THE GREEK TRAGIC POETS

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TO

MY WIFE

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

SINCE this book first appeared in 1950 important new evidence has become available and a large number of books have been published concerned with Greek tragedy, especially with Sophocles. The present edition has been extensively rewritten to take account of all this. Since it has become, to say the least, uncertain that the *Supplices* is a comparatively early work of Aeschylus the whole basis for the discussion of his plays has changed, and the chapter on Aeschylus is largely new. Changes in the chapters on Sophocles and Euripides relate mainly to matters of detail in order to take account of recent work and to allow for modification of my own views.

The other major alteration is in the introductory chapters. In the first edition these were, perhaps, somewhat out of scale, and the need for a general account of the world in which tragedy arose has been lessened by the appearance of such admirable works as Sir Maurice Bowra's *The Greek Experience* and Professor Kitto's Penguin volume, *The Greeks*. Accordingly the sections on Politics and Economics have been compressed and amalgamated, and brought into closer connection with the main subject, while I have expanded slightly the section on the religious background, a subject which is inseparably involved with Greek drama. In consequence it has been possible to enlarge considerably the scope of Chapter II, which now contains an account, compressed but I hope intelligible, of the problem of tragic origins, a section on the nature of tragedy, and a fuller account of the Theatre of Dionysus and the conditions of production.

Cambridge 1958 D. W. L.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

'It is matter for curious speculation to-day, to conjecture what Macaulay, what Samuel Johnson, *can* have found in Euripides to love him as it is on record that they did. May it perhaps be true of all great art, not that all men understand it in the same sense, but that it helps all men to understand something each in his own sense?' These wise words from the Introduction to Professor Meredith's *Four Dramas of Euripides* supply part of the justification for another book on Greek tragedy. We do not all get the same things out of Greek tragedy, and we are not all helped equally by the same sort of criticism. I hope there may be readers who will find this book bring them nearer to understanding something which is well worth the effort required.

The other part of the justification is that there is a considerable gap between works intended mainly for the few who can read Greek with ease and fluency and elementary books on Greek drama which supply no more than an introduction to the subject. In the text I have assumed no knowledge of Greek, and though considerations of space have made it impossible to explain fully every allusion which might possibly cause trouble to the reader without any knowledge of the background, I do not think there is anything which an ordinary Classical Dictionary will not make clear. The modern trend in education keeps the number of specialist Greek scholars little better than stationary, but it produces a great many who want, without learning Greek, to understand something of the Greek contribution to European civilization. It is for them especially that I have tried to write. I have had in mind also those who have some Greek and have read a few plays in the original, but are not so familiar with the whole body of tragedy that they can afford to dispense with all guidance, for example university students. Accordingly, in the Notes I have used some Greek words and discussed certain problems which may not be of interest to all readers.

I have devoted more space than is usual in a book of this kind to an attempt to describe the city and the people to

whom we owe the thirty-three surviving tragedies. Even so the result is necessarily much simplified, and I have not always qualified my generalizations in the way which caution would suggest. Some may object that, having given considerable space to the setting of tragedy, I have failed to show that tragedy was a necessary consequence of its environment, or to trace a detailed connection between individual plays and the circumstances in which they were written. I do not think this can be done without resorting to hypotheses which are unduly tenuous. But even though no close relationship can be worked out, it is important to call attention to the background, for Greek tragedy was an activity of a whole community, and the society in which it arose is part of the picture.

I have not filled the Notes with references to learned works in foreign languages though fully conscious of my debt to them, but I have recorded the sources of statements which an ordinary reader may wish to test for himself. As for acknowledgments to the works of others, views about a play, unless they are a Verrall's, can rarely be ascribed to a single originator as definitely as a textual emendation to its maker, and different statements of what is fundamentally the same view can have various effects. Though there are a few things which I am not conscious of having got from anyone else, no doubt I owe even more than I know to the books I have read and the teachers I have listened to during the last twenty-five years. For it has been my good fortune to live in contact with an oral tradition which goes back to one of the greatest of Aeschylean scholars, Walter Headlam, and in one of the few places in the world where Greek plays are regularly produced in Greek. I am far from claiming the authority either of Headlam or of those by whom the tradition has been developed, especially Sir John Sheppard, the Provost of King's, for everything I have written, but I do not doubt their approval of my object, which is to say those things about Greek Tragedy which are likely to help a reader today to appreciate it. For as Mr. Santayana has put it: 'Foreign classics have to be re-translated and re-interpreted for each generation, to render their old naturalness in a new way, and

keep their perennial humanity living and capable of assimilation. It is this continual digestion of the substance supplied by the past that alone renders the insights of the past still potent in the present and for the future. Living criticism, genuine appreciation, is the interest we draw from year to year on the unrecoverable capital of human genius.'

It is often easier and more entertaining to read about literature than to read literature, and as a means of making an impression on examiners and others there is much to be said for it. But no one will go far towards the understanding of Greek drama unless he puts himself to the trouble of reading some of the plays. No translation can reproduce all the colour of the original, but even a bad translation cannot fail to give a reasonable idea of form and structure. It is essential to read at least two or three of the most important works of each dramatist, for choice *before* reading the section in which they are discussed.

I have generally referred to the plays by their traditional Latin names; these are the names by which they are known in English Literature, and there is no uniform series of English equivalents; and where there is an English form the Latin is often shorter. In the same way I have used the Latin forms of Greek proper names; many of these names are familiar in their Latin dress, and when they are not, direct transliteration from Greek produces collocations of letters which are uncouth on an English page and suggest a pronunciation still so remote from the original that there is small compensation for the ugliness.

The greater part of the first two chapters has been read in typescript by Professor Adcock, and the whole book by Mr. W. A. Camps, Fellow of Pembroke College, and I am much indebted to them for a large number of corrections and improvements, as I am to my wife and to Mr. B. M. Caven, Fellow of King's College, who read the book in proof.

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF GREEK TRAGEDY

It is possible to make too much of the differences between ancient and modern drama. Some things, Cassandra's vision of impending death, Oedipus's slow discovery of himself, the farewell of Medea to her children, these need no commentator. Their impact is immediate, and it is obvious that here poetry and drama are united as they have rarely been since. Indeed, with Aeschylus the modern reader may even be at an advantage over the ancient, since he is less troubled by certain crudities of technique, and less surprised by an unrestrained splendour of language which seems, judged by the austere standards of Attic purity, to have verged at times on the ridiculous. But much of the ordinary run of a Greek tragedy is so startlingly unfamiliar that we may be baffled or irritated unless we have the knowledge which helps us to put ourselves, however incompletely, in the place of the audience for which the plays were intended.

The stories which are the subjects of Greek tragedies were drawn, with very few exceptions, from the great body of legend and tradition known as Greek mythology. The events which it purported to record ranged from the beginnings of the world to the wars of Thebes and Troy which were supposed by Herodotus to have happened some eight hundred years before his own time. Thus the action was set in the remote past. But the Attic poets were not historical novelists, and though they might draw some antique colour from the old epic poems which were in many cases their immediate source, the background of the action was largely the Greece of their own day. The city-state was the only political organization with which they were directly acquainted, and although in the heroic age it had not yet come into existence, they set the action in a more or less contemporary city-state because it was the only society they knew. Euripides did this of set purpose, since it was often of the contemporary world that

he wished to write. Thus it is in the light of fifth-century conceptions that we must try to explain strange ideas and strange figures that we encounter in the plays, ferocious tyrants, glib demagogues, heroic yet bashful maidens, and slaves, contemned as a class, as individuals often trusted and treated with half-apologetic respect; and above all the gods, who on the stage or off it bear little relation to anything we are inclined to call divine.

I POLITICAL AND SOCIAL

Ancient city-states were small; it was exceptional that in Attica a few inhabitants of the more remote parts lived more than a day's journey from the city. Life was correspondingly more intense; the distinction between local and national issues was for the most part non-existent, the distinction between private and public life was less marked. All the citizens could meet within range of one man's voice, and if the constitution was democratic they decided major questions of policy; forming themselves into smaller groups they could constitute juries; it was thus that elderly Athenians earned their old-age pensions. The city-state being small tended also to be unstable. The prize of power was so obviously there to be struggled for. The time was long passed, nearly a century when Aeschylus was born in 525 B.C., when a small group of aristocratic families, claiming perhaps descent from a god, could expect to keep political power to themselves. Their predominance passed when the heavy-armed citizen infantry replaced the nobles fighting from chariots as the principal arm in warfare; the new forces were composed mainly of peasant farmers who were now in a position to afford a hoplite's panoply.

A frequent consequence of instability of government was the rise of a tyrant. A tyrant was normally an ambitious aristocrat who seized power with the help of discontented members of inferior classes. Tyrants continued to appear from time to time throughout Greek history, but they were especially numerous in the century which preceded the birth of

Aeschylus. Unlike a legitimate king the tyrant owed his power to force, and so long as his bodyguard was faithful maintained it by force. His power was absolute, for having established himself despite the city's law he remained above the law and governed according to his will. Thus the tyrant was at the same time the most envied of men, because wealth and all the material good things of life were at his command, and the most hated and despised, because his good fortune was enjoyed at the expense of his fellow citizens of whom only the basest would be prepared to be his friends. Though not all tyrants were as bad as this, they certainly succumbed often enough to the tendency of power to corrupt, and if they did not their sons did.

Athens was fortunate in having in Peisistratus a most undespotic tyrant who made Attica into a land of reasonably prosperous small-holders depending for their livelihood on vines and olives rather than corn. He also encouraged the worship of Dionysus, the worship of which tragedy was, or came to be, a part. The Athenians managed to combine a hatred of tyranny with a memory of the reign of Peisistratus as a golden age. For, as usually happened in the dynasties of tyrants, the second generation showed a decline. His son Hippias, at least after his nerve had been shaken by an attempt at assassination, ruled like a typical despot. It is worth remembering that it was under this oppressive rule that Aeschylus passed his early years. Tyranny was a thing of which the tragic poets, or their fathers, had direct experience. The campaign of Marathon, in which Aeschylus took part, was fought to prevent the establishment of Hippias by the Persians as their puppet-king.

This experience of the Athenians lent reality to stories of other famous tyrants and had a profound effect on the portrayal of rulers in tragedy. Legitimate monarchs existed only on the fringe of the Greek world and were outside normal experience.[1] So the kings of tragedy, if virtuous like Theseus, govern with the aid of a popular assembly and do nothing without winning its consent; if wicked, assume the character of out-and-out tyrants. Even Oedipus, the father of his people,

is apt, when his will is crossed, to lapse into tyrannical behaviour; so great is the temptation which besets those who are above the law.

Athens never again submitted to the rule of a tyrant until she had to accept one at the hands of a foreign conqueror. But besides the tyranny of the individual ruler there is the tyranny of the demagogue and of the oligarch, and the troubled years to which most of the surviving tragedies belong were darkened by their threat. But to return to the expulsion of Hippias in 510 B.C. when Aeschylus was about fifteen; its immediate consequence was the establishment of a democratic constitution by Cleisthenes who, in the vivid phrase of Herodotus, 'took the people into partnership' (5, 66). That is to say, the ultimate decision on all policies was in the hands of the adult male citizens numbering about thirty thousand.[2] But the magistrates, who possessed the executive power, long continued to be drawn from the upper class, which alone had experience in the technique of government and sufficient wealth to be able to devote its time to public affairs. It is true that before long some of the less exacting offices came to be filled by drawing lots among those citizens who possessed a certain property qualification, a much more democratic mode of election.[3]

The effect of the introduction of democracy at Athens was an astonishing outburst of energy. Hitherto a by no means outstanding city, she began suddenly to dominate her neighbours, who were not well-disposed to the new democracy, and even to defy Sparta, the greatest power in Greece. As Herodotus put it: 'The excellence of political equality is proved not by one but by several instances, seeing that while the Athenians were subject to tyrants they were no better in war than their neighbours, but once they got rid of their tyrants they became by far the best.' (5, 78.) The triumph over Persia in which Athens took a leading part opened a way to greatness. As head of a confederacy which soon turned into an empire Athens became a Mediterranean power, and the Piraeus the most important harbour east of Carthage.

In the normal Greek city the powerlessness of the poorer

classes was due in part to their inferior role in war in which they served as light-armed troops. It is surprising that in Greece, a country peculiarly suited to the operations of light-armed troops, they were not used to more advantage. Possibly there was a certain reluctance to allow them to become an important part of the city's defences for fear they should claim a greater share of political power. In a maritime state the poorer citizens served on board ship. A man may be unable to afford a hoplite's armour, but no one is too poor to pull an oar. The power of the Athenian state rested on the body of highly skilled rowers who won for her fleets technical superiority over all rivals and enabled them to accept battle against heavy numerical odds. The impregnable walls which were hurriedly raised after the retreat of the Persians and later extended to enclose the space between Athens and the Piraeus made the city virtually an island, unassailable so long as she commanded the seas. It was not without reason that Plato when constructing his ideal Republic gave it a site far away from the sea. The Athenian democracy became an extreme example of the democratic type of constitution; the votes of the seamen decided that the policy of the city should be one of exploitation and adventure.[4]

In the middle decades of the fifth century the policy was conducted with discretion and success. Pericles, for more than thirty years the most influential leader, was able to restrain his supporters as well as to outmanœuvre his opponents. After his death early in the great war with Sparta in which his calculated policy involved his city the logical consequences of democracy were realized; the popular leaders began to be drawn from the people,[5] and the people began to be a harsher taskmaster to its leaders.

Since four of the seven surviving plays of Sophocles and all but two or three of those of Euripides belong to the period of this war, which broke out in 431 B.C., it is worthwhile to form a picture of the situation at Athens in those years. It was the rich and those who cultivated the land who suffered most from the war. The rich, some of whom were inclined to approve of Sparta, contributed heavily to the cost of the war,

though it was only in the last ten years, when the tribute from the allies began to dry up, that the pressure on them became really heavy. No doubt it was possible even then to grow rich out of war, but industry and commerce at Athens were on the smallest scale and the day of the big contractor was not yet. And it is perhaps significant that the largest munitions factory of which we hear, Cephalus's shield-factory employing a hundred and twenty men, was in the hands of a resident alien. The farmers of Attica big and small—there do not seem to have been many large estates—retreated into the shelter of the city walls as soon as war began and had to watch the smoke go up from their burning homes. To fight a pitched battle with the Spartan land forces would have been a sure way to lose the war. Their sacrifice was the greater because Attica was full of vineyards and orchards whose destruction was much more serious than the burning of crops. There was relief for a time from the annual ravages after 425 when Athens held a number of Spartan prisoners. But the losses became more serious than ever when the Spartans established a permanent post in Athenian territory at the time of the Sicilian expedition in 413. Thereafter much of Attica was denied to the Athenians.

On the other hand the poorer classes whose home was in Athens or Piraeus suffered much less. So long as command of the sea was unimpaired trade flourished, and sailors did not lack employment in time of war. There was always the hope of booty from expeditions over sea, and if Athens could enlarge her empire it was to be expected that the dividend paid to the citizens would increase. Hence the decision which proved the turning-point of the war, the decision to attack Syracuse in the hope of founding a new empire in the west. We need not suppose that all attitudes were decided by economic interests, but it is easy enough to understand how there came to grow up two antipathetic groups. On the one hand, those who doubted whether Pericles had been right to force the issue with Sparta and thought that peace could be made on satisfactory terms, on the other those who gloried in the aggressive spirit that had made Athens great and

wished to make her greater. And it was natural that the antipathy should grow; moderates were called pro-Spartan, patriots were accused of hankering after military command. There were also differences of principle, or perhaps one should say, of more deeply rooted prejudice.

Throughout the fifth century from Pindar to Euripides we meet the emphatic affirmation of the belief that men are not equal, that blood will out, that there is a superior class whose privilege it is to lead. We meet also, especially in Euripides, the contrary belief that one man is as good as another, and that men of any class are capable of the highest achievement. This issue became very much alive after the death of Pericles, when men of lower social class began to aspire to high office. And as high office became accessible to more men, so the temptation increased to acquire it by making irresponsible promises. At the same time confidence in the impartiality of the popular law courts began to wane. The rich man could no longer be confident that he would not be condemned for the sake of the fine which would accrue to the treasury. But, most embittering of all, loyalty to city, at least among extremists, became separated from loyalty to class. Just as democratic Athens secured her hold over her allies by establishing among them democratic governments which would have a vested interest in the Athenian connection, so the opponents and victims of democratic government might look for succour to the enemies of Athens.

During the last quarter of the fifth century the enemies of democracy inside Athens struck twice. After the democracy had been discredited by the failure of the ill-advised expedition to Sicily the oligarchic coup d'état of the Four Hundred took place in 411. But the democracy did not lack staunchness in disaster, and the coup failed when the extremists among the oligarchs tried to call in Spartan help. It is interesting that Thucydides described (8, 97) the modified democracy established after the fall of the Four Hundred, with limited franchise and no payment for magistrates and jurors, as the best condition that Athens had known in his time. Sophocles, who was probably associated with the early stages of the

anti-democratic movement, and Euripides too, would very likely have agreed.

When Athens lost command of the sea to a Spartan fleet maintained by Persian gold and fell after a long siege in 404, an oligarchic government was again set up, but the Thirty Tyrants did not rule for much longer than the oligarchic government of 411. And it is fair to add that the Athenian people, whose unfaltering bravery had failed to retrieve the damage done by misguided policies, showed at its restoration an admirable moderation and recovered in surprising measure the city's lost unity. Both Sophocles and Euripides were spared by an opportune death the horrors of the second revolution, but Sophocles' last play, the *Oedipus at Colonus*, was not produced until after the restoration of the democracy. It may have been the uncomfortable situation of a moderate and an intellectual in a period of bitter partisanship that encouraged Euripides to accept in 408 an invitation from King Archelaus of Macedon at whose court he died.

Such was the frame of political life in the period to which most of the plays belong, and political life was much more nearly the whole of life then than now. References to particular events in tragedy are, in the opinion of most scholars, rare. But the main issues of the times make themselves felt continually, especially in the work of Euripides. The problem of war and its futility, of political power and its real worth in comparison with the values of other ways of life, of human beings, whether their qualities are inborn or acquired by training, these problems are in the background of many plays from the war years.

The citizens, for good and for ill, managed the affairs of Athens. But they were not its only inhabitants; they were the privileged class, and alongside them were the metics, or resident aliens, and the slaves. Athens, as a great commercial centre, attracted large numbers of foreigners who settled permanently and were given a status with privileges and obligations. Some, like the Syracusan family to which the orator Lysias belonged, mixed with the best Athenian society on equal terms; Lysias' father Cephalus is a respected figure in

the opening pages of Plato's *Republic*. But in tragedy their only appearance is to supply a metaphor for all that is absent from its natural home. It is far otherwise with slaves, indispensable on the stage as in real life, whose status was a byword for contempt.

In most early societies slavery as an institution is taken for granted. The prisoner of war, if not put to death, becomes a slave, though at a later stage, if he is a person of consequence, he may be ransomed. It could conceivably happen to any Greek to become a slave, as it is said that Plato did after capture by pirates. But most of the slaves at Athens were non-Greeks, many of them from Thrace. Their economic importance was largely that they provided labour for the silver mines at Laurium; mining was a form of labour which it would scarcely have been possible to persuade a free man to undertake, though some citizens seem to have worked in their own concessions.[6] In the mines they were ruthlessly worked out, and their expectation of life was short. For the rest their material condition was probably not bad. They performed most of the domestic labour of Athens, assisted to some extent with agriculture, especially as shepherds and herdsmen, as skilled artisans worked alongside metics and citizens, and took some part in retail trade; the police force, such as it was, was recruited from slaves, and so were a number of clerks and public servants. These were in a privileged position, themselves often in control of other slaves. Household slaves, who appear most often in drama, were in a sense members of the family and joined in worship of the goddess of the hearth.

It is guessed that the number of slaves in Attica at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War was between 100,000 and 150,000.[7] Many citizens had no slave at all, while a rich man might own fifty. At a time when little land came on the market slaves were an obvious form of investment. They could be hired out, if unskilled for labour in the mines, if skilled in a trade as artisans, or set up in business on their master's behalf. It is surprising that we hear of no complaints from citizens of unfair competition from slave labour, and that

free men seem to have had no objection to working alongside slaves and metics. Under the conditions prevalent in Attica, where industry was organized in small units—the largest factory of which we hear employed one hundred and twenty men—slave labour was not especially attractive to an employer. A slave must be fed and kept from deteriorating whether there is work for him to do or not, whereas a free labourer can be dismissed. Indeed, if all Athenian slaves apart from those who worked in the mines had been freed and raised to the status of metic, the difficulties which would have ensued would have been social rather than economic.[8] So little was Athenian, as opposed to Roman, society founded on slave labour.

It is a mistake to think of the Greeks as a leisured people who owed to the exploitation of slaves the opportunity to achieve their artistic and intellectual triumphs. Had they been leisured, pay for public service would not have been a vital part of a fully democratic constitution. The ordinary man had to work, and only if paid could he devote his time to public duties. The well-to-do did not have more of their work done for them by slaves than is normally done by paid servants in a society where there are no slaves. The Athenians enjoyed leisure in part at least because their lives were simple, by our standards extremely uncomfortable, and their wants few. It is worth remembering that the arrogant assumption made by most Greeks of their superiority to barbarians was not based on 'technological' superiority, because many barbarians had reached a level of material development quite as high as that reached by the Greeks, but on their superior intelligence displayed in the way of life of the city-state.

Slavery was taken for granted. The slave, even though well treated on the whole, was at his master's mercy except that the law protected his life. In the courts he could give evidence only under torture, the reason, no doubt, why his evidence was not often called upon.[9] But the question whether it was right that one human being should stand in this relation to another was beginning to be raised. In the next century Aristotle maintained, though he mentioned that many dis-

agreed with him, that slavery was right because many men were natural slaves, fit to be regarded only as living tools. He did not go into such awkward questions as how many slaves were not natural slaves or how many natural slaves had escaped slavery, though he granted that a slave might *qua* man be an object of friendship, even if *qua* slave he was only a tool. Though some declared that the institution was unjustified, we do not hear that anyone proposed to abolish it. It would have been too awkward. But in Euripides we can see the beginnings of uneasiness. It is true that his most admirable slaves turn out in the end to be of noble birth, but some even of his genuine slaves are as good as their masters.

From this class, particularly from the enslaved captives, come many of the characters of tragedy: Cassandra, ambiguously invited by Clytaemnestra to join in the family sacrifice, Hecuba, Andromache, Tecmessa, Iole all belong to the same unhappy class as the woman of Melos whom Alcibiades is said to have purchased as a concubine, women whose husbands have been killed in battle or put to death after capture. The old nurses of Orestes, Phaedra and Deianeira, the slaves who look after Medea's children, the shepherd and messengers who correspond to the serving men of Elizabethan drama, and in many plays the Chorus, all belong to the same oppressed class. Like many barbarians who had served a lifetime at Athens they have assimilated Greek ways; only the Phrygian in the *Orestes* is conspicuously a foreigner. Most of them are fortunate in their station and have not lost their self-respect. Maltreatment of slaves was a theme more congenial to Comedy. But maltreatment there must have been. Not all the 20,000 slaves who deserted to the Spartans after they built their fort at Decelea came from the mines.

Aristotle's order of merit among human beings was men, women, slaves. At few times and places would it have been challenged. At Athens the legal status of women appears to have been in some respects disadvantageous as compared even with other Greek cities. Not only was a woman's marriage arranged for her, as has always been common practice in a large part of the world, but she might even be required to

leave her husband and marry a near kinsman in order to keep in the family the property which descended through her.[10] This, however, was a rare occurrence, and too much has perhaps been made of it. She seems to have been free in theory to leave a husband whom she disliked, but she could hardly move unless she could persuade her own family to take her back, and they would be reluctant to undertake the extraction of her dowry from her husband unless she had grave cause for complaint.[11] It is rather that the public attitude to women as expressed in classical writers strikes a chill into us. 'A woman's glory is not to be mentioned', Pericles is supposed to have said,[12] and there were few Athenian women mentioned often enough for their names to be known to us. To some extent tragedy too suggests that they were not treated with much consideration. A virgin about to offer her life for her country will apologize for speaking before she is spoken to. Heracles' wife, when her husband is restored to her out of Hades, is ashamed of herself for speaking to him before his father has greeted him. But these are a matter of convention which need have little meaning.

Remembering the women whom the tragic poets presented on the stage it is hard to believe that the women of Athens were oppressed and cowed. No doubt young women of marriageable age tended to be rather colourless since they had been kept in seclusion and given little education. But a woman who runs a house and a family is in a position to assert herself, and however little we may approve the manners of Athenian men in the presence of women, there can be no doubt of the deference shown to a mother. Comedy in this respect may be a better guide than tragedy, and no one could suggest that the women of Aristophanes are little mice. It is, however, quite true that they were invested with no erotic glamour; love was not yet regarded as the roof and crown of things. It was a passion of alarming violence, as Sappho said, 'bittersweet'. The victims of its more spectacular ravages were not regarded with a sort of awed respect; for love of women the world could not, by ancient standards, be well lost. By the end of the fifth century as the individual became more self-

conscious and less inclined to lose himself in the life of his group, the love-interest began in the plays of Euripides to make itself felt, and in Menander a century later its predominance was unfortunately complete. But the fifth-century attitude can be summed up in a striking fragment of Sophocles:

> This affliction is an alluring bane; I sketch its likeness thus. When ice has formed under a frosty sky boys eagerly take hold of the firm-set lumps and at first a novel joy is theirs; but soon they find they cannot let go of the melting mass, nor can they keep hold of it without pain. So desire often drives those in love both to go on and to desist. *Frag.* 149.

Those brought up in a world plastered with posters of film stars are likely always to find the Greek attitude to women somewhat alien.[13]

2 RELIGIOUS

Not less important for the understanding of their drama than the social relations of the Athenians are the relations of men with the unseen world—and not less strange. Man today asks of religion that it shall show him a picture of the Universe such that his own life and conduct have a significant place in it; he seeks a foundation for his ethical system and an assurance that he matters; this usually involves the belief in immortality and the possibility of some personal communion with the divine. None of these statements is generally true of the religion of fifth century Greece. For us religion is based on dogma and leads to certain kinds of conduct and certain forms of worship; for the Greeks it was based on ritual and led to appeasement. The ritual was what mattered; it was appointed for all the great occasions of life and death, providing no doubt a framework which was psychologically satisfying and soothing. Performance of the ritual was likely to win the favour of the powers and put a man on good terms with them. And what sort of beings were they who took pleasure in the ugly mess which must have been inseparable

from ancient sacrifices? There is no clear answer, or worse, a frivolous variety of answers, which are mutually incompatible. Often the origin of ritual is forgotten by later generations, or if remembered seems meaningless, and one or more new origins are invented. For instance, a piece of ritual to which importance is commonly attached is the burial of the dead; at some stage there was a definite idea of the consequences which followed a failure to dispose of a corpse in the proper way; the spirit of the dead man perhaps suffered because of it, as Patroclus tells Achilles in the *Iliad*, but the important thing was that the dead man was angry, and the living were afraid.

Now the question of giving or withholding rites of burial arises in more than one tragedy, and it was the Athenian practice to refuse burial in Attic soil to traitors;[14] on the other hand Nicias once sent a herald to the enemy, thus sacrificing his claim to a victory, because he persisted in searching for the bodies of two of his men.[15] One of the ugliest incidents in Athenian history is the judicial murder of the generals who had been in command at the battle of Arginusae on a charge of having neglected their duty of recovering from the wrecked ships not only the survivors of the battle but the corpses of the fallen. The people were easily carried away by an appeal to the powerful emotions connected with the rites of burial. But never in the literature of the time do we find a reference to any reason for this insistence on the urgency of burial, any hint that the living or the dead may suffer.[16] It is the pious thing to do, the conventional thing; failure to act piously may awake the divine displeasure, but no one asks why the gods are displeased. Religion was becoming stereotyped; it was safer, also comforting, to do the 'right' thing, and the only reason for doing it was that one's ancestors had always done it.

It may be objected that in view of the enormous mass of myth, legend, and folk-tale with which the Greeks were apparently familiar it is unreasonable to assert that they lacked clear ideas about their gods. Up to a point this is a fair objection. As Herodotus says in a famous passage: 'I think that Homer and Hesiod lived not more than four hundred years

ago; it was they who taught the Greeks the descent of the gods and assigned to them their names and honours and arts, and described their appearance.' (2, 53.) The influence of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* on Greek thought can scarcely be exaggerated; Homer fixed the form in which the Greeks visualized the great gods, and our own conception of Zeus or Apollo or Athena is inherited from him; not, of course, that he invented them, for they were already ancient in his day. These gods were important in the more formal part of Greek religion. The Maiden-goddess who lived on the Acropolis cared for her city, rejoiced in its triumphs and mourned its dead; the ordinary citizen was upheld by his belief in her protection, and when the approach of the Persians drove him to take refuge on Salamis he found comfort in the news that the sacred snake of the goddess had of its own accord evacuated its home.[17] But in all this there was nothing personal; his patriotism was the warmer for having such a symbol to which to attach itself, and when all is said official Greek religion was largely municipal piety. Yet, however unconscious the Greek may have been, as compared with modern man, of the nakedness of his own soul, he needed more than this. But the Homeric gods could not give it; indeed it is probably true that Homer exerted a greater influence through the ideal of purely human conduct which is implicit in his poems, than through his portrayal of the gods.

But Greek religion contained much besides the Olympian deities, a fact which is partly obscured by the general tendency of the great gods to assimilate to themselves less celebrated local deities. The religious life, if the term is not misleading, of an Athenian was both public and domestic; Athens was peculiarly rich in festivals, which is to say holidays occasioned by some ceremony intended to win or keep the favour of the gods; Pericles mentions it as one of the charms of the Athenian way of life.[18] The four-yearly Panathenaic festival was indeed in honour of one of the Homeric gods, but that was a comparatively late innovation of Peisistratus in search of popularity and national unity. If we examine the older and obscurer festivals, the Diasia, the Anthesteria, the Thargelia,

we find that they have little to do with anything in Homer, even though the Diasia was nominally in honour of Zeus. Really they are concerned with those ancient rites whereby man sought to ensure the efficacy of his sowing and harvesting, to control the forces of birth and life on which his existence depends. The gods who are closest to these forces are Dionysus, who was scarcely known to Homer, and Demeter, who takes no part in his story. The ritual was primitive, often no doubt meaningless to the citizens of the fifth century, and sometimes it must have seemed anachronistic even to them. What, for instance, did they make of the divine marriage of the wife of the King Archon, who went arrayed as a bride and spent a night in the temple of Dionysus?[19] This experience might befall any Athenian woman married to a husband who possessed the not very considerable means required as a qualification for the archonship.

Emotions were probably more deeply involved in the rites of the family circle. Noble families were usually guardians of ancient cults of some importance, hereditary priests in fact. But every father of a family was a priest in his own house, and the gods, never far away, seemed nearest perhaps on those occasions when men are most conscious of the ultimate realities, birth, marriage, and death. And the pious or superstitious man was free to cultivate the goodwill of the gods as much as he wished, or could afford; those who were 'fond of sacrificing' were a type which antiquity recognized, and it may have been commoner then than now to suppose that the powers can be kept in good humour by payment of the proper attentions.

For many men religious activities of these kinds, public and private, were enough; but the spiritual resources of antiquity were not yet exhausted. There were Mysteries, which were public, but not primarily national, and there were priests who could reveal a private way of salvation. Nor must we forget the oracles of all degrees of respectability from Apollo's at Delphi downwards.

The Mysteries of Eleusis were open to all who were free from ceremonial impurity; we may suppose that the majority

of Athenians were initiates, since on one occasion those who had not been initiated were required to leave the assembly, which would hardly have been possible unless they had been a minority.[20] The Mysteries have largely kept their secret, but it seems clear that the sowing of the seed corn and the sprouting of the crop were represented as a death followed by resurrection, and that the analogy was applied to the lot of the human soul. Eleusis had no dogma and inculcated no way of life, but it was agreed that there were privileges after death for those who had seen the holy pageant; 'those who have shared in the rite have gladder hopes for the end of life and for the whole of time'.[21] Yet it is strange that, though initiation was common, we hear so little of any such hopes on all the occasions when men speak of death. The great hope is to be remembered, and the cult at the tomb the best means of realizing it; it is exceptional in the fifth century to find traces of a belief in any more personal form of survival. Perhaps the life of the individual was still so much bound up with the city of which he was part, that little interest could be felt in a solitary survival in the strange, cosmopolitan world of the dead.

Further, there was the faith taught by the Orphic priests; this was not a separate religion, but an addition to the ordinary pagan beliefs. It was one of the peculiarities of Christianity that it could not be accepted along with another religion; but until the coming of Christianity the new faiths generally supplemented instead of displacing the old. The Orphics, and the Pythagoreans with whom they were often confused, were almost alone among the ancients in possessing a system of dogma; man combined in himself principles of good and evil, the one derived from the god Dionysus, the other from the wicked Titans who had devoured him; by cultivating the good and purging away the evil man might win something very much like salvation, escaping eventually from the 'weary wheel' of birth and death to live in everlasting bliss.[22] But the details of this, at first sight promising, way of life are disappointing; again ritual and charms are the decisive factor. Although some of their doctrines aroused

at least the interest of Plato, the devotees of Orpheus are always spoken of with contempt. Probably the professionals who made a living out of the credulity of the faithful were a shady lot whose place in society was not unlike that of fortune-tellers and spiritualists today; but behind the movement there must have been at some stage outstanding minds. It is a mistake to imagine regular congregations of the faithful; it was a case of more or less, but the number of those who at some time or other found themselves on the fringe or consulted an Orphic priest was no doubt considerable. The modern reader who finds it difficult, or perhaps displeasing, to imagine that men have ever been able to adjust themselves to life without some kind of personal religion like his own, is inclined to seize on Orphism as the answer to his perplexities: he should be warned that there is no evidence that it was either very important or very religious in the fifth century.

By the middle of the century there were a few daring spirits who were ready to deny the possibility of knowledge of the future more certain than a guess, but they were a tiny minority, and when Aeschylus was a young man probably non-existent. Even Herodotus in the next generation, a contemporary of Sophocles, who was far from believing all he was told, breaks off his narrative of the battle of Salamis[23] to remark that there is no denying the truth of oracles in view of the precision with which that battle was foretold. For most of us a real effort of imagination is required before we can put ourselves in the position of those who had an unshaken belief in the possibility of ascertaining from the gods what was going to happen, and what it was best to do, in small matters as well as great. The questions which the Delphian Apollo answered did not concern only the founding of colonies and the high policy of cities, but humble individuals sought his help in their difficulties; and at this date Zeus at Dodona seems to have been supported mainly by the custom of those in a private station. The reliability of these great and reputable oracles was doubted by few, though their persistent ambiguity might be regretted, but it needed no great scepticism to question the claims of the numberless charlatans,

the self-appointed, itinerant priests, who claimed knowledge of the divine purpose.

We find, then, that it was commonly believed that the gods were close at hand, that they were interested in the fate of mere mortals, and that their interference might be secured by taking the proper steps; as for death, most men hoped for little more than the survival of their memory living on in the hearts of those who tended the family graves.

But what of right and wrong? It is in the nature of gods not to be indifferent to these values. Some crimes they undoubtedly punish, perjury for example, which is a direct affront to themselves; yet gods who begin mainly as personifications of natural forces are not easily constrained to be champions of virtue. If a god did not send his rain on the unjust as well as the just, if the corn and the vines and the herds of wicked oppressors were regularly afflicted with plague and wasting, while the virtuous prospered, then there would be no doubt that certain kinds of conduct won the divine favour.

Unhappily the facts were not such as lead primitive man to conclude that the gods loved only the righteous. Indeed the gods needed to follow man in the acquisition of a moral sense towards which they were incapable of leading him. To some extent they did so; but here they were impeded by the very qualities which make them superior to the gods of most peoples. The genius of the Greek race, or of its ancestors, bestowed on these vague animistic powers so much life and personality that their forms became fixed and unmalleable at a very early stage; the splendour and magnificence with which they represent the ideal of a heroic, but not highly moral, world has been for ages an inspiring force in all the civilizations which have been exposed to their influence; but to the Greeks they were a handicap, because the traditional religion ceased too early to be able to absorb the best thought of the time. Thus a remarkable thinker called Xenophanes, who was born at Colophon in Ionia perhaps as early as 570, refused to believe in deities who did things which were reckoned disgraceful when done by men, and asserted that

there was one god and that he was not formed in the likeness of man. The refashioning or expurgation of the more startling stories, or the discovery of hidden meanings at variance with their obvious purport, were not effective means for resolving a fundamental contradiction. Heracleitus, and probably Pythagoras too, were no less definite in their rejection of the traditional gods. So religion died away into a series of observances which became gradually more meaningless, or sought a renewal of vigour in the importation from the east of more exciting and less innocent forms of worship, while the development of morality proceeded on independent lines.[24]

Yet Zeus was not indifferent to justice. In Homer he is the protector of the stranger and the suppliant;[25] Hesiod, who speaks for a poverty-stricken, peasant class, appeals to him as a champion against the iniquity of kings, and he makes Justice, Dike, his daughter. Solon passionately asserted that wickedness is always punished, even though justice may be long in coming. Apollo, as represented by the Delphic priests, sought to purify the morality of the sixth century, teaching that intentions, though unfulfilled, as well as actions, could be wicked; and in general there was a vague feeling that the gods were on the side of right. The injured party in a quarrel was apt to reinforce his morale by reflecting that the gods would be on his side, and men looking round to find a reason for failure might wonder if the gods had withheld their favour because the cause was not just. Such was the state of mind of the Spartans, who had enjoyed small success in the first part of the Peloponnesian War, when, through Athenian aggression, the war was renewed.[26] It would be harder to find a case where a State refrained from going to war because it feared divine anger.

In the time of Aeschylus the impending rift was still obscured, and there was little consciousness of the inadequacy soon to be revealed, but his was the last generation in which a genuine theological solution to the problems of evil and the nature of the divine government still seemed feasible—perhaps because there was still little facility in abstract thought, and speculation was mainly confined to the figur-

ative language of traditional religion. Aeschylus and his contemporary, Empedocles, made the last serious attempt to describe the universe as just and intelligible in terms of the traditional mythology; others after him, Sophocles for example, continued to accept the religion of their fathers, but they did so as an act of rather vague faith without trying to rear a structure of theology on its cracked foundations. During the century when tragedy was flourishing, the moral and the religious life of Greece were beginning to go different ways, and the long, but comparatively painless, decay of paganism set in.

To the reader familiar only with the history of more pugnacious religions this unresisting collapse of paganism must seem very odd; the explanation lies chiefly in the absence of priestly orders from Greek life. Priests there were in abundance, but very few of them were only priests. They were not subject to restrictions or taboos of such a kind as to set them apart from ordinary men. In the case of a few priesthoods abstinence from sexual intercourse was required, but if the normal period of office was longer than a year or two, the priesthood was usually restricted to the elderly. Apollo at Delphi originally made his revelations to mankind through a young virgin, but in historic times he used a priestess of discreeter years. Further, as in Rome, the importance of a priesthood might be mainly political, and the priest would be under no temptation to identify himself with any body of priests as opposed to the ordinary citizens. The King Archon at Athens took over the religious functions which had been performed originally by the king, but he had legal duties as well, and his office was just as secular as that of any other archon.

The orator Andocides[27] shows well how slight an addition to normal activities the possession of a priesthood might be; while enlarging, as was the Athenian way, on the private vices of his opponent, he raked up an old scandal to the effect that, having married a wife, he had soon after taken his mother-in-law into the house as his mistress, and then, purely by way of making a telling point, added 'he who was

priest of the Mother and the Daughter', meaning Demeter and Persephone. Had it not been that the chance of his opponent's holding this particular priesthood gave Andocides an opening for a neat hit, he would never have thought it relevant to mention the fact that he was a priest.

A consequence of this state of affairs was that no one had a vested interest in dogma; the functions of the state religion, its ritual and its festivals, were steadily carried on, partly because they afforded occasions for general enjoyment, and for the poor the luxury of a meat meal, partly because many would have feared the divine displeasure had the ritual been interrupted. For absence of clear-cut belief in no way implies disbelief. But the lack of a priestly caste prevented the growth of dogma or the rise of an orthodox system of interpretation. And if any enterprising thinker adopted explanations of the old myths which, in fact, explained them right away, it was nobody's business to protest; interest was likely to be aroused only if he asserted his strange doctrines with such stridency that the gods might be expected to interfere and punish the blasphemer's city. Neglect of customary ritual might be more serious, but Greek thinkers were disinclined to push scepticism to the point of bad taste. There were cases of persecution,[28] but usually there were contributory political causes.

Accordingly we must not be surprised if the situation from the time of the Persian wars onward is highly confused. A man was under no compulsion to define his beliefs, and consistency is not to be looked for. The world was a frightening place; such miraculous manifestations of divine power as thunderstorms, earthquakes, floods, eclipses, plagues, were constantly occurring, and the only means of keeping on good terms with the responsible powers was the observance of traditional ritual. Worship of these powers, especially as it was carried on in the countless humble shrines which still dotted the countryside when Pausanias visited Greece in the second century A.D., shrines where even the name of the guardian deity had sometimes been forgotten, gave perhaps to ordinary men a sense of friendliness and a hope of protection in a world whose apparent arbitrary hostility was not yet con-

verted into the remote indifference of natural law. Among the host of amoral powers some at least were allies. When the Athenians evacuated the countryside at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, it was not only their homes that they minded leaving, so Thucydides tells us (2, 16), but also the shrines where their ancestors had worshipped.

