus, and Euripides has deliberately attempted to remove those features which proved most objectionable in the original play. He has been eminently successful in here presenting Phaedra as a character worthy of sympathy. This remarkable feat is accomplished by various devices. First of all he hedges her about with divine approval; Aphrodite is introduced and reveals the coming fate of Hippolytus and Phaedra with a definiteness that is rare even in the divine prologues. This foretelling is designed primarily

not to facilitate irony but to intimate that Phaedra is the innocent means by which Aphrodite will take revenge upon Hippolytus (47-50). Again, near the end of the play, Artemis excuses Phaedra on the grounds that she was stung by the poison of Aphrodite; trying to recover herself by means of reason, she was brought to ruin against her will by the deceptions of the Nurse; she wrote the false letter in fear of being herself charged with her guilt.

Whether such divine indulgence can really constitute justification might be questioned, especially since in this same play the sins of Hippolytus and Theseus seem, from the modern point of view, mere peccadillos compared with those of Phaedra, yet these sins are punished with the most heartless severity by the gods. In point of fact, however, these divinities are essentially personifications of basic forces of nature. This is repeatedly brought out where Aphrodite is concerned. She feels no envy at the happiness of Artemis and Hippolytus (20), but Hippolytus must still pay the penalty for his sins. Aphrodite, therefore, is not subject to petty human emotions, but punishment follows violation of her law as inevitably as it does naturally. Such punishment often involves innocent victims. To call Aphrodite here or Dionysus in the *Bacchae* cruel and heartless is simply to rage against the immutable forces of nature. Euripides' interpretation of this divinity, which resembles that of Aeschylus (frag. 44) and many another before him, is brought out most plainly in the beautiful lines of the Nurse (447-50): "Cypris goes to and fro in the heavens; she is upon the wave of the deep; and from her all things arise. She it is who sows and scatters love, whose children all we upon the earth confess ourselves to be."

This interpretation of Aphrodite makes it possible for Euripides to view Phaedra's love in a light quite different from that of ordinary morality. Phaedra is not guilty of deliberate sin; overwhelmed by an irresistible natural force, she struggles against it in vain and is destroyed.* She is in a way the innocent victim, therefore, by which Hippolytus' sin against nature is punished. Here as elsewhere, however, Euripides uses this divine motivation as a means of profoundly interpreting human action and not as a substitute for psychologically sound, human motivation; for Phaedra's passion, like the actions of Hippolytus, has been made thoroughly plausible from the purely human point of view.

A sympathetic and extremely skillful characterization constitutes the second device by which Euripides presents Phaedra in as favorable a light as possible. At the opening of the play, the Nurse is not, as in Seneca, acquainted with Phaedra's passion. For three days Phaedra

has taken no food, wishing to die rather than confess her desires, and her body is weak and wasted (274-75). As she is brought on stage, however, her first lines reveal her feminine vanity, her conscious admiration for her lovely arms and hands, and her care to have her locks tossed most becomingly over her shoulders. Then in her wild delirium, she expresses the longing to visit those haunts and indulge in those pursuits which, as the audience knows, are the favorite haunts and pursuits of the one with whom she is in love.

When Phaedra has returned to normal consciousness and realizes the implications of her words, she is covered with shame and confusion. The concealment of her dreadful passion is her primary concern—though in a way, of course, she secretly wishes to confess it. Brief references to her heredity make this passion more plausible. Her mother, Pasiphaë, conceived an unnatural desire for the white bull presented to Minos by Poseidon (338); and her sister, Ariadne, aided Theseus in slaying the Minotaur only to be deserted by him on the island of Naxos, where the god Dionysus came to comfort her (339).⁸⁰ The Nurse with the greatest effort finally succeeds in discovering the malady of Phaedra. The Nurse, not Phaedra, must first speak the name Hippolytus.⁸¹ This whole scene is a masterpiece. Phaedra's pathetic speech of defense further softens her character: "We know and recognize the good, but we are unable to achieve it" (380-81). Most ingratiating with the Athenian audience, moreover, must have been the virtuous sentiments which Phaedra here expresses, especially her desire to die rather than betray her husband and disgrace her children (419-21).

The Nurse serves as an effective foil for Phaedra in the portrayal of her passion, and the role of the Nurse is another device by which Euripides has rehabilitated the character of Phaedra. A servant may well be depicted as prosaic and practical and somewhat crude. At the first of their scene together on stage, Phaedra consistently uses highly poetic Doric Greek forms, whereas the Nurse uses familiar Attic, although even the Nurse's lines are poetic and in similar anapestic meter. When Phaedra in her ravings longs to quaff the pure waters of a cold woodland fount, the Nurse unimaginatively points out that near the palace there is a cold unfailing stream from which she may have drink! The Nurse, furthermore, must here bear much of the onus for the tragic events which probably fell on Phaedra in the earlier version of the play as in the play of Seneca. The one immoral speech of the present play is that in which the Nurse answers the very virtuous sentiments of her mistress. The Nurse's reasoning is very seductive; and the chorus admit that her suggestions are practical, but they cannot

approve of them. Phaedra herself severely condemns them. But the Nurse, with strongly contrasting crudity, remonstrates at Phaedra's pretentious words and reminds her that she is in need not of specious words but of the man (491).

The Nurse finally wins Phaedra over by telling her that she knows of love charms which will cure her malady, and without harm or disgrace, if Phaedra will have courage. She then suggests that she will work a magic spell upon Hippolytus. Phaedra falters, makes timid inquiries, and expresses fears lest she be played false by the Nurse, and especially lest the Nurse inform Hippolytus. The Nurse reassures her and, since belief in the efficacy of such magic spells was popularly held in ancient times,⁸² it seems most reasonable to assume that Phaedra is genuinely deceived by the Nurse (cf. 1305).

Phaedra's false indictment of Hippolytus is her basest act, nor is it here condoned by the thought that the father will deal leniently with his son. Still, there are extenuating circumstances. She does not have the brazenness to face Theseus, as in Seneca, and indict Hippolytus in person. Although Phaedra and the Nurse have no real justification for thinking that Hippolytus will break his oath of silence, Phaedra insists that he will inform against her (689-92). Her desire to save the honor of her children and to avoid disgrace herself—her primary concerns in the earlier scene (419-21)—motivates her suicide. She finds justification for her false indictment, first conceived in these last lines, in her desire to forestall Hippolytus' gloating over her death and to avenge herself upon him for his haughty contempt. Under such circumstances, and especially since she is in a frenzy of despair and is taking her life, her false indictment is at least humanly understandable, and she herself appears more a victim of circumstances than a deliberately evil perpetrator of crime.

