

A Handbook of
CLASSICAL
DRAMA

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sion of the curative potion here seems to be designed to suggest that Creusa would be able to bring Ion back to life even after he had drunk the poison—conceivably another instance of false foreshadowing in the play. At least, complete uncertainty as to the development of the plot is maintained.

The possibility of Creusa's committing suicide, also, has been suggested (763); and the chorus now declare that she will slay herself rather than be ruled by a foreigner—she is a true Athenian! All this adds to the danger, the uncertainty, and the chaotic excitement at the climax, which is one of the most thrilling and melodramatic in extant Greek tragedy.

Various aspects of the *Ion* are suggestive of New Comedy. Intrigue and recognition by trinkets are there stock incidents, although comic intrigue is not so serious as the intrigue in the *Ion*. Indeed the whole story of this play comes very close in its essential features to that of the *Arbitration* of Menander, in which the illegitimate child of the wife is finally recognized as the child of the husband also. In Euripides' play, Ion first surmises that this, or something approaching this, is the solution of his own ancestry (1468–69). The sentimental irony of the *Ion*, also, resembles that of the *Arbitration*. The tone of the *Ion*, though more serious than that of a comedy, never perhaps reaches that of genuine tragedy. Some scenes verge on the comic, as when Xuthus attempts to embrace Ion. Lastly, the end of the play is written in the lively trochaic meter. So, as a rule, are the final lines of the comedies of Plautus and Terence.¹³⁴ The *Ion*, therefore, definitely foreshadows the developments in drama during the subsequent century.

11. *TROJAN WOMEN (TROADES)

(415 B.C.)

An obscure poet named Xenocles won first prize with three tragedies, *Oedipus*, *Lycaon*, *Bacchae*, and a satyric drama, *Athamas*. Euripides placed second with his *Alexander*, *Palamedes*, *Trojan Women*, and a satyric drama, *Sisyphus*. These plays of Euripides were definitely connected in subject matter and doubtless constituted a type of tetralogy. Although the *Trojan Women* alone has been preserved, the other tragedies can be reconstructed to a certain extent. Indeed a knowledge of these other tragedies is essential to any sound interpretation of the *Trojan Women*, and critics have frequently gone astray through neglect of them.

The subject matter of the *Trojan Women* is very similar to that

of the *Hecuba*, and incidents from both plays are combined in Seneca's extant *Trojan Women*.

Alexander.—When the child Alexander (Paris) was born to Hecuba and Priam, he was exposed on Mount Ida to die because of an ominous dream of his mother. But shepherds saved and reared the child. Years later he returned to Troy, and in athletic contests dedicated to the "dead" Alexander he vanquished even Hector and Deiphobus, the foremost princes of Troy and really his brothers. Deiphobus in his anger wished to slay Alexander. Perhaps his sister Cassandra, the prophetess doomed never to be believed, also wished to slay him, for she knew that he would cause the Trojan War and the ruin of Troy. But he was recognized and accepted as a son by Priam despite her dire warnings.¹³⁵

Palamedes.—Palamedes, the wise son of Nauplius, had revealed that the madness of Odysseus just before the Trojan War was only feigned in an effort to escape joining the expedition. Odysseus in revenge planted an amount of gold in Palamedes' tent and forged a letter ostensibly from Priam. Palamedes attempted to defend himself in a trial scene, in which Agamemnon perhaps did not distinguish himself as a judge. Palamedes was then stoned to death by the army as a traitor. The chorus of this play, like that of the *Trojan Women*, may have consisted of Trojan captives.¹³⁶ Certainly the action was interpreted from a point of view sympathetic to Palamedes and inimical to Odysseus and the Peloponnesian leaders of the Greeks.

Sisyphus.—The precise subject of this satyric drama is unknown, but Odysseus—the "villain" of the *Palamedes* and of the *Trojan Women*—was frequently considered the bastard of Sisyphus.

Discussion.—The *Trojan Women* is a stark and unrelieved tragic spectacle of tremendous power, a play in which choral drama and the poetic gift of Euripides are seen at their best. Few literary works so devastate the martial spirit; few have so effectively shown the futility of war and its annihilation of victor and vanquished alike. Although the play is not without elements of patriotism, it is truly remarkable that such a play was produced by the Athenian state in the midst of a bitter war. The Athenians had just finished the siege and barbarically cruel destruction of Melos, and now they were soon to send out their great but ill-fated expedition to Sicily. The whole trilogy has an obvious bearing on this contemporary situation, but precisely how much if any allegory is intended is a matter of dispute.¹³⁷

The *Trojan Women* would be termed a play of simple plot according to the Aristotelian classification, for it has no reversal of fortune or recognition but, like the *Prometheus*, moves directly from the tragic

to the more tragic. According to modern terminology, it is a play without plot. When read, it may appear somewhat disjointed and episodic, for the various incidents do not regularly follow in the relation of cause and effect. In its original context as the third play of a trilogy, however, the various incidents must certainly have seemed pertinent.

Even as an individual play, the *Trojan Women* exhibits a certain unity, and from the technical point of view the devices used to achieve this specious unity are among the play's most interesting features. First of these are the continuous presence of Hecuba throughout the action and the repeated appearances of Talthybius. The bracketing of the scene with Menelaus and Helen by the two scenes dealing with Astyanax also tends somewhat to knit the action together. Meticulous preparation, furthermore, is made for each episode, and the tone and the spirit of the action and especially of the choral songs are consistent throughout. If the subject of the play is considered to be the miseries of Hecuba and the horrors of war, every scene is distinctly pertinent.

The prologue, like that of the *Alcestis*, casts a certain irony over the whole action of the play, for it foretells the eventual punishment of the barbaric cruelty (764) and sacrilege of the triumphant Greeks. This prelude was important also for the preceding *Palamedes*, since the wreck of the Greek fleet off Euboea was presumed to have been caused in part by Nauplius, who took vengeance for the foul murder of his son by setting false beacons, as mentioned in Euripides' *Helen* (767), to lure the fleet to the Euboean reefs.¹³⁸

Cassandra, like Hecuba, had appeared in the *Alexander*. In the *Trojan Women* preparation for her entrance is found in Poseidon's mention of her future enforced and sacrilegious union with Agamemnon (41-44) and in the reference to the sacrilegious violation of her by Ajax, son of Oileus (70). Hecuba, furthermore, deprecates Cassandra's coming forth from the tents; and when Talthybius appears Hecuba inquires first of Cassandra's fate. The dramatic effectiveness of Cassandra's entrance and the following eerie scene, which recalls the scene with Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, can hardly be overestimated. The irony created by the revelations of the prologue is here continued. The flaming torch which Cassandra bears is ostensibly the symbol of marriage; but the torch is also the symbol of death and the symbol of frenzy. Her joy is real, though none of the other characters can appreciate it, since they do not believe her prophecies of the ruin of Agamemnon's house. Indeed, Cassandra's mad joy is so sane and reasonable that this scene might tend to relieve the stark tragedy of Hecuba, and we can easily imagine that a modern

playwright would place this scene last of all and end the play on the note of poetic justice and "heroic comedy." But Euripides does not wish Hecuba's tragedy to be relieved, and hence he is careful to place this episode early in the play and not allow it to terminate with the triumphant departure of Cassandra. The second episode closes with the departure of Andromache and Astyanax and the third with the departure of Helen and Menelaus, but this first episode must continue for fifty lines after the departure of Cassandra in order that the tone of the play may swing back to Hecuba's leitmotif: "How are the mighty fallen!"

The preparation for the scene with Andromache and Astyanax is less elaborate than that for Cassandra. Andromache's fate has been told by Talthybius (273), where the disposition of Astyanax has been left in ominous silence. Hector, too, has been mentioned by Cassandra (394) and by Hecuba (493). Andromache's magnificent review of her past life and her declaration that she would prefer the fate of the dead Polyxena to the future before her are only less appealing than her pathetic farewell to her infant son.

The scene with Helen, which might at first glance seem impertinent to the sufferings of Hecuba and inconsistent with the tragic tone of the play, receives the most careful preparation and, of course, harks back to the *Alexander*. In the prologue (35) we have been told that Helen is within and that she is regarded as a prisoner. Helen is repeatedly declared to be the cause of the war,¹³⁹ though Paris is sometimes burdened with the main responsibility (597). Again and again she is damned and called a disgrace to Greece. When Menelaus enters he insists that he came to war against Troy not for a woman who deserves death but to take revenge on the man who betrayed his hospitality and stole his wife. Helen is brought forth and, in the following debate, Hecuba succeeds in condemning her as personally responsible. Menelaus now admits that Helen must have gone with Paris willingly, thus apparently placed the main guilt on her rather than on Paris. In a way this scene is the climax of the whole trilogy, therefore, and proves that one shameless woman has caused the war and all its tragedy.¹⁴⁰

It is clear to the chorus (1105-9) and doubtless to Hecuba also that Menelaus will never punish Helen. Perhaps it is not too much to assume that the actor impersonating him interprets the scene so as to suggest that version of the legend according to which Menelaus actually drew his sword to slay Helen but threw it away at sight of her breasts.¹⁴¹ Indeed Menelaus' admission of Helen's guilt followed by the indication that he will be too base ever to punish her damns his character more effectively than all the vituperation of the *Andromache*

or the *Orestes*. This scene with Helen does not, therefore, give Hecuba even an appearance of satisfaction for her wrongs.

The final scene with the funeral of the child Astyanax and the burning of Troy sums up this tragedy of grief and annihilation with magnificent effectiveness.

12. *ELECTRA*

(Probably 413 B.C.)

This play dramatizes the same events as those of Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* and Sophocles' *Electra*. Euripides is obviously "improving" upon Aeschylus. Some modern scholars think that Sophocles' play also preceded that of Euripides. Perhaps it is more likely that Sophocles was following Euripides' general treatment of the material but was feverishly attempting to correct his moral interpretation.

Although the play of Euripides is not wholly satisfying from the moral and religious point of view, it is a powerful drama. In theatrical scenes it is not much inferior to the *Electra* of Sophocles, and in structure of plot it is superior to that play. Some critics, however, are offended by the realism of Euripides and the ordinary humanity of his characters.¹⁴²

Source.—In rewriting the material treated by Aeschylus, Euripides doubtless had two ends in view: he wished to interpret the matricide of Orestes from his own moral point of view, and to make the characters more realistic and the action more plausible. To serve these ends he made an innovation which, though somewhat bizarre, is as melodramatic as his innovation of the secret marriage in his *Antigone* or that of the Trojan embassy in his *Philoctetes*. He here presents Electra as formally but not actually married to a poor farmer and living in a desolate spot on the borders of Argive territory. Both the marriage and the location have very important effects upon the story, and it is impossible to determine which constituted the germ of this innovation. The primary effect of the marriage is that it brings out in dramatic fashion the abuse of Electra and makes her more realistically human. She, like Orestes, has been made an exile and robbed of her patrimony. She is practically a slave (1004–10). The primary effect of the location is to make Orestes' return appear far more cautious and the whole plan of slaying the guilty pair more plausible and realistic.

In accordance with these changes, the character of the farmer, the husband of Electra, is introduced, but he retains his active role for

less than one-half the play. The Old Man in a way takes the role of the Nurse in Aeschylus. Pylades is here reduced to a supernumerary, and Aegisthus is eliminated as a speaking character. Most important of all, Electra is played up into the main role of the drama.

Euripides reverts to the Homeric story for certain details. Aegisthus is given more importance in the actual slaughter of Agamemnon, and the superhuman stature of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra is correspondingly reduced. Menelaus and Helen, furthermore, are said to have returned on the day of Clytemnestra's death (1278–79).

Theme.—The Dioscuri at the end of the play seem to express the interpretation of the poet when they declare that Clytemnestra deserved her punishment but Orestes should not have been her slayer. Here, as occasionally elsewhere, Euripides in viewing legendary material from the standpoint of his own enlightenment falls into difficulty; for if Aegisthus and Clytemnestra were to be punished, and if Menelaus was not present to punish them, then presumably Orestes was the only person to do so. In heroic times, there was no public machinery for the punishment of criminals. The contention of Tyndareos in the *Orestes* (500) that Clytemnestra should have been prosecuted by legal process is a bold anachronism. From the historical point of view, therefore, Euripides' solution of this problem is not satisfactory.

There are references to Orestes' matricide in various other plays of Euripides. In the *Andromache* (1036) the chorus protests against Apollo's oracle. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Iphigenia calls it an ill but righteous deed (559, Potter's translation), and King Thoas protests that not even a barbarian would have done such a deed (1174).

Recognition and intrigue.—When Electra openly criticizes the devices by which Orestes is recognized in the *Choephoroe* of Aeschylus, it seems that Euripides is calling attention to the inadequacy of the means of recognition in Aeschylus. The technique of recognition in general was not easy, and its perfection required time and practice. Euripides is unquestionably much superior to the older poet in such matters, but perhaps he criticizes these details at too great length (518–46). Criticisms that are similar though less conspicuous are found in various other plays of Euripides,¹⁴³ and it may be that in this same play he again criticizes Aeschylus when the Old Man warns Orestes that he cannot simply go within the city and slay Aegisthus.