Yet on this picture of moral anarchy the Greeks imposed a sort of morality of their own, eliciting from experience a law of nature of which, from their earliest to their latest days, they remained conscious. Observing that amid the shifting patterns of fortune the mean always in the long run asserts itself, that the pendulum begins sooner or later its return sweep, they interpreted life on the principle that nature abhors excess, the principle later worked out in fullest detail by Aristotle, who loved to base his wisdom on the agreed conclusions of common men. So the Greeks knew that greatness will be followed by humiliation as surely as day must give way to night, or the exaltation of the sun in June lead to his depression in the winter solstice. Agamemnon treads the purple carpet on the way to his death, and Xerxes, who so far forgot his place as a man that he cast a yoke upon the sea, returns home a ragged fugitive. But even the prudent man, who does not forget his inevitable lot in the scheme of things, cannot help balancing his good fortune with bad. Polycrates threw away his ring but all the same he had to pay for his run of luck. 'For no painless lot has the son of Cronos, who disposes all things, appointed for mortals; but sorrow and joy in their cycle come to all, as surely as the Bear revolves in his courses.'[29] It is a just observation, but those who are most keenly aware of this aspect of life will turn to resignation rather than religion, though it may be a resignation tinged with a humility which is not utterly unspiritual; Sophocles is an example. Otherwise, failing a world beyond the grave where tardy justice is done—and few Greeks believed in that—there was nothing for it but to take all precautions against getting out of the middle of the road, while remembering that no human precaution will prevail against all the accidents of chance.

This belief in the pattern of change as fundamental in the scheme of things can be held in various forms. At one extreme is the crude conception of divine jealousy, of *Phthonos*, which causes the gods to strike down any human being who threatens to compete with themselves in power or blessedness, at the other is the idea of a divinely ordered harmony, a structure such that all excess is automatically compensated, any disturbance of the balance redressed, not because a divinity is stirred by malevolence but because it is a law of nature that all things tend towards a state of equilibrium. The clearest expression of the idea of jealousy is to be found in Herodotus, though he does not hold the idea consistently: 'You see how the god blasts with his thunderbolt creatures of exceeding greatness, but those which are small do not provoke him. . . . It is the way of the god to cut short whatever is of surpassing bigness . . . for he allows none to be proud except himself' (7, 10). This conception is hardly to be found in tragedy, unless in the Persians' account of their defeat in Aeschylus, where it is not the poet's own view. But the idea of envy passes easily into that of a grudge that is justifiable and so to righteous indignation. At the other extreme the notion of a justice which is an instrinsic part of the structure of the universe is to be found in Euripides, though the context, where we have it, does not suggest that Euripides had any confidence in its validity.[30]

Emphasis on the mutability of human things, which is also implicit in this picture of the human situation, could lead to another set of ideas, the reign of fortune, the supremacy and the blindness of chance, *Tyche*. Chance need not be opposed to divine providence; events may be ascribed to chance merely because they are unforeseeable, but by the later fifth century the idea of a random chance, the negation of government by gods who care for right and wrong, was winning acceptance, and, like most ideas of the time, is to be found in the works of Euripides.

When Aeschylus died just before the middle of the century the outlook of the Greeks was about to suffer a rapid change. The foundations of society were soon to be called in

question, and the speculations of the thinkers began to reach a wider public. In the plays of Sophocles and Euripides we are conscious of the disturbance caused by the spread of these new ideas. The generation which saw the production of the *Oresteia* was probably the last which could live comparatively untroubled by the questioning of traditional values.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF GREEK TRAGEDY

I ORIGINS

Much of what is most valuable in European literature is dramatic, that is to say written for performance by actors. It is natural to feel curiosity about the origin of so fruitful a literary form. Masquerades in which men assume together with a mask a character not their own are common enough in primitive communities; the mask is associated with some form of superhuman power which by the normal processes of magic man hopes to acquire. It is probably no accident that Dionysus, the god of tragedy, was one of the few Greek gods who was thought to enter into possession of human beings, and that the mask was associated with his worship. Primitive masquerades are common, drama as an independently developed literary form is extremely rare; it arose in Greece, in Japan, and in India, and although knowledge of ancient drama, in so far as it was preserved in Latin, was never quite lost in Europe, it seems that drama in medieval Europe was essentially an independent growth. But this curiosity about origins can be only partially satisfied.[1]

All discussion starts from the only ancient attempt to answer the question, Aristotle's account of the origin of poetry in his *Poetics*.[2] Man has a natural impulse to imitate and takes pleasure in the imitations of others; the precise meaning of 'imitation' or 'representation', the translation which better fits some contexts, need not concern us here. Some men imitate characters better than their own, others worse. Those whose impulse was towards the imitation of better, that is to say idealized, characters created epic, or heroic, poetry; epic in course of time was succeeded by tragedy, which is the more fully developed form. Aristotle was not alone in seeing Homer as the forefather of tragedy.

Tragedy originated, so Aristotle tells us, from the leaders (*exarchontes*) of the dithyramb. The early plays were of

satyric character and short. That Thespis first made himself an actor entirely separate from the chorus is not stated in the *Poetics,* but it was the common Greek tradition and appears to have been mentioned elsewhere in Aristotle's works.[3] It was only at a late stage that tragedy became solemn and grew to the length customary in the fifth century; at the same time the metre of dialogue changed from tetrameter to iambic. Aeschylus introduced the second actor and made the chorus less predominant, Sophocles the third; and with Sophocles tragedy reached its full development. A good deal in this account calls for explanation.

The dithyramb was a choral song in honour of Dionysus, one of whose cult titles was Dithyrambos. A fragment of Archilochus, a poet of the seventh century, preserves his claim that he knew how to lead off the dithyramb of the Lord Dionysus when his wits were smitten with wine. The suggestion is that the poet improvised a song on traditional lines and thus led off for the chorus who sang the refrain. The word is used as early as Homer to describe the individual's part in a performance which was mainly choral.[4] Thus we have here a rudimentary sung dialogue. But it is by no means clear whether the *exarchon* is to be regarded as more akin to the Leader of the Chorus, the Coryphaeus of mature drama, who both led the singing and represented the chorus in spoken dialogue with the actors, or to the actor first introduced by Thespis. At all events drama in its crudest form, when it was still mainly choral song, must have consisted of songs interspersed with passages of verse in which the actor reported action supposed to have taken place off-stage and so, as the situation changed, gave occasion for further songs from the chorus; presumably the actor[5] also entered into conversation with the Coryphaeus. More difficulty is caused by the statement that the early plays were of satyric character. In the fifth century it was the regular practice for each of the tragic poets competing at the festival to produce after his three tragedies a shorter piece of a lighter character called a satyr-play. It was so called from its chorus of satyrs, beings partly human and partly animal, and it has no connection

with our words satire and satiric. Its spirit was essentially burlesque. We have one complete example of this genre, the *Cyclops* of Euripides, together with half the *Ichneutae* of Sophocles, and considerable fragments of satyr-plays by Aeschylus. Since it was widely accepted that the satyr-play proper was the invention of Pratinas of Phlius in the northern Peloponnesus, and that it was made a regular part of the tragic contests only after Aeschylus had begun to compete, Aristotle cannot be supposed to mean that tragedy developed directly from the satyr-play. But the satyric character to which he refers implies that these plays were burlesque rather than serious and that the chorus was in part animal.

Tradition tells that the first official production of a tragedy was by Thespis and took place at the Dionysia in 534 B.C. Thespis's one-actor tragedy had probably been in existence for some time before it was adopted by Peisistratus as a feature of his great new festival in honour of the popular god, Dionysus. Subsequently, if we are to believe Aristotle, who stresses that it happened at a late stage, a revolution took place, and tragedy was virtually re-created in the form of the portrayal of heroic struggle instead of its burlesque. Since Aeschylus is referred to in comedy as the creator of tragedy,[6] it is possible that it may have been he who first wrote tragedy in the familiar sense of the word. The trochaic metre which Aristotle mentions is freely used in an early play, the *Persae,* but thereafter is almost entirely replaced for dialogue by the iambic which, like blank verse, is closer to the rhythm of normal speech.[7] The change made by Sophocles from two to three actors, each of them available, of course, for more than one part, is manifest in the surviving plays.

So long as it was believed that satyrs were goat-men, figures of the familiar Pan type, the word tragedy, quite reasonably interpreted as 'goat-song', seemed to give a measure of confirmation to Aristotle's account. The goat was not so closely associated with Dionysus as some animals; none the less there were connections, and it could be believed with some confidence that a celebration of Dionysus which began as an animal masquerade gradually acquired the dignity and

sobriety of tragedy. In the masquerade the element of impersonation peculiar to drama already appeared in a simple form.

There are, however, difficulties in the way of accepting this view as it stands. Before considering them it will be well to raise the question, what could Aristotle himself know? The *Poetics* was composed just about two centuries after the first official production of a tragedy at the Dionysia. Aristotle knew all there was to know about the written records, for he himself edited them, and to him in the last resort we are indebted for the information about the dates of production which have come down to us preserved in inscriptions and manuscripts; but these official records probably began only in 504. Reliable oral tradition about early tragedy would have continued down to the second half of the fifth century, but unless it was by then recorded in writing it probably perished. Works of what may very roughly be called literary criticism began to be produced about the middle of the century, but scarcely anything is known about them and it seems likely that no systematic attempt to write literary history was made before the time of Aristotle. It is quite clear that when the attempt came to be made undue reliance had to be placed on evidence from comedy because other sources were lacking. Further, it is generally agreed that none of Thespis's own plays survived, and it is uncertain whether even the recorded titles are genuine. So the possibility cannot be excluded that Aristotle was making an intelligent guess, and it is even possible that he may have been misled by an identification, common in his day, of the Pan type of goat-man with the satyr. His own statement that much was known about tragedy, whereas the corresponding developments in comedy were unrecorded, need not apply to the origins.[8]

When we come to consider the intrinsic probability of Aristotle's account, it strikes us as odd that a burlesque treatment of myth should have preceded the serious treatment. We should expect that, as in the case of epic, the burlesque would be a parody of an already existing form of serious poetry. A weightier difficulty is that the transformation from burlesque to serious must have been sudden. Thespis presumably

wrote the old kind of burlesque play; we have none of the early plays of Aeschylus, but it is known that Phrynichus's *Capture of Miletus* produced in 494 caused the audience to burst into lamentation. Accordingly it must have been a play of the new type. This does not allow much time for so fundamental and so surprising a transformation. Yet it must be allowed that a transformation of this sort would help to account for the addition of the satyr-play to the official celebration, perhaps about 496. The addition could have been made on the ground that an essential element of the old Dionysiac celebration had been lost when tragedy became serious. Further, it can be argued that Aristotle would hardly have invented for tragedy an origin so out of keeping with his definition of it as an imitation of the good or serious unless he had had reason for supposing that it was historically true.

If we accept the account of tragedy as a development from a primitive drama of 'satyric character', it seems to follow that this too was originally performed by a chorus of satyrs. About the chorus that Archilochus led when he was in his cups we have no information. But the dithyrambic choruses of boys and men which competed at the Dionysia, and other such choruses in the fifth century and afterwards, certainly did not masquerade as animals. When, if ever, did the change take place? It is agreed that the dithyramb was transformed from a rough improvisation with traditional refrain to a definite lyric category by Arion of Lesbos who worked at Corinth about 600, a generation after Archilochus. According to the late Byzantine Lexicon known as Suidas,[9] 'Arion is said to have been the inventor of a tragic *tropos* and to have been the first to station a chorus and sing the dithyramb and to give titles to what the chorus sang and to bring in satyrs speaking in verse'. If this is taken at its face value, it implies that satyr drama and dithyramb are already separate forms, but the suggestion that satyrs *spoke* before the introduction of an actor by Thespis arouses suspicion of the notice as a whole. On the other hand the statement that Arion invented the tragic manner, whatever this may refer to, is rather

surprisingly supported by the contemporary Solon, who is said to have referred in his elegiac poems to Arion as the inventor of tragedy. Just what Solon said we cannot tell, since the word 'tragedy' will hardly go into elegiacs. In any case the name of tragedy may be older than any form of dramatic poetry, and may even have been applied originally to a non-dramatic form.

A further difficulty concerns the satyrs themselves. It is clear that in fifth-century Athens the names satyr and silenus were used indiscriminately, and that a silenus was not a goat-man but a horse-man. But satyrs are first mentioned in a fragment of Hesiod as 'good-for-nothing creatures, the play-fellows of the nymphs'.[10] In what shape they were visualized there is no means of knowing. But attempts to show that the chorus of the satyr-play were dressed as goats have not succeeded.[11] Both in the *Cyclops* and *Ichneutae* they are addressed as beasts, without any indication of the kind of beast. The most notable representation of a dramatic subject on a fifth-century vase shows a satyr chorus with prominent horses' tails; the fact that some of them wear girdles of goatskin does not count for much.[12] It may well be that these mischievous, half-animal spirits, the companions of Dionysus in the wilds, could take more than one shape.

But the most baffling piece of evidence, and one that fits least obviously into the Aristotelian account, is to be found in Herodotus, who, it is important to remember, was a contemporary and friend of Sophocles. Thus he was resident in Athens at a time when many things were still known of which no record survived to the age of Aristotle. Herodotus (5, 67) tells how Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon near Corinth, carried out popular reforms which indulged the anti-Dorian feelings of the lower classes by slighting the Dorian aristocracy. 'The Sicyonians used to honour Adrastus (a Dorian hero) and celebrated his sufferings with tragic choruses, doing honour not to Dionysus but to Adrastus. Cleisthenes gave the choruses to Dionysus and the rest of the sacrifice to Melanippus (an enemy of Adrastus).' Whether or not Herodotus understood his sources aright, tragic choruses at the date when his history

was written could only be taken to mean something of the same general type as the chorus of Attic tragedy of the fifth century. The striking points are that a chorus described as tragic could at that date belong to the cult not of Dionysus but of a hero, and that here for the first time we find a connection between tragedy and heroic legend; its songs must have been of the nature of a dirge which appeased and pleased the dead man by lamenting his misfortunes and death. Nor is it easily to be believed that the chorus which lamented a hero masqueraded as animals.

Finally, it is to be observed that Phlius, the home of the inventor of the satyr-play, Sicyon, the scene of the mourning for Adrastus, and Corinth, where Arion perfected the dithyramb, are all regions where, though the population was mixed, the aristocracy was Dorian. It was claimed by the Dorians, Aristotle tells us, that both tragedy and comedy were their invention.

The difficulty of reaching a conclusion on the origins of tragedy arises because it is impossible plausibly to combine all the evidence into a single consistent theory, and there is hardly any piece of evidence which cannot with some plausibility be discredited. A possibility which is worth keeping in mind is that tragedy may have been a composite growth; lyric and dialogue may have had separate origins. The elements of Dorian dialect which are clear, though somewhat conventionalized, in the lyric portions are almost completely lacking in the dialogue, and the close connection between drama and the Dionysus of Eleutherae on the border of Attica and Boeotia strongly suggests the presence of some purely native element.

Though it may be disappointing that curiosity on this subject cannot be satisfied, from the point of view of the reader of tragedy it is not very important. What is important is to remember that the origins of tragedy are buried deep in the communal life of the people; that those who went to the theatre—there seem to have been women as well as men—went not as individuals expecting to be entertained, but as members of a community taking part in an action in which

the god on one side and the citizens on the other met together. The occasion was one of enjoyment, but it was something more; the welfare of the city was involved in it, and divine favour depended on it.

It may seem to us strange that while the festival was the festival of Dionysus the content of plays performed as part of his worship very rarely had anything to do with the story of the god in whose honour they were performed; it is as if a prayer or hymn should fail to mention the deity addressed. It seemed strange to the ancients too, at least if the proverb 'Nothing to do with Dionysus' originated, as is likely, in this connection. The number of legends in which Dionysus had a part was small. If the plays and dithyrambs had been confined to them, their content would have been very limited. It seems that at an early date the dithyramb ceased to confine itself to themes which were strictly relevant to the story of Dionysus. At the Dionysia the performances were in honour of the god and for his delectation; his statue was present in the front row. But only a few plays and dithyrambs dealt with his own exploits, a fact which gives some support to the hypothesis of a non-Dionysiac element in tragedy.

2 THE RAW MATERIAL OF TRAGEDY

Strange as the method of production of ancient drama appears to a modern audience, the practice of drawing almost exclusively on a current mythology for plots is in effect stranger. The closest analogy is provided by Shakespeare's historical plays; the story is more or less familiar to the audience, it is accepted as substantially a true record of what happened, yet the dramatist is free to make minor alterations when the plot and shape of his play require them. Richard II was deposed and murdered; that cannot be changed, but the middle-aged and selfish John of Gaunt can be turned into a venerable patriot.

The Greeks do not seem to have put to themselves the question, 'What is the historical value of our myths?' nor to have distinguished clearly between, say, the story of Prometheus, which we should describe as wholly mythical, and tales

of the Theban and Trojan wars, which might be supposed to be based on facts. If only for the reason that no one thought it worth making a categorical denial, they seem to have been accepted as true even in the fourth century; Aristotle habitually speaks in the *Poetics* as though the subject of drama was a sort of history. Thucydides feels himself free to reject or explain away irrational features of legend, just as Pindar leaves out episodes which are morally primitive, but he assumes that the stories in the main are true. No doubt it seemed inconceivable to the Greeks that so large a mass of legend could be anything else than a genuine oral tradition going back to the events narrated, sometimes distorted and falsified during the long transmission through the ages, but providing in the main a reliable picture of the past.

It was not only drama that was based on these myths. It is a striking fact, and one insufficiently appreciated, that myth supplied the raw material for all but a negligible quantity of Greek poetry. Homer, himself a storehouse for later Greeks, worked on material already traditional; choral lyric, which succeeded epic as the principal poetic form, was occupied mainly in re-telling the myths, no longer in straight narrative, but with a variety of emphasis appropriate to the form. Drama, in turn, derived fresh inspiration from myth, and gave it new life at a time when it was in some danger of declining into the merely ornamental. Finally, to the Alexandrians it was a delightful plaything which they decorated with all their charm. In fact, if we leave out personal lyric, some didactic poetry, and comedy, there is no poetry not based directly on myth.

Greek poetry, then, is in general concerned with myth. But what is myth? There is no simple answer. Many of the tales used by the poets are merely bogus history, the creation of the pedestrian fancy of systematizers. The story of Ion, for instance, was merely an expedient to explain the origin of the Ionian branch of the Greek people. But the older myths, and the conception of the gods which arises out of them, have a different status. They contain the collective experience of the peoples, both Mediterranean and northern, from whom

the Greeks arose. Much of it is obviously meaningful; the ideas are not expressed in a contemporary form, but translation is easy and the basic experience recognizable.

> 'When the Greeks spoke of their gods, of the power of Aphrodite and the need to remember Dionysus, what they really meant was something which life in instance after instance confirms. . . . I myself do not expect my sheep to do badly if I do not make sacrifices to Apollo, nor do I sometimes half fear to see, under the shadow of the trees, Cypris herself. Nevertheless, I believe so much of what the Greeks expressed in their stories of the gods that I count myself as one who holds beliefs not different in essentials from theirs.'[13]

With this, some with more qualification, some with less, we could most of us agree. It is no doubt unscientific to speak of love as a female deity, yet by doing so early man may have expressed the truth more readily and more vividly than if he had restricted himself to more commonplace language.

But some would claim for myth much more than this. All that has been suggested so far is explicable on ordinary rational assumptions. But it has been claimed that myth appeals to a deeper level of consciousness. Primitive peoples thought and felt in terms of myth, and the primitive mentality, however much overlaid, is still there within us. Just as we are affected by the poet's imagery in a way not to be explained in rational terms, because it appeals to something within us which we all inherit from our remote ancestors, so, like the image, the myth may be 'archetypal'. The idea is eloquently put forward in a paper written by the late Professor Cornford when Jung's psychological theories were still novel:

> The psychological interpretation asserts that behind both these alternative symbolisms (ritual and myth) there lies the universal inner experience of human beings—experience that is never antiquated but repeated in every generation, and not confined to Melanesia, or to Athens, or to modern England. This experience, which, in a great

> variety of degrees and shapes, besets every new life that comes into the world to confront the task of adapting itself to what it finds there, is the ultimate factor shared by us with Sophocles, and by Sophocles and us with those remoter ancestors who transmitted the symbolical expression of the universal problems of life and their solutions. It is the perennial existence of this experience, the recurrent pressure of the same problems, the recurrent need of the same solutions, that explains (as nothing else explains) that mysterious quality of appeal which, as I said, the myth contains, and the anecdote or artificial plot does not contain. The myth makes this appeal directly and universally, because, like the corresponding religious ritual, it symbolizes what does happen, what ought to happen, and what ought not to happen, in the inner development of any human life. That is, in the last resort, the reason why a play like the *Oedipus* is to us, not a stiff, archaic monument of a bygone age, but a living thing which shakes every nerve in our moral being.[14]

No one is compelled to believe all this. It may be that the sense of a wider significance which many experience in connection with these ancient legends is due merely to the early age at which, at all events until recently, men became acquainted with them, so that they were felt to be an integral part of the mental background. The feeling is real, and to it is due the preoccupation with myth of modern writers, who are forever trying to draw on the reservoir of emotional force which they contain. But ours is not an age of myth and 'probably there is no way back'.[15]

The kind of communication on which drama, and indeed all literature, depends, presupposes a body of knowledge common to author and audience. Today, when literature is mainly concerned with a more or less realistic representation of contemporary life, this knowledge is common experience; now that familiarity with the Bible is no longer universal there is no common ground, except in limited circles, in which a certain literary background can be taken as known. Thus the difference between ancient and modern drama is

far more than the obvious one that an author today can achieve effects of surprise which are impossible when the story is already known in outline. The subject matter of many myths was already laden with emotional significance which a modern writer must create for himself, unless he takes a plot based on some well known historical episode. Hardly less important, the familiarity of the audience with a large number of myths gave the dramatist a scope for allusion and hint much less restricted than it is now; while in place of surprise the dramatist could use the subtler weapon of dramatic irony, which is only available when the destiny of the characters is known to the audience before it is known to themselves.

In fifth-century Athens knowledge of the myths was derived, we must suppose, mainly from oral tradition, of which Homer and some at least of the later epics formed a part. But our knowledge of this tradition is very incomplete, and one of the greatest difficulties encountered in the interpretation of Greek plays is that we rarely know the form in which a myth was current when the poet took it for his theme, or the associations attaching to it; similarly, we are uncertain in many cases of the force of allusions to myths of which the choral odes in particular are full. For a complete understanding we should need a knowledge not only of the mythological repertoire of the educated Athenian, but also of many lost plays in which the tradition had been developed and enriched. For there is no doubt that the dramatists took for granted a considerable familiarity with earlier drama, though we are not often in a position to detect references back, such as the one in the *Electra* of Euripides (524–44) to the recognition scene in the *Choephoroe* of Aeschylus. And it is equally beyond doubt that mythology was not a mere storehouse of stories, as it was to Ovid, but a vehicle for thought and emotion which was only superseded by the development of philosophy.

3 THE DRAMATIC FESTIVALS

Dionysus, who entered Greece from the north, became important during the period of confusion and exhaustion

which followed the turmoil of the Dorian invasion, the last of the great immigrations of the Balkan tribes. Though we know Dionysus best as god of wine, he was really a god of vegetation and wild life in general. Greece had other nature gods, but they were not like Dionysus; with him a closer communion was possible, for he took possession of his votaries, who filled themselves with the god by eating him, usually in the form of raw bull's flesh. His worship was attended with frantic excitement and ecstasy in which men and women performed feats of strength far beyond their normal powers.[16] This new faith involving, as it did, dubious revels, in which men and women roamed the mountains together in a state of religious excitement, was not received into Greece without a struggle of which we have traces in the legend of Pentheus. At length a compromise was reached and Apollo, soberest of deities, shared his shrine at Delphi with the wild newcomer.

Dionysus seems to have had his following largely among the poorer classes; this is natural enough, since the priesthoods of the older gods would be in the hands of the nobility, who would be the less inclined to welcome a new god, one whose worship, moreover, was inclined to upset the discipline and undermine the obedience of the devotees who found release from the hardness of life in this orgiastic faith. So it is with no surprise that we find his religion especially favoured by the tyrants, whose power was founded on an alliance with the less favoured classes against the dispossessed aristocracy. Cleisthenes the tyrant at Sicyon, and Peisistratus at Athens, both encouraged the cult of the god.

The Great, or City, Dionysia, a festival which owed its importance, if not its existence, to Peisistratus, took place about the end of March and lasted probably five days. On the first day the image of Dionysus was taken from his temple beside the theatre on the south side of the Acropolis, carried some distance on the road to the god's traditional home at Eleutherae, and then brought back into the city in a magnificent procession, which celebrated the god's original entrance. On the following days he watched the contests for the prize

for dithyramb, tragedy, and comedy, which took place in the theatre. The dithyrambic contest was a tribal one in which ten choruses of fifty competed, five of boys and five of men; this probably occupied one day. The three tragic poets chosen by the archon produced each his tetralogy, or group of four plays, in the mornings of the next three days, and the three chosen comic poets exhibited each a single play in the afternoons, making fifteen plays in all, a feast of drama which might well have caused a surfeit. The contests were highly competitive, and a winner was proclaimed in each class.[17]

The theatre contained seats for some 14,000 people; whether there was standing room as well we do not know. At the Dionysia ambassadors and other distinguished foreigners were present. To the ordinary citizen the price of admission was two obols; presumably not everyone could afford this on all four days, and if we assume that the audience varied somewhat in composition from day to day it is possible that as many of the citizens as were within reach, and a certain number of strangers, resident and others, obtained admission. Women seem to have been admitted to the performances, but there can hardly have been many of them. At a later date the state paid the price of admission for the poorer citizens. A point which we may easily fail to notice is the large number of citizens who would be taking part in the performances; the choruses at the Dionysia alone would require over seven hundred singers assuming that no one performed in more than one chorus, and it has been calculated that as many as two thousand Athenians performed in the course of a year.[18] The audience must have been expert critics of technique.

After about 430 tragedies were also performed at the smaller, and more domestic, festival of the Lenaea, which took place some two months earlier, while the seas were still closed to navigation. But this was mainly a festival of comedy and there is no surviving tragedy of which we know that it was performed at the Lenaea, though the party described in Plato's *Symposium* was held in celebration of Agathon's tragic victory at this festival.

4 THE THEATRE

The sacred precinct of Dionysus with its two temples and the theatre was excavated nearly a hundred years ago.[19] The theatre was rebuilt so often during the seven hundred years that it continued in use that it has not been possible to recover more than a part of the ground plan of the structure as it existed in the fifth century. Originally there was nothing but a round dancing floor, the Orchestra, overlooked by seats terraced on the slope of the Acropolis, but sometime before the last productions of Aeschylus a permanent wooden building was constructed at the back of the Orchestra and the auditorium was built out from the hollowed slope till it formed rather more than a semicircle; the seats were mainly of wood. The marble seats now visible were put in a century later.

The stage building, as it is convenient to call it, whether or not there was a stage, had at least a wide central door and possibly doors at the sides, and a roof on which actors could appear. There were also entrances into the Orchestra between the ends of the stage building and the front of the auditorium practicable for horses and chariots.

The only real evidence for the way in which the theatre was used is to be found in the plays themselves and in references in contemporary comedy. Comments on staging and production found in the ancient scholia and explanations of technical terms given in lexica are probably derived from Alexandrian scholars, and it is difficult to see how they could be in possession of reliable information about what went on in the theatre at Athens in the fifth century.

Was there a permanent raised stage? All the remains of stone stages are of much later date, and it is undeniable that the chorus was able to move freely between the Orchestra and the door in the stage building. Accordingly there cannot have been a high platform stage approached by steps, but there is nothing against a low wooden stage with perhaps one or two steps continuous throughout its length. The word *skene,* our scene, literally a booth, was applied first to the

stage building; later it is the regular word for the stage, the platform in front of the *skene,* but whether it was so used by the time of Aristotle is uncertain.[20]

It is clear that the chorus, whose normal station was in the Orchestra, were free to use the stage area when it was convenient to do so. It is a question of some interest how far the actors moved from the stage into the Orchestra where, as on the Elizabethan apron stage, they would have the audience on three sides of them. There are indications that some scenes were played in the Orchestra; for instance when Heracles enters at the side of the stage (*H.F.* 523) he speaks several lines of greeting to his home before he becomes aware of the presence of his wife and children who are taking sanctuary at an altar. If they were near the palace and anywhere on the stage Heracles could hardly look at his palace without seeing them, so it is reasonable to suppose that they are in the Orchestra where they would not be in his line of sight.[21]

The Attic dramatist had at his command two stage devices of some importance, the crane, or *mechane,* whence the Latin *deus ex machina,* and the 'trundle platform', or *ekkuklema.* Gods could fly, and a god on a 'machine' represented, however remotely, a god in flight. The actor seems to have been suspended by a sort of parachutist's harness. Sometimes, as when Dawn carried away the body of her son, Memnon, more than one actor was transported. Whether the crane could manage an entire chorus as the text of the *Prometheus* has been thought to imply, must remain doubtful. The great employer of the crane was Euripides, usually for the introduction of a god at the end of the play, who did not cut the knot in which the action had fastened itself, but tidied up the action by revealing the future lot of the characters. Not all gods who appeared did so on the machine; Athena in the *Ajax* was very likely on ground level. They might also suggest divinity by appearing on the roof, perhaps on a particular part of it. It is not certain that Sophocles ever made use of the *mechane.* Apart from the evidence of tragedy the use of the crane is well attested by comedy. Trygaeus in the *Peace* of Aristophanes mounted on his dung-beetle and anxiously

exhorting the mechanic to be careful is a parody of Bellerophon who in the play of Euripides had recently tried to force his way into heaven on his winged horse, Pegasus.

The *ekkuklema* is more important and more perplexing. There were neither bedroom nor banquet scenes in ancient tragedy and there was no action which could not be represented without gross implausibility as taking place in the open air. But it was sometimes necessary to display to the audience the body of someone who had been murdered, the murder having, of course, taken place off stage. It may well have been found convenient to use a sort of wheeled bier to avoid carrying the body through the doorway and on to the stage. Such a vehicle would be suitable also for the burlesque employment of the device to wheel out Euripides in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and Agathon in his *Thesmophoriazusae*. If the scholiast on *Hippolytus* 192 was not talking nonsense when he said that the *ekkuklema* was used to bring Phaedra on to the stage not as a corpse but as an invalid, the reference must be to a conveyance of the same sort. But the conventional view based on a number of passages in the scholia and late authors is that the *ekkuklema* was a device for revealing interiors, and that persons on the device were regarded, though visible, as being indoors. This is not always true since both Agathon and Phaedra are unquestionably outside. But the problem remains whether there was some sort of larger platform which could be wheeled through the door of the stage building and reveal what was happening inside. Those who favour this convention discover numerous occasions for its use; there are two plays in which the question of its employment is of some importance.

In the *Ajax* the hero is in his tent surrounded by the carcasses of the animals he has butchered under the illusion that they are the Greek leaders. At line 346 the door is opened and without himself moving he becomes visible to the Chorus and presumably to the audience. This might be achieved merely by the opening of a wide door, but it is generally supposed that Ajax was pushed out on his trolley surrounded by animals. The other case is far more compli-

cated, Euripides' *Heracles*. Heracles while sacrificing inside his palace goes mad and kills his wife and children; we hear their cries. Heracles then falls into a stupor and his father Amphitryon, who has escaped the slaughter, emerges. At 1030 the doors open and the Chorus see Heracles tied to a broken column with the bodies of three children and presumably of his wife beside him. At 1080 Heracles recovers consciousness and the Chorus who have come up close to him rush in apprehension 'away from the palace'. However he proves not to be dangerous and at 1123 he seems to be untied from the column to which he had been secured. Theseus arrives by a side entrance at 1163 and at first sees only Amphitryon and the Chorus; then he notices the bodies and finally Heracles sitting veiled in their midst. They are certainly outside the palace and exposed to the light of the sun (1231). Heracles remains in the same place, presumably beside the broken column, until 1394 when Theseus begins to help him up before leading him away to Athens. Must we believe that Heracles and his family and the pillar were all on the trolley, and that Heracles sat beside a pillar, which must have counted as being inside, but counted as outside while he talked to his father and to Theseus, and that finally Theseus helped him down from his trolley and led him away? It is a lot to swallow, but the alternative seems to be to believe that when the doors were opened Heracles was carried through and dumped outside and that the pillar was imaginary. Scholars are hopelessly divided about the answer, but it must be admitted that if we are to visualize the use of this creaking and overladen vehicle it does not add to the amenity of reading Greek plays.[22]

The dress and appearance of the actors can be recovered from representations on vases and from tragic masks employed for decoration. But misleading pictures of actors in towering masks with gaping mouths and wearing buskins with enormously thick soles are still used at times to illustrate their appearance. These belong to a much later date. The masks of the fifth century seem to have been comparatively naturalistic, and the thick-soled buskin, though attributed to

Aeschylus in the ancient *Life,* does not appear in representations of tragic actors before the third century.[23] The sleeves which are a regular part of their costume were not a feature of ordinary Greek dress but a sign of splendour and opulence.

Obviously we should wish to picture a Greek play as being performed under the conditions for which it was intended. But it is extraordinarily difficult. The chorus together with the conventions which governed its song and dance are alien to us, and opera and ballet offer very incomplete analogies. The actors were masked and this would suggest that their acting was stylized; and so to some extent it must have been, since some of the audience was as much as a hundred yards from back of the stage, and they must have seen the actors on the scale on which we see a batsman at a distant wicket, so that only broad effects could be appreciated. Yet it is easy to exaggerate this. Acting may have been stylized; it was not statuesque. Tragedy has its moments of lively action. The acoustics of Greek theatres are such that there was no restriction on the speed at which a play could be taken. No one could imagine Aristophanes, or for that matter the stichomythia of tragedy, being played except at speed.

The element of spectacle was not lacking. Painted scenery was used and the art of perspective perhaps developed in this connection. But in the absence of artificial lighting the effects must have been obtained, as on the Elizabethan stage, mainly by the grouping and movement of the actors and their often numerous attendants, and by the brilliance of their dress.

5 THE NATURE OF TRAGEDY

It is well for anyone who proposes to describe and criticize tragedies to make clear from the start what meaning he attaches to the word tragedy. Violent antipathies are easily aroused in this context, but at least it should be possible to avoid misunderstanding.

To an Athenian anything was a tragedy which was produced at the tragic contests and was not a satyr-play. To us the word suggests a serious play with an unhappy ending.

Accordingly we must accept under the heading of Greek tragedy a number of plays with more or less happy endings, a few of which, notably the *Helen,* are not conspicuously serious. Aristotle, whom it is impossible to keep out of this discussion, regarded plays with unhappy endings as the most truly tragic. He would no doubt have justified the inclusion of serious plays with happy endings on the ground that they arouse, at least during part of their performance, the same emotions of pity and fear as a play with an unhappy ending. And it is quite true that *Measure for Measure,* for instance, could easily have been turned into a tragedy by a change of ending and that the emotions aroused by much of the play are of the kind we associate with tragedy. The same is true of the *Philoctetes.* All the same we are justified in regarding tragedy in the modern sense as significantly different from any play that ends happily because it contains an assertion that men in this world can be overtaken by undeserved catastrophe. Not every one would admit that catastrophe is really the last word, but the end of tragedy is apparent catastrophe, and it is one out of proportion to the deserts of the sufferers, because the mere fact that the play is serious makes it unlikely that the characters will be so worthless that they may be said to deserve all they get. None the less the degree of guilt attaching to them may vary greatly between tragedy and tragedy. We need only compare *Macbeth* and *Othello.*

It is open to question how far tragedies of different periods and different societies can be judged by the same standards. The Greek tragic form certainly has many peculiarities of its own, not least important its comparative brevity. Aristotle had read far more Greek drama than we ever shall, and is allowed even by those who admire him least to have possessed remarkable powers of generalizing, so that it is natural to start from his account. But it should be remembered that in making his generalizations he took little account of Aeschylus, and that he seems to have regarded the heroic legends which were the raw material of tragedy with an indifference in no way characteristic of the previous century when the tragedies were composed.

Tragedy, says Aristotle, is a representation of a serious action performed by characters sufficiently like us to arouse our sympathy but better than we are. The action shows the change in the hero's fortunes, a change in the best type of tragedy from good to bad. The unity of the play depends on there being a causal connection between the episodes of the play such that we are shown a series of events each of which is a necessary or probable consequence of what has gone before. With this demand for logic and emphasis on causality is connected the famous claim that poetry is more philosophical than history; logic is the same on the stage as in the world, and the logical connections between actions and events can be revealed more clearly in the simplified relations of drama than in the complex confusions of real life, where the forces involved are more numerous and less calculable.

In order that this sequence of events may be necessary or probable the hero, unless he is a purely passive victim, must himself take the initial step. Since this step will lead eventually to catastrophe it will usually be taken in ignorance of the consequences. This is the celebrated *hamartia*; it may be both mistaken and wrong, as it was in the case of Ajax; more often it is only mistaken, as with Oedipus, whether we regard his error as being his misconception of his parents' identity or his actions in killing a man who turned out to be his father and marrying a woman who was his mother. And here the error is the more striking in that Oedipus, in consequence of the oracle, was trying to avoid doing these very things. This brings us to what, in Aristotle's view, were two very important features of a well constructed play, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*, or recognition. If the hero begins the action under a misapprehension a moment must come, often just before the catastrophe, when he realizes his mistake and its consequences, and the situation is then transformed. Since it frequently happens in Greek tragedy that the vital misapprehension relates to the identity of one of the characters, recognitions are an important feature and often coincide with the *peripeteia*. At the climax of the *Oedipus*, the hero recognizes himself as the son of Laius and his wife as his own mother.[24]

Of the hero Aristotle has little to say; he has indeed no word to describe him. He is merely the character who experiences a change of fortune. For although the action arises out of some initiative of the hero's, the course the action takes is not, in most plays, closely connected with the hero's personality, and even his original initiative is often a response to a force intruding from outside. This stress on the action at the expense of character is uncongenial to modern tastes, and it is necessary to be on one's guard against attempts to extract by minute observation more in the way of character than is really present in the plays.

Aristotle's conclusions are based on Greek drama alone. How far can they be extended to apply to subsequent tragedy? The demand for unity of action certainly remains valid, but his notion that unity depends on a strictly observed causal sequence is too narrow, as even some Greek plays, the *Troades,* for instance, show. Although it is not always profitable to begin consideration of a play by searching for the *hamartia,* the idea remains widely applicable. On the other hand the undoubted importance of *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* in Greek tragedy is largely accidental, a result of the comparative shortness of Greek plays and the consequent need for concentration. Incidents to which the term *peripeteia* can be applied are common enough in later drama, but it is only rarely, as in the trial scene in the *Merchant of Venice,* that the whole play turns on one. Usually the climax is not compressed into so narrow a compass, and in fact the trial scene itself is a good deal longer than the corresponding scene in a Greek play. Again, though the disguised character who is ultimately recognized recurs continually from the *Odyssey* to yesterday's detective story, Greek plays for a particular reason are unusually full of them. Many Greek legends tell of the union of a god with a mortal maiden; the maiden bears her child, or twins, in secret, and abandons them. When they grow up they are recognized by their mother, whom they often rescue in the hour of danger. The Greeks furnished Rome with a foundation legend along these lines in the tale of Romulus and Remus. The tragic poets, especially Euripides,

found that these stories provided good plots leading up to the big scene of recognition. When Euripides' successors, the poets of New Comedy, used the same plot they were compelled in the absence of gods to make the hero or heroine a child exposed at birth and brought up by chance, thus perhaps giving a misleading idea of the frequency with which resort was had to this practice in fourth-century Athens.

We have therefore to consider as part of Greek tragedy plays which would in other connections be termed tragi-comedies, but for the rest the characteristic play shows the passage from prosperity to disaster of a character or characters who deserve our respect—characters drawn from the age of heroes can hardly do less—and our sympathy, and it is likely that the play will be more cohesive and more effective if the roots of the disaster are to be found in the hero's own actions and character. This is not to suggest that the hero will normally deserve to be unfortunate. In many admirable plays there is neither *peripeteia* nor *anagnorisis,* in the *Antigone*[25] for instance, but they are features suitable to drama of Greek form and Greek proportions and especially favoured by Aristotle.

The emotions aroused by tragedy are largely painful. Why do we of our own free will expose ourselves to this pain? To this question there is not, and there is not likely to be, an agreed answer. The reactions of an audience at a dramatic performance are complex, and individuals vary widely in their responses. Accordingly it is a mistake to seek, as most aestheticians do, a single answer to this problem. In the first place we like excitement, and our faculty of readily identifying ourselves with one of the parties to a contest, whether a football team or a dramatic hero, makes this emotion easily accessible. In excitement there is liable to be an element of pain. It is a price which the young especially, the class which according to Plato is most addicted to tragedy, are ready to pay. Excitement is often present in high tragedy, though a drama which offers no more than excitement is merely melodrama. Yet there is little in the *Poetics* which is not a recipe

as much for melodrama as for tragedy; the technical devices on which Aristotle lavishes most careful attention belong as much to one as to the other, and there remains a doubt whether he was not more fascinated by what the *Oedipus Rex* has in common with melodrama than by the qualities which raise it to a higher level.

But the tragic character, little though the Greeks had to say about him, is something more than the victim of exciting vicissitudes. His full stature can be revealed only in adversity; that is why tragedy has to be tragic. Only when the difficulties are most overwhelming, the threat of catastrophe overpowering, can his potentialities be realized. Quality can not be known in the last resort except through the ordeal that tests it. Nor is it right to think of action and character in isolation, because it is in relation to the action that the character is conceived; unfortunately it is rarely possible to talk about anything without separating it from other things with which it is in fact united.

Nearly everyone is prepared to risk some pain for the sake of excitement; many people are ready to undergo a sharper pain in order to share the vision of human greatness at full stretch which the tragic poet can communicate. Again we need not be particularly surprised. The literature of catastrophe has always been highly popular. We have a natural curiosity about the behaviour of ordinary people in extraordinary situations. One of the humbler functions of literature is to widen our knowledge, to increase our emotional range, and to enrich our lives with vicarious experience. Most of us, so far, have not come face to face with the more spectacular forms of catastrophe, with shipwreck, plague, or conflagration. We naturally wonder how people behave, how we should behave, in the circumstances. Fewer, but still a large number, wonder how human beings of a higher temper would behave in trials still more terrible. Tragedy can show the very extreme of human grandeur.