4. *HERACLEIDAE* ("CHILDREN OF HERACLES")

(Possibly about 427 B.C.)

The *Heracleidae* is probably the earliest of Euripides' extant political plays. It is an inferior production, and its influence has been negligible. Some scholars assume that our present text of the play is faulty and that lacunae occur at the end of the play and at various other points. There is no certain evidence, however, that any extended passages are missing.

Discussion.—Aeschylus wrote a play entitled *Heracleidae*, and though very little is known of his treatment it is altogether probable

that Euripides is here following the main lines of that play.⁸³ The legend of Eurystheus' persecuting even the descendants of Heracles was an old one, but the role of Athens in this legend is presumed to be an innovation of the fifth century.⁸⁴ The Athenians were very proud of this role, however, and the subject matter of both the *Heracleidae* and the *Suppliants* is found in a single passage of Herodotus (9. 27) wherein an Athenian is pointing with pride to the great deeds of Athens in early times. The precise date of the publication of Herodotus' work is a matter of uncertainty; but his account of the present events, we may be sure, was subsequent to the play of Aeschylus.

The chief purpose of the *Heracleidae* seems to be to remind the descendants of Heracles of their obligations to Athens,⁸⁵ or perhaps more properly to remind Athenians that Theseus, their great king, was the kinsman and friend of the Dorian Heracles, that the *Heracleidae* were indebted to Athens, and that an invasion of Attica by their descendants was contrary to justice and accursed. The play is also a flattering encomium of Athens, and more than any other extant play of Euripides it glorifies the martial spirit. If Aristophanes had wished to be fair to Euripides in the *Frogs* (1021), he might have cited at least this play of Euripides, for it is as "full of Ares" and possibly as efficacious in instilling the spirit of Marathon as any of the plays of Aeschylus. Praise of Athens as the refuge of the oppressed and the home of justice, furthermore, was politically very desirable at this time, for Athens was now known as the tyrant city and was feared and hated by almost all the Greeks. So Thucydides (2. 8) relates, and about this time Aristophanes was boldly attacking the exploitation of the allies.

Certain scenes are especially effective in achieving the purpose of the play. Very impressive, for instance, is the scene when Iolaus has the children of Heracles join hands with the Athenians and solemnly directs them forever to remain grateful friends of Athens. The noble self-sacrifice of Macaria, furthermore, is symbolic of that sacrifice which men and women are called upon to make in any state if battles are to be won; and it must have deeply affected the citizens of Athens in the midst of a very costly war.⁸⁶ The irrepressible lust for battle which even the ancient Iolaus feels is another tribute to the martial spirit. Even Eurystheus, though depicted as cowardly in refusing to face Hyllus in single combat, is ready to die without flinching. The Argive forces are treated with even greater respect. There is no vilification of the enemy here except by those who are obviously prejudiced in their judgments.

An interesting incidental feature of the play is found in the comic

touch of the scene wherein Iolaus arms for battle. Coming after the self-sacrifice of Macaria, this might fairly be called comic relief—one of the very few cases of such relief in Greek tragedy.⁸⁷

As a whole, however, the *Heracleidae* is dramatically weak. Like the *Suppliants*, it contains a series of minor complications which are immediately followed by their solutions and none of which is built up to the height of a powerful climax. The final scene, furthermore, somewhat disrupts the specious unity of the play. Iolaus, who has been the leading figure up to this point and who has been perhaps the hero of the battle, is now dropped with a lame excuse (936–37). Alcmena is a much less effective figure—to say nothing of the disconcerting shift of the center of interest—and she now becomes persecutor rather than the persecuted and pitiful suppliant of the former scenes. This shift in mood also is disconcerting. From the ancient point of view, there is nothing inhuman or especially cruel in her desire for vengeance; but certainly by the time she tries to circumvent the decree of Athens, and Eurystheus has revealed the oracle of his dead spirit's becoming a benefactor and protector of Attica,⁸⁸ the sympathy of the audience tends to shift from Alcmena to Eurystheus.

5. *ANDROMACHE*

(Possibly about 426 B.C.)

An ancient commentator (on verse 445) says that this play was not produced at Athens. Some scholars think that it was produced at Athens but by another person (though the authenticity of the play is not doubted), some that the play was produced at Argos, and some that it was produced at the court of the king of the Molossians, who traced his ancestry back to Achilles by way of Andromache's son and whose favor Athens now had reason to court.⁸⁹

The *Andromache* certainly belongs to the series of Euripides' political plays. For the modern reader it is perhaps one of his least interesting productions, unless the reader is primarily concerned with examining the basic material from which Racine constructed his *Andromaque* (1667), a very free adaptation, in which Neoptolemus (Pyrrhus) is made a central figure in an exciting, close-knit drama. Euripides' own play was produced at the Comédie Française in 1917.⁹⁰

Discussion.—The author's chief purpose in the *Andromache* seems to be to vilify Sparta and the Spartans, among whom, one might almost say, is included the Delphic Apollo—regularly termed Loxias or Phoebus in this play. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans had consulted the Delphic oracle and had been told that they

would win the war if they fought well, and that the god himself would be their ally.⁹¹ This prejudice of the oracle, of course, infuriated the Athenians, who already had more than one just cause for recognizing the corruption of this institution and for hating it.⁹² The *Andromache* is the one play of Euripides wherein a deliberate and sustained attack is made upon Phoebus with no subsequent mitigation of the charge.

Achilles and the Thessalians, as ordinarily in Greek tragedy, are viewed from an entirely sympathetic standpoint. Thessaly was at times an ally of Athens, and "the common people of Thessaly were always well disposed towards the Athenians."⁹³ Peleus in this play declares that he will raise the son of Andromache as a great enemy of the Spartans, but perhaps this should be referred to the Molossians rather than to the Thessalians (724; cf. 634–36). The city of Argos, whose favor the Athenians were courting when this play was written, is thought by some scholars to be the city to which Menelaus refers as formerly friendly to Sparta but now hostile (734–36).

