

The Labours of Heracles as Labours of Love

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Abstract

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes Euripides's unique place in the history of Greek thought. This thesis considers the implications of Nietzsche's case by analyzing Euripides's fifth-century tragedy *Herakles*. It argues that, for Euripides, the Heracles figure characterizes the shift from a mythic to a tragic worldview. As Heracles's role in myth suggests the struggle of an individual repressed by society, Euripides's use of allegory, which he sharply contrasts with tragic realism, reveals the consequences of an increase in self-consciousness. This shift from myth to tragedy suggests the importance of René Girard's theory of mimetic rivalry and a scapegoat mechanism, the efficacy of which is shown by comparing Heracles and Job. Because an elevated figure is disgraced in both literary works, the comparison is illustrative of foundational anthropology. Job and Heracles, in their respective traditions, represent the central position of a virtual scapegoat onto whom communal violence is directed, displaced, and even transcended.

Keywords: *autochthones*; polarization; the God of victims and the God of persecutors; foundational anthropology; repression; *sparagmos*

Dedication

To my mother, for introducing me to philosophy and literature, and my father, who is always ready to listen to my ideas.

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Introduction

The Athenian playwright Euripides, the last of the three great tragedians, is also considered the most innovative. In his tragedy *Herakles*—performed c. 416 BCE—he dramatizes the events surrounding the disgrace of the mythological hero famed for achieving a series of labours against exotic forces and mythological monsters. The play exalts the exploits of this exemplary Greek hero, but at the same time depicts civil unrest at the legendary city of Thebes. For example, in the tragedy's opening moments, Heracles's wife, Megara, and his mortal father, Amphitryon, are at the altar of Zeus attempting to delay further violence from being brought against them by an upstart tyrant named Lycus, who has murdered the city's ruler, Megara's father Creon.

By securing the execution of Heracles's family, Lycus aspires to establish rule over the city. However, Amphitryon pleads for salvation from Zeus, with whom he shares in the paternity of Heracles. Amphitryon is compelled to argue with Lycus, who claims that Heracles is cowardly. It is apparent from this scenario that the Theban crisis arises as a result of Heracles's absence from Thebes: Heracles is occupied by his last labour, to retrieve the three-headed hound of Hades, Cerberus, and remains absent as Megara and Amphitryon protect the lives of his sons and defend his reputation. Heracles has undertaken these labours for Eurystheus, the king of Argos, in an attempt to regain Amphitryon's birthright to this Mycenaean stronghold. According to Lycus, the heralds of the king have reported that Heracles is dead. At this rumor, Megara and Amphitryon lose their hope that Heracles will reappear. Despite their resistance, Lycus resolves to carry out the execution of Heracles's family, and just as this happens, Heracles fortuitously returns. Heracles joyfully reunites with his family, yet he is angered to see them wearing the robes of ritual sacrifice. He expresses his desire to take revenge on all the Thebans who support the tyrant. Fearing that those Thebans who have supported the tyrant could now suddenly unite against him, Amphitryon urges Heracles to ambush and kill Lycus within the palace chambers, and before setting off to carry out this action, Heracles hurriedly explains to Amphitryon that he has kept

Cerberus at Demeter's grove. It is subsequently revealed that Heracles is triumphant and has satisfied his revenge against Lycus. The chorus of Theban old men, enjoying the good fortune of Heracles's return, respond by singing his praises.

At this point, they are interrupted by the sight of Hera's servants, Iris and Lyssa, the goddess of madness, who appear above the house. Iris explains to the frightened chorus that they have not come to hurt the city. Instead, now that Heracles has completed his labours and Zeus no longer protects him, they have arrived at Hera's orders to inflict Heracles with a sudden frenzy. Hera fears that, if Heracles is not punished, the gods will be diminished while men are exalted. But Madness is reluctant to carry out her task against a hero who has benefited mankind. It is clear from Iris's response that Lyssa cannot resist Hera's authority, so as Heracles prepares a sacrifice to Zeus out of gratitude for his fortunate return, he is suddenly seized by madness. In his madness, Heracles imagines an extension of his mythical labours: after travelling to Megara and around the isthmus of Corinth to Mycenae, he believes he carries out revenge on Eurystheus by slaying this king's children.

The vision is pure delusion. As reported by a messenger, Heracles in fact kills his wife Megara and their three children. Finally, when Heracles attempts to kill his mortal father, Amphitryon, Athena intercedes by striking him and leaving him unconscious. Fearing further destruction, Amphitryon has his slaves bind Heracles to the palace pillars that have been toppled by the hero's fury. Eventually, Heracles awakes, believing that the destruction he sees around him may mean that he has somehow returned to the underworld from which he recently retrieved Cerberus and rescued his friend Theseus. As he directs Heracles to look upon the dead, Amphitryon helps him to recognize his mistake. It is nearly too much for Heracles, and, in his grief, he expresses his desire for death.

Having received word of the Theban conflict, Theseus arrives with an army, and in an effort to console his friend and encourage him to remain among the living, Theseus suggests that Hera alone is responsible for Heracles's downfall. Furthermore, he encourages Heracles to consider that the gods, like human beings, are flawed. However, seeing the gods as imperfect beings strikes Heracles as disagreeable, and he responds that he cannot believe the gods, like humans, are plagued by desire. Despite

this, in his debate with Theseus, Heracles realizes that, even though he has killed his family with his arms and carries the pollution for his crimes, as a hero, he is still responsible for protecting himself and others with these very same tools — perhaps even more responsible. Heracles thus accepts Theseus's offer of wealth and refuge at Athens and resolves to free himself, unquestionably, from his labours. With Theseus's help, he will return the hound of Hades to Eurystheus at Mycenae.

As the agent of the crimes, Heracles is not permitted to bury his family. Promising to return once Amphitryon has died, he requests that Amphitryon conduct his family's burial.

The play *Herakles* is divided between beliefs: it celebrates the hero's deeds and, as characterized by the tyrant Lycus, it is sacrilegiously skeptical of his accomplishments. It is arguable that Euripides allows this initial debate to surface as a part of his inversion of the traditional versions of the Heracles story. For Euripides, the mythological labours of Heracles, may not be a punishment on the part of the gods in response to his murder of his family in a fit of rage; it is once Heracles has accomplished his last labour that Hera drives him mad. As fate proves life's uncertainty, the order of events Euripides devises for *Herakles* perhaps suggests a more correct or rational relationship to the gods than was previously admitted in this tradition.

Chapter 1 of this thesis, "Euripides's *Herakles* as a Mythology of Culpability," argues that, in light of Euripides's presentation of the Heracles story, the question of Heracles's guilt or innocence for the murder of his family should be subsumed in a thematic interpretation of the play that considers why and how Euripides represents the mythological Heracles as a tragic figure. Accordingly, Heracles's madness may appear to be a consequence of the repression of individual desires. However, the connection of Heracles's madness with Euripides's appreciation of myth constitutes a part of cultural expression. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Eric Robertson Dodds appropriately contextualize Euripides's tragic portrayal of a mythological individual; in his relation to the gods, the hero is eventually destined to experience the burden of transcending a tradition that is partly defined through his mythological role. He is caught between a deterministic world, governed by the Olympian gods who both favour and hate mortals, and a transcendence of the worldview that attributes to them such humanlike desires.

Euripides explores the problem of Heracles's desire to protect his Theban family and his obligation to his labours, and this chapter considers the significance of this exploration with reference to classical scholars, including Emma Griffiths, Karelisa Hartigan, and Michael Silk. It also analyzes the play within the Girardian framework of foundational anthropology, which allows for the argument that Euripides's appeal to the Heracles of myth exposes society's need for a scapegoat. Furthermore, since ideas concerning sublimation and transference may confirm René Girard's claim that society's selection of a victim is seemingly spontaneous, this chapter suggests that the Girardian perspective can be qualified by a psychoanalytic view. Likewise, Heracles's relation to Zeus is held to be a central tenet of the play. Zeus's paternity of the hero, which is mitigated by its being shared with Heracles's mortal father Amphitryon (suggestive of the primitive aspects of Greek myth), pertains to the expression of Heracles's madness and the expansion of civilization that the myth signifies.

Chapter 1 also refers to Godfrey W. Bond's commentary *Heracles* and Jean-Pierre Vernant's understanding of Greek social organization, since these authors' insights allow for an assessment of the relations between characters in the play in terms of the play's larger mythical implications and the Greeks' development of a hierarchal society, respectively. Their insights strengthen the argument that, for Euripides, Heracles's madness is a result of his civilizing function, which draws together opposing traditions that are ultimately represented by Zeus and Hera. The thesis also focuses on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and considers some of the historical ideas of his near contemporary Jacob Burckhardt, who describes a development of the Greek competitive spirit called the *agon*. It is argued that the Heracles-Hera conflict may conceivably be rooted in this competitive ideal—a battle of the sexes originating at the time of matriarchal societies. In this connection, the obscure reference in *Herakles* to Minyans, who like the Thebans and Pelasgians represent *autochthonous* or indigenous people, provides reason to consider Euripides's approach with reference to the research of Robert Graves. The Greek sources that Graves deals with suggest that the conflict with the Minyans, which Heracles apparently resolves, may actually be a sign that madness divides the Greek world between an agricultural or domestic worldview, on one hand, and a civilizing or cosmopolitan worldview that produces the heroic ideal, on

the other. As Heracles's excellence embodies this ideal, he is thrown against it, and the result of this fateful throw is evident in Heracles's disgrace at the culmination of his labours, which his mortal father Amphitryon explains he has pursued as a means to regain Amphitryon's native home of Argos.

Chapter 2, "Euripides's *Herakles* from Myth to Tragedy," argues that the myth of Heracles relates to a connection between material sacrifice and penitence, and as such, to the development of notions concerning guilt and innocence. Consequently, as possibly a tragic representation of the *pharmakos*, *Herakles* may suggest an inversion of ritual punishment and penitence that parallels Euripides's inversion of the conventional version of the Heracles myth, wherein the play itself is taken to be comparable to the *Thargelia* ceremony. For example, as Heracles returns from the underworld, he claims to have seen mysteries, and by the end of the tragedy, he sets out to deliver Cerberus to Mycenae (as if presenting a ritual offering). Thereby, the Heracles of myth arrives at a stage at which he represents a religious sufferer, self-conscious of guilt, yet able to express the means to his redemption.

Furthermore, the claim that purification in *Herakles* is distinguished from Olympian worship is substantiated through reference to Karl Galinsky's appraisal of an evolution of the Heracles figure. Galinsky argues that Euripides's representation changes the traditional character of Heracles—who is often seen as hubristic—into a hero who attains spiritual penance and liberation. So Heracles's choice to view Amphitryon instead of Zeus as his father suggests that Olympian worship gives way to an Orphic and Dionysian revival—an idea that is supported by Jane Harrison's analyses of ritual. Also, Jean-Pierre Vernant's thought concerning the *pharmakos* as a figure *isotheos* (too close to the gods) is considered as support for the idea that, with Heracles's rejection of Zeus's parenthood, Euripides's tragic figure expresses a transcendence of conventional ritual practises.

Chapter 3, "The Psychoanalytic Perspective and Religiopolitical Aspects of Euripides's *Herakles*: Secrecy, Separation and Civil Unrest," interprets the plays' metaphor of a house's poor foundations in relation to Hera's challenge, which Heracles must repeatedly bear. It describes Hera's interruption of Heracles's life in a way that makes Philip E. Slater and Richard Caldwell's psychoanalytic approaches to Greek

myth relevant to the analysis of the play. They argue that Heracles represents a bisexual nature and that the hero's life symbolizes the snake of immortality. As Heracles's crimes against the domestic sphere produce a sense of finality, they also imply a primal fantasy and castration anxiety as a response to the constant threat posed by the goddess Hera. Euripides depicts an ethos of confusion and error that eludes Heracles's immediate experience, in a way that allows the playwright to demonstrate that Heracles's mythical existence has come full circle.

In the first section of Chapter 4, "Nietzsche's Ideas on the Tragic, Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism and Comparative Analysis of *Herakles* and *Job*," is the view that while the hero destroys the family and thus the play is pessimistic, it is not nihilistic. For example, as Euripides depicts Heracles as victor and then as victim able to endure his misfortune (perhaps representative of the tension under which the Greeks' patriarchal model operated), the hero finds the means to overcome his guilt. The presupposition that defines the hero as representative of a victim, which signifies the Greeks' patriarchal model, is one aspect of the play that may be examined through an appeal to comparative literature, in this case, a comparison of *Herakles* to the book of *Job*. According to René Girard in *Job: The Victim of his People*, Job's arguments lead to a disclosure of society's need to operate by virtue of a scapegoat mechanism. So too, this section of the thesis suggests that Euripides's *Herakles* depicts a similar revelation of the scapegoat mechanism.

Additionally, Sumio Yoshitake's position in "Disgrace, Grief and Other Ills: Herakles's Rejection of Suicide" is analyzed and contested to demonstrate that, although Theseus provides an example of *philia*, Heracles's reinterpretation of the gods' role in human suffering and his decision to live for Hellas offer the play's supreme exemplum of friendship for the Greeks. Furthermore, this elevation of the individual from his disgrace is comparable to Job's experience as he vies with the thoughts of his accusing friends. Consequently, a parallel between Theseus and Job's friends reveals the structural similarity between both texts and suggests a spiritual orientation that could possibly originate in the Greek tradition.

As suggested in Girard's analysis concerning Job, Heracles is a similarly charismatic and honourable figure. However, Girard argues that this quality pertains to

the downfall of such figures, and in Section 4.2 it is argued that Euripides's Heracles represents a figure whose excellence garners the hatred of his community. Furthermore, it appears that Heracles is more clearly what is termed a "virtual scapegoat" than Job, since Heracles does not experience the same threat of persecution and since Heracles alone overcomes a desire for death, whereas Job is saved from his persecutions through divine intervention. This absence of the gods is indicative of Euripides's theoretical genius. The depiction of individual suffering in *Herakles*, as far as it is comparable to the circumstances in the book of *Job*, seems indicative of the intensification of individual expression characteristic of fifth-century Athens.

Following the argument that Euripides's depiction of Heracles suggests a new orientation to the divine, Section 4.3 pursues the idea that the Greek tradition reveals a tendency toward a Job-like figure. It speculates that Heracles's defiant reaction to the gods must be mediated to the point where he turns his anger inward. As such, Euripides demonstrates that Heracles can survive his guilt; this new orientation toward the divine represents a change that does not necessarily come spontaneously.

The final section focuses on Nietzsche's understanding of choric development in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Society's attempts to reintegrate the victim Job into a standardized version of history is illustrative of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality that Nietzsche believes characterizes Greek thought in its transition from myth to tragedy and philosophy. It is also contrary to Girard's exclusion of Greek and thus Euripidean tragedy from the sacralization of the scapegoat (which he sees as the civilizing function of tragedy and assigns exclusively to the Christian tradition). Hence, section 4.4 argues that Euripides's *Herakles* is a tragedy that altogether represents the heroic iteration of the sacralization of the victim.

Chapter 1

Euripides's *Herakles* as a Mythology of Culpability

In the idea of "Guilty!" there lies the character of the "not." If the "Guilty!" is something that can definitely apply to existence, then this raises the ontological problem of clarifying existentially the character of this "not" as a "not."

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

On moral theory: In politics the statesman frequently anticipates his opponent's act and does it before him: "If I don't do it, he will." A sort of self-defense as the fundamental principle of politics. The standpoint of war.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*

The essential difficulty in understanding Euripides's *Herakles*¹ comes from a problem of determining guilt or innocence: Why is Heracles punished by the gods, apparently without cause? After he recognizes his disgrace, in the debate with his heroic companion Theseus over the nature of the gods and the significance of his own nature, why does Heracles unreservedly accept all responsibility for the murder of his family—an act that he commits while under the influence of the goddess Madness? In the Greek tradition, different representations of the Heracles's myth recognize the apparent cause of Heracles's madness to be the goddess Hera's malevolent divine

¹ References and quotations from *Herakles* in this thesis are from William Arrowsmith's 1968 translation, hereafter abbreviated in source citations as *Her*.

intervention. But Euripides, through the tragic representation of the hero, makes the meaning of her intervention more apparent as a problem for his Athenian public. Euripides's *Herakles* produces a new type of figure whose emergence from crisis as a spiritually liberated individual suggests a pervasively tragic worldview and reveals the effects of Hera's role as his iniquitous patron. Therefore, understanding the apparent causes of the astonishing reversal of fortune Euripides depicts and identifying the pattern that clarifies it show that the playwright on some level expresses Heracles's repression. By depicting a character who is receptive to an entire tradition, Euripides's *Herakles* reveals an important part of what Greek culture had suppressed.

The relation between these approaches presents a seemingly insoluble problem. *Herakles* cannot be taken at face value—that is, the gods cannot be directly responsible for Heracles's madness. Nor is it adequate to say that the gods are purely literary symbols representing Heracles's agency and his repressed motives. However, the answer to the question of Heracles's culpability runs the danger of becoming irrelevant if this overlap in perspectives is not recognized as a significant factor. Consequently, attempting to synthesize interpretive positions that are apparently diametrically opposed is worthwhile. This interpretation considers Heracles's acknowledgement of his guilt ("in ignorance, I killed them all" *Her.* 1364) in order to contextualize the play as a whole, without overly emphasizing the play's last phase as a philosophical discussion on the nature of the gods. Rather, it emphasizes how Euripides's *Herakles* represents the conflation of mythological and political thought that Jean-Pierre Vernant sees as transcending "the binary logic of yes or no" with "a logic different from that of the *logos*" (1980, 240).

By situating the mythological Heracles as having already realized his labours, Euripides expresses from the outset the two perspectives the audience will invariably shift between: they are compelled in one moment to blame the gods and in the next to blame necessity ("But now, I see, I must serve necessity" *Her.* 1357). Furthermore, *Herakles* as a tragedy is defined by an inability to distinguish or identify a necessity that derives from either the gods or humanity. By presenting an arrangement of allegorical or mythological "facts," spoken by the elderly Amphitryon in its opening, the play signifies

that this older hero has the vantage point from which to question Heracles's intentions. Likewise, Amphitryon suggests two possible rationales for Heracles's present endeavour and past labours. From the desire to "civilize the world" (*Her.* 20), Heracles faces the problem of being "mastered by Hera or by necessity" (*Her.* 20–21). For Amphitryon, Heracles's desire to civilize the world is contextualized by the expectation that, in exchange for civilizing the world, Heracles will win back from Eurystheus their native land of Argos (*Her.* 16–17). However, as the crisis at Thebes culminates in Heracles's madness, the possibility of restoring Amphitryon to his native Argos meets cultural or peripheral opposition.

The difficulty surrounding Heracles's fulfillment of his desire to restore Amphitryon to Argos is complicated from the start by the awareness that Heracles is mastered either by Hera or by necessity. This uncertainty demonstrates tragedy's appeal to a mythological history that is perhaps best described by E.R. Dodds, as he explains that,

behind the acceptance of astral determinism there lay, among other things, the fear of freedom—the unconscious flight from the heavy burden of individual choice which an open society lays upon its members. (1964, 252)

Even though the ancient Greeks were decidedly retrospective,² and Amphitryon indeed celebrates Heracles's labours, his discursion also involves an appraisal of Heracles's incentive. *Herakles* therefore begins as a meditation on this "fear of freedom" that, through a series of considerations, forces the audience to decide whether Heracles is mastered by Hera or by necessity. The problem is characterized by the skepticism that Thebes's latest tyrant directs to Amphitryon. The upstart tyrant Lycus, who has taken over Thebes in Heracles's absence, forces the question on Heracles's father and wife as he threatens them with execution: "you who filled all Hellas with your hollow boasts that Zeus was partner in your son's conception; and you, that you were

² On this point, the chorus's perspective is pertinent: "May my old age always sing of Memory, the Muses' mother, always shall I sing the crown of Heracles the victor!" (*Her.* 673–681).

wife of the noblest man!" (*Her.* 149–150). Lycus's skepticism implies primitive beliefs present in the Homeric tradition, which held that the gods and men were partners in the paternity of the human race. This is suggested by the digression in *The Iliad*³ that relates the story of Heracles's birth, delayed by a jealous Hera who aims to ruin Zeus's plans:

But teeming with treachery noble Hera set her trap,
"You will prove a liar ...
when the time arrives to crown your words with action.
Come now, my Olympian, swear your inviolate oath
that he shall lord it over all who dwell around him—
that child who drops between a woman's knees today,
born of the stock of men who spring from Zeus's blood."
(*Iliad* 19. 123–129)

In the mythic tradition, by virtue of their strange and unpredictable natures, the gods present humans with a fundamental or ontological problem, which underlies this partnership between mortals and gods. Likewise, since the tyrant's threat to Heracles's family is associated with his criticism of Heracles's status as a demigod (*Her.* 148–150), it is conceivable that Hera's vindictiveness is actually linked to Lycus's appearance at Thebes.

In his commentary *Heracles*, Bond explains that the "civilizing mission" is emphasized throughout and that the phrase "to civilize the world" (*Her.* 20) includes the "standard word for clearing land for cultivation" (1981, 67). From this understanding of the text and Euripides's choice in his arrangement of allegorical "facts," it is clear that Euripides implies that the process of civilization is itself open to question. From Amphitryon's vantage point, the question is whether Heracles's intention to civilize the world—rather than the goddess Hera—is more reasonably the necessity that compels Heracles. Amphitryon's question concerning Heracles's motivation to achieve his labours (*Her.* 20–21) establishes a conflict between the uncultivated and the civilized world. Madness, who is sent by Hera to spoil Heracles's triumph on his return, has this to say in defence of the hero: "This man whose house you drive me on has won great

³ References and quotations from *The Iliad* in this thesis are from Robert Fagles's 1998 translation.

fame on earth and with the gods. He reclaimed the pathless earth and raging sea, and he alone held up the honors of the gods when they wilted at the hands of evil men" (*Her.* 849–854). The give-and-take between chaotic and ordered worldviews is present as Heracles expresses *philia* for his family after returning from his labours; it is present between Heracles's *mania* and the gods allegorically held responsible for it; and it is present between Theseus's presence as the Athenian friend and his initial absence.