It is a common experience to find that the emotional stress of seeing a tragedy is followed by a sense of calm and tranquillity: 'calm of mind, all passion spent'; or again, 'what may

quiet us in a death so noble'. That this should be so is not surprising. The emotional experience may be intense, but it ends abruptly at, or soon after, the fall of the curtain, whereas the disasters of real life continue to cast their shadow for months and years. It is not strange that the easing of emotional strain should be noticeable and agreeable. However, far-reaching conclusions have been drawn from this effect of tragedy, usually in connection with Aristotle's theory of *catharsis,* which Milton had in mind when he wrote the phrases quoted above. That the effect of tragedy is cathartic is still for many the starting point for all consideration of the subject. The authority of Aristotle, the vaguely elevated associations of the word 'purify', and an apparent resemblance of the purging away of emotion to processes familiar in modern psychological treatment, have combined to give this theory a quite remarkable vitality. It is the more remarkable if we reflect that Aristotle's theory is based—whether directly or by analogy is not clear—on a theory of physiology and psychology according to which health depends on the purity and quantitative adjustment of the humours, blood, phlegm, and black and yellow bile. Though we still pay tribute to it when we use the word 'melancholy', which means suffering from an excess of black bile, it is fair to suspect that modern critics distort the original theory a good deal when they make it fit their own aesthetic preconceptions.

A more hazardous inference from the sense of calm and reconciliation which may follow the seeing or reading of tragedy is that the reconciliation may be implicit in the tragedy itself, as a true picture, so far as it goes, of the universe, that behind the apparent tragedy there is harmony and that somewhere, somehow, good is triumphant.[26] When such a vindication of the universe is part of the writer's purpose and grows out of his belief, we may no doubt be left with a sense of the higher harmony. But such a play will hardly be a tragedy in the normal sense of the word; this is very relevant to the tragedies of Aeschylus, which often end with reconciliation. It is in the nature of tragedy that it should raise, directly or indirectly, the problem of divine

justice. The answer may not be a denial, but it will not be a confident affirmation. Hence the question has been raised, and variously answered, whether tragedy is possible, in the full sense of the word, within a system of Christian belief. The hypothesis of this book is that it is not, since to the Christian, as to Plato, success and disaster are things not very momentous, and a drama that reaches its conclusion in this world cannot be complete. The only real tragedy is the tragedy of the lost soul.

Akin to this is the question how far the tragic poet was, of set purpose, a teacher. It is commonly asserted that he was, but this assertion has called forth contradiction; the idea that tragedy is a didactic art can arouse distaste. Possibly Aristophanes' famous line, 'Boys have a master to teach them, but the teachers of men are poets' (*Frogs* 1055), has been too freely quoted. Many of the claims made for the instructiveness of poetry both in the *Frogs* and in Plato's *Ion* are pretty ridiculous. Yet such claims were an attempt to rationalize the general feeling that poetry was important, and poets wise. If this had not been widely believed Socrates would not have turned to the poets in the expectation of finding men wiser than himself (*Apology* 22B). But about the middle of the fifth century the poets began to suffer from the competition of other and more professional teachers. By the end of the century poetry was coming to be regarded mainly as entertainment. For Aristotle the theatre was a source of pleasure, salutary pleasure it is true; and though he allowed poetry to be more philosophical than history, he certainly thought it a great deal less philosophical than philosophy. Yet so far as the ordinary man was concerned, for long it was the poets who discoursed on fundamental problems of human suffering and divine justice, who delivered the homilies which no one in the ancient world expected from a priest. Indeed, in any age to touch on the ultimate mysteries without in a sense teaching is not possible for a poet who takes his work seriously. A tragedy by its very nature is a commentary on life. But all this is very far from meaning that the poet began from an edifying idea which he worked up into a play. It means that

the play would be set within a framework of accepted ideas which would receive fresh strength and significance from the play. And it was not without relevance that it was performed in honour of a god and in a place sacred to him on an occasion of great solemnity.

CHAPTER III

AESCHYLUS

I THE PREDECESSORS OF AESCHYLUS

We are told, and most scholars are prepared to believe, that Thespis invented the actor who first spoke independently of the chorus, and that he was invited in the year 534 to perform his new entertainment, or ritual—neither term by itself accurately describes what it was—at the festival of Dionysus, which had been instituted by Peisistratus. We may guess that Thespis had been experimenting with his new form some years before it received official recognition; certainly some form of comedy had been popular long before it became a recognized part of the Dionysia in 486. Accordingly there is possibly some truth in a pleasing anecdote which connects Solon with the inventor of drama. Plutarch tells how Solon,[1] after witnessing an early dramatic performance, rebuked Thespis for encouraging deceit by play-acting, and gave warning that before long men would use such methods in earnest; the sage's warning was justified when Peisistratus appeared in the market place covered with make-believe wounds and persuaded the people to allot him the bodyguard which he at once used to make himself tyrant. This would allow some thirty years for the development of tragedy before it became officially recognized.

His plays, if they were ever circulated in manuscript, were soon lost, though forgeries were extant in the fourth century from which our alleged fragments were derived. It is possible that original records may have preserved some of the titles, but ours are probably from the forgeries.

The earliest figure after Thespis, and the only one of the sixteen poets who won victories before Aeschylus who is more than a mere name is Phrynichus. As a dramatist he soon became too archaic for later tastes, but his lyrics remained popular long after his plays were forgotten; a line from one

of his songs started an argument at a famous party at Chios at which Sophocles was present in 440.[2] But the interesting thing about him is that he made contemporary events the theme of tragedy, setting an example which Aeschylus followed in his *Persae*. In 493 he produced a tragedy on the capture of Miletus, and in 476, four years before the *Persae*, the *Phoenissae* dealing, like the play of Aeschylus, with the defeat of Persia. Moreover both these productions were associated with the name of Themistocles,[3] archon in 493 and his *choregus*, the wealthy citizen responsible for the expenses of production in 476, just as Pericles was *choregus* for Aeschylus when he produced the *Persae*.

The play on the fall of Miletus brought tragedy into the thick of contemporary politics; Miletus was the chief city of Ionia and bound to Athens by many ties. Several years before, when Ionia had revolted against Persian rule, the Milesians had appealed for help to the mainland Greeks and had received it from none but Athens and Eretria, and that on no very generous scale; after the first defeat it had been withdrawn. This indecisive action on the part of the Athenians must reflect a deep cleavage of opinion between those who thought it folly to challenge the overwhelming power of Persia and those who were moved by loyalty to fellow Greeks and by the thought of the restoration of the tyrant Hippias, which was likely to be a condition of any lasting agreement with Persia. The revolt collapsed and Miletus fell. Phrynichus's play seems to have been intended to keep alive the grief of the Athenians at this disaster; its performance had a profound emotional effect, and the decree passed afterwards, forbidding any repetition of the play, presumably reflects a success of the pro-Persian party rather than public resentment at being reminded of an unpleasant subject. Whether this was the first time a contemporary event had been made the subject of a tragedy we cannot tell, but it is strangely contrary to the spirit of tragedy as we know it. In the *Persae* history is treated as mythology—to Aeschylus indeed mythology was ancient history—and in later drama the direct references to events of the time are strikingly few. It

is probably true that the *Eumenides* alludes to the reform of the Areopagus and the Argive alliance; a few plays of Euripides contain some surprising gallery patriotism in the form of denunciation of Sparta, while the *Troades* may well be directed against Athenian imperialism; but considering how high feeling ran in the later years of the Peloponnesian War it is surprising how rare are direct references to politics. The mission of the poet was given a higher interpretation.

Among the stories which Phrynichus is known to have dramatized is that of Alcestis; as in the play of Euripides Heracles wrestled with Death, but the device by which Apollo persuaded the Fates to grant Admetus the chance of a second life, which is left discreetly vague by Euripides, is most surprising; he made them drunk.[4] This has been taken as evidence in support of the statement of Aristotle that it was only late that tragedy acquired dignity, having developed from the purely comic satyr-play; but it is simpler to suppose that the *Alcestis* of Phrynichus was itself a satyr-play. The new fragment of a play on Gyges which has been ascribed to Phrynichus is mentioned later.

Tragedy was already, as it remained, a craft as well as an art, so it is no surprise to find that, like cobbling or carpentry, it tended to run in families; Phrynichus's son, Polyphrasmon, was a tragic poet, and most of the great poets had descendants who achieved at least some distinction, among them Aeschylus, two of whose sons are said to have written tragedies.

2 LIFE AND WORKS

Aeschylus, the first of the great Attic writers, was born in 525 B.C. of a noble, presumably wealthy, family of Eleusis. His life covered the overthrow of the tyrants, the early victories of the new democracy, the two great defeats of Persia, in which he and his brother played an honourable part, and the founding of the Athenian empire; when he died in 456 Athens was committed to complete democracy and the most powerful state in Greece. It is likely, therefore,

that Aeschylus was inclined to regard the world as a place where in the end the better cause might, on the whole, be expected to prevail, for he had seen his own city survive against all likelihood one peril after another; in the victory over Persia even Themistocles, most self-reliant of human beings, asserted that he saw the hand of God.[5] We do not know how Aeschylus regarded the growth of democracy, or what side he took in the troubles which attended the attack on the Areopagus; it is sometimes stated that he was in sympathy with the reforming party because in the *Oresteia* he showed the Areopagus as a court of law, and it was practically to this that the reformers had reduced it. This is not conclusive, nor are we justified on the other hand in assuming a coldness between Aeschylus and the Athenians because he accepted an invitation to the court of the Sicilian tyrant, Hiero.

More significance may be attached to the tone of the representation of the tragic poet in Aristophanes' comedy, the *Frogs,* produced when oral tradition was still vigorous. When allowance has been made for comic exaggeration, and for the need of dramatic contrast with Euripides, we are left with something majestic, irascible, prophetic, very unlike the ordinary Greek citizen. The ancient view of his contribution to the art of tragedy leaves the same impression. The *Life of Aeschylus* prefixed to some of the manuscripts, a compilation of work of various dates which nevertheless preserves a genuine tradition, begins with a quotation from the *Frogs* (1004), 'First of the Greeks to build up a towering fabric of majestic phrases'. Sophocles was probably using the stock word of his day to describe the Aeschylean style of tragedy, when he referred to his *ogkos,*[6] a noun suggestive of pomp and opulence. Further, the tradition makes it clear that Aeschylus brought this new magnificence not only to the diction but also to the staging and production of tragedy. Taken along with the loftiness of his thought and the sublimity of his speculations, these things clearly indicate that Aeschylus was a man apart; excellent citizen and convinced democrat as he may have been, his thoughts were too little on the trivialities

of life for him to have been like other men; one may imagine that Demosthenes or Lysias would have seen much to apologize for in him, had they been writing a speech for his defence before an Athenian jury censorious of deviations from the average. But it is fair to remember that he was celebrated for his satyr-plays, a form which requires a certain joviality. None the less Aristophanes may not have been joking when he said that Aeschylus did not quite hit it off with the Athenians, (*Frogs* 807).

The birthplace of Aeschylus was Eleusis, home of the Mysteries. We have the authority of Aristotle[7] for the story that Aeschylus was prosecuted for revealing in one of his plays secrets which might not be known to the uninitiated, and that he secured his acquittal by proving that he did not know they were secrets, a story which might imply that he had not been initiated. Aeschylus's prayer at the beginning of the contest in the *Frogs*,[8] that Demeter will make him worthy of her mysteries, could be an allusion to this event, whatever it was.

Some scholars have attached an importance of a different kind to the connection of Aeschylus with Eleusis. The Mysteries consisted mainly in ritual, which revealed a certain picture of the world beyond the grave but involved no general doctrine. It can be said at once that there is nothing in Aeschylus's references to the fate of the soul after death which is particularly Eleusinian, but traces of such influence are altogether extremely rare; the ancients seem to have dissociated the Mysteries from the rest of their lives very completely. But the ritual of Eleusis was not an isolated phenomenon. The newer worship of Dionysus, the Orphic beliefs and the Pythagorean theology, which in ancient writers is rarely distinguished from Orphic, all these have been brought into connection with Eleusis; and so has a supposed Pythagorean strain in the thought of Aeschylus. The subject is one of extreme difficulty, and unless more is discovered about Pythagoreanism at this date no certain conclusions are likely to be reached. It is true that he uses phrases with Pythagorean associations, but we do not know how far

such phrases were confined to Pythagoreans; but 'the harmony of Zeus' (*P.V.* 551) was probably intended to convey a hint of Pythagorean ideas. It was natural to Greek religious thinkers to be eclectic, and Aeschylus was probably receptive to all but the most rationalistic strains of contemporary thought. But we cannot interpret the plays as a whole in any way which can be called Pythagorean.[9]

I have already said something of the world in which Aeschylus began the writing of tragedy, of the weight of tradition, of the nearness to man of the gods above and the dead in their graves, and of the narrow bounds of knowledge. Independent speculation had started a generation before in Ionia, but in the absence of means of publication knowledge travelled slowly, and it is a great mistake to assume of any thinker that he was acquainted with the whole thought of his time. In any case, apart from his ill-concealed passion for geography, Aeschylus was little interested in problems which occupied the Ionians. Although the passionate demand for righteousness on high is heard as early as the poet Hesiod, and re-affirmed by Solon, we do not hear much of the fundamental problem of divine justice in what remains of the poets of the sixth century. Exuberance of poetic fancy on the one hand, on the other a sense of the brilliant majesty of the Olympians, in which something of true religious significance lies concealed, had diverted them away from the moral problem. But as Greek civilization developed the anomalies became harder to ignore; a sense of them perhaps contributed to the rise of the new Dionysiac faith. Aeschylus may have known of Heracleitus's and Xenophanes'[10] demand that we should not attribute to the gods actions which would be disgraceful to men. But in his high and serious attempt to satisfy the demand for an intelligible and morally satisfying account of the universe within the framework of the old mythology he had no predecessor among the poets except Hesiod, and no successor.

To us in a different world trying to understand from outside the intellectual processes of that time much is bound to seem obscure; the creation of the language and technique

required for abstract thought was a long and difficult business, only begun in the time of Aeschylus and continuing over more than a century. The natural way to express new thought was still to frame new myth; abstractions were still most conveniently conceived as personifications. 'For me Hope treads not the house of Fear', 'Arrogance gives birth to young arrogance',[11] these phrases are not to be regarded merely as the exalted language of poetry but as reflections of a natural mode of thought proper to a civilization just emerging from animistic beliefs.

Again, it is sometimes necessary to restrain a certain natural impatience with polytheism. Since the first piece of religious history with which most of us are acquainted is the struggle of the Jews to maintain their monotheism against the attractions of rival polytheisms, we are inclined to regard as fundamentally frivolous any religion which is based on a plurality of gods and to make it our first demand on a religious thinker that he should set his house in order by expelling all deities but one. Indeed Aeschylus has received a certain amount of credit for the preponderance he allows to Zeus, as if he had created a sort of second-class monotheism. But it is obvious that it did not in general strike ancient thinkers that it was important to clear up the intolerable confusion involved in the relations of numerous gods. Aeschylus does raise, though only in a special context, the question of the relation between Zeus and Fate, but in general the supremacy of Zeus does not seem to affect the existence in their own right of numerous other deities. In fact to have abolished them would have upset the whole basis of thought, for there were many forces which could be objects of thought for most men only if presented in a personified form. A famous fragment runs: 'The holy Heaven is filled with love of Earth, to be united with her, and Earth is possessed with desire for wedlock; the rain falling from amorous Heaven causes Earth to conceive, and she brings to birth for mankind pasture for sheep and the source of life which is Demeter; and from this moist marriage the fruits borne by trees come to maturity; of these things I am in part the cause.' (*Frag.* 44.) So speaks

Aphrodite in a lost play, Aphrodite who became for later paganism the rather frigid personification of love, yet preserved as well, as in Lucretius, a memory of a wider significance, of the life force which is seen most conspicuously in the urge which drives men and animals to propagate their kind. But this same fragment, if stripped of its imagery, may pass for a kind of primitive science. Indeed the physics of the early philosophers consisted mainly of ideas, which previous cosmologists had wrapped up in a mythical form, expressed more impersonally. But not all mythology can be treated as an unconscious allegory susceptible of translation into scientific terms. It should cause neither surprise nor discontent that Aeschylus was untroubled by the contradictions latent in polytheism, and instead of denouncing the multitude of gods used them when it suited him and ignored them when it did not. He shows at times an awareness that the forms and names attributed to the gods may have no very close connection with the reality. 'Zeus, whoever he may be, if this name is dear to him, by this name I call him.'[12]

It remains to inquire what connection can be traced between the thought of Aeschylus and the time in which he lived and the experiences through which he had passed. As has been mentioned, the life of Aeschylus coincided with a period of triumph for the city to which he belonged, and his city was the centre of a man's life; the unlooked-for victory over Persia must have done much to reinforce the conviction, natural to a religious man, that the gods are not indifferent to great causes. Another event which has left its trace on the mind of Aeschylus is the 'glorious revolution' by which the tyrant Hippias was expelled. The essence of tyranny is lawlessness, for the tyrant recognizes no authority above his own will, and Aeschylus is one of the earliest writers in whom we find the traditional Greek picture of a tyrant. Hatred of tyranny leads directly to the antithesis of tyranny, the rule of law, and this we find extolled not only in the praise of the Athenians, who 'are slaves and subjects of no man' (*Persae* 242), but in the rule of the gods as well; the government of

the world is not wholly arbitrary, but certain principles can be detected in it, pride leading to disaster, suffering ripening into wisdom, the old Greek doctrine of the mean in various shapes. It might be objected that these are generalizations from experience which belong to the type of scientific laws rather than divine ordinances, but if the whole structure of the world is attributed to the gods the distinction loses its significance. It is likely that, with extraordinary theological boldness, Aeschylus portrayed Zeus as developing from the raw tyrant indulging a despotic power to something like a constitutional ruler under the divine law of his own making. Unfortunately only one play of the *Prometheus* trilogy, in which this idea may have been worked out, has survived, but though much is uncertain, this remains the most likely solution of the problem of its meaning.

There is little that can profitably be said of the influence exercised by internal conditions at Athens; there were conflicts of opinion within the city over policy towards Persia early in Aeschylus's life, and over the position of the mainly conservative Areopagus at the end. We may guess that Aeschylus was opposed at any price to the return of the tyrants and that he was in favour of the reform of the Areopagus and the extension of democracy. But these are only guesses. What is perhaps more important is that throughout his life Athens was free from such violent tensions and frustrations as marked the period during which most of the surviving plays of Sophocles and Euripides were written. Aeschylus was freer than the Athenians of other generations to live out the life of his own spirit.

3 THE PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

We do not know when it became customary for each competing dramatist at the Great Dionysia to produce three tragedies and a satyr-play, nor do we know whether others before Aeschylus had taken a single theme for all three tragedies, or for the whole group of four plays, and written trilogies or tetralogies. After his time it ceased to be the usual

practice; Sophocles wrote a trilogy on the story of Telephus,[13] and all of the group of plays to which the *Troades* of Euripides belongs dealt with legends of Troy, but we do not know how close a connection there was between them; few other examples are known outside the works of Aeschylus, and he did not invariably follow the practice; the *Persae,* for example, had no connection with the other plays produced at the same time.

A single Greek play is a close and compact structure; a trilogy, while maintaining a definite unity, is a somewhat looser composition than, for example, an Elizabethan tragedy. The time interval between the plays of a trilogy is often considerable; the chorus and some at least of the characters are new in each play. But for Aeschylus, whose purpose was not to develop character or tell a story but to treat a theme, the trilogy was an admirable instrument. In the case of a tetralogy the connection between the tragedies and the light-hearted satyr-play was presumably slighter and of less significance. But it is a grave disadvantage for us that only one trilogy has been preserved. The *Persae* is complete in itself, but three of the seven surviving plays, the *Supplices,* the *Septem,* and the *Prometheus* are in effect fragments, and there is little agreement as to the meaning of the trilogies to which they belong; this is especially the case with the first and the last of these plays, each of which is the initial play of its trilogy and poses the problem whose answer is missing.

Whether the early plays of Aeschylus were in trilogy form is not known, but there is no doubt that it was a form peculiarly suited to his purpose, which was no less than to comprehend human life and the moral law by which the universe, assumed to be rational, is governed. To do this he turned, as a Greek would, not to the life around him but to life as displayed in myth, where its essential nature is more fully revealed. Not that the myths were taken as divinely inspired or possessed of particular authority; yet it was easy to believe that the truth was more readily to be recovered from them than from the raw confusion of events. To comprehend life as Aeschylus saw it, it is often necessary to

comprehend process, the process for instance by which justice is fulfilled. A single play can never conveniently cover events widely separate in time, and it is hardly possible even for the Romantic playwright to pass from one generation to the next; he is not free to drop his characters and introduce new ones to the extent required. In the trilogy this can be done. Laius and Oedipus are both dead at the opening of the *Septem*; Clytaemnestra alone is common to all three plays of the *Oresteia*, and in the last of them she appears only as a ghost. No other Greek dramatist needs this extension of time, and the essential characteristic which distinguishes Aeschylus is naturally related to this need. Since his problem is general, it is mankind, or perhaps rather the Greek man, who supplies one of the terms of the problem. He is concerned with what happens to man rather than with actions which arise out of the characters of particular men. Nor is the predominance of the chorus to be explained entirely by the historical fact that, when Aeschylus began to produce, the actor had not long been invented. Aeschylus had need of the chorus, and not merely in order to give his own comments on the action. Today our attention is so much focused on character both in drama and in fiction that a form of drama in which character-interest does not take first or even second place is not likely to seem immediately attractive.

Until recently the task of the writer who discussed the plays of Aeschylus was simple in so far as he had a sequence of trilogies in which the chorus enjoyed a diminishing predominance, and the author's skill in the handling of the actors seemed steadily to develop. *Supplices, Septem, Oresteia* was a natural progression, with the *Prometheus* probably just before the *Oresteia*, and it was supported by two known dates, *Septem* 467, *Oresteia* 458. But it is in the nature of discoveries that they should shed darkness as well as light. A number of papyrus fragments of Aeschylus were published in 1953 of which some were from the introductory notices prefixed to plays.[14] These notices are of the same type as those which have been preserved for many plays in our manuscripts. They go back to the great edition of the tragic poets by

Aristophanes of Byzantium, who prefixed to each play certain information about the year of the first performance and the other poets competing in that year, what plays they produced and with what success. As this information comes in the last resort from Aristotle's *Didascaliae*, it is, apart from possible errors in copying, completely reliable.

The new fragment tells us that in a year which may be 463 (the letters AR . . . though they could be the beginning of the word Archon, are more likely to be the beginning of the name of the Archon, for which Archidemides fits) Aeschylus was first, Sophocles second, and a certain Mesatos, whose very existence was previously uncertain, was third. The titles of the plays produced by the two last are highly confused by cancellations—presumably the writer began copying the wrong list—while the bit of papyrus containing the first two titles of Aeschylus is missing; but the third play was the *Danaides* and the satyr-play the *Amymone*. Now it had been generally assumed that the *Danaides* was part of the trilogy to which our *Supplices* belongs, and the guess that the *Amymone* was the satyr-play had been widely accepted, and may now be considered as confirmed. If we allow, as we must, that the two missing titles are *Supplices* and *Aegyptii*, then the conclusion follows that the *Supplices* was produced after 468, when Sophocles began to compete, and probably in 463. As it was believed all but universally that the *Supplices* was by a long way the earliest extant play, dating from the years before Salamis (480) if not from before Marathon (490), this conclusion was highly disturbing. As the idea becomes more familiar it will probably be generally accepted. It is not, however, absolutely unavoidable.

Those who were reluctant to believe the new evidence at first suggested that the Sophocles of the papyrus was a later poet of the same name and that the notice referred to a revival of Aeschylus's trilogy at a later date, a desperate hypothesis. But the possibility that the first production was after the death of Aeschylus cannot be ruled out. There was a special enactment by which anyone who wished might compete with plays of Aeschylus, and we are told that he was six times

victorious in this way after his death. It is true that when Aristias competed with plays of his father Pratinas, both names were recorded in the notice, but in this case there was no special enactment, and we cannot be sure how Aeschylus's posthumous victories were recorded; nor indeed would the versions prefixed to the plays necessarily follow a wholly consistent scheme.[15] And it is always possible that a play may have been written many years before it was produced. But though it may not be absolutely certain that the *Supplices* was written after 468, it is no longer reasonable to assume, as was generally assumed when the first edition of this book was written, that the *Supplices* is the oldest surviving play. The chronological framework on which we can rely with reasonable confidence is: first production about 500, first victory 484, *Persae* 472, *Septem* 467, *Oresteia* 458. Aeschylus died in 456 at the age of about seventy.

The 'Persae'

It is natural to begin with the *Persae,* since we know of no play that is older. Further, it is an advantage that this play stood alone and not as part of a trilogy; it is complete, yet shorter and more comprehensible than his other works. But it is in some ways a disadvantage that it is unique among surviving plays in having a contemporary rather than a mythical subject, and is to that extent untypical; yet it is revealing to see how Aeschylus transforms history into a sort of myth before he dramatizes it. But before considering the play in detail it is necessary to say something about ideas which Aeschylus assumes to be familiar.

(*a*) *Fate and Responsibility*

The story of the great Persian defeat is transformed by Aeschylus into a particular case of the general law that heaven punishes human pride, the law which is revealed by so many mythical tragedies. The thought which arises at the back of the mind of the Chorus as they ponder the vastness of Xerxes' enterprise is that the decision to invade Greece may have been wrong. A man may make a wrong decision for a

variety of reasons. But it was a peculiarly Greek idea that a decision, especially a very momentous decision, may be wrong because the divine power wished it to be wrong. This wish might be due to divine jealousy of excessive human prosperity, though not in Aeschylus, or to the desire to punish wickedness, or more generally to the requirements of an overriding purpose. The process whereby a man's judgment is blinded so that he makes a decision which he would not otherwise have made is called *Ate*. Like many abstractions she is a goddess, but without personality or cult. Her nature may involve deception, but this implies no moral condemnation of the divine. Incidentally, *Ate* means also the consequence of divine deception, which is disaster.

Here we have a peculiarity of Greek thought which is encountered in most authors down to Thucydides and Euripides, who were perhaps the first to think of decisions made under stress of emotion in much the same way as we do. It was based primarily, no doubt, on experience. Sometimes men feel that a compulsion is working on them from without, forcing them to a certain choice; and looking back it may seem to them incredible that of their free choice they decided as they did. 'The god easily makes what is bad seem to a man to be good, and what is expedient seem bad', said Theognis (405, 6). So did Agamemnon explain the aberration which caused him to offend Achilles when he was piqued over the loss of Chryseis (*Iliad* 19. 86). Perhaps the baldest statement of all is given by the Chorus of the *Antigone* (621–4), 'Of wisdom was the famous saying born, to the man whose wits god leads to disaster the evil seems to be good'. Though the general name for the misleading power is *Ate*, any supernatural influence, for example an *Alastor* or avenging spirit, could have the same effect, and when we come to *Eros*, Love, and its beguiling power we approach common experience.

The commonest cause of the invasion of *Ate* is success, the sequence of successes which makes men take success for granted, the prosperity which produces insolent pride, or *hybris*. The Greeks were, if possible, excessively conscious of the danger of the confidence which is engendered by success.

As the Queen says in the *Persae,* anyone with experience of the world knows 'that when the wind of fortune is fair men are convinced that the breeze will hold steady forever' (601, 2). A more rationalistic age could easily translate this belief into psychological terms, and Thucydides is never tired of pointing out this same effect in the workings of contemporary politics. But the onset of *Ate* can by no means always be explained in these terms. Zeus was said to have brought about the Trojan War by means of the rape of Helen in order to relieve the earth of the burden of over-population. How then could Paris and Helen have been guilty if they were fulfilling the divine purpose? We reach a logical *impasse.*

This attitude was the more natural among early men because, as their laws show, they were concerned rather with actions and consequences than with motive and responsibility. When the world grew more queasy-conscienced increasing attention was paid to states of mind and rectitude, or the lack of it, in the intention. Its importance in connection with Aeschylus is that it was easily applied with reference to the divine purpose. In order that this purpose may be fulfilled it is often necessary that men should take certain decisions. The conception of the choice as determined, or as some anthropologists call it 'overdetermined', was familiar, so that it was simple enough to picture a man deciding as the divine purpose required. But, and here we can never enter completely into the ancient point of view, this determined decision did not entirely relieve the man of responsibility. This is illogical, though not, perhaps, more illogical than some modern pronouncements on responsibility with reference to heredity and the influence of environment. But for the Greeks, at all events before the late fifth century, the issue of free will as opposed to divine determination of human action had not presented itself. A man's decision might be in accordance with a plan predetermined by the gods but his decision remained his own. Similarly, when the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, we are not to suppose that Pharaoh was exempted from responsibility for what he did. No subtlety of formulation can remove this inconsistency, of which our traditional ways of thought

with their emphasis on purity or sinfulness as a state of mind make us particularly aware.[16]

Situations of this kind, where a man does what he is impelled to do by destiny or by some more limited external force, are quite common in Aeschylus's plays. Xerxes decides to invade Greece, Eteocles goes off to single combat with his own brother, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter and Clytaemnestra exacts punishment from Agamemnon. And Aeschylus shows an incipient awareness of the difficulty of this double motivation, though it cannot be said that he goes far towards resolving the contradiction. Though the Persians were destined to meet disaster attacking Greece, it need not have been under the leadership of Xerxes; but 'when a man of his own accord hastens to his doom the god too lends a hand' (742). Rather similar is the passage of the *Agamemnon* (1508) where Clytaemnestra declares that it was really the *Alastor,* the avenging spirit raised up by the crimes of Agamemnon, that struck him down. Here the Chorus will not allow her to evade responsibility, but allow only that the *Alastor* might take a hand. The same idea arises, probably, in a famous fragment of the *Niobe.* 'Nor must we allow', says Plato (*Republic* 380A) our young people to be told by Aeschylus that 'Heaven implants guilt in a man, when his will is to destroy a house utterly'. This looks like a piece of Calvinistic determinism, but the recovery of a piece of papyrus which gives us some of the context of the fragment reveals Plato as something less than ingenuous. For Niobe continues: 'Man must attend meantime to the good fortune that God gives him, and guard his lips from insolence. They whose turn it is to prosper never think that they shall stumble and spill forth the (welfare) of today. For see, I too, exultant in the beauty . . .' (Trans. D. L. Page). Clearly Niobe regards the divine will and her own unfortunate boast (that she had more children than Leto the mother of Apollo and Artemis) as parallel causes of disaster; her boast is not purely a consequence of the gods' purpose.[17]

Failure to appreciate the nature of this contradiction leads to the illusion that Greek drama is destiny-ridden. While all

that happens is the will of heaven and is recognized as such by those concerned after it has happened, there is no fatalism in the behaviour of Greek heroes before the event. Hector fights none the less vigorously in the *Iliad* because he knows that Troy will one day fall, and the same knowledge never suggests to the Greeks that they should sit still and let the destined victory fall into their laps. Similarly in tragedy, whether a man believes in the supremacy of Zeus, or of Fate, or of blind Chance, his belief does nothing to sap his energies or to weaken his conviction that his decisions count.[18]

(*b*) *The Play*

Of this kind is the thought in the minds of the Persian Elders as they brood over the absence of the great armament which went over the sea to Greece. Was Xerxes, they ask, the victim of *Ate*? Under the rule of Darius Persia had mastered all Asia. But Xerxes' decision to attack Greece meant that the Persians had to make trial of a strange element, the sea; in trying to extend, to a new element, the supremacy by land which the gods had given Persia, and in casting upon the neck of the Hellespont a yoke in the form of a bridge of boats, it might be that Xerxes was transgressing the appointed limits. Had he been tempted by the gods to his own undoing? 'The crafty deceit of the god, what mortal man shall avoid it? Whose foot is so swift that he can master the winged leap (from the snare)? For *Ate* fawning in friendliness first leads a mortal into the net, and no man may make his escape thence and flee away.' (107–14.) As they reflect their fear grows stronger, they remember the immensity of the host which has passed beyond the sea and the grief of the Persian women for whom no news comes of their husbands.

Their fear is reinforced by the arrival of Xerxes' mother, the wife of the great Darius, known to history as Atossa but never named in the play. She has had a bad dream which seems to bode ill for Xerxes. The Chorus advise her to pray and to offer sacrifice to the dead Darius, one of the figures who had appeared in her dream, thus preparing for the later scene in which Darius is conjured from his grave. While they

are still talking the Messenger appears with the news of the Persian disaster. The Queen is silent while the Chorus make their first breathless inquiries, impressive in her dignity; then she asks if her son is alive.

The Messenger's part, which is central to the play, is managed with great technical skill. His story, which is necessarily long and might easily have clogged the movement of the play, is divided between five speeches of which the most elaborate, the great set piece of the battle of Salamis, is the centre. Even here there are no concessions to chauvinistic sentiment. The ruse of Themistocles, by which the Persians were persuaded to attack, is mentioned, but not its author's name. The success of the deception is ascribed to divine envy which deprived the Persians of their judgment. But envy on the lips of the Persian messenger means, of course, to the Greeks righteous anger, and the passage must not be used as evidence that Aeschylus held the more primitive belief that the gods could be roused to resentment by the sight of human power. The superb account of the battle, in which Aeschylus like most of his audience had taken part eight years before, must have produced in the theatre a wonderful emotional effect. It is noteworthy that Aeschylus never speaks of the Persians with the bitterness which Euripides later used in reference to the Spartans. Proud consciousness of Athenian superiority is shown in the Queen's surprise at the information that they are no man's slave, and in her reminder to the Chorus that Xerxes victorious or defeated is (unlike Athenian magistrates) answerable to no one.

There is nothing for the Persians at home to do but try to appease the anger of the gods. While the Queen goes to fetch the offerings the Chorus sing a lamentation which is based on the contrast between the prudence of Darius which raised Persia to greatness and the rashness of Xerxes. This prepares us for the Queen's command, when she returns in mourning and on foot in all humility, that they shall join in prayer to Darius to appear from his tomb and give counsel in the hour of need. That Darius's tomb is in a convenient place near the council chamber deserves no more comment

than the nearness of Agamemnon's tomb to the palace in the *Choephoroe*. The idea that the dead live in their graves was implicit in the common Greek practice of hero-worship. Whether the conjuring of dead men out of their graves by prayer and incantation was familiar to the Athenians one may well doubt, though it was widely held that it was possible to establish communication with the dead, and it was quite proper to beat on the ground (683) to call their attention. Though Agamemnon's ghost does not actually appear in the *Choephoroe*, the scene around his tomb suggests the same set of beliefs. And we must suppose that Darius, coming as he does from the other world, is endowed with supernatural wisdom, that what he says is to be taken as the truth, even though he can be strangely ignorant, when the purposes of the play require it, of what has been happening on earth. One may doubt too whether, if Aeschylus had been writing not of a Persian king but of a Greek hero, he would have allowed him so pleasingly sinister a beginning and end. 'The gods below the earth are better at taking than at letting go' (690) and 'indulge your souls with pleasure day by day, since the dead are benefited nothing by their riches' (814, 2).

We have already heard from the Chorus of the famous bridge of boats by which Xerxes had crossed the Hellespont. News of this bridge appals Darius; it was equivalent to putting fetters on Poseidon; it meant transferring to the land what was the appointed province of the sea—a sign of diseased wits (750). At the time of the Persian invasion the men of Cnidus had tried to turn their city into an island by digging through the neck of the peninsula on which it stood, and many of the citizens suffered eye injuries from splinters of rock. When they consulted Apollo, his oracle told them that if the god had intended Cnidus to be an island he would have made it one. Accordingly the Cnidians gave up the attempt to defend the city (Herodotus 1, 174). It is interesting that Aeschylus concentrates on this one action and says nothing of the equally famous canal through the peninsula behind Mount Athos, and the even more scandalous punishment of the Hellespont, which was sentenced to be lashed for

breaking one of the bridges. As it is not unlikely that Aeschylus was well aware that Darius had himself yoked the Bosphorus with a bridge on his way to invade Scythia, it seems that he was more interested in the bridge as a symbol of Xerxes' limitless ambition than as an episode in the march.

The general picture which Darius reveals is of a conditional fate; Persia was fated eventually to meet disaster in an attack on Greece, yet it might have been long postponed. But heaven found Xerxes so apt a tool that it helped him to a personal catastrophe which he might have escaped. And the only counsel Darius can give is that Persia should leave Greece alone for the future, advice which is reinforced by a prophecy of the still unfought battle of Plataea, which completed the destruction of the Persian land forces. 'Piles of dead shall give a silent warning to the eyes even of the third generation that a mortal must not have thoughts above his station. For pride blossoms and yields a crop of *Ate* whence it reaps a harvest all of tears.' (817–22.)

With a disregard of time similar to that shown in the *Agamemnon* Xerxes arrives only two scenes behind his messenger. We do not, it is worth observing, see the Queen again in spite of her anxiety about her son's return. What later dramatist would have neglected the opportunity to represent the meeting of Xerxes and his mother with all the strength and contrast of emotions which it offered? Aeschylus was not concerned with his characters in their merely human relations with each other. Although his second actor was available, had he cared to use him, he chose to maintain the concentration of his play. We see the humiliation of Xerxes, and the attitude of the Chorus, neither over-sympathetic nor over-respectful, is in obvious contrast to their awe in front of the great Darius. Some older commentators thought this final lyric scene was intended to be comic. It is not that, although it would be difficult to produce it impressively on the modern stage without the help of the metrical and musical symmetry which belonged to the original and of the tradition of formal lamentation which we lack.

Of drama in our meaning of the term, of representation

of action, this play has hardly anything. Yet there is nothing crude about it. The poet is in full control of his material, and he succeeds in communicating his conception of the recent conflict as a process subject to the same divine laws as are manifested in the stories of the House of Oedipus or the House of Atreus.

The 'Septem'

Five years later, in 467, Aeschylus dealt with a more complicated form of sin and punishment in a trilogy consisting of the *Laius, Oedipus,* and *Septem,* while the satyr-play, the *Sphinx,* returned in its own spirit to an episode in the life of Oedipus. Laius was warned by the Delphic oracle that he must abstain from begetting children if he wished his city to be safe; he disregarded the warning and Oedipus was born; too late he tried to escape the consequences of his action by ordering the child to be exposed, but disobedience is not so easily atoned for, and the babe, who was fated to kill its father and marry its mother, was preserved, perhaps by the misplaced mercy of a servant. The second play presumably told of the discovery by Oedipus that he was guilty of paricide and incest and carried the tale of crime a generation further; for Oedipus, who ceased to reign when he discovered the contamination which he had incurred, quarrelled with his two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, and cursed them. The nature of their offence is obscure, but it was probably of the symbolic sort; either they served to their father a portion of meat less honourable than he was entitled to, or they gave him a plate of earthenware instead of gold. At all events he put upon them the intolerable burden of a father's curse, and the surviving play, the *Septem contra Thebas* or *Seven against Thebes,* shows the final destruction of the race of Laius, the death by mutual slaughter of the two brothers who had quarrelled about the throne of Thebes.

To us the idea of the inheritance of a load of sin seems primitive and inadequate; why should Eteocles suffer for the disobedience of his grandfather? Yet it owed its origin to the desire to find righteousness in the dealings of gods with men.

When the sense of the unity of the family group was stronger than the individual's sense of his own independent responsibility, it was not unreasonable to justify the workings of God by explaining apparently undeserved disasters as the punishment for the sins of other members of the group of the same or an earlier generation. The wisdom of Solon[19] had reached this conclusion in the search for justice. The doctrine of the curse leading to the annihilation of a family distinguished for the enormity of its sins is an extension of the same idea, made easier by the habit of symbolizing the consequences of crime in an objective form; blood becomes a magic fluid, and when it is shed by a kindred hand no power can cleanse the stain it leaves; 'blood will have blood', and the demand for vengeance is personified in the dreadful figure of the Erinys, the curse conceived in the form of a terrible, snaky-haired woman. So there may arise a chain of crime, in which each crime requires a vengeance, which is itself a fresh crime. Such is the situation we meet in the *Oresteia,* where Aeschylus propounds a solution, so that in the end the house of Atreus is saved from utter destruction. But the earlier trilogy of the house of Oedipus works out the tragedy to the bitter end, with results which are more tragically than ethically satisfying. For the story involves, not so much the punishment of the children instead of the father as the punishment of the children as well as the father. At about the same time at the far end of the Mediterranean Ezekiel was asserting that 'the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father', and the generation of Aeschylus was less ready than that of Solon to allow it to be justice that the fate of the individual should be determined by actions over which he had no control.

It is a remarkable fact that the great stories like those of the houses of Oedipus and Atreus tended to grow grimmer with the passage of time. In Homer Oedipus went on ruling after the discovery of his parricide and incest; the attempt of Polyneices to win Thebes was probably occasioned by ambition without the impulse of any curse. The darkening of the colours may have been due in part to the story-teller's wish to increase the power of his story by piling on the

horrors; but a more important factor was a growing sense of the danger to the city-state of the crimes committed by its members. In the loosely knit society described in the Homeric poems a murderer had nothing to fear from anyone but the kin of his victims, but in the city-state the crimes of one man might pollute the whole community. Oedipus could not go on ruling in Thebes when his past had been revealed, for he was a centre of moral infection; that his crimes had been committed in ignorance was irrelevant, since acts had their consequences regardless of intentions, and acts like those of Oedipus automatically rouse the Erinyes to activity. The consequences of deeds which involve pollution become more serious both for the doer and for the community to which he belongs.