The play has been severely criticized for its lack of unity. In the early scenes, the action is primarily concerned with the fate of Andromache and her son. After Peleus has come to their rescue, however, Hermione usurps the stage and in turn is rescued by Orestes. Finally Peleus returns and becomes the central figure. These incidents follow one another partially in the relation of cause and effect. The hysteria of Hermione, whose danger is foreshadowed in the lines of Peleus (709–10), follows as the result of her failure to do away with Andromache. Hermione's problem is solved by Orestes, who is also responsible for the death of Neoptolemus. The structure here would be improved very considerably if jealousy and resentment over Hermione's present circumstances were the sole motivation for Orestes' slaying Neoptolemus and if Phoebus and his resentment, like that of "an evil mortal," were eliminated. The choral song on the grief which Phoebus brought Troy and the Greeks, however, forms a very nice transition from Orestes and Hermione to the murder of Neoptolemus at Delphi and the subsequent vilification of Phoebus.

In all the episodes of the play, furthermore, Neoptolemus and his fate have been important considerations. Andromache in the prologue says that Neoptolemus has gone to Delphi "to make atonement for his folly"—an ominous phrase—in taking Phoebus to task for the slaughter of Achilles (51–55). This is echoed by Orestes when he suggests that Neoptolemus is about to be slain at Delphi (1002–4), and later by the Messenger in reporting the words of Neoptolemus himself (1106–8). The play as a whole relates the destruction of the house of Achilles, the man who sacrificed so much in winning the war, by

the son of Agamemnon and the daughter of Menelaus and Helen, those who caused and benefited most by the war.⁹⁴ Still the figure of Neoptolemus is too shadowy to give the play any effective unity.

One consistent and emphatic theme runs through the play, however, and all the action contributes to it—the vilification of Sparta, Spartans, and Phoebus. That the play well fulfills this purpose cannot be denied, and a close examination of the play seems to indicate that Euripides deliberately sacrificed dramatic unity to his desire to make his indictment as damning as possible. So Neoptolemus' death is not made the result of Orestes' desire to rescue Hermione, for to make it so would eliminate the worst charge against Phoebus. This would constitute a change in the legend also; but in other details Euripides has introduced changes where they enable him to paint the Spartans and Phoebus in blacker colors. Thus, according to one version of the legend, Tyn-dareos, Hermione's grandfather, made the engagement between Hermione and Orestes while Menelaus at Troy made the contradictory promise of Hermione to Neoptolemus. But, in Euripides, Menelaus treacherously made both promises (967)—somewhat implausibly, perhaps, since Hermione and Orestes were infants when Menelaus went to Troy and he doubtless did not anticipate being away for seventeen years. Again, Neoptolemus was commonly thought to have been killed at Delphi, but for various reasons none of which concerned Orestes. Euripides first, so far as we know, presents him as slain in a most foul, cowardly manner by Orestes and his confederates, among whom is Phoebus (1147–49).⁹⁵

The most eloquent indictment of Sparta is contained in Andromache's words when Menelaus brazenly confesses his treachery (445–53). Almost endless minor details could be cited to show the great care which has been taken to vilify the Spartans and Phoebus at every opportunity. Orestes, for instance, is usually called the son of Agamemnon, as we should expect; but he first introduces himself as the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (884), and later the Messenger once calls him merely the son of Clytemnestra (1115), obviously to remind the spectator of his matricide. Orestes more than once is made to refer to the slaughter of his mother, furthermore, and to dwell upon the disgrace which he has suffered because of this act (971–81; 999). The chorus are horrified at the thought of a divinity's commanding matricide (1027–36). This subject is especially effective for the purpose of the play, since it vilifies both Orestes and Phoebus.⁹⁶

The marital difficulties of Neoptolemus' household are exploited primarily as a means of attacking Menelaus, Hermione, Helen, and Spartan morals in general. This attack is carried out with some

subtlety. When the distracted Hermione appears, for instance, it is with garments loose and revealing charms that should be decorously hidden (832)—an illustration of the Spartan custom which Peleus has previously condemned (598), though her state of mind may furnish some excuse here. Perhaps Hermione's willingness to go away with Orestes, who is in love with her and with whom she has perhaps been corresponding,⁹⁷ is intended as an illustration of what Peleus has said about her mother Helen and about girls being similar to their mothers. The play cannot be considered a serious handling of the question of bigamy; for Andromache, the character which the author wishes to present sympathetically, is on the wrong side of this question, and here the chorus must support the side of Hermione though they despise her as an individual (464–93).

No other play of Euripides is so severe in its criticism of women. Hermione, somewhat out of character perhaps, advocates their harem-like seclusion (943–53). This suggestion, which approaches Athenian practice, sounds strange coming from the author of the *Medea*; but the political purpose of the *Andromache* demands criticism of the emancipated women of Sparta and unqualified praise of Attic conservatism.⁹⁸ These pronouncements, therefore, can hardly be taken as the frank and honest expression of Euripides' own ideas. The whole play has been directed toward one goal, and not only unity but even free opinion—always dearer to Euripides—has been sacrificed to this end. But we can accept as sincere and sound doctrine at least the fulminations of Peleus against marriage with the daughter of an evil woman regardless of the dowry which she may bring with her (619–23; cf. 1186–93). The repetition of this idea as the last spoken lines of the play gives it such emphasis that one must conclude that it is seriously intended as one generalization of the tragedy. The actions of Hermione also, like those of Helen before her, have forcefully illustrated this truth.

6. *HECUBA*

(Possibly about 425 B.C.)

The *Hecuba* attempts to combine tragic suffering with a somewhat melodramatic plot of revenge. It is not a very successful play.

Discussion.—Euripides himself is perhaps the best critic of the *Hecuba*, for in his *Trojan Women* he has taken essentially the same situation and has made a much more powerful play. He has there corrected the weaknesses of the *Hecuba*, or at least he has better exploited its latent possibilities. Indeed the *Trojan Women* could almost be called the revised edition of the *Hecuba*.⁹⁹

The formal structure of the *Hecuba* has been worked out with care and shows a considerable degree of unity. The ghost of Polydorus speaks the prologue—the importance of proper burial from the ancient point of view nicely motivates his appearance. He foretells the coming sacrifice of Polyxena and Hecuba's discovery of his own corpse. This foretelling along with Hecuba's ominous dream lends some feeling of inevitability to these two episodes, and their external juxtaposition from the very beginning of the play obscures and excuses the lack of causal connection between them. Indeed this juxtaposition is skillfully maintained throughout the first part of the play. Polyxena refers to her brother with pathetic optimism, and the slave who finds his corpse has been sent for water with which to wash the body of Polyxena. Still, the unity of these incidents is only a specious one. But the discovery of the corpse is the direct cause of Hecuba's plot for revenge.

