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THE HERACLES: MYTH BECOMING MAN.

by

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B.A., Queen's University, 1943

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## ABSTRACT

The *Heracles* is a play that is complex in structure and in theme. It is divided into three sections, and each section is again divided in three. Nine scenes serve to organize | mythological material that stretches back in history to the beginnings of agriculture, emotional material that is the outcome of a long period of war, and philosophical material that represents conflicting value systems of the late fifth century B.C.

There are at least ten major themes in the play, and they reflect the chaos of the Peace of Nicias. Because the period is only a brief interruption of a long war, the play can be understood in later times that reflect similar anxieties.

Heracles is the mythological hero who is believed to be a son of Zeus. The story of the play concerns his return from his Labours and his discovery that his wife, his three children, and his old father are to be put to death by an oppressor. Heracles rescues his family, and, suddenly, goes mad. He kills his wife and children, but is rendered unconscious by Athena before he can kill his father. When he regains consciousness, he is forced to acknowledge his guilt. Theseus appears and offers him refuge and honour in Athens. Heracles learns that he must live with guilt and become human. He does this by renouncing the paternity of Zeus and recognizing Amphitryon, who has loved him, as his real father. He comes to understand that friendship means

salvation.

As Euripides develops the problem contained in the story, he considers the nature of courage, the ideal of disarmament, the frustrations of old age, the responsibilities of family members for each other, the changing nature of the gods, and the possibility of good evolving from war.

The beauty of the play comes from its complexity and its organization, but it also comes from the emotions that are revealed as myth faces horror and becomes man.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

When Euripides wrote the *Heracles*, he was an old man. He had been born a few years before the battle of Salamis<sup>1</sup>, and he had lived through the time that Thucydides called the "pentekontaetia", the fifty years between the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War which were marked by the growth of the imperialism and of the cultural ascendancy of Athens. During the decade that followed the outbreak of hostilities in 431 B.C., he had seen a succession of calamities which included the loss of the greatest leaders of both Athens and Sparta, and the death of at least a quarter of the civilian population of Athens from the plague (Trever 1:329). In my view he wrote the play sometime before 417 B.C.<sup>2</sup> during the period which is usually called the Peace of Nicias.

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<sup>1</sup>The date of his birth is not certain, but from the evidence on the *Parian Marble* it is believed to be 485 B.C. The *Parian Marble*, or *Marmor Parium* is an engraved stele, part of which was sent from Smyrna to London in 1627. It purports to record a chronological list of events from the time of Cecrops to 264/3 B.C.

<sup>2</sup>As there is no traditional date for the production of the *Heracles*, scholars have made numerous attempts to assign a date both from content and from metrical analysis. The most recent commentary by Godfrey Bond uses figures from a study of trimeters and of iambic dialogue and their proper resolutions by Zielinski; he finds that Euripides became progressively more careless in this matter as he grew older. He also discusses the use of trochaic tetrameters and of enoplian dochmaics. From this evidence, he concludes that an appropriate date would be either 416 B.C. or 414 B.C.; he rejects 415 B.C. as it is known that the *Alexandros*, *Palamedes*, and *Troades* were produced that year (Bond xxxi).

The name of the period is misleading, for the years between 421 B.C. and 416 B.C. were full of tensions which frequently broke into war, and Nicias was only one figure in a complex political scene. It is true, however, that it was a time when some Athenians tried to find hope in one or other of the many alliances which their leaders negotiated, or in some of their daring and impractical proposals. It was not obvious to those living through 417 B.C. what is now obvious to us, with hindsight and the help of Thucydides, that the end of the city state, of Athens as a political power, and of the unquestioning acceptance of the Olympian gods was very near.

The tension which comes from a superficial feeling of hope in a period of declining fortune is, I suggest, reflected by the tension in the play. The expectations of many of the Athenians are an explanation for the optimism that inexplicably follows the madness and the murders and which ends the play.

Euripides, aware of the emotional responses of the Athenian marketplace to the political circumstances, chose Heracles as his protagonist. Heracles was the most famous mythological character of all Hellas. He was given credit for civilization, for man's domination of nature, and for innumerable feats of superhuman strength. He meant different things to different Greek cities, and he was commemorated in different ways; by cults and sanctuaries, by vase paintings, and by sculpture. He was the founder of the Olympic Games, a tradition which was honoured by the depiction of his Labours on the metopes of the

temple of Zeus at Olympia. He was a character in comedies and satyr plays, and Sophocles wrote a tragedy about his death and apotheosis called *The Women of Trachis*. Many Spartan colonies were named for him.

Euripides chose customary elements of Heracles' myth as the building blocks of his play, but he did not combine them in a customary way. The usual version of the story was that the Labours were a punishment for the murder of his family during a period of madness (Graves 2:122d). However, in Euripides' version, the murders follow the Labours, and Heracles appears to be rewarded for his unspeakable crime by being brought to Athens and honoured during the remainder of his life and after his death. The interpretive problem posed by this moral paradox presents one of the greatest difficulties for critics.

My argument will be that Euripides restructured the story of Heracles deliberately. The poet included at least ten themes which had to be presented in a highly organized fashion or each would have lost its relevance. The purpose of the play is to expose a network of feelings that were aroused by the historical situation, and the highly organized structure was a way of dealing with the complexity of these feelings and the contradictory nature of the ideas that surrounded them.

For these reasons, an analysis of the play must begin with its structure, for the structure exists to control all the other elements.

While it is true that the play, like any other work of art, can be appreciated to some degree without any knowledge of its historical background and mythological sources, it is also true that this kind of knowledge may illuminate a study both of themes and of structure. For these reasons, I will begin my discussion of the play with an analysis of the structure, and then proceed to a brief overview of the history of the period and the mythological importance of the characters to the major Greek cities. Euripides presented his play to fifth century Greeks who possessed all the necessary political and mythological knowledge, but twentieth century readers cannot attempt to understand the play in the same way without some background information.

## CHAPTER II

### ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

The structure of the play has been described as a "triptych" (Kitto 250); that is, it comprises three separate panels connected by unseen hinges. On the other hand, critics such as Arrowsmith, who summarizes Norwood and Zurcher in the introduction to his edition of the *Heracles* (45), have seen the play divided into two parts and have looked for reversed images in the first and last scenes. Their analysis minimizes the importance of the middle section, the appearance of Madness and Iris, the sounds of the murders and the Messenger's long speech describing the actual madness and killing. If one passes over the details of the madness and concentrates on the first and last sections of the play, Heracles seems essentially sane, whereas it is the "mad Heracles" that is placed squarely at the heart of the play. The events of the first section lead up to the madness, and the events of the last section lead directly from it. Paradoxically, the madness and the suffering bring about the hope that ends the play.

Arrowsmith points out that it is because of its structure that the play has been virtually ignored and frequently condemned in the past. Swinburne called it a "grotesque abortion", and Gilbert Murray said that it was "broken-backed" (Murray, *Greek Studies* 112). The reason for this sort of condemnation, as Arrowsmith says, is that the play does not

conform to Aristotle's analysis of tragedy, or, even worse, to Aristotelianism. It seems to lack unity, there is no "hamartia", and the scenes follow each other without "probable or necessary sequence" (*Poetics* ix, 10). Every critic seems to feel that he must either condemn or account for the unusual structure.

My own view is that the complexity of the structure provides an artistic form of great beauty which makes it possible for the poet to contain a mythology of enormous range and depth and, at the same time, present many controversial themes from more than one point of view. Without the control of structure such a task would result in a muddle of conflicting ideas; with it, the play becomes a simple and moving story of a myth who becomes a human being through his terrible suffering.

The play is clearly divided into three sections, and upon closer study, it becomes obvious that each of the sections is in itself divided into three scenes, so that there are nine scenes altogether. In order to make it easier to understand the relationships which exist between these scenes I have given them numbers and letters: section 1, scenes a, b, and c; section 2, scenes a, b, and c; and section 3, scenes a, b, and c.

Section one is the story of the homecoming of Heracles. He has been gone for some time while he has been completing his Labours, and has finally survived the last, the descent into Hades and the rescue of Theseus. Before his return we see the dreadful plight of his family, his earthly father Amphitryon

(who shares Heracles' paternity with Zeus), his wife Megara, and his three children. They are all victimized by the tyrant Lycus, who has conquered Thebes, and who proposes to kill them immediately. Heracles arrives at the very moment when Megara and the boys are dressed in their funeral clothes and are prepared to meet their fate. They all greet each other joyfully and Heracles goes inside the palace to kill Lycus as the chorus sings in triumph.

The Heracles that we come to know at the beginning of the play is a mythological hero, and his father, his wife, his children, and, undoubtedly, his audience, believe implicitly in him and in his virtue. When we see him first he is coming home in triumph from his twelve Labours in which he has conquered wild animals and aberrations of nature in all their real and imaginary excesses, and has brought civilization to the world.

When he appears on the stage he is dressed as the mythological character wearing a lion skin on his back with the head crowning his own, and he carries his great identifying symbols, his bow and quiverful of arrows, and his club (Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 187). Amphitryon and the old men unhesitatingly accept this image of the hero and so do Megara and the boys. His persona has been created by his family and the chorus long before he comes on stage, and they all sing of his great public exploits and his important gifts to humanity. They accept without question his role as a public figure who leaves his family to perform superhuman tasks for the

benefit of mankind, and sing with pride of his twelve Labours, and the greatest of all, the conquest of death itself. He is like a modern discoverer of a miracle drug who is seen by others as a saviour and comes to see himself in the same light. He has achieved his public persona at the expense of his private life, and while exulting in his accomplishments, he forgets his obligations to his home and to his family. He admits that he had to be reminded by a bird that he should inquire after their well-being.

When he arrives home and discovers the situation there, he is horrified at the thought that he has preferred the glory that he has derived from his accomplishments to his family, and that he has come so close to seeing them destroyed as a result of his neglect. With this realization, he enjoys becoming very protective towards Megara and the children as he takes command of the events. The section of the play ends as he is heard destroying the tyrant inside the palace.

There are three scenes that comprise section one. The first extends from line 1 to line 347, and is a prologue, spoken by the old Amphitryon, which gives the history of his family and the reason for their present predicament. During this scene, several themes are stated and explored through debates with Megara, Heracles' wife, and with Lycus, the despot. Other themes come from the chorus of old men who are witnesses to all the events. All of these themes will be re-examined later in the play. Briefly, they are man's need for friendship and the



problems involved in offering friendship in troubled times; the wisdom of unreasonable optimism as opposed to realistic hopelessness; frustrations of old age; the kinds of weapons that are best used by warriors; the challenge of death; and the injustice of the gods. The word "tyche" is also introduced, translated by Arrowsmith as "necessity", but meaning as well "fortune" or "luck", the personification of the fickle destiny with which man is born and about which he can do nothing. As the scene ends with the family of Heracles in a position of total dependency on the whim of a despot, it emphasizes the theme of helplessness which will also become a major concern of the play.

Section 1, scene b, is the most famous scene of the play, for it begins with a chorus that describes the Labours of Heracles, and is usually quoted as one of the sources of the myth. It tells of twelve of the Labours which demonstrate the role that Heracles has played as the great civilizer, and it ends with a bitter complaint on the part of the old men that they are too weak to protect the sons of the great hero. At the end of the chorus the family enters dressed in funeral clothes. They are prepared for death, and Megara speaks to the children of the fine marriages that would have been arranged for them and the great kingdoms that Heracles would have left them. She speaks of the mythological political father, not the nurturer who should have looked after them at home. She ends by calling on Heracles, whom she believes to be in Hades, and her cry is followed by that of Amphitryon, who prays to Zeus for help.

Scene 1, c, begins, startlingly, with the arrival of Heracles, who is suddenly observed coming in from the right. There is no question as to his identity, because his attributes are always part of him, and he generates tremendous excitement by his very presence. This scene begins at line 513 of the play, and carries on until line 814. Heracles is welcomed and then, in a dialogue with Megara, he is informed of everything that has happened to cause the present crisis. (This episode will be repeated in scene 3, a, later in the play, when Theseus arrives.) His father questions the hero about his activities during his absence, and this gives Heracles the opportunity to tell about his visit to Hades and about bringing back Theseus from that dreadful place. This device introduces the name of Theseus, and explains why he should be grateful to Heracles. For the Athenians, of course, Theseus is one of the most important mythological figures.

Two new themes are stated in this scene that are central to the play: first, the importance of a man defending his sons, his father, and his wife; and second, the insight that all men are equal because all love their children equally. With this insight Heracles displays a conscious tenderness to his wife and to his sons which will remain in the memory as a horrible contrast to the madness in the scene that is to follow. He then leads them all into the palace, using the same image of dependency that Megara used, the big boat towing the little boats behind.

The scene ends with the audience hearing the sounds of Lycus being killed inside the palace, and everyone is united in a feeling of joy that the brutal man is getting what he deserves. The song that the chorus sings is a justification of traditional belief in vengeance and traditional versions of mythology. The gods are just and Heracles is the son of Zeus.

The plot of the second section of the play is simple. After the chorus has finished its joyful hymn of revenge, the terrible figure of Madness suddenly appears in a chariot on one side of the roof of the palace, and Iris, the agent of Hera, appears on the other. This provides an effective change of scene, for the eyes of the audience are raised from the figures in the orchestra to a higher level as the debate begins. Iris says that Zeus has protected Heracles as long as he has been performing the Labours, but now that they are over, Hera can wreak her vengeance upon him and plans to drive him mad. Madness tries to argue Iris out of the verdict but cannot; she has no choice but to obey the edict, although she makes it clear that it is against her will that she does so. She will begin immediately and she will accompany the madness with an earthquake that will destroy the palace.

The action returns to the orchestra as the chorus sings of the dreadful events that are taking place within the palace, and then a messenger appears who tells the story. He tells of Heracles' delusions and his dreadful slaughter of each little boy and of their mother. Heracles was about to kill Amphitryon

when Athena put a stop to his madness by throwing a stone which knocked him unconscious. He is now tied to one of the columns that has fallen in the earthquake and is lying inert with the bodies of his victims around him.

This part of the play is an action that has a beginning, a middle and an end, and is therefore the kind of action that Aristotle described in his definition of tragedy (*Poetics* vii, 2-4). It can stand on its own and is not dependent on the other parts of the play. However, when it is seen as part of the larger action it assumes the central place, and refuses to be glossed over or treated as a simple conjunction. Heracles cannot be seen in this episode because he is mad, and being mad, he neither knows what he is doing in the present nor will remember it in the future. For him there will never be a cause for what has happened, for madness destroys the idea of causation and destroys the relationship between the past and the future. The violent disruption that has altered his personality, destroyed his family and his palace, has left only one thing unchanged, the old father whom he has never really acknowledged.

This scene also serves to alter every theme and every action that was present in the first episode. Just as Heracles was shattered by the madness, so was the mythology and so were the expectations that were set up by the initial events.

The first scene of this section, 2, a, extends from line 815 until 874, and it presents a difficult interpretative problem in

the play, the vengeance of Hera. This vengeance follows immediately upon that of Amphitryon and of Heracles in the previous scene, justified by the brutality of the tyrant Lycus, but Madness herself tells us that Heracles "alone has held up the honour of the gods" (852). The punishment, then, is not just, and Hera must either be seen as an unjust god or a personification of an unknown cause of madness, or as many in the audience would have viewed her, a powerful and amoral divinity. This begins the working out of the statement of the chorus at the end of 1, c, that there is justice among the gods, which in itself was a denial of Amphitryon's "callous god who was born unjust" (342), in 1, a.

Scene 2, b, is the story of the madness itself, in the middle scene of the nine in the play, and it extends from 874 to 1025. The story is told twice, once by the men of the chorus, who, we are asked to believe, can see what is happening inside the palace, and then by the messenger, who comes out of the palace and describes in further detail what it is that has happened. In this way Euripides provides two changes of scene and a repetition of the story. He is surely making it clear that the story is the heart of the action of the play. The theme that is stated and restated throughout is the killing of sons by their father, which is central to another theme that has been stated in 1, a, and again in 1, c, the nature of the relationship between fathers and sons and the responsibilities that they bear each other. The scene is also a hideous parody of

1, c, in which the audience heard the sounds of Heracles killing Lycus.

2, c, running from 1025 until 1153, brings another change of scene, as the doors of the palace are opened and Heracles is discovered unconscious bound to a broken pillar. When he was seen last he was a triumphant hero and the alteration is dramatic. This part of the story tells how he regains consciousness and how he must be told by his father what it is that he has done. He is left plunged into total despair as he realizes the depths of his pollution. The first part of this episode is a parallel to the scene in 1, c, when Megara had to tell Heracles of the danger that his family had incurred because he was away on his Labours. Amphitryon has to lead him into sanity and the realization of his crime, and this theme will be repeated at the very end of the play, when Theseus has to lead him into the future. For the moment, however, it is obvious that Heracles, the greatest of men, has to have his actions interpreted to him by someone who seems weaker than he. In this scene also the mourning begins which will continue throughout the play.

The third section of the play is the story of the salvation of Heracles by Theseus, who, through his friendship, is able to convince Heracles that he should continue to live in spite of his terrible burden of guilt. Theseus offers Heracles a home and veneration in Athens and glory after he has died, and Heracles is finally able to accept his humanity and his suffering and

acknowledge Amphitryon as his real father. He gives Amphitryon the task of burying his family and he promises to return and bury him when the time comes that he will have to do it. At the end he leaves, a human being totally dependent on his friend.'

The most stunning reversal in the play is in the role of Heracles. He is a great hero in the first section who appears as a saviour; in the second section his role is that of the murderer of those he thought he had saved. In the third section he is neither a triumphant hero nor a neglectful father but a polluted killer. His head is no longer crowned with the head of the beast he had strangled with his bare hands, but is abjectly bowed and covered with his simple garments. He feels that he must hide from all his fellow beings and even from the sun.

At the beginning of scene 3, a, Heracles is disgraced and his previous glories are completely destroyed. He is, therefore, in the same position that Megara was in at the beginning of the play. The scene begins with the entrance of Theseus, which mirrors exactly the entrance of Heracles at the beginning of 1, c, and it continues until line 1254. On his entrance, Theseus says, at line 1172, "What bodies scattered on the ground?", a reflection of Heracles' own question, "What is this I see? my children before the house?" (527) The earlier welcoming scene between Megara and Heracles (533-561) is played again, but this time it is between Theseus and Amphitryon, and the villain they

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'The theme of the "humanization" of Heracles is emphasized by Arrowsmith in his introduction to the play (44-45).

are discussing is not the tyrant Lycus, but Heracles himself.

Theseus' exhortation to Heracles (1227) that it is courage in a man to bear unflinchingly what heaven sends, is a reflection of Heracles' earlier speech when he told Megara to gather her courage up, tremble no more, and let his garments go (626-7). Just as the weak Megara shows courage in the way she faces death, so does the humbled Heracles show it in the way he faces life.