E.M. Griffiths argues that the fundamental meaning of the play is suggested by that contrast between Heracles's obligation to his children and his endeavour "to hale back up to the light of day the triple-bodied dog" (*Her.* 23–24). Griffiths argues that the "triple-bodied dog" is an inverse symbol for the love and attachment Heracles owes his three children but bestows on his labours. So, Heracles's last labour represents the hero's neglect of his family and consequently justifies Hera's wrath.⁴ Griffiths's argument shows how Hera's actions against Heracles are rationalized within the world of the play. However, this argument only alludes to what Griffiths calls the "the fundamental 'meaning' of the play" (2002, 641). Hera's penalty—Heracles's loss of his children at his own hands in a state of *mania* as a punishment for neglecting his family—does not resolve the question of her obvious role in this neglect. In fact, it is through her agent Eurystheus that Hera signifies the dilemma binding Heracles to his labours.

For Euripides, Hera's motivation to punish Heracles for his neglect of the family merely relates to an allegorical arrangement that dictates the logic of the play,⁵ by which the goddess's hatred of the illegitimate son of Zeus is certain to endure. The tragic Heracles, caught between his labours and his obligation to protect the family, is

⁴ Griffiths argues that Euripides signifies, in the heroic ideal, the pursuit of immortality: "The play manipulates the ideas of ascent and descent, to and from Hades, and the words of Iris and Lyssa stress this aspect; Herakles will send his children on a journey reversing the one he himself has just made..." (2002, 647); "The capture of Kerberos is a source of ambiguity at the start of the play. I would suggest that this act alone gives Hera the excuse she needs to act in defence of the 'cosmic order'" (2002, 650).

⁵ Griffiths makes a structural analysis of the play that allows for a defence of the argument that "the child figures in Herakles are carefully positioned in the thematic structure of the play" (2002, 642).

connected to contradictory conventions, and the family's suffering dramatizes for Euripides an irresistible *pathos*.

The demand of the cosmopolitan Greek world, as it results in the limitation or sacrifice of the domestic, is the very substance of Heracles's madness. For example, Euripides's personification of the goddesses Iris and Madness represents the contextualization of sublimated forces. Madness is ordered to strike Heracles: "Speed his passage over Acheron, where he must take his crown of lovely sons. Let him learn what Hera's anger is, and what is mine. For the gods are nothing, and men prevail, if this one man escape" (*Her.* 838–842). The intention behind the instruction is that, through punishment, Heracles's mortality will be brought to the fore; and since this is accomplished through his suffering for both the death and the killing of his loved ones, a leitmotif concerning death and darkness is repeated by Madness herself. In her reluctance to bring ruin on Heracles, she describes her lineage: "born of noble birth: my mother is the Night, and my father, Uranus" (*Her.* 843–844). Consequently, Heracles's appearance at Thebes is offset by the underlying forces that Iris and Madness denote; for example, Madness may personify what is concealed in darkness and what is sublimated⁶ in the course of Heracles's victories. Karelisa Hartigan interprets the madness scene by connecting it to Heracles's *athlos*:

His madness is beyond his control, yet it acts through his virtue—his strength—to achieve his ruin. Thus, maddened, he takes his bow and sets out on another *athlos*. Believing he is killing the children of Eurystheus, he violently slays his sons and wife too.

Herakles in madness is not doing a thing he would like to have done sane, the attack on Eurystheus' children does not spring from a desire repressed within his psyche. (1987, 128)

⁶ For the application of the psychoanalytic term *sublimation*, as characteristic of both individual repression and social beliefs, I refer to Freud's definition in *The Ego and the Id*: "Punishment must be exacted even if it does not fall upon the guilty. It was in studying the dream-work that we first came upon this kind of looseness in the displacements brought about by the primary process" (1960, 44). The idea that punishment meted out by the community is unfocused and primarily cathartic, and that there is a relation between the experience of punishment and the development of the unconscious, is particularly applicable to the understanding of Euripides's *Herakles*. For example, Hesiod's *Theogony*, to which Uranus belongs, describes the origin and genealogy of the gods through a series of punishments that lead to Olympian rule.

However, something remains unresolved in Hartigan's understanding of Heracles's virtue, since Heracles's strength as a hero is displaced from his civilizing mission to rid the world of mythical creatures to the slaying of innocent victims. Heracles's madness is a consequence of his labours but, as Hartigan contends, it may not result from "a desire repressed within his psyche." In other words, it does not derive from the individual psyche; rather, his act represents what may be characterized as an overdetermined compulsion. As her portion, Hera's punishment is like a mandate that leads a maddened Heracles to conform to a recklessness characteristic of a sordid and frenzied aspect of the heroic tradition.⁷

In his madness, Heracles conforms to a primitive sense of right and wrong that parallels Lycus's ignoble threat, which Amphitryon describes in asking the tyrant, "What will you achieve by killing these boys? How have they hurt you? Yet I grant you wise in one respect: being base yourself, you fear the children of a noble man" (*Her.* 205–208). On the other hand, Lycus's threat to the Theban chorus is prophetic as far as it describes a seemingly unavoidable decline: "But you old men, for this defiance, you shall mourn the sons of Heracles and each disaster that devours this house, each separate grief, until you learn you are only slaves; I am the master" (*Her.* 247–251). Although Lycus is unaware that fate will prove him the lowest, it is finally Heracles's

⁷ Peter W. Rose (1992, 72), in *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth*, explains that Homer depicted a magnanimous spirit but also implicitly criticized a warrior code that frequently dismissed such feeling in order to satisfy violent urges:

Agamemnon is singled out for his ferocious chiding of Menelaos (6.55–60; cf. Whitman 1958:160)—a figure associated with kindly, "maternal" (A. Parry 1972:17) imagery—for his readiness to ransom a son of Priam. It is perhaps a moot point whether this implicit celebration of humanity is a component of the heroic ideology or an aspect of the poet's critical distance from that ideology (Griffin 1980: chap. 4). I believe the latter to be true and indicated in the poet's rare explicit and, in my view, heavily ironic judgment offered after Agamemnon declares that even the unborn male child in his mother's belly must not escape their total vengeance: "So speaking the hero turned his brother's mind / Since what he'd argued was just" (*aisima pareipon*, 6.61–62). We later consider the whole issue of the justice of the Trojan War in the *Iliad*, but the pervasive sympathy for wives and innocent babies built into the formulas suggest the validity of seeing irony in the poet's intervention here.

strength (as a force that devours his house) that—directed in the wrong way—lowers him and Amphytrion in relation to the gods.

René Girard defines a number of elements that support the contention that Heracles's strength represents a regressive force that devours his house. In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard describes the urgency that drives the crowd's selection of its victim, contrasting the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* with the miracles of the Gospels:

With a ridiculous grandiloquence he denounces the beggar as an “enemy of the gods.” To make the violence possible, he must demonize the individual he has selected as victim. And finally the guru succeeds. He obtains what he desires: the first stone. Once it is thrown, Apollonius can take a nap or whatever, for now violence and deceit are bound to triumph. The same Ephesians who had pity on the beggar a moment earlier now demonstrate a violent emulation of one another that is so relentless, so contrary to their initial attitude, that our surprise can only equal our sadness. Not purely rhetorical, the first stone is decisive because it is the most difficult to throw. Why is it the most difficult to throw? Because it is the only one without a model. (2001, 56).

Strikingly, the absurdity that Apollonius generates in the crowd contextualizes Heracles's madness as indicative of cultural regression. Heracles's violence is seemingly also without a model. This is so because Euripides expresses the inevitability of the hero's tragic disgrace as systematically as possible. For example, Heracles's madness appears only once he is virtually free of his labours and after he kills Lycus. Furthermore, Euripides makes it clear that Heracles's strength, as he threatens to kill them with his bow, is far greater than that of the Thebans who betrayed him (*Her.* 569–570). Therefore, as Heracles's triumph represents the pinnacle of the heroic tradition, his madness—its antithesis—signifies that this triumph is mysteriously and suddenly corrupted by Hera. Furthermore, as Heracles is caught up in mimetic violence, the inevitability of her corruption is reinforced by the fact that the victims against whom he directs his anger are so closely related to himself.

The nature of Heracles's fury is captured in the remark he makes once he has delusionally murdered the first of his three children: “Here is the first of Eurystheus's youngsters dead; his death repays me for his father's hate” (*Her.* 981–983). Heracles provides a justification that is immediately associated with a repayment for an affect.

Whereas Heracles's actions actually confirm Hera's reprisal, he mistakenly believes that he is retaliating against Eurystheus. It is evident in this confusion that the maddened Heracles represents the survival or intrusion of an archaic tradition that is in conflict with those sentiments the tragic Heracles expresses when reunited with his family, as he declares that "All mankind loves its children" (*Her.* 636).

To understand the substance of Heracles's dramatic transformation, it is necessary to examine Hera's role as a source of corruption after Heracles has been reunited with his family and promises their safekeeping— "I accept this care and service of my sons" (*Her.* 632–633). Amphitryon, a hero in his own right and Heracles's mortal father, appeals to Zeus for the liberation of Heracles's family. Amphitryon's plea takes the form of a complaint regarding the shared parentage between him and the deity: "For nothing, then, O Zeus, you shared my wife! In vain we called you partner in my son!" (*Her.* 340–341). Amphitryon accepts Zeus's role in Heracles's conception as a sort of *droit de seigneur*. In the context of the play, his plea signifies the essential uncertainty of the archaic *oikos*; nevertheless, in relation to Heracles's exploits, shared parentage relates to the advance of the Greek civilization.⁸

The double paternity of Heracles—involving both Amphitryon, whose name means "harassing either side," and Zeus—represents the sublimation of an erotic intrusion in the lives of mortals or secondary figures. *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*⁹ may provide a more comprehensive illustration of this phenomenon. It suggests that the Greeks considered marriage integral to the fate of both individuals involved as well as to

⁸ The connection between repressions and primitive practices is analyzed in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Freud's study suggests that certain aspects of social behaviour and neurosis represent the sublimation of primitive practises. For instance, Freud remarks that "it may begin to dawn on us that the taboos of the savage of Polynesians are after all not so remote from us as we were inclined to think at first, that the moral and conventional prohibitions by which we ourselves are governed may have some essential relationship with these primitive taboos and that an explanation of taboo might throw a light upon the obscure origin of our own 'categorical imperative'" (1960, 22).

⁹ References and quotations from *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* in this thesis are from Apostolos Athanassakis's 1976 translation.

the fate of their nations or communities. As Anchises capitulates to the goddess, he requests that his name live on:

I shall make you an altar and offer you fair sacrifices in all seasons. And with kindly heart grant me to be an eminent man among the Trojans, to leave flourishing offspring behind me. (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 101–104)

As Aphrodite persuades Anchises to marry her, he responds with reverence and prayer. Therefore, the typical boon that a mortal requests of the gods conceals an impression of violence that, according to myth, can be offset by the promise of good fortune. The hymn evidently makes the connection between this mentality and the fate of nations, engendered by a flourishing or surviving name.

However, *Herakles* suggests a disclosure of sublimated violence that becomes evident if the nature of Heracles's social position as depicted by Euripides is considered. Although Bond indicates that Heracles is a Pan-Hellenic leader rather than a figure representing Dorian manhood,¹⁰ the tragedy places Heracles as having been away "performing labors for Mycenae's king" (*Her.* 387–388). As this was a time of limited movement through the known world, Heracles's labours may compare to a baron's duty in the service of his king. As a hero, the mythical Heracles represents a social frontrunner, but he also represents a subject whose performance of countless deeds or *athloi* leaves him remarkably detached from the society that employs him. This more terrestrial designation may remove much of the ambiguity from M.S. Silk's classification of the hero as an interstitial or "anomalous and neither" figure (1985, 17). It is true that Heracles is not bound to the land as a common subject or even as a ruler. For instance, the chorus characterizes him as seemingly capable of surpassing all physical limitations:

He passed below the sea and set a calmness in the lives of men whose living is the oar. Under bellied heaven next, he put his hand as prop: there in the halls of Atlas, his manliness held up heaven's starry halls. (*Her.* 400–407)

¹⁰ Bond argues against Wilamowitz's theory that Heracles "represents Dorian manhood" (1981, xxxii). Furthermore, he comments on lines 408–18 that "Heracles' companions represent all Greece" (1981, 170). Yet, considering Heracles's indissoluble relation to Hera who epitomizes vindictiveness, he might represent Dorian manhood as well as the consequences of an increasingly Pan-Hellenic world.

Each reference to Heracles's superhuman strength (as essentially support for the world) plays a positive part in the lives of men. Furthermore, Euripides reveals that, while the mythological Heracles surpasses in excellence the civilization (the authority of the ancient kings) that he helps establish, the hero's madness forces him to discover that the gods or fate draw him unimaginably close to the society of mortals who mark his progress. Accordingly, although the mythological Heracles, who has descended to Hades, is (to all effect and purposes) lost to the world, after Amphitryon greets Heracles (who miraculously returns to Thebes in time for the rescue of his family), he informs him, with disastrous effect, that Eurystheus's watchmen had reported Heracles's death: "The heralds of Eurystheus proclaimed you dead" (*Her.* 553). Whereas Heracles's exploits are celebrated in the play, it is the bargain that Heracles makes with Eurystheus for the restoration of Amphitryon to Argos that is central to the tragic portrayal of events.

Consequently, Heracles's social function is crucial to understanding the fundamental meaning of the tragedy. The social significance of what Silk calls Heracles's "anomalous and neither" status becomes even clearer if it is conceived that, in the world of *Herakles*, Olympian Zeus (unlike Hera, whose messengers actually appear at Thebes) signifies a withdrawn mythological authority derived from the Greeks' Mycenaean past that is similar to the distance in the play between Eurystheus (whose heralds falsely report Heracles's death) and Heracles. Only an acknowledged son of a king, yet one begotten outside the putative royal line, may have naturally assumed and been encouraged to perform the *athloi* of the hero.

Amphitryon's and Zeus's shared parentage of Heracles outlines the role of a hero who civilizes the world. However, according to myth, since Heracles's desire to secure his patrimony is overshadowed by Hera's interference and hatred, the evolution of Heracles's mythological status may be better understood within the context of the Athenian practices for adolescent military training, which Jean-Pierre Vernant describes in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*:

It was a festival celebrated by the phratries during which, on puberty, the Athenian adolescents were enrolled as members of the group by their fathers, following the vote of approval of the *phraters*. However, it would seem that this integration into the phratry came about at the end of the period of "latency" during which the ephebe was, in the company of the

rest of his age-group, segregated from society and sent to the “wild” frontier regions where he underwent a military training which constituted a kind of initiation into the status of a warrior as well as into that of a member of the community. (1980, 22–23)

Heracles’s “anomalous and neither status,” as described by Silk, perhaps reflects these practices. Similar but perhaps more organic circumstances than those described by Vernant could have, as a consequence of an incomplete expulsion from society, resulted in the particularly warlike profession of the hero. If a bastard son of a ruler was permitted to reach maturity, he would become dissociated because the meaning of his life would be associated with the restrictions inherent in primitive taboos.¹¹ Although the hero proves capable and self-sufficient, conflicted social forces would appear that work at one moment in his favour, and in another, against him.¹²

Such circumstances suggest that, as the mythological expression of primitive familial relations, the hero is unlikely to have a direct involvement in domestic politics. Consequently, although Euripides states that the hero’s city of birth is Thebes, Heracles is depicted in the tragedy as disassociated from this society. Euripides follows the idea that the hero is encouraged to assume the dangerous role of an ambassador in foreign political affairs. For example, the stock Greek reference in the play to a heroic

¹¹ Psychoanalytic insight as to a primitive communal setting in which warriors make an “instinctual renunciation,” is relevant to this idea. Freud describes the relation between sexual restrictions and a belief in the warrior’s success abroad: “When the men of a savage tribe go out on an expedition to hunt, to fish, to fight or to gather precious plants, their wives left at home are subjected to many oppressive restrictions, to which the savages themselves ascribe a favourable influence, operating at a distance upon the success of the expedition” (1960, 98).

¹² Freud connects the expression of ambivalence in Greek tragedy with the father complex. He imagines that the tragic hero was originally a primal father and that the members of the chorus represent a company of rebellious brothers who punish their father. Tragedy only distorts this event; it reflects the perspective needed for the chorus or company of brothers to cope with their guilt over their patricide. Instead of depicting the chorus rebelling against the father, tragedy depicts the father as a hero who rebels against authority: “Thus the tragic Hero [becomes], though it might be against his will, the redeemer of the Chorus” (1960, 156). Although Freud focuses on the Oedipus myth, Euripides’s *Herakles* is perhaps a better literary example to support Freud’s theory of a primal father. Freud’s ideas concerning ambivalence toward the mother-in-law (1960, 14) are essential to the myth of Heracles, who is uncharacteristically favoured by Zeus and hated by Hera. Euripides adapts the myth in order to show Heracles restricted from the killing of his mortal father and, in the last scene, discontent with calling himself the son of Zeus.

confrontation with the Amazons alludes to an encounter with apparently strange Eastern cultures. Such a stock mythological reference or convention may represent an ancient conflict played out between cultures in general and between the sexes in particular. For instance, the action narrated by the chorus describes an imagined matriarchal warrior society that Heracles, in the service of Eurystheus, is said to exploit:

What town of Hellas missed him as he mustered friends to fight, to win the warrior women's gold-encrusted robes, in quest for a girdle's deadly quarry? And Hellas won the prize, spoils of a famous foreign queen, which now Mycenae keeps. (*Her.* 412–419)

This passage refers to a mythological construct from Greek myth, suggestive of the social and political significance of the female. It is perhaps through such reference to a previous age, preceding the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, that Euripides relates a social aspect that is sublimated in the course of Heracles's exploits.

Heracles is praised for conquering a nation governed by women, whereas, *Herakles* essentially contrasts an allusive goddess, capable of interfering in Heracles's return to Thebes, with his loyal but ill-fated wife. The contrast between Megara and Hera is never made explicit, but it is structurally apparent. Hera and Megara are antipodal in the play: Hera's merciless authority is apparent through her subordinates, whereas Megara's despair is tangibly expressed in her own voice. So, since these matriarchal societies were likely distant and strange for the fifth-century Greek and yet appear immediately relevant to Heracles's fame, Euripides draws a connection between Hera and Megara that is qualified by Heracles's labours against Amazonians. It may be assumed that any Greek reference to them is typically transformed or distorted, since the impact these societies must once have had is established as a legend in which men battle and overcome women bearing political power. Consequently, Euripides's tragedy may signify a subtle inversion of the mythological tradition as it shows Hera's interference superseding the basis of Heracles's exploits, which in part represent a history of erotic suppression.

That the Amazons are overcome in distant domains specifies the hero's essential condition of being diverted from domestic affairs. Since obtaining the girdle of

the Amazon queen Hippolyta is one of the standard twelve labours, Heracles's battle against the Amazonians suggests cultural sublimation. However, in order to express the consequences of this sublimation, Euripides characterizes the hero and dramatizes his madness. For example, as contextual support for the events occurring "live" in the world of the tragedy, the chorus offers mythological constructs that suggest a past that defines Heracles's fate. First, Amphitryon expresses his fear that Heracles, by killing him too, would bring on himself "the curse of a father's blood" (*Her.* 1076), and as the chorus laments Amphitryon's fate, it relates his myth:

Best for you it would have been
if you had died that very day
you took revenge on those who slew
the kinsmen of your wife, the day
you sacked the city of the Taphians!
(*Her.* 1077–1080)

Turning to ask Zeus why he has punished his son Heracles in such a way, the chorus asks, "Why launched him on this sea of grief?" (*Her.* 1087–1088). Thus, as they contemplate Heracles and Amphitryon's sorrow, the chorus refers to a tribal agreement between wife and husband. As such, Heracles's inherently tenuous social position is connected to the archaic past (perhaps the foundation of the chivalric code) under which the hero's female counterpart dictates land claims and blood feuds.¹³

It should also be considered that on returning home from his metaphorically transgressive exploit, Heracles first pays homage to his Theban house "I greet my hearth! I hail my house and halls!" (*Her.* 523). Heracles does this before he notices the family he has been neglecting. The hearth, the house, and the halls are all symbols that represent family life, but they also designate the worldly success of the hero—a success that is threatened by Lycus. When Megara is reunited with Heracles, in her joy she

¹³ The details of this myth are provided by Hesiod, who describes Amphitryon slaying Electryon—a ruler in the Argolid and the father of Amphitryon's wife Alcmene—in a fit of anger over some cattle. Amphitryon then migrates to Thebes in order to be purified. However, Alcmene will not permit him to enter her bed unless he avenges the death of her brothers at the hands of the Taphians and Teleboans. As Amphitryon prepares for war against these people, Zeus descends from Olympus to Thebes and lies with Alcmene, who becomes Heracles's mortal mother (*Hes.* fr 195 MW).

rushes ahead of Amphitryon (*Her.* 535) in order to explain the situation: “We had no friends. We heard that you were dead ... The heralds of Eurystheus proclaimed you dead” (*Her.* 551, 553). Megara’s report reveals that Heracles’s position as a Theban hero is threatened; Heracles himself and his home are vulnerable. Furthermore, Heracles is beleaguered not only by Thebes but by Argos, to which Heracles has not yet returned with the hound of Hades. For his last labour, Heracles descends to Hades, but Argos goes over his head to communicate his absence (*Her.* 553). Although Heracles has the support of the Theban chorus of old men, Argos’s communication that Heracles is believed to be dead, delivered across borders, affords an opportunity for Lycus’s coup and threat to Heracles’s family.

Upon his arrival at Thebes, Heracles asks Megara where his friends are, since they have not shown support for his family in their time of danger. Significantly, Heracles also asks (more to himself than to Megara), “They thought so little of my Minyan wars?” (*Her.* 560). This question is the principal indication that what is described as civil war allegorically represents the political and ideological forces that position themselves against the hero. It symbolizes a price on Heracles’s head since his role in defeating the Minyans and the Thebans’ lack of gratitude indicate that Heracles’s role is similar to that of an emissary.