This later development of the play comes as a startling surprise. Since there was no legendary tradition to jeopardize this effect—the whole story of Polydorus and Polymestor seems to be the invention of Euripides¹⁰⁰—the poet is allowed free rein, and he takes full advantage of this. The omniscient prologue has given absolutely no hint of any such development, though it has introduced the name of Polymestor and the general background. When Hecuba explains her plan for vengeance, furthermore, she does so only in vague terms. Indeed we are repeatedly led to expect the death of Polymestor himself. Agamemnon assumes that this is to be the vengeance (877), and Hecuba seems to intimate as much both to Agamemnon (886–87) and to those who know her purpose when she is addressing Polymestor himself with her cruel irony (1006). The chorus too assume as much after Polymestor has been lured within the tent (1024–32). Such false foreshadowing is almost unique in Greek tragedy.¹⁰¹

The *Hecuba* fails to achieve great tragic pathos, however, for various reasons. It has an unduly large number of persuasive speeches and debates.¹⁰² At times these are awkwardly introduced, though they are brilliantly executed compositions and filled with quotable epigrammatic sententiae. Most famous are the lines in which Persuasion is described as the Queen of mortals (814–19). These very characteristics made the *Hecuba* a favorite play with later rhetoricians. It was one of the three plays chosen in Byzantine times to represent Euripides, along with the *Phoenissae* and the *Orestes*, and it was then one of the most frequently read Greek tragedies. Its popularity extended into the Renaissance.¹⁰³ But this intellectuality weighs heavily upon the play and does not allow the emotions the full sweep that they deserve.¹⁰⁴

The various episodes of the *Trojan Women* are in themselves much

more effective than those of the *Hecuba*. Polyxena is a colorless figure compared to Cassandra. The union of Cassandra and Agamemnon becomes almost sordid in the *Hecuba*, whereas it is dreadfully tragic in the *Trojan Women*. Cassandra's prediction of the death of Agamemnon, furthermore, is more natural and far more impressive than the very crude pronouncements of Polymestor.¹⁰⁵ The purposes of tragic irony, also, are much better served by having this prediction come near the beginning of the play rather than in the last lines.¹⁰⁶

The child Astyanax and his mother Andromache have a far greater appeal than Polydorus, and the inclusion of Astyanax' execution within the action of the play creates more pathos than the mere discovery of the corpse of Polydorus. The appearance of Helen, too, is an improvement in the later play. The various maledictions pronounced against her in the *Hecuba* are not very effective. Vilification of Helen was always a favorite topic with Euripides, but as a subject it deserved the serious treatment that it received in the trilogy of which the *Trojan Women* was the final play. Helen there becomes the antagonist of Hecuba, and their clash is far more significant in the tragedy of the fallen Trojan queen than the clash of Hecuba with the essentially extraneous Polymestor in the present play. The final scene of the *Hecuba*, also, is immeasurably weaker than the impressive finale of the *Trojan Women*.

Most important of all—but closely connected with the role of Helen—is Euripides' interpretation of the action. In the *Hecuba* no profound interpretation of the war or perhaps of anything else is offered. The play opens on the note, "How are the mighty fallen!" But at the precise mid-point of the play, Polydorus' body is brought in, and now the theme becomes that of vengeance. The spectacular action which follows is not consonant with the spirit of profound and hopeless grief which has characterized the first part of the play and which is maintained so successfully throughout the *Trojan Women*. Some critics see a causal connection here—grief drives Hecuba to an inhumanly cruel vengeance. But this is at least doubtful, and there is nothing especially barbaric about her vengeance. Almost any number of parallels could be cited from Greek legend: Ajax' attempted vengeance on the Greeks at Troy, Creusa's on Ion, not to mention the far more barbaric vengeance of Atreus on Thyestes or the horrors of civil strife which actually occurred at Corcyra and at Athens during Euripides' own lifetime. Hecuba's act is comparable to Medea's vengeance on Creon and his daughter, but not at all to Medea's slaughter of her own children. The "law" of vengeance was extremely severe in ancient times even among the Greeks.

The success of Hecuba's vengeance, furthermore, gives the end of the play a note of triumph for the Trojan queen. The play approaches the spirit of heroic comedy. This is not the spirit to which the figure of Hecuba most naturally lends itself. Her tragedy is stark and terrible; and it should be, as in the *Trojan Women*, unrelieved.

7. *CYCLOPS*. A SATYR-PLAY

(Possibly about 423 B.C.)

Since there is no information concerning the original production of this play, and since this is the only complete satyr-play preserved, no very reliable criteria exist for dating it.¹⁰⁷ Its comments on the Trojan War and Helen are similar to those in such plays as the *Trojan Women*.

The satyr-play.—During the fifth century at Athens, a tragic poet was usually required to present a series of three tragedies followed by one satyr-play. The chorus of such a play always consisted of sportive satyrs. These with their "father," the drunken old Silenus, obviously connected the play with the god Dionysus, as did their gay revels and their very frankly and indecently expressed delight in the joys of wine and love. The custom of following tragedies by such a play may have arisen after tragedies had become wholly serious and after a need had begun to be felt for re-establishing a close connection in subject matter and in tone between drama and the god in whose honor dramatic festivals were given.¹⁰⁸ The production of such a play also offered variety and relief, which were doubtless very welcome to the spectator after some five hours of serious and often depressing tragedy. The variety was probably welcome also to the poet. At least, the addition of the satyr-play gives a completeness to Greek tragedy and its poets which is typical of Greek art and literature and of the Greek way of life. No one can wholly appreciate the profundity of Aeschylus or the dignity of Sophocles or the thoughtfulness of Euripides until he has smiled at the playful fantasy and laughed at the indecency of their satyr-plays.