The great theme that is enunciated in this scene is that the power of love can remove pollution, and that one need no longer fear that pollution might be caught, like an infectious disease. This theme was really the end of a great stage in culture, and the anticipation of a new possibility (not yet achieved) based on the idea of the love of one human being for another. In this scene, too, Heracles shakes his fist at the gods, and, although he is reproved for it by Theseus, it is apparent that he will have to deal with his feelings about the gods before the play is over.

Scene 3, b, is a re-writing of 1, b, the great chorus in which was sung the mythological life of Heracles. When Heracles tells his own life story, beginning at line 1255, it has been transformed. He says, "Let me show you my life, a life not worth living now or ever" (1255-6). While he is working out his new life story, he is also working out the answers to many of the themes that have been raised during the play.



In looking for a cause for his misery, Heracles at first tries to fix on Amphitryon, who killed Electryon and then married his daughter Alcmene. For this he was cursed by having to tolerate the knowledge that Zeus had fathered his son and that Hera was that son's enemy. Just as Amphitryon killed his father-in-law, so Heracles has become a father who killed his sons. In spite of all these ideas he comes to realize that the only fact that is of any importance is that Amphitryon is the father who has loved him, and therefore, he is his only father.

Through his defiance of the gods, Heracles also realizes that the gods who can commit adultery and who punish innocent men unjustly are not the gods that he wants to worship. For him a god must be perfect, and he will not acknowledge the power of "poet's lies" (1346). This speech marks a great change in religious thought, for the reign of the Olympians was nearly over, at least amongst the intellectuals.<sup>2</sup>

The third great issue that is dealt with in this scene is the nature of courage, and Heracles has to face the bitter truth that it is braver for him to keep living than to kill himself. He understands that Megara and Amphitryon were braver in their weakness than he has been with his superhuman strength.

It is at this stage that Theseus offers Heracles a future in Athens, because as a polluted murderer he has no place else to

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<sup>2</sup>When Plato wrote the *Republic* fifty years later, he defined divinity as that which never does evil and always does good (Jaeger 2: 286).

go. Heracles, in his humility, accepts his generosity, and gains the great insight that he must acknowledge "tyche", or chance, and take what comes in life.

The scene ends at 1357. It has been parallel to scene 1, b in structure, in its place in the section, and in its subject matter, and through this parallel it has shown the mythological hero transformed into the suffering human being.

The last scene of the play, which is an epilogue, parallels the first, which was a prologue. This scene, 3, c, properly begins in the middle of Heracles' long speech to Theseus when he turns to his father, asking him to make arrangements for the funeral of the sons. At this point Heracles begins his mourning, as he weeps for his sons, for his wife, and for his father whom he has just acknowledged. He even mourns for his weapons which were his great attributes and with which he killed his family, but realizes that he must take them with him or he will not be able to defend himself against his enemies. Theseus gently persuades him to separate himself from the dead and to come away with him, and in the greatest agony, Heracles manages to do so. He begs his father once again to bury his children, and promises to return and bury him when he dies. He then leaves with Theseus, and is, at the end of the play, totally dependent on him and on his friendship. Amphitryon is the last person left on the stage, just as he was the first to speak at the beginning of the play.

The unity of the play is, in fact, provided by the character of Amphitryon. He is the hinge that holds together the panels, using Kitto's metaphor, and he is on stage from beginning to end with the exception of the murder scene when he is observing the events that are happening, and when his voice is heard off-stage. He is a sympathetic character throughout, for he is courageous, loyal, and hopeful in spite of the most impossible circumstances, and he is never treated fairly by gods or man until the end of the play. He is an old man, and he is truly the father of Heracles for he is the one who has raised him to be what he is, and he has spent a lifetime looking after all the others and is left looking after the funerals at the end. He is surely the character with whom Euripides identifies, for like him, Euripides is now getting old, and it is he who watches over all the characters on the stage. It is really Euripides who is the creator of the human Heracles, the suffering human being.

If we are willing to focus on the mad scene at the heart of the play, the other events gain significance in the movement of themes and characterizations that surround the catastrophe. While Amphitryon, at the beginning of the play looked like a foolish old man for hoping for the best against all common sense, at the end it seems that his optimism was quite justified as Heracles goes to an honourable future in Athens in spite of his dreadful crime. The archaic idea that justice means punishment still evokes some indignation at such an outcome, but Heracles is punished through his suffering and his hope lies in

becoming fully human. In the same way, a city that has gone through a period of madness which no one anticipated may become a better place if it will try to understand its suffering.

If the above outline is reasonable, as I believe it is, it suggests that the play has been carefully constructed rather than the "aberration" that some critics have called it. But in order to gain a fuller understanding and to defend the interpretation three steps must be undertaken; first, to consider it in relation to a better understanding of the period of history in which it was written; second, to relate it to an appreciation of the importance of both Heracles and Theseus to the major cities involved; and finally, in the light of these two steps, to undertake an even more detailed analysis of the play, observing the complexity of structure that is imposed on a multiplicity of themes. The web of ideas expresses a range of relationships between men and their families and their gods, and oppressors and their victims, which illuminates both the end of the fifth century and other periods similarly threatened by madness and war.

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A Greek tragedy, like any other work of art, is written and produced in a particular place at a particular time, and a modern reader must know something about both before he can speculate about intentions of the poet and the mood of the original audience. It is reasonable to expect the feelings that were the outcome of political circumstances to be somehow reflected in the plays, for the Greek theatre, like the Greek citizen, was essentially political in nature.

The festival at which the tragedies were first produced was the largest and most prestigious gathering of the Mediterranean world, and visitors came to Athens for the Great Dionysia to see the plays, and also to conduct business and negotiate treaties. Audiences were 15,000 or more. The plays were partially financed by the state, and partly by wealthy individuals who were singled out by the archons, and the prize that was awarded the poet who won the contest was the greatest honour the city had to offer.

The role of the poet needs some explanation, for the meaning of the word "poet" has become so limited that it does not mean the same thing today that it did in the fifth century B.C. As Werner Jaeger points out, the poet cannot be separated from his community. "The Greek trinity of this period, the poet, the statesman and the sage embodied the highest ideal of leadership" (1: xxvi). This means that he was accorded as much respect

during his lifetime as political leaders or philosophers, and was more important in the transmission of culture. When Socrates was searching for a wise man, he went first to the politicians and then to the poets (Plato, *Apology*). The poet was a playwright, a musician, and a choreographer; he was also a director and trainer of actors. In addition to this, from the evidence given in Aristophanes, it appears that his greatest role was that of a teacher. In the *Frogs*, produced shortly after Euripides' death, there is a competition between Aeschylus and Euripides, and the question is asked, concerning poets, "What skill should the world admire most?" The character "Euripides" replies, "Wit and wisdom and the power to educate the city's host" (1010). The purpose of the competition is to decide which of the poets should be brought from the underworld to save the city that is going down to defeat, and during the debate Aeschylus says, "For just as children have teachers to explain things, men are taught by poets" (1053-4). The point of the comedy is that the poets were responsible for the fate of the city because they were the teachers of its citizens. As Jaeger says, "At this critical juncture, the greatest of all the comic poets once more emphasized the intimate connection between the spirit and future of the state, and the vast responsibility of creative genius to the community" (Jaeger 1: 381).

If the role of the poet was to teach the "city's host", a population for whom "politics" was the essence of humanity (Aristotle, *Politics*), then it is probable that his work bore

some relation to the events of his time.

Godfrey Bord, whose dating of the *Heracles* is the most recent, believes that the play was produced in 416 B.C. (see p.3, Footnote 3). This was the year of the Melian expedition just prior to the Sicilian debate which inaugurated the last phase of the Peloponnesian War. As a play took months to produce, the *Heracles* must have been written sometime before the middle of 417 B.C., probably in the aftermath of the battle of Mantinea, the great Spartan victory which took place in 418 B.C.

Fortunately we have an outside source in Thucydides on which to base our knowledge of those years. Thucydides was ostracized as a result of his activities at the battle of Amphipolis of 424 B.C. and occupied himself by writing the history of the war in which his generals were involved.<sup>1</sup> The *History of the Peloponnesian War* provides most of the background for the period in which the *Heracles* was written.

The Peace of Nicias was signed in 421 B.C. and continued in its own erratic fashion until the Sicilian expedition of 415 B.C. The events of 418 B.C., when the *Heracles* was probably being written, came out of the shifting alliances and power struggles of the previous three years.

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<sup>1</sup>As he says, "It happened, too, that I was banished from my country for twenty years after my command at Amphipolis; I saw what was being done on both sides, particularly on the Peloponnesian side, because of my exile, and this leisure gave me rather exceptional facilities for looking into things" (V, xxvi, 5).

Even a brief overview of the time leaves a strong impression of a loss of reason so universal that it affected all the Greek cities, and so destructive that it was seen by the historian as merely another period of war.<sup>2</sup>

By 421 B.C., Sparta and Athens were both weary of a war that neither was winning. Each side had lost its most aggressive general in the struggle for Amphipolis, an Athenian colony in the northern Aegean, and the Spartan victory had several important repercussions. Amphipolis controlled the gold mines of Mount Pangeion, but it was also in an area that was an important source of timber for the Athenian navy. Its location made it enormously important strategically, for the corn routes to the Black Sea were Athens' most important source of food, and the corn routes were dependent on friendly cities which could guard their path. The loss of the city, therefore, left Athens in danger of being short of gold, timber, and grain. These factors contributed to a general anxiety which expressed itself in the short term by the banishment of Thucydides and in the long term by an agitated search for leaders and allies who could provide security and a return of self confidence.

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<sup>2</sup>Thucydides says, "It would certainly be an error of judgement to consider the interval of the agreement as anything else except a period of war. One has only to look at the facts to see that it is hardly possible to use the word "peace" of a situation in which neither side gave back or received what had been promised; and apart from this there were breaches of the treaty on both sides in connection with the Mantinean and Epidaurian wars, and in other respects, too; the allies in the Thracian are continued hostile as before; and the Boeotians were in a state of truce which had to be renewed every ten days" (V, xxvi, 3). These words were written after the fall of Athens and Thucydides knew how it all ended.



Nicias was the dominant figure in Athens after the death of Cleon at Amphipolis. Nicias was in his fifties and honoured for his military performance. As Thucydides tells the story, he wanted to leave behind a good reputation. He therefore took very few risks, and tried to secure for himself the role of diplomat rather than that of aggressor (V, xvi, 1). Together with King Pleistoanax of Sparta, he negotiated a truce which was intended to last for fifty years. One of the terms of the agreement was that the oaths should be renewed every year by the Spartans going to Athens for the Dionysia and by the Athenians going to Sparta for the Hyacinthia (V, xxiii, 14), a detail that emphasizes the importance of the festivals to the political life of the period.

In the Peloponnese, the position of Sparta was threatened by Argos, a democratic city state. Argos was prosperous, as she had remained neutral during the war, and she set out to form a network of alliances that challenged the authority of Sparta. Her allies included Corinth, the city that controlled western shipping from the Gulf, Elis, the home of the Olympic Games, and Mantinea, at the heart of the Peloponnese. She also allied herself with cities of the Chalcidice, the rugged three-pronged peninsula that stretches into the northern Aegean and dominates the shipping routes. Sparta became, quite justifiably, nervous. Ever since the middle of the sixth century she had dominated a group of alliances which had been known as the Peloponnesian League, and now she saw her authority challenged.

Other events were taking place in the neighbourhood of Thebes. Thebes was the major city of Boeotia, the agricultural area north of the Corinthian Gulf and Mount Citharon. There were a number of small, unwallled cities in the area whose citizens had come inside the walls of Thebes for protection following the outbreak of war in 432 B.C. Thebes increased in size and importance, and during the next decade she increased in power.

Thebes was an oligarchy, but she contained democratic forces which looked towards Athens with some interest while the Archidamian war was in progress. Athens was at that time preoccupied in the Peloponnese, but the Peace of Nicias meant that she might pose a threat to the expansionist Theban oligarchy. It is not difficult to imagine that some form of alliance between Athens and Thebes could be seen by some to be mutually beneficial.

Theban expansion threatened Sparta in 419 B.C. when some neighbouring tribes attacked a Spartan colony called Heracleia which was near Thebes. The Heracleotes sent to Thebes for help and one thousand Thebans marched to their assistance and succeeded in capturing the city for themselves (V, vii, 1). The episode could well have served to suggest the name of Heracles, in his association with Sparta and with Thebes, to the observer in Athens.

Inside Athens the political scene was altered dramatically by the appearance of Alcibiades. He was handsome and wealthy and

he had been raised by Pericles and taught by Socrates. According to Theophrastus, who was quoted by Plutarch, he was also very capable (*Alcib.* x, ii-iii). He had eminent connections both in Sparta and Athens, and, after the Spartan defeat at Sphacteria in 424 B.C., he tried to act as a Spartan agent in the peace negotiations. When he was rejected in favour of Nicias, he turned against the Spartans and threw his influence towards an alliance between Athens and Argos. Thucydides makes it clear that Alcibiades genuinely believed that Athens' best interests were served by an alliance with Argos, although he is equally clear that his dignity had suffered as he saw himself rejected because of his youth (V, xliii, 3). For the following six years he was an implacable foe of Sparta and longed for a war in which he could demonstrate his youthful brilliance.

The young king of Sparta was in a difficult position. He was Agis, the son of King Archidamus, and he had made some bad mistakes. The Spartans appointed ten "advisers" to oversee his actions and he was forbidden to lead the army unless they went with him (V, lxiii, 4). This was humiliating and he needed a decisive victory to restore confidence in his leadership.

During the year 419 B.C. both young men displayed their strength. Alcibiades undertook a march across the Peloponnese with a small force of men, and King Agis led his Spartan army northward but later retreated, ostensibly for religious reasons. Alcibiades went back to Athens, and tension continued to increase throughout the winter.

The following summer, Agis marched north again, this time with an army of 8,000 Spartans, Tegeans, and Arcadians. He was joined by other allies whose forces totalled 18,000 men (Kagan 91). Thucydides said that it was the finest Greek army ever assembled (V, lx, 3), and it joined the battle with the Argives at a place called Mantinea. This was on a high plain which contained two small cities, and nearby there was a sanctuary of Heracles where the Spartan troops camped. In spite of mistakes that were made by Agis and the refusal of two of his captains to obey his orders, the Spartans won the day. The Athenians had sent a small force to support the Argives, and it arrived rather late and under the command of two men who were friends of Nicias and who favoured peace. Surprisingly, Agis allowed the Athenians and the Argives to escape while the Spartans were destroying the Mantineans. Kagan believes it was because he was reluctant to engage Athens in another major conflict (133), but that in spite of this the battle was one of the great turning points of history. Sparta's confidence and reputation were restored (133) and "it was a victory for the principle of oligarchy" (133). He quotes a scholar named Busolt. "(It was) a turning point in the political development of Greece . . . It introduced an oligarchic reaction which after many fluctuations, finally gained dominion in all of Greece" (Busolt, *Griesche Geschichte* quoted in Kagan 133).

Following the battle of Mantinea there was an oligarchic revolution inside Argos and a truce with Sparta which was

supposed to last for fifty years but barely survived the winter.

Back in Athens, the power struggle between Alcibiades and Nicias continued. Alcibiades' reputation had suffered badly over Mantinea, and he wanted to precipitate another battle with Sparta, while Nicias thought they should march north and engage the Spartans in the Chalcidice. They seemed not to agree on anything.

Plutarch tells revealing stories about the two men and their personalities which have echoes in the *Heracles*. He says that, as Nicias lacked the "native excellence and powerful eloquence" of Pericles, he had to find another way of gaining the support of the people. He outspent all his contemporaries and gave the public great festivals and exhibitions. The most outstanding was at the opening of the Temple of Apollo at Delos in 417 B.C. when he staged a magnificent show. He built a bridge of boats from the nearby island of Rheneia to Delos and had it decorated with magnificent tapestries. He then led the chorus himself as they sang and moved forward to the temple. After a day of extravagant sacrifices, choral contests and banquets, he donated a bronze palm and gave the god an expensive piece of land. Plutarch says that the Athenians were impressed by this display, although he himself considers it "vulgar ostentation" (*Nic.* iii-iv). At line 687 of the *Heracles* the chorus sings of the Delian maidens whirling before the temple gates, and this reference has been used as evidence in dating the play. It could either refer to the festival itself or to its preparations which would have been

of great interest in Athens.

Alcibiades responded to this challenge by entering seven teams in the Olympic festival of 416 B.C. He came in first, second, and fourth, (Plu., *Alcib.* xi; Thuc. VI, xvi, 2), and Plutarch says that Euripides wrote an ode in his honour.<sup>3</sup> If this is true, then it is conceivable that Euripides admired Alcibiades, as many others did, for his handsome appearance, his natural ability, and his intelligence.

The conflict between Alcibiades and Nicias came to a head in 416 B.C. when an Athenian named Hyperbolus attempted to ostracize both of them. They were forced to combine forces to escape the danger, and managed to win the vote in the assembly, thereby having Hyperbolus himself ostracized. The point was that the split inside Athens must have been severe to have brought it to such a desperate state (Kagan 145, n. 28; Plu., *Alcib.* xiii).

After this there was little cause for optimism for any Athenian. 416 B.C. was the year of the Athenian invasion of Melos which showed the brutalization that had come to be a part of the heritage of fifteen years of war. After the men were slaughtered and the women and children enslaved, Euripides wrote the *Trojan Women*, which reflected his disillusionment and

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<sup>3</sup>"Thee will I sing, O child of Cleinias;  
A fair thing is victory, but fairest is what no other Hellene  
has achieved,  
To run first, and second, and third in the contest of  
racing-chariots,  
And to come off unwearied, and, wreathed with the olive of Zeus,  
To furnish them for heralds' proclamation."  
(Plu., *Alcib.* xi).

despair. In 415 B.C. the ill-fated Sicilian expedition was launched and the Peace of Nicias was over. Alcibiades escaped a trial for defacing the Herms and went to Sparta, and Athens continued on its path towards defeat.

So much for the bare outline. In a narrative description of events, the historian may see a number of important themes which lead to philosophical and political interpretations which attempt to make some sense out of the confusion of the period.

One of the themes that is common to all the Greek cities during the five year period is the struggle between the democratic and the oligarchic parties, and the constant turmoil that resulted, not only between different classes of citizens, but between different philosophies and methods of government. By and large Athens and Argos were democratic, and Sparta and Thebes were oligarchic, but in each city there was an opposing party or faction. These parties made alliances with parties that were of their own persuasion in other cities, and, depending on the point of view of the observer, this could be interpreted as the advancement of a cause or as disloyalty to the polis. It is possible to see the period as part of an early struggle for democracy which was lost at the Battle of Mantinea and would not be renewed for over two millenia.

Another way of viewing this history is to see it as the outcome of a problem of leadership. In Athens, the power struggle between Nicias and Alcibiades, the old and the young,

seems to have reduced the city's effectiveness, and to have seriously injured the government's ability to make sound judgements. In Sparta, King Agis was insecure and suspected of incompetence by his advisers; it was vitally important for him to secure alliances with other cities and achieve an important victory.