This conception of Heracles’s social function is supported by the chorus’s incantation. As they throw abuse at Lycus, the men of the chorus refer to the myth of Thebes’s inception and convey a religiopolitical climate: “O sons of earth, men whom Ares sowed, teeth he tore from the dragons’ foaming jaw, up with these staffs that prop our arms and batter the skull of this godless man, no Theban, but an alien lording it over the younger men, to our great shame!” (*Her.* 253–257). This sentiment qualifies Amphitryon’s role as an exile from Argos. Although it is not explicitly stated that he sends Heracles off like an emissary to perform his labours, since Amphitryon is an exile (he and Herakles might be considered foreigners), the fact that Heracles embraces his role as a civilizing figure is evidently connected to the expectation that Heracles’s exploits—and in particular his defeat of the Minyans—should be but are not appreciated by every part of the Theban populace.

Euripides's Heracles is caught between the advances of two tyrants. The first, Eurystheus, is cited as a part of the tragedy's allegorical arrangement. He is perhaps symbolic of former agrarian rulers and is Heracles's cousin; in contradistinction to Heracles, Eurystheus is supported by Hera who, according to Homer, delays the birth of Zeus's favourite son so that Eurystheus will be born first and will reign in Argos for that reason. The second tyrant, who holds Heracles's family captive, is of course Lycus. His coup overthrows Megara's father and reveals that Thebes has become divided between opportunists and loyalists. The loyalist portion of Theban society (such as the old men of Thebes) represent a council that views the imminent execution of Heracles's family as a disgrace. The precarious religiopolitical situation—defined by the hero caught up in forces of civil unrest—constitutes the principal topic underlying Euripides's tragedy; Hera, after all, represents a form of necessity, while Heracles's mythical expulsion from Thebes, provoked by her hatred, suggests an inescapable perpetuation of rival cultural forces.

Such a hypothetical account for *Herakles's* underlying conditions finds support in Vernant's understanding of the ancient Greeks' initiation practices:

For both sexes the initiation through which a young man or woman is confirmed in his or her specific nature may entail, through a ritual exchange of clothing, temporary participation in the nature of the opposite sex whose complement he or she will become by being separated from it. Warrior initiation ceremonies of young boys usually employ feminine disguises just as, in Sparta, on the first day of her marriage, the young bride wears men's clothing. (1980, 24–25)

As Heracles carries Hera's name in his own (as if it were an article of clothing), the story presented by Euripides may allude to the experience of prohibitive practises or rituals that specify the culture's underlying erotic ambivalence. For example, if "Hera-kleos" (Hera's renown) represents a warrior class that appeared as the outgrowth of those hierarchical divisions of which Greek civilization was comprised, the Heracles myth will be understood as the allegorical marriage between the Greek individual and the Hellenic world. The claim that Euripides saw exclusion as the consequence of the hero's political function in the Heracles myth, and that Heracles consequently represents

an allegorical marriage to Hellenism, is supported by Vernant's description of the stages that comprised early Greek initiation ritual:

A Greek festival does not only give expression to feelings of communion between its participants, conflict is also one of its essential social and psychological components. The combats sometimes feature women, sometimes men, sometimes women against men, sometimes one age group against another and sometimes territorial, tribal or family units within the same age-group especially when, at puberty, it was about to leave childhood behind and become integrated within the social community. (1980, 21)

Heracles's struggle with Hera similarly represents a struggle between worldviews and a hypothetical shift from matriarchy to patriarchy. For example, *Herakles* may portray a shift from an early precivilized society to the Mycenaean age—a time when distant but mutually reliant cities paid tribute to each other in a highly organized system of exchange.

Nineteenth-century Greek historian Jacob Burckhardt, who is responsible for characterizing the term *agon*, provides a relevant framework for developing a sense of the nature of such cultural developments. Burckhardt explains that the *agon*, as a form of open competitiveness that defied class boundaries, is uniquely Greek. Furthermore, although he designates the age preceding the heroic as *The Agonal Age*, he admits that it may have been present even earlier than this:

In the heroic world the *agon* was not fully developed, if we think of it as excluding practical usefulness. The hero usually accomplished his great tasks on lonely journeys; his adventure was not yet seeking to compete with other adventures. But there was a dawning of the competitive spirit, perhaps, in the communal enterprises of a number of heroes, and also in divine myth, for instance when Cecrops has to arbitrate between Athena and Poseidon, or Paris between the three goddesses; and in later times the birth of the *agon* was of course retrospectively transferred to the world of myth and was assigned its particular forebears in the mythical age of gods and men. (1998, 163)

As it was forced to combine with the more cosmopolitan demands and obligations that appeared in the Mycenaean period, this agonistic spirit, influenced by the practices of a primitive society that excluded practical usefulness, had an effect on the heroic age that produced those implications that are characterized in Greek myths

by divine madness. Consequently, the effects of the *agon* may be signified by a rebelliousness and resentment against class boundaries and sexual limitation. Therefore, in the case of the heroic, agonal,¹⁴ and classical Greek ages, the *agon* may actually be a delimited expression of the primitive agonistic spirit.

Accordingly, a shift from one mode of existence to another may be implicit in Euripides's *Herakles*. By depicting the effect of a convergence of worldly pressures, Euripides describes what underlies, as the inheritor of Heracles's world, the apparently impalpable experience of his own society. However, as Heracles's "anomalous and neither" status makes him the most appropriate figure to reflect the struggle of the individual who finds himself trapped in a political world, Euripides characterizes Heracles's vulnerability through allusions to his ambiguous parentage. Paradoxically, Heracles's social ambiguity is what lets the society that Euripides depicts elect him for the precarious task of pushing the frontiers in the first place.

It is perhaps this perspective that allows for an understanding of a theopolitical setting imagined by Euripides. For example, if the Minyans who are defeated by Heracles (before the events staged by Euripides) are considered a reference to *autochthones*—people born directly from the earth and without parents—it could be argued that Heracles's presence at Thebes signifies the psychological and social aspects of this setting.¹⁵

Like the Pelasgians described by Pausanias (viii. 1. 2), the Minyans arguably signify the pre-Hellenic world and its religions. Minyan Orchomenus is of such a distant origin that reference to these mythical people would likely arouse the Greeks' belief that humankind appeared first in their country. Burckhardt describes the thinking behind this claim:

¹⁴ Burckhardt describes *The Agonal Age* as extending from the end of the Dorian migration almost to the end of the sixth century B.C.

¹⁵ Bond does not provide very much insight concerning the origin of the Minyans. Concerning lines 50 and 220 of Euripides's *Herakles*, he cites the story that Heracles was appointed to the position of a polemarch at Thebes and that as such he killed the king Eriginus of Orchomenus who had exacted tribute on the Thebans (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4. II). Consequently, I have turned to Robert Graves's speculations concerning the potential historical significance of these mythological people.

If men were descended from the gods, then the Greeks possessed in their own country the birthplaces of these gods, their myths, the scenes of their battles with the giants, the famous natural cataclysms and finally the legend of the Flood, most of these localized in several different places. Linked with the legend of the Flood was that of the second Creation of man through the agency of Deucalion and Pyrrha, safely established as having occurred in Greece. (1998, 16)

Likewise, heroic figures such as Heracles (who on his labours holds up the world for Atlas and frees Prometheus) signal that era directly following the creation of man; according to the Greeks, this was a period inhabited by autochthonous and eponymous founders of ancient cities. Minyan Orchomenus was a site of some of the oldest mythical events, which Robert Graves associates in *Greek Myths* with the creation myths of other nations:

Armenia, meaning Ar-Minni, 'the high land of Minni'—Minni is summoned by Jeremiah (li.27) to war against Babylon—has no historical connexion with Armenus of lake Boebe. But *Minni* is apparently the Minyas whom Josephus mentions (*Antiquities* i. 1.6) when describing Noah's Flood; and the name of the Thessalian Minyas, ancestor of the Minyans, offered a plausible link between Armenian and Thessaly. (1960, 154.12)

Greek myths suggest symbolic narratives representing the initial resistance to a foreign influence. For example, such struggles are characterized by the three daughters of Minyas. According to Plutarch, as Dionysus spreads his vine cult throughout Europe, the sisters Alcithoe, Leucippe, and Arsippe refuse to take part in the revelry and, as a result, suffer madness, sacrifice, and therianthropy (*Why Oracles Are Silent*, 17). The episode suggests that the Minyans (as an indigenous Greek people) were some of the first groups in early Greece to come into contact with foreign influences, including what is known as the second generation of Olympians. Similar examples come from Apollonius Rhodius (i. 229) and Pausanias (ix. 36.3), who relate that the Argonauts were often known as Minyans who sprung from the blood of Minyas's daughters. Furthermore, Minyan autochthony is present in the myth of Tityos, a giant conceived of divine and mortal parentage; the daughter of Minyas's son Orchomenos, Elara, conceives Tityos after sleeping with Zeus (*Hes.* fr 78 MW). Pherecydes relates that Zeus hides the child under the earth for fear of Hera, so when the child is born, he is thus born from the earth (3F55).

As Euripides may have been familiar with such stories of the earliest inhabitants of Greece, Heracles's conquest of the Minyans could suggest the relationship between Greek settlements (defined by an early agricultural existence) and an often chaotic and uncontrolled growth of civilization catalyzed by foreign invasion. For example, as narrated by Polyaeus (i.3.5), Diodorus Siculus (iv.18.7), Pausanias (ix. 26.1), and Apollodorus (ii.4. II), after Heracles's victory against the Minyans, the hero forces them to pay double tribute to Thebes. Heracles's treatment of the Minyan heralds was also considered sacrilegious by most mythographers; Graves remarks that Heracles "must here represent the Dorian conquerors of 1050 B.C., who disregarded all civilized conventions" (1960, 99). Yet, as the events in the play seemingly occur at this historical point in the Heracles myth, Euripides's *Herakles* alludes to the conflict between autochthonous and foreign invaders. The play suggests that indigenous and foreign influence (subsequent to the Minyans and Pelasgians), represented by Heracles, results in the imperfect but perseverant Hellenic worldview.

As a conquering and exploitive hero, Heracles, in his service to the Thebans, typifies the survival of this worldview, whereas the events of Euripides's tragedy describe the anxiety that springs from the coercion integral to the irresistible expansion of the civilized world. Heracles is initially rewarded for the Minyan conquest through his marriage to King Creon of Thebes's daughter Megara. That this conquest goes unappreciated by common Thebans, as suggested by Lycus's entry as a tyrant, designates Heracles's uncertain social standing. Even as Euripides associates Heracles with the domestic, the Theban society he is attached to does little to nothing to keep his family secure from the danger of subjugation or death.

Instead of celebrating Heracles's deeds, the city effectively betrays him with this threat to his family. Amphytrion describes those among the Thebans who have turned against Heracles to promote civil strife as a group of henchmen: "a mob of needy men who pass themselves off for men of wealth" (*Her.* 589). Their motivation is explained as arising from "their substance" having been "drained away by sloth and spending"; they have "promoted civil strife and wrecked the state to mulct their neighbors" (*Her.* 590–592). Consequently, as they squander resources on the promotion of civil unrest,

Heracles discovers that the Theban mob wrecks the state in order to extort their neighbours. This situation should be linked to the Minyan rule of Thebes that Heracles reverses. It seems that *Herakles* requires a distinctive representation for a particular uncertainty introduced during the Mycenaean period, since its predominant political aspect must have been that struggle between rival cities over who would be forced to pay tribute to the other.

In his depiction of Heracles's madness, Euripides may have felt compelled to refer to the earliest mythological records and to characterize the situation through various levels of irony. This is evident as the messenger relates the absurdity of the scene he has witnessed:

“Is the master playing, or is he . . . mad?” Up and down, throughout the house, he drove, and riding through the great hall, claimed it was Nisus' city, though it was, in fact, his house. He threw himself to the floor, and acted out a feast. He tarried there a while, then said he was approaching Isthmus' wooded valley. He unstrapped his buckles and stripped himself bare, and wrestled with no one; then called for silence and crowned himself the victor of a match that never was. (*Her.* 952–961)

The idea of a master playing mad or actually being mad, leaving his servants unsure of how to act, may be Euripides's way of signifying a general sense of insecurity felt by the Theban population. Heracles's household servants are entirely loyal, but as they witness Heracles's imagined travels through Megara, they are in one moment giddy and in the next fearful—unable to decide “Whether to laugh or shudder” (*Her.* 950). Their inability to immediately come up with an appropriate expression for their confusion suggests the inherent difficulty involved in grasping the gravity of a situation that is outlined by essentially cultural incongruities. Consequently, the servants' reactions reflect the general uncertainty of their own situations at Thebes.

As Heracles's delusion takes place in his Theban home—the expression of the hero's madness an ingenious convenience for tragic performance—Euripides conveys the greater significance of the myth. In Heracles's madness, his house is incredibly transformed into an imaginary plain for him to carry out his civilizing mission. The hero believes he travels to “Nisus' city”—home of the legendary King of Megara—a place that lies in the Isthmus of Corinth. With this reference to a city that has the same name as

Heracles's wife, Euripides makes use of a name that could be considered coextensive in the context of the play. Euripides expresses a knowledge of myth that allows him to provide a sense of causal intensity to the performance; it connects the beginnings of a time the Greeks considered not so far removed from the gods' creation of mankind to Heracles's tragic loss of his family. Like Heracles's acting out of a feast and wrestling with an imagined foe before reaching a wooded valley, his loss of his family is suggestive of the gifts the gods miraculously give and freely take.

So too, Heracles's conquest of the Minyans signifies the hero's indeterminate relation to the society of mortals. However, caught between the Minyans and the Thebans who themselves claim autochthony (*Her.* 5–10), Heracles is most clearly defined by Hera's hatred, as Euripides proves. Hera's hatred for Heracles symbolizes a conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy—a tension that for the Greeks remained repressed. For example, if Heracles is considered a doublet of Dionysus, Walter Burkert's description in *Greek Religion* concerning the god Dionysus and his relationship to Hera also applies to the Hera-Heracles relationship:

The madness of the frenzied god himself can be traced to the anger of Hera. Hera represents the normal order to the polis—the inversion of this order is her anger. And yet it is in this inversion that Dionysos fulfils his true nature. (1985, 165)

The relationship that Burkert describes between Dionysus and Hera is analogous to the relationship Euripides depicts between the goddess and the hero in *Herakles*. Although Iris explains, “We bring no harm upon your city. Against one man alone our war is waged” (*Her.* 824–825), Heracles's involvement in the war between the autochthonous Thebans and Minyans suggests his role in an inversion of the *polis*. Consequently, Hera is explicitly connected to Heracles's ruin—a ruin that is carried out by Lyssa the goddess of Madness. Since Hera's anger forces Heracles to abase himself at the culmination of his labours, what is revealed is how inhumanely madness may overwhelm the desire for permanency. Therefore, by depicting Hera's anger, Euripides can allegorize the cosmopolitan Greek male's struggle to preserve the family.

Uncertainty characterizes the play's progression. For instance, Heracles responds angrily when he hears of Theban ingratitude, and upon his arrival he claims that he does not care if the entire populace saw him enter the city's walls. However, Heracles reassures Amphitryon that his opponents would not have noticed him: "Seeing a bird in some foreboding place I guessed some trouble had fallen on my house and thus forewarned, I entered secretly" (*Her.* 596–598). This is the first indication that, although the mythical Heracles could destroy the Theban population singlehandedly, Euripides chooses to couch the myth of Heracles in an allegory that expresses Hera's castigation of the hero. Apollo's prophetic powers (in opposition to those of Dionysus) are trusted just before Heracles is overcome by a madness shown through disbelief that the motions stimulated in Dionysian ritual have come about spontaneously (*Her.* 895). Therefore, mythical associations progressively and subversively reveal Heracles's human or constitutive vulnerability.

Furthermore, once Heracles returns to Thebes, the repetitions in Euripides's narrative display what may be considered a disruption. After telling Heracles of his present danger, Amphitryon directs him to greet his hearth (*Her.* 599) despite Euripides's description of Heracles hailing house and halls before he notices his family (*Her.* 523–524). Amphitryon's description of the greedy men, Heracles's secret entrance, and Amphitryon's insistence on his greeting the altar inside the house—as the hero progresses toward his object—imply the business of war. The forces working against Heracles have been related to him, and by describing his furtive entrance into the city, Euripides suggests a defencelessness. Amphitryon responds to this by encouraging Heracles to affirm his social position; but as Heracles greets the altar inside the house, Amphitryon also gets him out of sight of Lycus and those Thebans supporting the tyrant. The entire procedure is symbolic of patriarchal concerns. However, Euripides's emphasis on them suggests that they are subtly undermined; subconsciously, it reinforces Lycus's demeaning and sacrilegious rationalizations of Heracles's labours.

Understanding the complex of forces that surround the tragic figure prepares the reader for the fatal mistake or *hamartia* that is Heracles's murder of his family. Heracles

is fated to be trapped between two worldviews and cannot be blamed for it. Hartigan expresses this dilemma in the following way:

His madness is not a sickness that grows from within, resulting from some crime or deed he has done, nor is it an aspect of his character which is just now with divine assistance being revealed. Herakles is destroyed by the jealous caprice of Hera and he in no way deserves it. (1987, 127)

Whereas Griffiths likewise considers Hera's motives to be not entirely arbitrary, "the jealous caprice of Hera" described by Hartigan, which rules out internal motivations, leaves open only the possibility that the Heracles-Hera association represents a conflict of worldviews. For instance, in the context of the *autochthonous* Minyans and a mythological quest "for a girdle's deadly quarry" (*Her.* 412–419), Heracles's exploits characterize a cultural conglomeration. It is therefore not so much that Heracles deserves Hera's jealous caprice as that Heracles's life and deeds—as through her agent Eurystheus he follows her directives—represent her jealousy and capriciousness. Hence Griffiths associates the goddess's jealous caprice with a penalty that Hera, as a defender of the cosmic order has the right to enact. However, Heracles's life is the actual object of her jealous caprice. Understandably, Heracles is punished, but he is not destroyed by Hera's jealousy; rather he ends up destroying his family, enacting a penalty on the very conception of the *oikos*.

Hartigan is correct to note that Heracles's madness does not derive simply from the psyche. Rather, it comes culturally—from without—in the form of external laws that determine and shape the Greeks' mythological destiny. Euripides's depiction of the hero is comparable to the interpretation of Odysseus's voyage provided by Horkheimer and Adorno, who describe it as a journey where "the mythical monsters under whose power he falls represent ... petrified contracts and legal claims dating from primeval times" (2002, 45). It does little good to reason about Heracles's agency or the causes that lead to his *hamartia* by referring only to the will of an Olympian god. Instead, looking at the way Heracles deals, in an increasingly patriarchal world, with those forces that the tragedy illustrates leads to the strongest indication of innocence or guilt.

If *Herakles* is analyzed on a meta-level, the events of the play indicate the world of Heracles's *hamartia*. Otherwise, as argued by Griffiths, Heracles makes no mistakes. Yet Griffiths's arguments provide reasons to suggest that Heracles is a bearer of Greek ambivalence. She discusses the possibility of Heracles receiving his madness from the gods as a result of *hubris* and argues for this along the following lines:

The lack of a warning about hubris might suggest a general overconfidence, but the killing of Lykos is not flagged and linked to the final killing of the children. Its partner in thematic terms is Lykos' initial aggression, and as such it is an act which restores harmony, rather than creates an imbalance. (2002, 646)

However, this argument does not entirely accept the larger implications of intertextuality (those traditions influencing Euripides's contextualization of the Heracles myth). Although allusions to the mythological past are swiftly integrated into the play's dramatic development, the lack of forewarning of Heracles's *hubris* can be justified by reference to a mythological narrative that at least begins with Homer. Since Griffiths's interpretation begins too close to the action, she suggests that Lycus's aggression and Heracles's madness are comparable as opposite poles in a story of loss and restoration of harmony. She concludes that "the play contains no sense that Euripides was setting up an Orestian cycle of revenge, and there is no reason given for Hera to be concerned with Lykos's fate" (2002, 647). However, although it is never stated that Hera favours Lycus, his "initial aggression" by default represents the mythological Heracles's typical *hubris* or defiance of the gods. After all, since Heracles is punished for his absence, by displacing Heracles's typical *hubris* with Lycus's dishonourable conduct, Euripides avoids the Homeric depiction of Heracles.

Griffiths's insights are productive, but in terms of Euripides's treatment of the mythological tradition as a whole, they are brief. For example, as Heracles experiences his pollution, he realizes his "curse is unapproachable. Go to Argos then? No, I am banished there" (*Her.* 1284–1285). Despite this acknowledgement, with Theseus's help Heracles resolves to deliver Cerberus—whom he has kept "in Demeter's grove" (*Her.* 615)—to Argos (*Her.* 1386–1387). At the same time, Heracles's desire to restore his father to Argos is a hope he will abandon by the end of the play. Likewise, Euripides

shows that the law forbids Heracles to conduct his family's burial (*Her.* 1361). Instead, Heracles has to advise Amphitryon: "And when the earth conceals their small remains, live on in this city here, and though it hurt, compel your soul to bear misfortune with me" (*Her.* 1364–1367). For Euripides, the pain that Heracles suffers is memorable; even though it does not directly involve the hero in purifying actions at Thebes, or perhaps because of this, it is depicted as lifelong suffering. Finally, in an echo of Amphitryon's explanation of the purpose of Heracles's labours at the beginning of the play, the hero exclaims, "O wretched wife and sons! Wretched father! In grief I now unyoke myself from you" (*Her.* 1374–1375). Therefore, in avoiding the Homeric depiction of Heracles's typical *hubris*, Euripides depicts the hero's suffering as a sudden disconnect from an Oresteian cycle of revenge; the playwright signifies the need for ongoing, as it sends the hero, like his father before him, into exile.