The satyr-play exhibits some resemblance to Aristophanic comedy. Both delight in gay revels, frank indecencies, and comic goriness (cf. *Cyclops* 234-40). Both show their connection with Dionysiac fertility rites by the use of the phallus, worn by Silenus (*Cyclops* 169) and by the chorus in the satyr-play but only by the actors in Old Comedy. Both types of plays have little regard for plausibility and move with careless rapid progression. The language of Euripides' *Cyclops* is essentially the diction of tragedy but contains colloquialisms and slang such as frequently occur in Old Comedy. The case is very much the same with

the meter. Satire is a main feature in both genres. An extant fragment of a satyr-play of Euripides attacks the excessive emphasis on athletics in Greece with the directness of a parabasis of Aristophanes;¹⁰⁹ but the covert satire of men and their ways found in the *Cyclops* more closely resembles that of later comedy, such as the thoughtful skepticism of Onesimus in the last scene of Menander's *Arbitration*. In subject matter, of course, satyr-plays differ radically from the political comedies of Aristophanes. But there were other types of comedy, we must remember. Mythological travesty was a favorite subject with the Sicilian Epicharmus, the "father of comedy," and it was used at least occasionally by the contemporaries of Euripides and Aristophanes. It may be that the satyr-play bore other resemblances to the comedies of Epicharmus and to later mythological travesties. In atmosphere, satyr-plays are more bucolic than Old Comedy, since satyrs are naturally rustic creatures. But the greatest difference between the satyr-play and Old Comedy is the very basic difference in structure.

Structure.—In form the *Cyclops* shows no resemblance to Old Comedy. It is basically the same as tragedy, but its choral odes are much less elaborate and usually lack the responsion so characteristic of tragedy.¹¹⁰ Four choral songs, such as they are, divide the play into five sections. The length of the whole (709 lines) is much less than that of any extant Greek comedy or tragedy. The play opens with a brief monologue-prologue in the usual Euripidean style. This is followed by the entrance of the chorus with a responsive song (parodos). The first episode quickly introduces Odysseus, and the dramatic action begins. Complications set in when the Cyclops surprises Silenus and Odysseus trafficking in his goods. Here the amusing lies of Silenus lead to a "trial" scene like those in many of Euripides' tragedies. The episode closes with the condemnation of Odysseus and his foreboding prayer to Athena and Zeus. A choral song follows which is usually considered not to have responsion.¹¹¹

The second episode, if it may be called such, opens with Odysseus' report on the slaughter and consumption of two of his companions. He also divulges his plan for vengeance—making the Cyclops drunk and blinding him. A series of choral anapests are now followed by an exchange of verses with the tipsy Cyclops.¹¹² The Cyclops has been brought on stage here merely for illustration and amusement, since the scene has no effect on the dramatic action except to dissuade the Cyclops from calling on his friends—a threatened complication that has received some notice earlier (445-46). When this simple difficulty has been resolved—extreme simplicity characterizes the play throughout—Silenus and the Cyclops recline on the greensward and continue their drinking

bout. Finally the Cyclops becomes amorously inclined toward his cupbearer, the hideous and drunken old Silenus, whom he has mistaken for Ganymede, the beautiful young cupbearer of Zeus. The episode ends with their retirement and the prayer of Odysseus for success in his intrigue. After a choral song that has no responsion, Odysseus returns and tries to persuade the satyrs to fulfill their promise of helping him in his dangerous task. But they are of the opinion that discretion is much better than valor, and Odysseus is forced to make shift without them. His absence within is covered by a lyric so short that it could hardly be regarded as constituting another division of the action. The blinded Cyclops now comes on for the amusing scene of head-bumping as Odysseus and the satyrs make their escape. In his final lines, the Cyclops, like a *deus ex machina*, foretells the future wanderings of Odysseus.

Discussion.—The *Cyclops* is a travesty of the tale of Odysseus and Polyphemus as told in the *Odyssey* (9. 105–566). This subject had been introduced into drama by Epicharmus, and it is probable that the satyr-play of Aristias and a comedy, *Odysseuses*, by Cratinus also preceded the *Cyclops* of Euripides. Various changes have been made in the story by Euripides or these predecessors. Silenus and the satyrs have been added. The action has been condensed into a single day instead of extending over several days, and consequently only two of Odysseus' companions are devoured. The huge stone used to block the mouth of the cave in the story in the *Odyssey*, furthermore, has been omitted, and the escape from the cave is not made underneath the sheep. These last details have been changed doubtless to facilitate dramatic presentation, and also because Odysseus' escape hanging beneath a ram would have done injury to the dignity of his character as here portrayed. True to the precept of Horace (*Ars Poetica* 225–33), Odysseus in this play, like an ancient "matron ordered to dance at a religious festival," very distinctly retains his dignity even in this rude company. The satyrs and Silenus may indulge in various indecent jests, and the Cyclops may make an utter fool of himself in more ways than one; but Odysseus refuses to play the coward and invariably retains something of the heroic in language as well as actions.

In regard to the incidents, we may note also that Polyphemus in the *Odyssey* is blinded because the huge stone blocks the exit of the cave and Odysseus and his men could never get out if the Cyclops were slain. In this play, however, there is no reason for not slaying the Cyclops, but the blinding is retained because it was the tradition and because it makes possible the very amusing scene of head-bumping at the end of the play.

The *Cyclops* is a delightful little play. It is rich in quiet humor punctuated occasionally by boisterous laughter. (Both humor and laughter are sadly clouded in some translations.) Its spirit throughout is one of delicate travesty. But just as Odysseus still remains the Homeric hero in spite of his undignified surroundings, so the poet still remains Euripides. The play is not all light fancy. Even the barbarian Cyclops is made to scoff at a war waged over one indecent woman and to hold forth against the gods (and indirectly against men and their materialism) like a skeptic philosopher. Odysseus, furthermore, describes the devastating effects of the war upon the conquering Greeks in lines that might well have been inserted in the *Trojan Women* (*Cyclops* 304–7). The hand that strikes so hard in that tragedy cannot resist the temptation of at least a flip in this satyr-play.

8. *HERACLES

(Perhaps about 422 B.C.)