A third interpretation comes from Thucydides himself. He sees the events as the inevitable outcome of an extended period of war which finally destroys the fabric of a society. For the individual, the only important value is self-interest, and this eventually makes it impossible for him to act collectively.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>In the preface to his book, *The Necessities of War*, Peter R. Pouncey says of Thucydides, "The whole of history, past and future alike, is covered by the same explanation. The assumption is that human nature remains relatively constant, and the explanation is that the basic human impulses of aggression, fear, and self-interest direct the course of history at every stage" (xi). He continues, "The pressures or necessities of war (death, disease, siege, immobility, shortage of food, forced levies, etc.) act to undo the solidarity of a society, first testing its alliances and control of its subjects, and ultimately producing civil conflict ("stasis") within itself. Fear and self-interest are still the dominant forces but they are exercised in an ever-narrowing circle; when "stasis" attacks the centre, all collective action is seen to be impossible, and the war is for every man for himself, for his personal survival and his personal advantage" (xii).

Pouncey traces the development of this idea through the *History*, from Thucydides' exploration of the reasons for the rise of conflicts between nations down to his discussion of individuals and their actions. This progression is "pessimistic", defined by Pouncey in the following way: "By pessimism I mean only this - the conviction that human nature carries within itself drives that are destructive of its own achievements, that they are in fact the same drives as those that built historical achievements in the first place, so that in a sense the way up and the way down are the same" (xiii).



There is some truth in all these suggestions, but none of them gives an adequate explanation in itself for the complexity of the play. Other elements that need to be added include the changing philosophical climate, the theological shift away from the Olympian gods, and the influence of the rhetoricians. So much was happening politically, intellectually, and militarily, that it was just as reasonable to say that events came together by chance as to believe that they could be controlled by men. In this way the connection between the history and the play becomes more obvious, and while it is not possible to be certain of the source of Euripides' optimism in the midst of apparent confusion, nevertheless, there are some suggestions that come from a reading of the history.

Euripides may have seen some hope in one or more of the short-lived alliances that occurred with each change of government, and he may even have thought of Alcibiades as a new Theseus who could bring democracy and stability from Athens to the rest of the Greek world. Alcibiades' defection was still in the future, and we know of Euripides' ode in his praise. Euripides could also have seen the Theban attack on Heracleia in 419 B.C. as a "madness" which nevertheless had a favourable outcome for Athens, for it eliminated the Spartan presence in Boeotia and made it seem possible that a more reliable alliance might be formed between Athens and Thebes. Alternatively, he could have seen the battle of Mantinea, the Spartan victory, as a cause for optimism, for Thucydides tells us that Alcibiades

said that the battle exhausted the Spartans and they were not a problem for the following winter (VI, ii, 16).

If Euripides felt hopeful by the time he finished writing the *Heracles*, then it is easy to see how disillusioned he must have felt after the Sicilian expedition and Alcibiades' defection to Sparta, and to believe the story of his own departure from Athens and exile at the court of Archelaus of Macedonia.

We do not know why Euripides chose to write about Heracles but we can discover many reasons why the character might have suggested itself to him. Heracles was visible on at least three famous monuments; the temple of Zeus at Olympia, the Hephaesteion in Athens, and the Athenian Treasury at Delphi. There had been Olympic Games in 420 B.C. and competitors and visitors from Athens must surely have talked about the wonderful sculptures. Heracles' name was given to the Spartan colony that had been raided by the Thebans in 419 B.C., and a sanctuary dedicated to him was the centre of the battleground of Mantinea. In addition to these specific instances, each of the major Greek cities seems to have had special reasons to revere his name, reasons that came from different adaptations of an ancient myth.

CHAPTER IV  
MYTHOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Many authors assume that Heracles is Dorian, and this is a heritage of the reputation and authority of the great German scholar, Wilamowitz. Wilamowitz produced a text and commentary of the play in 1895, and he stated the belief, which he held at this time, that Heracles represented Dorian manhood, and that the play, therefore, had some reference to the Peace of Nicias when Athens and Sparta were comparatively friendly. L.R. Farnell rejected his argument in 1921 when he wrote *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, and showed that Heracles was a pan-Hellenic hero and was offered sacrifices both as a hero and as a god in most places in the Greek world. It is too simplistic an interpretation to say that Heracles represents Sparta and Theseus represents Athens, and it is simply not true that they were "friendly" during the Peace of Nicias.

Walter Burkert has written about the origins of Heracles in *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. He sees close connections between Heracles and a character found in pre-Sargonic Mesopotamia, a man wearing a lion-skin and carrying bow and arrows and a club, and engaged in combat with bulls, lions, snakes, and a seven headed hydra. Burkert identifies this figure as a Master of Animals, that is, a remnant of the pre-historic hunting society (80ff.), and he suggests similarities to the Epic of Gilgamesh in the myth of Heracles.

He also suggests that the Greeks could have known of such a Mesopotamian figure through their contacts with the Hittites in Cilicia. Burkert then goes back further than the Sumerians and posits a link between Heracles and the shamans that are believed to be connected with the cave art of the Upper Paleolithic age, and he makes a connection between the madness of Heracles and shamanistic ecstasy (96).

Martin P. Nilsson is the Swedish scholar who, in 1931, wrote *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, and continued to expand its parameters in the decades that followed. By 1971 he was writing a second revised version of *The Minoan-Mycenean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion*. As G.B. Kirk says, "It is generally believed that Nilsson, in the *Mycenean Origin of Greek Mythology* of 1932, demonstrated this fact of 'Mycenean origin'. Actually he did not do quite that. What he proved, by one of those simple but compelling observations that are so tantalizingly rare in scholarship, is that most Greek myths go back *at least* to the Mycenaean Age, because they are essentially related to cities and power groupings" (218). Kirk believes that many elements of the Heracles myth do come from earlier sources, and he agrees with the resemblances which Burkert noticed between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and Heracles and Theseus.

There are three Greek cities that are important to the play, and a fourth that should be discussed if only because it is mentioned once and a tradition connects it to the others. The play takes place in Thebes, and Heracles' saviour comes from

Athens. Amphytrion, the old father, came from Argos and this is where Heracles has been while performing his Labours. The fourth city is, of course, Sparta. It should be of interest to discover, as far as it is possible, what Heracles meant to each of these cities by the last quarter of the fifth century.

In both Athens and Sparta the tradition and the evidence gained from the study of cults and their worship seem to contradict each other. In Athens, tradition surrounding the destruction of enemies and the establishing of secure forms of government all surround Theseus, but according to Nilsson, Heracles seems to have been more popular from the evidence of vase painting and monuments. The so-called "old Solonion" temple which was the "grandfather" of the Parthenon had pediments which depicted Heracles fighting the Lernian Hydra, and, from what remains in another fragment, Heracles struggling with Triton, son of Poseidon. A monster called Nereus, who has three heads, is looking on. These fragments are interpreted by Angelo Procopiou in *Athens, City of the Gods* as Heracles slaying the old divinities of Mycenae who were monsters. R.J. Hopper comments on the fact that Heracles has little association with the Acropolis that is later than this, but notes that he appears on the temple of Zeus in Olympia in association with Athena. Hopper also comments on the strange absence of Theseus on Athenian pottery, and says, quite rightly, that "Theseus' absence from the Acropolis is odd" (64).

In an interesting parallel, tradition firmly establishes Heracles as the mythical ancestor of both Sparta and Argos, but Lewis Farnell was struck by the fact that there was very little evidence of his cult-record in Sparta, and adds, "Still more singular is the record of the Dorian Argos. Its series of coin-types is one of the richest in the Greek world; but neither the figure nor the head of Heracles appears on it at all till the Roman period" (Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults* 114). These contradictions may, of course, mean nothing, or they may only reflect a lack of evidence; but on the other hand, they may show how much of the "tradition" was created for political purposes. This is the theme of Martin Nilsson's book *Cults, Myths, Oracles and Politics* (1951).

The story of Theseus, which was so important to Athens, is primarily about Bronze Age Greece, and the earliest reference we have to it is in the *Odyssey*. This reference comes from the description of Odysseus' visit to the underworld where he catches a glimpse of Ariadne, the Cretan princess who showed Theseus how to find his way out the labyrinth by unwinding a ball of wool as he went in and following the strands on his way out. For her pains, Ariadne was abandoned, pregnant, on the island of Naxos, when Theseus was on his way home.

After the seventh century, aspects of the Theseus story were frequently portrayed on vase paintings and were the subjects of lyric poems, but the great development of the myth took place much later, during the tyranny of Peisistratus in the latter

part of the sixth century. Evidence for this development is primarily from vases and from the poems of Bacchylides (Connor 38). During this period, he was identified with Peisistratus, the autocrat who brought unity to Athens, controlled her external enemies, and developed her culture and authority. Peisistratus founded the Great Dionysia, the panathenaic festival in honour of Athena, and expanded the mysteries at Eleusis. Shortly after his death another festival was called the *Oschophoria*, and was superimposed on an ancient fertility rite. People gathered at the seashore and enacted the parts of mothers of children being sent to the Minotaur.

After the Persian Wars the character of Theseus changed. The great victory at Marathon was seen as a miracle in which the Greeks must have received superhuman help, and it was not long before stories began to circulate that a mysterious figure had appeared in their midst and had helped in the killing of Persians. This figure was identified as Theseus, for one of his mythological feats had been the killing of a great bull at Marathon.

After the Battle of Marathon, the Athenians remodelled the beautiful little building called the "Athenian Treasury" at Delphi. The Treasury had been built around 500 B.C. of coarse stone, and the metopes were carved with the labours of both Theseus and Heracles and their battles with the Amazons. In the remodelling, fine Parian marble was used, a costly substance to transport to the Athenians in their marvellous victory, and the

Amazons were used as a mythological representation of the Persians.

Miltiades was a famous Athenian general at the battle of Marathon, and his son, Cimon, rose to power in the period following the final defeat of the Persians. Cimon recognized in Theseus the kind of hero with whom he wished to identify, and he greatly enhanced his reputation by bringing back Theseus' bones from the island of Scyros in the northern Aegean. Cimon had been in the area leading an expedition against pirates. When he arrived back in Athens with the bones, there was an outbreak of enthusiasm with processions and celebrations, and another festival in honour of Theseus, the *Theseia*, was added to the calendar. A new building was erected in which to house the bones, a *Theseum* which was to serve as a public meeting place, and it was decorated with paintings of the hero's exploits. Naturally all this enthusiasm was also good for the image of Cimon, for he was frequently reelected and maintained his power in the Delian League for some time. It may be of interest that Cimon's great rival was Themistocles who eventually became exiled on a charge of medizing, and the mythological founder of the family Lycomidae, to which Themistocles belonged, was named Lycus.

Theseus was no longer identified with the autocratic Peisistratids, but was universally regarded as the founder of democracy. The frieze on the Hephaeston (449-444 B.C.) has been interpreted as identifying Theseus with Aristogiton and



Harmodius, the tyrannicides who overthrew the Peisistratids. In any event, by the fourth century, Isocrates, the orator, taught that Theseus had established democracy in an earlier age and that it had been overthrown by Peisistratus. Needless to say his history was not correct, but it did show that Theseus had been completely democratized.

When Pheidias made his marvellous gold and ivory statue of Athena in 438/7 B.C., he carved Athena's shield with the battle against the Amazons, and made Theseus look very much like Pericles. W.R. Connor says, "The use of myth as a prototype and justification for innovation, its function as a repertory of character types and models gave it an extraordinary role in the formation of personality in the age of Classical Athens. But its significance did not stop there. For the artist it provided a means of transcending the usual conventionizations of reality, of breaking down the barrier between present and past, and of revealing the present as the renewal of the past" (170). If Connor is correct, then it is understandable that by 416 B.C., Theseus had become more than an allegory for Athens. He was a figure that represented the ideals that are recorded in Pericles' funeral speech, and the glories that were the outcome of Marathon and Salamis. He was a figure that now would appeal to an Athenian who had suffered humiliation from losses in battle, inadequate leadership, and economic difficulty. In a sense he was the denial of everything that had happened in the last fifteen years.

Euripides was not the only artist who depicted a close relationship between Theseus and Heracles during this period. When Pheidias left Athens after being accused of stealing the gold from the statue of Athena, he went to Elis where he carved the great statue of Zeus in the temple at Olympia. On the stool on which Zeus sat he carved the battle of Theseus and Heracles against the Amazons.

In 1982, Nancy H. Demand published a book called *Thebes in the Fifth Century*, and gave it the sub-title *Heracles Resurgent*. She points out that although Heracles was supposed to have been born in Thebes, he was really only an in-law, as he was the ex-husband of Megara, Creon's daughter (46). In spite of this, he held a special place in the affections of the Theban people, evidenced by the number of shrines and holy places that were connected with his family. There was, for example, the tomb of Amphitryon, and the chamber of Alcmene; there was the tomb of his children by Megara and the stone that was thrown by Athene to prevent him killing Amphitryon. All of these were part of a large temple complex just outside the city which included a temple, gymnasium and race course, and were described by Pausanius in the second century A.D.

The particular appeal of Heracles for the Thebans of the fifth century was the result of the Persian Wars. After the battle of Thermopylae and the stunning Greek defeat, the Thebans made a decision to medize. They fought vigourously for the Persians and were defeated with them at the battle of Plataea in

479 B.C. As a result, the Greek victory which gave to the Athenians such a charge of creative energy had the opposite effect on the Thebans. They were "collaborators" and disgraced among their fellow Greeks, and Athens led an attack on their city and executed their leaders. Thebes faced the monumental task of rebuilding her economy and her reputation when she had lost a great number of her soldiers and her leaders. She was ridiculed throughout Greece, and the racist jokes of the day referred to "dumb Thebans" and Boetian pigs (Demand 3).

For twenty years Thebes was in obscurity, and then around 457 B.C. she appeared again in history, beginning a process through which she would regain control of Boeotia and eventually, territory outside its borders. There is strong evidence in the coinage of the mid-fifth century of an important emotional attachment to Heracles. A whole series of coins depicts the Labours, and he is shown stringing a bow, advancing into combat, carrying off the Delphic tripod after a victory, and strangling the serpent as an infant. Nancy Demand says:

These coins depicting the labors of Heracles seem especially appropriate to evoke the labors which Thebes itself had recently undergone . . . Moreover, the hero was himself an appropriate favorite for the Thebans in another sense as well. He too had erred (even if in madness), and had to carry out labors in recompense for his mistake . . . Perhaps it is also not irrelevant that most of his labors, including the most famous series, resulted from the unjust jealousy and persecution of Hera . . . (of all the medizing cities, the onus seems to have fallen most heavily on Thebes, placed there in large part by the jealousy of Athens) (2-3).

From 457 B.C. until 447 B.C. Thebes was in conflict with Athens and was under her control for most of the time. By 447 however, the Boeotians were dissatisfied with outside rule and, by forming an alliance with each other defeated the Athenians at the battle of Coronea. From this time forward Thebes was able to maintain her position as the leader of the Boeotians and developed a sophisticated federal system which assured her survival.

From the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, Thebes and Sparta cooperated with each other, and it was Thebes' attack on Plataea, an Athenian ally, which formed the first outbreak of hostilities of the war. Sparta came to Thebes assistance, and although it took five years, in 426 B.C. Plataea was destroyed and its citizens put to death. By 424 B.C. Athens was making a three-pronged attack on Boeotia which resulted in the battle of Delion and a decisive defeat at the hands of the Thebans. According to Diodorus, the Thebans were wildly assertive in their victory celebrations, overjoyed in their triumph over the Athenians (XII, lxx, 5). In 423 B.C. they attacked another Boeotian city, Thesbiae, which had showed friendship for Athens and tore down its walls; this left Thebes the only city in Boeotia with fortifications.

At the time of the Peace of Nicias, Thebes rejected the idea of a truce and turned against Sparta for having entered into an agreement with Athens. In 418 the battle over Heracleia in Trachis took place as the Spartan outpost was attacked by

neighbouring cities and "rescued" by Thebes. Once again the name of Heracles was brought to the attention of Athens.

Heracles was the mythical ancestor of both the Argives and the Spartans. A part of the story was told by Euripides in the *Heraclidae* and is generally believed to be connected with the Dorian invasions. A brief summary of real events, as far as they can be reconstructed, and the myths that surround them, is necessary to an understanding of the antagonisms that existed between the two cities.

The Bronze Age fortresses of Mycenae and Tiryns were destroyed sometime in the late thirteenth or early twelfth centuries B.C. The destruction was caused by raiders from the north who were later called Dorians. During the following two hundred years, there were sporadic movements of small groups of peoples which came into the Peloponnese to settle the devastated land. At the same time, there were movements of the original population eastward to the coast of Asia Minor and some of the islands (Tomlinson 59). The Dorian settlers established themselves first at Argos, and then at Sparta and Messenia.

Argos is in the Inachos valley and overlooks the fertile plain called the Argolid which was the important agricultural resource of ancient Mycenae. Mythologically, it was the geographical centre of the Labours of Heracles.

The story of the return of the Heracleidae concerns the fate of the children of Heracles after his death. The king of Tiryns,

Eurystheus, ordered these children banished and they wandered about as refugees until the Athenians took pity on them and allowed them to settle near Marathon. Later, Eurystheus attacked Athens, but the children came to her aid and one of them, Hyllos, killed Eurystheus. They then successfully attacked the Peloponnese but withdrew because they were afraid of a plague. They did not try again for three years.

This time the Achaens and the Ionians who lived in the Peloponnese banded together to oppose the attackers and Hyllos offered to settle the matter by single-handedly fighting one of their champions. He promised that if he lost he would withdraw for one hundred years as Herodotus tells the story; fifty years as Diodorus tells it (Herodotus IX, 26; Diodorus IV, 58, 3). Hyllos lost the battle and withdrew, but one of his brothers Tlepolemos separated from him and made another attack on Argos. He killed the king and was forced into exile. He then went eastward to the island of Rhodes where he founded three important cities.

After the hundred years had passed and the son of Orestes was king of Mycenae, the descendents of the Heracleidae renewed their attack on the Peloponnese. After a few battles and several deaths they succeeded in conquering the territory and then divided it by lot. Temenos gained control of the Argolid; his brother Kesphontes took Messenia; and Prokles and Eurysthenes, sons of a dead brother Aristodemos, won Sparta. This story explains the unusual Spartan political system of having two

kings. It also contains, in the idea of the territory being divided by lots, the basis of a continuing conflict between Argos and Sparta over territorial boundaries.

It must be emphasized as well that some parts of the older civilization did survive along with their Bronze Age mythology. Mycenae, for instance, continued as a weak but independent community until 468 B.C. when it was finally destroyed by Argos.

Around the middle of the eighth century, both Argos and Sparta were strong enough to expand. Both cities had the advantage of a strong Dorian military leadership and a local population which provided craftsmen and agricultural workers. Argos first moved to subjugate Asine, a small city south of the Argolid, and Asine appealed to Sparta for help. This was the beginning of many conflicts for which the evidence is very sparse, but which seem to be the result of the two states starting to move outward at the same time.

By the middle of the fifth century Argos and Sparta had developed different forms of government. Argos was a democracy, which made her sympathetic to Athens, and Sparta was an oligarchy.