As far as we can gather from the one surviving play, the Oedipus trilogy accepted these somewhat primitive notions and presented the inevitable process of doom. It is a guess, though it cannot be more than a guess, that Aeschylus felt the moral inadequacy of the story he was dramatizing, and that the difference between this trilogy and the *Oresteia* is the measure of the progress of the poet's thought in the intervening years.

After the death of Oedipus his sons Polyneices and Eteocles disputed the succession; for their father had laid on them his curse that they should divide their inheritance with the sword. Polyneices was driven out, took refuge in Argos, and returned with an Argive army intending to recover Thebes by force. When the play begins the city is in deadly peril, for the assault is imminent. Eteocles is calm in the hour of danger and makes his dispositions wisely and well. But the audience know he is doomed. They are reminded of the fact by the strange prayer with which he greets the news that the attack is about to begin: 'Zeus, and Earth, and warder Gods of the city, and Curse, my father's potent Erinys, grant that my city. . . .' (69–71.) To Zeus all men direct their prayers, and a Theban descended from the Earth-born might ask the mother of his race for help, but to join the Erinys to his prayer savours of the mad recklessness which is fully

revealed at the end of the play, when Eteocles appoints himself defender of the seventh gate against his own brother, Polyneices. For a great curse is a kind of *Ate,* which works in the same way, darkening men's wits so that they do things which in their right minds they would never do. So Eteocles, instead of taking every precaution to keep himself out of his brother's way, rushes insanely on to meet his fate without regard for the horror of shedding a brother's blood.

Eteocles hears from the Messenger that Polyneices, of course under the spell of the same curse, is vowing to perish killing his brother, or to banish him if he yields. And he hears that he bears upon his shield the figure of Justice promising to lead him home, a device which only an infatuated man could adopt when he was trying to sack his own city. Then with equal infatuation he announces, 'I will stand face to face with him myself; what other man has so just a claim? A leader I will stand against their leader, a brother against a brother, a foe against a foe.' (672–5.) The Chorus express the horror of all right-thinking people; there are plenty of other Thebans he might send: 'They can be purified of the blood they shed. But when men who are kindred lie self-slain—theirs is a pollution which grows not old.' (680–2.) But Eteocles submits with perverse eagerness to his father's curse, perhaps because it helps him to glut his hatred of his brother, though that in its turn has its origin in the curse. 'Since the god hastens the event, away with all the race of Laius, hated of Apollo, whose lot is the wave of Cocytus. . . . For the black, hateful curse of my dear father sits hard by with dry, unweeping eyes, telling of profit better than a death delayed. . . . We are neglected of the gods, and the only favour from us to which they pay regard is our death. Why then should we fawn longer on the death that comes to destroy us?' (689–704.)

He goes out to slay his brother, and by his own impious death to save his city. Meantime the Chorus, interpreting the present by the past while they await the outcome of the fatal combat, reveal much of the meaning of the trilogy. 'I shudder at the god, the destroyer of the house, not like other gods, a

prophet of evil unerring in truthfulness, the Erinys invoked by a father to fulfil the angry imprecations of the demented Oedipus; child-destroying is this strife which urges them on. . . . And when they perish self-slain, each by the other's hand, and earth's dust drinks the dark-clotted, murderous blood, who can give them purification, who can wash them clean? O new labours of the house mingled with ancient sorrows! Old is the transgression of which I speak and swiftly avenged, yet abiding to the third generation; when Laius in despite of Apollo, who three times at his oracle by the central navel-stone of Pytho bade him die without offspring and by so doing save the city, overcome by sweet folly begot his own doom, Oedipus the father-slayer, who sowed the holy field where he was conceived. . . . Grievous is the settlement of the curses spoken of old at the hour of fulfilment; the poor have disaster pass them by, but a load of wealth grown over-great bringeth loss. What man was ever honoured so much by the gods who share the city's hearth, and by the race of men rich in pasture, as was Oedipus in the days when he removed the plague which was stripping the land of men? But when he learned what he had done he put out his own eyes and in anger at the accursed food, he laid upon his sons, alas, curses of bitter tongue, that they should divide their possessions with the hand that grasped the sword; and now I fear the Erinys with returning foot may bring all to pass.' (720–91.)

The musings of the Chorus, while they await the news of the destruction of the third generation of the house of Laius, are not always coherent. Oedipus was destroyed not because of his wealth—the word implies also the opulence of royalty and the dangerous superfluity of blessings—but because his father disobeyed the commands of Apollo. Oedipus was not, like Xerxes, led astray by over-confidence in himself, though he may in Aeschylus, as in Sophocles, have been too sure of his own wisdom; yet his fall is not altogether irrelevant as revealing the feebleness of the greatest of men when the gods see fit to humble him. But the fact, asserted by more than one myth, that the gods think it just to extend the punishment

of a single crime over more than one generation is simply accepted without explanation or complaint. To us, at least, the trilogy reveals more of the blindness of man than of the justice of heaven.

Two questions are likely to trouble the reader of this play. First, why is the whole of the first scene after the entry of the Chorus, over a hundred lines, devoted to their wrangle with Eteocles, in which the latter rebukes them for their hysterical invocation of the gods as being likely to communicate their panic to the defenders of the city? No doubt women could be a nuisance during an assault.[20] But this hardly accounts for the violence of Eteocles' irritation and the harshness of his words to women who were at all events calling on the gods for help. One feels that a clue is lost. Perhaps there was something in the previous play, something in the curse of Oedipus, as that he should never be the father of children, which gave meaning to this scene. It is noticeable too that the Chorus itself is transformed at the end of the play. There is nothing in common between the panic-stricken maidens whom Eteocles reviles and the Chorus in the latter part of the play who sorrowfully recall the story of the doomed family and gravely recognize the accomplishment of the final destiny.

The second question, over which scholars have been much divided, is whether Eteocles' end is a heroic self-sacrifice which redeems his city even though condemned to be destroyed along with its rulers, or an insane crime which effects nothing but the destruction of himself and his brother. The self-sacrificing hero is a familiar figure both in Greek legend and Greek drama, and we may well feel that such an interpretation gives point to an otherwise bleak trilogy. Further, the beginning of Eteocles' first speech (71, 2) *can* be translated 'whatever happens to me do not extirpate the city', a suitable anticipation of a final act of self-devotion; and the oracle given to Laius (749), that by dying without offspring he would be the saviour of the city, could well mean that if he had a child the city would be destroyed. But it need not mean so much as this, and it is pretty well decisive in favour

of the second view that the Chorus at no time speak a word of admiration or gratitude, but express unmixed horror at Eteocles' fratricidal end. And on the whole the sombre grandeur of the close is enhanced if we imagine Eteocles as the wise leader who, at the dreadful moment when his brother is revealed as the champion who is to assail the gate which he has reserved himself to defend, gives way to the workings of his father's curse and insists on fighting his own brother.

The end of the play, as we have it, introduces Antigone demanding the burial of her brother Polyneices. The admission at this stage of a wholly new theme is hardly tolerable, and the general view is that this is an 'improvement' added at a posthumous production at some time when Sophocles had made the story of Antigone so famous that it was inevitably suggested by the death of her brothers.[21]

The 'Supplices'

The plot of the *Supplices* is summarized by Aeschylus himself in the *Prometheus* in the course of the hero's prophecy of the coming of Heracles to be his liberator: 'And the fifth generation from Epaphus (son of Zeus and Io) a family of fifty children, will come back not willingly to Argos, a brood of maidens fleeing from marriage with cousins, their own kin; and they in eager haste, like hawks in close pursuit of doves, will come after them in quest of a marriage which they may not achieve, but the god will deny them their bodies; the Pelasgian land will receive them laid low by the murderous hands of women bold in the darkness; for each husband will be bereft of life by his spouse who will plunge a two-edged sword in his throat. May such love as this be the lot of my enemies! But one of the maidens will be moved by desire for children (*or,* by love) not to kill her bedfellow, and her purpose will be blunted; of the two she will prefer to be called a weakling rather than a murderess. From her will spring the race which will rule in Argos.' (853–69.) The language is appropriately oracular, but the outline of the story is clear. The first part of it, the flight of the daughters of Danaus

from Egypt to Argos in an effort to avoid the marriage with the hated sons of Aegyptus, is the subject of the *Supplices*. The second play, the *Aegyptii*, dealt with the forced marriage and the murderous bridal night; the third, the *Danaides*, with the disobedience of Hypermnestra in sparing Lynceus and possibly with the trial of Danaus himself for the murders for which he was responsible, and with the marriage of the remaining daughters.

But although the main events dramatized are not in question, the most curious and baffling difficulties arise when we begin to ask what was the theme of the trilogy. Neither the summary of the story given in the *Prometheus*, nor the text of the *Supplices*, infested as it is with corruptions, makes clear the nature of the objection felt by the Danaids to the idea of marrying their cousins. The first impression of the reader of the passage from the *Prometheus* is likely to be that marriage with cousins was in itself regarded as an abomination. But such marriages were, and had long been, completely accepted by the Greeks, and were of common occurrence at Athens. And it is perfectly possible to read the strictures in the *Prometheus* as referring only to this particular marriage. In the surviving play the question is raised by Pelasgus, the king of Argos, who is by no means eager to extend to the Danaids a protection which is likely to embroil him with the Egyptians. But he gets no very satisfactory answer. The following are the relevant lines which start from the king's question:

CHORUS-LEADER. I flee that I may not become the handmaid of Aegyptus's race.
KING. Out of enmity, or do you mean something unlawful?
CHORUS-LEADER. Who would purchase kinsmen for masters?
KING. That is how men's families are strengthened.
CHORUS-LEADER. And if things go ill, divorce is easy.
(335–9.)

The text of the crucial line 337 is corrupt and cannot be certainly restored.[22] But it may be noticed that the King does not take it for granted that marriage with cousins is objectionable. And one point of great interest emerges. The

Athenians liked to keep property in the family; in default of a male heir the property went with the heiress, but the heiress went, if possible, within the family, to an uncle, cousin, or even half-brother. This strengthened the family by keeping the property together, but for the woman the arrangement involved a grave disadvantage. If she married outside the family, her own kinsmen would see to it that she was fairly treated, and if she were divorced, that her dowry was returned. If her husband, however, was also a kinsman, she was more likely to be made the victim of a family arrangement.

Interesting though this point is, the action can hardly be made to turn on it. The Danaids are not heiresses; their father is still alive and has the right to give them in marriage as he likes. Has there been a family quarrel, which has caused the aversion?[23] It is possible, but if so it is strange that the situation is not made clearer; and if it were so, we should expect the initiative to come from Danaus, while it is rather the Danaids who are set against the marriage. This brings us to the most probable solution. We are told, almost in the first lines of the play, that the Chorus have fled their country, not because of any shameful act, but shunning marriage with the sons of Aegyptus 'out of instinctive distaste for men'[24] (8–10). Here again the meaning of the words is far from certain, and it may be, in any case, not the whole explanation, but it does at least introduce a theme which recurs in the *Supplices,* and probably in the last play of the Trilogy.

A maiden views marriage with mixed feelings; she looks forward to self-fulfilment as wife and mother, but she dreads the change from the familiar circle to the strange life in the company of a man not, of course, of her own choosing. And Greek girls married very young. Her feelings are a traditional theme of the marriage song.[25] Later the *Medea*[26] of Euripides gave them more sophisticated expression. Two deities symbolize the maiden's contending emotions, Aphrodite and Artemis. Aphrodite is the goddess of love, not so much, at this date, of mere sexual passion, but of the divine urge which drives men and beasts alike to reproduce their kind. Artemis, or rather Artemis in one of her aspects, is a virginal goddess;

to her the maiden dedicated her dolls before marriage, as a sign that childhood was ended. Each goddess, as the Greeks put it, demanded her due share of honour, and the *Hippolytus* of Euripides will show what happened when Aphrodite failed to get it. For some characters, like Hippolytus and perhaps the Danaids, are unbalanced, and pay honour only to one of the deities, and thereby do violence to the great principle of *Sophrosyne,* which demands the avoidance of excess, whether of indulgence or abstinence.

After Zeus it is Artemis, his pure daughter, that the Danaids invoke in their first hymn of prayer. And at the end of the play, when their suitors have been at least temporarily repulsed, they again pray to Artemis to save them from marriage 'by compulsion of Aphrodite' (1031, 2). But this time there is an answer from the handmaidens of the Danaids, who form a subsidiary Chorus. They reply with the praise of Aphrodite, who along with Hera is the most powerful of the gods after Zeus himself. This lyrical dialogue is not the place to look for logical argument, but we may well suppose that the passage is to be taken seriously as a suggestion that there is something excessive about the loathing felt by the Danaids for marriage with their cousins.[27]

If the *Supplices* is not, in fact, a particularly early work of Aeschylus, it is easy to see how the assumption that it was came to be made. The Chorus is a collective heroine. Other plays have a chorus which is more than the conventional body of sympathizers, the *Ajax* where the hero's mariners are very much aware of their own plight, the *Troades* where the captives are a collective victim, the *Bacchae* where they are one of the parties in the conflict, above all the *Eumenides* where the Chorus lead the attack without the assistance of any character to be their spokesman in the way that Dionysus, for example, is the spokesman for his Bacchanals; but in none of these is the Chorus so predominant as in the *Supplices.* Since it was common doctrine that tragedy developed out of a choral performance akin to the dithyrambic chorus, what could be more natural than to assume that here was an example of that early drama which had not completely

emerged from the dithyrambic stage. There were fifty singers in a dithyrambic chorus; the daughters of Danaus numbered fifty; it was a pleasing speculation that in this early drama the chorus maintained its original number and, together with attendant handmaids and assaulting suitors, made a gallant spectacle in a packed Orchestra. It was also a fact, and it remains an awkward fact, that the actors were used in a way which suggested that the dramatist had not long had the use of two actors. What was rarely remembered was that the *Supplices* could not be typical of early drama, because few myths are such that the hero can be represented collectively by a chorus. Accordingly features of the play which could plausibly be interpreted as primitive might, in fact, be due to the use of one of the few myths in which it was possible to give the chorus this unusual predominance.

Though the Prologue is said to have been invented by Thespis and was certainly used by Phrynichus in 476, the *Supplices,* like the *Persae,* begins with the entrance of the Chorus, who explain the situation, in so far as they do explain it, without the aid of dialogue. In the use of a prolonged first song to give the connection of the story with a remote past the play resembles the *Agamemnon.* The anomaly is that when the King of Argos arrives and hears their appeal for sanctuary it is not Danaus but the Chorus-leader who conducts the case for the suppliants, reinforced when the urgency rises by bursts of song from the Chorus. This would be less odd if Danaus were not present, but there is no excuse for getting him off the stage. On the other hand the scene as a whole is extremely dramatic. The Argive King finds himself in a quandary; if he refuses the suppliants he incurs divine anger, and if he protects them he will have a war with the Egyptians on his hands. Like Agamemnon at Aulis, like Orestes on his return, like Antigone, whatever he does he cannot avoid offence. And the agony of his indecision is rendered with a clarity which is unique before the plays of Euripides.

But if this scene is not without promise of sophistication, the scale of the choral odes which follow suggests that the

old dithyrambic drama was not far away. While the King and Danaus are off-stage putting the case before the people of Argos, the song of the Chorus takes them far back to Zeus and their ancestress Io; twenty-five lines of iambics are enough to report the success of the appeal, then the Chorus again burst into lyrics to call down blessings on Argos. With that the arrival of the Egyptians is at hand. Finally the lyric dialogue with the handmaids at the end, though not quite unparalleled, is unique in that much of the weight of the play is contained in it. It is impossible to attain certainty how or when this play came to be written. A point of some interest that does seem to emerge from amid the contradictions is that poets are in less complete control of their material than critics often like to suppose. The King's indecision arises out of the situation and the writer makes good use of his luck. But he does not, and probably cannot, create the situation so as to yield a particular effect until there develops out of long experience a conscious technique. Sophocles and Euripides know what there is in a given myth and how to exploit it, at all events in their latest work, with complete mastery. Aeschylus, one feels, discovered the possibilities as he went along.

The second play must have represented the triumph of the opposite excess, that of the lustful Egyptians. In the third some balance was struck between the two extremes. Aphrodite appeared in person, perhaps to bear witness in favour of Hypermnestra, who had spared her cousin Lynceus in spite of the orders of Danaus, perhaps to denounce Danaus for his bloody instructions. The surviving fragment of her speech already quoted,[28] is enough to show how Aeschylus conceived her, as a cosmic force, the vital principle which it is blasphemy to deny. The end of the play may have mentioned, in addition to the wedding of the Danaids, the establishment of the Thesmophoria,[29] the women's festival which, so Herodotus says, was introduced to Greece from Egypt by the daughters of Danaus.[30]

We happen to know a little about the plot of the *Amymone*, the satyr-play with which the tetralogy ended. Amymone

was one of the daughters of Danaus. She was sent to look for water in the thirsty land of Argos, and in the course of her search threw a dart at a deer, which missed and hit a sleeping satyr. He tried to rape her, but Poseidon came to her aid and drove off the satyr, but took her for himself. Then he showed her the springs of Lerna. So we have a treatment of the main problem of the trilogy in a lighter vein.

The subject of the *Supplices* has less appeal to the modern world than those of the other dramas, at least so far as we can judge from the rather obscure remains. The reader today is likely to be more impressed by the magnificence of the prayers which the Chorus of suppliant Danaids address to the lover of Io and the begetter of their race.

> 'Secure it falls, and not upon its back, whatsoever is decreed by the nod of Zeus, that it should have accomplishment. For dark and tangled stretch the paths of his wisdom, and the wit of man cannot conceive them. He casts down mortals from their towering hopes to utter destruction, yet he has no armament of force. Without toil is all that is done by divine power. Sitting there upon his holy seat he brings his purpose to pass, yet stirs not from his place.' (91–103.)

Taken in isolation this seems to transcend what is usually understood by paganism. Yet it is inextricably mixed up with such primitive notions as that of the cow-headed maiden or of the efficacy of a threat to hang oneself from a statue of a god.

The 'Oresteia'

To read Homer in the original and to read the *Oresteia,* these are the two greatest rewards for those who submit themselves to the labour of learning Greek. There is nothing like the *Oresteia.* No other drama, not even the Book of Job, presents us with such concentrated yet sustained magnificence of thought and language. The insoluble problem of the discovery of divine justice in the fortunes of human beings is taken up again from the *Septem,* and treated in a more

complicated form with new originality. The process of sin leading to punishment, which involves fresh pollution and fresh punishment, until the only possible end is reached in the annihilation of the guilty race, is recorded again, but this time, by divine grace, a solution is found.

The 'Agamemnon'

Paris, the son of Priam, who had been reared like Oedipus in defiance of the warnings of the gods, robbed Menelaus of his wife, Helen. This was a violation of the laws of hospitality, and Zeus Xenios, guardian of strangers, saw to its punishment. The Greeks beseiged Troy and after ten years of war left it a smoking ruin.

With the news that Troy has fallen the action of the *Agamemnon* begins. But before ever the fleet could sail for Troy Agamemnon had sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia in order to get a fair wind. During the ten years of his absence Clytaemnestra matured her plans for avenging her daughter and took as her lover Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin and enemy. She received her victorious husband with fair words and then murdered him in his bath. So she punished Agamemnon, but the punishment was a fresh crime. The action of the second play, the *Choephoroe,* begins about seven years later. Agamemnon's son Orestes, who had been sent away from home before his father's return and brought up in Phocis, came back to claim his inheritance and, at the express command of Apollo of Delphi, to punish his father's murderers, not only Aegisthus but his own mother. This he achieved, but the act of justice was again a crime, and Orestes was pursued by the Erinyes, the Furies who are aroused especially by the shedding of kindred blood. The third play, the *Eumenides* begins at Delphi, the home of the god who commanded matricide. Apollo gave Orestes ritual purification and told him to flee to Athens, there to answer the accusation of the Erinyes before the Court of the Areopagus. At the trial before a jury of citizens instituted by Athena, Orestes with Apollo to plead for him was acquitted, but by the narrowest margin as the votes on both sides were equal. The Erinyes

were angered at this intrusion on their prerogative, but in the end they were calmed by Athena and persuaded to make their home at Athens and receive worship under the title of the Semnai, Holy Ones, or Eumenides. The trilogy is a closely knit work, and the reader must come to it with the outlines of the action clear in his mind.

But before considering the trilogy it is necessary to mention certain ideas which Aeschylus and his audience shared. They believed that their ancient Court of the Areopagus was the first court of law ever established for the trial of murder. And they were aware that before its establishment the punishment for murder was the revenge taken by the relatives of the victim. Such revenges are a common feature in the legends of many early peoples. And the idea that it was the particular duty of the relatives to see to this punishment was for them very much alive, because in the Athens of their own day, and the same thing was still true a century later, only the kindred of the victim could prosecute for murder, and if you could find a man so alone in the world that he had no relatives even of the degree of second cousin, you could murder him with a fair certainty of never being brought to book. For no one but Orestes could punish the murderers of Agamemnon.[31]

Murder is commonly felt to stand apart from other crimes. This is more than ever the case where it is believed that the dead man in the grave is conscious of his wrong and full of resentment against his murderer. Then his kinsmen are moved to avenge him not only by the call of honour but by fear that the dead man's anger will be turned against them, and so all the conditions exist to encourage the blood feud which can be ended only by the extermination of a family. Strangely enough the Homeric world was little troubled either by belief in the baneful activity of the dead or in the impurity which infects those guilty of bloodshed. Even for the murder of a brother a man might accept a blood-price in settlement of the feud. And Telemachus does what no respectable Athenian would have done, when he gives an escaping murderer passage on his ship. Possibly city life with its closer contacts led to a greater fear of the contamination which

might affect those who came into contact with impurity. But above all it seems to have been the Delphic Oracle which spread a keener sense of the danger of impurity and at the same time provided an elaborate ritual of purification, and further, in the cult of heroes, which it did much to encourage, a method of appeasing the angry dead.

Finally a word on the Erinyes, sometimes called by the name of the Latin equivalent Furies, who are even more important in this trilogy than elsewhere in Greek drama. They describe themselves as 'Curses, the daughters of Night' (*Eum.* 416). They were called into being by such curses as Oedipus uttered against his sons, or as Thyestes invoked on the House of Atreus when he discovered that he had been given the flesh of his own children to eat. Sometimes they are more like the personified anger of the gravely-wronged dead; for instance, the Erinyes of Epicaste, as Homer called her, the mother and wife of Oedipus, which afflicted him after she hanged herself. Elsewhere they seem to be the spirits who are the guardians of natural order, like the Erinys who checked Achilles' horse when it spoke with a human voice, or those Erinyes who, the philosopher Heracleitus said, would hale the sun back to his course should he depart from it. The conceptions are vague and not always consistent; but they were pictured as loathsome visitants from the lower world with no part in the cheerful rites of the Olympians. This contrast between the gloomy gods of the older generation and the radiant Olympians is important for Aeschylus both here and in the *Prometheus*. On the other hand the narrowing of their activity to the punishment of murderers of kindred which we find in the *Eumenides*, though it is not consistently maintained, seems to have been an innovation made by Aeschylus in the interests of the drama.

No play has a more effective beginning than the *Agamemnon*. The Watchman on the palace roof waits, as he has waited many weary nights, for the beacon which will be Agamemnon's signal to his wife that Troy has fallen. The beacon blazes up, and the Watchman dances for joy. Then joy is clouded by thoughts of wickedness at home and apprehension of evil

to come. This is a movement which is repeated many times in the course of the trilogy before we reach the ultimate reconciliation. But at the Watchman's shout of joy the whole Palace has sprung to life as Clytaemnestra begins the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

The Chorus of the *Agamemnon*, far more than the choruses of earlier plays, are outside the action; they are old men, feeble as children, like 'a dream that is seen in the daylight'; their songs are full of dream-like visions, but unlike dreams they fall into an intricate pattern of thought. As they brood over the past, unaware that Troy has fallen or why Clytaemnestra is sacrificing, their thoughts turn to the old wrong done by Paris, and the host, like an avenging Erinys, which started out ten years ago to exact punishment; to the ambiguous omen and threatening interpretation of Calchas; to its dreadful fulfilment in the sacrifice of the king's daughter, which is unforgettably described in brilliant lyric narrative. 'How shall I be a deserter, and betray my allies?' (212, 3) Agamemnon had asked when confronted with the terrible demand for his daughter's life. Her mother probably cared less for military reputation, but she was not consulted. This was no excuse for her betraying her husband with Aegisthus and murdering him on his return, nor is Aeschylus interested in psychological motivation; crime itself inspires crime, and Agamemnon, in sacrificing his daughter, was guilty of an offence against the mother which led to his own undoing. This is why a vivid picture of the sacrifice is the chief memory left by the first choral song of the *Oresteia*.

Clearly the sacrifice of Iphigenia is in some sense a starting point; from it dates Clytaemnestra's bitterness against her husband, and we do not know that but for Iphigenia she would have betrayed him for Aegisthus's sake. But much is left very obscure. First, why was Agamemnon's daughter demanded from him? When, as the Chorus describe, Calchas saw the portent of eagles devouring a pregnant hare, he concluded that the hare was Troy and this the omen of its fall. He knew too that Artemis, as the guardian of all wild things, would be angry, and he feared the consequences. But would

she be angry with Agamemnon because a hare symbolizing Troy had been devoured by her father's eagles? For Troy itself there is no sign that Artemis particularly cared. Can we suppose that Aeschylus identified, or made Artemis identify, as a modern poet might, the symbol and the object symbolized? It seems less inconceivable today than it would have at some periods, but there is no parallel for such an equivalence in Greek Drama. On the other hand a well-known legend supplied an independent cause for the anger of Artemis; Agamemnon when out hunting had killed her sacred stag. There is no word of reference to this in the play, but it could be that Aeschylus preferred a tacit allusion to an incident which by the standards of the *Oresteia* was somewhat trivial, and that we are to assume this story.

The second difficulty concerns Agamemnon's responsibility. He was in the position of having to sacrifice either his daughter or his expedition. When he had got as far as Aulis it may hardly have been practicable to give up the latter. We are told that he and Menelaus threw their sceptres to the ground and burst into tears (202); then 'he put on the bit of necessity'. Since the expedition sailed by the will of Zeus Xenios, the god of hospitality, who was outraged by the conduct of Paris, it has been argued that when Aeschylus said 'necessity' he meant it. Agamemnon was doomed to go, doomed to kill his daughter, doomed to be killed by his wife in retribution.[32] Yet it is clear that the Chorus think Agamemnon blameworthy; Helen was not worth a war, as they tell him unambiguously on his return (799 ff.) and as they hint several times in their references to a war for a woman (225, 447), and a woman of many husbands at that (63). A possible solution is that he should never have started out at all. Zeus certainly approved the punishment of Troy, it is less clear that he thought Agamemnon justified in spending Greek lives for the purpose. But the most likely answer is that Agamemnon was the victim of another kind of doom. The Chorus begin with Iphigeneia, but she was not really the beginning. Cassandra will take us further back to the crime of Atreus and the curse of Thyestes. *Ate* was already

at work, but her victims are not exempt from guilt. Agamemnon's daughter was the price to be paid for the murder of Thyestes' children.

Before we leave this first choral song, which is in a sense the foundation of the whole trilogy, one further feature will repay attention. After the initial anapaests, which were probably intoned as the Chorus made its way to its place in the Orchestra, their song falls into three clearly defined parts; first the omen of the pregnant hare, then a prayer or, more properly, an address to Zeus—the Chorus do not pray *for* anything—which is followed by the description of Iphigenia's death. The third and last stanza of the prayer runs (174–83): 'Zeus who set mortals on the path to wisdom, who established the law that men should win knowledge by suffering. In sleepless hours a sorrow of the memory of wrong-doing is shed over the heart; even against their will understanding comes to men. The grace of the gods who are seated on the holy throne is bestowed at times perforce.' That we learn by experience was a piece of proverbial wisdom, and the idea that the gods send us painful experience for our good is an easy development of this, however difficult its detailed application. Aeschylus does not work out the idea, which we need not regret; a hint is better than a laboured theodicy. Most of the sufferers of this trilogy would have to learn after they were dead, and the Aeschylean Hades does not on the whole seem to provide for this kind of after-life. But striking as the expression of this idea may be, it seems in the remainder of the trilogy to merge itself with the more familiar notion that actions have their inevitable consequences, that the guilty 'are taught a lesson', though they may not live to profit by it.

At the end of two hundred and fifty lines we know that Troy has fallen; the Chorus do not know even that; we have moved backward in time, not forward. By the standards of more realistic drama the first scene (258–354) advances things hardly at all. Clytaemnestra tells the Chorus why she is sacrificing; Troy has fallen. She stifles their incredulity with a gorgeous narrative of the beacons passing their news across the Aegean, and confirms her story, quite illogically, by

picturing the scene in Troy, the tribulation of the vanquished and the victors enjoying their first unsentinelled sleep. Then a hint of the temptations which may beset the victors and jeopardize their return, and of the anger of the dead still to be reckoned with, the dead who, for her at least, include Iphigenia. Clytaemnestra, already described by the Chorus as 'like a man in counsel', establishes her dominance. 'The great beard of flame' which blazed across the Aegean still flickers in the later darkness of the play, and the wailing of the women of Troy as they cling to their dead remains in our ears. The method, even in dialogue, is still half lyrical; that is why it does not matter whether Clytaemnestra tells what she knows or what she imagines.

In the ensuing song (355–488) the Chorus digest what they have heard. This at least can be said with confidence, that no greater lyric poetry than this has survived from ancient Greece. The movement, as in the Watchman's prologue, is from triumph to dismay. Justice has been done on Paris's crime, as the gods always see that justice is done. The Chorus remember Helen slipping through the gates leaving desolation in the palace. Then by a deft transition they pass from the sorrow of Menelaus to the sorrow that prevails in Greek homes when, in place of the soldier who went out, an urn full of ashes comes back from the war, war for another man's wife. 'The gods are not unmindful of the slayers of many men.' (461.) With an expression of fear of the Erinyes what began as a song of triumph has turned into an outright condemnation of Agamemnon. Finally, in a passage of which there is no agreed explanation, they censure the credulity of a woman who believes in tidings conveyed by beacons. Is this a subtle study in the psychology of disillusionment? Is it evidence that the Chorus is not to be regarded as a collection of persons possessed of consistency and continuity of character, but rather as an accompaniment which is varied according to the need of the moment? Certainly their doubts lend new interest to the arrival of the Herald from Troy who, with a disregard for the conventions of time natural to this type of drama, is now seen approaching.

The Herald proclaims that Agamemnon, having indeed sacked Troy with the help of Zeus, bringer of justice, is above all others worthy to be saluted as a happy man—ill-omened word. The Chorus, we recall, have a different view of their King's prospects of happiness. They hear from the Herald of the miseries of the siege, and his triumph is abated by the memory of his dead comrades. When Clytaemnestra enters (587) two actors are together on the stage for the first time. Even so there is no real contact. The Queen gives the Herald a message of fulsome and sinister welcome for her husband from whom, not from the Herald, she will hear the tale of Troy. From the Chorus she hardly troubles to hide her falseness, but the hints of the Chorus are lost on the Herald. After this centre-piece the Herald is again alone with the Chorus, who ask after Menelaus. The description of the storm which destroyed the Greek fleet on the way home and perhaps Menelaus with it is not, as may at first sight be supposed, a mere companion piece to the description of the hardships of the siege. It is not only that in this play Agamemnon and Menelaus are associated more closely than usual, the twin rulers of a single kingdom, but the absence of Menelaus makes the murder easier to carry through, and, more important, had Menelaus not been missing and presumed drowned, the burden of punishing Clytaemnestra would not have fallen on Orestes. Actually he returned just after that punishment was completed, and the satyr-play, *Proteus,* which followed the *Eumenides,* dealt with an episode from Menelaus's wanderings.

Again the thoughts of the Chorus wander back to the beginning of the war, the fatal Helen, so lovely and so disastrous; like a lion-cub reared as a pet who fills the house with carnage when he grows up, so the irresistible Helen turned out an Erinys for Troy; she was both crime and punishment. Then the poet making the Chorus his mouthpiece more openly than in any other play goes on,

> 'There is an ancient saying among men from of old that great wealth, when it is accumulated, does not pass away without leaving offspring, but from good fortune is bred

endless woe. But I alone, apart from the others, hold a different view. It is the impious deed which breeds other deeds like their parent. But the house which is righteously governed ever produces offspring that are fair. Yet ancient Pride is wont, sooner or later, to give birth to new Pride . . . But Justice shines in smoky homes, and honours the upright man. But halls gold-inlaid she leaves with soiled hands, her eyes averted, and makes her way to the righteous, honouring not the power of riches with its counterfeit praise; and she brings all to its accomplishment.' (750–81.)

It is the wealth and luxury of Troy and the crime of Paris rooted in the excess of self-assurance that wealth brings that suggest this train of thought. But it is no accident that the assertion of justice's ultimate fulfilment is heard at the moment when Agamemnon enters. His crime too, as we know from the Iphigenia Chorus, awaits its punishment.

This is the cue at which Agamemnon comes all glorious in his chariot with the spoil of Troy; part of the spoil is the King's concubine, Cassandra; she is motionless, at first perhaps unnoticed, a silent commentary on her master. The Greeks did not attribute any excessive importance to conjugal faithfulness (in men), and no one would grudge Agamemnon his captive maiden. But it was another matter to bring her into the household and expect his wife to accept her. Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is the best commentary on that. It is a pretty question whether Clytaemnestra is at the door to welcome her husband. That he should not address her until, like the returning Herald, he has greeted the gods of his native land is proper enough; he then addresses to the Chorus some coldly majestical reflection on loyalty and is on the point of entering his palace. But Clytaemnestra now speaks, and very surprisingly speaks not to him but to the Chorus. She certainly has no intention of snubbing her husband, and it may be that Aeschylus is still under the influence of the magnetic effect of the Chorus as the dramatic centre, and in taking note of Agamemnon's disregard of his wife we may be using a standard of realism which is irrelevant. Certainly

Agamemnon is consistently cold even though he has presumably no suspicion of his wife; equally this exchange of speeches and the brief dialogue to which it leads have, and are meant to have, little relation to what actually happens when a wife and a husband are reunited after ten years.

Clytaemnestra's speech is a description, patently false, of her ten years agony of anxious waiting, an explanation of the absence of Orestes—if Agamemnon fell in battle his young heir might be safer out of Argos—and an opulent welcome from a loving wife whose returning husband is 'the forestay on which the ship depends, master pillar of a lofty hall, a father's only child, land seen by sailors beyond hope' (897–9), and it leads to the temptation, that Agamemnon shall enter his palace treading rich purple stuffs.

And why should not Agamemnon tread on anything he likes? To use expensive material for a carpet is highly wasteful and amounts to an assertion of complete confidence in the continuance of prosperity. But a human being who claims to know what the future holds for him has forgotten his place in the scheme of things. To put it on the most primitive level, he is claiming to be more than a man and so a fit object for divine resentment. Aeschylus did not believe in jealous gods, and when Agamemnon yields to his wife's temptation it is rather, as when Eteocles determines to fight his brother, a sign that *Ate* is in the ascendant. No one but a man ripe for doom would do such a thing.[33] When he does it Clytaemnestra knows that her plot will succeed, and the knowledge shows itself in her exultant words of double meaning as she follows her husband into the palace, the 'complete man' who is also 'the victim without blemish' (972).

After such an act of folly we may even wonder that the Chorus, in the last of their four great odes, cannot explain the panic fear which besets them, the dirge of the Erinys which sounds in their ears. Their terror might seem the immediate prelude to the King's murder were it not that Cassandra is still on the stage, silent, as she has been since her entry. Even when Clytaemnestra returns to fetch her in she remains unresponsive, apparently uncomprehending.

Cassandra is the daughter of Priam whom Apollo loved; he gave her his gift of prophecy, but she cheated him of her love, and her prophecies won no belief. In the most astonishing scene in the trilogy she and the Chorus are left alone together, while Clytaemnestra contrives her husband's murder; the horrors of the past and future cycle of revenges are brought together into moments of crowning terror before Cassandra enters the palace open-eyed to meet her destined end at the king's side. In the light of her clearer vision the evil influences which have haunted the Chorus are revealed: 'This roof they never leave, the band that sings in unison songs ill to hear; for the words are evil. And the revellers, the bolder for their draughts of human blood, abide in the house, hardly to be expelled, the band of kindred Erinyes. They chant, as they haunt the house, their song, the primal curse; they reject in horror the violation of a brother's bed, hating the trespasser.' (1186–93.) And she sees the fresh crime by which the sin of adultery with a brother's wife was punished. 'Do you see them seated above the house, these little ones, like shapes that are seen in dreams? Children who seem to have died by the hands of their own kin, their hands full of the meat of their own flesh. They are clear to see, grasping their entrails and inward parts, a most piteous burden.' (1217–21.) The infection of sin and the plague of inexpiable bloodshed go back, as the eye of the prophetess can see, further than the death of Iphigenia. The double claim for vengeance is fulfilled when Agamemnon falls at the hands of the mother of Iphigenia and the son of Thyestes. And she can see in the future the death which will be the punishment of the punishment, 'an offspring that slays his mother, an avenger of the father' (1281). But beyond the hopeless series of crimes and revenges she sees no hint of the reconciliation with which the closed circle of lawless violence is to be broken.

The death of Agamemnon gives Clytaemnestra her brief hour of exultation; the spurt of blood from her dying husband falls on her as sweetly as the rain of heaven on young corn. But the reproaches of the Chorus soon remind her that her deed

has its place in the successive disasters of the guilt-laden house, and she thinks too late of breaking the sequence: 'So I am willing to make a compact upon oath with the spirit that haunts the house of the Pleisthenids, that I will acquiesce in this, hard to endure though it be; and hereafter let him depart from this house and afflict another race with mutual slaughter; of riches a small portion is enough for me who will possess all, if only I rid these halls of the madness which makes us slay one another.' (1568–77.) A glimmer of wisdom has come to her, but there is no way—as yet—whereby the call of blood for fresh blood can be stilled. Clytaemnestra does not surrender her riches, and in the fullness of time her turn comes to pay the penalty.

The 'Choephoroe'

Seven years, as Homer tells the story, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus enjoyed their power, and in the eighth, Orestes, who had been a child hidden away in Phocis when Agamemnon came from Troy, returned to win his kingdom and avenge his father. Apollo's oracle at Delphi had threatened him with unspeakable horrors should he fail in his duty of exacting vengeance. There is no problem so far as Orestes is concerned but the means of securing vengeance, since his action has the clearest warrant of heaven; the wife who has killed her husband must be killed in turn, and it is the son who must be the avenger of his father, even though it is on the mother that the punishment is due to fall. Nor have Electra and the captives who form the Chorus of the *Choephoroe* any doubt what they want; they pray for the return of Orestes, and when the prayer is answered, and brother and sister meet by chance at their father's tomb, there is no need to discuss what is to be done; they only ask their father's help in the perilous enterprise, and kindle his anger and their own by a recital of his wrongs.

The *Choephoroe* is much shorter than the *Agamemnon* and the action moves more briskly. Much that the Chorus has said in the first play has been said once for all and can apply to the whole trilogy. Yet to a modern reader the entire

central scene of the *Choephoroe* may seem to drag, thrilling though it can be on the stage, and he may well wonder what it is all about. This immense lyric dialogue (306–478) between Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus, the most elaborate structure of its kind in ancient drama, must be in some sense a preparation for the burst of action which follows. The most obvious sort of preparation likely to be needed by a man about to kill his mother is that he should be nerved to do it. And some have supposed that this is what the dialogue is about. Certainly a modern writer would be likely to put here a scene in which Orestes is persuaded to overcome his hesitation. But the last words of Orestes before it begins are to the effect that, even if he were not impelled by Apollo's threats, his own feelings and his own interests would compel him to make away with the usurpers. He feels, in fact, no doubts at all. Further, Apollo is never mentioned, as he would be if Orestes' purpose needed to be fortified. And it is Aeschylus's way to take one thing at a time. Orestes' moment of hesitation when he faces his mother would be less powerful if he had not seemed proof against all hesitancy.

An alternative is to suppose that the whole is directed not at Orestes but at the dead king beside whose grave the lamentations take place. This would be natural and appropriate, especially as Agamemnon had never been properly mourned, and there is no doubt that at the end they do turn to the dead man in prayer (456). But this gives rather the impression of being the beginning of a new section, and it is strange that in the previous hundred lines the dead king is never unambiguously addressed, whereas no one could be in doubt who was the object of prayer in the corresponding scene in the *Persae*. A third possibility, and this is the most likely solution, is that the ceremony is a preparation for Orestes, not in the sense that he needs any urging to do the deed, but in the sense that he has been outside it all, that he has not experienced except by hearsay the shock of the murder, the prolonged horror of the usurpation. That is the relevance of the details of the ill-treatment of his father's corpse. It is a kind of initiation through which the brother is brought into a closer union

with his sister, with the suffering people vaguely represented by the Chorus, and with his dead father. After it he is ready in a fuller sense to execute his revenge.

When Orestes has gained entrance to the palace by craft and the crisis is at hand, the Chorus hope in their blindness that the 'blameless bloodshed' of a mother's blood will bring release from the troubles of the house. The moment they have foreseen arrives; Clytaemnestra recognizes her child and her slayer; she cries for pity and bares the breast that had given him suck. Though Orestes had apparently set out on his dreadful mission without qualms, he has a moment of hesitation, and only the solemn reminder of Apollo's command from his friend Pylades drives him to carry out his purpose. Orestes takes his mother away to kill her by her lover's corpse, but her warning to beware of the 'wrathful hounds of a mother's curse' (924) are sign enough that the sorrows of the house are not yet at an end, though the Chorus fondly rejoice that 'a great light is shining and the curb has been lifted from the house' (961). Even as Orestes is justifying himself his wits begin to fail, and the Furies of his dead mother seeking his blood make their entrance—visible to him alone. Again blood is calling for blood, and if Agamemnon has peace at last beneath the earth, his son is a fugitive upon it. Now the Chorus understand that the light was a false dawn, and the second play of the trilogy, like the first, ends with no prospect but disaster. 'When will it end, when will the fury of destruction be lulled and cease?' (1075, 6.)