Like the *Heracleidae* and the *Suppliants*, the *Heracles* is a play with a political purpose. Euripides is depicting the kinship (1154), mutual obligations, and noble friendship of the Attic Theseus and the Doric Heracles. Since the tone of the play with respect to Thebes is so favorable (1281–82), it may be that this play was written in an atmosphere of reconciliation before the possibility of an alliance of Argos and Thebes had become evident and perhaps before the Thebans had treacherously destroyed Panactum, thus enraging the Athenians. But the *Heracles* is also a study of distress and courage with universal significance, and its poetry at times rises to sublime heights.

Lycus' mortal threat to the family of Heracles and the bringing of Heracles to Athens near the end of his life are both fictions of Euripides. It may be that Sophocles' *Trachiniae* was designed in part to correct Euripides' novel version and to reassert the established legend concerning the death of Heracles.¹¹³

The extant *Mad Heracles* of Seneca follows the main lines of Euripides' play, but the theme of the glorification of Theseus has been excised. Robert Browning translated Euripides' play, "the perfect piece," in his *Aristophanes' Apology*.

Discussion.—The dramatic structure of the *Heracles* is an unusual one. It has frequently been criticized as lacking unity, but such criticism obscures more than it reveals. The appropriateness of the material chosen and of the poet's purpose may be questioned, but the skill shown in dramatizing the material is beyond doubt. The play does consist

of two parts: Heracles' rescue of his family from the tyrant Lycus, and Theseus' rescue of Heracles after his madness and destruction of his wife and children. But the contrast of these two parts and the emotional variation are themselves the heart of the drama. Euripides' primary purpose is to present Heracles' being rescued *de profundis* by the loyal Theseus, just as Theseus himself had been rescued from the less appalling depths of the underworld by Heracles. To emphasize the profound distress of Heracles most effectively, he must be presented first in the glory of success and victory. Only thus can the great pathos and irony of his fall be appreciated.

Heracles, according to the legendary tradition, was an innocent victim of the wrath of Hera. His great success led Hera to destroy him. This motivation, though divine and external, befits Euripides' purpose; for the most annihilating discouragement is the conviction that one has been ruined through no fault of his own but by the injustice of Heaven. A wholly innocent victim, however, can normally be effective in tragedy only as a powerful indictment against this world and the divinities who are supposed to direct it.¹¹⁴ But such an interpretation here would detract too much from Euripides' purpose; for this, if for no other reason, it is rejected in the lofty passage near the end of the play where Heracles renounces the legendary tales of the sins of the gods (1340-46). Though an innocent victim of the most appalling punishment, Heracles is made to have the courage to face adversity through the friendship of Theseus and through his own nobility.

Euripides has taken great pains to knit the play as closely as possible without compromising his basic purpose. The inestimable value of friendship is the last note of Amphytrion's prologue, and the need for courage in adversity, his last note before the entrance of the chorus. Courage in adversity is also the theme of Megara when she determines to die willingly and nobly. These moral themes are maintained throughout the play.

Preparation for the entrances of Heracles and Theseus, the main characters, is carried as far as it plausibly can be. For Heracles, this is wholly adequate. His return is the prayer and only hope of the suppliants from the very first. It is most pathetically pictured in the win-some lines of Megara describing the anxiety of his children (71-79). The choral song celebrating his great deeds like those of a cult hero, furthermore, furnishes the most magnificent emotional preparation. For the entrance of Theseus, however, no such elaborate preparation is possible. Heracles briefly relates the rescue of Theseus, who, he adds, has gone home to Athens, joyful in his escape from the underworld. But at least Theseus has been given excellent motivation for his en-

trance when he does appear: he has come with armed force to support Heracles against Lycus.

The consideration of the children's fate during the first scenes of the play, though failing to suggest the manner of their eventual death, is still pertinent to this death, and the pathos built up over their fate is not lost. Those of the audience acquainted with the legend may well have expected the children to be slain by Heracles, for this was an established item in the tradition.¹¹⁵ Even to spectators unacquainted with this part of the legend, the second appearance of the children, now dressed and wreathed as victims for death, was doubtless too ill an omen to be dismissed by their immediate rescue: these children were consecrated to death.

The pathos of the scene of rescue can be appreciated fully only if the scene is visualized. Weeping and trembling, Megara and her children cling to the garments of Heracles as, with pathetic dramatic irony, he says that his homecoming is fairer to them than his departure and that he will draw those clinging to his robes like a ship towing skiffs, for all men alike have this in common, that they love their children! This whole scene, of course, is in a way preparation for Heracles' slaughter of his children.

The ensuing choral lyric on youth and age is one of the most beautiful in Euripides and artistically one of his most perfect poems.¹¹⁶ The chorus have repeatedly complained of their helpless old age (the previous stasimon ended on this theme, 440-41); and now they are rejoicing at the rescue effected by the youthful might of Heracles. All this subtly adds pathos to the coming action. But there is a deeper meaning to this lyric, perhaps, which emerges in the second strophe. Euripides himself "on his sixtieth birthday," so to speak, and now, as he thinks, an old man, professes his zest and his faith in a life devoted to the Graces and to the Muses—to enlightenment and to poetry and the theater—a life which, he intimates with obvious truth, he would be allowed to repeat if the gods were wise.¹¹⁷

The shift from joy to sorrow at the climax of the play is a violent one, but the action here is continuous. The appearance of Iris and Lyssa should be viewed not as a second prologue but as a very unusual and dramatic means of reporting to chorus and audience the all-important action that is taking place off the scene.¹¹⁸ The use of divinities is wholly warranted, because Heracles is being presented as the innocent victim of Hera and because madness in ancient times was conceived of as the visitation of Heaven. Iris explains this visitation as the consequence of Heracles' superhuman success, and in the external structure of the play—a point that the play's critics usually overlook—the mad-

ness and its sequel are presented as the catastrophe of the previous action. The last stasimon of the play is the joyful celebration of the death of Lycus, ending with the ironic implication that Justice still reigns in Heaven. The scene of Iris and Lyssa and all that follows is technically a single section, the exodos, of the play. Though incidental lyrics occur three times in this section, the action is very rapid and no pause is allowed for a complete choral song. Somewhat similar is the structure of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where the final stasimon occurs just after Agamemnon has entered the palace and the last six hundred thirty-five lines constitute the final section of the play. Thus the madness is the reversal of fortune which overwhelms Heracles at the height of his glory.

9. SUPPLIANTS

(Perhaps 421 B.C.)