To recapitulate, Heracles was regarded as the mythological ancestor of Sparta and Argos through his children, the Heracladae, although there is little evidence of actual cult worship in either city. In Athens, on the other hand, there is considerable evidence of his veneration, but he was deliberately

supplanted by Theseus in the latter part of the sixth century. The place that seems to have given him the greatest honour was fifth century Thebes, for there he was a symbol of past folly and present resurgence. There is no question that some people in Euripides' audience must have associated Heracles with one or other of these cities, but I shall argue that in this play he is intended to represent them all, and that his madness was not a symbol of Greek collaborating with Persian, but of Greek destroying Greek.

We should not forget the greatness of Heracles in our response to his madness, for he was a hero of superhuman ability who had the capability of triumphing over the greatest odds the Greek imagination could devise, including the murder of his own children. For this reason, he is a perfect symbol for the need that some Athenians must have felt during the Peace of Nicias, the need to rebuild the life of the polis by turning from the suffering of the past and triumphing over it.

I shall suggest, in a more detailed analysis of the play, that Euripides had this in mind when he chose the character of Heracles for his protagonist and portrayed him as a suffering human being. The mythological Heracles was a common symbol for the performance of superhuman feats, but the disgraced and polluted Heracles that could lead to further honour for the weary city was an even more apt symbol for the future of Athens.



CHAPTER V  
ANALYSIS OF TEXT

The *Heracles* begins in front of the palace of Heracles at Thebes. The altar of Zeus is in its place in front of the palace, and on its steps are five figures. They are Megara, the wife of Heracles, Amphitryon, his earthly father, and his three young sons. They are suppliants, begging Zeus for protection.<sup>1</sup> Suppliants often seek refuge in temples in the Hellenic world, and Athenians can identify immediately with the plight of the figures on the altar steps.

Amphitryon rises and speaks the prologue. He begins with a proud question. Is there anyone who has not heard of Amphitryon of Argos? He is the man who has shared his wife with Zeus, and therefore shares with him the paternity of Heracles. His pride is impressive, but it is puzzling, for men never take pride in sharing their wives with anyone. It rivets attention immediately with an unspoken question. "How could anyone have tolerated such a position for so long?"

Amphitryon remembers with joy the marriage of Heracles and Megara, the daughter of Creon, and then tells how Heracles has left home to recapture the plain of Argos and "those gigantic walls", undoubtedly the walls of Mycenae, from which Amphitryon

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<sup>1</sup>Bond 61. Godfrey Bond comments on the convention of the suppliant which was used by Aeschylus and Sophocles and overused, he suggests, by Euripides. It was, nevertheless, a convention that must have had an immediate relevance to an audience conditioned by war.

had been exiled because he killed Electryon, the king. Heracles promised Eurystheus, the king of Argos, a "vast price" if he would permit Amphitryon to return. The vast price was no less than "to civilize the world" (21).

Heracles made this promise, Amphitryon says, because he was "mastered by Hera or by necessity" (19). Hera is Heracles' "Enemy". She has been with him since his birth; in mythology it is because he is one of Zeus' bastard sons and this enrages her. She drives him to do inexplicable things; and Amphitryon is posing the question whether it is she who has made Heracles perform the Labours as a punishment, or whether he has done them simply because he thought he must. He thought it his duty to gain for his earthly father the right to return to Argos, and with his extraordinary powers, he simply could not refuse the challenge.

Heracles has now completed all his Labours except the last and the greatest. He has gone down into the underworld to bring back Cerberus, "the triple-bodied dog". Amphitryon says, very simply, "He has not come back" (26). Few have. Then he tells how Lycus has usurped the throne of Thebes and plans to kill the wife and sons of Heracles, and the old father as well. Amphitryon and Megara have vowed to save the lives of the children, and are, therefore, suppliants at the altar of Zeus. Amphitryon is responsible for the children because Heracles has appointed him guardian, and the altar was established by the hero when he conquered Orchomenus, the old rival of Thebes. In a

moving conclusion to his prologue, Amphitryon tells what it is like to be helpless and abandoned:

And of our friends, some prove no friends at all,  
while those still true are powerless to help.  
This is what misfortune means among mankind;  
upon no man who wished me well at all,  
could I wish this acid test of friends might fall. (55-59)

This statement of the problems of friendship in a time of crisis is a theme of the play. When great trouble happens, some friends desert the victim, and others find that there is nothing that they can do; in either case it is a dreadful thing to have to make a choice.

Megara changes the subject as she rises to speak. She tells us that she was the daughter of a man who was wealthy and who had "such power as makes the long spears leap with greed against the proud possessor" (65). This is the first reference to the weapons of war, weapons which seem to have a life of their own and act as though their owners' emotions had become attached to them. She tells of her "glorious marriage" (68) to the greatest hero of the Greek world, and contrasts that happy time to her pitiful condition in the present. She describes her children watching for their father's return, and asks the persistent question, which is to be another theme of the play, "Is there any hope?" (79) Megara is very close to that condition which Dante called "Hell", the profound depression of the hopeless. She looks to her father-in-law for an answer, knowing that he cannot be certain any more than she can.

Amphitryon cannot give up hope for he still loves life. Megara says that the word "hope" includes the idea of possibility and she implies that there is no possibility that they may be rescued. Amphitryon says that she cannot give up, if only for the children's sake; if necessary, she must tell the children stories to keep them calm. Stories, he says, are "those sweet thieves of wretched make-believe" (100). His words become a series of comforting platitudes to which they can cling as he bolsters his argument with his own make-believe. He concludes, bravely, that everything is change and that courage is trusting one's hopes. Cowards are those that despair. He bears out his own words for he is brave even when there is no logical reason for him to be so.

The chorus of old men enters. They are bent over and leaning on their staffs which are a parody of the weapons of the young. They have come to help Amphitryon, another old man, and they help each other as well, just as when they were young they protected their companions in battle. They admire the beautiful children and sing, "O Hellas, Hellas, losing these boys, what allies you lose" (134-6). These boys are Heracleidae, part of the group who are destined to be the ancestors of the Spartans and the Argives.

At this point the tyrant Lycus appears and there is a long confrontation between the two men; the arrogant wielder of raw power and the weak old man clinging to his weapons of courage and dignity. Lycus flaunts his power over Amphitryon and over

Megara, and taunts them for their impotence. He belittles Heracles, who, he says, only fought beasts by catching them with nets and did not strangle them with his bare hands. He says that Heracles is to be despised for carrying a bow, "the cowards weapon" (161), and not a spear as a real man would.

The conflict between Lycus and Amphitryon that follows these insults is, on one level, about weapons and the virtues that are associated with different kinds. On another level it is a battle in which words are weapons, those of Lycus being heavy-handed threats which accompany the abuse of power, and those of Amphitryon the more subtle phrases of argument and rhetoric. When Lycus says that a real man would carry a spear, he means a real Greek. The sword and the spear are the weapons of the Greeks and the bow is considered foreign and remote in time. It has been associated with the Scythians and the Cretans at least as far back as the Trojan Wars, and during the fifth century it is vividly remembered as the weapon of the Persians. The crack Persian troops who were known as the Thousand Immortals were armed with both spears and bows, but their tactics depended on archers who could defeat the enemy at a distance. The Greeks, on the other hand, considered themselves to be fighters with spear and sword, and their traditional battle formation was a tight formation called the phalanx in which each man carried a shield which protected both himself and the man next to him. The Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. has been interpreted as a triumph of

Greek weapons over Persian bows (Cleator 69).<sup>2</sup>

Lycus' speech concludes with a blunt statement. He cannot risk allowing the children to grow up and avenge their grandfather, Cleon's death. He must kill them now.

Amphitryon is still furious over the insults to Heracles, and he leaps to defend him. His speech is long and, at first, emotional, and it is addressed to Heracles. He is angry at Lycus' accusations of cowardice<sup>3</sup>, and he calls on the gods to witness the defense he must make on behalf of his son. He tells how Zeus was with Heracles when he killed the giants with his arrows, and he dares him to ask the centaurs whom they considered the bravest man. He is referring to a conflict between Heracles and the centaurs at Pholoe during which Heracles killed many with his club. He changes direction and attacks Lycus, suggesting that he go back to Euboea where he was born and see if he can find anyone there to say a good word for him.

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<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, in telling the story of Thermopylae says, "the most signal proof of courage was given by the Spartan Dienecis. It is said that before the battle he was told by a native of Trachis that, when the Persians shot their arrows there were so many of them that they hid the sun. Dienecis, however, quite unmoved by the thought of the terrible strength of the Persian army, merely remarked, 'This is pleasant news that the stranger from Trachis brings us: for if the Persians hide the sun, we shall have our battle in the shade'" (Herod. VII, 228).

<sup>3</sup>Such charges could be cause for prosecution in 5th century Athens (Bond 114, l.174).

At line 189 his tone changes as he seems to gain control of himself. He is using a new weapon now, the weapon of argument, as he answers Lycus and his sneering jibes at Heracles' bow. He says that a spearman is a slave, "the slave of his weapons" (190), and is dependent on the protection of his companions on either side, whereas the Bowman always has more arrows left even after a thousand are shot. He can stand at a distance and aim at the enemy, while protecting his own body. He concludes, "This is best in war: to preserve yourself and to hurt your foe" (201-2). Amphitryon's style of warfare sounds rational, almost scientific; it is a long way from "the kings passioned for battle" and Agamemnon's knife held at Iphigenia's throat (*Agamemnon* 228-30). In a sense it is even more sinister, for at least passion provided some kind of justification for the warfare.

Amphitryon continues to fight with words, firing his own arrows at Lycus as he accuses him of cowardice if he kills the boys and says that if Zeus stood for justice Lycus would be the one who would be killed. He asks Lycus to grant them exile and warns him not to use force "lest you suffer it, when god swings round again with a veering wind" (215). He then directs his anger at the ingratitude of Thebes, as he recalls Heracles' efforts in freeing the city from the bondage of Orchomenos, "your Minyan foe" (219). While he is at it he berates all the Greeks who do nothing to help the children in spite of all that Heracles has done for them. Then, in a brief retreat into

self-pity, he sees himself as a "weak old man" (228), "a jawing of words" (229), but this feeling passes quickly. He concludes with a forceful statement of how he would have bloodied Lycus with his spear if he were young again. The speech is that of an old man striking out in all directions with the only weapons he has left, but nevertheless there is wisdom behind its inconsistency, an acknowledgement that force has outlived its usefulness even though man's instinct is still to use it. The chorus comments appropriately that there is a source of speech in all men which is not lost even though it becomes slow, a wry commentary on the garrulousness of age. Did Euripides recognize the symptoms in himself? If not, he had only to look around him for there was a generation of old men in Athens at this time. The younger ones had been cut to pieces by the war.

Lycus sneers at the idea that words are weapons and says that he is a man of action. To prove it he orders his attendants to go to the mountains to get oaken logs and build a funeral pyre. He intends to burn the children alive and allow their grandfather to watch and mourn. He is proud of this idea and says that Amphitryon will know who has won.

The old men of the chorus are enraged and sickened and leap on him with their staffs. They are glorious in their impotence, fighting with their sad old weapons against the young oppressor and his brutality. They hurl words at him, saying that no Theban would ever act as he has done but only a godless stranger; and they defy him with every ounce of their strength. They bring



their defiance to a ringing conclusion, a conclusion that brings it right into the present:

But corrupt with evil schemes  
and civil strife, this city lost its mind;  
for were it sane, it would not live your slave. (272-4)

The city that has lost its mind is the world that Euripides has known, full of "evil schemes and civil strife" (273). Athens and Argos, Sparta and Thebes, and dozens of smaller cities have been torn apart by power struggles, oligarchic revolutions, or democratic counter-revolutions. Like the Thebes of the play, any one of them is in danger of falling to a tyrant like Lycus if sanity does not return.

It is now Megara's turn. It is her boys that are to be burned alive, and she has no hope that they will be saved. Her courage in the face of this torment comes from an older, aristocratic society; "our house and birth demand a better death" (70). She tells Amphitryon that he has been a victor and must not die as a coward,

while my husband needs no witnesses to swear  
he would not want these sons of his to live  
by living cowards. Because it hurts his sons  
disgraces break a man of noble birth; and I must imitate  
my husband here. (290-4)

Her strength is derived from the nobility of her birth, and it will sustain her in spite of her love for her boys and her terror of their death. She has, she says, thought of praying for their banishment, but it would be worse for her to see them beggars than to see them dead. There is an echo here of Spartan mothers who ordered their sons to come home with their shields

or on them. Megara is marvellous as she challenges the old man to face death.

The man who sticks it out against his fate  
shows spirit; but the spirit of a fool.  
No man alive can budge necessity. (309-11)

Her nobility in the face of the inevitable takes the instinct to fight out of the old men and they give in. Amphitryon says, "I am in love, it seems, with what cannot be" (318), and asks Lycus for one favour. He asks that he and Megara be killed first so they will not have to see the boys die and hear their voices calling to them from the flames. He has given up hope.

Megara too asks for one favour, that she be allowed to dress the children in their funeral clothes. Lycus agrees and orders his attendants to open the doors of the palace. His voice is still cruel as he warns that once the children are dressed they must die, but Megara answers with incredible dignity that others now have Heracles' wealth but that she and the children have his name. The name of such a hero is worth more than money or even life itself.

Amphitryon is left alone on the stage and hurls a defiant invocation at Zeus. He seemed to have agreed with Megara when she preached her proud resignation to the forces of necessity, but now it is obvious that such a course went against every one of his instincts. He rages at Zeus for having crept into his bed and fathered Heracles, and then for having abandoned Heracles'

children to such a terrible fate; his final couplet is horrifying in its blasphemy.

What do you know of saving those you love?  
You are a callous god or were born unjust. (346-7)

With this defiant speech, Euripides has brought to an end the first scene of the play. In just under 350 lines he has introduced a group of characters who are victims of an oppressor, and he has revealed that Amphitryon and the absent Heracles are also victims of different gods. He has shown the essentials of Amphitryon's and Megara's personalities and he has given the background to the present crisis. He has then shown how the oppressor and the victims react when they are forced into conflict with each other. In addition he has introduced at least six major themes which are important to the play. They are the need for friendship, the frustrations of old age, the reality of hope, the nature of courage, the virtues of different types of armaments, and, finally, man's alternate need to accept the gods and to defy them. The scene is a brilliant piece of dramatic writing, condensing, as it does, many ideas within a simple structure. It begins and ends with Amphitryon speaking, and contains only a soliloquy by Megara, a conflict between Lycus and Amphitryon, and a larger confrontation among all three.

The chorus remains on the stage and begins to sing an ode which is both a dirge for the dead Heracles and a eulogy praising his deeds and his virtues. It is a formal song modelled

on odes used by Aeschylus (Bond 147, 1.348); and it comprises six stanzas and an epode. It is placed in the very heart of the first section of the play, and thereby divides the section into thirds, just as the whole play is in thirds. The whole story which it develops is the story of the Labours of Heracles, which is extraneous to the main action of the play, but focuses the attention of the audience and chorus on the mythological exploits of the hero. The formality of the structure emphasizes the ritualistic nature of the material; it is a canon of Heracles' exploits which leaps out of the play in thrilling contrast to the depressing story that has just been told.

The song begins by remembering Apollo singing a dirge for Linos, Heracles' music teacher who was killed by the hero in a fit of rage after being reprimanded by him. Like Apollo, the chorus will sing of Heracles, who may be the son of Zeus, or may be the son of Amphitryon, and who has now gone underground. The chorus makes no judgement as to Heracles' paternity; it means only to tell of his exploits.

The mention of Linos brings to mind the brutal nature of Heracles, and hints very briefly that unreasonable violence has been part of his story before now. This is underlined by the tale of his first Labour, the killing of the Nemean lion which he skinned with its own claws and wore over his back with its "awful jaws" (362) on top of his hair. His image is established with his costume of the most violent of beasts, and it is with violence that he will bring other dangerous creatures under the

control of man.

In the first antistrophe<sup>4</sup>, Heracles is in Thessaly fighting the brutal centaurs who ran over the lands of Pelion with huge weapons made of uprooted pine trees. Heracles killed them with his poisoned arrows, superior weapons which gave him a distinct, if unfair, advantage. The point however, made clear by Bond, is that the valley of Peneios was extremely fertile and the centaurs were destroying the crops as they rode unchecked over them (Bond 158, l.368). The killing of the centaurs was, then, another stage in the development of agriculture, and represented the systematic, unquestioning destruction of wild animals which accompanied the planting of crops by man.

After killing the centaurs, Heracles killed a hind that was also ravaging the countryside, and gave her golden horn to the temple of Artemis at Oenoe, on the border between the Argolid and Arcadia in the Peloponnese.<sup>5</sup> The hind is another threat to agriculture; she is a "robber-hind, a ravager" (377). Heracles is again destroying the wild animal to protect man's emerging control of nature.

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<sup>4</sup>Strophe: the movement of the chorus from right to left, the song accompanying this movement. Antistrophe: the movement of the chorus from left to right; the song accompanying this movement and answering the strophe. Both strophe and antistrophe are in the same form and meter.

<sup>5</sup>Bond believes that Euripides has re-written the myth to suit his own purposes but that those purposes are somewhat obscure (158-59). The only hind with horns is the reindeer, and the myth usually has Heracles travel to the Hyperboreans in the far north, but there is no hint of this geography in this play. Bond thinks that the temple of Artemis at Oenoe may have contained some relic which connected the story to the Peloponnese.

The fourth Labour took place in Thrace. It was the taming of the wild mares of Diomedes, and it was a story that Euripides had told in greater detail in the *Alcestis*, in 438 B.C. These mares had never taken the bit or been bridled, and it was Heracles' task to harness them and drive them back to Eurystheus. The mares lived on the flesh of men and their stables were splattered in blood.<sup>6</sup> Similar stories of the breaking of horses are part of the folk-culture of modern North America and may have stretched back several millenia in northern Greece.

After taming the mares, Heracles crossed the Hebros River, which is the geographical boundary of modern Greece, and performed many other labours for Eurystheus. When he returned and reached Mount Pelion, on the Pagasaeon Gulf, he met Cycnus, the brother of Diomedes, "that stranger-slaying monster" (391). Cycnus and Diomedes were sons of Ares, and Cycnus preyed on pilgrims who were going to the temple at Delphi. He used their skulls to build a temple of his own. Heracles brought him down with an arrow, acting as a policeman removing a dangerous brigand who was both an offense to Apollo and a threat to civilization. This was a different kind of Labour which did not involve the suppression of other species, but the protection of a sacred duty of man.

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<sup>6</sup>Charles R. Redman, in *The Rise of Civilization* says that archaeological sites in Argissa, in Thessaly, and Nea-Nikomedeia in Macedonia show that "certain animal species were domesticated there at least as early as they were in the Zagros-Taurus mountain arc, probably indicating an independent centre of early animal domestication in Greece" (173).