The 'Eumenides'

In the third play of the trilogy, the *Eumenides,* the powers, which had previously lurked behind the human action and inspired it, meet face to face on the stage; drama merges into theology, but remains so far dramatic that the primitive inadequacy of the theology does not offend, and even passes unnoticed, perhaps because the thought is expressed not in abstractions but in concrete symbols. The Erinyes, the terrible beings, black-robed, rheumy-eyed, and snaky-haired, whose sustenance is the blood of murderers, form the Chorus. Apollo

himself drives them from his shrine at Delphi whither they have pursued Orestes; he, at Apollo's command, flees to Athens, where Athena is to give judgment in the dispute between the powers. Athena represents the new order in which civic justice overrides the anti-social rigour of the blood-feud, while the 'revel rout of kindred Erinyes', which the inspired vision of Cassandra had seen performing their ghastly dance in the house of Atreus, assert the legality of the ancient function allotted them by the Moirai: 'What mortal man is not filled with reverence and dread when he hears my Fate-appointed ordinance, the gift made perfect by heaven; mine is an ancient privilege, and though my place is beneath the earth in sunless darkness, I am not without honour.' (389–96.) That there may be no doubt as to the issue between them it is stated twice, in argument between Apollo and Erinyes at Delphi, and at the trial at Athens, where Apollo comes to plead Orestes' cause.

Those who slay a parent are guilty of the shedding of kindred blood, but the crime of a wife who kills a husband, since she has not shed the blood from which she is herself sprung, is not of the same inexpiable order, and does not arouse the same divine wrath. That is why the Erinyes did not pursue Clytaemnestra after she killed Agamemnon; 'she was not of the same blood as the man she slew' (605). Apollo, speaking from the point of view of a more highly developed society, argues, first that such an attitude dishonours Aphrodite and the institution of marriage (213–24); second, that the murder of a victorious hero by a woman is a particularly heinous crime (625–39); third, the subtlest, that the woman is a mere seed-bed in which the child procreated by the father grows till it is ripe for birth, and accordingly not of the same blood as her offspring. How else is it possible to explain the birth of a child from the father alone, as Pallas sprang from the head of Zeus with no mother as intermediary? (657–73.) With Pallas herself, who has established a court of her wisest citizens to judge the issue, this argument carries weight, and she gives her vote for acquittal. Even so the matter is not easily determined. Athena herself warns the jury that the

effects of fear are salutary (911–30), and that the state cannot afford to dispense with all such checks—a warning inspired perhaps by the enthusiasm of the democrats for the removal of restraint. The votes are equal but this, by the practice of the Areopagus, as established by Athena herself before the trial, means the acquittal of the defendant. Yet the Erinyes feel their honour to be so far saved that Athena is able to prevail upon them to be reconciled and make their home in Athens, no longer the afflictors but the benefactors of men.

There is a certain awkwardness in the *Eumenides* because, it seems, two independent endings to the story are combined; an ending in which Apollo purifies Orestes when, perhaps after long wandering, he reaches Delphi, and frees him from the pursuit of the Erinyes, and another in which Orestes escapes by the verdict of the Areopagus at Athens. The story that the Areopagus was established for the purpose of trying Orestes, which Aeschylus here uses, was not the only explanation of the origin of the Areopagus, nor the one most commonly received. Again, the role of the Erinyes expands and contracts in a curious manner; they punish only shedding of kindred blood (210–12), yet Apollo had threatened Orestes with the onset of the Erinyes if he failed to avenge his father (*Choe.* 283), and in their song (490–565) the Erinyes themselves claim to be guardians of justice in general, a claim that Athena seems to accept.

It is a consequence of this that the part of Apollo is capable of more than one interpretation, and it is possible to take a somewhat hostile view, especially if we regard him as the thwarted seducer of Cassandra. In his arguments with the Erinyes he does not obviously get the better of them, and his discourtesy is in strong contrast with the suavity of Athena. But we must accept his assertion (618) that his oracle never fails to express the will of Zeus, and the necessary implication that Zeus approved the command that Orestes should kill his mother. If Apollo does not come altogether well out of it, the reason is that he must not steal the limelight from Athena, and we need not look for subtle theological hints.

So the *Oresteia,* like the trilogies to which the *Supplices* and *Prometheus* belong, ends with a reconciliation. The argument by which the verdict is reached must seem dubious to us, and even if it was in accord with a physiological theory seriously held in antiquity it remains uncertain how seriously the audience took it. It matters less that the dilemma of Orestes is not finally resolved, because it is an extreme case. For the dilemma which arises out of the blood feud is resolved, and we need not make Aeschylus into a social historian in order to explain his awareness of it. The claims of family vengeance were still real enough, and up to a point maintained in Attic law by the limitation of the right to prosecute. The law was not such an unassailable rampart that men were likely to forget what they owed to it. The acquiescence of the Erinyes means both that the wronged dead are satisfied with a vindication under the law and that the division between the older gods, the Moirai and the Erinyes, and the generation of the Olympians is ended, though this is a piece of purely *ad hoc* theology which had no influence on belief. But for Aeschylus himself it may have been an expression of a belief in the developing harmony of the divine government, an idea which may be present also in the Prometheus trilogy. For the Athenians it was a source of patriotic satisfaction that the great innovation was made by their own court of the Areopagus, that it was at Athens that the Erinyes had made their new home and as the *Semnai,* the Dread Goddesses, were pledged to maintain the prosperity of the land, and that Argos was under a permanent obligation to the city to which the Argive Orestes owed his salvation.

The 'Prometheus'

Although we cannot reconstruct the Prometheus Trilogy with any certainty, it is clear from the surviving play that it dealt with a theme certainly not less tremendous than that of the *Oresteia.* Prometheus was one of the Titans, the older gods whom Zeus cast out and imprisoned in Tartarus; they belong, probably, to the same stratum of belief as the Moirai and the Erinyes. Prometheus, who is the impersonation of

foresight, as his name implies, failed to persuade his brother Titans to rely on guile rather than force in the struggle with the upstart Zeus, and, seeing that their ruin was unavoidable, joined Zeus and won for him the victory. So Zeus succeeded Cronus, as Cronus had succeeded Uranus, and the universe was shared among his kinsmen, a younger generation of gods. Among the reforms he proposed was the destruction of the miserable race of men and its replacement by a better. But Prometheus saved mankind in his pity, foolish pity, perhaps, and gave them fire, the source of all civilization and all the arts. It is not made clear in the play whether, or how, these two actions were connected; in the story as told by Hesiod (*Works and Days* 50), Zeus hid fire from men and Prometheus procured it for them again. However that may be, Zeus in his anger ignored his debt to Prometheus and had him nailed to a precipice on the confines of the world. At this point the action of the *Prometheus Bound* begins. Prometheus knows he has done wrong in thwarting the will of the ruler of the world; yet he does not regret his disinterested pity for mankind, but is rather filled with indignation at the harshness and ingratitude of the tyrant god, who has visited on him so disproportionate a punishment. At the same time he knows, at least in his calmer moments, that one day they will be reconciled.

In his torment he receives a series of visitors, the Ocean Nymphs who form the Chorus, who pity him but reason with him; Oceanus who proposes to intercede with Zeus, but is easily dissuaded when the dangers of the project are pointed out; Io, the cow-maiden, the victim too of the cruelty and capriciousness of Zeus, and finally Hermes, the herald and lackey of the new god, who brings threats of more punishments. Each new arrival emphasizes the tyrannical nature of the new ruler; men who have just achieved wealth and power are proverbially harsher than old established rulers, as Clytaemnestra sneeringly tells Cassandra, and Zeus is like a crude human tyrant. Prometheus reveals, in the end more clearly than is discreet, that he possesses a secret. Zeus is the third ruler of the world, and unless he is warned against a

certain mistake, he too will be cast out and make way for a fourth generation. The secret, as the audience know well, is that if Zeus yields one day to his passion for the sea-nymph Thetis, she will bear him a son who will be stronger than his father and rule in his stead. In the event Zeus was warned, and Thetis was married to Peleus and became the mother of Achilles. He knows also that one day a son of Zeus will deliver him and slay the eagle, which will later have been added to his torments, and that his deliverer will be the descendant in the thirteenth generation of the maiden Io, who is now being afflicted because Zeus loves her. But Prometheus in his rising anger speaks too loud, and Hermes comes to give him the choice of revealing the secret or being swept down to Tartarus, precipice and all; with this cataclysm, produced with we know not what degree of realism, the play ends.

The *Prometheus* is only a part of a greater whole made up of the *Prometheus Unbound* (the *Freeing of Prometheus* might be a better rendering of the title) and the *Pyrphoros* or *Firebearer*. The last-mentioned *may* have been the first play of the trilogy and have dealt with the theft of fire from heaven, but the more general view is that it was the last play and that this trilogy, like others, ended with the establishment of an Athenian festival, in this case the Prometheia. What else the play contained it is hard to suggest. But we know scarcely anything about this play, and it is on the *Unbound* that we must rely to increase our understanding of the trilogy. The Chorus consisted of Titans, brothers of Prometheus, who had probably been released from bondage by a Zeus grown more confident of the stability of his regime. Prometheus after the passing of thirteen generations had been brought back from the depths of Tartarus still nailed to his crag and tormented in addition by an eagle, which feasted daily on his vitals. Heracles, descendant of his fellow-victim Io, visited him when on his way to the ends of the earth to perform one of his Labours. Prometheus supplied him, as he had supplied Io, with geographical information. Out of pity or gratitude Heracles shot the eagle and burst the bonds which long ago

Hephaestus had fastened upon him. Since Prometheus addressed his benefactor as 'dearest son of a hateful father', it appears that Prometheus and Zeus were still unreconciled, though the birth of the fatal son was only a generation away. How the secret was revealed and how Prometheus made his peace we cannot guess.

There is one important issue here about which we are completely in the dark. Prometheus by giving fire to men thwarted Zeus's intention to destroy them. Incidentally, according to Prometheus's account he bestowed on man not only fire but all the arts on which civilized life depends. In the old version of the story given by Hesiod, Zeus intended to destroy men by withholding fire, without which they could not live, and Prometheus thwarted him by restoring fire to man; that is comprehensible. In the play, what Prometheus is supposed to have done to prevent Zeus from destroying mankind is wholly obscure, but from the emphasis with which it is mentioned in the Prologue it must have been important.

However that may be, the action seems to have ended with a compromise, as indeed Prometheus prophesied that it would. 'He will abate his harsh spirit and come eagerly to the union and friendship which will be eagerly offered.' (190–2.) Prometheus revealed his secret and forewent his revenge. With or without the consent of Zeus, Prometheus was released before the secret was revealed. Accordingly both must have been to some extent wrong and grown wiser by experience, in obedience to the law which, we are told in the *Oresteia*, Zeus himself appointed. What is said about Zeus's tyrannical harshness in the surviving play may not be the whole truth, but it is incredible that it is to be altogether discounted. The natural conclusion is that Aeschylus with surprising boldness portrayed a ruler of the universe whose wisdom and goodness increased with the passage of time. It was perhaps an aspect of the same idea that the harmony of the universe grows as the other powers are increasingly reconciled and made one with the supreme, but not omnipotent, ruler. There is a hint of such a notion at the end of the *Eumenides*, where the pacification of the Erinyes is extended to mean that Zeus

and Moirai (Fate) are in harmony. It is likely that the much quoted passage from the Prometheus, one of the few in ancient literature where the relation between Zeus and Fate is discussed (515–9), looks forward to a similar conclusion. Here it is affirmed by Prometheus in answer to questions of the Chorus that the course of Necessity is steered by the triple Moirai and the unforgetting Erinyes, and even Zeus cannot escape what is ordained by fate—a passage which should not be used as evidence for ordinary Greek thought on this subject. All speculation about the content of lost plays is hazardous, but it would at least make sense if the release of the Titans followed by reconciliation between Prometheus, representing the older generation of gods, and Olympian Zeus were the solution of the conflict of which our play contains only the beginning.

It should be mentioned that a different solution of the problem enjoys at the moment a good deal of favour. It is that Zeus does not change but that he reveals different aspects of himself at different times; in the *Prometheus* we have only half the picture. Common sense, which perhaps has no place in this discussion, would suggest that a god who wears one aspect at one time and an opposite one thirteen generations later might reasonably be supposed to have changed in the meantime.

It need not be concealed that it has been seriously suggested that the *Prometheus Bound* is not the work of Aeschylus but of an unknown author who lived in the second half of the century and probably intended the play for reading. Its peculiarities are so real that a number of scholars of repute would accept the hypothesis if the difficulties involved were not greater than those it is meant to remove. These are formidable. Though we may explain the theology as no more than a bold extension of what we meet in the *Oresteia,* there remains the surprising description of the emergence of man from a state of primitive squalor by the help of the civilizing arts of Prometheus (442–71), which is not only in contradiction to the usual conception of a decline from a golden age but is similar to the sort of sophistic speculation associated

with Protagoras,[34] and in form the play is even more unlike the rest of Aeschylus than it is in ideas. The extraordinary thing is the comparative insignificance of the Chorus, and the consequent predominance of dialogue which amounts to four-fifths of the whole, as against half in the *Agamemnon*. The Chorus sympathize and urge prudence like any conventional chorus, but their real function is to provide an audience for Prometheus.

Once suspicion was roused un-Aeschylean traits were of course discovered on every side, but a play in which the hero is literally immovable is bound to show structural peculiarities. Since Prometheus cannot move, other characters must come to him, and the play consists of a sequence of visits during which Prometheus passes from resignation with a trace of self-pity through indignation to defiance. Oceanus and Io each in their own way amplify and confirm the idea of Zeus's character as it emerges from the conversation of Prometheus and the Chorus. It is no doubt the natural technique to employ in the situation, but the like has not been seen before. On the other hand the problem of arranging long narrative sequences is more successfully solved in the *Persae*. In trying to avoid the monotony of relating a number of events in chronological order Aeschylus involved himself in a very artificial arrangement of the narratives of Io and Prometheus.

Another great difficulty is to imagine how the *Prometheus* was staged. Though the idea appeals to some, it is unnecessary to introduce a monstrous dummy figure from behind which the actor spoke. On this hypothesis either Prometheus must be immovable through all three plays or he must change his size from one play to another. Few would doubt that the trilogy belongs to the period after the use of a third actor came in, and with three actors the Prologue is quite feasible. Nor does the winged steed of Oceanus present great difficulty. Aeschylus seems to have made use of the *mechane* in several of his plays, and it must have been part of the regular equipment of the theatre in his later years. But no one has been able to explain how he managed the entrance of the Chorus.

The text makes it clear that they arrive in some kind of vehicle and implies that they arrive through the air, and for the first hundred and fifty lines that they are present they remain in their winged car. Yet the imagination boggles at the thought of the *mechane* carrying an entire Chorus weighing hardly less than a ton. One can see the merit of the suggestion that this was a play intended only for reading.

4 CHARACTER

Little has been said so far about character in Aeschylus. No one would expect to find a highly developed portrayal of character in a form of drama which had recently originated in choral lyric devoid of actors, which lacked the means necessary for any kind of realistic performance, and which treated the myths which were its raw material with the object of showing man in his relation to the universe rather than of revealing the significant differences between men, which was concerned, in short, with divine purpose and not with human motive. But it will not be out of place to say something about the subject of character in general, because to the modern reader the creation of character often seems the most important element in imaginative writing, and it is the thing to which he responds with most sensitivity; at the same time it is a subject rarely discussed with precision.

The expectations of the modern reader are based on his familiarity with such figures as Don Quixote, Falstaff, Hamlet, Uncle Toby, and Tom Jones, and their derivatives in more recent works of the imagination. To these there is no parallel in ancient literature, and no good comes of attempting by subtle interpretation to find what many feel ought to be there, if the classical dramatists are as great as they are said to be. The ancient approach to the subject was quite different. The Greeks lacked both the degree of self-consciousness and the sense of the importance of the individual and his idiosyncrasies necessary for the invention of a Hamlet or a Falstaff. But this is not the only reason why Greek tragedy contains nothing comparable. Every form of art exists within certain

limitations, demands a certain kind of selection. Consider, for example, detective fiction; this commonly deals with what might be regarded as one of the most solemn of subjects, crime. But the reader of this kind of fiction is not looking for solemnity, he is looking for excitement and intellectual ingenuity. So although the writer of this sort of novel gives to his characters a life-like exterior, he does not look into their souls, either the soul of the man who commits the murder or of the man who suffers the almost equally awful experience of having caught the murderer. A writer may, of course, do both these things, but then he is no longer properly described as a writer of detective fiction. *Crime and Punishment* has many of the characteristics of a detective story, but a librarian who offered Dostoievsky to customers in search of a shocker would win little gratitude; for the very things which the popular entertainer must hide away are presented by Dostoievsky in all their momentousness, and the response they demand from a reader is quite different. Similarly, a light comedy must represent only so much pain as can be swallowed up by the bliss of the finale. Had Shakespeare been writing *Twelfth Night* with an eye on the modern market he would not have exposed Malvolio to such bitter humiliation; it suggests to us too much of real suffering, but not enough to trouble stout Elizabethans nourished on bear-baiting and public executions. The nature of Greek drama imposes its own limitations on the portrayal of character, quite apart from the question whether the Greeks were capable of creating characters of the elaborate sort to which we are accustomed.

Accordingly we have to consider two things, the extent to which the ancients were aware of character and interested in it, and the sort of characters which could properly exist within the strictly selective world represented by Greek Drama. Interest in character for its own sake, in the processes and struggles of the human soul and the mysterious quality of personality, is a late growth. Perhaps is was impossible for it to reach the degree of subtlety to which it has been advanced in Europe until a religious belief, which laid great emphasis on the importance of the individual soul and encouraged

continual self-examination, had become widespread. In the beginning it is in the story that men are interested, in waiting to hear what happens next. Characters possess only such obvious traits as the mechanism of the story requires. Little Red Riding Hood must have been, as children often are, vague and unobservant, or she would not have been imposed on by a wolf in her grandmother's clothing, and there would have been no occasion for the dramatic interposition of the woodcutter. But whoever first told the story did not begin by imagining a vague child and planning an appropriate adventure for her; he thought of the story and supplied Red Riding Hood to the required specification. As stories became increasingly complicated, so did those who took the parts of the chief characters, but it is only at a very late date that the motive power of character replaces external forces in making the story go.

But in the case of Greece there is a complication in the development, Homer, who forms the exception to so many rules. Homer to us is the beginning, but from many points of view he seems rather to come at the end of a cycle whose earlier stages we cannot trace. After him there is a break, and literature, though always profoundly influenced by him, starts afresh. In the handling of character, too, Homer, though unsophisticated, shows a mastery which the Greeks never surpassed; and many of the characters who occur in early drama had received shape and vitality at the hands of Homer. And since they were already familiar to the audience, and had a sort of independent existence, it was often sufficient for the poet to allude to what would otherwise have required detailed portrayal. At the same time the poets were free to vary the tradition; Odysseus, for example, may be either the wily hero of Homer or the unscrupulous opportunist of later epic.

None the less it is true that most of the figures in Aeschylean tragedy are presented with the minimum of characterization; they are what the plot requires them to be and no more. Of Agamemnon or Clytaemnestra, of Orestes or Aegisthus, we know extraordinarily little; they are people caught up in the movement of larger forces; it would hardly

be true to say that their individual characters are irrelevant, for not any woman would be driven, by the wrongs which Clytaemnestra suffered, to murder her husband, nor would all men obey even the horrific utterances of Apollo, when it was a question of killing their own mother. But their dispositions are really given by the story, and tradition has already endowed them with a faint outline of character. Yet there remains our second question, whether it would have been possible for Aeschylus, writing the kind of drama he did, to invest his characters with realistic traits. In the *Frogs*, when Euripides is made to scoff at the grandiose diction of Aeschylean tragedy, Aeschylus defends himself as follows:

> 'Alas, poor witling, and can't you see
> That for mighty thoughts and heroic aims, the words themselves must appropriate be?
> And grander belike on the ear should strike
> the speech of heroes and godlike powers,
> Since even the robes that invest their limbs
> are statelier, grander robes than ours.'
>
> 1058–61 (Trans. *Rogers*.)

The characters of Aeschylus are heroes and godlike powers, and the consequence is that the aspects under which we can know them are few. Consider those august beings who people the world of French Classical Drama; how few of the processes of daily life is it permitted them to experience! They sleep only to have portentous dreams, they eat only to be poisoned, they love that they may be betrayed. The world of Aeschylus, though less rigid in its conventions, is not less remote, and in it there is no room for most of the activities of ordinary life. It is difficult to visualize heroic figures except as engaged on heroic activities; indeed to show them in non-heroic settings is one of the commonest expedients of comedy and burlesque. The point was finely put by Professor Cornford, who said, speaking of Agamemnon: 'He is not like a character in Ibsen, a complete being with a complex personality, a centre from which relations radiate to innumerable points of contact in a universe of indifferent fact. He has not a continuous history;

nothing has ever happened to him, except the conquest of Troy and the sacrifice of Iphigenia, nothing ever could happen to him except Pride's fall and the stroke of the axe.'[35] What he needs Aeschylus supplies, the dignity of a hero-king and the moral weakness which makes him a ready victim of the family curse. What Cornford says about the lack of continuity would be still truer if we depended entirely on the play for knowledge of the characters; but Agamemnon, and most of the others, had an independent existence outside it in the Homeric legend.

All this does not mean that the characters are not memorable. We can know little about them, but what we do know we seem to know differently, with a deeper realization; for they fit into the pattern of their universe. They live on the highest of all levels, where heroic man comes face to face with the gods, and human and divine are freely mingled. Only a poet of supreme imagination, Aeschylus or Milton, could maintain the action at this level, and it involved the most rigid selection. The characters reveal through the mists of distance magnificent outlines; detail would reduce their stature; perhaps the very absence of detail stimulates our imagination. But we know very little about them since they can have no existence in most of the situations of which we have experience, and human beings can share the life of gods and heroic men only at moments when their imagination is at full stretch. The pain of a Prometheus, the guilt of a Clytaemnestra, the hatred of an Eteocles we see mainly from the outside. Even when Aeschylus uses pathos, the most shareable of emotions, our sympathy is not so complete, and therefore not so painful, as with the characters of other writers. Cassandra is the most human figure in Aeschylus, and we are deeply moved as she goes reluctant and open-eyed to her death, but we cannot enter wholly into the feelings of a mortal who has betrayed a god. Euripides would have seen to it that we watched her departure through a mist of tears, but his Cassandra would have been more like ourselves, and we should not have believed of her that she had seen Apollo face to face.

Although the characters of Aeschylus are apart from any others in Greek drama, they show a clear development. Danaus, whatever the date of the *Supplices*, has only a tiny spark of life. Darius and Atossa impress mainly in virtue of their shadowy remoteness. Eteocles, the sober man with madness in the blood, has the rudiments of personality, but the real change comes with the last plays, and it may not be irrelevant that in 468 B.C. Sophocles began to compete. Clytaemnestra is capable of varying her moods; weariness follows on exultation, whereas Eteocles merely takes the wrong turning in response to a certain stimulus. Electra has a moment of self-revelation; she wishes her mother ill, but she is not evil by nature; 'and to me grant that I may be chaster far than my mother and purer of hand' (*Choephoroe*, 140); so she concludes her prayer that Orestes the avenger may come. It is not priggishness in her, as it might be in more sophisticated drama, but the simplicity of a frank soul perplexed by opposing loyalties. Cassandra, now silent, now the frantic vehicle of prophecy, now tragically sane, is portrayed in a manner which could almost be called realistic, if the whole thing were not so far beyond real experience. And the old slave nurse of Orestes, with her homeliness which raises a smile, yet is never out of keeping with the atmosphere of the tragic climax, shows what Aeschylus could have done in a less restricted medium, and makes us regret the loss of all his satyr-plays. It is noticeable that the tragic convention allowed unusual liberty in the portrayal of the few slaves who are admitted into the world of tragedy, and they alone are permitted to introduce a glimmer of humour amid the darkness; slaves, perhaps, could not in the nature of things be heroic.

The characters, as much as the dramatic technique, of the *Prometheus* support the view that it is a late play. The brutal Kratos and the mild Hephaestus of the opening scene seem to lead on to the pairs of contrasted characters with which Sophocles was fond of working; and though Io, considering the length of her part, is surprisingly featureless, both Prometheus, and, on a smaller scale, Oceanus are among

the most developed characters in Aeschylus. The poet seems to have made an effort to get inside the mind of Prometheus, and his emotional reaction to the situation is more fully worked out than is usual; first silent anguish, then a cry of pain passing into apprehension as the approach of the Chorus is heard, recovered composure under the influence of their sympathy, the calm confidence of superior foresight with which he meets the fussy good nature of Oceanus, the memory of righteous benefactions to unfortunate man, and mounting anger at the thought of excessive punishment raised to a higher power by the sight of the fellow-victim of divine tyranny, and lastly the desperate rejection of the tyrant's final overtures—all these changes of mood are the very stuff of the play. But even so they are always the consequence, never the cause of the action. Prometheus is what he is; we do not feel that it is anger at the sight of Io which makes him defy Zeus's messenger; at whatever moment Hermes had arrived the answer would have been the same. The most that can be urged is that, without the stimulus of his visitors, Prometheus would not have been so indiscreet as to utter the threats which impel Zeus to apply stronger pressure. But Aeschylus was not really writing the sort of play in which action is determined by anything so trivial as a change of mood.

A surprising feature of the plays of Aeschylus, which can be regarded as cause or consequence of this attitude to character, is the extreme rarity of scenes of conflict. Conflict somewhere there must be, or there will be no drama; but Aeschylus avoids portraying the direct collision of opposing characters. The *Persae* has for its theme the conflict between Greece and Persia, but Greece is not represented except through hearsay. In the *Septem* we see Eteocles, we only hear of Polyneices. In the *Supplices* we indeed have a brief collision and threats of violence, but the merits of the case are never debated as they would be in later drama. Even in the *Agamemnon*, where Clytaemnestra and her husband exchange speeches and a few lines of dialogue, their speeches hardly touch each other, and their climax is an argument not

about Troy or Iphigeneia but about walking on a carpet. Conflict only crystallizes in the trial scene in the *Eumenides*; probably the end of the *Danaid* trilogy also was a trial. In the *Prometheus* Hermes is a very incomplete representative of his master Zeus, and if Prometheus is answered it is in another play. Since the greater part of all the dialogue is between one character and the colourless *coryphaeus,* the impulse to reveal character and scope for doing so are alike limited.

In the plays of Sophocles and Euripides we shall see the handling of character grow more delicate and subtle; in a form of drama intended to depict reality rather than to teach theology many of the obstacles to more detailed characterization will have disappeared, but still we shall find nothing comparable to the creations of Shakespeare, or Ibsen, or Tchehov, no trace of their delight in personality for its own sake, the appreciation of the uniqueness of every human soul, which can be revealed not only by 'moral purposes and choices' in which Aristotle[36] rather prosaically found the differentia of character, but by every gesture and mannerism and trick of speech. There will be no Desdemona haunted by old songs, no Gaef endlessly wielding an imaginary billiard cue. There is little fantasy in ancient psychology. Yet what the modern reader seeks is not altogether lacking in ancient literature, though he will scarcely find it in tragedy. Whether the convention of tragedy was unsympathetic and excluded it, or whether it was unrealized until Socrates discovered the soul, the fuller awareness of personality is revealed first in the prose drama of Plato's dialogues; perhaps it was love for the dead Master which showed Plato that a man is more than the record of his words, that the voice and look with which they are spoken are also part of him. So Socrates with his snub nose, and piercing glance from under the eyebrows, and his mischievous ironies and unbending sincerity presents today a clearer and more memorable picture than many a hero who stalked across the tragic stage.

5 AESCHYLUS: CONCLUSION

'Great things in literature, Greek plays for example, I most enjoy when behind their bright splendours I see moving darker and older shapes'.[37] One of the reasons why Aeschylus will always hold a higher place in the admiration of many than the more perfect Sophocles is just this, that in his plays dark and mysterious forces are close at hand, closer even than in the more ancient epic of Homer. Aeschylus was no primitive but much that is primitive is still alive for him. The rising sun of enlightenment is well above the horizon, but in the vast areas of shadow dim and fearful shapes still lurk. Not only is Agamemnon's spirit real in his tomb, but it lies there maimed by the previous mutilation of his body. How far we are from the killing of Laius in Sophocles' *Oedipus* when the Oedipus of Aeschylus sucks the blood of his unknown victim and spits it out in order to shield himself from the anger of the ghost! Again, use of the chance suggestiveness of words and names is common in the poetry of all ages, and John of Gaunt can play nicely with the implications of 'gaunt' without arousing suspicion that he dabbles in the occult; but for Aeschylus the connection between names and things is not arbitrary but, rather, full of mysterious significance. When Eteocles hears from his scout the boastful devices and mottoes borne upon their shields by the Argive champions he wins a sort of preliminary victory by attaching a sinister meaning to them and so turning them to his enemies' disadvantage.

It may be argued that all this is irrelevant to the aesthetic value of Aeschylus, that any interest the plays may possess as a document for the anthropologist is adventitious. A more serious consideration is that our feelings are very different from those of the audience for which Aeschylus wrote, and that the change in outlook between then and now is merely a darkening of the varnish on the original picture. However that may be, Aeschylus's feeling about the forces which impinge on human life, that they are half personal, and his feeling about words, that they are a power in their own right, are not without effect on another part of his work which

makes him for many the greatest of Attic poets, his use of language.

Even in translation some of the features of his style emerge, especially a free and vivid use of metaphor and simile in strong contrast to the rather pallid figures of speech, judging by English standards, which we encounter elsewhere in Attic poetry. Pindar may surpass him in boldness of metaphor but not in suggestiveness. The weight and opulence of his diction recalls Milton, but there is an important difference which brings us up against the essential difficulty of talking sense about style in ancient poetry. Milton was familiar with a large body of literature, both biblical and classical, which was known also to his readers; accordingly his work depends on the assumption that the allusions in which it abounds will be recognized. Of the literature known to Aeschylus and to some at least of his audience, apart from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, only a minute proportion survives. It does not mean very much that the striking simile in which the Atreidae robbed of Helen are compared to vultures which have lost their nestlings is reminiscent of two passages in Homer; this is the common stuff of similes, and it is used again in the *Septem*. It means more when, as occasionally happens, Aeschylus uses a word of unmistakably epic flavour. Again, it can be no accident that the poet most akin to Aeschylus in his use of metaphor is Pindar, and that Pindar is the only writer of choral lyric dating from this or an earlier period whose work has survived in any quantity. If we possessed the plays of Phrynichus or some pre-Aeschylean dithyramb our impressions might be quite different. All the same we may guess that Aeschylus's style was very much his own, partly because its richness extends to the iambic dialogue, where it is less in accord with convention, and partly because Aristophanes treated his style as his own unique invention.

Although many of Aeschylus's metaphors serve rather to enrich the texture of his writing than to illuminate his meaning—for instance, 'shepherds of the ships' for captains (*Supp.* 777), or the almost ludicrous 'thirsty dust akin to mud' (*Ag.* 495)—others are worthy of Shakespeare himself and

unparalleled in Greek: 'Ares, the gold-changer who deals in bodies and holds the spear in battle as the beam of his balance sends home from Ilium from the fire heavy dust bitterly wept, filling with ashes in place of men the urns that are easily stowed' (437–44); Clytaemnestra describing the death of Agamemnon 'and breathing out a sudden spurt of blood, he splashed me with dark drops of bloody dew as I rejoiced no less than the growing corn in the bright rain from heaven at the time when the ears are setting' (*Ag.* 1389–92); or, more homely, the description of Orestes and Electra, the last survivors of the House of Atreus, as 'corks which save the woven net from sinking into the depths' (*Choe.* 506).

But not less striking than the quality of the imagery itself is the way in which Aeschylus will maintain an image. The most obvious instance is the ship of state, an image made famous by Alcaeus, which is found, if we accept the largest figure, sixteen times in the *Septem.* In the *Persae* the yoke is recurrent, in the *Supplices*, naturally enough, images of pursuit, in the *Oresteia* there are several, of which the net is the most prominent, centring around the robe, or whatever it was, in which Clytaemnestra entangled her husband before murdering him. There is also a striking abundance of legal terms which are employed both with reference to the crime of Paris and of the members of the House of Atreus; this too is obviously appropriate for a trilogy which ends with a trial. The rarity of such repetitions in the *Prometheus* is one of the points which has been advanced in arguments against its authenticity. The repetitions are there, and no doubt there are reasons why one image prevails in any play and not another, but whether much that is really significant can be said about them is an open question.[38]

This style has not always been admired. Aristophanes cast upon it affectionate ridicule. The typical ancient view has been expressed by Quintilian: 'sublimis et gravis et grandiloquus saepe usque ad vitium, sed rudis in plerisque et incompositus'; he adds the interesting information that when his plays were revived after his death they were 'corrected'. When we remember how blind foreigners have always been to the

crudities of Byron we may be tempted to doubt our own admiration, but we may be slightly reassured by the thought of the dismay which many of the greatest English poets could certainly have afforded the Greeks.

Sophocles had, so he said, his Aeschylean period. But it was inevitable that for his faster moving kind of play he should turn to a more flexible style. It was only because his plays consist so largely of brooding that Aeschylus could write as he did. He is more often engaged in extracting the meaning from what has happened, in digesting the past, than in the discussion which leads to action; and even when action is being prepared, as in the central scene of the *Septem,* speech is heavily embroidered while Eteocles appoints his champions with reference to the devices on their opponents' shields. It is no accident that at the climax he tends to rely largely on stichomythia; the single lines or couplets are often allusive and heavily charged. They are at least compatible with action. Even the brisk and vivid messenger's speech is missing from his work, except for the *Persae,* which is a special case, and perhaps the description of the storm in the *Agamemnon.* The meeting of the assembly in the *Suppliants* and the death of Eteocles are never described at all, the murder of Agamemnon only in scattered hints.

CHAPTER IV

SOPHOCLES

I THE THOUGHT OF THE LATER FIFTH CENTURY

ALTHOUGH the world in which Aeschylus grew up cannot without qualification be called primitive, both the ideas and the processes of thought which were normal to it were so unlike our own that imagination is hard put to it to bridge the gap. Sophocles, born in 494, was about thirty years younger than Aeschylus; Euripides, born in 484 or 480, younger still by half a generation; their boyhood was passed in the Athens of Themistocles, of Aristides, and of Cimon. The years which followed Salamis and Plataea were no post-war years as we know them; there were victories and booty from abroad, and at home a stable government with the old aristocratic families mainly in control. These for Sophocles were the formative years, and his naturally serene and tranquil soul grew to a mellow maturity, while the 'Athenian gentlemen' of whom, as Ion of Chios tells us, he was one, enjoyed their last period of unquestioned supremacy; this supremacy ended with the agitations which led to the long predominance of Pericles, but Sophocles' serenity, saddened though undestroyed, survived the trials of more difficult times. Euripides, less self-assured by temperament or by social status, was not affected so much by the politically untroubled years of his early life as by the impact of the intellectual and spiritual revolution which burst on Greece about the middle of the century and transformed Athens into a place less strange to the modern man than Europe at any time between the fall of the Roman Empire in the West and the end of the Middle Ages.

Broadly speaking, the new thought was welcomed by Euripides and resisted by Sophocles, who had acquired his outlook before the new forces became strong. But neither they, nor the audience for which they wrote, could disregard

them, and it is as important to the reader of Sophocles, who often chose to ignore the new spirit, as to the reader of Euripides, who was one of its missionaries, to have a clear idea of its nature.

At all times men's habits of thought and ideas about the gods, as well as the society in which they live and the customs and forms which provide the framework of their lives, are mainly inherited from their elders and passed down from generation to generation. The content changes slowly in response to the stimulus of circumstances, which includes the influence of original minds as well as the pressure of events. This change has usually been slow, especially in small and self-contained societies, where the prevalent pattern of thought is commonly supposed to be the only conceivable one. When change is rapid, it has usually been the result of some violent intrusion, such as those associated with war and conquest. Otherwise traditional habits of life and thought have possessed an authority which has gone unquestioned by most men. But in Ionia in the later sixth century speculation began on questions which have usually been either ignored or settled by authoritative pronouncements, the nature and origin of the physical world. The reasons for this sudden stirring were leisure, curiosity, and the absence of those repressive influences often to be associated with the existence of influential priestly orders. And there may have been readier access to the store of knowledge accumulated in Babylonia and Egypt.

There was nothing intrinsically irreligious about such speculations; to Thales all things were full of gods, and most of the Ionian philosophers doubtless found no difficulty in taking part in the celebrations of the gods which belonged to the life of the city. Yet man was trespassing on a new domain; he was attempting, by merely taking thought, to discover truths of a kind which had previously been known by revelation or tradition, which is to say knowledge derived from sources sanctified by antiquity. If the results of speculation clashed with revealed truths, which authority was to prevail? And might not speculation seek to extend its province by

passing from physics to politics and ethics? This is precisely what happened in the course of the fifth century; the 'laws' were weighed in the balance of reason.

In Greek the word 'law' includes far more than those written enactments by which cities were governed, even though the written codes dealt with subjects which are no longer considered the business of the legislator. What we call 'custom', including much religious ritual, such as burial ceremonies, and what we call morality, in which our conception of good and evil is enshrined, were both exposed to the scrutiny of what aspired to be a detached reason. The fact that something had been customary from immemorial time, and therefore probably sanctioned by divine approval, was no longer regarded as a reason why it should not be examined on its merits. Authority ceased in many minds to inspire reverence.

The history of Europe can show only two comparable periods of intellectual ferment: the one, the Renaissance, partly due to the rediscovery of Greek thought with its spirit of free inquiry; the other in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the status of the Christian sacred books, the main source of authority, came to be re-examined in the light of other knowledge.

In the fifth century this intellectual activity is associated with the sophists, who may be described as itinerant professors who supplied the growing demand for higher education by taking pupils for pay. It is certainly true that they were responsible for the rapid dissemination of the new ideas, but it is well to remember that it was the Ionian philosophers who did the preparatory work, and that the distinction between sophist and philosopher is not always relevant. In fact, the first name we encounter is that of the philosopher Anaxagoras, who came to Athens from Clazomenae in Asia Minor about the time of the rise of Pericles, and lived there for some years as his friend and adviser, until he was forced to leave the city owing to a conviction on a charge of impiety based on his denial of the divinity of the heavenly bodies;[1] the

accusation may have been as much a political attack on Pericles as a defence of orthodoxy. Later tradition was emphatic in connecting Anaxagoras, not only with Pericles, but with Euripides and Thucydides, who were both said to have been his pupils. Yet except for an anecdote[2] which shows him to have been incredulous of omens, we have no evidence that Anaxagoras concerned himself with those ethical questions which the sophists discussed. All the same, there must have been implicit in his rationalistic approach, with its elimination of the divine except for a minimum motive power retained under the name of 'Mind', a denial of many conventional values; and he discovered the true explanation of eclipses. It would have been well for the unhappy Athenians, stranded in front of Syracuse, if the orthodox Nicias had found his science more congenial. On the other hand Protagoras, who also was one of the circle of Pericles, and drew up the constitution for the Athenian colony at Thurii, counts as a sophist since, unlike Anaxagoras, he had to earn his living, and his activities were not purely speculative.

Perhaps the most important single fact about the 'Age of Enlightenment' is just this, that traditional values were regarded as open to question, and the authority of mere antiquity was not enough. The individual was left free to choose, and even among professional sophists there was no uniform choice. In practice, many, at least of the older sophists, respected the moral conventions and led lives of the utmost rectitude. Some of the most exalted morality in all Greek is to be found among the sayings of Democritus, a philosopher, but the founder of materialism, who accepted sophistic relativity: 'Goodness does not consist in not doing wrong but in not even wanting to do wrong.' (62.) 'The man who wrongs another is more unfortunate than the man who suffers a wrong.' (45.) But it is true that the doctrine most characteristic of the enlightenment was the doctrine of the relativity of values enunciated by Protagoras in the famous phrase 'man is the measure of all things'.[3] And the most significant controversy of the time was that of *Nomos* (law,

custom, convention) versus *Physis* (nature), which arose directly from the denial by Protagoras of objective standards, but had been prepared for by the breakdown of parochial barriers and the realization of the enormous variety of social and religious observations to be found among different sections of mankind.

The tree of knowledge, or perhaps one should say of philosophical research, had yielded a perilous fruit. It might do no harm to its sage discoverers, but it was inevitable that before long many should take the easy way of arguing that whatever they wanted to do was right for them. The extreme view is put in a papyrus fragment of the sophist Antiphon, who belongs to the generation after Protagoras: 'The most profitable behaviour would be for men to follow the laws of the city in the presence of witnesses but the laws of nature when they are alone. For the commands of the laws are arbitrary, but the commands of nature are based on necessity. The commands of the laws are conventional and not rooted in nature, but the commands of nature are natural and independent of convention. If we transgress the laws without being found out by those who made them, we escape disgrace and punishment, but not if we are found out. But if we disobey necessity and disregard the law of nature, we suffer no less if no one knows of it, and no more if all see it. For it is not by virtue of men's opinions but by virtue of the truth that men suffer. . . . The laws in asserting certain things to be good put a restraint on nature, but to do what is naturally good is true liberty.'[4] This is a view that was certainly held by some at this time. We meet again in Plato the argument that the laws of a society are really a conspiracy of the weak majority to coerce the strong minority and prevent their enjoying the advantages which would naturally be theirs in virtue of their superiority.[5] Such opinions may be reflected in practice in the behaviour of such men as the Thirty Tyrants. More important from the point of view of the city than this exaggerated interpretation are the countless little immoralities and self-indulgences of ordinary men which the new ideas must have seemed to justify.