The *Suppliants* seems to be designed to remind Argos of her obligations to Athens and of her ancient enmity toward Thebes. The play's bitter criticism of Thebes and somewhat sharp tone toward Argos suggest that it may have been written during those months of 421 B.C. when an alliance between Argos and Boeotia, Athens' bitterest enemy, seemed a distinct possibility.¹¹⁹ The play is also an encomium of Athens as champion of the oppressed. Although these purposes are well served, the play is an inferior production.

Discussion.—These same events were dramatized by Aeschylus in his *Eleusinians*. The use of such material, the play's tendency to become a threnody over the dead, its elaborate pageantry, and its effusive praise of Athens all suggest that Euripides is closely following Aeschylus. We are told that in Aeschylus, however, Theseus secured the bodies not by a successful battle but by parley and persuasion.¹²⁰ The events are related also in Herodotus, who has an Athenian say (9. 27, Rawlinson): "Again, when the Argives led their troops with Polynices against Thebes, and were slain and refused burial, it is our boast that we went out against the Cadmeians, recovered the bodies, and buried them at Eleusis in our own territory." Here too a battle is assumed, and the work of Herodotus was probably published before the *Suppliants* was produced. This old legend had taken on new meaning in 424 B.C., when the Thebans, winning a battle over the Athenians at Delium, had at first refused to allow them to bury their dead.¹²¹

Throughout the *Suppliants*, the poet seems to vacillate between enlightenment and prejudiced enthusiasm. Theseus at first analyzes the

cause of Adrastus with searching and passionless logic. He all too convincingly concludes that Adrastus made a great mistake in undertaking an expedition against Thebes contrary to the will of the gods, that the young men associated with him were motivated by ambition and greed, and that now there is no adequate reason for Athens to undertake a war in behalf of the Argives. But when his mother Aethra makes a passionate appeal with the age-old phrases about religion, honor, justice, and the preservation of the Hellenic way of life, Theseus, though he still recognizes the correctness of his logic, can no longer resist. He has earlier pointed out that Adrastus gave way to emotion rather than to logic (161), and now he does the same himself. This, it is true, is man as he is and not as he ought to be; but the inconsistency seems to detract from the dramatic effectiveness. In defense of the poet it may be stated that the political purpose of the play requires that Theseus undertake the cause of the Argives primarily out of gracious generosity and that religion and the age-old phrases be taken very seriously.

Another inconsistency is found in the attitude toward young leaders. Theseus himself is praised as a young and goodly leader (190-91). Some scholars think that Euripides in the figure of Theseus is indirectly praising Alcibiades, who was now rapidly rising to power.¹²² And yet Theseus' own fulminations against rash young men who are interested in self-aggrandizement and personal gain read very much like Thucydides' subsequent description of the motives of Alcibiades in undertaking the Sicilian expedition.¹²³ Near the end of the play, furthermore, Theseus seems to be not unfavorably disposed toward these same rash young leaders of the expedition (929), or at least he allows Adrastus to praise them for modesty and altruism.

The attitude of the poet toward war also seems to be confused. The decision of Theseus, which has already been discussed, is pertinent here; but much more important are the speeches of Adrastus in which the folly of resorting to war and the wisdom of arbitration to settle international disputes are stressed.¹²⁴ These pronouncements may be vaguely directed toward the Athenians as a plea to make and keep a permanent peace. But the primary purpose of the play cannot be the advocacy of pacifism; for, if this were so, Sparta (187) and Thebes would not be vilified, and persuasion, not force, would be used by Theseus to recover the bodies. At the end of the play, furthermore, the sons of the fallen chiefs along with the son of Adrastus look forward to vengeance. Their plan is given divine approval by Athena, as we might expect, because this second Argive expedition was very famous in legend and was wholly successful. The political purpose of the play

made it advisable after dwelling so long on an Argive defeat also to flatter the Argives by reminding them of their final victory over Thebes.

The lengthy discussion of democracy by Theseus and the Herald from Thebes is not surprising in Euripides. It not only flatters the Athenian audience; it makes a very important contribution to the political message to Argos, for it calls attention to the basic hostility between the forms of government of Argos and Thebes and the basic compatibility between those of Argos and Athens. Incidentally, this discussion also furnishes a good opportunity for abusing Thebes; indeed the very occurrence of the discussion is cleverly laid to the impudent talkativeness of the Herald (456-62).

Several minor technical features of the play are noteworthy. The opening tableau of suppliants must have appeared somewhat trite to Euripides' audience, as he uses it also in the *Heracleidae* and the *Heracles*, not to mention the single suppliant of the *Andromache* and the later *Helen*. In the *Suppliants*, however, the whole chorus is on the scene and must have presented an arresting spectacle. The second entrance of Theseus in abrupt conversation with his herald is extraordinarily natural and effective (381). This technique is repeated later in the play (837), but it is so unusual for Greek tragedy that some scholars have suggested emendations to soften the abruptness.

The episode of Evadne and Iphis has often been criticized as extraneous or at least abrupt. It might be considered a minor plot, but it seems strictly pertinent to the theme of the suffering of the Argives. The chorus represent the mothers of the slain; Evadne and Iphis, the wives and fathers. The appearance of Evadne is admittedly abrupt, though it has been given as much preparation as plausibly possible by repeated references to Capaneus. This most notoriously wicked of all the seven, furthermore, has been rehabilitated into an ideal gentleman and citizen.¹²⁵

The portrayal of the grief of the chorus is wholly compatible with the genius of Euripides and is doubtless the best feature of the play. The character of Theseus, however, is not tragic in any sense of the word. Again we note the spiritual dichotomy of the play. But this dichotomy and the various inconsistencies pointed out are after all not very conspicuous. Indeed, the inconsistencies are no greater than men "as they are" actually show in regard to war; but the poet's idealization of Theseus and his praise of Athens make it unlikely that he is deliberately depicting men "as they are." He has simply fallen into the same inconsistencies himself, inconsistencies inherent in idealizations and glorifications. Euripides was too enlightened and too honest to write a play successfully for any purpose beyond exhibiting the truths

inherent in the material. It is unfortunate that he undertook an ulterior motive in writing the *Suppliants*.

10. ION

(Possibly about 417 B.C.)

This melodramatic play, like the *Iphigenia in Tauris* and the *Helen*, should be read without any previous knowledge of the story, for the events covered were vague or unknown to the original audience, and suspense and surprise are important elements of the drama. The plot is one of intrigue and discovery of identity.