The chorus next told how Heracles travelled west to the very limits of the Mediterranean, to the garden of the Hesperides which is generally thought to be located on the northern coast of Africa, just south of Gibraltar, where the Atlas Mountains reach a height of 15,000 feet (Bond 165, 1.394-9). On his way there he went under the sea and calmed it, just as he had calmed the horses, bringing natural element under control. The garden belonged to Hera, and in it was a golden apple tree which had been a gift of Mother Earth. Hera had given the Hesperides, who were daughters of Atlas, the task of guarding the golden apples, but she discovered that they were stealing them instead, and so she placed a dragon under the tree as an effective deterrant. Atlas was holding up the sky when Heracles arrived, and Heracles offered to take on the task for him if he would bring him the golden apples. He first shot the dragon, and then bent under the sky to hold it for Atlas, a task which was vividly commemorated by the statue on the temple of Zeus at Olympia. Atlas brought back the golden apples and asked Heracles to bear his burden for him a little longer, but Heracles asked for a minute in which to put a pad on his head, and when Atlas was back in position again he left him there (Graves 2:133:a-e).

This, however, is not the way Euripides tells the story. He picks highlights, and strings them together in a random fashion. Heracles is in the garden; he picks the fruit; he shoots the dragon; he calms the sea; he holds up the heavens. There is no reason given for any of these events, nor is any one the cause

of the others. The audience must know some version of this tale and not need to have the details filled in, yet the five disjointed images bring alive the whole effect of superhuman strength that accomplishes the impossible. The stanza is a microcosm of the structure of the play; that is, random scenes are placed side by side, and their juxtaposition intensifies the effect. The incidents are from the sixth, seventh, and eighth Labours of Heracles, some of the most famous. They show man central to the rest of nature; supporting the heavens, calming the seas, and picking the apples which signify immortality (Bond 366, l.394).

In the third strophe, the chorus tells of Heracles' battle with the Amazons when he gathered a Hellenic army together to capture the girdle of the Amazonian queen. He passed through "the swelling sea of black" (409) which is today known as the Black Sea. This Labour was evidently very popular for it was depicted on the throne of Zeus at Olympia, on the shield of Athena in the Parthenon, and on the treasury of the Athenians at Delphi. It surely represents the battle of men against women, for the Amazons were the epitome of female aggression, and the heroes defeated them. They gained the girdle of the queen, and the chorus says that it is at Mycenae (419).

The tenth Labour is the destruction of the thousand-headed hydra which lives at Lerna, south of Argos in the Peloponnese. The Hydra barred the way from Argos, and could not be killed, for every time one of its heads was cut off another grew in its



place. Heracles discovered that, by cauterizing the stump, he could prevent the new head from growing, and eventually killed the monster, an aberration of nature like the three-bodied Geryon who lived in southern Spain. The Geryon's conquest formed the eleventh Labour, for Heracles killed him, in order that he could steal his fine cattle and bring them back to Mycenae. Cattle were introduced into Greece at a relatively late date, for there were few plains where they could be allowed sufficient grazing room; the Argive plain was one and its cattle contributed to the prosperity of Mycenae. The eleventh Labour sounds like a memory of the time when the first cattle were imported, and it also seems to have been the most popular Labour. As Bond says, "it was given six metopes in the Athenian Treasury at Delphi and two in the Hephaesteum" (174, 1.423).

The last Labour, sung in the third antistrophe, does not take place in this world at all, but in the underworld where Heracles must challenge Death himself. The very mention of the word reminds the chorus of the poor children who are awaiting "Charon's ferry" (431).

The mythological Heracles has been man at the centre of the universe. He has defeated wild beasts who have threatened civilized man's crops; he has tamed other beasts who have never before fallen under the rule of a fellow creature; he has controlled the sea and has held up the heavens; and he has destroyed monsters who have victimized mankind. Now he has challenged Death. This Heracles is a personification of man's

cultural and social evolution from the hunting and gathering period to the last ten years of the Greek city state. With all its marvels, civilization has cost individuals dearly, and Euripides will bring the theme forward again in his last play when the chorus of the *Bacchae* sings,

unwise are those who aspire,  
who outrange the limits of man.  
Briefly we live. Briefly  
then die. Wherefore, I say  
he who hunts a glory, he who tracks  
some boundless, superhuman dream,  
may lose his harvest here and now  
and garner death. Such men are mad,  
their counsels evil. (396-401)

The chorus of old men in the *Heracles* suddenly return to the present and think of the plight of the innocent.

Could I have my youth once more,  
could I shake my spear once more,  
beside the comrades of my youth,  
my courage now would champion  
your sons. But youth comes back no more  
that blest me once. (436-41)

This return of the old men to the real world is a signal to Megara to come out of the palace "drawing her sons behind her as she comes" (445-6). This is the first use of an image which will be repeated twice during the play. The parent is like a large boat which has little boats tied on behind, and the little ones depend on the energy of the large one to determine where they will go and what they will do. The old man is with them too and they are dressed in grave clothes. It is a heartbreaking sight.

Megara speaks first. She sees herself as a sacrificial victim, and dramatizes the position of herself and the children

as she reflects bitterly on the incongruity between her hopes for her children and the reality of her present position. To the first child she says that his father would have left him Argos, and then she remembers how sometimes in play, Heracles threw over the child the same lionskin that he wore over his own head. This was his crown and he was dreaming of passing on his role to his son. To the second son she says that his father would have made him king of Thebes, and that he would have willed him the club that he always carried. To the third she says that he would have been given Oechalia, which Heracles ravaged with his arrows. She then goes on to dream about the marriages she had planned for the little boys; she had thought of brides from Athens, Thebes, and Sparta. Megara had hoped for some unification of the Greek city states in the persons of her sons, but these hopes were all "might have beens" that were dashed because of the oppression of Lycus. She ends with an appeal to her "dearest Heracles" (489) to come back from Hades and rescue his family, an appeal which is an echo of all the widows who have not accepted the reality of their husbands' deaths. She calls to him to come back to save her, to save the children, and to save his old father. She finishes by bravely turning on her destroyer and calling him a coward.

Amphitryon now speaks, and everyone believes that it is for the last time. He praises Megara for sending her prayers to Hades, but says that, for himself, he is sending his prayers upward. He is calling on Zeus, not in rage or defiance, but with

resignation and acceptance, as he says, "Death is on us like necessity" (502). He develops this idea in a beautiful song about the passage of time:

Our lives, old friends, are but a little while  
so let them run as sweetly as you can,  
and give no thought to grief from day to day,  
for time is not concerned to keep our hopes,  
but hurries on its business and is gone. (503-6)

He is praying for the minimum that life can offer in a period of disaster, the absence of pain; and survival, one day at a time. It is a brave old man's prayer; an old man who does not ask for miracles, but for a fair share of good fortune.<sup>7</sup> Amphitryon knows that he once had a great reputation, but "fortune in one day has snatched it from me as though from a feather" (510). He concludes with a moving farewell to all his old friends:

"Friends of my youth, farewell,/ You look your last on him who loved you well" (512-3). The speech has been beautifully orchestrated, working towards a conclusion that is rich in emotion and dignity. In fact, the whole scene has been constructed to keep the people in the audience intent on his words, and identifying with him to the extent that they are not watching the entrance ramp on the other side of the orchestra. Amphitryon's predicament is made to seem theirs so long as the possibility of war remains in Greece.

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<sup>7</sup>Others besides Euripides were expressing the same kinds of ideas in the fifth century; Aeschylus had said much the same thing in the *Persians* (Aes., *Per.* 1.840); Pindar had used the idea (*Isth.*, and Gorgias, the philosopher, has repeated it (*Hel.* fr.11.8,10). Much later, the same thoughts would be passed through the Christian tradition by the authors of Luke and Matthew in the *Lord's Prayer* (Bond 195, 1.503-5).

This is the end of the second scene of the first section, and in less than 200 lines Euripides has given the highlights of the complicated mythology of Heracles which stretches back at least to the beginnings of agriculture in the Near East, and he has shown the dignity and beauty of Megara and Amphitryon as they bow to the inevitable and face death, becoming idealized examples of heroic excellence. The scene has covered past, present, and future, for Megara's dreams for her sons show what the future might have contained without the violence that intervened. Heracles has been placed at a great distance, both in time and geography, and also in the distance that is death; emotionally, he is as far away as it is possible to be. When Megara cries to him for help, it seems as impossible that he should reply as it does that Zeus should answer Amphitryon's prayer after he has been so openly defied. The chorus has repeated the theme of the frustrations of old age to which they return in each of the first three scenes; but the position of Amphitryon has been reversed, for he no longer clings to an impossible hope, but bows to "tyche", fortune. The mood is hopeless, but the victims are courageous. There seems to be no possibility of help. This makes the beginning of the next scene particularly thrilling.

Suddenly, dramatically, Heracles appears in the distance.

Megara responds. "Look Father! Can it be?" (514), and the old man replies that he does not dare to say. Amphitryon, who has hoped, against all hope, cannot believe rescue when it

finally comes within his sight. The poet has created a dramatic moment to cause the audience to draw a collective breath as it stares in disbelief; everyone recognizes the familiar figure with the lionskin over his back and the bow and arrows in his hand.

Megara's voice peals out as she calls to the children to welcome their father, and the family is united at the very moment that it is prepared to meet its doom. It is one of the coincidences that Euripides does so very well, a coincidence that underlines the force of fate and the accidents in life, or, on the stage, the coincidence that brings events together at the last possible moment and saves them from what seems to be inevitable. The sense of relief that spreads from Megara to the old man, and then to the children, reaches the audience as it watches the joyful reunion and identifies with Heracles as he absorbs the idea of his children in funeral clothes, his father weeping, and his wife surrounded by a chorus of old men. Everyone is thankful that the superhuman force has arrived and is going to solve the horrible predicament.

Quickly, in one lined exchange of speech (stichomythia)<sup>8</sup> Megara tells Heracles what it is that has happened. Heracles asks first if it was a revolution or a civil war. Both are familiar to the Athenian audience, as Greek has fought Greek, and as oligarch has fought democrat. The dreadful possibility is

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<sup>8</sup>Stichomythia: alternate question and answer, each taking an entire line (Pickard-Cambridge 159).

that either can result in oppression (543).

Heracles' response is to reassure his children and to tell them to take their grave wreaths off, and then he thinks about his revenge, which is to shoot everyone who has been disloyal to him. With a sudden display of insight he realizes that he was wrong in performing the Labours and neglecting his family, and he rejects the title "Heracles the victor." The chorus agrees. "This is right, that a man defend his sons, / his aged father, and his wedded wife" (583-4). Heracles is taking a step away from his mythological role and is starting to become a human being with a family and a community. At the moment he is caught between his exploits and his responsibilities.

Amphitryon now makes a speech that is similar to one that is part of Thucydides' story of the Sicilian debate of 416 B.C. It is possible that Thucydides could have been influenced by Euripides, but it is more likely that both were describing a familiar and disturbing situation. Amphitryon's speech, in the dramatic context, is a warning to Heracles to be cautious.

The king has henchmen, a mob of needy men  
who pass themselves off for men of wealth.  
These men, their substance drained away by sloth  
and spending, have prompted civil strife  
and wretched the state to mulct their neighbours. (588-92)

Thucydides' version is a description of Alcibiades. "He wants to be admired for the horses he keeps, and because these things are expensive, he hopes to make some profit out of his appointment. Beware of him too and do not give him the

chance of endangering the state in order to live a brilliant life of his own. Remember that with such people mal-administration of public affairs goes with personal extravagance" (VI, xii, 2). The young men of Athens were Alciabiades' henchmen, and they were pressuring the state for a continuation of the war. Old men, represented by Nicias, could see only folly in such a policy. Thucydides is describing a situation that exists around the time that the audience is first seeing the play, and it is difficult to believe that Amphitryon's message would not be clearly understood.

Amphitryon continues to advise Heracles to be cautious, and although it goes against his nature Heracles agrees, and decides to take his father's advice and go first to greet his household gods. Before he can leave, however, the old man begins a series of questions that are typically paternal and prevent Heracles from going anywhere. There is a touch of humour in the father who wants to know where his son has been, why he has taken so long, and if it is really true that he has been to Hades. Heracles answers patiently and says that he has brought back Cerberus, "the triple-headed dog" (611), and that he was able to subdue him because he had been fortunate and had seen the mysteries.<sup>9</sup> Amphitryon asks him where the monster is now, and he answers that he has left him at Hermione, a city near Troezen. In response to the question why he has delayed so long in Hades,

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<sup>9</sup> This statement is a reference to a story that is told both by Appolodorus (*Bibl.* 2.5.12) and Diodorus (4.25.1) that Heracles was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries before he went down into Hades.



he replies that he had to save Theseus, who has gone to Athens, "rejoicing to be free" (621). This conversation serves several purposes; it completes the story of the final Labour of Heracles which the chorus began, and it introduces the idea that ~~Theseus~~ Theseus is alive and owes Heracles a great favour.<sup>10</sup> The exchange serves to reduce the mood of the play to a conversational level and to provide a brief feeling of relief before the terror that is to come.

A touching little scene follows as Heracles turns to his children and his wife. They have begun to cry with relief after their great show of bravery when they thought they were going to be killed by Lycus, and now they are clinging desperately to their father's clothes. He urges them to let go but they can only clutch him tighter, and so he puts down his bow and his club and takes them by their hands. In a tender speech which repeats the image Megara used at 445-6, Heracles says,

Here, I'll take your hands and lead you in my wake,  
like a ship that tows its little boats behind,  
for I accept this care and service  
of my sons. (631-4)

Heracles is at last shouldering his responsibility to protect his children. He left it to his wife and his old father when he went off to his Labours.

The first audience probably knew that his responsibility was going to collapse in a hideous way, for fragmentary evidence indicates that the tradition of madness in Heracles was much

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<sup>10</sup>Godfrey Bond sees in this passage evidence of Euripides' interest in myth (217, 1.612).

older than Euripides.<sup>11</sup> If the audience did know what was to happen, and everyone did after the first production, then this scene is increased in its emotional impact because of the dramatic irony that it contains. However, at this moment, Megara and the children are weak with relief, and Heracles, as always, is confident. He finishes his speech with a commentary on the equality of man, for it occurs to him that everyone, rich or poor, is equal in the love that he bears for his children.

In this way, Euripides introduces a theme that seems to concern him greatly, for he brings it into other late plays.<sup>12</sup> It is true that the principle of equality is contained in the idea of democracy, but it is also true that even in democracies men are not equal. The observation of this paradox is a threat to the political system. During the Peace of Nicias, the struggles between the democrats and the oligarchs were becoming more intense as democracy was disappearing from the Greek experience, and now Euripides is searching for ways in which he can justify a failing political system by demonstrating an essential equality between men.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The fragmentary evidence that is available in the *Cypris*, and in Stesichorus indicates that there is some older tradition of madness, (Bond intro. xxviii) and many argue that the Labours followed the madness as a punishment (Bond xxix).

<sup>12</sup>In the *Bacchae*, for instance, both rich and poor have the "simple gift of wine" (421-2), and in the *Electra*, Orestes says, "How then, can man distinguish man? What test can he use? The test of wealth? . . . of poverty? . . . nerve in war?" (373-6).

<sup>13</sup>The problem of equality continued to occupy the thoughts of the philosophers. Aristotle, writing in the fourth century addressed the problem. "If there is any one individual (or any group of more than one but not enough to provide the compliment

Heracles leaves the orchestra, followed, just as he has said, by his little boats, the children, Megara, and Amphitryon.

This part of the scene, from the return of Heracles to the exit of the family is a "homecoming" story, a "nostos"; a traditional part of Greek literature at least as old as the *Odyssey*. The model is simple, for in all these stories the hero has been gone a long time and in the interval his family has been gravely threatened. He arrives home just in time to save them all and to be restored to his position as king. Until this point in the *Heracles*, the action follows the model, but in the scene to come there is to be a terrible twist which explodes the predictability of the traditional outcome. However, for the moment, the audience and the chorus can relax with the feeling of security that the homecoming of Heracles has given thus far, and the chorus sings a hymn in his praise.

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<sup>13</sup>(cont'd) of a city) who so stands out from the rest by superiority in virtue and that the virtue and political capacity of all the rest put together is not comparable to theirs - such members should no longer be reckoned as members of a city. They will be suffering an injustice in being judged worthy only of equal treatment. . . They are a law unto themselves.

"It is for this reason that cities democratically ruled set up the institution of ostracism.. They aim most of all at universal equality, so that they used to ostracize and remove from the city for a certain period those who seemed to excel through wealth or number of friends or any other source of political strength. Mythology tells that the Argonauts left Heracles behind for a similar reason. The Argo did not want to take him along with the rest because he so far excelled all the other passengers" (*Politics* viii). It should be noted that Aristotle did not agree with this position, for he added that in his ideal state, a man of outstanding virtue would be accepted as a ruler.

They begin by deploring their own old age once again, and wishing for the loveliness of youth. They are angry at being old; age is "ugly, murderous" (649-50), "Let the wind whirl it away forever!" (653) In their anger they propose to reconstruct nature itself. If the gods were wise, they say, they would make second youth the prize for man's good behaviour, and bad men would only live once. This would give men a way in which they could tell the good from the bad; as it is now we can never be sure of anything except a man's wealth. In their frustration they have defied the gods and nature and all of society, but once rid of these feelings, they say they will continue to sing to Memory first of all, to the gift of wine, to the flute, and to the lyre. "Never shall I cease from this, Muses with the Graces joining. . . I may not live without the Muses" (673-6). Even if poets are getting old, they will continue to be poets.

In the second antistrophe, the chorus compares its song to the paeans to Apollo sung by the maidens at the Delian festival. Like these maidens, they are singing to a hero, Heracles, who is renowned for his strength and for his conquest of the beasts. This verse is an important historical reference, for it gives support to the date of 416 B.C. which Bond has assigned to the play.<sup>14</sup> Thucydides described the events in the eighth chapter of his third book. The Athenians built a temple to Apollo,

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<sup>14</sup> In 426/5 B.C., the Athenians had carried out the purification of the island of Delos, and had reinstated the ancient Ionian festival. They meant by purification the removal of all dead bodies, and they issued an edict that no one should henceforth ever be born or die there. This edict is again enforced.

restocked the lake with swans, and added horse races. In 417 B.C., Nicias dedicated the whole festival with glorious ceremonies which he himself paid for (Plu., *Nic.* iii-iv). There is some evidence that Euripides may have been connected with the Delian Apollo as a boy (Bond 241), but the festivities of 417 B.C. must have been well publicized in Athens as their purpose was to impress everyone who could vote. The reference in the *Heracles* would provide a bright and current image of good fortune.

After this chorus Lycus enters and there is a deliciously ironic exchange between him and the old man Amphitryon who has just come out of the palace. Amphitryon pretends that he believes that they are all in danger, and there is no question as to his happiness when he sees the unpleasant Lycus go in to the palace to begin the murders. He speaks of justice and his certainty that evil will be returned to Lycus for his dreadful crime. He turns to his old friends, the men of the chorus, and says, "This is sweet, to see your foe perish and pay to justice all he owes" (732-3).<sup>15</sup> Amphitryon's statement is meaningful.