Herakles does not set up a cycle of revenge, yet the madness that intrudes in Heracles's life causes his last ambition to remain regrettably unfulfilled. Heracles's ability to establish the *polis* through conquest is compensated with madness. However, his excellence and perseverance extend to the pitiable task of having enough strength to pick up the pieces of a broken life. So, whereas Amphitryon entreats Zeus but he and his son only receive Hera's hatred, the disgraced Heracles's decision to consider Amphitryon his father (instead of Zeus) suggests that Heracles's suffering draws the mythological figure closer to earthly experience. For example, this is evident as the Heracles who responds to his wife and children—who, when they see him, grasp his robes—that he does not have wings and will not fly from them (*Her.* 626–627) must acknowledge, after madness sends him flying into disgrace, that in ignorance (or unconsciously) he has murdered them. Consequently, as an expression of a fate that Heracles has no control over, the hero refers to Hera's jealousy:

For she accomplished what her heart desired, and hurled the greatest man of Hellas down in utter ruin. Who could offer prayers to such a goddess? Jealous of Zeus for a mortal woman's sake, she has destroyed Hellas' greatest friend, though he was guiltless. (*Her.* 1305–1310)

It is the paradox of Heracles's life that by completing his labours he does not defend the *oikos* soon enough. Therefore, once Heracles expresses that he wrongly

preferred his labours to his family, Euripides demonstrates through the madness scene that this sentiment as well as Heracles's rescue of his family is all wishful thinking. Given the mythological background that the play accepts as integral to its logic, Hera's punishment at this point is allegorical. Euripides characterizes Hera as a distorted defender of the *oikos* in much the same way that Heracles is. However, this allows Heracles's *mania* to suggest that the mythical and the tragic Heracles are distinguishable in almost the same way as are two individuals: one determined by the realizations of his epoch and one subsequently alienated by the very same realizations that his accomplishments embody.

Chapter 2.

Euripides's *Herakles* from Myth to Tragedy

Greek tradition largely agrees that, after Hera confounds Heracles with madness and Heracles kills his wife and sons, he atones for these sins by performing his celebrated labours.¹⁶ However, in Euripides's fifth-century tragedy *Herakles*, it is only once Heracles's labours are completed that the playwright depicts the hero's madness and its sacrilegious outcome. In order to understand the playwright's decision to invert the traditional sequence of the completion of the mythological labours and Heracles's monumental crime, we need first to understand how, for the Greeks, the characteristics of guilt and innocence derive from ritual.

An experience of purification that is distinguishable from Olympian worship may be expressed in Euripides's depiction of Heracles. For example, Karl Galinsky interprets the significance of those arguments that Euripides develops in the final scene of the play (*Her.* 1227–1228). He explains that by emphasizing his uniqueness, the Athenian hero Theseus argues against Heracles's desire to kill himself:

¹⁶ Heracles's motivation to perform his labours is dichotomized. Either Heracles makes a promise to Hera and Eurystheus, which, as suggested in Euripides's tragic portrayal, can never be satisfied, or Heracles's labours, as he sets off on a course to rid the world of its mythological monsters, represent an Apollonian remedy for his transgressions. Timothy Gantz (1993, 382) describes the tradition in the following way:

As for Herakles' motivation to perform the Labors, there are two main lines of thought. Euripides, who is the first surviving author to commit himself on the matter, says that Herakles wished to return with his family and father to Tiryns, and promised Eurystheus in return for that permission that he would tame the earth (*HF* 17–21). Certainly this seems a bit weak, especially when compared with Apollodoros' notion that Delphi advised him to serve Eurystheus for twelve years as a penance for killing his own children. (*ApB* 2.4.12)

This Theseus is the noblest personification of enlightened, compassionate Athenian humanism. He tells Herakles that Herakles' misfortunes are no reflection of his quality. The inner man is what matters. Euripides makes this shift to internalization explicit by having Theseus define what a noble man really is: one who bears unflinchingly what heaven sends. (1972, 63)

Although the point presented by Theseus seems straightforward, as Galinsky demonstrates, Euripides deals with a complicated matter with an artful simplicity. What we must keep in mind is that the hero commits the most atrocious acts within a context that explicitly states that his madness is an unjust punishment from heaven. The goddess Madness, appointed for the task set against Heracles, resists her employment, calling it "wicked plans" (*Her.* 854), and she cites the honour Heracles has paid to the gods. So, although, for the Greeks, the distinction between the inner man and the influence the gods may have on him was not absolute, it is this complicated distinction that Euripides deals with as he considers the agony of the Greeks' most popular mythological figure. Euripides's depiction of Madness suggests that he realizes Heracles's agony is dependent upon an understanding of ritual that has its traditional expression in myth.

The performance of ritual allowed the ancient Greeks to differentiate between conditions of purity and impurity. Because tragedies were performed in honour of the god Dionysus, we may think of their intention as necessarily ceremonial. This means they reflected as well as helped to determine a political and religious climate. As such, it is arguable that the Heracles myth is consummately related to a connection between material sacrifice and penitence and the development of notions of guilt and innocence. After the death of his family at his own hands propels Heracles to seek penance by completing a series of mythological labours, he is primarily a hero whom the Greeks envisioned living a life of self-sacrifice. Consequently, Heracles's life story relates directly to what Jane Harrison calls a "magical cleansing from physical evil" (1922, 161). In particular, Euripides's inversion of the traditional rendering of the story in *Herakles* provides what may be understood to be a new or reintegrated religious perspective.

The play highlights circumstances that leave Heracles deprived of the possibility to cleanse himself of his crimes at Thebes or to redeem himself through those efforts represented by the labours. Although Heracles's purification will take place at Athens through Theseus's support, what *Herakles* brings to the forefront is an idea that purification is directly related to sacrificial expiation and does not need to be associated with the sort of punishment Heracles suffers. This claim is supported by Harrison's suggestion that Olympian worship gave way to the revival of Orphic and Dionysian ritual. She explains that, although the Greeks were practical in their belief that evil had a physical manifestation (such as the presence of the goddess Madness), religious ceremonies of purification meant it was possible to cleanse an individual rather than to placate the deity conditionally:

In the Thargelia the ceremony of the *pharmakos* was seen to be also a purification, but in the sense not of the placation or riddance of ghosts and sprites but of a magical cleansing from physical evil. (1922, 161)

It is this shift in religious attitude that the Heracles myth expresses, since Heracles's suffering suggests a *pharmakos*, or an individual who is fated for suffering or sacrifice.¹⁷ The patterns that we see in Euripides's *Herakles* in fact provide a symbolic narrative representative of this important harvest festival as well as the Eleusinian mysteries. It should be kept in mind that Heracles's madness leads him to kill his wife and children and that he suffers expulsion as a result of the pollution of these crimes.

¹⁷ For the suggestion above, Jean-Pierre Vernant's essay describing the reaction of the city to a figure who is *isotheos*, or too close to the gods, may be considered as well:

When it establishes ostracism, it creates an institution whose role is symmetrical to and the inverse of the ritual of the *Thargelia*. In the person of the ostracized, the city expels what in it is too elevated, what incarnates the evil that can come to it from above. In the evil of the *pharmakos*, it expels what is vilest in itself, what incarnates the evil that menaces it from below. By this double and complementary rejection it delimits itself in relation to what is not yet known and what transcends the known: it takes the proper measure of the human in opposition on one side to the divine and heroic, on the other to the bestial and monstrous. (1978, 491–492)

Euripides's *Herakles* fits Vernant's criteria, since the heroic Heracles has recently completed his last labour in Hades and then commits crimes in a state of madness, which leaves him polluted.

Furthermore, Heracles attacks but is unable to kill his father Amphitryon, an exile from Argos, which suggests to Euripides the reasoning for Heracles's labours (as Heracles's labours represent the hero's attempt to regain from Eurystheus his birthright). Additionally, Theseus, as the friend who brings consolation and the opportunity for Heracles to cleanse himself at Athens (*Her.* 1324), is also his most heroic companion. As such, Theseus and Amphitryon represent the preservation of the heroic tradition. However, Euripides conveys conflicting traditions as Heracles wishes at first to protect his family and then acknowledges that he must continue as a hero. Therefore, the structure of the play, as it incorporates mythological figures, may be comparable to the Thargelia, leading the *pharmakos* out of the city. Harrison provides Harpocration's explanation of the word *pharmakos*:

“At Athens they led out two men to be purifications for the city; it was at the Thargelia, one was for the men and the other for the women.” These men, these *pharmakoi*, whose function it was to purify the city, were, it will later be seen, in all probability put to death, but the expression used by Harpocration is noteworthy—they were led out. The gist of the ceremony is not death but expulsion; death, if it occurs, is incidental. (1922, 95–96)

The illustration in *Herakles* of a mythological event meaningful enough to have inaugurated such a ceremony begins at Thebes and leads out to Athens. It brings with it two of the greatest heroes, who will presumably live out their days in Athens (*Her.* 1331–1332). In this way, Euripides alludes to the Eleusinian mysteries and the Thargelia ceremony: first in relation to Heracles's capture of Cerberus from the underworld and second, in Heracles's admission that all mankind, independent of status, love their children (*Her.* 634). It is this comment, pointing to Heracles's uncertainty between hero and family man that, connected with the aborted sacrifice to Zeus, is comparable to Harrison's understanding of Cecrops:

He was halfway between the old and the new, half civilized man, half snake. [...] These forms of primitive sacrifice—the *pelanos*, the barley grains, the *nephalia*, the fireless rites—have been considered at some length because, though in part they went over to the Olympians, they remain broadly speaking and in their simplest form characteristic of the lower stratum and of the worship of underworld spirits. (1922, 95)

Heracles's sacrifice that leads to madness takes place as Cerberus is kept above the earth instead of residing in his proper place in the underworld. Furthermore,

the sacrifice is interrupted by the goddess Madness. She appears once Heracles throws Lycus's corpse out of doors and after the sacred basket of ritual gets passed around the hearth and Heracles reaches out to quench the torch in holy water (*Her.* 926–929).

Euripides associates Heracles's disgrace with an incomplete Olympian ritual. Because what is depicted is the downfall of an elevated but nonetheless estranged figure, the playwright suggests an Athenian commemoration that in tragedy is expressed as its inversion. Like the Thargelia in practice, such a ceremony would lead a representative criminal out of the city to his death. However, in *Herakles*, the city's purification begins from a pollution, whereas the hero's anticipated arrival at Athens allows a ceremony purifying the hero to begin and, presumably, to be perpetually commemorated. Furthermore, Heracles's crimes against his family, with their intimacy and grievous confusions, suggest an elusive connection with the feminine aspects of Greek religion. On the other hand, Amphitryon (who is already an exile) and the hero Theseus, who is spared from Hades by the still heroic Heracles (*Her.* 619), may represent *pharmakoi* who are for the men.

Cerberus, whom Heracles hides in Demeter's grove (*Her.* 615), should likely be understood as a symbolic sacrificial beast of ritual, such as the pig slaughtered in the mysteries at Eleusis. Harrison explains that ritual procession to the sea,

was not a mere procession, it was a driving out, a banishing. This primary sense seems to lurk in the Greek word *πομπή*, which in primitive days seems to have mainly meant a conducting out, a sending away of evil. The bathing in the sea was a purification, a conducting out, a banishing of evil, and each man took with him his own *pharmakos*, a young pig. (1922, 152)

Heracles's request that Theseus bring Cerberus to Argos (*Her.* 1387–1388) provides a placation of the evils carried by Heracles, who has subdued monsters, retrieved the mythical beast that guards the underworld, and murdered his kin. As Euripides acknowledges how these things are related, the requirement for Heracles to return Cerberus to Argos, with Theseus's assistance, acquires a new and greater significance by the end of the play. The solemn task he will undertake answers the question posed by Amphitryon concerning the beast: "You subdued him? Or was he the goddess' gift?" (*Her.* 612). Given Heracles's misfortunes, the idea that this was an

ominous gift of the gods seems to be implicitly satisfied. However, Heracles's immediate answer to his father's question is, "subdued him: Luck was mine, I saw the mysteries" (*Her.* 613). So, as the mysteries guarantee the participant resurrection from death, and as Heracles prepares to return Cerberus to Argos, this act replaces that version of the Heracles myth that believes redemption for crimes is achieved only through the penance of successive labours.

By making it obvious that Heracles's luck will run out by virtue of his most daring adventure below the earth in Hades, Euripides is starkly ironic. In fact, with Heracles's pollution and his consequent banishment from Thebes, the entire play suggests those phases, exemplified in myth, which are represented by a ritual's procession. For example, as he resolves to secure their safety, Heracles's words to his children capture the extent of Euripides's irony: "Follow your father to the house, my sons, for this, your going in, shall be more fair than your coming out" (*Her.* 622–624). These remarks are of course pertinent to Heracles's consequent banishment. Euripides's irony is apparent once Heracles becomes an exile or *pharmakos* whose spiritual obligation (signalling the tension between his labours and his vulnerable family) is then personified by Cerberus. After the killing of kin, the monster suddenly appears as a substitute for Heracles's children, who in his madness he has sent to Hades.

Heracles's greatness, his ignorance or innocence, and his suffering make him an expression of that demand of ritual characterized by a commutative contract. Therefore, for Euripides, the Heracles myth expresses a transition from the expiation of guilt through punishment to a ritual sacrifice of physical transcendence. For example, Galinsky traces the portrayal of Heracles from Homer's critical portrait of a demigod, whose relation to Zeus allows him to become the highest example of *hubris*—as Galinsky puts it, "the defiant fighter against the gods" (1972, 63)—to Euripides's portrait of an isolated figure who must come to terms with his mortality. Paradoxically, it is Heracles's humiliation that suggests that man can only become god through the untiring acceptance of fate. This is precisely the process that Harrison describes below:

Purification practically unknown to Olympian worship is the keynote of the lower stratum [...] The essence of that new religion was, as will later be shown, the belief that man could become god: the new ritual feature it

introduced, a feature wholly lacking in the old uneaten “sacrifices,” was mystical communion by the eating of the body of the god. But, because man was mortal, there was mortality to be purged away; and hence, although with a new faith and hope, men reverted to the old ritual of purification. (1922, 162)

In particular, Euripides suggests the Athenian relation to myth, but in general, the playwright expresses a relation to myth that was changing in all of Greece. However, the particular significance of the Athenian influence is evident in Euripides’s depiction of the relationship between Theseus and Heracles as it provides a model for the Greek soul. As Heracles disavows Zeus, Theseus acts as an advocate who will help carry the pollution that results from his crimes. Hence, Theseus’s importance in the play is that of a counsellor who provides refuge and support for the religious sufferer.

Theseus’s counsel champions a new perspective that allows for an outlook related to what Harrison calls a lower stratum. Heracles’s suffering, his tendency to transgress, and the fact that in myth he is at once favoured and assiduously punished by the gods all indicate that Heracles (whose name literally means “the glory of Hera,” but in practice might be better rendered “Hera’s anger”) is emblematic—after the appearance of Olympian worship in Hellas—of a meeting of effects, repressions, and the demand for a new conception of virtuousness, such that “nobility of lineage now is replaced by nobility of spirit, a spirit of perseverance” (Galinsky 1972, 63).

Chapter 3.

The Psychoanalytic Perspective and Religiopolitical Aspects of Euripides's *Herakles*: Secrecy, Separation, and Civil Unrest

Since Euripides connects the hero to the allegorical pursuit of fundamental political and religious ground, *Herakles*' characterization of the utterly disgraced hero, polluted and unable to restore his father Amphitryon to Argos, produces a response to Lycus's skepticism and the constant and devastating trials that comprise the plot of the play. The search for unity and meaning in the midst of chaos begins with Amphitryon's defence of Heracles's renown and continues once Heracles suffers his disgrace. At this point, Heracles describes the mythical content that connects his birth with scandal:

When a house is built on poor foundations, then its descendants are the heirs of grief. Then Zeus—whoever Zeus may be—begot me for Hera's hatred. Take no offense, old man, for I count you my father now, not Zeus. While I was still at suck, she set her snakes with gorgon eyes to slither in my crib and strangle me. And when I grew older and a belt of muscle bound my body—why recite all those labors I endured? All those wars I fought, those beasts I slew, those lions and triple-bodied Typhons, giants, and four-legged Centaur hordes! I killed the hydra, that hound whose heads grew back as soon as lopped. My countless labors done, I descended down among the sullen dead to do Eurystheus' bidding and bring to light the triple-headed hound who guards the gates of hell. And now my last worst labor has been done: I slew my children and crowned my house with grief. And this is how I stand: I cannot stay with those I love at Thebes. (*Her.* 1261–1284)

As Heracles recites the myth of his infancy—that he fights the snakes that Hera sends to kill him in his crib—the poor foundations of a house are exemplified. Essentially, Heracles's labours are cyclically connected as part of a healthy or corrupt relation between the Greek family and the city. The references to monsters with powers of regeneration can be linked to that household that Heracles himself finally destroys—

as if he himself were one of the monsters he faces. Since the myth of Heracles as described by Euripides communicates a profoundly troubled connection to the city of the hero's birth (*Her.* 1332), Heracles must recognize the meaning of that grief that he associates with the poor foundations of a house in the character of the snake. Citing Philip E. Slater's psychoanalytic insight into certain patterns evident in Greek myths, Richard Caldwell, in the "The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Greek Myth," explains that, in sexual and material terms, the snake seemingly has the ability of regeneration:¹⁸

The frequent association of snakes with the older generation in myth, as well as in Greek funerary and hero cult, is probably due to the facts that snakes inhabit holes in the ground, like the dead, and achieve a kind of immortality by sloughing their skin. In addition, snakes are pre-eminently bisexual symbols (swallowing and enveloping as well as penetrating) and therefore particularly appropriate for a primal-scene fantasy. It may be because they are phallic that snakes can penetrate into women's "secrets," but it is because of their intermediary position on the boundaries between life and death, male and female, that snakes are so often associated with the acquisition of special or prophetic knowledge. (1988, 375)

All the characteristics of the primal-scene fantasy are present in the episode of Heracles's infancy. While the serpents Hera sends threaten Heracles either with penetration or with swallowing and enveloping, his precociousness in dealing with them is a premonition of a kind of immortality. Yet, it is a kind of immortality Heracles achieves only as he is continually challenged by Hera, who signifies his bisexual nature and a maternal threat. For instance, as Hera's wrath is motivated by her jealousy of Zeus, the consequence of Heracles's labours (as the reflection of her hostility)

¹⁸ Since he survives each challenge set by Hera, in a way, Heracles proves the ability to regenerate. Although Caldwell refers to the myths of Bellerophon and Pegasus, his psychoanalytic explanations are appropriate for those conditions that Euripides uses to depict Heracles: "Everything happens in this myth because of the hostility of a maternal figure whose sexual demands are unfulfilled. We should then ask what sort of fantasy on the part of the male child would produce such a situation. Both before and during the Oedipus complex, the child's primary desire is to please his mother, and in order to do this he must first learn what his mother wants him to do. The child's desire is always a function of his mother's desire, or, more specifically, of the child's fantasy of what his mother's desires are. (1988, 365)

characterizes an attempt to penetrate into women's secrets; this idea is maintained by Euripides, as he never justifies Hera's punishment.

Hera's hatred is motivated by the fact that Heracles is the son of Zeus by a mortal woman. However, it is not merely a romantically inspired jealousy. In fact, considering that Zeus and Hera represent Olympian siblings, Hera's wrath against the illustrious hero suggests a modification of the orthodox psychoanalytic thinking argued for in *The Glory of Hera*:

In societies where sex antagonism is strong, the status of women low, and penis envy therefore intense, the woman's emotional satisfactions will be sought primarily in the mother-son relationship ... (Slater 1968, 30)

Since Hera's persecution of Heracles represents her retaliation against Zeus, the conflict in Euripides's *Herakles* signifies a mother-son rivalry. In other words, as a cultural expression of this phenomenon, Heracles's suffering and madness suggest the consequences of a sublimation of female resentment or penis envy. This interpretation, however, should be considered primarily from Heracles's perspective. His success at his labours is ultimately unrewarded by both Zeus and Hera. Heracles experiences a "rejection of masculine strivings by both parents" (1968, 197).

Consequently, just as Hera's resentment suggests penis envy, Heracles's madness betrays castration anxiety. Euripides depicts this underlying aspect of the Heracles story with the disastrous outcome of the hero's self-emasculating murder of wife and children. The illustration of this event in *Herakles* suggests the displacement of the primary father-son rivalry for a mother-son rivalry that is produced as a consequence of the female's narcissistic wounds.¹⁹ Heracles's attempt (in madness) to kill his mortal father Amphitryon, and his subsequent rejection of Zeus's paternity, qualify the hero's anxiety as fundamentally a father-son rivalry. However, as Heracles claims, "Let the noble wife of Zeus begin the dance, pounding with her feet Olympus' gleaming floors!"

¹⁹ The argument that a transference of Hera's resentment is expressed in Heracles's deluded actions is supported by the comments Slater makes concerning Hera's son Hephaestus, who, as the counterpart to Zeus' daughter Athena, is also conceived through parthenogenesis.

(*Her.* 1303–1304)—because in one moment Heracles is triumphant and glorified, and in the next he is disgraced by mistakenly and absurdly murdering his own family—it is clear that Hera’s threat of castration at least temporarily outweighs Zeus’s influence or favour.

This contextualization of the tragic incident portrayed by Euripides is perhaps reinforced by the play’s representation of the prophetic and by metaphors representative of the womb. The hero’s last sanctioned labour takes him to Hades—a journey symbolic of a return to the earth or womb. After he re-enters the city of his birth, Heracles characterizes his most deluded task—the killing of his family—as an unofficial last labour: “And now my last worst labor has been done: I slew my children and crowned my house with grief” (*Her.* 1279–1280). As Heracles realizes that the love that existed for a time at Thebes has disappeared, the image of the snake and the idea of multiplicity—expressed, for example, by the “triple-bodied Typhons,” the “triple-headed hound,” and the three sons he has slain—is juxtaposed with the possibility of human finality and severance: “And this is how I stand: I cannot stay with those I love at Thebes” (*Her.* 1284).

Heracles’s mythical existence comes full circle: beginning with Hera’s threat that descends to him from Olympus (although her snakes are chthonic tokens), Heracles’s labours henceforth follow a trajectory that allows him to rise in his struggles. However, like foundations degraded from the bottom up, his struggles eventually bring him closer to existence in the underworld. Euripides’s examination of a religiopolitical significance associated with the Heracles myth derives from the hero’s relationship to the city Thebes.²⁰

²⁰ The Heracles myth relates to Greece’s earliest inhabitants. Evidence suggests the earliest stages of Greek civilization were beset by devastation of all sorts—such as the war between the sons of Oedipus—at a time characterized by feuds between cities fueled by patrimonial claims. Hence, John V.A. Fine in *The Ancient Greeks* remarks that “one of the main themes in Greek epic tradition was the war of Argos against Thebes” (1983, 14).