The plan for slaying Aegisthus and Clytemnestra is indeed simple in both Aeschylus and Sophocles. In Aeschylus, there is at least some subsequent complication, for the success of the plan seems threatened when the old Nurse is sent for Aegisthus and his bodyguard. In Sophocles there is no such complication, but the report of Orestes'

death has been subtly elaborated. In Euripides separate plans are formed for the two slayings, and both are more involved and more plausible.

The scene of reunion between Orestes and Electra is extremely brief in Euripides as in Aeschylus. The joy of brother and sister is sternly suppressed in order that the great task before them may be taken up without delay. This stands out in sharp contrast to the lengthy scene in Sophocles. Although the situation of Orestes when the recognition takes place is there much more critical, the soft emotions are given full play.

Discussion.—The character of Electra in Euripides is not unlike that of Electra in Sophocles. Her whole life has been cankered with hatred of her mother and with loathing of her persecutor, Aegisthus. She takes an unhealthy delight in dwelling upon her unfortunate condition and displaying it to the gods. In actual production, of course, her filthy dress, her unwashed body, her torn cheeks, and her shaven head would accentuate her misery (146–48; 1107, etc.).

Her "marriage" to the farmer, like the rejected invitation of the chorus to join them in a joyful celebration, obviously makes her state more pitiable. A real marriage would have been contrary to the accepted legend in which Electra married Pylades. It would also have been incompatible with that part of heroic dignity which the characters of Euripides still possess. Although Orestes in a very democratic speech (367–72) insists that nobility is entirely an individual matter and not the result of birth, Euripides does not go all the way in breaking down the nobility of birth.¹⁴⁴ The real marriage of Electra to a farmer, even for Euripides, is inconceivable.

Electra is a much stronger character than her brother. Upon Orestes' first entrance, he states that he is seeking his sister's aid, and for her part she is more than willing to help in accomplishing the death of Clytemnestra. She plans the device for the entrapment, and she never falters in her resolve. When Orestes himself falters, she is ready to add strength and resolution to his vacillation in a passage that is one of the most pathetic and perhaps the most honest statement of Orestes' dreadful task in any of the three dramatists (962–87). Orestes cries, "Alas! How am I to slay her who bore and nourished me?" Electra responds, "Just as she killed your father and mine." This line of Electra is almost the same as an earlier one in which Electra congratulates Orestes for slaying Aegisthus, "who killed your father and mine" (885). By this repetition she effectively implies that Clytemnestra must be considered in the same category as Aegisthus.¹⁴⁵ Orestes inveighs against Apollo and the thought of slaying his own

mother. Like Hamlet, Orestes wonders if it can be a fiend instead of a god who has commanded such a vengeance.¹⁴⁶ Electra still reassures him.

With such a scene as this in the play, there is no need of a foil like Chrysothemis in Sophocles' play to bring out the strength of Electra, nor does such a strong Electra allow any real place for Pylades in the action. Euripides' technique is at once more economical and more effective than that of Sophocles; for, after all, Sophocles' Chrysothemis is basically an extraneous character. But Euripides' technique is made possible by the weakness of his Orestes. Pylades is not needed in either Sophocles or Euripides, because he serves as the representative of Apollo and neither poet gives Apollo's command the significance which it has in Aeschylus. In some respects Sophocles' Electra appears stronger than Euripides' Electra. In Sophocles she resolves herself to slay the guilty pair if Orestes is dead, whereas, in Euripides, Electra resolves to commit suicide if Orestes is unsuccessful in his attempt against Aegisthus; but these two resolutions can hardly be compared, because the situations which elicit them are very different. In Euripides, again, Electra thinks of Orestes as a man of heroic stature and courage. She assures the Old Man that he is mistaken in thinking that Orestes returns by stealth through fear of Aegisthus.¹⁴⁷ A similar nice bit of characterization is found in Sophocles (1220–21), where Electra thinks of Orestes as far more a man than the youth who confronts her in the recognition scene.

At the climax of Euripides' play, Electra stands out cold and heartless. She has been quite unmoved by all that Clytemnestra has said, as is amply revealed by the diabolical irony of her own words and actions. "You will indeed sacrifice to the gods the sacrifice which you should make to them," she says as Clytemnestra goes within; "the ritual basket is at hand, and the sacrificial knife is whetted . . ." Then, since Clytemnestra is no longer able to hear, Electra drops her ghastly irony and plainly foretells her mother's death. This passage vividly recalls the similar scene in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, where Clytemnestra has enticed her husband into the palace with a similarly ironical welcome. A daughter worthy of her mother! The pictorial similarities and contrasts of these two scenes also, at least for those who had seen a production of the *Agamemnon*, must have been extremely effective.

In the actual slaying Electra grasps her brother's sword, and after the deed she takes full responsibility. But she is overwhelmed by the dreadfulness of it and suffers a complete moral collapse. Here she shows a weakness and humanity that is entirely lacking in the Sopho-

clean Electra; but her ordeal has been a more harrowing one, for Clytemnestra herself is here a more piteous character and Electra has taken a more intimate part in her slaughter. Even for the audience, indeed, though somewhat inured to horror after the scene wherein Orestes enters with the head of Aegisthus, the very appearance of brother and sister bespattered with their mother's blood must have been harrowing.

These characters of Euripides lack the heroic stature of those of Aeschylus or Sophocles; but they are not, as critics have often insisted, base or contemptible. Orestes returns with the intention of slaying both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and there is nothing unheroic about the extreme caution which he shows in the execution of his plans. True, he is so cautious that he does not reveal his identity even to the sympathetic Electra; but this merely adds plausibility and suspense to the action.¹⁴⁸ In Homer, Odysseus is no less cautious when he returns to his home. Orestes slays Aegisthus manfully, and his courage there is effectively contrasted with his reactions when Clytemnestra is seen approaching. Here he falters much more seriously than does Orestes in Aeschylus, and his collapse after the murder is even more complete than that of his sister. At this point he appears in his most unheroic light but not as unheroic as some translations make him—for the assignment of lines in this lyric scene is confused. The bitter reproach addressed to Electra which manuscripts and some translations assign to Orestes should, according to Murray and others, be given to the chorus (1201-5). This correction—and the responson of the passage shows that some correction is necessary—improves the character of Orestes considerably. Euripides' play approaches melodrama at times, but there is nothing in it so melodramatic as the Sophoclean Electra's resolve herself to slay the guilty pair. If the characters of Euripides are weak, they are also human.

In Euripides' play the one character who is most strikingly different from the corresponding character in Aeschylus is Clytemnestra. She is no woman with a man's will, no figure of superhuman stature, but a very human sister of Helen of Troy. Her guilt, though never denied, is made less odious in various ways. First of all, Clytemnestra here, as in Homer, has been merely the accomplice of Aegisthus in the actual murder of Agamemnon.¹⁴⁹ Aegisthus, furthermore, has wished to slay Electra; but Clytemnestra, though cruel, has saved her daughter from him (25-28). Both of her children hate her intensely, and the Old Man is very anxious to see her slain (663); still, she will come to Electra when she hears of the birth of the child, although she doubtless took a selfish delight in the birth, as Electra intimates (658), because it

would reduce Electra to the status of the peasant class and practically eliminate her and her child as potential avengers.¹⁵⁰

The scene between Clytemnestra and Electra is a masterpiece, effective in its pictorial as well as in its verbal aspects. Clytemnestra enters upon her chariot, dressed in queenly attire and attended by a throng of captive Trojan maidens—"a poor though pretty consolation" for the daughter whom she has lost. These captives are themselves gorgeously bedecked with Oriental robes and gold finery (317-18). Small wonder, then, that in the presence of these, Electra—another daughter whom Clytemnestra has "lost"—should come forward and confess herself a slave, ready to perform the servile task of aiding the queen to step down from her chariot. Clytemnestra is nicely characterized as a grand lady condescending to do a service for her unfortunate daughter, but at the mention of the word "father" by Electra she launches into a defense of her actions. Her first words upon entering have already intimated that the sacrifice of Iphigenia will be her main defense. She does not deny that such a sacrifice might have been justified if it had been made to save the city or the other children; but Helen did not deserve such a sacrifice, and the subterfuge of Agamemnon in claiming that Iphigenia was going forth to wed Achilles was base.

This defense of Clytemnestra might have been made even stronger, as Euripides himself has shown in his *Iphigenia at Aulis* (1146-1208). Only there in all Greek drama are the full possibilities of this defense exploited. But there Clytemnestra is a different woman. Incidentally, if Sophocles' *Electra*, in which Clytemnestra's guilt is made more odious in every possible way, preceded that of Euripides, we should expect Euripides, in reaction to an interpretation which must have been offensive to him, to give Clytemnestra here as strong a defense and perhaps as respectable a character as possible. But here in his *Electra* Euripides portrays Clytemnestra as the vain and licentious sister of Helen of Troy, and his purpose is obviously to give her not the strongest possible defense but only the defense which such a character deserved. Thus he has Clytemnestra confess that she would not have slain Agamemnon if he had not come home bringing a concubine with him—a strange confession, for Clytemnestra had presumably long before begun an intrigue with Aegisthus and her choice upon Agamemnon's return was doubtless to slay or to be slain.¹⁵¹ Still, one often rationalizes after an event and in perfectly good faith gives not only the actual motivation for his action but every conceivable motivation. Perhaps, however, the poet intends this as a patent instance of bad faith.

More plausible is Clytemnestra's contention that she was forced to turn to Agamemnon's enemies if she wished to take vengeance on

him. But Electra insists that her mother was playing the wanton even before the sacrifice of Iphigenia—a contention made only in Euripides. Electra cites Clytemnestra's cruel treatment of her children and rightfully concludes, as in Sophocles, that if Clytemnestra was justified in murdering Agamemnon, then Orestes and Electra are justified in murdering her.

Finally, real remorse is shown by Clytemnestra. In Sophocles (*Electra* 549–50), Clytemnestra insists that she has no regrets over what has taken place; but in Euripides, she is “not so very happy” about what she has done, and she sighs with regret at her present course of persecuting her children, although she has perhaps been somewhat softened by the ironic thought that Electra and her baseborn child are now no longer potential avengers. This Clytemnestra has often been compared to the mother of Hamlet, and her humanization fits well into Euripides' general plan for making the deed of Orestes and Electra a more appalling one.

Deus ex machina.—This play nicely illustrates the justifiable use of the *deus ex machina*. Euripides, like Aeschylus, wishes to interpret the slaughter of Clytemnestra by her son as a dreadful deed which is followed by dreadful consequences. But, since Euripides is writing a single play rather than a trilogy, it is technically impossible to present a dramatic solution of the state of turmoil in which the characters find themselves near the end of the play. Hence the *deus ex machina* is introduced to relate the eventual solution, which somewhat resembles that of the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus (though Orestes is not sent to Delphi). An admirable dignity and finality, also, is thus given to the close of the play. The author's own opinion of Orestes' act, furthermore, is here stated with more authority than a pronouncement of the chorus could carry.

Several incidental points are noteworthy in the speech of the Dioscuri. They command proper burial for both corpses, thus contradicting Orestes' earlier intention of throwing the corpse of Aegisthus to beasts and birds (cf. 896–98). The legend of the real Helen's having been taken away to Egypt and never having been at Troy is confirmed—apparently in preparation for the *Helen*, which was produced in 412 B.C., perhaps one year later than the present play. The peasant “husband” is not forgotten in the disposition of happiness. As in comedies and melodramas, everyone must be remembered. In their last lines, finally, the Dioscuri reveal that they must hasten away to aid the great Sicilian expedition which the Athenians had sent out in 415 B.C. and which was annihilated in 413 B.C. This reference serves to date the play. The most competent leader of this expedition and

probably the one Athenian who could have made it successful, Alcibiades, had been forced into exile soon after the expedition sailed. It is just possible that Orestes' repeated references to the ills and misfortunes of an exile may be covert allusions to the situation of Alcibiades, although such lines on exile are a commonplace in Euripides. In all three dramatists, furthermore, the fact that Orestes has been robbed of his patrimony and made an exile is a motivation for his action. There is no certain evidence, therefore, that any political allusion is intended.

13. **IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS*

(Perhaps 414–412 B.C.)

Either this play or the *Iphigenia at Aulis* was reproduced at Athens, 341 B.C.

This play shows striking similarities to the *Ion* and especially to the *Helen* (412 B.C.), but it is impossible to determine the chronological order of these three plays with certainty. They all resemble melodrama in that their actions depend primarily on romantic and sensational incidents rather than on forces of character, and in that conventional sentiments tend to be exaggerated.

The *Iphigenia in Tauris* seems to have been highly esteemed by Aristotle. No play except the *Oedipus* is favorably noticed more frequently in the *Poetics*.