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<sup>15</sup>"Dike" or justice was the firm base of government for which the Greeks had been searching since the time of Hesiod (Jaeger 1: 140). The struggle to find the best form of government had gone on through the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries, and the first literary record of the search was in Hesiod. Hesiod made "Dike" divine, the daughter of Zeus who sat on his right hand and watched for injustices amongst men so that Zeus might punish them (*Works and Days* 274). Solon took over these ideas which had been widely disseminated amongst the Ionian Greeks, and as Werner Jaeger says, "He never tired of proclaiming that it is impossible to ignore the power of "Dike" because it is always victorious in the end. Sooner or later punishment comes, and man's "hybris" must pay the penalty for overstepping the bounds set by justice" (140, quoting Solon frag.1,8). The punishment

"Dike" is on the side of the victim when the oppressor is vanquished, and it is right that this is so, for if it were not, the state would be a despotism in the sense that it had been when Lycus was in power.

As Lycus goes in to fetch his victims, he is the only one who does not know that Heracles awaits him inside. The irony in his position increases the excitement, and the chorus sings in joy. "Disaster is reversed!" (734) "Justice flows back!" (736) "Joy once more! Overboard with grief! The king has come again!" (742-3)

Lycus' first cry is heard, and the response is instant, so that there is a double response, the audience's imagination which pictures the events which are happening in the palace, and the words of the men of the chorus who picture the same events and respond to them as victims always respond to the defeat of the aggressor. We also respond to the chorus, knowing in our hearts that their delight in vengeance is more than justice, but that it is our delight, and is perfectly justified.

Contained within the joy of the chorus is the idea that the gods must be strong if "they raise the good and scourge the bad" (773-4), and that the response of the people of the community must be wild elation, to dance and to sing, for vengeance will

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<sup>15</sup>(cont'd) that Solon saw from "Dike" was not the pestilence and pollution that Hesiod described (*Works and Days* 213ff.) but "a disturbance of the social organism" (Solon frag.3,17), and "party feuds and civil war" (frag. 3,28). The class conflicts that continued all through the period following the seventh century included the battlecry "Dike!" (Jaeger 1:102).

be carried out. They call on the river, and the streets, and the mountain crags, all to celebrate the joy of revenge, and they sing in praise of the marriage bed of Alcmene which produced such a marvellous offspring as Heracles. Their last ringing stanza ends the last of the three scenes of the first action. With this joyful and vicious song it completes the story of the victimization of Megara and her children, the Labours of Heracles, and the homecoming of the great saviour. The end of the chorus leaves everyone hanging, for a moment, on a wave of euphoria.

This has been a complicated scene, the third of the first section. The first part of it is a "homecoming", with all the expectations which that idea brings both to a late fifth century audience and to a modern one. Within that framework, the poet has reintroduced the theme of old age and its frustrations, and he has repeated the idea of the responsibility that fathers have to sons, and that sons have to fathers. He has introduced the abstract ideas of "justice" and "equality", and he has raised the question as to whether vengeance is the justice of the gods. By the end of the scene, there seems to be no doubt that the gods do exist, and that Zeus is the father of Heracles, for the traditional past seems to be contained within the triumphant present.

At the moment when the euphoria of the chorus and the audience is at its peak, a dreadful sight is presented to both. A black chariot has appeared on the roof of the palace, and a

figure with a ghastly gorgon face and a goad is seated within it. The figure is Madness. On the other side of the roof another figure has appeared and is identified as Iris, the messenger of Hera.

This short scene of just sixty lines has its own setting, its own character, and is complete in itself. By the simple device of making the audience raise its eyes to the roof, the poet achieves a feeling of having moved everyone into another dimension, the world of myth. In this world, Hera is an enemy of Heracles merely because he exists; even Madness realizes that the punishment she must deliver is unjust. The morality of Madness is human, but the morality of Hera is that of a primitive goddess one could fear, but neither respect nor love. Before the play is over, the question will be raised whether one should worship her.

The theme of vengeance which seems appalling coming from the goddess is contrasted with the vengeance which was so glorious at the end of the previous scene. Human instinct delights in revenge as a response to injury, but when the poet shows it as an attribute of a goddess with unlimited power, it is revealed as the primitive response it really is. It is the response which has kept the cities of Greece at war for fifteen years.

When the chorus sees the figures on the roof it becomes terrified and screams for help. The old men trip over each other in their panic.



Iris tells them to be calm, for she does not intend to bring any harm to the city but is only carrying out Hera's vengeance against Heracles. As long as Heracles had been performing the Labours, Zeus protected him from Hera, but that protection has now been lifted. Hera's plan is to send Heracles mad and make him destroy his sons, and it is Iris' task to see that this plan is carried through. She commands Madness, "unmarried child of blackest Night" (834), to "harden her heart, send madness on this man, confound his mind and make him kill his sons. Madden his feet; drive him, goad him, shake out the sails of death . . . Let him learn what Hera's anger is" (835-840). She adds, "For the gods are nothing if this one man escape" (841-2). It is clear that whatever the gods are, they have a primitive concept of justice if this can happen to Heracles.

The speech by Iris is, in fact, a prologue, for it opens the second section of the play and sets the stage for an entirely new action. It also gives a reason why Hera has not been able to revenge herself against Heracles before now. Madness protests her orders, for, she says, she does not like to visit men that she loves. She warns Iris that Heracles is very famous both on earth and sea, and he defended the honour of the gods when evil men threatened them. However, Iris is implacable, and Madness, still protesting, is forced to comply with her orders.

Her action is swift. She is quicker than an earthquake or a crack of thunder, and wilder than the ocean's waves. She describes the effects of her attack.

Look: already head writhing, he leaps to the  
starving-post;  
jumps and now stops; his eyeballs bulge, and pupils  
roll;  
his breath comes heaving up, a bull about to charge!  
And now he bellows up the horrid fates from hell.  
(867-70)

She tells Iris to go back to Olympus while she goes into the house of Heracles. Both figures disappear, and a peculiar wailing flute is heard throughout the theatre.

The story of the madness of Heracles is structurally, dramatically, and thematically, the very centre of the play. Structurally, it is the second scene of the second section, for exactly the same number of scenes come before and after. Dramatically, it is the centre because all the action turns at this point, and it is here that the audience experiences its most intense feelings. Thematically, it is at the centre, because it renders meaningless the mythological and narrative events of the first section, and it makes essential a new interpretation of life and a new basis for living that is found in the third section of the play. The madness is central to the theme because the mad Heracles is one of three characters called "Heracles". He separates the mythological hero from the suffering man, and is the link that transforms one into the other.

None of the horrors occurs on stage, which is, of course, consistent with the tradition of Greek tragedy. They are made increasingly vivid by being described three times; first, in a few lines of Iris as she is departing at the end of the previous

scene; second, through the responses of the chorus who can see what is happening inside the palace; and finally, by the messenger who reports the whole episode in ghastly detail.

It is safe to assume that Euripides must have observed madness with considerable interest and a keen observer's eye for detail. He wrote "mad scenes" in the *Hippolytus*, in *Medea*, and in the *Bacchae*, all of which come out of different situations and have the ring of truth (see Appendix).

The story of the madness is begun by the chorus, who, we must believe, can "see" what is happening inside the palace. Their song of horror is interspersed with cries that come from inside. The sound is antiphonal, a chorus highlighted by the agony of Amphitryon, the viewer who is inside.

The chorus says, in a cry to Zeus, that his son has lost his own sons, and Amphitryon responds, "O my house!" (892) The chorus sees the dance, a dance without a thyrsos, a dance of murder, and another call comes from Amphitryon, "O my home!" (893) The chorus then sees Madness calling for blood, and Amphitryon calls to the children to fly, and then the chorus sees the terrible picture of Heracles hunting his children down. They end in terrible grief for the mother and for the old man, and then they alert everyone to the earthquake that is destroying the house, bringing down the roof, and reducing it to ruin.

At this point a messenger appears. He tells the story again, this time in terrible detail. This is the third telling, and each one has increased in intensity, underlining the horror which is absorbed by the spectators. The messenger gives the chorus the confirmation that they are waiting for; the children are dead. The chorus asks how it happened, and he begins his long speech describing the scene.

At first, Heracles, after he had killed Lycus, began to purify himself. As the messenger says,

Offerings to Zeus were set before the hearth,  
to purify the house, for Heracles  
had cast the body of the king outside. (922-4)

Lycus was disposed of in an appropriate way, for his body was thrown to the dogs. However, the house had to be purified because of his murder, and Heracles began a ritual sacrifice. The family gathered in a circle around the hearth, the children in "a lovely cluster" (925). The basket and the knife were passed around the circle, and then Heracles reached for a torch to dip it in the water.

These are all the details of the ritual that are given in this play, and the audience would need no further explanation. We, who do, can reconstruct the scene by referring to a sacrifice in Euripides' *Electra*, 784-813, and to another in Aristophanes' *Peace*, 922-1038. In *Peace*, the victim is a lamb, and the torch is dipped in water and shaken over it to make it shake its head in assent. After this, the sacrificer washes his hands in the water and sprinkles it over everyone who is

present. The basket contains barley grain which is also sprinkled over victim and participants. In the *Electra*, the victim is a calf, and the sacrificer is Aegisthus.

Some brought the lustral bowl and baskets of holy grain, some laid and lit the fire or around the hearth set up the sacred ewers - the whole roof rang with sound.

Your mother's lover took the barley in his hands  
And cast it on the altar....

...Aegisthus raised  
the narrow knife from the basket, cut the calf's front  
lock,  
with his right hand dedicated it to the holy fire,  
and, as his servants hoisted the beast upon their  
shoulders,  
slashed its throat. (800-813)

Heracles, then, was going to sprinkle the victim and his family with lustral water, but he stopped and stood motionless.

Suddenly he changed:  
his eyes rolled and bulged from their sockets,  
and the veins stood out, gorged with blood, and froth  
began to trickle down his bearded chin. (931-4)

He laughed crazily and began to speak. Why should he purify the house, he asked, before he had finished his work and killed Eurystheus? He would cut off his head and put it with the other corpse before he performed the ritual. He ordered his weapons to be brought to him as well as crowbars and picks, which he needed to tear down the Cyclopien walls of Mycenae. He imagined that he saw his chariot in the room, and he made a great show of jumping into it and riding off, prodding his horses with a goad.

The servants did not know whether the pantomime was a joke or whether it was serious, and they asked each other whether the master was really mad. It soon became clear that he was truly demented, for he pretended that he was driving his chariot

through the countryside, and then he stopped to have a feast on the ground, stopped to wrestle with an unseen foe and crowned himself the victor. When he thought that he had arrived at Mycenae and challenged Eurystheus, Amphitryon tried to stop him, and asked if the blood of all those that he had killed had made him mad. This triggered a response in Heracles in which he thought that Amphitryon was Eurystheus' father and that his own children were Eurystheus' children. He decided to kill them all, and started to aim his arrows at the children who ran from him in their panic and tried to hide.

Megara screamed at him. "You are their father! Will you kill your sons?" (975) but it had no effect for he chased the oldest boy around a pillar and pierced him through the heart. Had Heracles been sane, he would have killed his enemy's children just as mercilessly, but mad, he did not know his own family. Amphitryon had put his finger on the reason; he was inflamed with killing. As the old man had also done much killing in his youth, he could recognize the symptoms.

Heracles aimed another arrow at the second boy who fell on his knees and begged for his life, but his father was incapable of understanding and smashed a club over the boy's head. His wife, in her panic, picked up the third boy and ran with him into another room, locking the door behind her, but with incredible strength, the madman tore the door from its frame and killed the mother and the boy with one arrow.

He looked around for Amphitryon to kill him in the same way, but Pallas Athene appeared, wearing her plumed helmet, and carrying her spear, and threw a rock which hit him on the chest and knocked him out. He lay unconscious on the ground, and Amphitryon and the servants bound him with ropes to prevent him from harming anyone else. The messenger sums up his own response very simply. "I do not know one man alive more miserable than this" (1014-5).

A brief choral song serves as the epilogue. The chorus sings of other terrible murders in mythology, the murders the fifty daughters of King Danaus committed when they killed their bridegrooms on their wedding night. Only one man was spared. They also sang of Procne who killed her son and fed him to his father Tereus in revenge for his having attacked her sister Philomela and cut her tongue out. These stories, although dreadful, cannot compare with the horror of the murder that has just been committed, and the chorus concludes its song with the recognition of its inadequacy, "What dirge, what song shall I sing for the dead?" (1023-4) and also concludes the central scene of the play. Only the old men are left in the orchestra, abject in their grief. They know that the audience is silent and motionless.

The third scene of the second section of the play begins with Arrowsmith's directions. "The great central doors of the palace slide slowly apart, revealing, in the central court, Heracles asleep, bound to a central pillar. The bodies of Megara

and the children are wheeled on stage on the eccyclema."<sup>16</sup> These words of Arrowsmith's introduce the scene in a serious and spectacular way, that makes it possible to visualize an audience reacting to the dreadful picture. The chorus, which, at this point speaks for the audience, points with horror to the bodies of the children, bemoans the sight of Heracles bound to a pillar, and reacts with great pity to the sight of old Amphitryon coming on to the stage with the bitterness of deep sorrow reflected in every movement. Amphitryon and the men of the chorus exchange their feelings of grief. Amphitryon takes charge of the mourning as he directs the chorus to keep quiet and not to disturb Heracles for fear that he could awaken and destroy everyone else. They mourn together in quiet, responsive phrases, supporting each other in their grief until Amphitryon notices that Heracles is stirring and looks around for a hiding place. The other old men think that he is afraid and call on him to be brave, but Amphitryon says that his concern is not for his own life, but for Heracles. Should he kill his father, he would be even more terribly polluted than he is already. The chorus replies that it would have been better for Amphitryon if he had died on the day that he sacked the city of the Taphians, the day that was the greatest moment of the old man's life, and his proudest memory.

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<sup>16</sup>Eccyclema: a machine which was pushed forward on rollers to display something to the audience. Scholars are not agreed on the existence of this device in the last part of the fifth century. Pickard-Cambridge argues that it could not have existed in pre-Hellenistic theatre, but T.B.L. Webster believes that it is possible that it did (Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus* 100; Webster 9).



Suddenly Heracles begins to move, and Amphitryon calls in alarm to the chorus to run lest they be murdered too. The chorus replies by challenging Zeus himself. "O Zeus, why have you hated him so much, your own son? Why launched him on this sea of grief?" (1086-7) This defiance of Zeus is an echo of Amphitryon's speech at line 339 when he hurled words at the greatest of the gods for his ill treatment of innocent people.

The chorus has practically nothing more to say, and from this point the action focuses on Heracles and his return to sanity. He tries at first to understand his position with his "muddled senses" (1091). He can see heaven and earth and the sun, but he feels as though he were on a rough sea; he knows that he is breathing deeply "from heaving lungs" (1093). He looks around more carefully and sees to his amazement that he is like a ship tied with cables to a piece of broken masonry (1094-5). This is not the first time that Heracles has called himself a ship (632), but this time the ship is broken and tied up. He can see that there are corpses lying near him, but he does not as yet recognize them. He does recognize his weapons and greets them with affection when he says "those faithful former comrades of my arms, that guarded my chest, and I guarded them" (1099-1100). He wonders whether he is in Hades, but is sure that he is not, for he cannot see the rock of Sisyphus, or Pluto, or the sceptre of Demeter. In his confusion he calls for help, for some friend to come and help him make some sense out of his bewilderment.

Amphitryon responds to his call, but is, at first, very careful. He asks the men of the chorus if they think it is safe for him to go near, and they say, "Go, and I'll go with you sharing in your grief" (1110). This is a significant line for it is the last that the chorus speaks until the end, but they do all stay on the stage and provide support for Amphitryon. Just as Heracles' help will come through friendship, so will Amphitryon's, through the old men of the community.

Amphitryon is weeping as he approaches Heracles, and Heracles responds to his tears. "Why do you cry, father, and hide your eyes?/ Why do you stand off from the son you love?" (1111-12) His response is to a father from a loving son, and Amphitryon replies within this relationship. "O my son, my son, whatever you have done" (1113). In their sorrow, both have acknowledged the tie that is between them but has always been denied by both. Heracles knows that he must find out what it is that he has done that should cause his father to weep so bitterly, but first Amphitryon has to find out if his son is sane enough to comprehend the truth. Heracles is agitated by such a suggestion, and that makes Amphitryon wonder if he is still mad. The very word makes Heracles more upset and Amphitryon appeals to the old men for advice as to whether they think it is safe to unbind him. Heracles turns his agitation on some unseen enemy who must have disgraced him, and then his father tells him to accept his own troubles and not look for someone or something outside himself to blame. For one moment

the old man forgets his own advice and berates Hera, but then retreats from that position and says "Let the goddess go. Shoulder your own grief" (1129). It does not matter where the madness has come from; Heracles has committed the murders and must acknowledge his own responsibility.

Amphitryon uncovers the bodies of the children and Heracles is forced to recognize who they are. Amphitryon calls his deed an "unnatural war", that is, a war against his own family, and sums up the responsibility. "You and your bow and some god are all guilty" (1135). Heracles committed the murders; he had the weapons available with which to do so; and it was "some god" which sent the madness which made it all happen. (It is also an "unnatural war" for Greeks of the same city to kill each other over political parties, or for Greeks of different cities to kill each other with the weapons that they have made available for that purpose. The only explanation as to why they do it must be that "some god" makes them mad.)

Line by line Heracles extracts some detail of his horror from his father. He finds that he has also killed his wife, and that he has ruined all his house. He asks where he was when it all happened, and he is told that he was by the altar, purifying his hands. In the awful moment when he realizes that terrible extent of his crime, all he can hope for is to avenge the murder by killing himself:

Let me hurl myself down from some sheer rock,  
or drive the whetted sword against my side,  
or expunge with fire this body's madness

and burn away the guilt which sticks to my life. (1149-52)

The scene of the play which has just been concluded is Heracles return to sanity, his recognition of his crime, and his acceptance of guilt. He is polluted and he is the most shameful of creatures; for him the only possible solution seems to be death. This is the conclusion of the central part of the play, for part of the theme of madness includes the return to sanity and the acceptance of responsibility for what has been done.

Several new themes have been introduced in the last scene. Mourning has begun and will continue until the end of the play. Shame has become an attribute of Heracles and has replaced his supreme self-confidence, and the archaic idea of pollution, the aura that surrounds a murderer which is so evil that it can be caught like a disease has replaced the aura of the lionskin-covered hero who could conquer the beasts and hold up the heavens.

The dialogue in which Amphitryon tells Heracles what he has done repeats the scene in which Megara told him what had happened to his family while he was away. This type of dialogue will be repeated once more in the scene to follow, when Amphitryon is faced with having to tell Theseus what has happened to his saviour.

The question of the paternity of Heracles has been raised in this scene. The chorus has challenged Zeus, asking how he could have allowed his son to be treated in this way, and both

Heracles and Amphitryon respond to each other as a loving father and son must do in time of trouble. Neither one seems to realize as yet that this is the nature of their response to each other, but before the play is over the relationship will be put into words.