Likewise, Euripides makes it explicit that Lycus's rise has been possible only because Heracles, occupied as he is with his labours, remains absent from Thebes. However, just as Heracles's family is on the verge of execution, Heracles fortuitously reappears at the Theban gates. As Heracles himself explains, after sensing a danger awaiting him, he decides to enter his palace secretly. Once within, in a scene filled with *pathos*, Heracles is happily reunited with his family (*Her.* 525–564). However, on hearing about the civil unrest that has taken root in his absence, he expresses anger with the Thebans who supported it (*Her.* 540–574). Instead of attacking them as he threatens, Heracles settles for finding Lycus within the palace and killing him (*Her.* 565–582). It is from this point forward, as Euripides presents his culture's heroic values at their most esteemed, that the play takes on its deepest tragic dimension.

The audience hears the chorus rejoice at Heracles's homecoming: "This is right, that a man defend his sons, his aged father, and his wedded wife" (*Her.* 583–584). The chorus describes precisely the difficulty in the myth that Euripides's *Herakles* exploits in tragedy. Heracles tells Amphitryon and Megara that when he had approached the city, he perceived "a bird sign in some foreboding place" (*Her.* 595–599). The omen signals to Heracles dangers ahead and the need for secrecy. Once Heracles explains this, Amphitryon becomes concerned with Heracles's last labour in Hades. Although the description of a foreboding homecoming may seem inconsequential to the rest of the play, there is a significant continuity between Heracles's recognition of the danger that awaits him and Amphitryon's question concerning his last labour.

Amphitryon informs Heracles that King Creon's death is the consequence of civil strife rather than war. He also expresses his belief that Heracles was seen entering Thebes (*Her.* 593). Heracles acknowledges to Amphitryon that, on his last labour, he subdued and stole Cerberus, the "triple-headed dog," rather than receive it as the goddess's gift (*Her.* 612). This is followed by Amphitryon's oddly pertinent question, "Does Eurystheus know of your return above?" (*Her.* 616). Although Eurystheus may have been informed of Heracles's return, his act of hiding away his quarry and returning to the earth without informing Eurystheus implies a need for secrecy as Heracles is surrounded by the civil unrest that has taken root at Thebes.

After he kills Lycus, Heracles begins to make offerings to Zeus (*Her.* 922). In this way, he first reveals his presence to the Thebans. Through the messenger's narration, this is made apparent as Euripides transports the spectator to a moment of tragic paradox. As the messenger who witnessed the events recounts, after Heracles kills Lycus, he casts the body of the perfidious king outside the house to purify it of murder. Then, as servants throw seeds from a basket to the ground around the altar and others at the hearth pour water over offerings to Zeus, Heracles, still surrounded by his family, is suddenly and absurdly overwhelmed by bloodlust. It is immediately clear that, in this state, Heracles's motive is to right the wrongs the gods have arbitrarily committed against him his whole life. A sudden desire for freedom from the gods' capriciousness paradoxically perpetuates Heracles's subjection to their will. Mistakenly believing that his own family is actually the family of his despised taskmaster Eurystheus, the enraged Heracles slays his own sons and his wife Megara—those who escaped danger and were joyfully reunited with him just moments before at his return (*Her.* 526–582).

As the messenger's recounts the events subsequent to Heracles's madness, it is important to analyze this re-envisioning. The messenger says that the dead body cast outside the house is "the body of the king" (*Her.* 924). This is certainly Lycus's corpse, rather than Creon's. But calling Lycus the ruler (*anax*) introduces a slight confusion; this part of the messenger's statement allows an implicit or rivalling opinion to persist. When the chorus realizes that Heracles has returned to Thebes, they exclaim that Heracles *is* their ruler (*Her.* 744). Euripides employs the word *anax* in this situation rather than *basileus* or king. An *anax* is often a military "lord"; nevertheless, it seems to be the word used for ruler in Thebes. For example, Creon is *anax* (*Her.* 9), and Lycus won his throne (*Her.* 167). Heracles becomes *anax* partly because he is married to the daughter of the rightful *anax*.²¹ However, in the messenger's account, Euripides expresses the opposition that first allows Lycus to succeed Creon and displace Heracles. Although the

²¹ Professor Mirhady's understanding of the original text has allowed for a greater contextualization of the argument that, after Heracles' homecoming, the messenger implicitly expresses a confusion concerning who remains the rightful *anax*.

animal offerings presented at Heracles's hearth are not described, the children are said to prepare for Heracles's sacrifice to Zeus in "a lovely cluster" (*Her.* 925). The scene is a subtle reminder that the children were moments before on the verge of being sacrificed and that their own father finally carries out this sacrifice in his madness. For instance, the messenger's description of the children dressing up for "sacrifice" corresponds to that earlier preparation, in which the idea of dressing up for sacrifice was first introduced as a tactic to delay Lycus, who would have been content with an unceremonious execution (*Her.* 325–335). It is Heracles who responds to the sight of his children dressed up for their sacrifice with anger (*Her.* 549–564). In this way, Euripides continues to emphasize an ethos of confusion and error that eludes Heracles's experiences.

It should be considered that, as Heracles is struck by madness, he is heard ranting, "Why hallow fire, Father, to cleanse the house before I kill Eurystheus? Why double work, when at one blow I might complete my task" (*Her.* 936–937). These questions and the messenger's confusion concerning the identity of the king of Thebes characterize Heracles's ensuing mental crisis as it derives from the Thebans' civil strife. No one can decide who is the king or, consequently, who or what should be sacrificed—not even Heracles, as his mind defers to his hatred for Eurystheus. Perhaps what is signalled is that Heracles cannot truly achieve the closure that he seeks without taking Eurystheus's head. Euripides is exploring a resentment already present in the Homeric tradition. For example, according to Homer, Odysseus hears from Heracles's shade at the entrance to the underworld both of his resentment for Eurystheus and of the hero's greatest achievements:

Son of Zeus that I was, my torments never ended, forced to slave for a man not half the man I was: he saddled me with the worst heartbreaking labors. Why, he sent me down here once, to retrieve the hound that guards the dead—no harder task for me, he thought—but I dragged the great beast up from the underworld to

earth and Hermes and gleaming-eyed Athena blazed the way! (*Od.* 11. 711–717)²²

By closely focusing on the moments preceding Heracles's madness and those causes that tend toward the destruction of his pride or what undermines it, Euripides realizes what is conveyed through reference to that metaphor of the uncertain foundations of Heracles's Theban house.

So, in *Herakles*, Euripides characterizes the moment when the degradation of the foundations of Heracles's Theban home becomes most apparent. Euripides first portrays the hero's resoluteness compromised by showing Heracles engaged in the oracular (*Her.* 595): after seeing an ominous omen outside the city's gates, Heracles decides to enter secretly. As a foreshadowing not only of the threat to the family he will encounter but also of the crime he will commit against them, it demonstrates the hero's weakness—one that may be rationalized by the psychoanalytic interpretation of myth, described by Caldwell:

On an infantile level the knowledge of the prophet is that the child cannot give what the mother wants. On an adult level it is the message of all prophets in all cultures: the absolute fact of human limitation, the inescapable discrepancy that must always exist between our fundamental desires and our inability to fulfill them. (1988, 376–377)

The difficulty that Heracles admits to on re-entering Thebes—and the murder of wife and children that follows in his madness as a consequence of Hera's jealousy and wrath—signify a disturbance of the psyche that originates or is primordially related to the child's experience of inadequacy, an inadequacy related to his need to satisfy what he imagines are his mother's desires. So Euripides characterizes the Heracles myth within a religiopolitical context as an expression of that "inescapable discrepancy" that incorporates the gods, the heroes, and the failings or terrors of social life.

²² References and quotations from *The Odyssey* in this thesis are from Robert Fagles's 1997 translation.

After completing the last of his labours, the tragic Heracles returns home to be rewarded with madness and humiliation, and what is dreadfully conveyed is a pessimistic worldview. Instead of emphasizing the labours, Euripides presents an intimate account of Heracles's murder of his own family, which destroys any vestige of the optimistic worldview that resides in the ennoblement of the hero's mythical accomplishments. The play does not ennoble Heracles's *athlos*. Instead, heightening the sense of *pathos* in the play, Euripides uses the completed labours as a foil. He shows Heracles as he discovers, for an instant, all the reward promised by the completion of his labours only to violently squander his family due to a sort of neglect of the mind. This suggests that Heracles's penance must be not material, but in its most challenging sense, purely intellectual and spiritual.²³

²³ What Socrates's pupil Antisthenes writes concerning Heracles's first encounter with Prometheus contextualizes the fifth-century philosophical tradition that influences Euripides's *Herakles*. The visionary god warns Heracles, "Your conduct is very contemptible as you are striving for worldly things, for you have neglected to care about what is more important. You will not be a perfect man until you have learned what is higher than man, and when you have learned that, you have also learned what humanity is worth. If, however, you learn only earthly things, you are erring like the wild animals" (Galinsky 1972, 450–451). Likewise, by killing his own brood, Heracles errs in the manner of a wild animal. What remains for him after this error is more spiritual than anything suggested in his mythological labours. Furthermore, Heracles's response to Theseus as he dismisses the idea that the gods experience desire reflects the realization that true divinity cannot be expressed in human terms.

Chapter 4.

Nietzsche's Ideas on the Tragic, Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism, and a Comparative Analysis of *Herakles* and *Job*

It is likely that the cultural presuppositions inherent in the patriarchal worldview can be best defined by engaging in comparative literature: comparing works of literature that both share many similarities and give expression to their respective traditions, but also vary in a critical manner to allow for broader and more comprehensive analysis. Both the Hebrew book of *Job* and Euripides's *Herakles* suggest that it is the individual who overcomes his worldly despair by transcending both divine and human judgment.²⁴ This is the essential resemblance between these two works. However, Euripides conveys more prodigiously than the author of the book of *Job* that, once an individual has been affected by tragic circumstances, his or her rational speculation concerning the divine judgment that leads to suffering must itself reach transcendence for that suffering to be endured. Consequently, both works suggest the existence of the primordial social mechanism that concerns foundational anthropology. The existence of a scapegoat mechanism, such as that described by René Girard, is apparent if we

²⁴ Horace M. Kallen suggests in *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy* that the author of *Job* was influenced by Euripides's tragedies: "Concerning reconstructions of the Book of Job, I have not yet found in any a sufficient reason for altering my judgment, first: that it is the work of a Hebrew poet aware of Euripides' tragic form but un-Greek in his emulation of it; second, that he followed the Greek precedent by framing his heresy in orthodox events and symbols; third, that the form he gave his tragedy was scrambled from the dramatic to the narrative when Job was added to the canonical Scriptures; it was added in order to fit it into the conventional perspectives of the dominant Judaism of the time" (1959, ix). Kallen's hypothesis—that the author of *Job* was acquainted with Greek tragedy—is compelling not only in terms of whether or not it is provable. His study points to parallels suggesting, despite differences in expression, both traditions follow a similar spiritual or moral development.

compare the depictions of an unsettling celestial mediation overwhelming the protagonists in both *Herakles* and the book of *Job*.

4.1 Loss, Heroic Individuality, and Religious Ethos: *Herakles and the Book of Job*

Euripides focuses in *Herakles* on events that lead to the hero's killing of his family. As such, the tragedy expresses a pessimistic worldview. After the murder of his family, once Heracles is finally able to give an answer to Theseus, he commences with the sentiment, "Let me show you my life: a life not worth living now, or ever" (*Her.* 1256–1257). Despite its hero's utter dejection, the play's tragic *pathos* ultimately does not communicate a nihilistic perspective. By the end of the play, Heracles begins to reaffirm his life. How he finally comes to his affirmation of life may be sought in the cultural presupposition that informs Euripides's tragic worldview, with Heracles at its centre. As a mythological hero, Heracles is conventionally opposed by the goddess Hera, and as such he is an obvious representative of the Greeks' patriarchal worldview. Yet in his tragedy, Euripides alludes to its cultural development. Through tragic representation, Euripides attempts to rationalize the fabric of a hero who is situated simultaneously as the greatest victor for the gods as well as their victim.

Herakles and *Job* both feature a central, final consequence of divine intervention: a practically inaccessible isolation suffered by the individual at the centre of the action. When the community is galvanized by contagious or habitual states, the spheres of the individual, the divine, and humanity are entirely estranged from each other. Girard's comments in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* concerning an episode from *Don Quixote* called "The Curious Impertinent" allow for an explanation of this phenomenon:

It is hard to see the connection between the sublime chivalric folly and the sordid passion of the internal players. But the connection clarifies precisely the metaphysical theory of desire and the inevitable transition from external to internal mediation. (1965, 103)

In the context of *Don Quixote*, the “sublime chivalric folly” signals the ethic that defines the game for each player. Likewise, in the book of *Job* and *Herakles*, a transition from external mediation to internal mediation occurs as traditional myth or legend is questioned or even ridiculed. Such criticism characterizes a frenetic movement that is resolved by polarization that pits the community against a single victim. With the players’ interrogations, idols fall until a single victim is elected as scapegoat. This victim then becomes, once again, the model in a system of external mediation. The victim is exonerated in one way or another, and the circle is complete; each separate sphere in the community can again exist with the others—with its model for its centre.

The process is evident in both *Herakles* and the book of *Job*. It is precisely what Euripides’s tragedy conveys through a depiction of Heracles’s shame, his desire to commit suicide, and his rejection or dissatisfaction with Theseus’s suggestion that, as conventional deities, the gods (or solely Hera) transgress in the same manner as mankind (*Her.* 1340–1346). Within this framework, it is logical to connect Heracles’s dissatisfaction with Theseus’s idea of the gods to Heracles’s ability, by the end of the play, to reject the lure of suicide and agree with Theseus concerning the value of his life.

Sumio Yoshitake’s “Disgrace, Grief and Other Ills: Herakles’s Rejection of Suicide” analyzes the rejection in its connection to *deilia* or cowardice. Yoshitake’s analysis of the expression of suicide in the Greeks’ literary tradition indicates an attitude in *Herakles* that is consistent with the expression of suicide in the Greek tradition as well as in most other traditions: “Suicide is not normal behaviour when a man is under divine protection, but it becomes possible when he has been forsaken by the gods” (1994, 148). For Yoshitake, although Theseus convinces Heracles that killing himself will be a cowardly act— “*You die so mean a death? Hellas forbids it*” (*Her.* 1224)—Euripides does not suggest a new doctrine that all suicide is cowardice. Only in light of “Theseus’ supreme act of friendship” (Yoshitake 1994, 153) would Heracles’s desire to kill himself be taken for an essential cowardice. Yoshitake consolidates his suggestion that the

logic of the play exemplifies the virtue of *philia* as he argues that, in light of Theseus's friendship, Heracles's desire to kill himself is offset by unbearably undignified feelings.

However, a consideration of the similarities between Job and Heracles reveals the importance of Heracles's estrangement even as he is influenced by Theseus's *philia*. Take for the first example those counterpoints that for Euripides define Theseus and Heracles:

THESEUS: Your wretchedness towers up and touches heaven.
HERACLES: Then where it touches heaven, I will strike.
THESEUS: What do you think the gods care for your threats?
HERACLES: Heaven is proud. And I am proud to heaven.
THESEUS: No more: your presumption will be punished.
(*Her.* 1240–1244)

In this state and in such a context, Heracles describes his desire to return to the earth:

THESEUS: What will you do? Where does your passion run?
HERACLES: To death: to go back whence I came, beneath the earth.
(*Her.* 1247)

This is an immoderate explosion, as he imagines his extension to heaven is clearly tempered by Theseus, who unduly reminds Heracles of the possibility of punishment. Theseus's friendship is necessary, but as Heracles points out, it is also imperfect: "Will you, who did not suffer, preach to me?" (*Her.* 1249). The idea that the gods could punish Heracles further is evidently more an affective statement than a reasonable one. It does not suggest that Theseus is ill-intentioned, but rather, that he lacks Heracles's experience so cannot give a full expression to the spiritual realization that Heracles alone experiences.

There are aspects of their dialogue that go far beyond logical argumentation. Nevertheless, these aspects convey Euripides' philosophical approach. Euripides defines Theseus as a friend who may describe Heracles as the dignified benefactor of mankind (*Her.* 1252). As such, Heracles's enraged orientation toward heaven is compared with his diminishment. However, in the context of Heracles's last labour to free Cerberus from the underworld, this diminishment is not wholly unglorified. Euripides does not neglect or diminish the importance of Heracles's relation to either the

gods or mankind, who must by necessity descend to Hades. In one important sense, Heracles's anger against heaven reveals to him his role: "But now, I see, I must serve necessity" (*Her.* 1357). The fact that Heracles desires to reach out to heaven but feels drawn to Hades is something that Theseus admits only Heracles may be capable of tolerating. So Heracles sincerely admits to Theseus, "Even in my misery I asked myself, would it not be cowardice to die?" (*Her.* 1347–1348). For these reasons, Heracles's decision not to commit suicide is motivated by concerns that are more philosophic than Yoshitake admits. Because Heracles' understanding of cowardice is directly linked to his experience of misery, what is suggested is that overcoming misery is even more valuable than his prior accomplishments. For example, only as a consequence of his disgrace does Heracles experience the full depth of his relationship to both the gods and mankind. The connection is accentuated by his realization that through his own actions he is responsible for the death of his family. Therefore, Heracles remains mankind's greatest benefactor only as he chooses to continue, as a result of this acknowledgment, to live and suffer.

To begin with a comparison that may demonstrate this, the Olympian structure that positions Heracles under a mythological or divine protection does not exist for Job. Job's suffering suggests to him that it should have a natural end, so in spite of his suffering, Job concludes that killing himself is cowardice. In response to the constant watch that his friends expectantly set over him, he says,

Am I the Sea, or the Wild Sea Beast,
that you should keep me under watch and guard?

If I say, "My bed will comfort me,
my couch will soothe my pain,"

you frighten me with dreams
and terrify me with visions.

Strangling I would welcome rather,
and death itself, than these my sufferings.

I waste away, my life is not unending;
leave me then, for my days are but a breath.
(*Job* 7:12–16)²⁵

Job concurrently addresses God and the friends who act as his persecutors. He rejects the notion that his life has more meaning than he can give to it. As he attempts to break from his consternation, he also rejects the idea that the visions his friends attribute to or inspire in him contain both the vanity of a deathless life and their insistence on his sinfulness. In comparison, although Theseus's reproach is intended to provide the means for Heracles's salvation, it presents him with similar sentiments and argument:

No other god is implicated here, except the wife of Zeus. Rightly you judge. My advice is this: be patient, suffer what you must, and do not yield to grief. Fate exempts no man: all men are flawed, and so the gods, unless the poets lie. Do not the gods commit adultery? Have they not cast their fathers into chains, in pursuit of power? Yet all the same, despite their crimes, they live upon Olympus. How dare you then, mortal that you are, to protest your fate, when the gods do not? (*Her.* 1311–1321)

What Theseus says seems to be in accordance with Heracles's own thoughts, as initially Heracles blames Hera's hatred for his disgrace. Yet Heracles's responses quickly begin to evolve and allude to an experience that is more complex than Theseus imagines. What makes Theseus similar to Job's friends is that, as he concludes that no man is exempt from fate, he associates man's suffering with the pursuit of power and man's imperfection. The comparison between Theseus and Job's friends can be tied to their perceptions and judgments; yet it is Theseus whose idea of a companioned voyage provides a reflection on the nature of Job's friends:

I loathe a friend whose gratitude grows old, a friend who takes his friend's prosperity but will not voyage with him in his grief. Rise up; uncover that afflicted head and look on us. This is courage in a man: to bear unflinchingly what heaven sends. (*Her.* 1223–1228)

²⁵ Citations from the book of *Job* are taken from the *Jerusalem Bible*.

In both Theseus and Job's friends' consolations there is the insistence on facing the light of day. But whereas Theseus suggests a physical voyage, through a succession of arguments, Job's friends insist on a journey of the mind. Both Theseus and Job's friends are in some way pitiless. However, Job's friends are more obviously vindictive in their search for what is right. What seems evident in comparing both texts is that they differ regarding what is insisted upon and by whom. Whereas Heracles becomes persistent in relation to an absolute while Theseus flatly accepts imperfection (in the gods and especially in men), Job's friends engage in a competition that indefinitely prolongs Job's position of righteousness.

Somewhat like Job, Heracles accepts Theseus's invitation to recover his honour by going to Athens. However, the decision to restore his honour is not as closely connected to Theseus's offer of *philia* as Yoshitake suggests. Theseus points this out as he says, "He needs no friends who has the love of gods. For when god helps a man, he has help enough" (*Her.* 1338).²⁶ Heracles understands this much as Job understands the vanity of life. He says plainly,

Ah, all this has no bearing on my grief; but I do not believe the gods commit adultery, or bind each other in chains ... Even in my misery I asked myself, would it not be cowardice to die? The man who cannot bear up under fate could never face the weapons of a man. I shall prevail against death. I shall go to your city. (*Her.* 1340–1342, 1347–1352)

Here, we see that Heracles reacts against visions of the gods as imperfect beings, like mortals. As well, he claims that his rejection of suicide derives not from any notion of honour, but from his experience of misery. For both Job and Heracles, the rejection of suicide lies within a context newly open to them—one in which the conventional understanding of the gods is detached from the unfair or unjust attribution

²⁶ Consider Bond's notes for line 1335 in *Euripides: Heracles*. It is difficult to determine if or how Theseus still regards Heracles as *esthlos* or *agathos*—good, genuine, or noble. Heracles's *aretê* or excellence likely only remains for Theseus as he will refer to Heracles's career. If this is the case, it suggests a similarity between Theseus and Job's friends. Hence, Bond's comment that "this looks like the quibble of one who is arguing a case (that the broken Heracles at the end of *HF* cannot be termed ἀγαθός)" (1981, 397).

of their own guilt. As Heracles asserts that “the man who cannot bear up under fate could never face the weapons of a man” (*Her.* 1349–50), what is suggested is not necessarily the Greeks’ heroic tradition, but rather those weapons that Euripides’s *Herakles* continually evokes: competing visions that are attributed to the gods and the heroes and that are needed to explain the lives of mortals. Like Job, Heracles decides not to kill himself as he realizes that his shame is related to a notion of the truth concerning the gods and the self.