Legend.—“The Tauri have the following customs,” writes Herodotus.¹⁰² “They offer in sacrifice to the Virgin all shipwrecked persons, and all Greeks compelled to put into their ports by stress of weather. . . . The goddess to whom these sacrifices are offered the Tauri themselves declare to be Iphigenia the daughter of Agamemnon.”

Human sacrifice was practiced in prehistoric Greece, as in other ancient and modern primitive societies. The legend of Iphigenia's being herself saved from sacrifice at Aulis is an etiological myth, like the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis (chap. 22), designed to explain the cessation of human sacrifice. The various legends about the sacrifice at Aulis and even the name Iphigenia are not mentioned in the Homeric poems. There the daughters of Agamemnon are named Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa (*Iliad* 9. 145). The name Iphigenia (“Strong-Birth”) was originally and properly the name of a goddess of childbirth, later identified with Artemis. A statue of Artemis “Tauropolos” in her temple at Halae in Attica was supposed to have been brought from the Taurians by Iphigenia. This part of

the legend, obviously, is due to popular but false etymology. The epithet "Tauropolos" has no real connection with the name Tauri; but, in addition to the verbal similarity, two coincidences aided this popular conception. The Taurians actually indulged in human sacrifice, and there were vestiges of human sacrifice, explained by Athena at the end of this play, in the worship of Artemis Tauropolos.¹⁵³

From these various confusions, which are typical of early religions, one may easily conjecture how the story of the exile of Iphigenia arose. The story of Orestes' rescuing her and bringing her back to Greece, however, may be the innovation of Euripides or of Sophocles in his lost *Chryses* (before 414 B.C.). The majority of the original audience probably knew the tradition, reported in Herodotus (1. 67), that Orestes died in Greece, and so they might expect him to return safely at the end of the play.

It need occasion no surprise that these legends are wholly ignored in all the plays concerning Electra and the vengeance of Orestes. Those plays are grim and serious tragedy, far removed from the realm of fantasy, and there the assumption that Iphigenia was not actually sacrificed at Aulis would introduce a confusing complication.

Influence.—The *Iphigenia in Tauris* seems to have been one of the most popular of Euripides' plays. It resembles the *Electra* of Sophocles in that Iphigenia assumes that her brother is dead and mourns for him and in that the recognition scene is extended to melodramatic length and the softer emotions are allowed melodramatic freedom. The dates of these two plays are unknown; but since these characteristics seem more proper to the melodrama of Euripides than to the tragedy of Sophocles, it may well be that Sophocles in this instance has imitated his younger rival. This recognition scene probably influenced still other plays, as the contest in generosity between Orestes and Pylades almost certainly did.¹⁵⁴

We hear of two other Greek dramatizations of this story and a Latin version by Naevius. The story was also burlesqued. Euripides' play had tremendous influence on ancient art, and many temples of Artemis from Asia Minor to Sicily claimed to possess the true Taurian statue of the goddess.¹⁵⁵

Among modern adaptations of the play may be mentioned a sketch for a first act by Racine and plays by Lagrange (1699), de La Touche (1757), and J. E. Schlegel (1742). Goethe's famous version appeared in 1779, and in the same year the opera by Gluck, with a text based on the tragedy of de La Touche.¹⁵⁶

Theme.—Plays such as the *Iphigenia* seem to be designed almost wholly for entertainment, and it would be a mistake to insist upon

finding any great moral or political significance in them. The tendency to write such plays during this period is due at least in part to a natural desire of both playwright and audience for a romantic escape from the depressing chaos at Athens during the last years of the long Peloponnesian War. This is the period when Aristophanes' comedy of escape, the *Birds*, was produced (414 B.C.). Sophocles, too, was influenced by this trend, as is shown by what we know of his lost *Chryses* (before 414 B.C.) and by his *Philoctetes* (409 B.C.), although our knowledge of the dates of plays is not sufficient to indicate precisely how far this trend went with him. Euripides seems to have been the leader in this movement. Along with the *Helen* in 412 B.C., just after the devastating catastrophe of the Athenian defeat in Sicily, he produced his *Andromeda*, which seems to have been the most romantic and the most brilliantly successful of all these plays of escape. The *Iphigenia in Tauris* itself appears very romantic and melodramatic when compared to most Greek tragedies; but it is still far—how far can best be appreciated by a comparison with Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*—from modern romanticism.

The *Iphigenia in Tauris*, like many Greek tragedies, is designed incidentally to explain and glorify Attic religious customs, especially the festival "Tauropolia" and the cults of Artemis at Halae Araphenides and Brauron in Attica. Certain practices at the festival of the "Pitchers," also, are explained (958–60). Iphigenia's insistence upon the essential goodness of the gods (391) is similar to the Platonic Socrates' contention that God is wholly good and cannot, therefore, be the cause of evil (*Republic* 379 C). Orestes' inveighing against Apollo, furthermore, should not be considered an attack upon religion, because Orestes is here laboring under presumptions which are proved false in the course of the play.

Discussion.—The opening scenes of the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which resemble those of Euripides' *Electra*, are unusually awkward and, according to dramatic standards, exemplify the Euripidean prologue at its worst. The relation of the dream of Iphigenia should come first of all, for it was the custom, as we may observe in Sophocles' *Electra* (424, on which see the ancient commentator), to describe one's dream to the morning sun in order to avert any evil consequence. Psychologically, too, this should be Iphigenia's first concern. Some of the information which precedes the relation of the dream is superfluous and must have been known to every person in the audience. Even so, it is repeated with desirable incidental effects in later scenes (cf. 214–35). What is not superfluous could have been inserted unobtrusively in the relation of the dream, perhaps, although Iphigenia's escape from Aulis must be explained fully and unmistakably. Awkward also is the "vacant stage,"

like that in Euripides' *Electra* and *Phoenissae*, which follows Iphigenia's speech. The second prologue by Orestes and Pylades does not improve things.

In plays of genuinely tragic outcome the most ominous foreboding often has a note of ironic optimism, a pathetic hope that all will turn out well in the end. Thus Oedipus is confident that with the aid of Apollo he can free Thebes of its plague, and Teiresias in the *Bacchae* of Euripides prays that Pentheus and his city may come to no harm. This ironic optimism may continue up to the climax of the play, and it makes the reversal of fortune all the more tragic. In melodrama, however, the process is usually reversed. The play opens on a note of ironic pessimism. The dramatist makes every effort to create pity and fear, which become more intense as the action progresses, and to maintain suspense by delaying as long as possible the happy ending. This is the scheme followed in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

The prologue of Iphigenia, though exciting pity and fear, does not give the impression of imminent doom. Iphigenia obviously makes a too pessimistic interpretation of her dream, and Orestes appears immediately afterwards. Although the oracle seems to promise Orestes' safe return, the extreme danger of the two young men is stressed upon their first entrance, as it has been indirectly suggested by Iphigenia's description of the grim rites of human sacrifice and of her ominous dream. This danger is made even more obvious at the first encounter between brother and sister; for both, as in the first encounter of Creusa and Ion in the *Ion*, have a distinctly hostile attitude, though they are secretly attracted to each other.¹⁵⁷ Iphigenia, offended by her father's attempted sacrifice of herself and embittered by the conviction that her brother no longer lives, is now more than willing to sacrifice Greek strangers. Orestes, for his part, is offended by Iphigenia's sentimental pity for his home and family and by her apparently impertinent curiosity. Hence Orestes sullenly refuses to reveal his name, and the suspense is effectively maintained.

Serious dramatic irony, with which both the words of brother and sister and their situation are heavily fraught, increases the effectiveness of this scene. Iphigenia in her ignorance seems to be on the point of officiating at the sacrifice of her own brother. One later writer, as Aristotle (*Poetics* 1455 a, Bywater) points out, brought about the recognition by having Orestes declare: "My sister was sacrificed, and I am to be sacrificed like her." Such a situation, wherein one unknowingly jeopardizes the life of a kinsman, is most powerful in arousing pity and fear, in the opinion of Aristotle (*Poetics* 1453 b), and these situations were a favorite device with Euripides.¹⁵⁸

Actual recognition of brother and sister is postponed as long as possible. Meanwhile Pylades tries to allay the wonder of Orestes over the identity of the priestess. Then the two young men indulge in their contest of sentimental generosity, which makes it appear for a time as if neither will make any effort to escape. That an ancient audience was as enthusiastic about such a melodramatic scene as a modern one could be is proved by comments which Cicero makes about a Roman play with a scene apparently modeled on this one:

What applause arises from the throng and even from those of no education in the theater when these famous words are spoken, "I am Orestes," and the other contradicts him, "No, I am really Orestes, I tell you!" And again when a solution is offered by both together to the confused and puzzled king, "We both, then, ask to be slain at the same time." Does this scene ever fail to arouse the greatest admiration when it is acted?¹⁵⁹

The best of all types of recognition is that which naturally arises out of the incidents themselves, as Aristotle (*Poetics* 1455 a) says, citing the *Oedipus* and the *Iphigenia*; for it is not improbable, he continues, that Iphigenia should wish to send a letter home. Nor is the process by which Iphigenia is brought to read the letter improbable; an oath was absolutely binding according to ancient thought, and it is natural that Pylades should insist upon being relieved of his oath in case of shipwreck and loss of the letter. The impatience of Iphigenia at Orestes' interruptions while she is reading the letter and, after he has declared himself, her skepticism over his identity lengthen out the excited expectation of the audience. Except in depth of pathos this scene rivals the scene with the urn in Sophocles' *Electra*.

Despite the precariousness of the situation, Iphigenia and Orestes must express their joy of reunion, Iphigenia must ask about Electra and the family, and Orestes must explain his past at length. Then their attention is turned to the desperateness of their situation. Iphigenia's first thought is for bold and concerted action; but she immediately loses heart, and a second contest in melodramatic generosity, this time between Iphigenia and her brother, threatens to stifle action. In casting about for a plan, the crude suggestions of Orestes are rejected; but Iphigenia's skill in device—a typical characteristic of women in ancient tragedy and comedy—is demonstrated by her discovery of a plan for deceiving the king which has something of Oriental subtlety and boldness.

According to theatrical convention the chorus must be sworn to silence after the formation of the intrigue; but instead of employing this device in the usual stereotyped manner, which really calls the attention of the audience to the implausibility of forming an intrigue

before so many witnesses, Euripides has here elaborated this conventional notice of the chorus into such a long and pathetic appeal by Iphigenia that the audience, far from remarking any implausibility, cannot fail to be impressed with the extreme precariousness of the situation.¹⁰⁰

The excitement remains at a high pitch during the scene with Thoas. The elaborate deception practiced upon him by Iphigenia seems more proper to melodrama or comedy than to tragedy and is reminiscent of Euripides' satyr-play, the *Cyclops*.¹⁰¹ One is tempted to laugh when Thoas naïvely compliments Iphigenia, saying that Greece has made her wise, and when Iphigenia warns him that Greeks know no faith. Comic irony is contained also in Iphigenia's request that Thoas assign some of his own bodyguard to go with her, in Thoas' pleased assent to her command that all citizens remain within their homes, and in his joining Iphigenia in her prayerful wish that the purification may succeed "as she desires." The growing tenseness of the scene is emphasized by a sudden shift to the fast trochaic meter with very short and rapid exchanges between the king and Iphigenia. The ironic prayer to Artemis forms a fitting conclusion to this scene of deception.

When Iphigenia and her kinsmen leave the scene, the chorus sing an interlude song that has no immediate connection with the present tense situation although it is concerned with Apollo, who is the ultimate author of all this action. This type of interlude was condemned by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1456 a). It is possible, however, that the poet designedly inserted an interlude at this point, believing that the extreme emotional tension here would be jeopardized less by an interlude, like an entr'acte in the modern theater, than by any effort of the chorus to heighten or maintain the tension.

The Messenger enters, mauled and disheveled. The chorus attempt to deceive him, but this results only in their becoming implicated in the plot and themselves incurring mortal peril. The ship is being washed back upon the shore, and Thoas seems to be on the point of destroying Iphigenia and her kinsmen—a climax worthy of any melodrama—when Athena appears as the *deus ex machina*.

Deus ex machina.—The *Iphigenia in Tauris* shows most plainly that the *deus ex machina* in Greek tragedy is not necessarily a device employed to solve an otherwise unsolvable complication, for here a natural solution is deliberately avoided by the poet. Since the ship of Orestes could easily and plausibly have escaped safely, it is obvious that the storm and these last reverses, like so much of the remainder of the play, are designed to maintain suspense and excitement to the very end and to necessitate the spectacular finale of a *deus ex machina*. A

divinity may also best put an end to all thought of pursuit or revenge on the part of Thoas—perhaps a mere device for immediately announcing the eventual result of the action. By introducing Athena, furthermore, Athens may be praised and the divine origins of certain Athenian customs may be explained. The future of Iphigenia and of Orestes also may be foretold—information which could not be imparted without divine aid—and the chorus may be rescued, so that Iphigenia's earlier promise to them does not go entirely unfulfilled (cf. 1068). Lastly, the action may be brought to a close with a finality that is as satisfying as it is absolute.