From another point of view as well Protagoras is the central figure. The sort of education most in demand was education in public speaking. From Homer onwards we find the Greeks practised in persuasiveness, but up to this time only the leaders had needed to cultivate the power of speaking in public. In a democracy, however, the occasions on which a man might need a ready tongue were multiplied. When office was conferred by the chance of the lot anyone might find himself under the necessity of performing in public. Socrates had no political ambitions, none the less it happened to him to be one of the presiding officers of the assembly on an important and embarrassing occasion.[6] Further, all who held office had to submit to a public examination of their record at the end of their term. An even more pressing motive for the unambitious citizen to equip himself as a speaker was the expectation of having to appear in the courts. Litigation at Athens was cheap and popular. Few propertied Athenians can have got through life without being engaged in a lawsuit. As there were no professional lawyers, the parties to a suit had to perform in person, even if they got their speeches composed for them by a speech-writer, a class of men who were not numerous before the fourth century. Professional rhetoricians are said to have arisen first in Sicily on account of an outburst of litigation about real property which followed the expulsion of the tyrants from Syracuse. At Athens in the second half of the fifth century the demand was permanent. Aristophanes vividly describes the lot of the elderly unfortunates who found themselves tied in knots by smart young men well up in forensic tricks:

'There we stand decayed and muttering,
hard beside the Court-house Stone,
Nought discerning all around us
save the darkness of our case.
Comes the youngster who has compassed
for himself the accuser's place,
Slings his tight and nipping phrases,
tackling us with legal scraps,

Pulls us up and cross-examines,
setting little verbal traps,
Rends and rattles old Tithonus,
till the man is dazed and blind;
Till with toothless gums he mumbles,
then departs condemned and fined.'

Acharnians, 683–9 (Trans. Rogers).

It followed naturally from Protagoras's denial of objective standards that many things, which seem true or obvious to men who happen to take the same point of view, are not really so. Protagoras put it in the form that there are two arguments in every case, and the greater the virtuosity of a speaker the more likely is he to be able to make what is apparently the weaker argument prevail. This is not so casuistical as it may appear, since the weaker case is not necessarily the worse, and both in the Assembly and the courts the weaker case may well be the one which a good man will support. Yet in practice this is a deplorable approach, and obviously a training which consists mainly of learning tricks with which to disguise a weak case without regard to anything but plausibility, can only be disastrous. Protagoras may have hoped for better things, but Pheidippides in the *Clouds*, who went to school to learn to cheat his creditors, was a natural, and perhaps a typical, consequence.

Much of the matter of ancient rhetoric strikes us as rather thin, and thin indeed it is. But though in bulk it may arouse weariness, not to say nausea, it is important to try to realize something of what the discovery meant to the Greeks, what new possibilities it seemed to open to them. For it amounted to the discovery of a scientific method, only the matter to which the method was applied was too vague and shifting to yield reliable results. The common practice was to start from some plausible generalization, which would be acceptable to both sides, and deduce conclusions based on logic or probability.[7] Had the generalizations been as true as mathematical axioms and common words, particularly abstract terms, been as unchanging as mathematical symbols, the

results would have been of the highest value. But those who discover a new technique do not at once realize its weaknesses, and it was natural that it should take generations of reflection to see through fallacies which to us are obvious. Most of us are aware that words were invented by men to express ideas which were not precisely defined. But the assumption from which men naturally start is that words exist in the same way as objects, and have some necessary fixed relation to objects. The notion that a point can be what we call 'verbal', just does not arise. Even Thucydides, who had an absolutely first-rate mind, was bewitched by the fascination of this new and glittering toy, and remained to some extent in bondage to his means of expression. We may find fault with later antiquity, if we wish, that it did not completely outgrow these trivialities, but we should sympathize with those who first imagined they had discovered a new pathway to truth, and took long to realize that it did not lead as far as they had hoped.

Aeschylus is untouched by the new influence; Sophocles shows himself aware that the old values are under attack, but he is no more indifferent than his audience to the charms of a set debate; what Euripides thought himself he does not tell us, but he is clearly much attracted by the new ideas, and he is so completely fascinated by the new rhetorical technique, that he rarely misses an opportunity of turning the stage into a court of law, and the audience, who spent a considerable part of their lives sitting as jurors, seem to have taken the pleasure of experts in the proceedings. It is no wonder that Quintilian, when surveying ancient literature from the point of view of the budding orator, glows with enthusiasm on reaching the name of Euripides.[8]

Since Sophocles and Euripides competed together on the Attic stage during the greater part of their long lives, it would seem best, at first sight, to treat of them together. Unfortunately we do not know the dates of production of several of the plays of Sophocles, and we cannot, as with Euripides, arrange them with any confidence in chronological order on the evidence of a gradual, but regular, development in the

use of metre. Further, the aims and methods of the two poets are so unlike that little would be gained by discussing their plays side by side. Among the extant plays only the two *Electras* dramatize the same myth, and though one was clearly written with some reference to the other, scholars are still not agreed which was written first.[9] Accordingly it will be convenient to discuss the two poets separately, in spite of their common background.

2 LIFE AND WORKS

'Blessed is Sophocles, who had a long life, was a man both happy and talented, and the writer of many good tragedies; and he ended his life well without suffering any misfortune.' So wrote the comic poet Phrynichus a few months after the death of Sophocles in his play, the *Muses,* which was produced at the same time as Aristophanes' *Frogs.* 'Call no man happy until he is dead' is the essence of Greek wisdom, and both Sophocles and his friend[10] Herodotus wrote under its influence. When Sophocles was dead men called him happy, which meant to a Greek that he had enjoyed throughout life, not only prosperity, but all those things which are necessary for the good life and the realization of the ideal of *arete,* that is to say, birth, wealth, wisdom and beauty. In knowing this we know nearly all we need to know about him, and the few scraps of information which have survived only fill in the outlines. He was rich; he was chosen, as a boy of fifteen, because of his beauty to take part in the celebration of the victory at Salamis; he was successful the first time he competed at the Dionysia in 468, though Aeschylus was his opponent. He held the high office of *strategus* at the time of the Samian war, though not, as the story goes, on account of the success of the *Antigone*;[11] he was one of the Ten Commissioners appointed in the hour of crisis after the Sicilian expedition; and he died just in time to escape the final humiliation of his city.

It so happens that we possess a contemporary portrait of him at a drinking party on a winter evening at the time

of his command in the war against Samos. Such accounts are rare, and there is nothing comparable outside Plato's *Symposium*; presumably it is not generally quoted because it might be offensive to rigid moralists. The author is Ion of Chios, himself a tragic poet and something of a philosopher, who wrote a work called *Epidemiai* or *Visits*, recollections of distinguished men whom he had met at Chios; they must have been some of the first memoirs ever written. The account of a meeting with Sophocles was fortunately quoted by Athenaeus, and is as follows: 'I met Sophocles the poet at Chios, when he was sailing to Lesbos as general, a clever man and one to be merry over his wine. He was entertained by his friend Hermesilas, the Athenian proxenos;[12] when the slave boy who poured out the wine was obviously blushing as he stood by the fire, Sophocles asked him "Do you want me to enjoy my party?" When the boy said he did, he continued, "Don't be too quick in bringing and taking away my cup." The boy blushed all the more at this, and Sophocles said to his neighbour, "How well Phrynichus put it when he wrote, 'The light of love flames on purple cheeks'!" At this the Eretrian, who was a schoolmaster, answered, "You are a good poet, I know, Sophocles; all the same Phrynichus was wrong to call the boy's cheeks purple. For if a painter had used purple pigment to render the boy's cheek he wouldn't have seemed beautiful any more. One certainly ought not to compare the beautiful to something which does not look beautiful." Sophocles smiled at the Eretrian and said, "Then, my friend, you do not like the line of Simonides, though it is much admired by the Greeks:

The maiden spoke with purple mouth.

Nor the poet when he called Apollo 'golden-haired'; for if a painter showed Apollo with his hair golden and not dark, the picture would be the worse for it; nor him who said 'rosy-fingered'; for if anyone tinted fingers rose-colour, he would show the hands of a dye-worker, not of a beautiful woman." Everyone laughed and the Eretrian was silenced by the rebuke. Sophocles then returned to his conversation with the boy. He asked the boy who was trying to remove a speck from

the cup with his little finger, whether he could see the speck; when he said he could, he told him to blow it away so as not to wet his finger. As the boy put his face nearer the cup Sophocles brought the cup close to his own mouth, so that the boy's head should be nearer his; when it was almost touching, he put his arm round the boy's neck and kissed him. They all applauded with much shouting and laughter, because he had led the boy on so skilfully, and he said, "I am practising generalship, friends. For Pericles says, though I am a poet, I am no general; hasn't my stratagem succeeded?" He was full of such witty words and acts whenever he was at a party or in playful mood; but in state affairs he was neither clever nor effective, but just like any ordinary Athenian gentleman.' His political ineffectiveness is rather confirmed by his reply, when asked if he did not think the Ten Commissioners had acted ill in establishing the rule of the Four Hundred: 'There was nothing better to be done.'[13]

Those on whom the good fairies shower their gifts at birth are usually much at ease with themselves and with the world, for others readily defer to them. It was so with Sophocles, and we find it reflected above all in his style. With Homer and Plato alone in Greek literature he shares the possession of perfect poise; they are aristocrats in the best sense of the word, in loftiness of spirit as well as in mastery of a convention. It is a quality which can only be found in a milieu where a certain stability has been achieved and a form of behaviour worked out. The Athenians called the man who possessed it *asteios*, a true man of the city, free from rusticity, but the quality had not yet degenerated into mere urbanity. Before a character in one of Sophocles' plays has spoken five lines we are conscious of a certain distinction, often of a certain magnificence, which is wholly different from the grandeur of Aeschylus or the easy fluency of Euripides. We are reminded of the high courtesy of Homer's heroes. To this more than to anything else Sophocles owes his long supremacy.

But if he was fortunate, he was no spoilt child of fortune; if he had been, fortune would have deserted him, as it deserted Alcibiades. The saving thought, 'there but for the grace of

God . . .' was never far from his mind. Though he was popular and convivial he had thought much and alone, not striving like Aeschylus to form myth into a new theology, but brooding over experience and fitting it into the pattern of traditional piety. To those outside that tradition, to those who are not content to accept the power and the glory of God and to leave his righteousness, if not open to question, at any rate as a matter of faith too high for men to understand, Sophocles sometimes seems obtuse and complacent. When man forgets his place he is punished, but not all suffering can be explained as the punishment of a failure in humility, nor is the severity of the punishment proportioned to the gravity of the offence. Security is not for men; they can only practise the virtues and observe the laws which the gods have appointed, and hope to attain the peace of death uncrushed by misery. Yet the acceptance of life as it is does not make depressing plays. If life is represented as terrible in its uncertainty, his men and women are worthy of their setting, and their greatness of spirit is most conspicuous in catastrophe. Sophocles did not lift his eyes for long from the sufferings of his fellow-men, and his own comparative immunity was far from making him complacent or forgetful of the wearisome condition of humanity. But it was perhaps due to his immunity that his resignation was untinged with bitterness, while Euripides was sometimes bitter and not at all resigned.

The difference between the purposes of Sophocles and Aeschylus shows itself clearly in the differences of dramatic method. In Aeschylus the significance of the myth is slowly unfolded, while the action itself is inclined to be spasmodic, bursts of activity being interspersed with long preparatory periods, in which little happens but endless, astonishing poetry. In Sophocles thought and action cannot be thus separated, and the poet's control of his medium is such that the play advances with perfect smoothness of motion, without pause or hurry. Its guiding force is the will of human beings; yet although this will of theirs is free, the action is in accordance with the will of Zeus or destiny, and often this will has

been revealed long before in oracles, which men in their folly have failed to comprehend, or tried to evade. Nor is the movement simple, as it usually is in Aeschylus; the direction changes; hope alternates with fear; tensions are relaxed and increased; the climax, though long foreseen by the audience, comes with a shock. A play of Sophocles is a moment of life, but of life in a more heroic world, which can exist only in men's minds. His characters, as he said himself, are 'as men ought to be',[14] in contrast with the more realistic figures which walk the stage of Euripides. He worked, not by charging a myth with new significance, but by representing on a higher plane a life which is subject to the same laws as ours. Much more than with Aeschylus and Euripides, both of whom in their different ways made their plays the vehicle of thought, his plays are their own meaning.

The surviving plays of Sophocles, though written over a period of nearly forty years, are far more homogeneous than the works of the other two poets; all the same, there are signs that at the beginning of this period Sophocles was still of the opinion of Aeschylus that a dramatist should attempt to convey direct instruction in his play. The *Ajax* and the *Antigone* are certainly the two earliest surviving works; there is reason to date the latter at about 440, and the *Ajax* gives most readers the impression that it is distinctly less mature. This impression is not perhaps worth very much, since no author's work can be relied upon to give an impression of steadily increasing maturity; however, an examination of technique shows it to be in most respects less developed than the *Antigone,* and if we put it about 443 it is unlikely that we shall be more than a decade out. Since Sophocles first competed in 468, this means that we have nothing at all from the first twenty-five years of his creative life, and that all his extant work comes from his middle and late periods, with the possible exception of the few hundred lines of the *Ichneutae,* a satyr-play, partially preserved on papyrus.[15] The *Oedipus* and the *Electra* probably date from the early and middle years of the Peloponnesian War, which began in 431. The *Philoctetes* is know to have been produced in 409, and

the *Oedipus Coloneus* to have been produced posthumously, and so presumably it was written late. About the date of the *Trachiniae* scholars are much divided.

3 THE PLAYS OF SOPHOCLES

The 'Ajax'

No other play of Sophocles is didactic in the same direct way as the *Ajax*. The hero is guilty of the besetting sin of heroes, *hybris*; in his glory and consciousness of worth he forgets the limits imposed on mortal man by his nature. This shows itself when Odysseus is preferred to him in the contest for the arms of the dead Achilles. His fury at this outrage to his honour knows no bounds. It is not for nothing that the Athenians had a rule that the Tribe *Aiantis*, whose eponymous hero was Ajax, should not be placed last in the tribal competitions, lest being notoriously a bad loser he should show his anger from the grave.[16] He decided to vindicate his honour by murdering the leaders who were responsible for the verdict. This conception of honour may seem a little primitive, though it would not be impossible to find parallels in our own society. It is no doubt affected by the Homeric conception that the hero's honour overrides all other claims.[17] But whereas Achilles in the *Iliad* is not regarded as a traitor to the Greek cause, but merely as one who makes demands excessive by the standards of the code, Ajax is judged according to the wider loyalty of the city-state. None the less even Aristotle allows the good man to be covetous of honour, because honour from others provides an assurance of one's own worth.[18] But Athena thwarted the project and saved him from the crime by sending him mad, so that his anger was vented on the sheep and oxen which the army had collected as spoil.

Sophocles begins his play with a slightly artless contrast in black and white; Athena herself asks Ajax, while he is still mad, to be merciful to his victims; his arrogant refusal shows him treating the goddess as no more than an equal. On the other hand Odysseus, who is present and sees Ajax scourging

a sheep under the impression that it is himself, refuses to take pleasure in the humiliation of the man who is in intention his murderer. 'I pity him in his misery although he is my foe, since he is bound fast to this evil doom, and I think of my own lot no less than his. For I see that all of us who live are nothing but phantoms or feeble shadows.' (121–6.) This to the Greek is the truly wise man's reaction to the sight of disaster, the reflection that it may be his turn next. Indeed the effect of tragedy is largely to bring this truth home to men. Odysseus by refusing to gloat, as the Greeks too often gloated,[19] qualified himself to speak with authority at the end of the play as the representative of Athena. But the *hybris* of Ajax is further revealed by facts which emerge later. When he left home he rejected his father's parting advice to prevail always with the help of the gods, saying that with their help any weakling might conquer; true glory was to conquer without them. Again, he has told Athena in the midst of battle to go and encourage the others, since where he stood the line was safe. Both these incidents, as the priest Calchas says, speaking not without authority, show a disregard of the limits proper to mortal man. Yet the gods are not inexorably angry with Ajax; if his faults are great so are his virtues; there is a plain hint that had he lived another day he might have made his peace. But the proud spirit, which could not bear the superiority that belonged of right and nature to the gods, would not endure to live in humiliation after the mockery of a revenge diverted to the army's live-stock. Ajax kills himself, and the magnificence of his spirit for all its defect of arrogance is revealed to the full at the moment of his suicide. This is the time to remember that Aristotle, in his moving little poem in memory of his friend Hermias (*Oxford Book of Greek Verse,* 459), speaks of Achilles and Ajax as two who have gone down to Hades because of their love of *arete,* their fineness of spirit. Ajax's rehabilitation is effected by his brother Teucer. He secures his burial against the opposition of the Greek commanders who desired to treat Ajax as a traitor, and it is the intervention of Odysseus which turns the scale. 'Do you really bid me allow the burial of his body?' asks

Agamemnon of Odysseus; 'Yes', is the answer, 'for I too shall come to this.' (1364, 5.) And we know from the first scene that his words are, as it were, backed by the guarantee of Athena.

The meaning of the play seems almost inartistically clear. Sophocles was a god-fearing poet and when he introduced a goddess into the Prologue of his play and made Calchas, the seer, intervene in the middle, he was giving his audience a clear direction how they were to take his meaning. All attempts at a different interpretation founder on this fact. Yet the emphasis is not on the punishment which the defiant blasphemies of Ajax merited—this would have been no way to celebrate an Attic hero—but on the magnificence of Ajax, which was such that the gods punished him with reluctance and allowed his honour to be saved after death. If the second half of the play loses its grip, as many have felt since the ancient scholiast complained that 'it becomes frigid', it is not so much that Ajax has disappeared, for his body lies before us, or that we do not think burial of the first importance, as that Teucer, Menelaus, and Agamemnon are three insignificant people, and that their altercations, though calculated by their rhetorical balance to please the audience for which they were intended, contain too much of mere repartee.

The heightened tension of the first half is obtained by a device which Sophocles uses again and again in the extant plays, a deceptive reversal of the action, a treacherous moment of hope which renders even darker the ensuing despair. The Chorus and the captive concubine of Ajax, the Trojan Tecmessa, both of whom feel their safety to be bound up with that of their master, are led for a moment to believe that he has relented and decided after all to be reconciled to the gods and to his leaders, the Atridae. In the same way Oedipus and Jocasta are led to believe for a moment that the oracle they fear has been proved false; in the same way it seems, when, too late, Creon changes his mind, that Antigone may yet be saved; and Deianeira is cheated for a little with the consoling thought of the love charm which is to recover for her the affections of Heracles. Each time the

Chorus is taken in and gives utterance to its empty jubilation in a song made ghastly by the shadow of catastrophe. This is no mere trick of the theatre. It reveals a profound reality. The audience, like gods, know what is to happen, and they see in the Chorus the image of their own blindness, the blindness of all men, who perpetually mistake the signs, rejoice on the brink of disaster and fail equally to recognize the approach of good fortune; and all the time the gods look down on the unending drama, their hearts, it is to be hoped, not quite empty of pity for the human victims. This is the essence of tragic irony. But whereas in the other plays the mistake arises easily and without violence in the course of the action, it is due here to something very like deception on the part of Ajax; it has never been satisfactorily explained why Ajax makes the superb, but ambiguous, speech which leads the Chorus and Tecmessa to suppose that he goes to the shore only to purify himself, while it is clear to the audience that he is going there to kill himself.

Ajax is not the man to make a disingenuous speech, and his ostensible motive, that he wishes not to be obstructed in the act of suicide, is barely adequate. Though the subject has been endlessly discussed, there should be no serious doubt that Ajax chooses his words with the intention to mislead—Tecmessa really says as much at 967—and that the audience, who were familiar with the story of the suicide, were not misled. On the other hand Jebb put his finger on the essential fact when he said: 'To employ imagery so solemn and so beautiful for the purpose of pointing mere mockery would be incongruous and repulsive.' And this is borne out by the peculiar structure of the scene. Ajax speaks, but no one answers, because any answer would have underlined the fact of the deception; Sophocles wishes to direct attention away from this. It is possible without irreverence to suggest that Sophocles was not uninfluenced by the desire to interrupt the simple development of his plot and give it a rudimentary *peripeteia*. But though the speech is uttered to deceive, the imagery reveals perception of a truth. Ajax had decided to die because his honour could not survive the humiliation he

had suffered. The decision was made in anger. Now he has realized that the order of nature is not compatible with his own high demands. All things must give way in due course, but if he must give way it is by dying, not by submission to his enemies. He will not accept the conditions on which alone life is possible.

Plutarch[20] records a saying of Sophocles that in his earlier years he was influenced by the pomp of Aeschylus, then found his own more pungent style, and finally that style which was most suitable for the rendering of character. Since he had been writing plays for not less than twenty years when the *Ajax* was produced, we can scarcely attribute it to the first period; but there is an amplitude and opulence of diction, and a certain shadowiness in the portrayal of character which make the play seem to us, though we have little of the evidence before us, to belong to a period of transition between early and fully mature tragedy. 'Therefore I shall know henceforth how to give way before the gods, and learn to honour the Atridae. They are the rulers, so I must submit; how else? For things terrible and mighty submit to prerogative; winter with its snow gives place to fruitful summer; the dreary round of night makes place for day with her white steeds to kindle light; the blast of dreadful winds allows the moaning sea to sink at length to rest; and like them all-powerful sleep looses what it has bound and does not always hold it fast. And I, shall I not learn wisdom?' (666–77.) These may not be the best iambics Sophocles ever wrote, but they are the most obviously poetical in the grand manner.

Apart from the hero the characters are shadowy, and like those of Aeschylus possess no more distinctiveness of feature than the situation requires. But the situations are different from any that we find in Aeschylus, and they demand more of the characters. When Clytaemnestra begs her son for life in the play of Aeschylus, when Orestes and Electra are unexpectedly united, though we are conscious enough of an emotional climax, the emotion is in no way personal. Clytaemnestra bares her breast which is a symbol of all the varied tenderness of maternal love, but except for the repeated 'child'

there is no tenderness in her words; indeed only a compressed and economical dialogue could include all the arguments from the past and threats for the future which are brought before the mind of the audience in the bare thirty lines of the *Choephoroe* which pass between mother and son. Similarly, the emotion of Orestes and Electra when they meet is not a transformation of the emotion of two real people meeting after a long time, as it is in the *Electra* of Sophocles; it only just emerges from the conjuration of Agamemnon sleeping in his tomb, and it is quickly absorbed again into the main theme; the children are united at once in the prayer for vengeance; yet from this point of view their pathos is not forgotten; they are nestlings, and he the eagle, and we remember the opening simile of the *Agamemnon,* the vultures wheeling in anger above the nest and the late avenger that the gods send. Sophocles makes no use of such methods. But Tecmessa's relations with other people, as contrasted with those of Aeschylean characters, are the relations of flesh and blood, not of symbolism. She reminds Ajax that she has slept with him and borne him a child, that the child with none but a captive mother to shield him will fare ill, that he himself has a father and mother who pray to the gods for his safe return; she points out firmly, though with great delicacy, that his conception of honour is not the only one that can be considered valid.

There is still a trace of the remoteness of Eteocles and the Messenger who stand side by side but do not impinge one on the other. The mood of Ajax changes, but we do not see it change. He has been softened, he says, by Tecmessa (651), but when she spoke he did not show it. In the next scene he will make his farewell to life without a thought of her. To compare this with the play of Philoctetes' character on Neoptolemus, thought it is never analysed, is to realize the transformation which took place between the middle and the late plays of Sophocles.

And what of Ajax himself? If he is composed of Aeschylean granite, at least he is completely disengaged from the block out of which he has been hewn. The terrifying force of

his devotion to a narrowly interpreted ideal of manliness would be weakened by any accumulation of detail. Philoctetes belongs to the same old-fashioned type of hero with no doubts as to the figure he owes it to himself to cut, but he is milder and more courteous. On the other hand Ajax is not without kinship to Eteocles in the *Septem,* but he moves with far more freedom and makes contact with life on other levels. Above all, it is on the will of Ajax that the action mainly depends. A god may intervene to thwart him, or to give a hint that he may not be past saving, but the plot is shaped by action freely taken by the chief characters. Though Aeschylus may not deny the freedom of the will, it is overshadowed by predispositions arising out of divine purposes or ancestral curses. Sophocles is acutely conscious of an underlying divine purpose, but the gods for the most part confine themselves to foretelling what men will do, and the human actors in blindness, but with no lack of freedom, fulfil their long foretold destiny, and sometimes bring it to pass by their very efforts to thwart it.[21]

The 'Antigone'

In the *Antigone* Sophocles does not indeed underline his moral so firmly as in the *Ajax,* but the two plays are alike in the openness with which they condemn. No gods appear in person, but their hand is evident in the crushing punishment which falls on Creon, and the seer Tiresias is almost as much their spokesman as Odysseus in the *Ajax*. Though Hegel, or his interpreters, have clouded the issue by taking the *Antigone* as an example of the fusion of two partial rights in a higher synthesis, there is no doubt that in the eyes of Sophocles Creon is wrong and Antigone is right, and Creon's end points a moral as clear as that of the *Ajax*. In no other play of Sophocles does a character who is on balance bad play so large a part. It is less easy to know what we are to make of the end of Antigone.

After Oedipus was dethroned, Thebes was ruled jointly by his sons Eteocles and Polyneices; they quarrelled, doomed

as they were by their father's curse, and Polyneices, on being driven out, tried to return by force with the aid of friends in Argos. The attempt failed, as the *Septem* of Aeschylus relates, and the two brothers fell each by the other's hand. It is at dawn on the day after the flight of the Argive host that the action of the play begins, a day of triumph for Thebes. Creon, the uncle of the fallen princes, is now king; his first duty is to see to the burial of the fallen, and his first act as king is to refuse burial to the traitor Polyneices. This, though an act of extreme rigour, especially when directed against a near kinsman, would not strike the Athenian audience as unprecedented; the Athenians denied their traitors burial in Attic soil, and we know a number of cases in which this denial was enforced.[22] But they were normally buried abroad, not left to sully with their impurity the land on which they lay, and to affront the gods both of the upper and the nether world by their presence in a realm to which they no longer belonged. Yet Creon was no merely vindictive tyrant; he did not refuse Polyneices burial out of personal hatred. Creon was a man with a strong sense of order and authority; rebellion was so heinous a crime in his eyes that it deserved the utmost punishment; human logic might well assert that it was absurd to allow the customary rites of burial to a man who had fallen in an attempt to sack his own city and destroy the temples of its gods. But when there exists a law, sanctioned by a timeless tradition and derived ultimately from the gods, it is not for men to override it on the authority of their own sense of what is fitting. 'Not even if Zeus's eagles snatch the carrion up to the throne of Zeus, not even so would I fear this contamination and allow that body to be buried. For well I know that the gods cannot be touched by any man with impurity.' (1040–44.) This is disguised rationalism doing lip-service to piety. The last words of the play are with the Chorus; 'great words of proud men have paid a penalty of great blows and taught wisdom to the old' (1350–3). Creon is guilty of the same offence as Ajax in a subtler, and perhaps more insidious form; he forgets his place as a man and sets himself up as one who can correct what the gods have established. He is

punished, and for him, unlike Ajax, there is no ultimate rehabilitation.

All the same Creon is no ignoble character. The manifesto which is the prelude to his decree that the traitor shall not be buried would be acceptable to the wisest and most benevolent of kings. He intends to rule without fear or favour, putting the interest of the city first in all things. Never will the enemy of the city be a friend to him, because it is on the prosperity and welfare of the city that all else depends, and without it we can have no friends. So he refuses burial to his own nephew; and the sequel is that he has to condemn his own niece, Antigone, to death, and that his son, Haemon, and his wife, Eurydice, commit suicide. He is indeed taken at his word in his profession of devotion to the city even at the expense of friends and kin.

Creon's initial mistake may be ascribed to the excess of a virtue; but it cannot be denied that his subsequent conduct when he is thwarted, first by Antigone who buries her brother in open defiance of his decree, then by his son who is betrothed to Antigone and tries to save her, and finally by Tiresias who denounces his impiety, would befit one whose character had been warped by a longer enjoyment of supreme authority. He is impatient, suspicious, and quick to assume that anyone who disagrees with him has been bribed. And he changes his mind too late in response, not to the good advice, but to the threats, of Tiresias. It is too late when he realizes that, after all, it may be best to live according to the established laws. And when his punishment comes he is completely broken by it; he hastens to admit his own folly, but as a man he is extinguished. Had Sophocles really intended the play to present the problem of two contending rights, he would not have made Creon approach the verge of tyranny with his claim that the ruler must be obeyed 'in small things and in just things and in the opposite' (667).

The play is called *Antigone*, yet so far all has been about Creon; and this is no accident, for the structure of the play is built around him; it is his action which calls forth the response of Antigone, and his punishment is her vindication.

The two sisters, Antigone and Ismene, are the last survivors of the house of Oedipus; Antigone, in frank defiance of Creon's decree, insists on giving her brother at least symbolic burial. As next of kin to the dead this was her particular obligation, yet her action was extremely drastic. This is clearly shown by the mingled horror and surprise of Ismene, the normal good woman; she cannot act 'in despite of the law' (59), and no one would expect that she should. But Antigone is magnificent, high-mettled, a true daughter of Oedipus. She knows what is right and will not compromise, however unwomanly it may be to thrust herself forward with a man's resolution; for no man is left alive to secure for her brother the burial which is his due. Yet in the play she has no friend —except Ismene, whom she repels because she will not share the deed. The Chorus, who in most plays are sympathetic to the chief character and of the same sex, are men and gravely disapprove. They are Creon's council of state, and so see things from the 'government' angle. Creon's ordinance about the burial they accept without enthusiasm, and they reveal where their sympathies lie by their suggestion, which greatly annoys Creon, that the unknown hand which has scattered dust on the body of Polyneices may have been that of a god. Yet when the real culprit is discovered they condemn her, for they feel the law must be observed. When Antigone is on her way to her death they are moved to human pity, but because she shows herself, if no longer defiant, wholly unrepentant, they again rebuke her. 'Reverence for the dead is indeed piety; but the authority of him in whose hands authority lies must in no case be transgressed; thine own self-willed temper has destroyed thee.' (872–5.) Only when the inspired voice of Tiresias has denounced the blasphemy of Creon do they change their tone and urge Creon, as he wavers, to undo the wrong he has done. Even when it is clear that the change has come too late they have no word of pity for the victim; she is lost in the principle she has been instrumental in confirming.

The Chorus have their own answer to the problem of Antigone; she comes of a doomed family; the curse which

has already destroyed her brothers finishes its task with her; and Antigone herself is much aware that she is the final tragedy of the house of Oedipus. Yet there is no reason to think that Sophocles took this view. Antigone is, of course, her father's daughter with all his intensity of spirit, 'the fierce daughter of a fierce sire' (471) as the Chorus call her. But Sophocles nowhere, in this or any other play, lays stress on the familiar doctrine of the inherited curse. Nor is Antigone's fate her own fault in the same way as was the fate of Ajax. She is the stuff of which martyrs are made; in certain circumstances such people get martyred; it is a penalty not of weakness but of strength. The audience perhaps came away with a feeling that if a woman diverged so far from the norm of her sex she had no right to be surprised if she suffered for it; and we need not suppose that Antigone was surprised.

In easy mastery of structure the *Antigone* far surpasses any surviving play of earlier date. The situation, possibly unfamiliar to the audience—for it was Sophocles who made the story famous—is explained in an opening dialogue, which brings out with admirable clearness the contrasted characters of the two sisters. No sooner has Creon stated his ideal of kingship and published his ordinance than an embarrassed guard brings the news that it has been mysteriously violated. Creon's anger is roused and his less admirable characteristics revealed; immediately after the ensuing choral ode Antigone arrives under guard, taken in the act of performing forbidden rites at her brother's grave. Much effort has been expended in vain inquiries how the body was covered with dust without the guard's seeing who did it, and why, once she had committed her 'crime', Antigone returned to the scene and repeated the ritual. It is not hard to suggest what Sophocles might have done, had it been his object to write a play of crime and detection; no doubt what he actually had in mind was that the play would be more effective if the burial were discovered before the identity of the burier, and the stage shows that his device is brilliantly successful.

All is now ready for the clash of causes, the statement of the claims of human and divine law; it is argued in two

speeches of moderate length and a few lines of dialogue, for the Euripidean habit of introducing set debates on the stage had not yet prevailed. Creon suspects Ismene of being a confederate, and she, frantic with grief, would gladly implicate herself, but that Antigone refuses to allow her. In an effort to save her sister, Ismene mentions the betrothal of Antigone to Creon's son Haemon, a betrothal in which the emotions of both are deeply involved; this prepares the way for the next scene, in which Haemon, with as much diplomacy as a young man may possess, tries to persuade his father that the proposed execution is impolitic because unpopular. To the father the son's motives are transparent, and in the increasingly bitter quarrel which develops Creon behaves like a tyrant, Haemon no longer like a son; his parting threats prepare the way for the catastrophe.

We have now reached the central scene of the play, in which Antigone, utterly friendless and forlorn, goes out to her punishment, to be immured alive in a rock tomb outside Thebes. To a modern audience the lyric dialogue between Antigone and the Chorus is a good deal more congenial than the somewhat frigid speech in which she defends and explains her decision to die; but since this last was accepted as genuine by Aristotle,[23] modern attempts to be rid of it are vain. The mood of Antigone has changed since the exaltation of her defiance of Creon. But it is going too far to say that she is reduced to defending her action with 'a frigid sophism'.[24] Unaware that Haemon is true to her she naturally, by Greek convention, mourns her own premature end, having none to mourn for her. As Jephthah's daughter 'bewailed her virginity upon the mountains', so Antigone bewails her virginity, and without regretting the choice she has made.

The last third of the play, like the *Ajax*, lacks its chief character. But this is not the cause of the slight failure of concentration which marks the end. After Creon has given way to the threats of Tiresias and the Chorus has been beguiled with the hope that Creon will be able to undo what he has done, a new character is introduced, Creon's wife Eurydice. Her function is to hear the tale of Haemon's death

and Antigone's, and by her own suicide to complete Creon's desolation. But to her Antigone's death is nothing in comparison with the death of her son, and to Creon Antigone's death is the least of his afflictions; thus there is a slight shift of emphasis which disturbs the even rhythm of the play.

It will be obvious from the account of sophistic thought given above that the play is not without references to the disputes of the age. The claim that the unwritten laws of Greece had absolute validity and divine sanction is strongly supported;[25] it is supported by the fate of Creon, and also by the great choral song on the boldness and resourcefulness of man, who has overcome all except death; but the condition of his prosperity is obedience to the laws of the city and the justice of the gods. It is true that as they sing these words the Chorus have in mind the unknown person who has defied the king's edict and buried Polyneices; but they have an ambiguous application to the lawless prohibition of Creon, as is obvious when the song is read in conjunction with the play as a whole. Yet it is easy, especially today, to overstress the importance of the topical issue; and in any case the issue is not the one most in men's minds at the present time, namely, the relation of the State to the individual, but the status of laws made by men in relation to those made by the gods.

The 'Trachiniae'

The *Trachiniae* is usually the least esteemed, though not the least enjoyed, of the plays of Sophocles, and it is very uncertain to what period of his career it belongs. Whatever its actual date may be, it is convenient to deal with it next, because it belongs next in the logic of Sophocles' development. For it employs a theme which is highly characteristic of Sophocles' later work, though it is scarcely to be met with in the *Ajax*, and not at all in the *Antigone*, and employs it clumsily. Though the will of the gods is freely made known in the two earlier plays, either by themselves or by human spokesmen like Calchas or Tiresias, we find no oracles or prophecies made long before the events to which they relate.

The *Trachiniae*, like the later plays, makes use of the theme of the working out of destiny—without prejudice to the question of free-will—as revealed by oracles, oracles that are misunderstood, and the emphasis passes from human wickedness and goodness to human blindness. Now the famous Sophoclean irony has full scope.

Heracles is absent, and his wife, Deianeira, as so often, alone. She has been warned by her husband that a time of crisis has arrived, bringing either disaster or rest from toil; so much the oracles have revealed. News comes that he is returning in triumph, having sacked Oechalia, the city of his enemy Eurytus; then news not so good, that he sacked Oechalia for love of Iole, the king's daughter. His wife thinks to win back her husband's love by using a love-potion given her years before by the Centaur Nessus, who had tried to carry her off and had been shot by Heracles; the potion turns out to be deadly poison. As soon as she learns that Heracles is perishing in agony Deianeira kills herself without a word spoken in self-defence. Heracles is carried in prostrate with pain and anxious to tear his faithless wife to pieces with his own hands, but when he hears the story of the gift of Nessus, he at once recognizes the fulfilment of an old oracle, that he should not be killed by any living creature; for it is the hand of the long dead Nessus that has struck him down, and the peace which was promised him was the peace of death. Accordingly he prepares to die.

This is not a very dexterous piece of construction. The explanations require too much narrative. An Aeschylean Chorus may move as easily in the past as in the present, but here it is the actors who supply the information, and to do so they have to wander off into the past too often. Half the effect of an oracle is lost if the audience cannot watch it come true in a way unsuspected by the characters. But we know nothing of Heracles' imagined immunity from violent death until he tells us himself why at the mention of Nessus he knows himself doomed. There is no fumbling of this sort in the *Oedipus*.

Though it is interesting to see Sophocles trying a device which he afterwards used with masterly skill, and though

the movement of the action is smooth and controlled, these details are not enough to account for the great affection with which the play is regarded by many. The explanation is that Sophocles wrote greater plays, but never created a more attractive character than Deianeira. She is of the type of Tecmessa and Ismene rather than Antigone, but conceived in greater completeness, for she has a more important role than either. She is the most delicate and sensitive of all Greek heroines; life has been rather much for her, not because of any great disasters, but because she has been fretted by anxiety ever since the day she watched her suitors, Heracles and the river-god Achelous, locked in combat; Heracles won her and her love, and she brought him up a family, but her life was half a widow's, since her husband's absences were many and long; her spirit is low, for a life of anxious waiting has taught her to fear the worst rather than to hope for the best, and she looks back with too much nostalgia to the carefree days of childhood. She is of a fine, not a strong, nature, and has been set in a place too hard for her. This is well revealed in what should be her moment of triumph. Heracles is on his way home victorious; he has sent on his herald, Lichas, with a train of captives, among them Iole, the king's daughter, for the sake of whose beauty he sacked Oechalia. (It is hard to get a clear picture of Heracles, whom we see only in his death agony, but this action suggests a spirit as insensitive as Deianeira was sensitive.) Her words of pity at the sight of the captives, among whom, though she does not know it, is her supplanter, show that she at least was in no danger of *hybris*; 'For I am filled with pain and pity, friends, as I see these ill-fated women, homeless, fatherless wanderers in a strange land, who before, perhaps, were the children of free men, and now are slaves' (298–302).

Iole herself, when questioned, remains silent—not the least dramatic silence in Greek tragedy—and Lichas half from kindness, half from embarrassment, keeps her secret. When Iole's identity is revealed, Deianeira's first desperate thought is to accept the new love into her house; she is willing to pay any price for the recovery of Heracles from unknown

dangers. On second thoughts she realizes that this would ask too much even of her love. There is no reason to think, though many do, that both first and second thoughts are not genuine, and that, like Ajax, she consciously deceives, and intends from the beginning to use the charm. It is only with the realization of what Heracles' love for Iole will mean that there occurs to her the memory of the antidote to love which Nessus gave her long ago. It was not, perhaps, very shrewd of her to suppose that Nessus would be other than a treacherous ally, but she was no doubt more conscious of his love of her than of his hatred of Heracles; and the Chorus do not discourage the experiment. So Heracles is done to death by the gentlest and most devoted of wives.[26]

But does Heracles die? Opinions on this question are divided, and much turns on it. The accepted tale, alluded to by Sophocles in the *Philoctetes*' was that Heracles ascended from the pyre on Oeta and was received among the gods. It seems very unlikely that the play could end with Heracles on his way to Oeta and the audience not assume that his deification was at hand. And on this assumption it is much easier to understand the denunciation of the cruelty and incomprehension of the gods with which, in most un-Sophoclean manner, the play ends. For in reality divine grace has the last word. Even though the Greeks were less ready than we are to make the distinction between moral and intellectual errors, Deianeira's error of judgment is not in the same category as the *hybris* of Ajax or Creon. This is *Hamartia* in the true sense of the word; it is less applicable to Creon, and has no meaning in connection with Antigone, who was not guilty at all. Yet its results are equally catastrophic and, like Creon, she involves another in destruction. Sophocles seems to be moving away from the drama which contains a moral problem to the drama which represents tragic action, and the problem of life in general. Sophocles can no more give an answer in terms of human reason than anyone else, though a sure part of the answer is that we must accept what the gods send. Yet the greatness of his greatest plays lies in the imaginative magnificence with which he poses the problem.

The 'Oedipus Tyrannus'

In the *Oedipus* which, according to the most generally accepted guess, Sophocles wrote when he was between sixty and seventy, the drama of fulfilment, of which the *Trachiniae* is a comparatively crude example, is presented with terrific power. This was a story which everyone knew; Laius begot Oedipus in spite of the warning of the oracle, and tried to undo what he had done by having the child exposed; the child was saved by chance—or providence—and brought up in ignorance of his birth as the son of Polybus, king of Corinth; he was warned by Apollo that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother, and accordingly made himself a voluntary exile from Corinth; on his way to Thebes he killed a stranger who insulted him, and the stranger was Laius; he rid Thebes of the monstrous Sphinx, and was rewarded with the hand of the widowed queen, and the queen was his mother Jocasta; thus his efforts to avoid killing his supposed parent led him to kill his real parent. Out of a folk-tale which exists among many peoples, inspired perhaps by a fancy to picture the worst misfortune which can afflict a man, the Greeks made a myth expressing their sense of the blindness and helplessness of mankind. In its original form it was far older than the Delphic oracle which came to play so large a part in the story, and the ankles, scarred where the pin had been thrust through when he was a child, must have been the means by which 'Swollenfoot's' identity was revealed to Jocasta.