4.2 Charisma and Honour: *Herakles* and the Book of *Job*

By rejecting a vision of the gods as imperfect or sinful beings, the surviving and memorialized individual in Euripides’s tragedy *Herakles* necessarily surpasses the wisdom of his community; it is his role in a debate over the old gods that makes this individual victim experience isolation from the rest of the community. Even if it is not explicitly stated, it is assumed that this figure transcends his community’s wisdom. Whereas René Girard’s investigations are concerned with the polarization of the community and its transformation of the scapegoat into a religious symbol, it is equally important to consider the other side of this affair. Although Girard (whose theory derives in part from the insights of psychoanalysis) is right to consider the scapegoat as the founding divinity, it is equally important to comprehensively consider the virtual scapegoat: a victim who narrowly escapes the punishment of death.

Both the book of *Job* and Euripides’s *Herakles* present scenarios of virtual scapegoats. Girard considers the book of *Job*, beyond all biblical and Greek texts, as a work that intimates what he calls a god of victims. Although Euripides is perhaps less

free from the aristocratic bias and narcissism suffered by the Greeks,²⁷ he too discloses a latent need for a god of victims.

Beyond primitive mechanisms, Euripides's *Herakles* is explicit concerning the development of this particular quality of social justice. This occurs in spite of the Greeks' well-known misogyny (or perhaps as a result of it) as they did not sublimate the role of women to the extent that we see in the book of *Job*. Whereas the narrator of the book of *Job* attributes his suffering to a senseless wager between God and Satan, Euripides, through Theseus, attributes Heracles's degradation to Hera's jealous persecution. However, if it is recognized that Job and Heracles represent both the most unfavourable and the most favourable of human fates, the quality of desire attributed to God or the gods is irrevocably rejected. In the experience of a human sufferer who maintains his culture's patriarchal bias, it is finally discovered that reliance on the society of the gods is hopeless unless this is intended as a means of overcoming the self.

Since an excess of the culture's patriarchal bias is represented or symbolized by this sufferer, the civil unrest that generates or clothes his tragic circumstance naturally derives from the question of his reputation. In the book of *Job*, it is due to Satan (who receives God's consent) that a perfectly pious servant of the Lord loses his property, his family, and his physical wellbeing. On the other hand, Euripides depicts the Greeks' mythological hero, reputed to be the most beloved son of Zeus, bearing a miserable disgrace because of Hera's hatred. Furthermore, Heracles's humiliation begins at the very moment when he decides to perform a sacrifice to Zeus (*Her.* 922–923). Likewise, after God puts Job's good fortune into Satan's hands (1:12), saying, "all he has is in your power, but keep your hands off his person," what was apparently attended by Job's

²⁷ The Neo-Freudian Philip E. Slater analyzes the psychosocial conditions of the ancient Greeks. The gist of his thesis is conveyed by the statement, "The Greek male's contempt for women was not only compatible with but also indissolubly bound to, an intense fear of them, and to an underlying suspicion of male inferiority" (1968, 8). Since Hera's punitive relation to her stepson is central to the tragic mechanism that unfolds in *Herakles*, Slater's study of the ancient Greeks is vital to an analysis of the play. Slater uncovers a tension between the sexes that governed the Greeks' group psychology (or rather their ideology), and reference to it may disclose aspects of mimetic desire that would initiate the snowball effect of communal violence.

constant praise and respect for the Lord is, ultimately, taken for granted. However, a reason for God's consent for Satan's intrigue is only implied by the author of *Job*. Theseus's role is less static than that of Job's friends. As Iris explains her presence, she offers an apparent cause for Zeus's consent:

We bring no harm upon your city. Against one man alone our war is waged, him whom men call Alcmene's son by Zeus. Until his bitter labors had been done, his fate preserved him; nor would father Zeus let me or Hera do him any harm. But now Eurystheus' orders have been done, Hera plans, by making him destroy his sons, to taint him with fresh murder; and I agree. (*Her.* 824–832)

In *Herakles*, the matter of consent is almost tangible; yet again, the problem is nearly if not actually the same, with differences only in apportionment. For example, whereas God refuses Satan power over Job's person, Iris reassures the old men of Thebes that a war is waged only against Heracles. Nevertheless, in both cases, collateral damage is suffered as a by-product of divine consent. Thebes suffers the loss of its inheritors as a result of Heracles's madness; and through his physical torment, Job struggles with a sort of madness. Both works sustain the markings of war: sons are destroyed and the city or nation's guardian is estranged. It is clear in *Herakles* that Hera goes to war with the hero by causing him derangement. In *Job*, Satan harms all that Job loves and is close to. Furthermore, although God gives in to Satan's counsel straight away and Hera is only freed from her agreement with Zeus once Heracles's labours are complete, divine consent in both *Herakles* and *Job* is paradoxically underrepresented. Both human protagonists suffer visibly, and yet their punishments are not impartial. Therefore, Theseus's attempt to discharge Heracles of his suffering by comparing his downfall to the story of the gods is disconcerting just as the constant search for Job's sinfulness is essentially misguided.

Some might object that the Job of the Bible is of a wholly different character and does not compare to a Greek mythological figure, yet we should consider that tragedy's structure, while it relates to myth, is formally representative. Unlike the introverted folktale's world of the imagination, which simultaneously supports self-awareness and—like the symbolic world of the dream—a sense of self-abandon, tragedy, like myth, deals with the concerns of the community. Although it is suffused with literary device, the

characterization in tragedy demands that it be grounded in the language and concerns of its historical context. As such, it retains the mythic through its characters' supplications to the gods; and as the tragedy progresses toward its culmination, its characters' discussions reflect how self-abandonment is linked to disaster and error. This ability of tragedy to connect with the immediate while describing the past makes it available to a historical sensibility or a critical analysis of genuine social practice and belief.

In *Job the Victim of his People*, Girard provides a sociocultural comparison of the two literary figures in question that considers those conditions that are clearly both economic and religious:

The Job of the Dialogues is not just somebody who made a lot of money and then lost it all. He is not just a person who goes from splendor to misery and decides to talk over with his friends the attributes of God and the metaphysics of evil. The Job of the Dialogues is not the Job of the prologue. He is a great leader who at first commands the respect of the people and is then abruptly scorned by them. (1987, 11)

Euripides's Heracles experiences a comparable depression of substance and reputation. Although he is a leader and benefactor of the Theban people, as he remains absent from the city for too long, he loses their support. When Heracles returns, he is forced to question his wife: "And were my friends so scarce when I was gone? ... They thought so little of my Minyan wars?" (*Her.* 558, 560). To this, he receives her reply, "Misfortune has no friends" (*Her.* 561). This leads Heracles to express his desire to secure through violence the respect he deserves:

All those men of Thebes who took my goodness and returned me ill—this bow with which I won the victor's crown shall slaughter them with rain of winged shafts till all Ismenus chokes upon the corpses and Dirce's silver waters run with blood. (*Her.* 568–573)

Heracles's assertion is remarkable as that of a demigod in his relation to others. In its far-reaching force, it embodies the sentiments of the heroic and mythological tradition. Despite that, it is an allusion to a time of glory; his sentiments are comparable to Job's lamentations. Job describes how people once worshipped him, nearly to the

extent of blasphemy. Concerning the passage (*Job* 29:2–25), Girard remarks, “Before he became a scapegoat Job lived through a period of extraordinary popularity bordering on idolatry” (1987, 11). Job even compares himself at that time to “a king amid his armies” (*Job* 29:24). It seems evident that Job and Heracles, not so long before the events that dramatically alter their lives, were both charismatic leaders of nations. To illustrate the situation of double mimesis that affects Job, Girard contends with the sociological account of charisma:

Social science has tried to define a typical leader by using such notions as *charisma*. Here we should note the use of the language of the sacred. Charisma comes from *Charis*, meaning grace, who was a goddess. Charisma is defined as if it were yet another characteristic of the leader’s personality, like the colour of his hair or the mould of his chin. If that were true the leader’s charisma would not be so easily transformed, as it is, into the anti-charisma or counter-charisma of the scapegoat. (1987, 69)

This procession from charismatic to anti-charismatic personality applies to Heracles as much as to Job. The difference is that, instead of lamenting in heroic and mythological fashion, Heracles not only revisits his past glory but also attempts to resume and expand his glory, once madness (personified as a goddess) inflicts him. Similarly, in Sophocles’s tragedy *Ajax*, the delusional hero boasts that he has killed the Atridae and that he holds Odysseus captive. The goddess asks Ajax to relent, but he refuses, claiming that he must carry out his intentions: “Athena, in everything else I will do what you want, but nothing will stop him from receiving this punishment” (*Ajax* 2007, 112–113). Then, as Ajax turns back again to his folly he utters the ironic prayer, “To work! But let me say this: Always stand by my side; be my ally forever” (*Ajax* 2007, 116–117). In the tragic tradition, the individual will evidently risks overflowing in the experience of madness. Likewise, in the process of contextualizing Agamemnon’s fate, Aeschylus speaks of the delusion of human greatness in its relation to the wisdom of Zeus:

He who in time long ago was great,
throbbing with gigantic strength,
shall be as if he never were, unspoken.
He who followed him has found
his master, and is gone.

Cry aloud without fear the victory of Zeus,
you will not have failed the truth:

Zeus, who guided men to think,
who has laid it down that wisdom
comes alone through suffering.
Still there drips in sleep against the heart
grief of memory; against our pleasure we are temperate
From the gods who sit in grandeur
grace comes somehow violent.
(Ag. 167–83)

This strange conception that through suffering one attains wisdom is prominent in Greek thought. The Greeks invent, reinvent, or re-envision—from myths to the height of tragic representation—situations in which heroes finally endure a reduction that verges on annihilation, but the Greeks also conceive that it is at this critical stage where actual wisdom is gained. In spite of the fate that the gods bring, something of the true virtue of the heroes continues to escape defacement, so that even in their sufferings there is some reward.

As they reflect on the nature of divinity, both Euripides's Heracles and Job engage directly with this metaphysical supposition, but the entire community becomes involved in the reflection. Job and Heracles face the consequences of social polarization. Their situations accord with that emotional ambivalence that Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*, suggests savages offered to their kings:

Worshipped as a god one day, he is killed as a criminal the next. But in this changed behaviour of the people there is nothing capricious or inconstant. On the contrary, their conduct is entirely of a piece. If their king is their god, he is or should be also their preserver; and if he will not preserve them, he must make room for another who will. (1960, 44)

In condemning him for his sin, Job's interlocutors expect to advance or appropriate for themselves his former position in society. Inversely, Heracles threatens the Thebans with punishment from the outset and satisfies his anger by killing the unlawful ruler who momentarily occupies his station. Yet Heracles also has his religiopolitical interlocutors. Indeed, the entire tragedy is constructed in such a way as

to explore how messages (between all those interested in what Heracles's renown represents for them) are relayed.

This intrigue falls into four divisions, which take place somewhat chronologically in the tragedy:

- (1) the debate between Amphitryon-Megara and Lycus over Heracles's glory (*Her.* 0–345);
- (2) the debate between Hera-Iris and Madness over the divine justification of Hera's vengeance (*Her.* 821–874);
- (3) the debate between the messenger (who narrates the tragic sequence) and the audience that listens to what the messenger relates (*Her.* 916–1015); and
- (4) the closing debate between Heracles and Theseus, as Heracles realizes his guilt and dishonour and questions his own worth and the nature of gods (*Her.* 1214–1417).

In this framework, what does Heracles's prominence—followed by its degradation—suggest about the Theban community that must continually raise the question of the gods? Each section relates to the others through its references to the gods; indeed, the relation between them can be said to constitute the religious ethos that the play conveys at the beginning and in the middle of its action.

This attitude is shaped by intergenerational beliefs, and for Euripides, its character is borne on a series of dangers. For example, aside from Zeus and Hera, who remain silent, each generation is pressed by its concern with the outlook that is held by the previous generation. Each generation appeals to the gods, and there seems to be no possibility of escape and no reasonable solution available. This scenario is best illustrated with reference to the way Megara, in her plight over the lives of her sons, assesses the situation. She asks, "Then do we have to die consumed alive, mocked by those we hate?" (*Her.* 284–285). By way of comparison with this outcome, she considers,

The thought had come to me that prayers might win the children's banishment; but this is worse, to preserve them for a life of beggary. How does the saying go? Hardly one day do men look kindly on their banished friend. (*Her.* 302–306)

Her pitiable prayers and her indecisions are directed to gods who might grant mercy and ameliorate her suffering as much as is possible in her present situation. Her words are also directed to Amphitryon and the chorus of the old men of Thebes. How this exchange, in a time of momentous danger, characterizes but also criticizes the traditional ethos is rendered by that remark that we may call Megara's resolute decision in crisis—an expression of her resolve: "Come, my sons, follow your poor mother's steps into your father's halls. Other men possess his wealth; we still possess his name" (*Her.* 336–338). It describes the tenor of the play until, with Heracles's miraculous arrival, a second act begins.

In a manner of speaking, the play starts up again from this moment. It is the first of three logical breaks in the action. The last, of course, is Heracles's realization that he himself has killed his family. Heracles's crime is the antithesis of his arrival; it indicates that the gods, if they have any share in Heracles's fate, implicitly or unconsciously force the matter of loss onto Heracles alone. By the end of the first section, Megara has already reached a point of no return, similar to that of Heracles after Hera disgraces him. So, after his madness, it is Heracles, rather than his wife and sons, who enigmatically remains only with his fame. He must abandon the wealth, in all its connotations, that had surrounded and cursed him as he falls into the role of the banished.

From the experience of loss, Euripides suggests a completely new possibility. Without the immediacy and pressure that surrounds Megara and her children alone, there exists for Heracles, despite his grief, a possibility of initiating a new ethos or of freely abandoning the possibility. It is in this light that Heracles accepts Theseus's offer to restore his honour.

4.3 The Myth of Shared Parentage: *Herakles* and the Book of *Job*

As we have seen, a few crucial passages in the play illustrate that ethos from which the Theban crisis develops. It runs a course until Heracles awakens from the slumber that had finally overtaken him after his madness. Heracles awakes realizing that he has carelessly and unintentionally destroyed the very objects of love he desired to protect. It is, of course, Heracles's most atrocious act. Yet, Euripides is able to contextualize and so make sense of it. Galinsky explains that, in Euripides's attempt to make "Herakles impervious" to criticisms that are "peripheral aspects of the Herakles myth," the playwright emphasizes "internal achievement rather than external deeds" (1972, 60). This requires a perceptive sense for the place that the Heracles myth occupies in its tradition. Likewise, as Heracles debates the nature of the gods with Theseus, the "Homeric Herakles, the defiant fighter against the gods" (Galinsky 1972, 63) makes an appearance. But Euripides composes a scenario so that Heracles's defiance of the gods can only be turned inward as a true estimation of the self. It is at this moment that Heracles experiences *anagnorisis*. In light of Theseus's encouragement and Heracles's experience and understanding of the godly, Heracles fully realizes his function; he expresses his sorrow through perseverance in a human society that is governed by the will of the gods.

In the language of Heidegger, Heracles encounters a *clearing*. The relative absence of Zeus and Hera throughout the play, which has such a human outcome, suggests the significance of this Heideggerian concept. In emphasizing the absence of the family, Euripides emphasizes an unceasing development of the self and its integral relation to the effects of the isolation of the hero. By suggesting a difference in religious sensibility (between the older hero Amphitryon and Heracles), Euripides allegorizes the unceasing development of the Greek hero. Heracles will completely forgo the conventional entreaty to Zeus, not out of disbelief in the gods but because he has adopted a more factual appreciation of the world. Between civil strife and the madness that leads to the ruin of his family, Heracles's discussion with Theseus suggests there is

a possibility for Heracles to reassume a vital orientation to his world. This may be understood to be what Heidegger, in *On the Essence of Truth*, terms *Lichtung*:

Sheltering that clears is—i.e., lets essentially unfold—accordance between knowledge and beings. The proposition is not dialectical. It is no proposition at all in the sense of a statement. The answer to the question of the essence of truth is the saying of a turning within the history of Being. Because sheltering that clears belongs to it, Being appears primordially in the light of concealing withdrawal. The name of this clearing is *alētheia*. (1993, 137–138)

To perceive the shift from crisis to a clearing away of the old ethos—revealing something radically different—we have to begin with Amphitryon’s complaint to Zeus for begetting his mortal son Heracles. As it follows from the separation between mortals and the gods, the complaint reveals the starting point for a particular mythical ethos: thought concerning procreation is essentially a social concern, and as we assume a relation to the gods, we presuppose a metaphysical significance for procreation. Consequently, as Amphitryon boldly imparts his resentment for sharing his son’s paternity with Zeus, he expresses a sublimated resentment that the individual naturally harbours for others, and his resentment is directed at Lycus as much as at Zeus:

For nothing, then, O Zeus, you shared my wife! In vain we called you partner in my son! Your love is even less than you pretended; and I, mere man, am nobler than you, great god. (*Her.* 339–342)

The tension in Amphitryon’s statement over this shared paternity with Zeus and his own sense of bearing a greater nobility, in the context of his distress, suggests a triangular metaphysical relation. In a way, the question that Amphitryon asks is identical to the problem that Heracles faces throughout his life—as the son of Zeus, yet mankind’s greatest sufferer.

Although Zeus is partner with Amphitryon in Heracles’s conception, Zeus is unwilling to save his grandchildren. The question of how this can be undermines the mythical ethos on which it is based. Firstly, the madness scene in *Herakles* is sparked by an aborted sacrifice to Zeus that vainly sets Heracles off on an imagined extension of his labours. It follows from a sense of futility; Amphitryon and Heracles are forced to recognize that the context of Heracles’s madness counterpoises with the expectations of

the believer. In the final analysis, Heracles embodies the person who strives for the gods but must also accept that sentiment Euripides has him express: “Zeus—whoever Zeus may be—begot me for Hera’s hatred” (*Her.* 1263–1264).

Despite this sense of futility, Euripides’s *Herakles* demonstrates that, unlike in the Hebraic tradition, protests against the gods in the Greek tradition are typically pervasive and unreserved. This makes the gods at once more and less distant (or cruel) than the God of *Job*. How such a difference between cultures can exist may in part be explained by reference to Girard’s explanation of a mimetic crisis. Girard demonstrates that a text may function to isolate its protagonist from all the other characters and even from the reader. Hence, in *Job: The Victim of his People*, what is emphasized is the unique merit of this particular Bible story. For those who, after generations of violence, accept a humility that should come before all judgments, the book of *Job* accomplishes a necessarily long-awaited realization:

We are willing to recognize Job as the victim of God, of the devil, of bad luck, of fate, of the “human condition,” of clericalism and anything else, provided it is never a matter of his neighbours—that is, ourselves. (Girard 1987, 106)

So too, for *Amphitryon*, the gods are neighbours who happen to be inextricably and intimately connected to his culture’s conception of fate. It is from such a vantage point that tragedy as an art form, and *Herakles* in particular, may be understood to explore the consequence of civil strife from the perspective of the individual sufferer. But tragedy does not simply set the one against the many. Rather, by setting up a pitiable family against the force of an oppressor and the neglect of the gods, it is able to describe naïve *pathos*. In its relation to the mythological tradition, *Herakles* extends the metaphor of the family that suffers from social intrigue to suggest the potential destruction of cultural and traditional values.

With such an investment in the reinterpretation of popular myth, tragic form is generally richer than the structural form of similarly minded contemporaneous works.²⁸ In *Herakles*, it is the gods who are depicted as refusing to recognize the sanctity of their victim, whereas for Job, it is the friends who claim that a victim of fate cannot actually be without sin. In this sense, tragic form inverts the isolation suffered by Job. Those oppressed by the changing tide of civil strife are poeticized and memorialized in tragedy, unlike Job, whose lamentations are unaccompanied or rendered null by the other voices of the dialogue.

As it depicts victimhood, tragic art is an outgrowth of the tradition of myth, which is the source of allusions relating to the ground of religious beliefs. What is preserved in tragic form but concealed in the book of *Job* is the assumption of a paternal relationship between the gods and mortals, such as Amphitryon recalls. In *Herakles*, the gods come in league with mortals, and this makes their absence in times of crisis more acute. So it is not out of place to suggest that, as he attempts to shelter his grandchildren from harm, Amphitryon is a prototypical Job. However, as Madness makes clear, what brings Heracles even closer to the Job type is the widely held belief, affirmed by the chorus, that Heracles acts nobly even as evil men surround him.

Self-reliance ultimately separates Heracles from the assumptions Amphitryon and Megara still hold. As they anticipate Heracles's return, what they say to each other reflects their culture's presuppositions. Amphitryon suggests that time may bring a cure, but Megara responds, "It is the time between that tortures me" (*Her.* 93). Realizing that their present difficulty is multiform—involving time, the imagination, and the relationship between mortals and the gods—Amphitryon explains how Megara can console her weeping children:

Console them with stories, those sweet thieves of wretched make-believe. Human misery must somewhere have a stop: there is no wind that always blows a storm; great good fortune comes to failure in the end.

²⁸ Horace M. Kallen argues in *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy* (1959) that the book of Job takes its influence from Greek tragedy.

All is change; all yields its place and goes; to persevere, trusting in what hopes he has, is courage in a man. The coward despairs. (*Her.* 99–106)

In order to lift their minds from their present situation, Amphitryon advises Megara to tell her children stories that can transmute their wretched experience. Amphitryon's remarks define the tension between the reality of misery and the healing power of the dream. Precipitously, each one twists the other, and the difficulty to put either ahead of the other is enduring. As Megara is about to give up all confidence in the possibility of their rescue, Amphitryon is compelled by the persistence of his own hopes: "Even now, out of our very evils, for you and me a better wind may blow" (*Her.* 95–96). According to Amphitryon's judgment, courage comes from accepting that fate, like time, is forever subject to change. His philosophy suggests that we must accept (without an empirical basis) that reality and the imagination share one and the same foundation. Even so, Amphitryon's reflection is supported by a sense of give-and-take in the rebukes and the appeals that he directs to Zeus. It is characterized by the distinction he makes between himself and the god: "Let Zeus act to guard his interest in his son. For my part, Herakles, I have but words to prove this man's gross ignorance of you" (*Her.* 170–172).