Character of Iphigenia.—The willingness of Iphigenia to invent and execute the deception of the king has sometimes been criticized as a blemish upon her character. In the *Iphigenie auf Tauris* of Goethe, for instance, it is Pylades and not Iphigenie who invents the deception, and although Iphigenie at first makes an attempt to carry out the plan, in the end she finds that she cannot bring herself to practice such dishonesty. She frankly reveals the whole plan to the king, therefore, and throws herself and her kinsmen upon his mercy. The king is thereupon discovered to be almost as noble as she, for he can only send her and her kinsmen away with his blessing. Such romantic falsification or, at best, idealization of human character—we must not forget that Thoas was a barbarian practicing human sacrifice—would in the Greek theater have been considered proper only to the fantasy of comedy, which is wholly unconcerned with plausibility.

The attitude of the Athenian dramatists toward deception is much the same as that of Homer. An ability to deceive is an indication of superior intelligence and an admirable and very desirable trait if the deception is practiced only against enemies and only where open combat could not possibly be successful. In the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles we may see a higher moral code, but the deception which Neoptolemus is there asked to practice obviously becomes base and despicable and cannot in any important respect be compared to the deception by which Iphigenia saves the life of her brother. In this deception, according to ancient standards, there is nothing despicable or unheroic.

14. HELEN

(412 B.C.)

Along with the *Helen*, Euripides produced the *Andromeda*, which told of Andromeda's being chained to a cliff in "Ethiopia" as a sacrifice to a sea monster and of her being rescued by Perseus, the flying Greek hero. This romantic tale of a maiden in distress was one of the most

popular melodramas of Euripides. (By the irony of fate the brilliant *Andromeda* has been lost and the very mediocre *Helen* preserved.) The satirist Lucian amusingly relates that after the people of Abdera, a town in Thrace, had seen a production of the *Andromeda*, they became so mad with enthusiasm over it that they all turned pale and went about the streets declaiming passages from the play.¹⁶²

Legend.—The legend that a mere wraith of Helen accompanied Paris to Troy doubtless originated in an effort to exonerate the deified Helen. This was a natural movement at a time when the rising ethical consciousness was beginning to subject early legends and divinities to critical re-examination. The Dorian poet Stesichorus (seventh and sixth centuries B.C.) was reputedly the originator of this version of the legend of Helen, whose cult was of course important mostly among the Dorians; but Stesichorus, so far as we know, made no connection between this story of the wraith and Egypt.¹⁶³

Herodotus (2. 113–20) was told by Egyptian priests that Helen and the treasures taken by Paris from Sparta never went to Troy but were retained in Egypt when the king, Proteus, learned how they had all been stolen. The Greeks, they continued, mistakenly sailed to Troy and only after the city was captured did they finally believe the Trojans, who had from the first insisted that Helen and the treasures had been taken from Paris and held in Egypt. Traveling thither, Menelaus was received with the kindest hospitality. Helen and his treasures were restored to him. But he returned evil for good by seizing two Egyptian children and sacrificing them to secure a favorable wind.

Euripides has combined these two legends, and the result is a story very similar to that of the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. We need not, with some scholars, interpret the *Helen* as itself designed to rehabilitate that heroine whom Euripides had so often vilified in his earlier plays. He was to vilify her even more in his subsequent plays. But a plot naturally favorable to Helen has been accepted for two reasons: it constitutes excellent material for a melodrama, and it allows Euripides again to interpret the Trojan War—and by implication perhaps all war—as a wholly mistaken cause. He had made this point in the profound tragedy of the *Trojan Women*, and he now repeats it in a play of entirely different tone and spirit. Although Euripides was mainly concerned, no doubt, with the dramatic effectiveness of the material, this second point is given such emphasis that it must have been seriously intended.¹⁶⁴

Discussion.—The *Helen*, like the *Andromeda*, is apparently a romantic play of escape. Escape from tragic reality seems to have been Euripides' primary reaction to the appalling disaster which had just

befallen Athens with the destruction of the Sicilian expedition in 413 B.C. But beneath the surface of the *Helen* there are a seriousness of purpose and a profound despair which are not found in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In the *Helen* (744–57), for instance, the Messenger denounces divination and oracles in a speech which resembles a parabasis of Aristophanes addressed directly to the Athenians. The chorus echo his skepticism. Such skepticism is obviously out of place in this play, where Theonoe and her omniscience have an important bearing. But it was especially appropriate to the Athenians after the failure of the Sicilian expedition, for various oracles had been cited in favor of this rash venture.¹⁶⁵ Again, Menelaus (1441–50) prays to Zeus for deliverance from their misfortunes in lines which every Athenian might well have repeated after him.

The *Helen* is essentially the same play as the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. A list of their common features will reveal the formula upon which they are written—still an excellent one and with slight changes still used. Both plays are laid in a foreign and exotic land; both open with the heroine's monologue, which is filled with despair, and soon continue with the heroine's lamentation over the supposed death of the hero. The hero on entering delivers what amounts to a second prologue. He is actually in great danger, for Greeks are put to death by the king of the land. Ironical hostility marks the first encounter of hero and heroine, but the recognition finally is accomplished. The suspense, however, now increases instead of disappearing, since the situation is fraught with danger and apparent hopelessness. In a contest in generosity hero and heroine pledge their faith to live or die together. The hero fumbles about for a plan of escape and clumsily suggests slaying the king. The heroine comes to his rescue, however, and with typically feminine cunning and deceit devises a dangerous but hopeful plan. The chorus, composed of Greek women favorably disposed, are enjoined or sworn to silence. Their own rescue is held out as a reward. The barbarian king now appears and is deceived by the clever Greeks in a scene filled with comic irony; indeed, he is made a ridiculous dupe by being inveigled into furnishing the means of escape or very materially aiding the escape. At this climactic point the chorus sing a lyric having nothing to do with the immediate action. Thus they maintain the suspense by giving no hint in word or tone of the outcome. Escape is now made by sea, although various unforeseen complications have arisen to threaten its success. The king is informed of the escape by a messenger and is about to take violent action when a *deus ex machina* appears to end all efforts of pursuit or revenge.

Such is the formula which Euripides uses in both plays. The *Iphi-*

genia in Tauris appears to fit the formula more precisely, however, and to exploit its possibilities more effectively, especially at the beginning of the play. The belief that Orestes is dead makes a very important contribution to the first half of the play, whereas in the *Helen* the belief that Menelaus is dead becomes merely an excuse for melodramatic laments. Indeed, the whole scene with Teucer seems clumsy and basically impertinent. Theonoe's threats to reveal Menelaus to her brother, also, seem patently designed to introduce a melodramatic situation and an inferior example of that persuasive oratory of which Euripides was so fond. The simple pathos which is so effective in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* has been entirely lost in the *Helen*. We should like to assume, therefore, that the *Iphigenia in Tauris* is the original play.

Some scholars, however, have contended that the latter part of the formula was designed for the *Helen* and that the *Helen*, therefore, is probably the original play.¹⁶⁶ But such a view seems to be based on the assumption that this deft intrigue of deception and escape was original with Euripides, whereas it was probably a formula hoary with age when Euripides was a child. Briefly stated, its main features are these: someone, usually a husband or lover, is persuaded to send away a girl with another man; he is duped into furnishing their means of escape or into materially aiding their escape and possibly into giving large gifts in addition. The deception is usually planned by the girl, and its success is threatened by exciting complications. But in the end all comes out well, and pursuit or revenge is prevented by some device. This plot is found in a comedy of Plautus, *The Braggart Warrior* (*Miles Gloriosus*), and in various Oriental and European stories.¹⁶⁷

The elements of this deception and escape are so simple and their effects are so obviously desirable that it may possibly have been independently invented many times. Still, Euripides may have taken it from story or legend. Once discovered, it was the almost inevitable solution of a romantic plot of escape. One must not, therefore, contend that, in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Orestes and Iphigenia, already having a ship, might escape secretly or more easily than they actually do.

The deception practiced in these endings is essentially comic; but the deception of Theoclymenus is not the only comic element in the *Helen*. The Old Woman who answers Menelaus' knocking at the gates is a lowly character, and this scene is not very different from a stock scene in New Comedy in which an ill-humored slave answers one knocking at the door. The scene in which the hero, by a reversal of nature, resists the advances of the heroine, also is amusing (567). The Old Man who brings the news of the wraith's disappearance to Menelaus is serious enough on the whole, but his tirade on the good and evil slave

(726-33) is a commonplace of New Comedy. Many comic elements, therefore, are found in the *Helen*, and indeed such plays of Euripides as this became the model for later comedy.

15. *PHOENISSAE* ("PHOENICIAN WOMEN")

(Possibly 409 B.C.)

Euripides won second place. His other tragedies may have been his *Oenomaus* and his *Chrysippus*, and these three plays are sometimes termed a trilogy; but the connection, it seems, could not have been close.¹⁶⁸ Events of the legend before and after those of the *Phoenissae* formed the subject of his lost *Oedipus* and *Antigone* and of his extant *Suppliants*.

Influence.—The *Phoenissae* was one of Euripides' most popular plays, often reproduced, apparently, and widely read, especially in the Byzantine period. The Roman Accius wrote a *Phoenissae*, which seems to have been an adaptation of this play. Two or three scenes for such a play are preserved from Seneca. The Roman Papinius Statius wrote an epic poem, the *Thebaid*, the story of which is thought by some to have been taken primarily from Euripides. In modern times the play has exerted important influence on Rotrou, *Antigone* (1638), Racine, *La Thébaine ou les Frères Ennemis* (1664), and Schiller, *Die Braut von Messina* (1803).¹⁶⁹

Discussion.—Euripides in this single play has attempted to cover the whole story of the downfall of the house of Oedipus. Every important character of the generation of Oedipus appears in the play—one of the largest casts of any Greek tragedy—and great skill is shown in handling them. Jocasta and Antigone, who are portrayed with keen psychological insight, are introduced at the opening of the play. (Antigone is apparently included in the *Seven against Thebes* of Aeschylus but only at the very end of the play.) The use of a stereotyped Euripidean prologue, however, results in a somewhat clumsy opening with two unconnected expository scenes. Antigone's scene of observation from the palace roof is much more picturesque and could doubtless have been made to serve all the purposes of exposition.¹⁷⁰ This scene is reminiscent of the famous scene in the third book of the *Iliad* where Helen points out the Greek warriors to Priam from the walls of Troy. But the audience must clearly understand that Jocasta is still alive and Oedipus within the palace, since these facts contradict the accepted legendary tradition. The two opening scenes, then, aid in presenting the broad background of the action and prepare for the subsequent roles of Jo-

casta, Antigone, and Oedipus. The mere mention that such an important personage as Oedipus is within the palace, of course, unmistakably foreshadows his appearance. Reference is made to him again and again, and his very existence haunts the whole play. A certain amount of deliberate suspense, also, characterizes these opening scenes. Some lines might be interpreted as foreshadowing the defeat of Thebes, as when the Paedagogus stresses the justice of the cause of Polyneices and fears that the gods will view it with favor (154-55).

The *Phoenissae* is much concerned with matters of state and patriotism. Indeed few if any debates in Euripides are more interesting and more dramatically effective than the debate of Polyneices and Eteocles before their mother. It was justly famous in ancient times. Julius Caesar like Marius before him, Cicero implies, took as a motto the infamous defense of Eteocles: "If it is necessary to do wrong, to do wrong to achieve the power of a ruler is best; but in other matters one should be just."¹⁷¹ This is similar to the contemptible sophistry of Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles. That play was produced in 409 B.C., as the *Phoenissae* may well have been, shortly after the collapse of the tyrannical and bloody revolution of 411 B.C., when civil strife was frequent at Athens and many citizens were unjustly forced into exile. Euripides, unlike Aeschylus, had lived to see the time when tyrants had seized the city and an attack by exiles or political opponents would obviously have been justified.