At this moment Theseus appears, making an entrance from the right. His entrance is a repetition of Heracles' in the third scene of section one, and just as Heracles was the saviour in that scene, so is Theseus in this. The scene following is parallel to the earlier one, as the arrival is followed by informing the saviour, and the process of salvation begins to take place. Heracles catches sight of Theseus and is horrified because he recognizes his own pollution and is afraid that he may infect his friend. Pollution is something that can be transmitted through the eyes, through the ears, or by touch, and if a victim is infected he must be excluded from all social intercourse until he is purified. For this reason Heracles wraps his clothing over his head so that Theseus will not know him (Dodds 35f.). The great pan-Hellenic hero is reduced to a cowering guilt-ridden creature who has murdered his own wife and his children, and cannot face nature or his fellow men.

Theseus does not at first notice Heracles, but speaks to Amphitryon and tells him that he has come from Athens with a group of young men who have formed an alliance to help Heracles in his battle against Lycus. They are waiting off-stage by a stream called Asopos. He has come to repay Heracles for

having rescued him from Hades. Suddenly he sees the dead bodies on the stage and realizes that some new disaster must have occurred. He questions Amphitryon, who tells him slowly and painfully what has happened.

The entrance of Theseus alters the whole play. Theseus speaks for Athens in this play, as he does in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, and the Athenians think of themselves as a people who collectively help their friends when they are in trouble. In 418 B.C., the Athenians had gone to help Argos at the battle of Mantinea. It was true that their participation was less than enthusiastic, as the force they had taken was small and it arrived a little late; nevertheless, it was a popular idea that their participation had come from the generosity of their spirit. It was the same attitude that had been expressed by Pericles thirteen years earlier in his Funeral Speech.

Amphitryon greets Theseus, in grief-stricken tones, as "lord of the olive-bearing hill" (1178), a speech directed to an audience sitting on the side of that very hill, an audience that surely responded with a thrill of pride and, possibly, a hope that its own future might be affected by Theseus' return. Amphitryon, once again, is forced to relate the story of the disaster. "O gods, my son begot these boys, / begot them, killed them, his own blood" (1182-3). This scene is an echo of two earlier conversations in the same form that the poor old man has had during the course of the play. The first occurred when he

told Heracles what had happened to Megara and the children while he had been away performing his Labours, and the second when he had to tell him how he had murdered his own family. Now he must tell Theseus the same terrible story.

The bearer of bad news has always had a miserable role, and Amphitryon attracts more and more pity as the play progresses. He is directly involved in all the events that he is forced to report, for these are about the people whom he loves the most. His responsibility for these people never seems to contain the possibility of a merciful conclusion.

Theseus states categorically, "This is Hera's war" (1191), and thus dismisses, in a phrase, the whole question of Heracles' responsibility for what has happened. The madness came from outside the hero and hence he can not be blamed for it, but he still must deal with the feelings which result from it both within himself and within the community.

Theseus asks who it is that is lying on the floor, and Amphitryon has once again to endure pain by telling him that it is the great Heracles, reduced to such a pitiable state. Theseus speaks for everyone. "What mortal man was ever cursed like this?" (1195) he says, suggesting something superhuman in the depth of Heracles' suffering, and then he asks why he is hiding his head under his robes. Amphitryon replies, "Shame of meeting your eye, / shame before friends and kin, / shame for his murdered sons" (1199-1201). He is speaking of the "shame" of a culture

first described by Ruth Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, written about 1946 about Japan. The description was adapted by E.R. Dodds and others to describe the culture of Homeric Greece. The principal involved is that an individual is dependent for his feelings of self-worth on the opinions of the other members of the community, and the most terrible thing that can happen to him is to lose "face". It was a standard of morality that was aristocratic, outmoded, and limited, because it disregarded motivation, and it was often used by Euripides to present a particular point of view. (In the *Hippolytus*, for instance, Phaedra's response to her illicit passion is that it will ruin her "good name".)

Theseus represents another point of view. He is a late fifth century Athenian, and he refuses to accept Heracles' response. He orders Amphitryon to uncover Heracles because he wants to share his grief, a stunning challenge to the idea that the pollution of the murderer is catching and that he should be avoided by everyone and everything.

Amphitryon reacts immediately to Theseus' compassion, and begs Heracles to uncover his face and feel the sunshine. A friend has come, he says, "a rival weight to counterpoise your grief" (1206-7). His terrible feelings have upset the balance of his emotional scale and have been brought back near normal by a friend's compassion. He begs Heracles to calm the dreadful rage which is making his grief so much worse.



Theseus joins in the old man's exhortations and calls on the sufferer to show his face as he throws out a direct challenge to his beliefs. "Why wave me off, warning me of blood?/ Are you afraid mere words would pollute me?" (1219-20) he asks, and the answer is that this is exactly what Heracles is afraid of. The idea of pollution came from the Archaic Period, the time when there was an increase in anxiety, due to the expansion of the group and loosening of familial ties. This was the time, as Dodds says, when sons began to challenge their fathers, and the generations became worried about doing each other some harm (45). Heracles' belief in pollution was still common in the fifth century, especially amongst conservative, old-fashioned individuals, and the common people. Gilbert Murray has called this set of beliefs the "inherited Conglomerate", using an interesting geological metaphor (Murray, *Greek Studies* 66).

Murray's "Conglomerate" has been breaking down through the century, however, as a result of the new "scientific" thinking that has come from the Ionian philosophers and spread into Athens through Anaxagoras, Protagoras, and Socrates. These men have questioned traditional forms of wisdom, especially the customs of men and the workings of nature, and by the time of Euripides they are the heart of an intellectual revolution usually called the "Enlightenment". By the time that Euripides is writing this play, the two sets of values are frequently in conflict, and charges have been laid against some of the the new intellectuals concerning impiety or leading the youth astray.

Theseus represents the thinking of the Enlightenment.

Theseus introduces two new moral principals when he urges Heracles to uncover his head. He says:

You were my good fortune once,  
You saved me from the dead, brought me back to light.  
I loathe a friend whose gratitude grows old,  
a friend who takes a friend's prosperity  
but will not voyage with him in grief.  
Rise up; uncover that afflicted head  
and look on us. This is courage in a man:  
to bear unflinchingly what heaven sends. (1221-8)

In other words, a good deed is one which repays a debt of gratitude, and a brave man is one who can accept whatever fate may send to him.

They work through their ideological differences in a "stichomythia". Heracles expounds the old doctrine of pollution and Theseus refutes it. Heracles at first maintains that he should not be uncovered for he must not pollute the sun, and Theseus answers that no mortal can pollute anything that is divine. Heracles then turns on him and tells him to flee so that he may not be polluted himself, and then Theseus answers by saying, "Where there is love contagion cannot come" (1234). The meaning of "love" here clearly seems to be "friendship" rather than "eros", and if this is correct, then friendship is stronger than pollution, an argument which destroys forever the archaic code. If, on the other hand, love includes "eros", as Arrowsmith implies that it does in his introduction to the play (53), it means that the male homosexual bond which was idealized by the Archaic society and immortalized in the poems of Theognis and

Pindar was the antidote to pollution. The idea of pollution and the idealization of the homosexual relationship co-existed in the archaic society, but, in the late fifth century, Theseus' "philia" seems to mean a friendship based on gratitude rather than eroticism.

Heracles offers his thanks for the relief that Theseus has brought him, and says that he now sees how right he was to have helped him. Theseus says that now his great feeling is one of pity, for, he says, "Your wretchedness towers up and touches heaven" (1240). This brings a spark of life to Heracles, who flashes something like his old anger: "Then where it touches heaven, I shall strike" (1241), but Theseus reminds him that the gods do not care if he is angry with them or not. Still stubborn, Heracles replies, "Heaven is proud. And I am proud to heaven" (1243). This kind of pride is dangerous; it is "hybris", the pride that defies the gods and will surely be punished, and Theseus steps in and bluntly tells Heracles to stop.

Heracles has only direction in which he can go, and that is towards death. Even that consolation is denied to him by his compassionate judge. Theseus says that only an ordinary man would take that way out, but Heracles replies that even he has an end to his endurance. He is not permitted this escape, for his benefactor tells him that he who has been mankind's greatest helper is forbidden such an ignominious death. "Hellas forbids it" (1254), he says. Theseus, then, can speak for all the Greeks when he commands Heracles to live.

This speech ends a scene of the play which has run from line 1153, the entrance of Theseus. The whole scene is parallel to the earlier scene which began at 513 with the entrance of Heracles. In both scenes the action is completely altered by the arrival of a great man, for Heracles is just in time to save his family from destruction, and Theseus is just in time to save Heracles from death at his own hands. Both scenes begin with an episode during which the heroes are informed of the events that took place during their absence. Dramatically, this serves to repeat, and therefore underline, the horror of the crisis that has occurred. In the first scene, Heracles is the saviour, a superhuman being wearing his lionskin and carrying his bow and his club. He is confident in his domination of people and events, as he had been confident in his domination of nature. In the later scene Theseus is dominant. In his role of king of Athens his authority is without question, but he is always a human being who relies on his powers of persuasion and his offering of compassion to save the sufferer. He never uses any form of violence although he does have an army which gives him some authority. Megara and the children in the earlier scene are "Sacrificial Victims", dressed in funeral clothes to make their roles even clearer. At Theseus' entrance, Heracles is also a victim, but not in a ritualistic sense. In contrast to the proud bearing of his wife and children facing their deaths, he is crouched abjectly on the floor with his clothing over his head. Heracles' homecoming ends with the chorus singing joyfully that his vengeance has shown that the gods do prevail and that there

is justice among them (814), but by line 1243, the hero is shaking his fist at heaven.

The parallel structure of the two "salvation" scenes underscores their differences. Heracles saves his family from the oppressor, although the reason that they are victims is that he has neglected them while he performed his Labours. There is no question of Heracles forgiving Lycus, for he merely throws his body to the dogs, and this seems to be the appropriate thing for him to do. However, in the case of Theseus, he is shown to bring mercy and compassion for the most dreadful of all crimes, the murder of one's own family, and, by the end of the scene forbids the murderer to punish himself any further. Euripides is showing a changing morality, and is contrasting it with the older, harsher response which has been the motivation of the Greek city states and has nearly brought their destruction.

At line 1255, Heracles begins a long speech in which he gives his version of his life story. This speech is the centre of the last third of the play, just as the long chorus which told the story of the Labours was at the centre of the first third. The contrast is immediate.

He begins by saying, "Let me show you my life: a life not worth living now, or ever" (1256-7). This is an incredible statement, that the greatest of all men should think that his life has been worthless. In his depression, he tells us that Amphitryon killed Electryon and then married Alcmene, the

daughter of his victim. This act gave the house a poor foundation on which to build. Then Zeus, and, he adds, "whoever Zeus may be" (1263); slept with Alcmene and begot him, but he tells Amphitryon not to be offended at him saying this, "for I count you my father now, not Zeus" (1265). This line is the turning point of the whole play, for Heracles has denied the paternity of the greatest of the gods, and acknowledged the man who has nurtured him and loved him. The tenderness illuminates the happiness in the old man's heart, as he is at last rewarded for all his years in his role of cuckold.

Heracles returns to the anger of Hera and tells how she sent the serpents to his crib when he was a baby. He briefly recites his list of labours, which have been sung in the earlier chorus, "why recite all those labours that I endured? All those wars I fought, those beasts I slew (1270-1). He mentions them anyway, in the wistful way a great man looks back at past accomplishments: the lions and triple-bodied Tryphons, the giants and Centaurs; the hydra, the trip to Hades, and the triple-headed hound. "And now my last worst labour has been done:/ I slew my children and crowned my house with grief" (1279-80). When he slew the Nemean lion he skinned it and wore the skin over his back in such a way that the lion's head was a crown. Now his murdered children are a crown of grief for Thebes.

Heracles now knows that he must leave the city, for he is polluted, and will be unwelcome everywhere else. He cannot

return to Argos for he has been banished from that city as well. Anywhere he goes his reputation will go with him, and he will never escape from the bitter jibes that will be hurled at him because of his terrible crime. (Most scholars agree that the next three lines, 1291-3, are an intrusion, and it is true that they make no sense in the context of the play. They say that the man who prospers suffers from change, but the one who lives with trouble minds it less.) Heracles continues his song of grief; as he once was the "most prosperous" (1300) and the greatest man in Hellas, he is now the most sorrowful. His pollution is so great that the earth itself will reject him, and the very rivers will forbid him to cross over. "I am like Ixion, bound forever to a wheel" (1297-8). (Ixion is one of the mythological characters who is given the most dreadful punishments in Hades. He attempted to rape Hera, and Zeus had him bound to a wheel that was covered in serpents and condemned him to spend eternity revolving on it.) Heracles knows that it will be best if he should leave Hellas, but cannot think of any place that will take him in. He thinks with bitterness of Hera, and tells her to begin her dance of triumph. She has done what she wanted to do and from her jealousy has brought down the greatest of men. "Who could offer prayers to such a goddess?" (1307-8) he asks in his misery.

Theseus replies to this heresy, and is in total agreement with it. He says, "Rightly you judge" (1312), but adds that Hera is the only one of the gods who is implicated in this case.

Heracles must suffer what he must and not give in to grief. He says that all men are flawed, and so are the gods; they commit adultery, they have bound their fathers in chains in order to get power. This is a story that Aeschylus reported in the *Eumenides*, that Zeus bound Cronos in his old age and seized his power (640). In spite of their sins the gods are able to live on Mount Olympus, and so Heracles should not complain about his fate. This strange speech, which grates on ears conditioned by Christian doctrines of guilt, undoubtedly grated on conservative Athenian ears as well. Theseus does not deny that Heracles should suffer for his deeds, in fact it is important that he does so, but he does deny the value of wasting more time bewailing the guilt.

The law says that a homicide must be punished by exile, and so Theseus says that Heracles should leave Thebes and come with him to Athens where he will purify the sinner, give him a home and share with him the wealth and land which he was given after he slew the Minotaur. When Heracles dies, he says, Athens will erect a "monument of stone, and honour you with sacrifice" (1332-3).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>One such monument that Euripides was referring to was the temple now known as the *Hephaestion*, built around 449 B.C., whose metopes and pediments have been identified as the labours of Theseus and of Heracles. In Homer Thompson's restoration, Heracles has been given the place of honour (Bond 396, l.1331). An earlier monument, raised in 506 B.C. at Delphi, was the so-called "Treasury of the Athenians" whose metopes exhibited the exploits of both heroes.



Theseus continues his speech by saying that when Heracles dies Athens shall win from Hellas "a lovely crown of fame" (1335), and he himself will have repaid the debt that he owes and will have lived up to the ideals of Athenian excellence. The image of the crown has been used once more in a changed form, it has been the head of the lion on the mythological Heracles; the grief for the dead children of the mad Heracles; and now it is the glorious reputation of Athens gained from the rescued Heracles. Theseus is talking about the future. The earlier chorus which described the labours of the hero were all about the mythological past, and the mythological past has been transformed into the possibility of a great future for Athens. Theseus concludes his speech by saying that at this moment Heracles needs a friend.

Two lines follow (1338-9) which some critics insist should be deleted. The lines say that men do not need friends who have the help of the gods, for the help of the gods is enough. It seems that these lines do, in fact, contradict two of the themes of the play, one being the importance of human friendship, and the other the uncertainty of the gods' help. In this case, a goddess has done a great deal of harm, but even if this were not so, the importance of this part of the play is to show Heracles learning the great value of love.

Heracles now replied to Theseus' generosity. He says that it has no bearing on his grief, and he is quite correct, for it will take him a long time to work through his period of

mourning. He says that he does not believe the gods commit adultery nor bind each other in chains. "I never did believe it; I never shall" (1343), and he continues, "nor that one god is tyrant of the rest. / If god is truly god, he is perfect, / lacking nothing. These are poets' wretched lies" (1342-6). Heracles is searching for a new interpretation of the gods, one which is a direct challenge to the whole Olympian system in which adultery, tyranny, and irrational whims are part of the "poet's lies". He is looking for the kind of god that Socrates and his pupils are discussing, an abstraction that includes the possibility of perfection and excludes the evil side of human personality that leads it into horrors like the present. If Hera has caused his madness because of human jealousy she is something else besides an Olympian goddess; she is a dreadful power that can disrupt his own sanity and make him murder his family. When Heracles chose to acknowledge Zeus as his father instead of the loving Amphitryon, he had to acknowledge Hera's jealousy, and part of his return to humanity is to realize that Amphitryon is his father through the fact of his love, and he need no longer fear Hera.

He is also reaching a new interpretation of life; he no longer believes that great accomplishments and daring physical feats are the mark of the good life, but that this must include courage in the face of disaster. He also realizes that he cannot commit suicide, for dying would be the mark of a coward. He therefore accepts Theseus' friendship and agrees to go with him

to the city. He says,

For countless were the labours I endured,  
never yet have I refused; never yet have I wept, and  
never did I think that I should come to this: tears in  
my eyes. (1353-56)

When the great hero reaches the stage of being able to weep, he can become fully human. Until now, brute force has kept emotion at bay, but now Heracles can express the sorrow that he feels for his lost family and accept his own responsibility for their deaths. He will suffer, but he will also weep, and he will be a greater man than the egocentric hero who had spent his life going from one physical accomplishment to another. His new labour is an internal one, to mourn, and through mourning to grow. He has been brought to this realization by love, the love of his father Amphitryon, and the love of his friend, Theseus.

"But now, I see, I must serve necessity." (1357)

"Necessity" is "tyche" in Greek, more often translated as "fortune" or "luck". It was a concept that was inherited from the Archaic period, and which became personified and worshipped in the Hellenistic age. A man was born with a certain "tyche", just as today he is born with a certain genetic or cultural inheritance which over-rides anything that he can try to do to alter his life. E.R. Dodds quotes Nilsson as saying that the cult of Tyche is the "last stage in the secularization of religion, the sentiment of dependence (which) attaches itself to the purely negative idea of the unexplained and unpredictable" (242). Heracles means that he must adjust to the vagaries of

fortune; this will be easier for him than being submitted to the jealousy of Hera.

This line concludes the new version of his life, both in Heracles' reconstruction of his past and Theseus' predictions for the future. Life now includes rejection of Zeus as his father, and therefore of Hera as the agent of his madness. It affirms instead Amphitryon, the loving father, and Theseus, the loving friend, and it discredits the Olympian gods and their mortal immortality to give acceptance to sheer chance, which is as good an explanation of madness as any. Poor Megara first expounded this doctrine at line 311, when she went to meet her death, as she thought, at the hands of Lycus.

This reconstruction of a life story which runs structurally parallel to the myth told by the chorus in part one, emphasizes the importance of Heracles' agonizingly attained self-knowledge that has come only through madness and suffering. His view of his life comes from within at this stage in the play, in contrast to the story that was told of him earlier by the old men of the community who spoke from a great distance both in time and place. Euripides is saying that knowledge of the myth, like worship of gods, must be brought in line with present reality before it can be transmitted to the future. The reality of a man is contained in the love he bears for his father and his friend, and this is infinitely more important than his domination of nature and his advancement of civilization.