So when the play opens with the plague,[27] which in the fullness of time the gods sent on Thebes to end the intolerable outrage of a king who was incestuous and a parricide, the audience know all that the king must painfully discover; when Oedipus curses the unknown murderer, they know that he is cursing himself; when Jocasta pours scorn on oracles and tells how Laius fell by an unknown hand, though it had been prophesied that his own son should kill him, they know that she is forwarding the vindication of the oracle she is trying to bring into contempt, and when the shadow of fear seems lifted for ever by the messenger from Corinth who tells that

Polybus is dead, they know that Oedipus will be engulfed in a moment by the impenetrable darkness of despair.

There was once a collision in a fog between a liner and an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean; one of the carrier's aircraft exercising above the fog, and powerless to intervene, could see the converging mastheads of the two vessels and the disaster in which their courses must end. That is a type of situation to which the term 'dramatic' is applied; it is by no means the only kind of drama, but it is a recognizable category, and no plot could be better raw material for such a drama of 'the convergence of the twain' than that supplied by the myth of Oedipus.

Oedipus was famous for his cleverness, yet this cleverness serves only to enmesh him in a net of illusion. He starts, through no fault of his own, from a false premise; he does not know who he is, that is his *hamartia*. Tiresias tells him of his guilt, and he jumps, not indeed unreasonably from the evidence in his possession, to the conclusion that Creon and Tiresias are conspiring against him. Jocasta intervenes to stop the quarrel between her husband and her brother, but in attempting to show the absurdity of the charge that he had murdered Laius she gives him a clue to his guilt. The final discovery depends on putting together the evidence of two parties each of whom knows only half the truth. The Theban Herdsman knows that the child he was ordered to expose was Jocasta's and that Laius was killed by Oedipus; he does not know that Oedipus was the child. The Corinthian Herdsman knows that Oedipus is the baby that he received from the Theban Herdsman. When the two are brought together, the pieces of the puzzle fit. Nothing could exceed the brilliance and dexterity with which Sophocles handles his material so as to extract the last ounce of drama from it.

Some readers may find these claims highly irritating, for it is possible to look at the play in another way. The actual story is puerile, the antecedents of the play are full of impossibilities, and the play itself contains not a few things which will not bear looking into; Oedipus's ignorance about his predecessor, his failure to respond to the plainest hints in

spite of early doubts about his parentage, and the extreme irritability of Tiresias which leads to such momentous indiscretion, all these can be made the subject of easy wit, which would be justified if Oedipus was intended to be a Sherlock Holmes. The answer is that when the play is acting we do not think of looking into these things, and Sophocles never troubled himself to provide answers to questions which were not going to enter the mind of his audience.[28] The simple and poetic fancy which contrives the folk-tale is puerile when judged from a certain angle; Sophocles, if less simple, is still moving in the world of poetry, and his plays can only be seen or read by those who are prepared to enter that world leaving all irrelevant cleverness behind.

The question of the guilt of Oedipus has been much discussed; here we are troubled by fundamental differences between primitive and sophisticated thought. Though things were moving fast when the *Oedipus* was written, men were finding great difficulty in escaping from the notion that certain acts brought with them a physical contamination as definite as the infection conveyed by contact with a leper. To this sort of guilt intention is irrelevant, though the Greeks at all times distinguished between acts done willingly and under compulsion. The incestuous parricide is a pariah; it is futile to try to analyse the horror felt by Oedipus and the Chorus at the discovery, but it is clear that they did not feel the purity of his intentions to be relevant. In the *Oedipus Coloneus* written many years later Oedipus does feel this, but he still thinks that his touch conveys contamination. It is not, however, allowable to infer anything about the ideas implicit in an earlier play from the views expressed later in the poet's life.

There is also the question whether the king's conduct in the course of the play is deserving of censure; clearly he is not perfect—perfect characters have no place in drama. Though he is a good king and the father of his people he has not wholly escaped the moral perils of greatness; he is too quick to suspect that Creon and Tiresias are in league against him, that Creon has bribed the priest to help him to the throne.

That tyrannical nature, which manifests itself at once in the Creon of the *Antigone*, is there in embryo, though the measure of the difference between Creon and Oedipus is the difference of their attitudes in disaster; Creon is crushed, Oedipus accepts without cringing or railing. Perhaps he is not entirely uninfluenced by his wife's impious scepticism about oracles. Again, there is a trace of spiritual recklessness, as well as of honesty, in the way he presses on to solve the riddle of his birth. But these are the faults which make Oedipus flesh and blood rather than cardboard.

If we go outside the action of the play it is possible to find a cause of offence in the killing of Laius. But Oedipus describes this vindication of his honour with obvious satisfaction, and no one in the play has a word to say on the subject. Nor by the standards of the heroic world in which the action moves was such a deed open to criticism. No amount of special pleading can show that anything Oedipus did deserved to be repaid by so prodigious a catastrophe. The causes of that lie hid deep in the nature of god and man. Sophocles does not try to reveal it; he gives us a vision of life in which divinity shapes our ends and in some cases punishes crimes, as when men disobey or distrust the commands which the gods give through oracles. He does not guess at the divine purpose, or pretend that its workings are in harmony with the partial view of human justice.

Critics from Aristotle onwards have generally agreed that the *Oedipus* is the greatest production of the genius of Sophocles. In the three plays we considered first, the action is perhaps fitted a little crudely to an idea; in the ones we are to consider next character is perhaps inclined to dominate the action; in the *Oedipus* there is perfect harmony.

The 'Electra'

The *Philoctetes* is known to have been produced in 409, four years before the poet's death; the *Electra* is probably earlier but, according to the general guess, later than the *Oedipus*. Its subject is that of the *Choephoroe* of Aeschylus,

but the emphasis is wholly different. Electra herself is the centre of the play, the noble-natured child, who, like Hamlet, is forced to pass her days in the house of sinful parents whose sin she detests; but her predicament is more terrible, partly because as a woman she is more helpless, partly because the real criminal is not the step-parent but her own mother. Her one solace is the thought of her brother Orestes; she hopes for his coming, she hears that he is dead, she finds him before her, disguised as the messenger who brings home her brother's ashes. That is the substance of the play, and the climax is the hysterical joy of sudden recognition; the actual end is the murder, first of Clytaemnestra, then of Aegisthus; they are very exciting, but, to the horror and perplexity of generations of critics, they have something of the effect of a happy ending. Yet the legend tells us that the ending was not a happy one, and it is natural to suppose that Sophocles did not approve the murder of parents. The trouble has arisen because readers have assumed that, like Aeschylus before him and Euripides, probably after him, Sophocles was writing a play primarily about the moral issue. He takes that for granted; he neither looks forward to the coming of the Erinyes nor backwards to the fateful command of Apollo, which is mentioned only casually as one of the data of the story; on the other hand, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that his Orestes and Electra were imagined as living happily ever after. If the play was to be a satisfying whole, it was no use making the audience sit in expectation of a *Eumenides* which was not to come, but without which the moral issue could hardly be treated, unless the play, like the *Electra* of Euripides, was an attack on the moral standards implied by the legend. If we think of the play as a *Choephoroe* which ends at 972 before Orestes' madness begins, we shall not be entirely wide of the mark. But Electra is the heroine, and in order that she may be reasonably sympathetic Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus have to be portrayed as altogether odious; only so can the hatred which Electra feels for her mother, murderess and adulteress though she was, be made a symptom, not of depravity, but of the tragic warping of a noble soul under stress of too much

suffering. It is noteworthy that prolonged endurance is a theme in all of the last three tragedies, and, like Electra, Philoctetes and Oedipus are not undamaged by what they have nobly borne.[29]

Since the play is about Electra rather than the famous tale in which she played a rather secondary part, Sophocles takes pains to show what manner of woman she is. It can hardly be less than seven years since her father was murdered and she sent Orestes secretly out of the country to be reared as an avenger; she herself is past the prime of womanhood and prematurely aged by bitterness; she lives unwanted in the palace, hostile and uncompromising; the only way to show loyalty to the dead is to keep their memory alive and miss no chance of taunting her mother and Aegisthus with their misdeeds; her motives are of the highest, for her whole nature is outraged by what has happened, and the thought of it will not leave her in peace: 'For if the dead are to lie in their graves mere dust and nothingness, and their murderers are not to pay the penalty for murder, that is the end of honour and goodness among men.' (245–50.) So, in her customary suits of solemn black, she haunts the palace like the shadow of one of her father's Erinyes. Yet even in mourning there is a due measure; when the Chorus tell her she violates it, she shows she knows it is true, but cannot help herself. Chrysothemis, her sister, who no more approves her mother's behaviour than does Electra, can forget and compromise with the foe, and receive as reward the amenities due to a princess. Electra will not come to terms; the fineness of her nature is its own undoing; it destroys itself through the very nobility which forbids it to be moderate even in the hatred of wickedness. That is the tragedy. Antigone and Electra suffer what Ismene and Chrysothemis escape.

It takes nearly a quarter of the play to show what Electra is, and then the action begins; there is a gleam of hope, Clytaemnestra has had a bad dream; the amiable Chrysothemis is persuaded to turn the offerings, which the frightened queen has sent to her husband's grave, to the opposite purpose of rousing the anger of the dead. Clytaemnestra follows in

person and feeling is exacerbated by a long, rasping exchange with Electra, which reveals the daughter as obsessed and the mother as abominable; she prays in scarcely veiled language for the death of her son from whom alone vengeance could come. The prayer seems answered; news is brought of Orestes' death, a hero's death in the hour of victory in the chariot race at the Pythian games. Clytaemnestra for a moment shows vestiges of humanity. Electra is utterly crushed, for the hopes aroused by the dream are belied, and the tale of her brother's glory is also the tale of his death.

The long fictitious account of the death of Orestes has been censured by critics both ancient and modern; if this play were part of an *Oresteia,* they would be justified in calling it a mere piece of fine writing; the exact method by which the avengers obtained access to the palace would be a detail, but it is no detail in the experience of Electra; only the peculiar acuteness of her suffering can explain the next scene. Chrysothemis returns from her mission to Agamemnon's tomb with the strange news that she has found a lock of hair and offerings there; she suspects the return of Orestes and is much dashed to learn that it his ashes that have come home; she is more deeply dismayed when her frantic sister presses her to join in an attempt on the life of Aegisthus, and apparently to kill her mother too. We are left in no doubt of the extent to which Electra's judgment has been warped by despair, for she uses the extraordinary argument that men will be anxious to win as wives the girls who have been so staunch in their loyalty to their father—the *Orestes*[30] of Euripides well represents what men were actually likely to think. Not less extraordinary is the failure of Chrysothemis, when arguing against her sister's proposal, to mention the notion that it is wrong to kill one's mother. It must have been the intention of Sophocles to say nothing that would remind his audience of this aspect of the situation.

As false hope precedes the climax of the *Ajax,* of the *Trachiniae,* of the *Oedipus,* so after Electra's despair comes the joyful revelation of the truth; nothing in tragedy surpasses in tenderness and delicacy the scene in which Orestes

sees the frantic grief of his sister as she mourns over what she imagines to be his ashes and, as pity triumphs over discretion, throws off his disguise. The murder of Clytaemnestra is rapidly executed, as though to avoid the raising of moral issues, and Electra is so little shattered by the experience that she undertakes with obvious relish the final task of ensnaring Aegisthus, with whose slightly stagey murder the play ends. He comes hot-foot to see those who bring the news of Orestes' death, and asks for evidence; Electra plays him for a little, then bids him pull back the covering under which he expects to find the corpse of Orestes and finds his wife's. So the play ends with only the scantiest hints of the horrors still to come; and this is right; for Electra the worst is over. Even though she finds her brother only to lose him again, and the House of Atreus is not yet at the end of its trials, for Electra the long nightmare is over. It may seem deplorable to us that anything could be worse than to have a mother's murder on one's conscience, but Sophocles took myth seriously, and it was not without significance in his eyes that Apollo sanctioned the deed. This is not to say that Sophocles thought that matricide might be excusable in his own day; for now there was a law and an Areopagus to take such matters out of the hands of the individual.[31] The price in suffering that Electra paid in advance was heavy enough. None the less the impression remains that Sophocles with extreme virtuosity has managed to evade the real issue. In this play, as in the *Philoctetes,* the myth provides the starting point, not, as in earlier dramas, the substance of the work.

The 'Philoctetes'

In the *Electra* the action is no longer determined entirely by the myth but is developed out of it. In the *Philoctetes* the myth is so far abandoned that it is only by the arbitrary intervention of a god from the machine that the action can be restored at the end of the play to the lines which tradition had laid down. If Sophocles had worked out his play to its logical conclusion, Philoctetes would have gone home with

his bow and his wounds and the Greeks would have gone on besieging Troy till doomsday. The real interest of the play has moved a step further in the direction in which drama has been tending ever since; the action depends less on the course of events than on the stresses to which the events give rise in the minds of the participants. Though there is no attempt to analyse the conflict, as Euripides had done over twenty years before in the *Medea,* the main interest lies in the decisions reached with difficulty and hesitation by Neoptolemus and Philoctetes.

The story was very familiar to the Athenians; it had already been dramatized by Aeschylus and Euripides, and we possess a comparison of all three versions from the hand of Dion of Prusa,[32] who lived in the second century A.D., a rather feeble piece of belles lettres. Neoptolemus, son of the now dead Achilles, has been sent along with Odysseus to obtain the bow of Philoctetes, which, as an oracle has revealed, is the only weapon with which Troy can be taken. Philoctetes is ill-disposed towards the Greeks because in the course of the voyage to Troy he was bitten by a sacred snake and the wound festered; the stench of the wound and the victim's cries of pain made him an intolerable companion. So the Greeks left him marooned on the desert isle of Lemnos. As he has been living in distress for nearly ten years and nursing his grievance the while, it is unlikely that he will be willing to bring his bow to the aid of the Greeks, even though the only cure for his bite is to go to Troy. So the youthful Neoptolemus is ordered by Odysseus to secure Philoctetes and his bow by deceit; this goes much against the grain. It is easy to justify the use of deceit on such an occasion by arguments no worse than the Athenians were accustomed to hear in the Assembly, but to a fastidious soul it would be distasteful. Neoptolemus is persuaded with difficulty by the pressure of his eminent companion, and by the lure of the glory of capturing Troy, which he is to share with Philoctetes. The psychological struggle is indicated, never directly revealed; but the son of Achilles feels such methods to be out of harmony with his nature, and he is not easy about using them. He uses them,

however, with great success, and finds himself after a time in possession both of the confidence of Philoctetes and of his bow. But the contact of one generous nature with another has produced sympathy as well as pity, and he finally decides—off the stage—to defy Odysseus and restore the bow. He does so and then tries to persuade his friend to follow his own best interests and the will of heaven by going to Troy; but Philoctetes has something of the same simplified and rigid conception of honour as we met in Ajax; though reluctant to disoblige his benefactor, he is driven by his sense of honour to accept a life of unending pain rather than do a service to those who have injured him. As Neoptolemus is sadly preparing to fulfil his pledge and take Philoctetes, not to Troy, but to his home under Mount Oeta, the god Heracles appears, and his command Philoctetes obeys.

There is scarcely enough here to suggest those variations of tension which are an essential part of mature Sophoclean drama; it is of the greatest interest to observe how subtly Sophocles has added a complication, which so far as the action is concerned, is a pure blind alley, but by the time the audience is in a position to realize this its attention is otherwise engaged. Odysseus had arranged, if the deception of Philoctetes seemed to be taking unduly long, to send one of his men disguised as the captain of a trading ship to help things on. When he arrives Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are already on the point of moving off, ostensibly that Neoptolemus may give his new friend a passage home. Philoctetes has been successfully tricked, and a hundred lines of conversation (542–627) with the pretended trader leave the situation just where it was. The trader tells a story in which truth and falsehood are inextricably mixed, to the effect that the Greeks are sending in pursuit both of Neoptolemus and of Philoctetes in order to bring them to Troy. Thus Philoctetes first realizes that the Greeks have need of him, and from the violence of his reaction the audience realize how immovable is his resentment against them. Like the double burial in the *Antigone* this is a device to increase tension by distributing the impact of new information. In the first scene Philoctetes is full of

hope and still unaware that he is hunted; next he learns that the Greeks are after him; finally he is betrayed by his new friend. The necessary information could have been conveyed either in the first or last of these scenes, but the progress of the play would have lost its even rhythm.

The growing interest in character brings with it the need for a more complicated plot; it is by a variety of episodes that the many facets of a character are best revealed. Ajax is a hero obsessed with the requirements of his own honour who pays the price for the loss of it; Philoctetes is a far more complete human being. His code is like that of Ajax, but his quandary is made to reveal very much more of the man. In Philoctetes and Neoptolemus we have two readings of the Greek heroic ideal. That of Neoptolemus is the better, partly because youth is itself a part of the heroic ideal, but partly because it is more submissive both to law, which enjoins moderation, and to the divine will. In the repeated emphasis on the true nature, the *physis*, of Neoptolemus we may find an echo of contemporary controversy. The question, how far a man's disposition was determined at birth and how much could be effected by education, was frequently in men's minds. Odysseus too with his conscientious freedom from scruples is not unconnected with Athenian demagogues.

So it comes about that although the interest is now largely centred on plot and character, the moral framework remains. The will of the gods has been expressed, that Troy should fall into the hands of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus; perhaps Neoptolemus was right in his guess: 'I see here no cause for surprise; unless I am mistaken, it was in accordance with the divine purpose that these sufferings came upon him from cruel Chryse (the divinity in whose precinct he was bitten by the snake) and it is by the will of the gods that he suffers untended, that he may not bend against Troy his invincible bow before the hour is come in which it is fated to fall before his arrows.' (191–200.) Yet Philoctetes is not guilty of such obtuseness as Creon, since until the appearance of Heracles he hears only dubious third-hand reports of the oracle.

Much connected with this vital oracle is obscure. Is it Philoctetes' bow that takes Troy, or Philoctetes and his bow? And if the latter, is Odysseus's threat to leave Philoctetes on Lemnos and use the bow himself merely bluff? It seems likely that the obscurity is intentional; if we were quite sure of the situation its emotional potentialities would be smaller. The attempt to show that the impious Odysseus is misled by his own attempts to make free with the words of the gods requires an impossibly vigilant audience.[33] Another part of the prophecy which is slurred over is the promise that Philoctetes shall be cured of his horrible malady when he reaches Troy. Philoctetes must seem slightly perverse in any case while, like Achilles in his tent, he refuses amends to his wounded honour; if we remember that his cure too is at stake his perversity reaches the bounds of the credible. Accordingly Philoctetes never receives a clear promise that he will be healed until the final persuasion of Neoptolemus which all but succeeds (1333). 'Men must needs bear the misfortunes which the gods send, but those who remain of their own will sunk in affliction, like you, deserve neither pardon nor pity. You are embittered and will listen to no advice, and if anyone admonishes you in a friendly way you hate him and think him your enemy.' (1316–23.) Such is the plain speaking of Neoptolemus, and it almost succeeds, but the bitterness is too deep—until Heracles appears. The divine command is obeyed without hesitation. But is it a command from without, or does Heracles represent a voice from a deeper layer of consciousness? The idea is becoming popular. It makes Sophocles seem less antique. In many ways, however, Sophocles was quite as antique as he seems.[34]

The 'Oedipus Coloneus'

We do not know that the *Oedipus Coloneus* was the last play Sophocles wrote; it is always possible that it was laid aside not completely finished and produced for performance by his grandson in 401; we are not justified in assuming more than that is was a work of his old age. Though it has not

been the subject of as much controversy as, for example, the Electra, it is the most baffling of the plays; it contains unknown quantities, of which we must guess the values, but the guesses can rarely be checked against anything outside the play. There is a local patriotic element connected with the Athenian suburb of Colonus, but we know nothing of its traditions except what we learn from the play and the ancient commentators; it was Sophocles who made these traditions famous, and some may have been his own invention. Further Oedipus becomes a 'hero', and contemporary beliefs about 'heroization' are hard to recapture. Finally, the situation is one into which we are quick to read our own values, one which we interpret after the pattern of beliefs which belong to a different world. Other much wronged old men, Job and Lear, confuse our reckoning, and the mysterious end of Oedipus sets us looking for a mellow wisdom of reconciliation and humility which is not there. Because Oedipus was raised up from penury and contempt, we remember how 'He hath exalted the humble and meek'. It is essential to make an effort to rid ourselves of these associations. Oedipus came into the world under a curse and he left it cursing. The imperious temper, noted as a characteristic both by friends and enemies, was never more in evidence than in the last tragic interview with his doomed son.

The typical Greek tragedy deals with the sudden fall of the mighty. But the same natural law which makes greatness precarious can lead also to the opposite effect, the unforeseen elevation of the humble. Oedipus, in whose life is reflected so much of the experience of the Greeks, underwent both transformations. On discovering that he was his father's slayer and his mother's husband he gave expression to his self-loathing by putting out his eyes, and at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* we find him confined at Thebes awaiting the decision of Apollo of Delphi as to his future. According to the present play—which must not, of course, be read as a sequel to the *Tyrannus*—Oedipus lived on for a time at Thebes, and came to regret his impulsive act of self-punishment, for he realized that neither of the deeds which had led

to the catastrophe had been intentional, that he was not, as we should say, morally responsible. This idea, which is not to be found in the earlier *Oedipus,* recurs many times in the later play; he pleads his case to the Chorus of men of Colonus, and scarcely persuades them; the enlightened Theseus takes his innocence for granted, and it is reasserted before the spiteful Creon. But although innocent, Oedipus never claims to be uncontaminated by his actions. When he is on the point of embracing Theseus in gratitude at the restoration of his daughters. he checks himself, as he remembers that his touch is unclean. Here we have a striking contrast with the more rationalistic Euripides, who in his *Heracles,* probably a good many years earlier, had gone out of his way to rebut the notion that the innocent in purpose can be carriers of this sort of infection.

Just as Oedipus was reaching his fuller realization of the nature of his actions and coming to terms with life again, he was expelled from Thebes. This expulsion was due to, or at least could have been prevented by, his two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles; he never forgave this breach of filial duty, the violation of one of the fundamental Greek commandments. But his daughters, Antigone and Ismene, by their devotion did something to atone for the undutifulness of the sons; Antigone attended him on his wanderings and shared his sufferings; Ismene kept him informed, at some risk to herself, of what went on in Thebes. Then the gods, who had cast Oedipus down, began to exalt him; oracles revealed that the possession of the body of Oedipus after his death would be a source of strength; Creon came in pursuit, in order to try to obtain control of Oedipus and so of his grave. Polyneices who had quarrelled with his brother and been deprived of his share in the rule of Thebes, learnt that his attempt to recover Thebes by force could succeed only if he had the blessing of his father; he too came to beg a blessing, and received a curse. At the same time Oedipus recognized in the grove of the Eumenides at Colonus the place appointed by the oracle for his death, and after he had received, as testimony to his renewed importance, the solicitations of both Creon and

Polyneices, a mysterious death, or rather passage to a different life, brought his earthly career to a noble and solemn end.

It is necessary to consider first the meaning of the status of 'hero' to which Oedipus attains. Among the various conceptions of the life after death which were current in the ancient world one of the most persistent was that the dead man had a sort of existence in his grave; it is implied, in so far as any definite idea is implied, by the ordinary Athenian ritual of sacrificing at the grave of their dead on the birthday of the deceased. But certain men were placed after death in a more favoured category. Not only did many of the heroes of legend receive a cult at their real or supposed place of burial, as did Ajax for example, but individuals in historic times were 'heroized', as it was called, in large numbers, often at the command of the Delphic oracle. All founders of colonies were the object of a 'hero' cult. When Amphipolis changed sides in the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian founder of the city, Hagnon, then still alive, was disestablished, and replaced by the Spartan Brasidas. Sophocles himself was worshipped after death as a 'hero' under the name of Dexion, the Receiver, because he had received the god Asclepius when his cult was introduced into Athens. Anyone who was, or did, or suffered anything remarkable might be heroized; Philippus of Croton, for his beauty, the athlete Theagenes of Thasos, because of a miraculous intervention on the part of his statue, Cleomedes of Astypalaea,[35] because of the violence with which he expressed his annoyance at an athletic failure and the mysterious disappearance of his body after death. It was not a reward for virtue but a recognition of some more than ordinary potency which, like all extraordinary things, was accounted divine.

This potency was commonly believed to be exercised even from the grave, and to be hostile to disturbers of its site. The local 'hero' Echetlaus fought at Marathon against the Persian violators of his peace. A patriotic play of Euripides, the *Heracleidae,* ends with the prophecy of Eurystheus that he will guard the Attic land where he is buried; his corpse was even supposed by others to have been divided in order that its deterrent qualities might be exerted over a wider area.[36]

There was no reason why Eurystheus should wish to protect Attica, though Euripides invents one. Originally the possession of a potent corpse, like a large amulet, was thought to ensure automatically certain advantages. Hence the anger of Oedipus is of no account to Creon; once he is safely buried in Theban land the charm will work, even though the 'hero' died full of resentment against his country. It is an unusual addition that the place of Oedipus's passing was a secret revealed only to Theseus and his successors. But it is natural to preserve secrecy over a valuable talisman, and the site of the grave of Dirce at Thebes was known only to the magistrates. But in this case it may be relevant that Oedipus had no ancient connection with Athens and that he already had an alleged grave on the Areopagus.

Presumably it was a desirable thing to be made a 'hero', but we must be careful not to confuse it with being raised to the gods, as Heracles was. The hero's life in the tomb is not represented as privileged or enjoyable; when the daughters of Oedipus mourn him after his death, no one thinks of comforting them with assurances of his everlasting bliss. Oedipus speaks of the battle to be fought one day by his graveside, when 'my cold corpse sleeping in a secret place beneath the earth shall drink their warm blood' (621, 2). In earlier times blood was, it is true, poured through openings in the tomb for the delectation of the dead. But Oedipus was not a savage, and he means only that it will be through his influence that Theban blood will be shed. The real advantage of being worshipped as a 'hero' was that one's cult, and so one's memory, was assured of preservation, and the one kind of existence beyond the grave after which the Greeks seem to have hungered was to live in the memory of their descendants.

The play has very little plot. The structure is of the type least admired, in which, as in the *Prometheus* and in *Samson Agonistes*, the hero is the centre of a sequence of scenes which have only a loose causal connection. Yet it is by no means undramatic, as occasional performances have proved. There is the same perfect control of the speed and movement as in

the more closely-knit dramas. Oedipus, with Antigone for guide, appears at the nadir of his fortunes, outcast and unwanted. He discovers that he has reached the precinct of the Eumenides at Colonus, and at once he knows that he has come to the end of his wanderings; the same oracle which told him that he must kill his father and marry his mother told him also of his end. But the moment of exaltation is followed by apprehension; the Chorus of citizens of Colonus, on discovering who he is, are on the point of expelling him in horror, and only with difficulty does he obtain leave to stay till Theseus can decide his fate. But before Theseus comes Ismene arrives from Thebes with important news of the strife between the two brothers, and of the oracle which has warned Creon that he must get control of Oedipus; this prepares for the later scenes in which come first Creon, then Polyneices, and Oedipus denies his help to each. Emotionally and dramatically it is important, because it shows that the gods have not forgotten Oedipus:

OEDIPUS. Had you hope that the gods would take heed of me to save me?

ISMENE. Yes, father, knowing of the late oracles.

OEDIPUS. What oracles? What has been foretold?

ISMENE. That the Thebans must seek you out, for living and dead their welfare depends on you. . . .

For now the gods exalt you who before cast you down.

OEDIPUS. It is a poor thing to exalt in old age a man who falls when he is young. (385–95.)

Theseus, when he comes, unlike the Chorus, shows no instinctive repulsion; he, no doubt, had realized that all was done unwillingly. The two wise men, the reader of the Sphinx's riddle and the enlightened ruler of Athens, meet, and though Theseus is inclined to question the justice of the stranger's hatred of his own kin, Oedipus has the last word in wisdom in a passage of mature beauty which balances the splendour of the speech of Ajax on the same theme in the earliest of the plays. Theseus has questioned the value of the help which Oedipus offers against the still friendly city of

Thebes: 'Dear son of Aegeus, to the gods alone it happens never to die or to grow old; all else is confounded by almighty Time. The strength of the land wastes away, and the strength of the body; faith dies and faithlessness comes to be, and the same wind blows not with constancy either in the friendships of men or between city and city. To some now, and to others later, the sweet becomes bitter and then again pleasant. And if in Thebes it is now fair weather for you, Time in his course brings to birth ten thousand nights and days, in which they will break to pieces the present pledges of harmony for a small word's sake.' (607–20.) And so Oedipus is received as an inhabitant of Attica, and the Chorus sing of the peerless beauties of the Athenian land, a song not heard until after the city's final capture and humiliation.

The two following scenes show Oedipus in his new status, no longer the suitor but sought after. Creon tries to lure Oedipus away with the pretence that he will re-establish him in Thebes, but thanks to the warning given by Ismene, Oedipus knows that he intends no such thing. The old king's sharp answers so anger Creon that he uses force, carries off Antigone in addition to Ismene who had already been kidnapped as a hostage, and is only prevented by the appearance of Theseus from laying hands on Oedipus. Though the audience is unlikely to feel any grave apprehension about the security of Oedipus and his daughters, Creon is sufficiently formidable to cause an increase of tension.

The scene with Polyneices is parallel, though the emotion is different. Only pressure from Theseus and Antigone persuades Oedipus to see his son at all; there is no question of threatening now. Polyneices begins like Creon with expressions of pity at the sight of Oedipus in his rags, a pity which in his case may well be genuine; on the will of Oedipus turns the whole success or failure of the attempt of the Seven on Thebes. He has become the arbiter of great events. This is the scene which causes the most perplexity to the modern reader. Polyneices is humble, and apparently sincere; he does what he can to offer amends; further, Antigone, the most dutiful and self-sacrificing of daughters, receives him with a

sister's affection and is full of sorrow at his plight. Oedipus is scarcely persuaded to answer him, and when at last he answers it is only to curse him; nor does his anger seem due to any disapproval of the proposed exploit on the grounds that it is the act of a traitor to attack his own country. He is moved purely by resentment at the failure of his son to prevent his expulsion from Thebes; this was certainly a great fault, but Oedipus is a great man and he stands on the verge of the grave. Forgiveness was less esteemed as a virtue by Pagans than by Christians, yet to forgive was the mark of a magnanimous man. The opening words of the play claim for Oedipus that he has been schooled by suffering, by time, and by innate nobility; but he has not ceased to be vindictive. This the reader can hardly manage to forget, even after the magnificent narrative of the passing of Oedipus to that grave, like the grave of Moses in a valley in the land of Moab, where 'no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day'.

This is, perhaps, the measure of an unavoidable difference in response between the ancient and the modern world; not that Sophocles wished to represent Oedipus as faultless, or his heroization as a recompense for undeserved suffering, but probably he did not intend that Oedipus in this scene should seem, as he does seem to us, hard to a fault.

Even less than the other later plays can the *Oedipus Coloneus* be summarized in the language of prose. Sophocles conceived for the tremendous figure of Oedipus an end which is imaginatively satisfying. That we can all feel; the Attic audience had other, more personal feelings as well, which we cannot wholly recapture.

4 SOPHOCLES: CONCLUSION

The inspiration behind the plays of Sophocles is the conception of an heroic world in which man, if not more virtuous, was more magnificent than man as we know him. Sophocles derived his picture mainly from epic poetry composed long after the times it purported to represent, and of course such a world never existed. We may compare the vision of the

Greek and Roman world which was current in Europe from the Renaissance until its gradual destruction by 'scientific' scholarship beginning early in the last century. The noble Romans, the serene Greeks, who cultivated their sense of intellectual beauty in verdant northern glades set by the blue Mediterranean sea, never existed either, but that did not prevent their inspiring the humanistic spirit for many generations in Europe and America. Sophocles' vision was a more personal matter, and the changing spirit of the age was enough to ensure that he had no successors.

If we consider the surviving plays together for a moment, we find that they have a certain unity of attitude to life and to heroic character. There are certain flaws. A man must remember his innate weakness, the precariousness of prosperity, the transience of disaster; he must remember the limits of power and not overstep them. When heroes fall it is sometimes because they have forgotten this. Heroes are conscious of their own superiority, of the greatness of their spirit, and they may be slow to realize that they are as nothing beside the deathless gods. Further, the gods often shape human life for their own purposes, purposes which we must not ask to understand, though they give hints of them through oracles. It is not often that we feel certain that Sophocles is preaching, but there are two passages about which there can be no doubt, Antigone's defence of the validity of the unwritten laws, and the insistence of the Chorus in the *Oedipus* that disbelief in oracles saps the very foundations of religion. Men may be foolish enough to disregard the manifest purpose of the gods, or worse still, to try to evade it. Their efforts only accomplish what they seek to avoid. It is not denied that the accomplishment of the divine purpose may involve the morally innocent in suffering and disaster; this must be accepted, and without much hope of recompense in this world or the next. The universe is moral in so far as sin brings disaster in its train, but not all disaster is the punishment of sin. Here we are reminded at once of Herodotus, in his way the most typical of Greeks, and a friend of Sophocles; but Herodotus appears naive, and Sophocles is

mature; that is, perhaps, why he never ascribes to the gods the merely petulant jealousy in which Herodotus often finds the key to their actions.

The crudest interpretation of the divine law is in the *Ajax*. Ajax rejects the well-meant advice of the gods who love him because of the greatness of his spirit. Accordingly they humiliate him; he might, it is hinted, have been forgiven, but he could not forgive and he slew himself rather than fail to maintain his primitive but exacting conception of honour. Creon, the central, if not the most important, figure in the *Antigone,* is guilty of a rarer crime, intellectual pride. He tries to be a good king, putting the welfare of his city first; but he prefers his own conception of justice to the common traditions of Greece; because traitors deserve punishment he tries to punish them beyond the grave by leaving them unburied, arguing, with false piety, that men cannot contaminate what is divine; but the gods are angry, and punishment follows swiftly, yet not swiftly enough to save Antigone; her only recompense is the cold comfort of fame.

After these two plays there is a slight shift of interest; the characters are portrayed with a more loving attention to detail, more stress is laid on persons and less on what they stand for; we watch them in the fell clutch of circumstances, while the divine purpose is fulfilled at their expense. Deianeira was injudicious; a centaur's gift should be used with circumspection. Yet her error of judgment did not merit such a catastrophe, nor is the agonized end of Heracles meant to point the moral that a hero should be content with one wife. It was the purpose of the gods, indicated in this case by a plethora of oracles, yet men in their blindness are taken by surprise and comprehend the divine warnings only at the moment of execution. Oedipus too was wise, but the blind Tiresias was wiser than he. Yet though he was by nature somewhat hasty, and not wholly unaffected by the temptations which accompany power, he was a fine man and a good king; he has faults enough to make him human and to save him from being tediously faultless, but nothing to justify the terrible punishment with which he is afflicted. The power of

the play lies in the fascination of watching a hero about whom we are better informed than he is about himself, approaching step by step the appalling revelation, watching the delusive hopes and relaxations of suspense produced by partial knowledge. Yet this is no mere melodrama; it is relevant to life as Sophocles saw it. Oedipus, wisest of men, was not wise enough to read the riddle of his own identity, though the gods gave him clues enough. How much more do we need humility and circumspection, who are not wise?

With the *Electra* and *Philoctetes* the interest passes still more to the characters, and the plot is shaped largely to show them in action. Electra, the brave soul warped by an excess of not ignoble hatred, is revealed in despair, in hope, and in darker despair, while with incredible virtuosity Sophocles develops his plot to bring tension, relaxation, and yet greater tension. But at the end he finds some slight difficulty in adjusting himself to the requirements of the old epic story. In the *Philoctetes* he follows up the spiritual adventures of Neoptolemus, the charming, fine-souled boy, almost dominated by the coarse-grained Odysseus, and the honourable, stiff and old-fashioned Philoctetes, until he gets into a situation where only a god from the machine can find the way to the ending which tradition required. In its portrayal of mood and character the *Oedipus Coloneus* is similar to the other late plays, but the interest of a tightly constructed plot is replaced by an appeal to patriotic emotions and the venerable associations of the precinct of the Eumenides at Colonus.

As compared with Aeschylus, Sophocles is most obviously superior in the management of the plot; the action is more extended and more involved; it can change direction and there is room for false scents. This is partly due to the disuse of the trilogy. Plays are longer, and less space is given to the chorus; characters are more freely introduced in the middle of an episode, which can thus be almost the equivalent of two separate scenes, whereas Aeschylus restricted the amount of development between two choral odes. Even so, genuine triangular conversation between three actors is unknown.

Equally striking, but less analysable, are the changes in

style and character. Traces of the grand Aeschylean manner are obvious in the *Ajax*; they grow less so later, but there is no progressive change in style as in Euripides, whose plays can be approximately arranged in sequence according as the greater number of resolved feet reflects a freer and more colloquial manner. It is an amazingly flexible style; it is highly dignified, and like all dignified styles much given to circumlocutions, yet it can sound spontaneous, especially in conversation, and even such grimly humorous characters as the Guard in the *Antigone* and the Messenger in the *Trachiniae* seem to slip straight into it without incongruity.

With style character is closely related; Sophocles himself is reported to have said that his final style was especially adapted to the expression of ethos, or moral disposition.[37] If we assume that Ajax is some twenty years later than Aeschylus's Eteocles he seems a natural development of the Aeschylean manner; his characteristics, though strongly drawn, are very few; it is rather that our imagination is invited to build a character round him than that the poet has given us a finished person. Judged by the standards of later schools of drama the Greek always seems to practise a rigid economy; the points of contact of their characters with life are few, and they are not made to act or speak merely for the sake of lending verisimilitude to themselves. But character is relevant to Sophoclean drama as it was not in the earlier period, and many of its figures are astonishingly real; though no wealth of detail has been lavished on them, they were conceived by their creator as individuals, and we realize at once their differences. Electra and Antigone are both beings of the same type, so are Chrysothemis and Ismene, but we do not confuse one with the other. Yet they are irremovably attached to their background, the heroic world. Like the world of Homer it is an ideal world, but the ideal is in each case largely that of the society in which the poet lived; it is this that gives to the heroes both of Homer and Sophocles their composure and assurance of manner; there is an accepted framework of behaviour, a proper way of facing almost any contingency.

This leads to a rather paradoxical result. Euripides, as

we shall see, had a keener psychological insight, was more interested in the analysis of motive and the discovery of the hidden springs of conduct. The result is that he has moments of vision, which may last for as much as a single scene; then he compels the audience, as Longinus[38] says, to see what he sees; for a moment he gets right behind the eyes of his characters, and is able to communicate the feel of things as Sophocles never does. But taken as a whole his characters are much less memorable. For they exist more in isolation; they fit into no particular background, and though more realistic fail to take on the reality which comes of belonging to a homogeneous world. For the attitude of Euripides was not one of acceptance; we do not know if it was open to him to move naturally in the same circles as Sophocles, but, whether from choice or necessity, he never absorbed the spirit of that genuine aristocracy which gave its colour to the work of Sophocles in the fifth century and to the work of Plato in the fourth. His characters lack the support it gave and become real only during the flashes of their creator's intellectual brilliance.

Further, the characters of Sophocles are hardly drawn at all from contemporary types; an heroic world, which was an idealized version of what his own society aspired to be, had little to do with contemporary demagogues. Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* has a timeless unscrupulousness, though he may owe something to the politicians of the time, and the same is true of the Creon of the *Oedipus Coloneus*. Creon in the *Antigone* may owe his intellectual *hybris* more definitely to the sophists. That is about all. Euripides, on the other hand, often sets his plays in the Greece of his own day; we can put our finger on many passages with a contemporary application and characters who were suggested by types to be met in fifth century Athens. But at times Euripides is all bits and pieces, because he has broken away from a tradition and can no longer use its language consistently. The characters of Sophocles bring before us the ideals of a society within the Athenian commonwealth, those of Euripides restore to us scraps of the reality.

CHAPTER V

EURIPIDES

I LIFE AND WORKS

EURIPIDES was born in the year of Salamis, 480 B.C., or a little earlier; the home of his family was at Phlya on the far side of Mount Hymettus, the ridge which bounds the plain of Athens on the east. Since he was rich enough to pay the Athenian equivalent of surtax and to collect a library[1] when books were still rare, he was apparently of good birth; it was counted as a joke by the comic poets, and presumably by their audience, to mention vegetables in connection with his mother Cleito. It is not very likely that his father Mnesarchus had made a mésalliance with someone in the greengrocery business, and we do not know the origin of the gibe. But one is left with the impression that, whether from choice or compulsion, Euripides did not move in the same circle as Sophocles. Tradition made him the pupil of Anaxagoras, but this may be only because to later generations Anaxagoras was the typical rationalist; Aristophanes more than once brackets him with Socrates,[2] who was even said to help him write his plays. He was prosecuted by Cleon for impiety;[3] since such prosecutions were usually political it is likely that he was considered no friend by the extreme democrats. He is said to have written a poem in celebration of the spectacular victory of Alcibiades at the chariot-race at Olympia in 416(?), and an epitaph on the Athenians who fell before Syracuse: 'These men won eight victories over the Syracusans, while the gods were still impartial.'[4] If the tale is true that some of the enslaved Athenian captives in Sicily won their liberty by reciting the lyrics of Euripides to their enthusiastic owners,[5] it was appropriate that the same poet should have been chosen to honour the dead. Though we have no portrait of Euripides to put beside that of Sophocles by Ion of Chios, he is made more real to us by the story of his fondness for a cave by the sea on Salamis, where he used to sit and brood, indulging a

love of solitude regarded as highly abnormal in that uncrowded world, and by some lines of uncertain attribution: 'The nursling of old Anaxagoras, sour of speech, averse to laughter, unable to be merry even over the wine, but what he writes is full of honey and the Sirens.'[6]

In 408 he accepted an invitation from King Archelaus, a patron of art and letters, to go to Macedon, and he died there some eighteen months later. How far this may have been an indication of a certain coldness between him and the Athenians we cannot tell; his plays were seldom victorious at the Dionysia, partly, it is said, because of his own negligence,[7] and the atmosphere of the city during the last desperate years of the war was strained and suspicious. And no doubt the king's court had a good deal more to offer in the way of physical amenities. The news of his death reached Athens early in 406 in time for Sophocles to dress his chorus in mourning at the Proagon, the dress-parade before the Dionysia. The Athenians asked for the body of their poet, but he was buried in Macedon, and at Athens a cenotaph was erected on the road to the Piraeus. After his death he came into his own, and in the fourth century he was read and acted far more than the rest of the tragic poets put together.