The *Phoenissae* is one of the longest Greek tragedies and one of the very few which contain a well-defined minor plot. Its structure, accordingly, is unusually elaborate. The quarrel and death of Eteocles and Polyneices is the subject of Aeschylus' extant *Seven against Thebes*. This earlier play is extremely simple. Its scene is located within the city of Thebes; Eteocles is the only important actor; the justice of the cause of Eteocles is accepted without question, and his cause is identified with that of Thebes. The enlightened Euripides, as Aristophanes (*Frogs* 958) derisively points out, must question all things, and he is obviously improving upon Aeschylus when he makes the moral dilemma of the two brothers a main theme of the play. His introduction of Polyneices and the debate of the two brothers before their mother Jocasta is a master stroke. The portrayal of the duel scene itself very unfortunately has been omitted, possibly because limitations of staging and the very small number of actors available for a Greek dramatist seemed to preclude such a scene. Euripides' dissociation of the cause of Eteocles from that of Thebes also allows the plausible introduction of Creon and Menoeceus and the minor plot. This Menoeceus and the whole incident concerning his sacrifice seem to be the invention of Eu-

ripides.¹⁷² Its artistic purpose, no doubt, is to contrast the glorious patriotism of Menoeceus with the mad selfishness of the two brothers.¹⁷³

The minor plot is articulated with the quarrel of the two brothers with consummate artistry. Incidentally, its introduction immediately after the departure of Eteocles prolongs the suspense concerning the fate of the brothers. It is Eteocles who first directs that Teiresias be consulted and who first mentions Menoeceus. This consultation with Teiresias involves the fate of Oedipus and of his sons as well as that of Thebes and Menoeceus. Very subtle is the foreshadowing of the death of Menoeceus contained in the early lines of Teiresias. Here he relates that he has just returned with his crown of victory from Athens, whose citizens by his aid have won a victory over their enemies. Creon accepts this news as a good omen—somewhat ironically, for Athens has been saved only by the sacrifice of a daughter of the king,¹⁷⁴ just as Thebes is to be saved by the sacrifice of a son of Creon. Tragic irony again produces its effect just before Teiresias announces the necessity of this sacrifice, when Creon says that Menoeceus would rejoice to hear the means of safety. After the death of Menoeceus the minor plot is joined closely with the major one when the messenger reports this patriotic sacrifice to Jocasta, who is primarily concerned with the fate of Eteocles and Polyneices, and at the same time reports the progress of the battle and finally with reluctance the resolve of the brothers to decide the issue by single combat.

But Euripides is not satisfied with these artful sutures immediately preceding and following the incident. The final section of the play opens with Creon's bringing on the corpse of his son in order that Jocasta—ironically enough, for she is now dead—may prepare it for burial. The cause of Thebes, furthermore, is a major concern throughout the action, and this cause is saved by the sacrifice of Menoeceus.

The problem of joining the final scenes to the earlier action also was a difficult one, and the degree of success which Euripides has here achieved is a matter of dispute. Creon plays an important role here just as he serves to articulate the minor plot with the major. The chorus, though often criticized for its loose relation to the action of the play, continually reminds us of the wider historical background of the action—its exotic costumes add to this effect—and thus prepares us for the final scene and the author's interpretation of the subject of his play as the downfall of the house of Oedipus and not merely the tragedy of the two brothers.

Antigone's resolve to bury her brother even at the cost of her life seems, if we may trust the textual tradition, to be a part of the endings of both the *Seven against Thebes* and the *Phoenissae*. Significant

preparation for this outcome in the *Phoenissae* may be found in Antigone's words at the first of the play when she expresses the impetuous wish to fly with the wind and embrace "the pitiful exile" (156-67). In Euripides, furthermore, it is Eteocles who first issues the order that the body of Polyneices shall be refused burial and that anyone, even a friend, who may bury him shall be put to death (775-77). Since this decree originates in the blind hatred of Eteocles, Antigone is more obviously justified in her insistence that the body be given burial, and her motivation is strengthened by the dying request of Polyneices to be buried in his native land (1447-50). The sympathetic portrayal of Polyneices and the insistence on the justice of his cause, also, increase the importance of his proper burial.

Still, this resolution of Antigone suggests a new action and causes the play to lack that utter finality which is the rule in Greek tragedy. In the ending as it stands, furthermore, Antigone resolves also to accompany the blind Oedipus to Attica. Both ancient and modern critics have considered these two resolutions contradictory, and parts of this ending are frequently considered spurious. These two resolutions would certainly be contradictory if we accepted Sophocles' version of the subsequent events as given in his *Antigone*; but Euripides' *Antigone* gave a very different ending to the story, wherein the heroine married Haemon. These two resolutions, therefore, might both be possible in Euripides' very free adaptation of the legend.¹⁷⁵

In its number of deaths and calamities, the *Phoenissae* far surpasses any other extant Greek tragedy. This number is excessive in the opinion of an ancient critic,¹⁷⁶ and certainly it would do honor to an Elizabethan tragedy.

16. ORESTES

(408 B.C. Reproduced at Athens, 340 B.C.)

"This play belongs to that class of plays which is effective in the theater," says the ancient critic Aristophanes of Byzantium; "but it is very poor in its characters, for they with the exception of Pylades are all mean."

Although the proper names of the *Orestes* are taken from legend, the main incidents are wholly fictional. Even Homeric tradition is violated in various important respects.

The *Orestes* did not lack a certain popularity in ancient times. Its original presentation, however, was marred by the leading actor's slip in reciting verse 279. Here the deranged Orestes, slowly returning to his senses, says that he discerns a calm returning over his troubled

sea. The Greek word for "calm" as here used differs from the word for "weasel" only by having a sharply rising accent instead of a rising and falling accent. The actor Hegelochus gave the wrong accent with disastrous results which Aristophanes (*Frogs* 304) and the other writers of comedy never forgot.

The *Orestes* not only was reproduced in the fourth century but later was among the nine or ten plays chosen as representative of Euripides and also among the three selected from this group in Byzantine times. The play is crowded with excited dramatic action, but this late popularity is due primarily to the very skillfully written debates in the play. The modern reader, however, is likely to be repelled by these, as when Orestes, for instance (591-95), reasons that Apollo ordered him to slay Clytemnestra; if this act was a crime, he concludes, Tyndareos and the Argives should consider Apollo the criminal and slay him! Such sophistry foreshadows the plays of Seneca.

Discussion.—The plot of the *Orestes* is not well constructed. The first half of the play is concerned with the appeal of Orestes to Menelaus. The failure of this appeal and Orestes' consequent failure to obtain mercy from the Argives lead to the intrigue for murdering Helen and seizing Hermione. Both the appeal to Menelaus and in part this later intrigue, furthermore, are designed to save Orestes and Electra, and both concern primarily the same characters. But the spirit and the action of the two parts vary so greatly that the feeling of unity has been disrupted. The plan for taking vengeance on Menelaus by murdering Helen is not really pertinent to the main problem of escape; indeed, it seems to contravene this main objective, for obviously a stronger appeal could be made to Menelaus if both wife and daughter were seized as hostages. The vilification of Helen in the early part of the play repeats a theme obviously dear to the heart of Euripides and nicely prepares for this later plan to slay her. But the effectiveness of this vilification is wholly vitiated by her miraculous escape and by Apollo's pronouncement that the gods are responsible.

The ending of the play is unsatisfactory for other reasons. The whole complex entanglement is solved by the *deus ex machina*. Nor is it easy to understand how, even at the command of a god, Orestes and Menelaus are now to forget, the one his contempt, the other his jealousy and hatred; or how Hermione is to love and cherish the man who lately held his sword at her throat. The guilt of matricide and the torment of madness, furthermore, are merely waved away by the divine hand. At this, of course, Orestes' repeated denunciations of Apollo lose all force; for here, as in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, these denunciations are in the end discovered to be mistaken and due to human failure to fore-

see the outcome. Such a mechanical and external solution solves none of the interesting moral problems presented in the play. Indeed, this ending, as an ancient critic remarks,¹⁷⁷ is more proper to a comedy.

What is the explanation of this failure of Euripides to meet the conventional requirements of plausibility? We might assume that he was here interested primarily in presenting an exciting melodramatic spectacle, or, with one recent critic, that Euripides here set out to dramatize a situation and that "it got the better of him."¹⁷⁸ But in view of Euripides' usually serious intentions and of his usually competent dramaturgy these assumptions are not attractive. It seems more likely that Euripides here, like Seneca later, is primarily interested in making a study of characters under the most violent stresses of emotion. The action of the play, if this assumption is correct, has been artificially manipulated in order to observe the responses of the characters under almost inhumanly severe situations. In the *Alcestis*, one may recall, the legend itself presented a series of events that was impossible in actuality but highly desirable as a dramatic and psychological situation. Perhaps in the *Orestes* Euripides has deliberately created such a series of events.

As a drama, however, the *Orestes* has various other shortcomings. It employs too many motives that are not well adapted to the present play or that have here been too obviously exaggerated for effect. The character of Menelaus in the *Orestes*, as in the *Andromache*, approaches that of the villain of modern melodrama and is all too certainly colored by war prejudice.¹⁷⁹ Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454 a, 1461 b) rightly protested against this unnecessary debasement. Pylades suffers from the opposite tendency. His contest in generosity with Orestes and his resolve to live or die with him are too closely modeled on his role in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where these noble sentiments are perhaps more plausibly motivated. Reminiscent of that play also are the mortal danger of the characters, the farewell of Orestes and Electra when they think they are about to die, the excitement and suspense, and the thrilling climax with the *deus ex machina*. The final scene of the play where Menelaus below helplessly pleads with Orestes on the roof of the palace is apparently taken from the final scene of the *Medea*.

But Euripides has not limited himself to imitating his own former successes. The *Electra* of Sophocles seems to have inspired the scene in which Electra stands before the palace and cries out bloodthirsty encouragement to Orestes and Pylades while they are attempting to murder Helen within. Indeed, the *Orestes* is often considered a reply to Sophocles' *Electra* by those who think that Sophocles' play was designed to answer the condemnation of Orestes' matricide in the *Electra*

of Euripides. Certain it is that Euripides in the *Orestes* repeatedly insists that Orestes' act was a dreadful crime (538-39, etc.), though the *deus ex machina* somewhat nullifies this insistence along with all the other contentions of the play. Euripides retains the view that Clytemnestra's adulterous love was her motive in slaying Agamemnon (26-27; 917-42). He thus meets Sophocles on his own ground and does not give Clytemnestra the very strong defense which she has in his later *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Even so, Euripides twice, with subtle indirectness, makes the point—made more effectively and doubtless originally in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1174)—that the act of Orestes was that of a barbarian or even worse (485; 1424). The contention of Tyndareos that Clytemnestra should have been punished by legal process, however, really begs the whole question. No such process existed in Homeric times, and if such a course had been open to Orestes he never would have been faced with his appalling choice.

Other less obvious adaptations in the *Orestes* are the opening scene and the spectacular use of torches—these items perhaps from the *Trojan Women*. The seizure of a child as hostage was made famous in the lost *Telephus* of Euripides. The unwashed, unkempt, somewhat repulsive appearance of the main characters is reminiscent of the *Telephus*, the *Philoctetes*, and many another play of Euripides. If all the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides were preserved, it would doubtless be found that such motives and devices were repeated more frequently than the few preserved plays indicate. Still, the *Orestes* is too largely a cento of previous plays. This may account for its failure to generate any deep pathos.

The *Orestes* is not, however, wholly without original features. Its portrayal of madness is widely admired,¹⁸⁰ and here Euripides has made a distinct improvement over the *Iphigenia in Tauris* by presenting Orestes' seizure "on stage." The figure of Helen, also, has rightly been called a "triumph of characterization."¹⁸¹ The scene between Electra and her is a masterpiece. It is of prime importance in bringing out the ironic and pathetic contrast between the ruin of the house of Agamemnon, who won the war, and the prosperity of the house of Menelaus and Helen, who caused it—a significant theme throughout the play.¹⁸² The scene with the Phrygian eunuch, also, is startlingly original. This character nicely emphasizes as background the harem-like atmosphere surrounding Helen and even further alienates all sympathy for her,¹⁸³ at the same time allowing author and audience to exercise their contempt for the effete East. The frantic excitement of the eunuch requires lyric meter for this messenger's speech—the one example in Greek tragedy. It is also one of the rare scenes with distinctly comic aspects.

17. ***BACCHAE* ("THE DEVOTEES OF BACCHUS")

(About 405 B.C.)

After the death of Euripides, his son produced at Athens the *Iphigenia at Aulis*; the *Alcmaeon at Corinth*, and the *Bacchae*. A first prize was awarded Euripides after his death, and it seems plausible to assume that these were the plays which won it. The *Bacchae* was probably written after Euripides left Athens (about 408 B.C.) and went to the court of King Archelaus in Macedonia.¹⁸⁴

The *Bacchae* is unsurpassed for stark tragedy and theatrical effectiveness. It may well be taken as the most representative play of all Greek tragedy. The structure of the *Bacchae* is not inferior to that of *Oedipus the King*, for its action progresses with equal rapidity and inevitability. Its plot is one of tragic decision, whereas that of the *Oedipus* is one of tragic discovery—a less frequent and perhaps less interesting type. The third episode of the *Bacchae* with its eloquent messenger's speech and its fascinating contest between Pentheus and Dionysus is one of the finest scenes in drama; but it is surpassed by the second messenger's speech and the scene where Agave enters with the head of her son thinking it the head of a mountain lion.