The last scene of the play properly begins at line 1358, as Heracles turns to his father and begins the mourning and the directions for the funeral. It is an epilogue which balances in form and in content the first scene of the play, and brings to a resolution questions which were introduced at that time.

At the beginning of the play Heracles had left his father to care for his children while he was away civilizing the world. Now he is going from Thebes once again and he is leaving his father to bury the children. The law forbids him to conduct the funeral himself, because he is a "miastor", a murderer of a blood relation, and he is forced to ask Amphitryon to take his place again and to remain in Thebes and do his mourning for him.

He speaks to his sons and bewails the fact that they can never benefit from all his hard work and the fame he strove so hard to acquire. He weeps for his wife who was so loyal to his bed while she waited for him to return and was repaid so unjustly. He tears himself away from them all as he weeps over "the bitter sweetness of the last embrace" (1377).

He then picks up his weapons, "bitter partners of my life!" (1378) which have been used to bring him his greatest glory and his greatest sorrow. If he carries them he will never cease to be reminded that they caused his children's death, but if he leaves them behind he will suffer shame at his enemies' hands. He decides painfully against being disarmed, but acknowledges that it is a terrible decision to make. This speech contains the

resolution of the long argument that occurred between lines 159 and 204, when Amphitryon and Lycus debated whether it was better to carry a bow or a spear. Now, at the end of the play, Heracles realizes that it would be better not to carry weapons at all, but that he must if he is not to be dishonoured.

Finally he calls to the people of the city to mourn with him.

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. (1390-3)

This appeal is a reflection of Amphitryon's reproach to the city at line 217,

"O country of Cadmus, on you too  
my reproaches fall! Is this your vigil  
for the sons of Heracles? For Heracles  
who single-handed fought your Minyan foe  
and made Thebes see once more with free men's eyes?"  
(217-21)

Amphitryon told the community directly that it must bear some of the responsibility for Lycus' oppression, and by the end of the play the community must accept part of the duty of mourning for the dead. Tragedies are not matters that affect individuals alone, they affect everyone in the society.

Now that Heracles has said farewell and given his instructions to Amphitryon and the people of Thebes, it is time for him to go. But he finds he cannot move; "my limbs are rooted here" (1395). He has not reached the stage where he can separate himself from the people that he is mourning, but Theseus keeps telling him that he must, for "necessity breaks even the strong"

(1396). He is speaking of "tyche", the "tyche" that Heracles has just understood that he must acknowledge. We remember that Megara stated this theme at the beginning of the play when she said, "And yet how base a thing it is/ when a man will struggle with necessity!" (309-11) Now Theseus is telling Heracles that he must fulfill his destiny and come with him to Athens. Heracles is in agony and cannot move, but Theseus holds out his hand and tells him to take it and the help that he offers. Once more Heracles draws back and says that he will pollute him, but Theseus says quite simply, that he does not care. In one phrase he has destroyed the power of pollution; it does not matter where there is friendship between two people.

Heracles gives in at last. His sons are dead, he says, and now Theseus will be his son. Theseus tells him to place his hand on his shoulder and he will lead him. Heracles replies, "A yoke of love, but one of us in grief./ O Father, choose a man like this for friend" (1403-4). The "yoke of love" is like the yoke that bound the old men of the chorus together at their first entrance. The burden that united them was their age and they struggled like "the colt that, yoked and slow, tugs uphill, on rock, the heavy wain." They supported each other with their hands, if need be, just as when they were younger they supported each other in war. The need for friendship was part of the predicament of Amphitryon and his family. In line 55 he told how "of our friends some prove no friends at all", and two lines later "upon no man wished me well at all, could I wish this acid

test of friends might fall" (58-9).

Old Amphitryon makes a polite bow to Theseus as he says that his native land has produced noble sons, and this seems to trigger a response in Heracles that makes him want to turn back and see his sons again. In the midst of a great wave of sorrow, both Heracles and Amphitryon embrace each other, and very gently Theseus persuades them to part. He asks first if Heracles has forgotten his labours, and receives the response which he received earlier, that the Labours were nothing compared to the present anguish. Theseus then suggests that other people seeing the hero's weakness would not praise him, and, in this way successfully arouses a spark of anger. Heracles says, "I live: am I so low? You did not think so once" (1413). He has to live with humility now and he does not enjoy the sensation; he knows that he once had too much pride and that he now suffers from its consequences. His anger affirms his life, and, in a round about way, he acknowledges the fact that he must continue to live.

Theseus agrees. He once did not think that Heracles was humble, but the famous Heracles is gone now. Heracles' anger still flares up as he demands, "What were you when you were underground?" (1415). Very, very gently Theseus replies, "In courage I was the least of men" (1416). He, too, has been humble and afraid, and he knows what it is like to be a fallen hero. With a return of his pride, Heracles says, "Then will you say my grief degrades me now?" (1417). Satisfied that he can now deal with living, Theseus says, simply, "Forward". (See Appendix)



Heracles gives in and starts to move, but first he turns back to his old grief-stricken father. They bid each other farewell, and Heracles asks him to bury his children. The old man says, sadly, who will bury *him*, and Heracles answers, "I". Amphitryon asks when he will come, and Heracles answers that he will come when the children are buried, and that he will have them brought from Thebes to Athens. He adds, "While I, whose whole house has gone down in grief, / am towed in Theseus' wake like some little boat" (1423-4), in words that are echoes of those that the chorus uses to describe Megara coming out in her funeral clothes, "drawing her sons behind her" (445), and of Heracles' own that he used to his children when he led them into the house to save them from Lycus. Just as the children were dependent on him and just as they were dependent on Megara in the earlier scene, so now is Heracles dependent on Theseus. The children and he have changed places, but he has learned something very important when he adds, "The man who would prefer great wealth or strength / more than love, more than friends, is diseased of soul" (1425-6). He himself was that man at the beginning of the play.

The chorus then speaks a brief, mourning couplet.

"We go in grief, we go in tears,  
who lose in you our greatest friend." (1427-8)

The two younger men leave the stage, and Amphitryon follows the bodies of Megara and the children as the eccyclema is wheeled inside the palace and the doors slowly close. The chorus leaves quietly in the opposite direction from Theseus and Heracles. The

old men are staying in Thebes to mourn, and the two friends are going on to Athens.

The audience is left with a feeling of quiet hope that is a contrast to the alternatives that were offered at the beginning of the play, Amphitryon's unrealistic optimism and Megara's despair. The hope that the poet offers lies in the possibility of friendship between human beings, a more important idea than all of the mythological glories of the past. Heracles' civilizing mission and conquest of nature led only to the murder of his family and his alienation from his city, and the only cure for alienation lies in "philia", the love that is between friends. This love may lead to a future that contains something better than the madness, pollution, and mourning of the present.

We know, of course, that this did not happen. By 404 B.C., Athens had gone down to defeat, and by the time another century was over Alexander of Macedon had conquered most of the known world and his successors were battling each other for their share of the spoils. Greeks continued to fight Greeks, and as centuries went by, men continued to fight men everywhere. They struggled for glory, formulated by outmoded systems of thought, that included ideas such as honour, and revenge, and the total subjugation of nature, and they forgot the victims that were sacrificed along the way.

However, if the old Amphitryon, who is always present in the play, watches and suffers along with all the other victims of

oppression and insanity, and if he can somehow survive in the midst of conflicting value systems, senseless killing, failure of reason, disillusionment with the gods, and opportunistic leadership, then so, perhaps, can the poet. He at least can sing, in the words that he placed in the mouths of the other old men of the chorus.

I may not live without the Muses.  
Let my head be always crowned!  
May my old age always sing  
of Memory, the Muses' mother  
always shall I sing the crown  
of Heracles the victor!  
So long as these remain -  
Dionysus' gift of wine,  
the lyre of seven strings,  
the shrilling of the flute -  
never shall I cease to sing,  
Muses who make me dance! (673-86)

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

On the interpretation I have offered, the *Heracles* can be seen, amongst other things, as illustrating the power of myth in history and the urgency of man's need to understand his full humanity. When men go to war they construct a mythology which explains their own nature and that of their enemies, and in the end, makes conflict inevitable. Men still believe what Heracles believed, that honour can be gained through war, and they refuse to recognize the suffering that this idea brings to its victims as the myth demands its sacrifices.

The Peloponnesian War provides a useful example of the development of this insight, not only because it had such literate observers, but also because it was a war between people who were of the same race, spoke the same language, and shared aspects of the same mythology. Their differences had their origin in politics, that is in the ways they thought their cities should be governed, and in their use of mythology to explain their past and justify their present. As I have pointed out, each of the cities believed that Heracles was important to its past, but each one adapted his story in a different way. A modern analogy would be that of two Christian countries going to war, each with the same God leading the way.

By the time that the Peace of Nicias was signed, the cities were debilitated by fifteen years of war and intellectuals were

questioning the old beliefs. While it was a period which was marked by erratic political behaviour, it was also marked by great intellectual excitement and new waves of thought were appearing everywhere. Consequently, during the breakdown of the old and the advent of the new, the society was composed of many disparate threads.

The complexity of the *Heracles* reflected the complexity of the period, for there were many themes in the play just as there were many threads in the society. The shape of the play, its title, and its characters, were determined by the theme of the conversion of the mythical Heracles to a suffering human. This theme was presented in such a way that it contained a possibility of hope and was paralleled by an urgent need to question and to redefine the idea of the gods. The old mythology had outlived its usefulness.

Within this framework other themes were developed, some of them related to war. In the first scene, Euripides showed two responses by victims of oppression, Megara's hopelessness and Amphytrion's unreasonable optimism, and then he showed Lycus, the incarnation of the inhumane oppressor. The oppressor and the oppressed were, in a sense, both victims of war, for when Heracles avenged the brutality of Lycus, he threw his body to the dogs. His action was justified, but it triggered the madness and the indiscriminate slaughter of his family. Violence bred violence and the innocent were the ultimate victims. In the same way Hera proved to be an unjust oppressor and could not retain

the respect of mankind.

The first scene also contained the long debate about weapons; those that were the most effective, and those that enhanced the reputation of their bearers. Neither member of the debate questioned the need to have weapons, but in the last scene Heracles, whose great attributes had been his bow and his club, finally came to the realization that he should ask whether it was right to carry weapons at all.

The theme of friendship was stated within the first few lines of the play when it was shown to be the greatest need for all the victims. The idea remained in the forefront of the action, at first through the old men of the chorus, and then through the person of Theseus. At the very end of the play Heracles was able to recognize that friendship, the love of one human being for another, provided the only possibility for his salvation.

Old age was a constant theme of the chorus in each of the first three scenes of the play. While it is true that Euripides himself was getting old and was conscious of the problems of age, the theme had more importance than the biography of the poet. Age was not a valuable commodity to a country at war, and the chorus was bitter about its impotence. This reflected a political schism within Athens in which the old were associated with peace and the young with war. In the last section of the drama, after the arrival of Theseus, the theme did not recur.

Amphitryon, who was old, was shown to be strong, and he was left to take care of Thebes with the help of the other old men.

The meaning of fatherhood and the relationship between fathers and sons was carefully examined. Heracles believed at first that his father was Zeus, but knew that Amphitryon was the father that had loved him. Amphitryon had killed his father-in-law before he married Alcmene, and later Heracles killed his own children in the fit of madness sent to him by Hera. The resolution of the play came when Heracles realized that he must acknowledge the human who had loved him as his real father, and this recognition was coincidental with the realization that he could no longer respect the gods. Heracles had also to learn that he had responsibilities to his sons which he had neglected for the sake of his own accomplishments, and at the resolution of the play he replaced them with Theseus whom he adopted as his new son. The recurring image of dependency, the large boat towing the little boat behind, was part of this theme, and it included Megara for she had taken responsibility for her children when Heracles had neglected them. Euripides was clearly demonstrating the great cycle of human responsibility; sons dependent on mothers, wives dependent on husbands, sons dependent on fathers, and in the end fathers dependent on sons. All human beings are dependent on other human beings, and Heracles had to recognize that essential wisdom and cease to pretend that he was the son of a god.

The nature of courage was examined during the course of the play by observing how it was displayed by the weak and by the strong. The most courageous character was the weakest, Megara, who derived her strength from her archaic value system. Amphytrion, although old, was brave, because he deluded himself into believing that he had something to live for. Lycus, the oppressor, was brave because he was temporarily in power, and Heracles, the strongest man in the whole world, had to learn to be brave enough to live with his guilt.

An important theme of the last section of the play was pollution, the dreadful "miasma" that surrounded a man who had killed a blood relative, so that he could infect a city or any other human that he came into contact with and must be exiled from society. This belief prevailed throughout Greece especially during the archaic and the early classical period, and was enshrined in the law. Now Euripides was suggesting that such pollution could be erased through friendship, and that a sinner could find refuge in Athens and even be honoured there. This idea was to be found in other plays, for Euripides had already used it in the *Medea*, and Sophocles would use it a little later in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, and it reflected Athens' reputation for liberality and mercy. The attitude that it expressed, that a judgement of guilt should include a consideration of motivation represented a change from the archaic point of view.

The structure supports so many themes that it is difficult to select one that is central to the whole play. The answer must



come from the action, that is, the change from mythology to reality. Mythology supports alienation from the rest of nature and a disruption of the bonds of human society. Alienation and disruption lead to violence and suffering, and gods that are derived from this outlook are no longer entitled to worship. The epilogue of the play shows that peace and honour may be achieved through human suffering by recognizing the power of friendship.

The three worlds of history, mythology, and tragedy may seem to be different expressions of the human imagination, and yet they are like three strands of silk that form a braid. They cross and recross and reinforce each other at every turning. One does not cause the other, for the strands can be separated and live independently of each other, but they are strong, interwoven bonds of a culture whose reflections can be seen in a serious study.

The relationship between Thucydides' *History* and Euripides' *Heracles*, is not causal; that is, the *Heracles* is not an allegory of the Peace of Nicias. On the other hand, Euripides lived through the period as an important personage in the city of Athens. He expressed his imagination in a popular form of art that spoke to widely diversified groups of people, and he used mythical material that was acknowledged and worshipped throughout the Greek city states. In the same way that the play was not an allegory of the history, neither was it a myth. It was an artistic work that had a reality of its own, but showed in structure and themes reflections of the times in which it was

written and of beliefs that were part of the background of most of the Greeks.

I have examined the historical and mythological background and have offered a detailed analysis of the play. This analysis has been largely based on the text, but has considered commentary and scholarship that may clarify or expand the meaning. I believe that it is a plausible suggestion that the play does reflect aspects of the events that Thucydides described and Euripides' attitudes to them, and that the mythology provides the symbolism and the imagery, the tools with which the poet created his drama.

The "madness of Heracles" became one of the great literary symbols, to be used by later poets and authors to reflect the human condition in later times and different cultures. This is its universal aspect, the greatness of the poetic imagination which continues to be relevant across 2,500 years. That it came from a particular time and a particular place, does not in any way diminish it.

## CHAPTER VII

### APPENDICES

#### Appendix I

Godfrey Bond has attempted to use the symptoms of Heracles' madness and to decide whether they are consistent with a diagnosis of "epilepsy" (Bond 309). His attempts are not completely successful, but he does raise a question that should be answered in some way.

Euripides was not alone in his interest in "madness" in the latter part of the fifth century, for Hippocrates of Cos, a younger contemporary had probably visited Athens. Hippocrates left a treatise *On the Sacred Disease* which recognized the fact that epilepsy could be hereditary, and tried to assign a cause. His conclusion was that "all things are equally divine or human" (Marinatos). In this way he avoided a direct statement of choice between the gods and man by saying that there was really no difference.

Socrates also thought about madness, as the *Phaedrus* of Plato tells us. He saw madness as a good force which came from different gods. From Eros and Aphrodite came the madness of love, from Apollo came prophecy, from Dionysus came mystic ritual and from the Muses came poetic madness (244 a-b, 265 b). In these terms "madness" is a condition of inspiration.

A brief look at some medical publications of the early 1980's seems to show that any attempt to improve on Euripides by "diagnosing" Heracles in 20th century terminology is not only impossible but is arrogant and futile. Articles published in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, June 1980, *Neurology*, 1982, and *A Textbook of Epilepsy* (ed. John Laidlaw) 1982, all emphasize the difficulty of accurate diagnosis today. A brief quotation from *Pseudoseizures: Diagnostic Evaluation* (King et al., in *Neurology*, January 1982, p. 18) is, I think, sufficient for this purpose.

Since at least the 17th century, authors have described episodes that superficially resemble epileptic seizures, but that are not of epileptic origin. Most authors have used the term "hysterical", but Liske and Forster introduced the term "pseudoseizure" to refer to these episodes. Despite numerous articles describing case reports, psychologic attributes, diagnosis, and management, pseudoseizures remain poorly understood, and the differentiation of epileptic seizures remains difficult.

If one must look at modern theories, it seems to be more profitable to read *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise* written by R.D. Laing. A quotation from his chapter "Transcendental Experience" speaks for itself:

When a person goes mad, a profound transposition of his position in relation to all domains of being occurs. His centre of experience moves from ego to self. Mundane time becomes merely anecdotal, only the eternal time matters. The madman is, however, confused. He muddles ego with self, inner with outer, natural and supernatural. Nevertheless, he can often be to us, even through his profound wretchedness and disintegration, the hierophant of the sacred.

Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death.

This seems to me to be very close to Euripides, but even so, it does not add anything to the poetic statement of the *Heracles*. All that it does is legitimize it for the kind of modern reader who looks for verification in the language of today's research. In itself, this is a kind of "hybris", an assumption that the language of science must, of necessity, be better, or more accurate, than that of the ancient poet.

E.R.Dodds devotes a chapter to "The Blessings of Madness" in *The Greeks and the Irrational*. He is primarily concerned with the shamanistic or ecstatic aspects of madness, following Plato's categories (64ff.).

#### Appendix II

The lines that follow, 1410-17, have been the subject of much critical comment, and Bond devotes an entire appendix to the argument that they should be placed after line 1253 (Bond 417). He says, "This dialogue seems intended to exhibit Heracles smartly getting the better of an unsympathetic Theseus. After what has preceded it may seem petty. Greek audiences evidently appreciated a display of sheer cleverness, one character scoring off another" (Bond 411, 1.1410-17). Donald J. Mastronarde in his review article in *Classical Views* discusses these lines at some length, and, while he feels that their interpretation is "problematic", he does not agree that they need to be acted as harshly as Bond describes. He says, "To me, the dramatic point

of the passage is to display the common humanity of Theseus and Heracles and to show that judging and learning can work both ways - there can be no facile judgement of the proper amount of grief nor of how "low" a hero may feel and act" (111).

My own view is that these lines are an example of a scene which is common to Euripides in which a friend acts as a therapist and uses words to help restore equilibrium to a disturbed mind. The nurse acts in this way in the *Hippolytus*, and Cadmus does the same for Agave in the *Bacchae*.

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