Conversely, once Heracles's fate is sealed by his crimes, the circumstances and source of his courage appear in a different light. The Heracles who is left without his family in complete despair must, without traditional appeals to the gods, discover his courage. Amphitryon's contrast between his own words and that ignorance he claims Zeus offers his son pertains to the gods' silence—or rather, in times of crisis to the unadulterated openness of the world. Heracles and Amphitryon must experience this disclosure of reality. Without graceful intervention by the gods, Heracles's relation to the divine seems invested, without compromise or stipulation, by both his disgrace and his ability to attempt what is honourable.

4.4 Nietzsche's Theory of the Birth of Tragedy and Girard's Scapegoat Theory: *Herakles* and the Book of *Job*

Before the enlightenment that Heracles's realization and suffering introduce, Amphitryon's relation to his grandchildren, his love of life even in despair, and his own self-reflections, reveal something essential to the development of tragic form in the Greek world. Whereas Aeschylus does not introduce children in his tragedies, Sophocles and Euripides do.²⁹ But, Sophocles or Euripides may not so much introduce a fundamentally new element in tragedy as arrive at a point where it becomes necessary to make explicit a previously sublimated aspect of the tragic—an aspect that derives from the Greeks' awareness of their own patriarchal bias or rather, that derives from the implications of this awareness.

What Euripides's chorus voices as trepidation, warning, disagreement—or as horror, excitement, or contentment—is accessible to only a few select characters. Consequently, the comments of the chorus have an imperfect effect on the play's dramatic action or (as is often the situation in Euripides's tragedies) are seemingly hopeless commentary. Since the language of the chorus may rest beyond the events of the play—either wise or naïve beyond its reach—the tragic poets do not use the chorus to portray popular opinion. Instead, by modelling the mysterious naïveté of an individual who offers his unitary perspective to other beings, the chorus presents religious and political sentiment. In other words, the chorus represents a group of original sufferers. They are not directly included in the action of the play, but express a primordial agony; in relation to every act, they represent suffering by approximation. In tragedy, this is not the philosophical sense of an immediate empathic experience but agony defined by the encounter with cultural practises that derive from mythological events, which are as such comprehensive and integral to popular belief.

²⁹ In *Children in Greek Tragedy*, G.M. Sifakis (1979) discusses the role of children in Sophocles's and Euripides's extant tragedies, but he notes that no children seem to be present in any of the extant plays of Aeschylus.

Such an interpretation of the Greek chorus is supported by Nietzsche's views in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this work, Nietzsche begins by assessing certain political interpretations concerning the tragic chorus. When defined politically, as an established contrast with the aristocratic consciousness, the chorus is understood as a voice for the opinions of the common people. However, Nietzsche considers Schlegel's view that the chorus is actually an "ideal spectator" who appreciates art objectively. So the question Nietzsche formulates is whether this ideal spectator expresses the consciousness of the common people or the Greek aristocrats. Nietzsche finds some truth in both views, but he distances himself from both, as he finds that they each presuppose a moral standpoint.

For Nietzsche, the development of tragic form runs parallel with the development of a moral vantage point. The moral and the objective standpoints have nothing to do with involuntarily conveying the best interest of a group. Rather, a moral point of view is framed as such only by virtue of an inherent, willing opposition to what Nietzsche calls the Apollonian or *principium individuationis*³⁰ (a recognition of the self). A morality is apparent and provides resolution only by virtue of its opposition to an individual element.³¹ The individual, for Nietzsche, is the essential form in stagecraft.³² So, as they created tragedy, the Greeks perceived a rare and bitterly unheeded protest against immoderate ecstasy in pain or pleasure. Therefore, the chorus, as the primordial sufferer, is the original noble who is finally perceived or rewarded for his suffering. Yet,

³⁰ A main premise of the argument is conveyed in Nietzsche's (2000, section 21) remark that "Dionysian liberation from the fetters of the individual finds expression first of all in a diminution of, in indifference to, indeed, in hostility to, the political instincts. Just as certainly, Apollo who forms states is also the genius of the *principium individuationis*, and state and patriotism cannot live without an affirmation of the individual personality."

³¹ Consider that Nietzsche develops throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* the insight that "existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (2000 section 24).

³² Describing the natural or phenomenal opposition between Apollo and Dionysus, Nietzsche relates the Greeks' aesthetic impulses, as expressed in Greek cult, Dionysian orgies, and festivals, by saying, "It was with them that nature for the first time attains her artistic jubilee; it is with them that the destruction of the *principium individuationis* for the first time becomes an artistic phenomenon" (2000, section 2).

as the primordial sufferer³³ is elected by the common people to represent the experience of suffering, he is also linked to the basest political and objective element.³⁴

Consequently, Nietzsche transmutes the political and aesthetic interpretations of the tragic chorus. As an outcome of the curative power of moderation, the political perspective appears with the aesthetic. It is from this point that both the political perspective (organized, human-centred society) and an objective appreciation of art manifests. Because of this, Girard's scapegoat theory, which is preoccupied by a connection between the polarization inherent in social phenomena and the appearance of religious experience, resembles Nietzsche's ideas concerning the conception of the tragic chorus. For example, as Girard discusses the victim's political function, he clarifies the following:

The victim is expected to explain to his fellow-citizens all the evil that should in future be attributed to him. This facilitates everyone's adherence to the orthodoxy that is being developed. The strength of this

³³ In his work, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, Arthur Danto describes Nietzsche's insights concerning the Greek's appreciation of art. The primordial chorus gradually and (in psychoanalytic terms) as the consequence of transference, eventually become the representatives of a Dionysian figure:

The first "image" would have been of Dionysus himself, thus introducing a split within the heretofore unified choric group between god and celebrant. Later heroes of tragedy were but *personae*, masks, of this god. In time, image encroached upon lyric, dialogue replaced music, the chorus became less and less necessary and more and more a mere stage convention, standing as an odd barrier between audience and dramatic action and making the performance stylized and unreal. In Euripides' plays, its role and function were already long forgotten, and the chorus is merely vestigial. (1965, 56–57)

However, although Nietzsche understands the Euripidean chorus as merely vestigial, the confusion of patriarchal figures and the solitary Heracles in relation to the Olympians' extended reach may at one level imply that Euripides is, as Nietzsche claims in *The Birth of Tragedy*, "conscious" (12. 85) of his art, whereas the brilliant design and timing of *Herakles* suggests that it is a tragedy deeply punctuated by the Dionysian or by a mysterious sense for epic poetry.

³⁴ The theory of a primal father who is murdered and inspires religious feelings, Freud believes, is eventually displaced: "A son-religion displaced the father-religion. As a sign of this substitution the ancient totem meal was revived in the form of communion, in which the company of brothers consumed the flesh and blood of the son—no longer the father—obtained sanctity thereby and identified themselves with him" (Freud 1960, 154). Metaphysical religion, inspired by murder, undergoes its reification through this sort of displacement. Freud connects it to a "self-sacrifice" that "points back to blood-guilt" (Freud 1960, 154).

adherence, in primitive societies, makes it possible to tie the final knot and make the scapegoat the principle of social unity, a god who is both harmful and beneficial. (1987, 112)

Girard describes the final attempt at a reintegration of the victim as the victim is forced into confessions. Likewise, it may be useful to think of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality in terms of successive waves that, before leaving him on an isolated shore, try repeatedly to submerge the individual. Despite these attempts, however, the main force is expulsive. Although most victims are successively reintegrated by what Girard calls “orthodoxy,” the fact that their confessions lead to their deification suggests a correspondence between political and aesthetic interpretations. Even though Girard’s “ancient trail” suggests the effacement of the victim’s names or identities, the tragic chorus (although set at a remove from the action) is sentimentally allied with the hero.³⁵ At least through the spoken word, the chorus provides a voice for what is commonly suppressed. This is so because the chorus is artfully situated between the action of the play and the wisdom of the immovable gods. The chorus has the free space to question what may or may not be actual justice. Like objectified victims or gods, in tragedy, the chorus formally communicates a sense of moral indeterminacy in the action.

The idea of a “free space” occupied by the tragic chorus is implicit in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. The sense of “free space” may be clarified as we consider Nietzsche’s insights in conjunction with the Girardian hypothesis. The mimetic crisis and the scapegoat mechanism—as a unified theory—provide a certain precision in analyzing the tragic chorus and Euripides’s use of characters in *Herakles*. The perspective of the chorus of Euripides’s tragedy is that of a spectator who, rather than

³⁵ Girard describes the “ancient trail trodden by the wicked,” which begins with “grandeur, riches and power, but ends in overwhelming disaster” (1987, 14). He explains that “Job’s decline in public opinion had to have begun in his own social circle and then spread downwards. The untouchables of Chapter 30 would never dare attack Job as they do without the encouragement of the upper class” (1987, 52). Therefore, a sentimental allegiance of the tragic chorus to the protagonist may suggest that it derives from a more primitive context than the book of *Job*. By virtue of a less defined hierarchy, the so-called effacement of the victim is readily retained in a variety of expressions of myth.

being an “ideal spectator,” functions as a politico-aesthetic group. The following passage provides a strikingly imagined construct for justice:

If the gods were wise and understood what human wisdom understands, second youth would be their gift, to seal the goodness of a man. And so, conspicuous of life, the good would run their race to death and double back to light again. But evil men should live their lap, one single life, and run no more. (*Her.* 655–663)

In their complaint, the chorus cannot help but express a disparity between human wisdom and that of the gods. This is similar to Amphitryon’s recognition, at the beginning of the play, that all he can do as he comes near despair is blame Zeus for letting his grandchildren come to harm (*Her.* 342). However, like Job, who is told at the end of the dialogue between him and his friends that their wisdom or knowledge of God’s worldly designs³⁶ is greatly insufficient, the chorus’s desire for a greater wisdom also reveals that, despite their age, they must seek understanding: the wisdom of the gods is misunderstood or not easily understood by human beings who live only once. Consequently, the chorus imagines a solution that reveals its naïveté as well as that of all the tragedy’s sufferers. Comparing their desire for perfect justice with the restoration of their youth signifies the futility of wisdom, as it requires time and arrives too near to death. We might even compare the perspective of a chorus, forced to look outward at each scene in awe, with that of children who must be safeguarded and who have a particularly troubled or even naïve desire for justice.

Likewise, the individual reveller described by Nietzsche, once he gains self-perception, must at this moment be separated from the multitude. It is in this vein that Nietzsche comments on Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*: “The chorus of the Oceanides really believes that it sees before it the Titan Prometheus, and it considers itself as real as the god of the scene” (Nietzsche 2000, 7). Nietzsche realizes that this Aeschylean scene emphasizes a play on perspective between the “I” and the “we” that is

³⁶ In his answer to Yahweh, Job says, “I am the man who obscured your designs with my empty headed words” (*Job* 42. 3). Although not immediately evident, it is perhaps a reflection similar to the Theban chorus’s expressed wish to be granted a second life.

characteristic of myth. But as it is taken up in a tragic form, what is emphasized is the arresting, dwelling effect and the experience of naïveté. As the Oceanides see Prometheus's suffering, it is implied that they and the audience encounter a world-historical moment; they witness the god's struggle to determine the future. As the moment he depicts draws from a variety of mythological events, the Greeks' collective memory is fundamental for Aeschylus. By virtue of the characters' intrigue or concern, the playwright is able to suggest that Prometheus's punishment is yet to be determined. Feeling close, yet unable to break from the suffering of its visionary helmsman and benefactor, the experience of the Oceanides is a pristine example of how tragedy can lead the chorus and audience out into a mythical world-historical moment. Girard's study of *Job* may provide another supreme example of artistic technique that reinterprets and engages what lies in the past. Girard's starting point, in the Greek tradition, is an analysis of the transformation of the Erinyes from chthonic to spiritual deities. In their transformation, he understands an older cultural origin of the drama than that associated with the god Prometheus.

Girard presents these ideas during his analysis of the book of *Job*, as he compares the Greek and the biblical tradition on the whole. According to Girard, the biblical tradition (for which the book of *Job* and the life of Christ are the exemplars) does not impose itself on the world of the God of persecutors; instead, with a contrary logic, the God of victims exists parallel to its measures.³⁷ In the Greek tradition, according to Girard, there is never truly a god of victims, but there is an attenuation of communal violence or, rather, the increasing efficiency of the scapegoat mechanism. The prototype for such attenuation is evident in Aeschylus's tragedy, *The Eumenides*. At the close of the *Oresteia* trilogy, Orestes acts on behalf of the community when he kills his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. After a trial in which Athena and Apollo

³⁷ Girard explains that, by affirming its failures, Christian theology remains true to the God of victims: "In a world of violence, divinity purified of every act of violence must be revealed by means of the event that already provides the sacrificial religion with its generative mechanism. The epiphany of the God of victims follows the same 'ancient trail' and goes through the exact same phases as all the epiphanies of the sacred of persecutors. As a result, from the perspective of violence, there is absolutely no distinction between the God of victims and the God of persecutors." (1987, 159)

debate over the necessary consequence of the matricide, the Erinyes are transformed into the Eumenides—deities who no longer feed on vengeance and hatred. However, Girard argues that their hatred is now merely suppressed. When they are transformed into the Eumenides, the Erinyes are sublimated by the community:

The Erinyes represent collective murder very explicitly and they must abjure it solemnly if it is to disappear. This abjuration transforms them permanently into the gentle and fruitful Eumenides. Athena assumes responsibility for bringing this about. Without the confession on the part of the religious forces directly associated with the original violence, any modification of the system would be only illusory. The transformation would be merely in appearance only. (Girard 1977, 148)

The function of a victim who recants is integral to Girard's scapegoat theory, whereas its successful representation contributes to a level of understanding or awareness of the scapegoat as a religious mechanism within its respective social system. By calling Aeschylus the "shepherd of being," Girard (1977, 151) characterizes what is going on with the Eumenides. Importantly, after Orestes's trial at Athens for matricide, as the Erinyes become the Eumenides, Aeschylus appoints as their steward Athena, who has characterized herself in the following way:

There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth,
and, but for marriage, I am always for the male
with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side.
So, in a case where the wife has killed her husband, lord
of the house, her death shall not mean most to me.
(*Eum.* 736–740)

This characterization is cognizant of setting a new precedent. It is as if Aeschylus characterizes a moment in history by which a cultural model has been solidified. Athena guides the reluctant deities through threats: "I have Zeus behind me. Do we need to speak of that? I am the only god who know the keys to where his thunderbolts are locked" (*Eum.* 826–828), and then mixes these with reason:

I will bear your angers. You are elder born than I
and in that you are wiser far than I. Yet still
Zeus gave me too intelligence not to be despised.
If you go away into some land of foreigners,

I warn you, you will come to love this country. Time
in his forward flood shall ever grow more dignified
for the people of this city. And you, in your place
of eminence beside Erechtheus in his house
shall win from female and from male processionalists
more than all lands of men beside could ever give.
(*Eum.* 848–857)

Athena represents an obvious male bias that encounters a tremendous opposition. The Erinyes must be cajoled into what Girard calls abjuration, whereas Athena's admission that the Erinyes are older than her suggests the origin of a scapegoat, whose killing allows this part of the Athenian model (placating vengeful deities) to take form. Under this interpretation, it seems reasonable to compare the model presented by Euripides's *Herakles* with Aeschylus's *Eumenides*. While Heracles gets neither hearing nor trial, Hera, who is securely established as Zeus's Olympian counterpart, is associated with the transformed Eumenides through her remoteness. Furthermore, both the Erinyes and Heracles are promised rewards through banishment: the one must stay clear of the city, while the other will receive his refuge at Athens. Each figure or group of figures, then, indicates a certain relation to the Greeks' expression of patriarchal bias and to the persistence of chthonic female deities who, as they are incorporated into the Olympian religion, mark the development of ritual.

By virtue of Athena's role in the matter, the Greeks' expression of patriarchy is perhaps less repressive of women's roles in society than that in the book of *Job*. Job's opponents and rivals are exclusively male, yet it is his wife (whose presence is ephemeral) who, if included among his interrogators, delivers one of the work's most nihilistic sentiments. The religious dictum maintained by Job is best summarized by the observation, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!" (1:21). But Job's wife presents an antithesis to this mantra. She asks rhetorically, "Do you now still mean to persist in your blamelessness? Curse God, and die" (2.9). That this counterpoint is spoken by Job's wife emphasizes its intended demoralizing effect. Since her criticism attempts to undermine the very notion of integrity, and because Job is not at all demoralized by it, what it emphasizes is Job's observance of the truth. But before

considering in what way the book of *Job* consigns women to that misfortune typically brought by Satan, it may be prudent to consider that the Greek tradition reveals either an earlier or later stage in the development of a society's patriarchal bias. This is exemplified in Athena's enigmatic relation to Zeus, as she is born without a mother. It may be pertinent to compare this aspect of Greek myth with the characterization of Job, whose blamelessness is reflected in his ability to praise God even in the light of that attack on his flesh permitted by God.

Girard finds the hatred that the Greeks accept as a normal part of a functioning *polis* is never wholly embraced in the biblical tradition. Rather, as with the restoration of Job's wealth, even as mythical transformations are achieved, the text suggests that generative violence must be displaced.³⁸ In fact, the book of *Job* as a work of political irony reflects, rather than represents, the tendency in a community to sublimate violence. Girard points out that "the text that links mimetic envy directly to the phenomenon of the sacralized scapegoat is not to be found in Job. But it is found elsewhere in the Bible, in Psalm 73" (1987, 55). The book of *Job* approximates this explicit revelation of the victim. Girard argues that the Greek tradition does not have this insight, although it eventually arrives at justice:

The chorus is indignant over the success of the arrogant, and there is a temptation to scepticism and impiety, inspired by divine action. Why serve the gods if *hybris* goes unpunished? Fortunately, *hybris* is always ultimately punished. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides all comment on the reciprocal affinity of extreme heights and depths. The chorus celebrates its own mediocrity, which it considers a reassurance. Extraordinary fortunes attract divine punishment. (1987, 58)

³⁸ As Girard compares Aeschylus with *Job*, he states that "nowhere in the Bible will we find the idea that the city of man should accommodate itself to generative violence, making room for it under the pretext that 'much wrong in the world thereby is healed'" (1977, 151). The book of *Job* finally betrays an aspect of generative violence as Job, in the presence of Yahweh, capitulates. Although this mirrors the beginning of the book, since it fantastically depicts a wager between Satan and Yahweh, it is foreign to the nature of the dialogues in which Job remains steadfast in the face of his persecutors.

Euripides may actually represent something different, as *Herakles* depicts a mythological hero who is explicitly and unjustly punished, and only rewarded through the excellence of a powerful friend, Theseus, who desires to console and support him. Without suggesting that a miraculous divine intervention is needed, Heracles's actions interrupt that "violent succession of *tyrants* [that] corresponds to the ancient trail of the wicked" (1987, 58). Whereas the chorus remains uncertain of divine justice, Heracles's experience suggests the consolidation of self-reliance and awareness. In one moment, for Heracles's return and for the vengeance he exacts, the chorus declares,

Disaster is reversed!
The tyrant's life turns back to Hades!
Justice flows back! O fate of the gods,
returning!

Your time has come. You go now where the price
for outrage on your betters must be paid.
Joy once more! Overboard with grief!
The king has come again!
He has come, of whom I had no hope,
my country's king, come back again!
(*Her.* 734–746)

Euripides captures the essence of the mythological Heracles. For the chorus, his presence instantly signifies the arrival of justice in the present and the hereafter. Momentarily, Heracles suggests the ability of the hero to restore balance to the city. Yet, shortly, thereafter, the chorus comments on the hero's reversal of fortune, which is a reversal for the city that he represents as well:

How did disaster strike, madness,
hurled from heaven on this house?
How did those pitiful children die?
(*Her.* 919–921)

As one of his benefactors, the city's experience is closely if not entirely related to Heracles's experiences. Nevertheless, for Euripides, the impact of Heracles's arrival represents a significantly hopeful and genuine understanding of human motive and justice. Instead of attaching a miraculous resolution at the beginning or end of the work, as in the book of *Job*, *Herakles* maintains its dreadful tone. The miraculous is effectively

interpolated between conflicts here, as in Aeschylus; on one level, it admits the significance of generative violence and suggests the inevitability of unforeseen and seemingly inexplicable evil. However, characterized by Heracles's individual experience of his own crimes and the capriciousness of human fate, rather than sublimation, the new orientation reveals the possibility of a displacement of violence.

Despite Girard's emphasis on the biblical tradition, Euripides may come close to revealing a god of victims. Without making use of a false pretence that obscures the paradox of such a god, Euripides's *Herakles* displaces his culture's sublimation of violence. The play does not disavow Heracles's suffering as it characterizes the relation between him and the goddess Hera as well as his unsettled connection to Thebes. In *Herakles*, Euripides interprets mythology in such a way that there is no longer a need for a *deus ex machina*. He creates a tragedy in which the effects of divine persecution and communal violence are not transferred. Heracles's banishment is not transformative in the sense of an *apotheosis* or an agreement between him and the gods. His nature does not alter, as that of the Eumenides, from vindictive to peaceful. Instead, Heracles transforms his outlook. Even though, under Hera's influence, the obligation of his labours leads him into a state of bewilderment, Heracles admits the necessity of his heroic function:

Yet, naked of these arms,
with which I did the greatest deeds in Hellas,
must I die in shame at my enemies' hands?
No, they must be borne; but in pain I bear them.
(*Her.* 1382–1385)

Unlike the Eumenides, whose enmity, as they are miraculously uncloaked, is apparently resolved, Heracles realizes that his shame and disgrace run deeper than self-hatred or feelings of submission, defeat, or even anger. In accordance with Theseus's material and moral example, Heracles perseveres by portioning out his culpability:

O land of Cadmus, O people of Thebes,
mourn with me, grieve with me, attend my children
to the grave! And with one voice mourn us all,
the dead and me. For all of us have died,
all struck down by one blow of Hera's hate.
(*Her.* 1389–1393)

These statements are extraordinary, since Heracles sees in the killing of his family the symbolic deaths of himself and the city (as represented by the chorus). This “one blow of Hera’s hate” symbolically rubs the slate clean of the mythological connection that Heracles and Thebes share with her. Rather than succumb to his guilt, he is able to overcome it. As Heracles is forced to move on from Thebes, a sublimation rather than a displacement of violence is implied. So, rather than rescue or incentive, it is only Heracles’s madness sent by Hera that resonates as a divine intervention.