Legend.—The coming of the god Dionysus or Bacchus to Greece was a frequent theme in poetry and art. Opposition to this new religion was offered especially by the Thracian Lycurgus (not to be confused with the Spartan lawgiver or the Athenian orator of the same name) and the Theban Pentheus. The fate of Lycurgus is told in the *Iliad* (6. 129–40). Pentheus met his doom, according to some versions of the legend, in open combat with Dionysus and his Maenads. This version is mentioned by Aeschylus in the *Eumenides* (25–26). In the *Bacchae* (51, 780–809) it first appears that open conflict may be the outcome. Pentheus' more dreadful fate of being torn apart by his mother and her sisters may have been the invention of Euripides.¹⁸⁵

Source and influence.—Perhaps no theme is older in Greek tragedy than the story of Pentheus and Dionysus. Thespis, the "originator" of tragedy, is said to have written a *Pentheus* (but this, like almost everything said of Thespis, is of very doubtful authority). Aeschylus wrote on the same subject and also produced a tetralogy on the legend of Lycurgus. In 415 B.C. an obscure Xenocles, with a set of plays including a *Bacchae*, defeated Euripides' *Trojan Women* and other plays. (It is noteworthy that both Xenocles and Euripides placed their *Bacchae* last in the series of three tragedies produced. This subject, like a satyric drama, was dedicated to the god of the theater.) Iophon,

the son of Sophocles, also wrote a *Bacchae* or a *Pentheus*. Various other dramatists treated the legend of Pentheus.¹⁸⁶

Among the Romans, both Pacuvius and Accius were attracted to this subject and wrote plays which in the main, it seems, followed the treatment of Euripides.

The *Bacchae* had a wide influence on later literature. In classical Latin literature it is one of the most influential Greek tragedies. Catullus reveals an intimate acquaintance with it. One passage (*Bacchae* 918–19) is quoted by Vergil (*Aeneid* 4. 469–70). It seems to have been the favorite tragedy of Horace if we may judge from the number and importance of his quotations and references.¹⁸⁷ That the *Bacchae* was widely popular during the period is shown by the story concerning Hyrodes the Parthian and Artavasdes the Armenian in Plutarch. These two rulers were giving each other entertainments at which Greek compositions were frequently introduced.

Now when the head of Crassus was brought to the king's door, the tables had been removed, and a tragic actor, Jason by name, of Tralles, was singing that part of the "Bacchae" of Euripides where Agave is about to appear. . . . Jason handed his costume of Pentheus to one of the chorus, seized the head of Crassus, and assuming the role of the frenzied Agave, sang these verses through as if inspired . . .¹⁸⁸

The *Bacchae* exerted an important influence also on early Christian writers. Though greatly admired in modern times, its peculiarly pagan subject has not encouraged adaptation. This story is a favorite one in ancient art, especially the scene of the rending of Pentheus and that of the mad Agave with the head of her son.¹⁸⁹

Theme.—The *Bacchae* is one of the most interesting of all Greek tragedies in part because its interpretation is so provocative and baffling. This magnificently vigorous swan song of Euripides has sometimes been taken as a recantation of his skepticism and a return to orthodoxy. While criticizing the "almost childish incompetence" of this view, Gilbert Murray is convinced that we here have "a heartfelt glorification of 'Dionysus'"; but he interprets Dionysus in a broad and somewhat mystical fashion.¹⁹⁰ Other critics have taken a diametrically opposed view and have seen in the play another indictment of popular religion.

It is undeniable that there is a certain "orthodoxy" about the play, but there is none that does not seem entirely proper in its context and dramatically desirable. The chorus consists of the ardent worshipers of Dionysus. Thus Pentheus is isolated, and the choral lyrics in honor of Dionysus and the joys of life add greatly to the poetic qualities of

the play. The chorus' reiterated praise of an orthodox religious attitude and of simplicity, however, need not be interpreted as indicating that Euripides himself is actually renouncing his enlightenment. This praise is designed to emphasize the folly of the pretensions to wisdom and virtue of a man like Pentheus, who in the end is discovered to be less wise and less virtuous than the average person of no pretensions whatever. Essentially the same explanation may be offered for the orthodox sentiments of the messengers. Simple folk, furthermore, are always prone to superstition and are so depicted in both tragedy and comedy. The religious enthusiasm of Teiresias and Cadmus, also, forms an effective foil for the cold skepticism of Pentheus. At the end of the play Cadmus admits that Pentheus sinned and cites his fate as a warning to those who disdain the gods (1325-26); but he also inveighs against the severity of the god, precisely as we should expect Euripidean characters to do under similar circumstances. "It becomes gods," says Cadmus, "not to imitate the wrathful acts of mortals." And Dionysus, as cold as a marble statue, answers (1349): "My father Zeus long ago ordained these things." The words of Dionysus may be taken to mean that violation of natural law is followed by punishment according to the law of Necessity; perhaps it is more reasonable, however, to take them as a statement of mere determinism. In the prologue, Dionysus has seemed to intimate that the course of events is not determined; but we have observed elsewhere that Greeks and moderns alike tend to view the future as undetermined but the catastrophes of the past as inevitable and fixed from the beginning.¹⁹¹ An especially strong condemnation of Dionysus is pronounced by Agave (1374-76): "Dreadfully, in truth, has Lord Dionysus wrought this outrage against your house." Here Dionysus responds by citing the dishonor which he has suffered. Greek morality was characterized by a rigid severity, but certainly the punishment here does seem too severe and the tragedy too overwhelming for the play to be a glorification of Dionysus in any sense or to create in the spectator any affection for such a divinity. That Euripides' version of the story did not present the god in a favorable light seems to have been the opinion of certain later authors who modified this version in order to make the sin of Pentheus more deserving of his punishment.¹⁹² We cannot, therefore, interpret the *Bacchae* as a glorification of Dionysus.

Equally untenable, however, is the view that Euripides is writing a condemnation of Dionysus. If the poet had wished to emphasize the fate of Pentheus as unjust, we might have expected the chorus to change its allegiance and denounce the punishment, or perhaps some other god to appear and condemn Dionysus. The defense which Dionysus makes

is curt and formal, but we cannot overlook the fact that Pentheus has been quick to wrath and has betrayed his trust as the chief justice of the land. He has been guilty of insolence—always a serious crime in Greek morality—toward the divinity and his worshipers, especially toward the innocent Teiresias. Pentheus' charge of immorality in the worship, however plausible, is shown to be unfounded. Pentheus himself beneath his apparent constraint and continence has revealed an unhealthy viciousness. Even if his acts were predestined, plausible human motivation has been given him. Obviously he must be held responsible for his moral choice. His guilt, therefore, is sufficient to nullify any attempt to interpret the play as primarily an attack upon the divinity.

The *Bacchae* seems most naturally interpreted as essentially similar to the *Hippolytus*. Dionysus in certain aspects is the male counterpart and supplement of Aphrodite.¹⁹³ Such divinities in the Athens of this period were little more than poetic abstractions. Genuine religious fervor was centered in the worship of the mysteries at Eleusis and similar cults. Indeed, we may well doubt whether a serious iconoclast would have expended his efforts on worship as purely formal as that of Dionysus. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus is the spirit of physical enjoyment in life and is opposed by the intellectual, abstemious, and somewhat unnatural Pentheus. Such a divinity, in reality hardly more than a personification of a basic force of man's nature, is quite incapable of mercy or pity or any other human emotion.¹⁹⁴ He is utterly inexorable. Punishment follows transgression of his law as inevitably as it does that of any other natural law. Such a divinity is wholly beyond the realm of human ethics, beyond good and evil—beyond belief and disbelief, also, for his existence and power theist and atheist alike must admit.

Discussion.—Dionysus himself speaks the prologue (63 lines). He mentions, but with no appearance of wrath, the opposition of Pentheus. Distinctly ominous is his description of this opposition as contending against divinity—a phrase that occurs again and again as a leitmotif throughout the play. Dionysus also declares that if the city takes up arms against his devotees he will lead his Maenads against its forces in battle; but he appears to lack clairvoyance and to leave the decision entirely to Pentheus. Such partial foretelling is dramatically the most effective, for now the audience knows that Pentheus' decision involves his fate.

The entrance song of the Bacchic chorus is one of the longest series of lyrics in Euripides (parodos, 106 lines). With mystic enthusiasm the chorus sing a gay and excited encomium of Dionysus and his worship, suggestive of the choral dithyramb from which tragedy is said to

have originated. They exhort Thebes to join in the worship of its own Dionysus.

As if in answer to the exhortation of the chorus, Teiresias now enters and very skillfully introduces himself and Cadmus (first episode, 200 lines). These old men present a somewhat ridiculous (line 250) appearance each with his fawn skin and thyrsus (staff with a pine cone affixed to the end, a symbol sacred to Dionysus). Their gray heads are crowned with ivy, and perhaps they are tipsy under the influence of this god of wine. But they have chosen to take no chances of incurring the wrath of a new god.¹⁹⁶ Cadmus is further influenced by the fact that Dionysus is his grandson and any honor to him is an honor to his family, whereas a denial of his divinity would constitute an admission that Semele had given birth to an illegitimate child.

Pentheus first enters in a state of great excitement. His bold condemnation of the new worship stands out in sharp contrast to the sly caution of Cadmus and Teiresias. His first lines reveal the obsession which never leaves him and which is his main reason for opposing the worship of Bacchus: he believes that the women have gone off on a drunken revel in order to indulge in sexual immoralities. He pronounces the same slander of Semele (245) which Dionysus has cited in the prologue (31) as his justification for maddening the women of Thebes. The ill omen of this pronouncement is made unmistakable in the original by the literal repetition of a half-line. Sighting the two old men, Pentheus upbraids his grandfather Cadmus and accuses Teiresias of promoting the worship for his own selfish ends. The refutation which Teiresias attempts begins with a poetic description of the two great blessings of human existence: the grain of Demeter and the liquid of the grape cluster, discovered by the child of Semele, "which relieves suffering mortals of their grief, whenever they are filled with the flow of the vine, and gives a sleep that knows not the misfortunes of the day; nor is there any other sedative of woes." Eloquent this, especially in a land where bread and wine were and still are the staples of ordinary existence. But the old seer proceeds to sophistic rationalizing which leaves us cold indeed.¹⁹⁸ Cadmus, also, attempts to win over Pentheus, urging the honor of the family again and ominously reminding Pentheus of the fate of his impious cousin Actaeon.¹⁹⁷

In answer to their invitation to join them in worshipping the god, Pentheus orders the seat of augury of Teiresias to be destroyed utterly and the effeminate stranger to be apprehended. The anger of Teiresias now breaks out, and he denounces Pentheus as a persistent fool¹⁹⁸ and prays that the wrath of the god may not be aroused against Pentheus or the city. The vagueness of this warning and the deprecation of Pen-

theus' coming to grief are here noteworthy, since the most effective foreboding tends to have a certain ironic optimism. On this significantly ominous warning the first episode comes to an end, having dramatized the situation described in the prologue and having portrayed Pentheus in a specific insolent act against established religion.

The chorus now echo the ominous words of Teiresias by calling the goddess of Sanctity to witness the insolence of Pentheus and by suggesting the evil fate that awaits Pentheus and the folly of unwise wisdom and of too great an ambition (first stasimon, 64 lines). The second part of the choral song celebrates Dionysus as the natural companion of Aphrodite, the Graces, and Desire (402-15); he loves Peace, the bringer of wealth and nourisher of children. The final note returns to the folly of too much wisdom and the desirability of accepting the ways and thoughts of the common man.

The mysterious stranger (Dionysus), whose apprehension was ordered at the close of the previous episode, is now brought on (second episode, 85 lines). The guard recounts the disconcerting gentleness of the prisoner and the miraculous escape of the imprisoned Maenads. But Pentheus is unimpressed and proceeds to insult the god and to reveal his own unhealthy curiosity concerning the rites of worship. The imperturbable dignity of the god emphasizes the angry insolence of Pentheus. As the god is finally led off to prison, he warns Pentheus in vain. For the second time Pentheus has refused to recognize evidence of godhead or to recant.

The chorus now protest at Thebes' opposition to her own god and invoke Dionysus to come and destroy Pentheus, who dares to contend against the gods (second stasimon, 57 lines). The voice of Dionysus is heard; the earth quakes; the entablature of the porch is rent (a few stones probably fall by some stage device); the fire on the tomb of Semele flashes. The chorus fall to earth before these divine manifestations.¹⁹⁹

Dionysus, who announced at the end of the previous episode that the god would release him when he willed (498), now appears, again in his disguise as "the stranger," and reassures the chorus in trochaic meter—which is presumably suited to the excitement of the chorus rather than to the mood of Dionysus himself, for he maintains an Olympian calm in effective contrast with the rage and futile busyness of Pentheus (third episode, 286 lines). The young king is quite blind to the significance of the miracles which he has observed. He is equally blind to the report of the messenger, who now arrives in mid-episode²⁰⁰ again to refute the charges of immorality and drunkenness upon which Pentheus has insisted. Further evidence of miracle and divinity is pre-

sented. Finally the messenger makes his own appeal (769-74): "Then receive into your city this divinity, whoever he may be, my master, for he is great in respect to these other marvels and especially so in this: he it was, they say, who gave the care-releasing vine to mortals and, were there no wine, Love would no longer exist nor any other joy among men."