Discussion.—The story of this play is designed to establish Ion, the founder of the Ionian Greeks according to late legend, as the son of Apollo, who was the patron god of the Ionian Greeks. The story is designed also to account for the fact that no such divine ancestry was commonly attributed to Ion. Further, the play indicates that Dorus and Achaeus, the titular founders of the other Greeks, were mere mortals and that all were originally Athenians! This genealogy, though obviously false, was intended to stress the close kinship of the Attic and Ionian Greeks and to justify the Athenian claims of empire over the Ionians (cf. *Ion* 1584-85).

No indication of the divine ancestry of Ion is found in any previous writer. Indeed, in Euripides' lost *Melanippe the Wise*, Ion was considered the son of Xuthus.¹²⁶ Sophocles wrote a *Creusa* and perhaps an *Ion*, but the dates and stories of these plays are unknown. Even if the divine origin of Ion is not original with Euripides, the incidents of the present play probably are original.

This particular task of glorification was not compatible with Euripides' enlightenment. He himself had frequently made sport of legends of divine ancestry,¹²⁷ and even now when he wishes to use one he cannot treat it with the ethical naïveté which is proper to such stories and the periods when they thrive. He must consider the moral implications. These, of course, are all against the divinity and involve Euripides in a curious medley of naïve myth and enlightened criticism. His skepticism becomes embarrassing and almost comic at the end of the play, where Ion, in a plainly marked aside to Creusa, is very humanly inclined to think that Creusa's talk of Apollo is only a pretty tale to cover a maiden's sin. (But Ion's skepticism also furnishes a good motivation for the *deus ex machina*.) Many critics have mistaken Euripides' own confusion in this play for a subtle attack upon popular religion. But the *Ion* is obviously not a polemical play; it is rather an

exciting piece for the theater and a patriotic glorification of early Athenian history.¹²⁸

The great beauty of the opening songs of *Ion*, like that of the following choral lyrics, must have had a powerful and somewhat nostalgic effect upon those members of the original audience who had made a pilgrimage to Delphi, as it has upon those modern readers who have done so; for Delphi is one of the most majestic sites in the world, with the crags of Parnassus and the eagles of Zeus—still there—standing out above, and the olive groves stretching down the precipitous sides of the mountain below. The genuine local color contained in these songs is extraordinary, for the setting of almost all Greek tragedies is vaguely generalized.¹²⁹ Critics who think this play a serious attack upon Apollo—or anything else—must be strangely impervious to the mood and poetic beauty of these early scenes.

Romantic and sentimental pathos dominates the play throughout. This is seen especially in the tale of Creusa, told four or five times in the course of the play, and in the wistful longing of Ion to know his mother. His most pathetic musings are those in the final section of the play when the Priestess has given him the cradle. This sentimental romanticism accounts in part for the very high esteem in which many modern critics hold the play. *Ion* has been called the most appealing youth of Athenian poetry and has been compared to the inimitable youths of Greek art.¹³⁰

The most interesting technical feature of the play is its suspense. The prologue must be spoken by a divinity, since the true identity of Ion as Creusa's child must be revealed so that the audience may appreciate the very elaborate ironies which characterize almost every scene. The manner in which Ion's recognition by Creusa is to be accomplished, however, remains wholly uncertain; no hint is given of the exciting complications that are to develop. Indeed, one line of the prologue indicates that Ion is not to be recognized by Creusa until he has come to Athens (71). This is the divine plan (1566–67), and the intentions of Xuthus seem to coincide with it (657–60). These lines of the prologue seem designed deliberately to mislead the audience—an almost unique instance of such technique in Greek tragedy. Even the experienced playgoer, who would naturally infer from the remainder of the prologue that the play is to be one of recognition, must have been puzzled. Euripides apparently wishes to give the impression that the course of the action, though largely directed by Apollo, is not unalterably determined beforehand, and that the interference of the chorus when they reveal Xuthus' secret to Creusa changes everything and upsets the plans of the god.

There is nothing misleading or incorrect, however, about the statement in the prologue that the relationship of Ion to Creusa and Apollo is to be kept secret. Although Athena at the end of the play reveals this relationship before the chorus, it is never to become known to Xuthus and the world in general. The presence of the chorus here is admittedly embarrassing, but it is unavoidable. Besides, the chorus is thoroughly devoted to Creusa and her cause. That this relationship should be kept secret is required for an entirely happy solution of the play. It is required also as an explanation of history's failure to record that Ion, the founder of the Ionian Greeks, was the son of Apollo.

At the end of his prologue Hermes expresses his intention of retiring to the grove near by in order to see the fulfillment of Ion's destiny—the god himself is subject to the suspense of anticipation!

Suspense is deftly maintained after Ion has been recognized by Xuthus. First of all, the youth is reluctant to leave his present happy life, although some preparation for his eventual willingness to go to Athens has been made in his earlier thought of a change in fortune (153) and in his praise of Athens and his interest in Athenian history (262–98). After he has finally been won over, the suspense is given a new impetus by his great anxiety over the identity of his mother (563–65). Creusa has previously been introduced. The audience is presumably more interested in her than in Xuthus and is looking forward to the solution of her problem. Concern over Creusa's reaction to Xuthus' recognition of Ion is expressed by the chorus, by Ion—who even suggests the possibility of being slaughtered or poisoned by her devices—and, finally, by Xuthus himself (567–660). These thoughts all foreshadow further serious complication. But the episode of this first recognition very properly ends on Ion's conjectures concerning his mother and on his hope that she may be an Athenian.

The choral song which follows is wholly devoted to the misfortune which Xuthus' discovery of a son has brought upon Creusa. The chorus determine to reveal the secret to their mistress even though they have been enjoined to silence with a threat of death (666–67).¹³¹ They curse Xuthus and pray for the death of Ion.

The plan for slaying Ion adds greatly to the tension of the play. Like the various intrigues in the other melodramatic plays of Euripides, it is conceived by the woman involved. This situation, wherein one unwittingly plots against a close kinsman, is a favorite motive with Euripides and is declared by Aristotle to be the most effective tragic situation.¹³² It should here be noted especially that Creusa has not only a lethal potion of the Gorgon's blood but a curative one as well (1005). This is according to the legend of the Gorgon's blood,¹³³ but the inclu-