Girard concludes that, by comparing and interpreting Hebraic and Greek texts, “we are at that junction between religion which is still sacrificial in the strict sense, and politics that is sacrificial in the broad sense” (1987, 59). Girard believes that a primitive sacrificial stage is finally transcended as a consequence of an approach manifested in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, the arguments above suggest that Greek civilization has also led to a transcendence of the sacralization of the victim.

The foundations of Euripides’s literary expression in *Herakles*, as it leads to a transcendence from culture contingent on the sacrificial victim, may be specified through a sociological study of ancient myths. For example, Slater characterizes the mythological hero that Euripides depicts in tragedy as startlingly wounded by Hera and simply ignored by Zeus:

Heracles resembles Orestes in his murderous attacks on women: his wounding of Hera, his murder (in Euripides’ version) of Megara, and his apparently unprovoked slaying of Hippolyte and other Amazons (Apollodorus: ii. 5. 9; Diodorus Siculus: iv. 16). But these incidents are merely episodes in an extensive anti-feminine career, one which in this regard most closely resembles Apollonian myth. (1968, 370–371)

It is this “anti-feminine career” that is crucial to the logic of Euripides’s tragedy. The love and the despair that Euripides depicts Heracles demonstrating for his wife and children does not suggest the violence, deceptiveness, and often-reckless side of the Heracles of myth; yet Euripides’s depiction of a noble Heracles remains continuous with the tradition. Euripides conceals but also implicitly interprets these aspects of the hero and their conditions, until the point at which a tragic Heracles is affected by madness.

Focusing on a contrast between the myth and Heracles's representation as a man, Euripides depicts his culture's mythical evolution; as the life of Heracles reflects the Greek soul, the persecution that this figure suffers reveals a flawed individual expression of that soul.

To distinguish the scapegoat mechanism in Euripides's *Herakles* from the Greeks' logic of a god of victims, the reason or manner in which Slater uses the term *Apollonian* (to characterize Heracles's anti-feminine career) should be considered. Both Slater and Nietzsche place the Apollonian in opposition to the Dionysian, which suggests the destruction of the social differences—from sex to station. But what are the cultural differences between people that Heracles's life and his striving exemplify? How may his tragic fate prove the inherent insubstantiality of such differences? When we point to Heracles, we find that the historical destiny of the Greek soul, as it shifted from paternal and fraternal rivalry, finally developed a psychological conflict between mother and son. It is this later rivalry that intensely colours ancient Greek myth and that arguably defines the culture's institutions. To conjecture what led the Greeks to such an unusual rivalry between mother and son (one need only appeal to psychoanalysis to suggest its unusualness), the conspicuous Hera-Heracles relationship appears at the forefront.

The dynamic may be illustrated in the following manner: Hera's jealousy signifies a response to the sublimation of chthonic deities that took place as Greece's earliest inhabitants resisted their conquerors, whereas Heracles's career—his suffering and perseverance—alternatively suggest, in the challenge to Greece's original matriarchal divinities, a struggle that demands the execution of strictly Apollonian impositions.³⁹ This collective history had a particular effect on the nature of mimetic conflict, which led the Greeks to the most sophisticated forms of rule. Yet the Greeks remained a highly volatile people. Instead of enjoying long periods of stability, as the philosophical

³⁹ Apollo is described as an ethical deity who “demands due proportion of his disciples” and “self-knowledge,” but Nietzsche contextualizes and links ethical or military practice to “the Doric state” that is “explicable only as a permanent military encampment of the Apollonian” (Nietzsche 2000, section 4).

tradition attests, by dint of war and revolt they became familiar with various forms of government. The result was more often than not the internecine feuds to which the Greek historians pay homage. This familiarity with instituting political measures yet suffering from political disaster may have allowed Euripides to interpret the Heracles myth as a representation of mimetic rivalries.

Slater's description of a fraternal rivalry between Heracles and Eurystheus may disclose the connection between the biblical tradition and Euripides's *Herakles* that substantiates a universal literary or artistic appreciation for mimetic rivalries such as is argued by Girard. Slater suggests certain psychosocial issues that determined the Greeks' inability to arrive at a truce among nations after they defeated the Persians:

Twins in Greek myth are usually amicable, but such is not the case in many other mythologies. Questions of precedence are particularly likely to arise in cultures with primogeniture. The book of Genesis is almost totally devoted to this problem, with several generations of rival brothers, the younger often gaining the elder's rights: Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh, Joseph over his elder brothers. Jacob and Esau were twins who fought in the womb (Genesis 25:22–23) ... Interestingly enough, this issue is never raised with Heracles and Iphicles. But it is raised between Heracles and Eurystheus. There is a struggle to see who will be born first, and who will thereby obtain the right to rule. The father is deceived into cheating his favourite, just as Isaac was deceived into cheating Esau. Heracles, like Esau, is a hunter, while Jacob, like Eurystheus, is "a quiet man, dwelling in tents" (Ibid., 25:27) ... From this it is clear that Iphicles and Eurystheus were originally the same. Their near-simultaneous birth, their common descent from Perseus, and the fight over birthright make it clear that Heracles and Eurystheus are the functional twins (no attention is given to Iphicles' claims, for example). (Slater 1968, 383)

In mythological thought, the problem of primogeniture is likely the essential political question. Likewise, it is treated openly in the book of *Genesis*. However, by making Eurystheus (instead of Heracles's twin brother Iphicles) the competitor for Heracles's right to rule the Mycenaean kingdoms, the Heracles myth defers the problem of warring brothers: "The Heracles myth is thus a version of the vicissitudes of Esau, ignored in the Biblical tale" (1968, 383). The deferral of gratification is, in fact, the most integral part of the Heracles myth.

The story of Heracles and many biblical stories begin with similar political and social problems. However, the viewpoint of the biblical and the Greek tradition are contrary from the start. The biblical tradition assumes the perspective of the second born who, with his mother's favour, gains that inheritance that belongs rightly to his elder brother. In the Hesiodic cosmology, Zeus (the youngest of the first line of Olympians) is aided by his mother Rhea to usurp his father's rule and inaugurate a political stability. However, the myth of Heracles adopts the perspective of a disinherited brother.⁴⁰ Consequently, the myth of Heracles celebrates a different variety of endurance than that depicted in Olympian or biblical references. Just like Zeus, the biblical Jacob (Esau's younger twin) carries out a deception prompted by his mother, and each is rewarded for it with the control of his tribe. Though, for Heracles the task is often asocial. Although in mythology Heracles is repeatedly praised as a preserver, his endurance often depends on his ability to enter society through the use of heroic force or disruption.⁴¹ This facet of the myth of course derives from Heracles's relationship to Hera; the Herculean perspective (in its symptomatically unrewarded relation to society) should be viewed as the elaboration of Esau's or an older banished brother's perspective.

Euripides acknowledges that Heracles's sociability is a veneer susceptible to disintegration; by emphasizing Heracles's loyalty to his family, Euripides signifies the complications that derive from the myth. Since Heracles's perspective is that of the dispossessed and he seeks satisfaction or resolution for his obligation to the gods, the

⁴⁰ Greek myth implicitly suggests that Heracles represents a disinherited elder brother, but his disinheritance occurs before his birth. In Eurystheus's favour, Hera interferes in Heracles's fate: she contracts the goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia, to delay Heracles's birth so that he will not be the first descendant of Perseus to be born that night. According to an injunction made by Zeus, this firstborn descendant will inherit the kingdom of Tiryns.

⁴¹ The extent of Heracles's role in Greek literature, from Homer and Hesiod to Pindar and the tragedians, is described in *The Herakles Theme*, by Galinsky. In Hesiod, "Like Zeus, Herakles is a beneficent, regulatory force that fights against the disorderly and abnormal forces of a nature which is in the process of being formed" (Galinsky 1972, 16), yet "Homer does not extol the ideal of lonely splendour and of a lifelong struggle to achieve equality with the gods" (Galinsky 1972, 9), and "Herakles meant to Pindar all that was good and necessary to be saved from the onslaught of the incipient democracy and its non-values" (Galinsky 1972, 30). In all of these accounts, the one constant is that, although Heracles may represent Zeus's will and reflect his ideals, Heracles is continually striving for Olympian acceptance.

conditions that give rise to mimetic rivalry are more pronounced.⁴² From the beginning, there is an implicit confusion between Eurystheus and Heracles's twin brother Iphicles that perhaps expresses a dissatisfaction with the cultural practice of primogeniture (a reproach we might imagine brings the Greeks closer to the democratic innovation). The allusion to twins can be recognized in Amphitryon's introduction of the Theban conflict:

Here in Thebes the legend goes that once
a certain Lycus married Dirce, our queen,
and ruled this city with its seven gates
before the twins of Zeus, those "white colts,"
Amphion and Zethus, ruled the land.
This Lycus' namesake and descendant,
no native Theban but Euboean-born,
attacked our city, sick with civil war,
murdered Creon and usurped his throne.
And now our marriage-bond with Creon's house
has proved in fact to be our greatest ill.
For since my son is gone beneath the earth,
this upstart tyrant, Lycus, plans to kill
the wife and sons of Heracles—and me,
so old and useless, that I scarcely count—
blotting murder with more, lest these boys
grown to men, someday revenge their mother's house.
My son, when he descended to the darkness
underground, left me here, appointing me
both nurse and guardian of his little sons.
Now, to keep these heirs of Heracles from death,
their mother and I in supplication
kneeled to Zeus the Savior at this altar
(*Her.* 26–48)

The legend Amphitryon mentions concerns the twins of Zeus, Amphion and Zethus, legendary founders of Thebes; it provides a parallel with Heracles's own tenuous rule of the city that is undercut by a namesake and descendant of the Lycus of Amphion and Zethus's generation. The legend alludes also to Heracles and Iphicles (or Heracles-Eurystheus) who are also said to be Theban born (*Iliad* 19. 95), and the separation between Heracles and the upstart tyrant suggests the idea of adversarial

⁴² In *Violence and the Sacred* Girard considers *Herakles* to be a play that deals with a social and religious disintegration: "The real subject of the play is the failure of a sacrifice, the act of a sacrificial violence that suddenly *goes wrong*" (1981, 40).

doubles. As Heracles is underground at the beginning of the tragedy, he represents the second twin, who remains in the womb, whereas Lycus, above, becomes the ruler of Thebes. The allusions to Amphitryon, Heracles's children, and a marriage-bond to Megara that has proved their greatest ill should also be considered part of a structural pairing of Lycus and Heracles in which Heracles is the good but disinherited twin. Likewise, for Euripides a notion of repression and the subtleties that are created because of it are thematic. Instead of having Eurystheus directly disrupt Heracles's potential rule of Thebes, Lycus, a lesser figure, instigates social unrest; this allows the problematic of warring brothers and fraternal envy to remain a suggested origin for political unrest. *Herakles* is composed so that the Heracles-Iphicles binary is alluded to yet transferred in favour of Eurystheus-Heracles. In the course of Heracles's life, his singular problem is sublimated until he faces a political enemy whose ambiguous origin and unlawfulness suggests the futility of Heracles ever attaining his rightful kingship.

Despite the inherent sense of futility rooted in the Heracles myth, an aristocratic logic, which may be derived from Greek myth, remains a constant. Euripides and the author of the book of *Job* express its exhaustion; both place their mythological heroes at a similar juncture. Each figure, although he reaches it by a different cultural road, arrives at the end of an "ancient trail trodden by the wicked" (Girard 1987, 14). However, in the analysis of the Heracles myth, it is more apparent how a contiguous political individual arrives at this juncture, or rather, how humanity is characterized at this stage.

As we compare Job's trial (Girard characterizes it as totalitarian) with the argument between Amphitryon and Lycus, we can see something of the democratic ethos that is linked to a practice of ostracism, present in both situations. The victim, or the hero who wears the victor's crown, harassed by the delegates of a particular model of resentment, brings to the surface the question of a cultural notion of equity. As such, the charm of a Dionysian chaos undermines or supersedes the culture's Apollonian objectivity. In myth, as soon as Heracles is born, his rightful kingship is continuously delayed. This may be understood as metaphor for the struggle between a Dionysian

overabundance and its checks. Similarly, as they insist on the reality of his sins, Job's friends represent the opposition to his charisma.⁴³

In *Herakles*, as it ruins the life he has made for himself at Thebes, the undoing of an Apollonian rigour follows from Heracles's madness. And, for *Job*, as Yahweh reproves all attempts to explain his motives, a measure of this culture's patriarchal model begins to unravel. Job, instead of his friends, is miraculously rewarded (42:10–17). But as Yahweh finally vents his anger at Job's friends (42:7–9), the suggestion is that Job's life, post crisis, must still be mythicized; whereas, in Euripides's *Herakles*, after Heracles's madness, there is no intervention by the gods or *apotheosis*. According to tradition, there is ultimately an *apotheosis* championed by Athena (e.g., Diod. Sic. 4.38. 4–5, Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.7), but for Euripides, it is Theseus's intervention that takes centre stage. Although the two heroes Theseus and Heracles are left to overcome adversity, it is arguable that, without Zeus's aid, Heracles's opposition to Hera conveys more profoundly or thoroughly the pitfalls (as rooted in resentment) of a patriarchal model than does the book of *Job*.

While the story of *Job* begins and ends with the supernatural, Euripides's representation of Heracles begins and ends without it. The gods and Heracles's godlike achievements are from the first held up as examples. Backed by Amphitryon, *Herakles* leads with an argument over the success and glory that the mythical hero achieves as he completes each labour. And the play ends (as if in a wry commentary on Lycus's reproaches) with commentary as to the worth of these actions, with Heracles electing to view Amphitryon instead of Zeus as his father (*Her.* 1265). By the end of the play, Heracles leaves the stage, characterizing Lycus's motives and the reasons behind his suffering thus: "The man who would prefer great wealth or strength more than love, more than friends, is diseased of soul" (*Her.* 1425–1426). This political or rational

⁴³ Charisma, rightly or wrongly, is felt by a community that idolizes a political figure to be an essential quality (Girard 1987, 69). Likewise, as the same figure is scandalized, his sinfulness is also experienced as being necessary. Greek culture, however, has the enlightened advantage in that the Heracles myth represents the persistence of what Girard calls "the obstacle model."

problem (introduced before and after the main action) contrasts with the religious aspects invested in the play. For example, as the chorus reacts to Heracles's madness, the image of the goddess Madness combines with that of the hero:

O city, mourn! Your flower
is cut down, the son of Zeus.
O Hellas, mourn! You have lost
your savior! He dances now
to the fatal flutes of madness!
Madness has mounted her car;
She goads her team!
She drives for death!
O gorgon of Night, O hiss
of a hundred snakes! O Madness,
whose look makes stones of men!
Instantly, god's fortune is reversed!
Instantly, and father murders sons!
(*Her.* 875–886)

The culmination of this passage links the reversal of fortune that affects a god with Heracles's crime of killing his sons. The chorus indirectly suggests a betrayal of Heracles by Zeus; the question of whether or not Heracles is a derivative of the god Dionysus here precipitates. The contrast between the political or rational aspect governing human nature with a supernatural disruption heralded by Hera's hatred allows Euripides to contextualize the play. Heracles's madness and crimes imply a connection between the hero and the god Dionysus. So, as Madness arrives without warning, the chorus voices a paradoxical statement: "For blood, she drives, for blood! No wine of Dionysus here!" (*Her.* 894–895). The chorus emphasizes the direct connection between Heracles's madness and blood rather than the ritualistic and seemingly necessary ingredient of wine.

In myth, Dionysus's mortal mother, Semele, inspires Zeus with love. But, in retribution, Hera persuades Semele that she should convince Zeus to reveal his true form. Without foreseeing that Semele will ask him to reveal his true form, Zeus promises to grant her whatever she desires. Bound by an oath, Zeus is forced to reveal himself, and as Zeus complies, Semele is destroyed by the vision. From Semele's ashes, Zeus retrieves the fetal Dionysus and draws the child to his thigh. Accordingly,

Dionysus is born from his father. Hence, in *The Bacchae*, the prophet of Apollo, Teiresias, recounts the story of Semele (who creates wine) and the birth of Dionysus:

You sneer, do you, at that story that Dionysus was sewed into the thigh of Zeus? Let me teach you what that really means. When Zeus rescued from the thunderbolt his infant son, he brought him to Olympus. Hera, however, plotted at heart to hurl the child from heaven. Like the god he is, Zeus countered her. Breaking off a tiny fragment of that ether which surrounds the world, he molded from it a dummy Dionysus. This he showed to Hera, but with time men garbled the word and said that Dionysus had been sewed into the thigh of Zeus.
(*Bacch.* 287–296)

Engaging in etymology, Teiresias attributes the story of Zeus sewing the infant Dionysus to his thigh to men who “garbled the word.” It is in their version that Dionysus has one father. Since Zeus rescues the infant Dionysus and ties him to his thigh, he has two mothers—the second being his father—so according to the Greeks’ patriarchal bias, the maternal aspect is superseded. The myth characterizes the patriarchal bias in general, as father and son are essentially one. But the insights afforded by psychoanalysis suggest that behind such an expression of a patriarchal bias there is a fundamental displacement of the good mother with a jealous goddess (Hera) as stepmother. For example, in the Roman version by Hyginus, Hera incites the Titans to kidnap, mock, and rend the child Dionysus to pieces.⁴⁴

Significantly, for Girard and Nietzsche, Dionysus is the original scapegoat or tragic figure. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues the following:

The tradition is undisputed that Greek tragedy in its earliest form had for its sole theme the suffering of Dionysus and that for a long time the only stage hero was Dionysus himself. But it may be claimed with equal confidence that until Euripides, Dionysus never ceased to be the tragic hero; that all the celebrated figures of the Greek stage—Prometheus, Oedipus, etc.—are mere masks of this original hero, Dionysus. (Nietzsche 2000, section 10)

⁴⁴ There is an obvious parallel in this story with Jesus’ crucifixion. Furthermore, it should be considered that, as the myths that surround Dionysus often relate to punishments carried out through madness, he is a god who embodies the actual processes involved in the sublimation of violence. Hence, the classification that Girard provides in *Violence and the Sacred*: “Dionysus is the god of decisive mob action” (1977, 134).

Nietzsche then states that, for the Greeks, the individual on the stage had to be experienced as a comic figure, and that prior to Euripides, the original suffering hero, in whatever manifestation, was actually Dionysus. Similarly, in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard argues that Dionysus represents a conflict between representations of the individual and the sensibility of the community: “*The Bacchae* offers ample evidence in support of my definition of sacrifice. Euripides’s tragedy and the whole cult of Dionysus seem to provide strong support for the hypothesis that traces myth and ritual to a generative act of unanimity” (Girard 1977, 132). It is important to note Nietzsche’s insight concerning Euripides’s significant departure from earlier tragic iterations. Euripides is fully conscious of the ritualistic iterations of the Dionysian dismemberment in tragedy. It follows from this that Girard finds support for his hypothesis in *The Bacchae*. However, it is possible that Euripides’s *Herakles* suggests a more developed concern for the Greeks’ religious sensibility and the representation of the tragic figure.

For example, as the scapegoat mechanism is apparent in the story of Dionysus’s birth, similarly, Heracles’s destruction of his wife and children re-enacts the *sparagmos*⁴⁵ of Dionysus. In his madness, it is revealed that Heracles is unable to protect his family. It follows from this that Heracles’s killing of his three sons and wife is both a physical representation of sacrifice or the division of the body and also, more immediately, the hero’s spiritual degradation. As Heracles is at once both the signification of Hera and the object of her torture—such as Slater describes the oral-narcissistic dilemma (1968, 88)—after killing his wife and children, Heracles’s condition of self-reliance suggests the progressive development of the tragic individual. Heracles’s crisis seemingly causes him to transcend both society and the gods; yet his excesses paradoxically bring the two together more securely. By depicting the madness of the mythical demigod, Euripides’s *Herakles* dramatizes episodes between Zeus and Hera or between Zeus and the Titans in a more terrestrial form. Therefore, Girard characterizes the development of the tragic in the following way:

⁴⁵ *Sparagmos*, σπαραγμός (from σπαράσσω, *sparasso*, “tear, rend, pull to pieces”): in Dionysian rite, a living animal or sometimes even a human being is sacrificed by being dismembered.

Euripides speaks less in terms of religious “faith,” in the modern sense, than in terms of the transgressing of limits, of the fearsome knowledge that exists beyond these limits. We do not seem to be dealing in his case with a simple choice between belief and disbelief—two equally abstract concepts. Something else is at play, something more to the point than sterile religious scepticism. (1981, 130)

Comparing Nietzsche’s thoughts on the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of Greek art and religion and Girard’s scapegoat theory, Euripides’s mythologically guided depiction of the idiosyncratic Heracles is understood as a part of the playwright’s contribution to the final developments of Greek tragedy, in which Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, sees the triumph of the theoretical man (2000, 15). But Euripides is not what we might call irreverent. *Herakles* is particularly expressive of a balance between the political and religious, since Euripides defines the manner in which myth bridges the legendary Heracles to the democratic Athenian citizen. As the chorus sees Heracles latched by Amphitryon’s servants to a broken pillar that Heracles, himself, has levelled, as part of a new obtrusive reality with corpses of his family strewn about him, the chorus and the audience realize that the setting for their culture is at once savage and civil:

The hill of Argos had a murder once
Danaus’ daughters did, murder’s byword,
unbelievable in Hellas!
But murder here has far outrun,
surpassed by far
that ancient crime.
And Procne’s noble son was slain,
murdered by his mother’s hands and made,
I say, the Muses’ sacrifice.
(*Her.* 1016–1022)

In this legend that the chorus uses to express Heracles’s disgrace, Euripides alludes to a sacrificial victim at Argos, where the story really begins: a mother murders her own son in retribution for his father’s rape. Yet in their horror, the chorus admits that Heracles’s madness has far outstretched that ruin that they believe foreshadows Heracles’s Theban scandal.

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