But here, as each time before, instead of assuming a calm and unbiased attitude and reaching a decision based on the evidence, Pentheus persists in his blind prejudice. Though chief justice of the land and presuming to represent the cause of reason against orgiastic superstition, he is anything but reasonable or just. As Theseus in the *Hippolytus* casts his son out of the land without allowing him a fair trial, so Pentheus repeatedly refuses to recognize the most unmistakable evidence of the presence of divinity. He clearly is guilty of insolence (*hybris*), and his punishment follows inevitably.

The climax of the play is pointed with unusual distinctness. Pentheus orders out his troops against the women—an action which Dionysus in the prologue (50-52) has cited almost casually as justification for the marshaling of his own forces. He now warns Pentheus that the god will not tolerate this, and he even offers to bring the women back of his own accord. But Pentheus calls for his armor, and Dionysus acts (810). Before "most gentle to men," Dionysus now becomes "most dreadful" (860-61).

The first line which Dionysus speaks when he begins to intoxicate Pentheus is of the greatest significance for his method: "Would you care to see the women sitting together on the mountain heights?" Dionysus has perceived the weakest spot in the character of Pentheus, a weakness which was observable on close scrutiny earlier in the play, especially in the first scene between Pentheus and Dionysus, and which might be accentuated by a skillful actor. Though presuming to be the champion of virtue and high morals, Pentheus under the spell of the god of wine reveals his prurient desires, emerging distorted and unlovely because of the suppression that has formerly inhibited them.

With keen psychological insight Euripides presents Pentheus, now drunk, as resisting Dionysus not on the main moral issue, the lecherous spying upon the women, but on a secondary act, the assuming of the dress of a woman. Still this itself is disgraceful, and the issue here, though secondary, consists of a single definite choice and so stands out with unmistakable clearness. The dramatic irony of many of the lines of this scene is noteworthy, as when Pentheus says that the sight of the drunken women would be painful to him (814). He is still vacillating when he retires into the palace, but Dionysus knows what the choice of

Pentheus will be and foretells his fate in a speech that is substantially a prologue to the latter part of the play.

After Pentheus and Dionysus have retired into the palace, the chorus sing of joyous escape (from the threats of Pentheus) and of reveling (third stasimon, 50 lines). In a refrain typically pagan in feeling, they express the joy of revenge upon an enemy. They celebrate the sure vengeance of the gods and again the happiness of the simple conventional life.

When the little remaining moral compunction of Pentheus has been dissipated on the secondary issue of clothing himself in the dress of a woman, he has lost all shame and is wholly in the power of the god (fourth episode, 65 lines). Now disgustingly drunk, he allows his costume to receive its final touches on stage as though he were a woman being tended by her maid. He descends to his lowest depths, however, when he says that the women must not be overcome by force, and when he fancies seeing them in the woods caught like birds in the sweetest snares of their beds of love (957-58). Here for a moment we suspect that Pentheus not even yet expresses his most intimate desires, that he really wishes to join in the immoralities of the women with the utmost abandon. The scene closes with a fearfully ironic exchange between Pentheus and Dionysus and with the god's again foretelling the fate of Pentheus.

In highly excited meter, the chorus envisage the fate of Pentheus out on Cithaeron (fourth stasimon, 47 lines). They pray for justice and vengeance upon "the godless, lawless, unjust" Pentheus with a refrain similar to that in the previous choral song. Again wisdom is renounced and the orthodox life is praised.

The final scenes open with another brilliant messenger's speech (exodos, 369 lines). After the innocence of the pursuits of the Maenads has again been stressed, we hear the dreadful story of the death of Pentheus and finally how Agave regards the head of her son as that of a lion. This prepares us, as the chorus have previously done (985-90), for the ensuing scene.

After a very short lyric, without responsion, in which the chorus rejoice, the mad Agave enters with her ghastly trophy. She is followed by other revelers, and she joins the chorus in an excited lyric exchange. Her exultation forms perhaps the most powerful scene of dramatic irony in all tragedy.

Such scenes with intoxicated or insane characters have an eeriness and effectiveness all their own.²⁰¹ One need recall only the scenes of the mad Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Euripides was especially skillful in depicting them. Here in the *Bacchae* the effect of the scene with Agave is

overwhelming. The emotional tension has been magnificently built up by the divine manifestations of earthquake and lightning and by the scenes of the gradual intoxication of Pentheus.

Pitiful beyond words is the figure of the mad Agave. Even the chorus, though they have greeted the news of the death of Pentheus with merciless joy, must show some pity for her. She thinks of her son Pentheus and repeatedly wishes that he might come and rejoice with her (1212; 1252). She regrets that he is not a good huntsman like herself and that he is able to contend only with gods. The mad joy of his daughter embitters the grief of old Cadmus, who has now entered with the mutilated body of Pentheus, as if in answer to Agave's wish that her father and her son come and nail up on the front of the palace as a trophy the head which she bears. Agave madly insists on the appropriateness of a feast to which she invites the women of the chorus, and commands Cadmus, also, to invite his friends. Although the old man realizes that his daughters would be happier if they could remain mad always, he gradually brings Agave back to her senses by questioning her on those facts which she should know best of all. Cadmus admits the justice of the anger of the god, but he complains of the severity of the punishment and bemoans the ruin of his house, now without male issue.²⁰² He ends on the note on which the Messenger previously ended—the necessity of worshiping the gods.

At this point a considerable number of lines have been lost from the play. (Our one manuscript for this part of the play dates from the fourteenth century.) For modern tastes, however, it may be well that the lines have been lost, for we are told by a certain rhetorician that Agave "taking each of the members of Pentheus in her hands, laments them one by one."²⁰³ We may be sure that for the Greek audience, however, Euripides so managed the scene that pathos did not degenerate into the revolting or the ridiculous.

Finally Dionysus appears as the god and foretells the future for these characters. But he in no way mitigates the ending of this most tragic of all Greek tragedies.

Character of Pentheus.—The technique used in the portrayal of Pentheus is noteworthy. It consists of a gradual unfolding, and only in the final scene is this process completed. On his first entrance his mask would have revealed him to be a very young king (cf. 1185–87). His actions show him to be quick to wrath, high-spirited, and too imperious—faults which later the first messenger with servile bluntness attributes to him. But Pentheus has the virtues as well as the faults of youthful nobility. He is idealistic and resentful of the introduction of demoralizing influences. He is also skeptical of the unreasonable and the

implausible, contemptuous of seers and miracles and mysticism. In his first clash with Dionysus a hint of another of his faults is given, for here he shows an unhealthy curiosity concerning the rites of the new worship and a contempt that is not all contempt for the beauty of the stranger. With this revelation his insistence on the immorality of the devotees begins to take on a new light.

At first this suspicion of immorality has seemed plausible enough. Insistence upon the demoralizing influence of too much wine is common in Greek thought, including Euripides himself (cf. *Ion* 550–53). In very early Rome this conviction resulted in the severe ruling that a matron might even be put to death for drinking wine. Orgiastic cults appealing to women met opposition in both Athens and Rome.²⁰⁴ However reasonable such a conviction may seem in the present play, the substantiation of it would, of course, justify the position of Pentheus to such an extent that the present outcome of the play would be unbearable. Euripides is primarily not a rationalist or a psychologist or an iconoclast, but a dramatist, and in the *Bacchae* these repeated charges of immorality are repeatedly refuted.²⁰⁵ It is undeniable, furthermore, that wine and the joys of life need not lead to bestiality. Indeed it is only the unhealthy who associate these things with bestiality. The charges of Pentheus, therefore, are doubtless intended in part to reveal the unhealthy pruriency of his own mind. Certain it is that this pruriency makes it impossible for Pentheus to give credence to the refutation offered even by his own representatives. It is this pruriency, then, that is his tragic fault.

The pruriency of Pentheus' mind is brought out most clearly in his last scene when all inhibitions have been removed by intoxication. He is still pitiful rather than contemptible, however, for his vice is not such a very unnatural or unforgivable one in a spirited youth whose idealism has hardened into bigotry. Pentheus, then, is enough like ourselves to arouse our own fear of similar error, and his misfortune is not so thoroughly deserved but that it evokes our profound pity. He is the most effective type of tragic character.²⁰⁶

The admirable virtues of Pentheus, however, are well brought out only after his death—when the information is most tragic. Cadmus describes him as the affectionate and zealous guardian of his old age, and in the original text Agave also doubtless extolled his good qualities.

Some critics have maintained that Dionysus and not Pentheus is the main character of the play. Some also feel a "bewildering shift of sympathy" away from Dionysus to Pentheus as the play progresses.²⁰⁷ But it is Pentheus who makes the tragic decision and suffers the reversal of fortune. The actor Jason of Tralles in the story from Plutarch

already quoted chose to play the roles of Pentheus and Agave rather than the single role of Dionysus. Surely any actor would do the same. It seems likely, furthermore, that Euripides intended the audience to be sympathetic with Pentheus from the outset. Dionysus is so perfect, so utterly self-sufficient and untouched by human weakness, that a human being can hardly have the slightest community of feeling with him. Certainly Dionysus needs no pity and excites none. Pentheus, it is true, stands isolated from sympathy and support throughout most of the play.²⁰⁸ But this is no indication that the poet does not wish the audience to feel sympathy with him. Indeed, the poet, by displaying absolutely no pity himself for Pentheus, obtains the greatest pity for him from the audience.

18. *IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

(About 405 B.C.)

The *Iphigenia at Aulis* was produced along with the *Bacchae*. The *Bacchae* seems to have been finished before the death of Euripides, but the *Iphigenia at Aulis* was apparently left unfinished. In comparison with the texts of the other plays, at least, the faulty text of the *Iphigenia at Aulis* resembles that of a production copy.

This play, which might be termed a melodramatic heroic comedy, is one of the most emotionally stirring of all Greek tragedies and perhaps the one most romantic and modern in its atmosphere. Its brilliantly developed plot has more complication and more dramatic action than is usual in Greek tragedy. Indeed, few if any Greek tragedies surpass it in this respect. Its appeal to the modern reader is correspondingly strong. Many noteworthy innovations—including innovations in degree—account for these effects. Although these effects may be very desirable, they are in part incompatible with the form and spirit of classical Greek tragedy. Dramatic complication and romantic excitement are achieved somewhat at the cost of classic simplicity and profundity.

Source and influence.—Aeschylus and Sophocles both wrote plays on the sacrifice of Iphigenia. A tragedy by the Roman (Oscan) Ennius on this subject seems to have been based primarily on Euripides' play. Among modern adaptations may be mentioned the *Iphigénie* of Racine (1674), the opera by Gluck (1774), and a contemporary production, *Daughters of Atreus*, by Robert Turney.

The sacrifice of Iphigenia was a favorite subject in ancient art. A famous picture of Timanthes, a contemporary of Euripides, is described by Cicero (*Orator* 74) and by Pliny the Elder (35. 73). Timanthes,

we are told, had exhausted every means of depicting sadness in the faces of those standing about; so he covered the face of Agamemnon, whose grief he was unable adequately to depict. But doubtless the artist so portrayed Agamemnon because the father would naturally not wish to look upon the slaughter of his child.²⁰⁹

Discussion.—The opening dialogue in anapestic meter is one of the play's most noteworthy innovations. It may have been designed by some adapter to replace the monologue by Agamemnon, which may possibly have been the genuine Euripidean prologue.²¹⁰ This monologue constitutes an unusually dull prologue, for it insists upon reciting at length the story of Helen, which must have been known to every person in the audience. The alternative dialogue, however, is dramatic from the beginning and in a more spirited meter. This dialogue also contains very subtle preparation for the Old Man's revealing Agamemnon's secret to Clytemnestra (46–48), and for the wrath of Achilles when he learns of the low use to which his name has been put (124–27; 133–35). Aristophanes in his *Frogs* (1206 ff.), which was produced at about the same time as this play, severely criticizes the monotonous prologues of Euripides. Obviously a movement for a more dramatic opening scene is under way.

Alternate final scenes have not been preserved; but all scholars agree in rejecting the extreme end of the present play as spurious, and most scholars think that in the original ending Artemis appeared as the *deus ex machina*. A fragment of such a speech, describing the substitution of the hind, has been preserved, though its authenticity is sometimes questioned. Some lines spoken by Iphigenia in her final scene (1440–42), furthermore, obviously foreshadow her rescue and later apotheosis. It seems fairly certain, therefore, that the original ending included the supernatural rescue of Iphigenia despite the fact that such a rescue somewhat vitiates the very strong case which Clytemnestra has here been given against Agamemnon. This version of the sacrifice of Iphigenia reminds one of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis (chap. 22). Such myths are designed to explain and justify the abandonment of human sacrifice. The main change made by the substitution of the extant final scene for the original one seems to be the introduction of a messenger's speech instead of the appearance of Artemis. It is possible that this change was undertaken to eliminate another favorite device of Euripides, the appearance of a divinity.²¹¹

Certain metrical practices of the play are noteworthy. Several shifts from the ordinary iambic trimeter to the excited trochaic tetrameter occur, usually with the entrance of a character. The lyrics show the peculiarities characteristic of Euripides' late lyrics—peculiarities sati-

rized by Aristophanes in the *Frogs*. The tendency for long solo arias to replace choral songs is very marked, especially near the end of the play where the dramatist wishes rapidity of movement and desires to maintain Iphigenia as the center of interest.

Minor technical advances toward realism are noteworthy. Menelaus and the Old Man enter with lines that suggest they are continuing a conversation already in progress. Later in the same episode, a messenger enters and interrupts Menelaus in the middle of a line (414).²¹² Very naturally these innovations were adopted by later dramatists.

In the *Iphigenia at Aulis* Euripides employs melodramatic devices to a remarkable extent. Intense pathos characterizes many scenes. Though at times genuinely tragic, as when Iphigenia greets her father, this pathos goes far beyond the limits usual in Greek tragedy. Indeed it often borders on sentimentality. Thus Iphigenia begs the infant Orestes to intercede in her behalf (1241-48), and later she pronounces a very pathetic farewell to the infant.²¹³ Suspense, also, plays a very important role in the play. But suspense and surprise, of course, tend to preclude that inevitability which characterizes most serious Greek tragedy. Again, spectacular scenes and events crowd the action of the play.

Still, the characters of the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, far from being the stereotyped puppets of melodrama, are vividly depicted individuals. They are drawn with a degree of homely realism that is uncommon even in the later plays of Euripides. Agamemnon, for instance, is a contemptible weakling. He vacillates helplessly and finally becomes the victim of circumstances which he should presumably command. His frantic efforts at base deception are as pitiful as they are futile. Menelaus has somewhat more determination but even less probity. Achilles, if proud and conceited, is at least brave and, to a degree, honest; but his cautious deliberateness differentiates him from that Achilles who is wrathful and inexorable and fierce, who recognizes no law as applicable to himself but refers all things to arms.²¹⁴ In Euripides' play the Homeric hero has been transformed into the more or less ideal, law-abiding citizen of Athens in the fifth century.

These characters are unheroically weak and ruled by external events. But this is not, as in true melodrama, the result of the poet's becoming primarily interested in these external events. Euripides wishes deliberately to expose the very ordinary humanity of these men and to contrast their weakness with the moral strength of Iphigenia. He wishes to dramatize what is perhaps the most pathetic paradox in all human life: ordinarily human beings are mean and contemptible, but at times one may rise to the most glorious heights of generosity and self-sacrifice.

The most melodramatic feature of these characters is found in their startling reversals of attitude. Agamemnon no sooner realizes that he is caught inextricably in events and must, after all, sacrifice his daughter than Menelaus himself shifts his position—or pretends to do so²¹⁵—and begs his brother's pardon and admits that the sacrifice should not take place. Achilles enters complaining of the delay, but when he discovers that his name has been basely used—in an effort, of course, to put an end to the delay—he is willing to die in opposing the very factions which he at first represented.²¹⁶

But the most startling reversal of all is that of Iphigenia. The same intimate and trivial realism of portrayal of character which reduces Agamemnon and Menelaus to the unheroic now creates a very appealing Iphigenia. As an affectionate girl of timid modesty, she greets her father and later makes her tearful appeal to him. But after she has come to realize his helpless dilemma and to appreciate the gallant if rash bravery of Achilles, she suddenly becomes a courageous heroine. This reversal of attitude is criticized by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454 a). We may assume perhaps that Aristotle was acquainted with a reluctant Iphigenia of Aeschylus and Sophocles. He was perhaps more surprised by this change, therefore, than the modern reader is likely to be. The effect of Iphigenia's reversal may indeed be melodramatic, but it is undeniably powerful. After the spineless vacillation of Agamemnon, after the frantic terror of Clytemnestra and the futile busyness of Achilles, emphasized by their nervous exchange of half-lines immediately before this climax, Iphigenia finally speaks out and announces her glorious resolve. She is unwilling to endanger family and fatherland, to block the united effort of Hellas, to see Achilles risk his life in contention with his own army, or to oppose Artemis. Helen has caused battle and death; Iphigenia will become the savior of Hellas.

This contrast between Helen and Iphigenia is an important theme of the play. Careful preparation has been made for it. Every choral lyric except that dealing with Achilles and Iphigenia has sooner or later come around to the theme of Helen and Paris. The chorus and almost every character of the play have insisted that Helen and her wicked passion have caused the war. Iphigenia now redeems Hellenic womanhood in saving the Greeks from internecine strife.

This stress upon Helen as the cause of the war may seem to spoil the contention of Iphigenia that the war is being waged for the honor of Hellas. Certainly the argument which Agamemnon uses with her (1259-75) is not consistent with all that has been said in his first clash with Menelaus. But consistency has never characterized such discussions in times of war. The original cause of war may well be greed of

belly, groin, or back; but when war is once undertaken, honor and life itself are at stake for everyone. Iphigenia's contention that her sacrifice will save Greece and the men of Greece is not, therefore, wholly an illusion. Glorious self-immolation, furthermore, has been a favorite theme with Euripides from his first preserved tragedy, the *Alcestis*, and sacrifice for the fatherland has repeatedly been celebrated—Macaria in the *Heracleidae* and Menoeceus in the *Phoenissae* will be recalled. The patriotism of Iphigenia has a message for Athens in the last desperate phases of the Peloponnesian War. If Iphigenia is proud and conscious of her greatness, we must view her, like Hippolytus, in the light of her subsequent apotheosis.

The one character of the play having full tragic stature, however, is Clytemnestra. She is never reconciled to the sacrifice, despite the pleas of Iphigenia (1369–70; 1454), and she darkly hints of revenge upon Agamemnon when he returns home (1187, 1455). Indeed this play, like the *Trojan Women*, must be interpreted in the light of subsequent events.²¹⁷ Only in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, furthermore, is Clytemnestra's case against Agamemnon stated with the full power which it obviously possesses. Here is Euripides' final word on the injustice of the vengeance of Orestes, and his final word utterly devastates the cold interpretation of Sophocles.

19. RHESUS

(Authorship and date uncertain)

Euripides seems to have written a play entitled *Rhesus*, but the genuineness of the present play was questioned even in ancient times. Some modern scholars, following an ancient critic, think that this play is a youthful work of Euripides; others with perhaps more justification believe that it was written by an unknown dramatist of the fourth century B.C.²¹⁸ It is probably the poorest of all extant Greek tragedies.

Discussion.—The *Rhesus* is a dramatic adaptation of the tenth book of the *Iliad*. Two major changes in the material may be noted. The Homeric version deals primarily with the Greeks, whereas the play is written from the Trojan point of view. This is obviously a necessary change if the play is to have anything of tragedy in it.²¹⁹ The other change, however, is a dramatic blunder which destroys the close connection between Dolon and the murder of Rhesus. In the Homeric version, Odysseus and Diomedes, having captured Dolon, inquire the whereabouts of Hector and the guards. Dolon in his craven efforts to save his life answers all their questions but gives an especially glowing account of the steeds and rich armor of the newly arrived Rhesus. Odys-

seus and Diomedes then dismiss any thought of attempting to find Hector and go straight to the camp of Rhesus. Athena appears only at the end of their depredations and warns them to flee. In short, the Homeric version is closely knit and uses divinities only for poetic effects. The playwright has made Athena give information affecting the immediate dramatic action—a device unparalleled in Greek tragedy—and the substitution of Athena's information for that of Dolon destroys the close connection between Dolon and Rhesus or, in short, the unity of the action. This blunder seems to betray an inferior dramatist.

In certain respects, the *Rhesus* shows striking similarities to other Greek tragedies. The final scene of the Muse with the body of her son may have been modeled on a similar scene of Eos (the Dawn) with the body of Memnon in the lost *Psychostasia* of Aeschylus.²²⁰ The similarity of the subject matter here is also noteworthy: Memnon, like Rhesus, was an ally of the Trojans. Reminiscent of the words of Artemis at the end of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, furthermore, is the contention of the Muse that Athena is responsible for the death of Rhesus and that Achilles too must die.²²¹ But in the *Hippolytus* the quarrel of the divinities has profound significance; here it seems pointless. Again, some modern critics have thought that the scene of Diomedes, Odysseus, and Athena is modeled on the opening scene of Sophocles' *Ajax*. This may be so, but the dramatic function of the divinity in Sophocles' play is merely to allow this very spectacular scene of exposition, for Odysseus' own cleverness is equal to the task of discovering the guilt of Ajax. Similarly in Euripides' lost *Philoctetes*, Odysseus was disguised by Athena, but perhaps this was hardly more than a manner of saying that Odysseus showed inspired artistry in disguising himself. In the *Rhesus* Athena's interference is of a much more tangible nature.

The dramatic irony and certain other effects of the play are crude and heavy. Dolon promises to bring back the head of Odysseus or Diomedes—the very men who are to slay him. Rhesus is greeted by Messenger and chorus as the one man to slay Achilles. The chorus consider him Zeus or Ares and the deliverer of Troy. The boasts of Rhesus himself are no less extravagant. He will destroy the Greeks in a single day even without the help of Hector and his forces. This cannot be interpreted as mere braggadocio, since Athena herself later confirms it (600–604). It must be intended as dramatic irony and perhaps as serious glorification of Rhesus. As either it is overdone. To Rhesus' request that he be allowed to face Achilles, Hector responds by reminding him that there are other Greeks equally formidable—Ajax, Diomedes, and Odysseus. The crafty Odysseus, he continues, has done the land more harm than anyone else. He has entered Troy as a disguised

spy and has stolen the statue of Athena and slain the guards. Rhesus is only contemptuous of such ignoble craft and promises to impale Odysseus as a temple robber! Even cruder are the words of the Charioteer near the end of the play, who in charging Hector himself with the murder intimates that no enemy could have discovered Rhesus unless some god had revealed him. Such irony is really comic.

Some good dramatic qualities, however, are found in the *Rhesus*. The opening scene is excellent. The entrance of the chorus at the very beginning of the play, however, is unique in Greek drama after Aeschylus and is thought by some critics to constitute deliberate archaizing. Ancient commentators reveal that two alternative opening scenes in iambic verse were known to them. One of these, attributed to actors, consisted of a scene between Hera and Athena.²²² The appearance of opposing divinities in prologue and epilogue is again reminiscent of the *Hippolytus*. Such hurry and excitement of the chorus as they enter in the *Rhesus*, furthermore, is more characteristic of Old Comedy than of tragedy. But no serious fault can be found here. Previous exposition is quite unnecessary, and the present opening gives a realistically effective impression of the disorder and confusion of the night camp.

The atmosphere of night is well simulated and maintained throughout the play—no small achievement, since the play was to be acted in the intense light of the open Greek theater. The entrance of Rhesus also is well managed. The Messenger's speech presents a splendid first description of Rhesus, and the second stasimon furnishes a spirited fanfare. The chorus are deftly involved in the action and play the role of a minor character. Their lyrics contain very little poetry—it takes more than one nightingale (550) to make a poetic drama. The departure and re-entrance of the chorus are plausibly motivated and effectively allow a vacant "stage" for the very melodramatic scene with Odysseus and Diomedes.

An excellent theatrical effect is achieved when the two Greeks enter with the wolf-skin of Dolon. Thus the audience immediately realizes that the Trojan spy has been slain. This effect, of course, is not found in the Homeric version.²²³ It is aided by the immediately preceding foreboding of Hector and the chorus. Odysseus' clever use of the watchword at the end of the scene is also the dramatist's own. The later scene with the wounded Charioteer is good theater, and the grief of the Muse is not without pathos.

As a whole, however, the play fails to create anything but the most superficial tragic effect. It lacks a tragic character. Hector is well portrayed in the early scenes, but unfortunately he has little to do with forwarding the dramatic action. Nor is the impact of the events of the play

brought to bear upon him in an effective fashion. He well represents the Trojans, and the two tragic events of this night could have been interpreted as making the final ruin of Troy inevitable. If Hector had been made less confident in the opening scenes, the loss of Rhesus would have affected him more profoundly. The much less important loss of Dolon might have contributed something to this effect upon Hector. As it is, though the fate of Dolon is revealed to the audience, Hector only surmises it, and hence there is no occasion to depict any profound emotional reaction. Hector as presented is not a tragic character.

Nor does the play reveal any profound significance. The dramatist toys with the theme of divine Nemesis when the chorus hail Rhesus as a god and when Rhesus himself makes his extravagant boasts. But we hear no more of this theme. The anger of Hector at Rhesus' late arrival lends plausibility to the Charioteer's suspicions of treachery, but all this too is without significance. In short, the author has not been equal to the task of making this material into great tragedy. Indeed, he appears to have attempted only a loosely connected sequence of exciting action.