Owing to a popularity which continued as long as the ancient world, a greater number of his plays have been preserved. Of the ninety-two which he wrote, seventy-eight were known to the scholars of Alexandria, and no less than eighteen, excluding the *Rhesus,* which is probably by another hand, are still extant. This is partly because, when in the second century A.D. the selections were made from the works of the great classical authors which were the main factor in determining what was to survive the passing of the ancient world, ten of Euripides' plays were chosen compared with the seven each of the other tragic poets. But further, by some odd chance, nine plays have survived which formed a section of the complete edition of the work of Euripides made by the Alexandrians; the plays in question are the *Helen, Electra, Heracles, Heracleidae, Cyclops, Ion, Supplices, Iphigenia in Tauris, Iphigenia in Aulis.* This is the order of the plays as

indicated by the numbers attached to each play in the oldest manuscript. If they are written out in Greek script it will be seen that they fall into a partially alphabetical arrangement in groups according to the first letter which seems, from other evidence,[8] to have been a feature of the collected edition. Indeed it is hard to imagine any rational scheme which would select for survival such a mutilated fragment as the *Heracleidae*.

So it has come about that we possess not only more plays of Euripides than of any other Greek dramatist, but that they are a more random selection, since about half of them were preserved by chance and not choice. This may explain in part why it is so much harder to see the work of Euripides as a whole than the work of the other two tragic poets. Yet it is easy to believe that if we possessed an equal number of the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles, they would still group themselves together in virtue of their common characteristics as clearly as do the surviving seven. For though the thought of both these poets developed and the character of their work changed with the passage of time, their attitude remained, broadly speaking, the same. We may often be in doubt precisely how to take a particular point in one of their plays, but we feel we know in general where they stood, and we can see them in their place in a developing tradition. And there is no reason to suppose that this unity was imposed by the taste of whoever made the selection of plays which have survived. With Euripides it is quite otherwise. Though his plays, too, have characteristics in common, especially a sort of intellectual restlessness, there is no one point of view from which the plays were written. The ancients called him repeatedly the philosopher of the stage; in the sense that he was passionately interested in the thought of his time and reproduced its speculations in his drama with a freedom which was not always appropriate, this is quite just. But a philosopher has beliefs and a system which are his own; Euripides can by insight of imagination see the attitudes of others as though they were his own, but he commits himself to none. He argues every case as conscientiously as a barrister

doing his best for a client, but more often than not the conclusion of the play gives no decisive verdict. He seems more concerned to raise questions than to answer them, to cast doubts than to show how the doubts are to be resolved. In general he rejected, not traditional values as such, but the authority of tradition to impose its values for no better reason than that they were traditional, and he did not try, as did Aeschylus, to enlarge the tradition to make a place for modifications of older views. In an age of intellectual effervescence the alternatives to tradition are many. Yet there is no one school of thought which can claim Euripides as a follower.

The best known example of Euripides' unwillingness to say just where he stands is the *Bacchae*, where both the beauty and the dangers of a religion of ecstacy and self-abandonment are fully stated and the audience left to think what it will. A clear conclusion like the end of the *Electra*, the condemnation of the god who commanded a man to kill his mother, is quite exceptional, and many of the plays stand in no less need than Shaw's of an explanatory preface. But the perplexity of a modern reader is due as well to the contradictions resulting from the convention which compelled Euripides to express himself in terms of the traditional mythology, though it was fast losing its significance. In consequence form and content are often at variance with each other; what the poet has to say may be inconsistent with the implications of the legend he is dramatizing; at times he reminds one of a man sitting on the bough of a tree and sawing it through between himself and the trunk. His gods are sometimes symbols who retain the force of their personality, because they are part of a system of belief which is still alive, though Euripides does not share it. Sometimes they are lay figures who duly reduce themselves to absurdity. Myth has ceased to enshrine an ideal and the heroic world is a faded dream. The gods and heroes who peopled it must play a new role; sometimes they try to put off their grand trappings and disguise themselves as the contemporary citizens Euripides really wanted to write about, but they do not move easily in their new parts. At other times they remain in the

old environment, but jerk the audience to attention by showing how human even a hero can be and by revealing the spiritual shabbiness which may underlie a divine pedigree. The confusion, the contradiction, sometimes significant and sometimes to be ignored, which arises from the attempt to write serious drama about myths which are not taken seriously, perplexed and annoyed the Athenians; they may annoy us less, but they perplex us even more, because we miss the hints which the poet's own production would afford, and the passage of time has removed many clues which we can ill spare. What for instance are we to make of a play, an obviously serious play, like the *Heracles*? The hero is the son of a mortal and a god, and possesses superhuman power appropriate to a miraculous origin; the catastrophe which strikes him down is attributed by him, by his friends, and to all appearances by Euripides, to the jealousy of the wife of his divine father; yet in a moment of vision the hero denies the truth of all such stories as that of his own birth—and then resumes a few lines later his complaints of the divine jealousy which is responsible for his unmerited sufferings.

Though we cannot find a point of view from which the plays of Euripides appear as the orderly development of a single attitude, it is possible to allot a number of them to particular groups. The plays of each group are similar in that they reflect an interest in the same problem or an attempt to create some particular effect. It is worth while to distinguish three main groups, though not all plays can be assigned to one of them and overlapping is not uncommon. In the earlier surviving plays Euripides seems much concerned with psychological problems, with the difficulty of seeing ourselves as others see us, and with the nature of passion. Then in the course of the earlier years of the Peloponnesian War he wrote several plays with a strong, sometimes a disconcertingly strong, patriotic interest. Finally, after the renewal of the war in 415 he turned his attention to plays with complicated and exciting plots which seem intended in part to provide distraction and an escape from the contemplation of a depressing present and a threatening future. But the *Electra,* which

is similar to the rest of the group in structure, is highly serious, one of his most outspoken attacks on the myth as a source of moral authority. Not all the important plays can be associated with these groups, neither the *Heracles* nor the *Orestes* nor the *Bacchae*, but a short account of them will go some way to reveal most of the main characteristics of Euripides.

The outstanding plays of the first group are the *Medea* (431) and the *Hippolytus* (428). The *Andromache* and *Hecuba*, both earlier than 423, contain studies of female passion, though the psychological interest seems to be fading. In the same period Euripides wrote a number of plays, now lost, which dealt with crimes and tragedies of love, an earlier *Hippolytus*, the *Phoenix*, the *Stheneboea*, and the *Aeolus*, while the *Cretans*, of which a quite extraordinary fragment has been recovered on papyrus, may have been of the same sort. We can also see a pioneer in psychology at work in the earliest surviving play, the *Alcestis* (438), though unlike the others, it does not deal with violent passion. Accordingly, it seems reasonable as a practical convenience to speak of a psychological period in the work of Euripides, and it is not impossible that there actually was a time when he was preoccupied with the workings of the human soul and especially with the nature of passion.

Early conceptions on this subject were naive and inadequate. It is well known that the early Greeks had no word for the faculty of the 'will', and even later philosophers tried to avoid using the concept. To the Greeks it seemed that decisions were almost entirely an intellectual matter; what a man did was what he thought to be best in any given circumstances. They made little allowance for what we should call a failure of will, the choice of an easy course in preference to one less agreeable but ultimately more expedient, or one wrong and easy in preference to the right and difficult. The Greeks may have been justified up to a point in regarding what we call the exercise of the will as an intellectual process, since it does consist in part in discovering and representing

to oneself as vividly as possible the consequences of various courses of action. But the fact remains that when we look back across the centuries at the ancient world one of the striking differences is the greater emphasis on the intellect; even appeals to the emotions are disguised under an intellectual form. If a man was overcome by a powerful and apparently irrational impulse—the antics of lovers were familiar enough to the Greeks—it was traditionally explained as a force acting from outside, very often the compulsion of a god. This is regularly the case in Homer, but the same way of looking at things survived long after Homer's day; the emotions in question might be given a less personal form, Aphrodite might be conceived more as an abstraction, but the feeling that something from outside was soul-compelling and that the individual was hardly responsible, continued to be prevalent.[9] An ingenious and convenient sophistry went so far as to suggest that it might even be impious to resist what was in effect the will of a god.[10] So Phaedra's Nurse argued when she tempted her mistress to indulge an illicit passion that she could not master. So Helen in the *Troades* pleads that she is not to be held responsible for her divinely inspired infidelity, and she is answered that what she calls Cypris, the goddess of Love, was really her own mind stirred by Paris's beauty.[11] But the most surprising denial of responsibility is to be found in a fragment of the *Cretans*.[12] Here Pasiphaë, the wife of Minos, who has been guilty of an unnatural amour with a bull and given birth to the monstrous Minotaur, defends herself as follows: 'If I had offered my body to a man trading love by stealth, I should rightly be regarded as a wanton; in fact I went mad through the visitation of a god; it is painful to me, and this is no willing sin of mine. It is altogether too unlikely. What could I see in a bull that I should be afflicted with this shameful passion? Was it because he looked so handsome in his fine clothes?' and so on. Euripides' ingenuity is not easily exhausted in such a context. Since, according to the story, this passion really was sent as a punishment for Minos's broken promise, it is possible that Pasiphaë's case is regarded as exceptional,

but it is more likely that Euripides is doing what he does with Phaedra, making a god the ostensible cause of a passion, but treating the victim as psychologically responsible.

Euripides himself certainly rises superior to this conception, but with an effort and the consciousness that he is breaking new ground. That is why Medea's desperate cry echoed down the centuries[13] till the end of the ancient world, because she was the first to express awareness of the division within the soul which men perceived more and more as they acquired self-consciousness in a larger and lonelier world than that of the city-state, until St. Paul could express what had become a common experience: 'The good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do.' Medea was wronged by the man who was bound to her because she had saved his life and helped him to his glory, and because he had given her the most solemn pledges imaginable that he would not desert her. Being wronged she desired vengeance above all things. She did what she calculated would hurt Jason most, even though it hurt her more, killed the children. Here was no intellectual balancing of alternative courses, but a battle between contending forces in which passion triumphed. 'I know what evil I am about to do, but my passion is stronger than my reason.' (1078, 9.)

No one, so far as we know, had ever said that before, and human experience was correspondingly widened. Again, in the *Hippolytus* three years later, Phaedra expressed more calmly her sense of the same irrationalism lying at the roots of human conduct. Phaedra was the victim of Aphrodite who had afflicted her with an impossible passion for her stepson Hippolytus, not because Phaedra herself was guilty of offence, but because the goddess foresaw that it was a means by which she might ruin Hippolytus, the chaste companion of Artemis who would have nothing to do with her or her works. Here, incidentally, we have a good example of the self-contradiction to which Euripides was driven by the necessity of deriving his plots from myth. His Aphrodite and Artemis are at the same time abstractions and personalities, symbols of states of mind and passionate beings who control the action; they

cannot be explained away as fictitious machinery or mere allegorical figures, because they are capable of independent action, yet their intervention does not relieve the human characters of responsibility, as in logic it should. Phaedra's love is imposed on her by Aphrodite, but it is also something inside her with which she must wrestle and for the consequence of which she must suffer; so, I have suggested, was the not dissimilar passion of Pasiphaë. When the secret of Phaedra's suffering has been dragged from her by the devoted and unscrupulous Nurse she describes her struggle: 'Often in the long hours of the night I have reflected on the disasters in men's lives. Men seem to me to come to grief not from defect of judgment, for many can make right decisions; but we must look at it in this way; we know the good and recognize it, but we do not do it, some through laziness, others because they choose some pleasure in preference to the good.' (375–83.) This is a commonplace to us, for the whole Christian tradition is behind our conception that the difficulty is not to decide what to do, for that we are told, but to make the moral effort to do it, to exalt the spirit above reluctant flesh. And the almost complete absence of this idea from the Greek literature of the greatest period is the cause of that impression of something hard and over-intellectual which, with much else, we carry away from its study.

The earlier play on Phaedra and Hippolytus also depicted passion; in it there appear to have been scenes more unrestrained than anything in our play, in which Phaedra confronted Hippolytus with her love and tried to justify herself to Theseus. The argument may have been similar to that of the *Aeolus*, which dealt with the incestuous relations of a brother and sister, a denial of the validity of a purely human convention. There is nothing to show whether the problem of the will was raised in either of these plays, or in the *Stheneboea* or *Phoenix*, both of which, like the *Hippolytus*, treated of variations of the old story of Potiphar's wife. Faithless wives, Clytaemnestra for instance, had not been unknown in the older drama, but the emotions leading to faithlessness had not been regarded as a proper subject for

study or, still more dangerous, for sympathy. Euripides' predilection for unsavoury subjects was brought up against him many years later by Aristophanes; in his plays, it was objected, he exhibited not what was untrue but what was best kept hidden. We can say little with assurance about these plays on the strength of the *Hippolytus* and a few fragments, but it is a likely guess that Euripides was attracted to this theme not so much by its dramatic possibilities and easy appeal to emotion, as by a desire to understand those volcanic forces of the spirit which can burst out with such devastating effects in spite of the sanctions with which society seeks to repress them.[14]

The *Hecuba* and *Andromache* both portray women in a state of emotional tension, Hecuba who is driven by intolerable wrongs to take a wild beast's vengeance on the murderer of her son, Andromache who is ready to die to save hers from the persecution of her rival Hermione, a woman at first despicably spiteful, then as hysterically repentant. But it must be confessed that the modern reader, though he may admire the insight shown here and there in both plays, is not likely to be much impressed by the characterization as a whole; indeed no attempt seems to be made to use the opportunities presented by Hermione's jealousy and remorse; her violent changes of mood are seen entirely from the outside. The *Hecuba* is a competently made play which holds its own in virtue of its dramatic effectiveness; the *Andromache* falls feebly and mysteriously to pieces, leaving one with the feeling that there must be missing clues which would show the play less inept than it seems.[15]

The *Alcestis* (438) is a slighter work; it stood fourth among the plays with which it was produced and filled the position normally occupied by the farcical satyr-play; the gluttonous Heracles, a popular figure in satyr-plays, is there to give a faint reminiscence of the satyric element. The play deals with the old folk-tale motif of the man who is allowed a second life if he can find someone else to die for him. Euripides gives the story a characteristic twist. Admetus, who receives the doubtful privilege of a second life as a reward for entertaining Apollo during his exile on earth, is a character of magnificent

selfishness; when his wife Alcestis lies dying—in his place—he refuses to see that the only thing she cares about is the welfare of her young children, and persists in salving his uneasy conscience by expatiating on the elaborate funeral and lengthy mourning he proposes for her. At the funeral he rudely rejects the condolences of his father Pheres, a man as selfish as himself, and taunts him with cowardice in refusing, though an old man, to die in place of his son, and there follows an unseemly wrangle, while the body of Alcestis lies before them awaiting burial. The home truths he hears from Pheres impinge, and when Alcestis is brought back to him from the grave he is no longer so utterly unworthy of her; for he has learnt his lesson that by saving his life he had really lost it. The tart treatment of a rather sugary theme provides a mixture not to all tastes, now or then. Of course, a character who is ignorant of weaknesses in himself which are obvious to the audience belongs more to the realm of comedy, the rather cruel comedy of a Malvolio. But it is easy to make too much of the failings of Admetus. Indeed there are few plays more likely to be misinterpreted in the light of modern preconceptions. The assumption of the folk-tale is maintained; a man's life is more valuable than a woman's and no one except Pheres, who has a personal motive, criticizes Admetus for accepting his wife's sacrifice, which it was perhaps not open to him to refuse. What in his egoism he naively supposed to be a blessing turned out not to be a blessing at all. Alcestis too fails to fulfil modern expectations. She is more than candid about the greatness of her sacrifice, and the tone she adopts towards her husband does not suggest the degree of devotion which would lead to such a sacrifice. The answer is that she is moved more by her own ideal of a wife's conduct than by personal affection.[16]

Admetus, though slightly ridiculous, is not without a certain simple magnificence. No doubt he did well enough among the horse-loving lords of Thessaly. But Jason in the *Medea* is selfish and insensitive in a coarser way, and his lesson is too hard, and comes too late, for him to learn from it. If he was once the dazzling hero of the Argonauts there is a

distant pathos in the change that has overtaken him, but it is not clear that Euripides wants us to believe that he had ever been a hero; we are not encouraged to see his past through any romantic haze.

It is certainly not all gain that Euripides looked on the heroic age with disillusioned eyes. His vision may be truthful, but it revealed to him a remarkable number of mean heroes. This was due in part to his desire to divest his characters of the lofty associations of heroic myth, to ensure that our moral sense should not be dazzled by irrelevant splendours; but it is due, too, to a lack of sympathy with his material and the blighting effect of irritation combined with cleverness. Our emotions may be stirred, our indignation roused, by the sight of the sufferings of his men and women, but there are very few to whom our hearts ever go out. Good characters are rare and often featureless, like Polyxena, or chilling, like Hippolytus. Aristotle commented on the unnecessary badness of many of the characters of Euripides, and it is true that some, Menelaus for instance in the *Andromache*, take surprising pleasure in stressing their own unscrupulousness; perhaps they reproduced a tone to be heard in real life among those exulting in the discovery that morals were only an unnecessary convention. But the absence of characters capable of calling forth a strong respect or of winning us by their charm is a real fault. Euripides was not unable to draw attractive characters, but it rarely suited his purpose to do so.

The second group of plays, those inspired by the war and expressing patriotic sentiments, are more surprising than important. The *Heracleidae* is the earliest and least significant of them. When the Athenians were contemplating their legendary glories, there was an episode which they regarded with especial satisfaction, proud of their disinterested interference on behalf of the right. After Heracles' death Eurystheus had tried to protect himself against the risk of future punishment by making away with the children of Heracles while they were still too young to protect themselves. Athens alone had given them sanctuary, and had met and defeated the armies

of Eurystheus rather than give them up. The plot is thin; it is diversified not unskilfully with episodes, one of which, the self-sacrifice of one of the children in response to the bloody demands of an oracle, contains some poetry. Presumably the Athenians got a satisfaction denied to us from the references to their local legends, and perhaps a half credulous hope that the Spartans and their allies, the descendants of Heracles, might really be punished for their impious invasion of the land of the benefactors of their family, and that Eurystheus might really show his anger from his grave in Attic soil. The Angels of Mons appealed to an age much further removed from the period of divine interventions.[17]

The lost *Erechtheus* is thought to have been produced about the same time. One of the longest of our fragments is derived from it, because the orator Lycurgus a century later embellished a patriotic oration with the speech of the queen, Praxithea, who, in response to the command of the oracle, made the hardest of all sacrifices to ensure her city's victory, the sacrifice not of herself but of her child. If *Richard II* were lost, John of Gaunt's speech might have survived in a similar way.

The third and most interesting of these plays is the *Supplices,* which tells the story of another proud episode in Athenian legend, the story how Theseus compelled the Thebans to surrender for burial the bodies of those who fell in the unsuccessful attack of the Seven. It is reasonable to associate it with an episode in the Peloponnesian War which caused much bitterness, the refusal of the Thebans to give up the Athenian dead without conditions after the battle of Delium in 424, though it may not have been written immediately afterwards. It was an ugly trick of the Thebans, which they seem to have repeated after the battle of Haliartus a generation later.[18] The play is one of the richest sources for Euripides' political ideas, but it is not altogether clear which of the points of view which he puts forward with all the persuasiveness at his command is the one he himself favoured. The weaknesses as well as the merit of democracy are tellingly enumerated; and the following sagacious warning that men are apt to declare war without counting the cost of waging

it—the most Thucydidean passage in Euripides—is put into the unworthy mouth of the Theban herald: 'Consider carefully, and do not return an answer swollen by the consciousness of strength, because your city is free. For Hope is the bane of men; she has embroiled many cities by raising their spirit too high. When a people comes to decide on peace or war, no one votes with his own death before his eyes, but each thinks of ill as befalling only his neighbour; if he had had death in sight when he cast his vote, Greece would not be perishing from lust for war.' (476–85.)

Although we do not know the year in which the *Supplices* was produced, this can be nothing but a reference to the Peloponnesian War, and it is hard to believe that Euripides is not expressing his own view. Another curious feature of the play is a parody, or something very close to parody, of the Athenian custom of commemorating by a funeral oration in each autumn of wartime those who had fallen in battle for the city during the year. This custom is familiar from the account of the ceremony given by Thucydides and the great speech put into the mouth of Pericles in the first year of the war. So Adrastus makes a set oration over his fallen allies after their bodies have been recovered by force of Athenian arms. One of these allies was Capaneus; the place of Capaneus in the legend of Thebes is quite unambiguous; when he was clambering up the scaling ladder he declared that he would sack Thebes whether Zeus willed it or no, and Zeus promptly made an example of him by blasting him with a thunderbolt. This well known episode is mentioned earlier in the play, and it is clear that Euripides accepted the ordinary version of it. Indeed, we know of no other. It is with Capaneus that Adrastus begins his speech. 'Though he was rich he was no prouder than a poor man' (861–3), and he goes on to describe his moderation and affability. Euripides, when describing in this way the man who represented to the Greeks the type of insolent daring, may have wished to hint that the speakers who delivered the annual encomium on the city's dead went too far, in certain cases, in attributing to them[19] virtues they had never possessed.

As if to make amends for a touch of vinegar Euripides follows it up with a mouthful of saccharine. Evadne, the distraught widow of Capaneus, makes a wholly unexpected appearance and plunges from a conveniently placed rock into the flames of her husband's funeral pyre, unmoved by the pathetic remonstrances of an aged father. On a stage where violent action was rare this scene must have been extremely surprising, and it may have been welcome to spectators who found the rest of the play poor in entertainment. But though this demonstration of private grief might be regarded as revealing a not irrelevant aspect of the public policy which results in war, Euripides has done nothing to show that this was his train of thought, and one suspects that here, as on a number of other occasions, he had thought variety worth attaining at the expense of dramatic unity.

These are the plays which are richest in patriotic sentiment, and also in political thought; but in fact the most violent expressions of hatred and the happiest expressions of his patriotism occur in isolation in other plays. Two savage outbursts on the perfidy and private immorality of Spartans disfigure the *Andromache,* and suggest that the years of the plague and the Spartan devastations of Attica had put an unbearable strain on the sanity even of Euripides. On the other hand, in the *Medea* the suggestion that the child-murderess is to find sanctuary at Athens calls forth one of the noblest poems in praise of the city's graciousness and humanity ever written; it was appropriate that the Athenians should have heard it on one of the last days when her majesty was still unimpaired, on the eve of the outbreak of the war which was to bring twenty-seven years of deterioration ending in disaster.

> 'Sons of Erechtheus happy from of old, children of the blessed gods, sprung from a holy land never spoiled by war, you cull the fruits of peerless wisdom, ever moving delicately through the clearest air, where once, they say, the nine Muses of Pieria brought to birth golden-haired Harmonia.

> 'From the fair-flowing streams of Cephisus men tell how Cypris draws fragrant breath of gentle breezes and sheds them over the land; and with a sweet-smelling garland of roses in her hair she sends the Loves to take their place beside Wisdom, that they may forward all manner of excellence.' (824–45.)

The Attic land was not for long unspoiled in war, and though it was not at once that Wisdom and the Loves abandoned Athens, the next century knew only a prose wisdom which lived retired in Plato's Academy instead of being shared by all at the Dionysia. But these lines are enough to show that Euripides too had his vision of an ideal Athens.

The patriotism of the *Supplices,* as has been shown, was neither unqualified nor unreflective; it may even have marked the transition to the spirit of the *Troades* which is often considered, probably rightly, to be an open attack on war inspired by its renewal in the expedition to Syracuse. As in the episode of Evadne's suicide, the emphasis is laid on the personal anguish which war brings in its train, and on the degrading cruelties of victory. It exploits, sometimes a little shamelessly, those situations which call forth a ready tear, the pain of parting, the pathos of a dead child. But the Prologue give the whole play a sinister significance. For angry gods reveal that the victors will soon be in no better plight than the vanquished. 'Foolish is the man who sacks cities and makes desolate temples and tombs which are sacred to the dead, only to perish afterwards himself.' (95–7.) The Athenians, all agog with the preparation of the splendid fleet which was to perish in the great harbour at Syracuse, can hardly have failed to apply these final words of Poseidon to their own ambitions; they may even have thought, as they were to think ten years later on the night[20] news came that Athens no longer possessed a fleet, of the cities which they had sacked, of the men they had killed, and the women and children they had enslaved.

The plays of the third group have in common elaborate and exciting plots with sudden changes of fortune and un-

expected recognitions, the two things which seemed to Aristotle essential to the best drama. They show, too, an awakening sense of much of which the older drama had been little aware, of the strangeness of distant lands, which have a sweet unreality half of faery-land, half of comic opera, of the enticements of love, and above all of the unimaginable freaks of chance. At times they are satirical and questioning, and one, the *Electra,* is deadly serious, but they all show a new virtuosity in the handling of plot, and they work on the audience, not by revealing to them a vision of terror or grandeur, but by means of the cruder and simpler pleasures which come from suspense and hair-breadth escapes and last-minute rescues. The poet seems to have been trying to give his hearers release rather than to provoke thought, though he can never write for long without revealing by some challenging generalization his own interest in ideas and their concise expression.

The *Telephus* (438) may have been the first play of this type; it appears to have contained a striking scene in which the ragged hero reinforced his petition by snatching the royal baby from its cradle and threatening to dash its brains out. We know that the play made a great impression, and it may be that it contained not only ragged costumes but a foretaste of Euripides' later manner. A clearer example is the celebrated *Cresphontes,* probably produced about 425. Polyphontes had murdered the king of Messenia, and seized his throne and his reluctant widow, Merope, but her child, Cresphontes, was smuggled out to safety. In the hope of forestalling revenge Polyphontes offered a reward for the child's death. As soon as Cresphontes was on the verge of manhood he returned to his country in disguise and claimed the reward on the pretence that he had himself killed Merope's son. His story was believed, by Merope as well as by Polyphontes, and she planned to kill the murderer of her son. She stole upon him while he slept, and Plutarch tells[21] of the breathless suspense which prevailed in the theatre while she paused with her sword raised above his head, and an old slave was just in time to bring about a recognition, which was soon followed by the destruction of Polyphontes

himself. Here we have the essential ingredients of this kind of play, a recognition which brings about a complete reversal of the course of the action. There is, of course, no better example of this type of drama than the *Oedipus* of Sophocles in which Oedipus makes the most terrible of all recognitions, of himself as the wanted criminal. But one would no more describe the *Oedipus* as a melodrama than *Hamlet,* because it contains much more than an enthralling plot.

Of the other plays the *Iphigenia in Tauris* has a similar recognition, this time between brother and sister, which changes the course of the play; the *Helen* a recognition between husband and wife; and the *Ion,* the most complicated of all, two recognitions, one false and the other genuine, the second leading to a reversal as violent as that of the *Cresphontes.* The lost *Antiope* must have been similar, with its recognition between the mother and the long lost twins, Amphion and Zethus, and the ensuing punishment of their mother's persecutor, Dirce.[22] The lost *Andromeda* told the more romantic story of Perseus and the rescue of Andromeda from the sea monster and their subsequent marriage; there was no room for a recognition scene here, though plenty for excitement and suspense. But the real interest of the play is that it is the first recorded drama to deal with the theme of love triumphant over obstacles and subsiding into a blissful wedlock. Euripides started the audience dreaming of their own wish-fulfilments, and they have rarely stopped since.[23] All these plays, except the *Telephus* and *Cresphontes,* belong pretty certainly to the last ten years of his life, and so does the *Electra* (?413) in which the traditional recognition between brother and sister leads on to the treacherous enticement of Clytaemnestra into her daughter's trap. But here the interest of a well constructed plot is subordinate to more important issues.

Of the plays which do not fall readily into any of these groups the *Cyclops,* our one complete satyr-play, is a dramatization of the story of Odysseus in the cave, in which Euripides succeeds better with the broad humour of bur-

lesque than one might have expected. The *Phoenissae* (409) is remarkable chiefly for the very large slice of legend which it succeeds in including within its limits, as much as was contained in some trilogies; it may have been something of an experiment. The *Orestes* (408) is a more striking play; like the *Electra* it transfers the story of the matricide into a modern setting in which it appears in all its bizarre loathsomeness; the horrified citizens of Argos meeting for an anachronistic trial condemn the criminals to death; but at this point the play loses the seriousness of the *Electra,* and the interest shifts to the exciting expedient by which the criminals save themselves, and the end of the play is enlivened by the ludicrous terror of a Phrygian slave of Menelaus. In fact, after the brilliant opening scene in which Electra nurses her delirious brother afflicted with visions of the Furies, and the vigorous debates of the middle of the play, the end seems slightly frivolous. It has even been suggested that, like the *Alcestis,* it was a substitute for a satyr-play, which is improbable because the lighter tones are confined to the last scene.

The *Iphigenia in Aulis,* like the *Bacchae,* was written in Macedonia and produced posthumously. The extraordinary differences between the two plays are a warning against any assumption that works composed about the same time show the same spirit. Iphigenia herself is a real character and there is pathos in her self-sacrifice, but the play as a whole contains more social comedy than any other of Euripides. The emotion most conspicuous is embarrassment, the embarrassment of Agamemnon when he receives his daughter who arrives at the Greek camp along with her mother supposing that she is to make a distinguished marriage, though the real purpose for which she has been sent for is to be sacrificed; the embarrassment of Clytaemnestra when she makes an effusive speech to her supposed son-in-law only to find that it is the first word he has heard about the marriage. It is very entertaining, and Clytaemnestra's snobbery is as good as her embarrassment. Clearly Euripides could have written admirable farce if he had cared to, and the convention had allowed. But the *Iphigenia* has nobility as well as farce. Were it not for the

mutilation of the end and the extreme corruption of the text it would probably enjoy greater celebrity than it does. Of the two remaining plays, the *Heracles*, written within a few years of 420, and the *Bacchae* written in Macedonia and performed after the poet's death, more must be said later.

The foregoing sketch should suffice to show both the variety and the apparent incoherence of the work of Euripides, in so far as we can judge it from the surviving plays and fragments. Certain things are so obvious that they hardly need saying: that he was interested in ideas and in the pointed expression of them which the growing taste for rhetoric encouraged; that he was sympathetic to the purification of religion, and ready to reject the grossness of mythology with its morally inadequate conception of the gods—an attitude which cannot have been very startling to many Athenians of the late fifth century. He raised fundamental questions and showed little respect for the authority of tradition, yet even the case for tradition he was prepared to state, and in the *Bacchae* he states it so eloquently that it has seemed to many that he must have come to believe in it. In the absence of further guidance an attempt to find the most profitable point from which to examine the work of Euripides must be more harzardous, the choice more personal, than is the case when we consider Aeschylus and Sophocles. A possible method is to ask which are the plays which really matter, not necessarily the most skilful or the most faultless plays, but those into which he seems to have put most of himself; this is highly subjective, but that objection is hardly to be avoided.[24]

Which of Euripides' plays, we may ask, are the most significant in revealing his thought on the ultimate questions about the nature of the world in which man finds himself and man's place in it? We shall not all give the same answer, but certain plays do stand out, the *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, the *Heracles* and the *Bacchae*, not perhaps as in all senses the best plays, certainly not the most pleasing plays, but as the plays into which Euripides has thrown himself most completely. It may not be accidental that up to a point all four are concerned with the same theme, with the relation of

man to the forces which work upon him, his struggles and his defeat. A rather fuller consideration of these plays will serve to throw light not only on the thought but on the dramatic method of Euripides.

2 THE SIGNIFICANT PLAYS

The 'Medea'

The voyage of the Argonauts was one of the most familiar of Greek legends; everyone knew how Jason had been enabled by the help of the witch-maiden, Medea, to overcome insuperable obstacles and return with the golden fleece to claim his inheritance from Pelias, his wicked uncle. The events which followed the return were perhaps less well known. Euripides' first play, *The Daughters of Pelias* (454) dealt with the story of Jason's revenge. Medea showed the daughters how to rejuvenate the old, giving proof of her powers by restoring to its youth an elderly ram, which she cut up and boiled in a cauldron with the appropriate charms. But when the daughters treated their father Pelias in the same way, she saw to it that the charms failed to work. The vengeance was complete, but Medea and Jason were driven out, and removed to Corinth. There they lived for some time as exiles, until it occurred to Jason that he might better himself by marrying the king's daughter; Medea, his alarming bride, would probably have to be put away. Since she was an exile with no kinsmen to stand by her and demand at least the return of her dowry, this would present little difficulty. In any case Medea's dowry had been the golden fleece, the betrayal of a father, and the murder of a brother, things not easily returned. As for the great oaths by which Medea had bound him before she left her home, an obligation additional to the ties of marriage, Jason was too enlightened a person to worry much about the consequences of breaking them. For Jason does not belong to the heroic world, but to the Greece of the fifth century; the facts of the legend are accepted, its atmosphere is rigorously suppressed. As in the *Alcestis,* the Chorus avoids recalling in its songs the strange adventures which the characters have

undergone in the past. In moving from Colchis to Corinth Jason and Medea have traversed centuries as well as seas. Medea is just a wife, friendless and unwanted in a strange city; Jason's treatment of her is shabby, but he is an ambitious man tired of rusting in obscurity and it is worth a lot to him to marry a tyrant's daughter.

This is the situation revealed in the Prologue by Medea's Nurse, her confidential slave, and the Old Man attending on the children, to whom she opens her heart. In most of his plays Euripides banishes all attempts at dramatic illusion from his Prologues in the interest of clarity, in order that he may get his play properly started with the least delay; when foreknowledge is required a god is usually found to supply it. In the *Medea* there is no god, yet it is likely that the audience did not know at the beginning of the play that Medea was going to punish her husband by murdering his children—and her own. That may be why the Prologue provides hints of the future to an extent unusual in Euripides, and a statement of the heroine's character; for had Medea been any other woman in the world she would have acquiesced in banishment or made the best of a bad job in Corinth. The action of the play is determined entirely by Medea's disposition. We are told that she has a great spirit, a stubborn heart, and is hard to check; and the Nurse is afraid that in her hatred of Jason she may do some harm to the children, and she warns them to slip past their mother without attracting her attention. And we hear her cry of wrath from within the house as she sees them pass by. It may well be that Euripides was presenting the story in a form unknown before, and gave these hints of the outcome of the action, though at this stage Medea had not yet decided what form her vengeance was to take.

Medea's cries, her appeals to the gods who guard the oaths which Jason swore, prepare for her entry. Yet when she comes there is a surprise, for she is outwardly composed. Medea can master her rage when it serves her purpose. Her purpose is revenge, and to obtain it she must first win the sympathy of the Chorus, and they are easily persuaded, being women, to sympathize with a woman's wrong.

But at once a new obstacle arises. Creon, the king, Jason's new father-in-law, orders her to leave the country at once, since he fears the threats which she has been heard to utter. All Medea can achieve by supplication and much feigning of innocence is to secure a respite of a single day, a single day in which to plan and carry out her revenge; what it is to be she does not yet know. But to be complete it must not involve her own capture and punishment. For if she is captured even after punishing her wrongers, her enemies will not only destroy her but gloat over her ruin, and to her the mockery of enemies is the supreme evil. This prepares the way for the coming of the Athenian king, Aegeus, who will offer the refuge which alone can make her vengeance complete.

The ensuing scene in which Medea confronts Jason does not directly forward the action. We know the situation, but Jason has to be seen to be believed; if Medea is not to forfeit every shred of sympathy by her crime, Jason must be represented in such a shape that we desire only his punishment. The scene in the *Electra* of Sophocles in which Clytaemnestra and Electra argue their case has a similar function. Jason is utterly selfish and utterly unconscious of his selfishness. His self-satisfied answer to the just reproaches of Medea is enough to alienate any audience. Yet Jason's case is not so completely null as a modern reader may be tempted to suppose. Had an Athenian wife acquiesced in her husband's replacing her by a rich and distinguished bride for the sake of her children's prospects and a share in the material comfort, she would have been admired, by some at any rate, for rising superior to the characteristic weakness of her sex; others, perhaps, would have censured her indifference to her family honour. But such behaviour would not have been completely out of the question, since the bonds of wedlock were not so sacred that they might not be broken in the family interest. Indeed an Athenian might be under an obligation to terminate a satisfactory marriage in order to unite himself to a niece or half-sister to whose hand the family property was attached.[25] Jason's obligations to Medea were, of course, far heavier than those of the ordinary husband to his wife, but in the course of her

argument some curious notions are implied. 'If I had not borne you children, it would have been pardonable in you to want this new marriage.' (490.) And again, 'One word will destroy your case; if you were not a cad, you ought to have won my consent before making this marriage and not wedded in secret.' (585.) None the less, in spite of his self-approving offer of financial assistance, Jason is wholly odious, and the hint of punishment with which the scene ends causes no displeasure.

The next scene opens abruptly with the entrance of Aegeus. This is sheer coincidence. There is a break in the train of causation where there should be no break. All that can be said in defence is that the Athenians were less surprised at his arrival than we are, because the stay of Medea at Athens as the mistress or wife of Aegeus was familiar to them from the Theseus legend, and Euripides may already have produced his *Aegeus* in which the story was dramatized. At all events the scene is of vital importance; once assured of an asylum Medea can plan a complete revenge. Aegeus has been consulting the Delphic oracle about a remedy for his childlessness. At once Medea sees her way clear; that is why she responds with unnecessary energy to a piece of news of no great intrinsic interest to her: 'Good heavens—are you still childless?' (670.) She sees to it that Aegeus inquires why she is looking so wretched and when his sympathy is aroused falls on her knees as a suppliant and asks him for a refuge in her exile, and tricks him into swearing an oath—though Jason's oaths had done her little good—that he will protect her. In return she promises the aid of her skill in magic to help him to a family; she does not reveal, however, the relevant fact that before she leaves Corinth she proposes to exact a revenge which will not make her a more desirable guest. How far it was possible within the convention of tragic acting for a male actor in a mask to suggest the exploitation of feminine sex appeal it is hard to say; it would not be inappropriate to the situation.

The moment Aegeus has gone Medea casts off her demure melancholy and bursts out in savage exultation; and she chooses her revenge—what will hurt Jason most, the loss not of his own life, but of his bride and his children; he will be

left quite alone; the cost to Medea does not matter provided Jason suffers. The remonstrances of the Chorus are futile; they keep their promise of secrecy, and find relief in their wonderful song on Athens, the city of humanity which is to be asked to harbour the woman who has slain her children. This scene is closely and effectively parallel to the earlier one in which Medea cajoled Creon. In each Medea triumphs by a combination of deceit and the suppliant's appeal; in each the break caused by the departure of her victim is marked by anapaests from the Chorus, which indicate a heavier division than commonly occurs within a scene; and in each the second part begins with an outburst of scorn from Medea at those who do not realize what she is.

The fulfilment of her plan requires the appearance of a reconciliation with Jason. The obtuseness with which he succumbs to her flattery and accepts the dangerous offer of a gift to his bride is hardly less repulsive than his earlier selfishness. But Medea begins to find what her revenge is going to cost her; she has to plead that her children may be allowed to stay in Corinth, the children she has herself condemned to death. Twice she breaks down, and has to reply with a feigned answer to the clumsy condolences of Jason. But as always she succeeds, and the children leave with the poisoned robe, the wedding present for Jason's bride.

The news that the presents have been accepted, and the sentence of exile on the children remitted, brings Medea face to face with the consequences of her decision. She must say goodbye to them, as if she were going into exile and they staying in Corinth, but knowing that the parting has a grimmer finality. Before their uncomprehending laughter even her resolution yields; twice she is on the point of forgoing her revenge, but she reminds herself of the sneers of her enemies, reminds herself that the bride is already being consumed by her burning finery. But having confirmed her resolution to do what she knows to be better left undone, she does not act. There are two weighty reasons why she cannot proceed at once to carry out her resolve. Though there is room in the theatre for much which, if strictly examined, is seen to be

irrational, there are some things which are likely to disturb an audience. It would be intolerable for Medea to commit such a crime while there was still a possibility that the revenge of which it was a part might have miscarried. And even more important, the narrative of the bride's death, horrible though it is, must not follow after the murder of the children. There is no room then for more horror. So we must first listen to the gruesome story of the reception of the children by the sulky princess, of her sudden delight at the loveliness of the gifts, of her laughter at 'her lifeless image' decked in her finery in the mirror, and of the agonizing death in which her father perished with her. Then the climax is mercifully rapid. 'My friends, I am resolved what I must do, kill my children at once and go, not delay and give them to be slain by another and less loving hand. Any way they must die, and since they must, I will kill them who gave them birth. Come, arm yourself, my heart. Why linger, when there is this dreadful pressing work to do? Come, hapless hand, grasp the sword, grasp it and draw near the line where you will begin life's race anew, a sadder life; do not play the coward, do not even remember that your children are very dear, that it was you who gave them birth; for this short day forget, then mourn them after. For though you kill them, yet they were dear to you—but I am an unhappy woman.' (1236–50.) Soon the last cries of the children are heard from the house, but the final horror is softened by the Chorus whose song drifts away from the present to memories of old unhappiness.

In the final scene, which maintains a level of emotional bitterness unusual at the close of a Greek play, Jason and Medea meet for the third and last time. He comes in the hope of saving his children, not from their mother but from the fury of the Corinthians whose king she has murdered. As he is on the point of battering down the doors his wife appears above, where the gods sometimes made their epiphanies, on a chariot drawn by dragons sent by the Sun, her grandfather. A last wrangle shows her hatred unabated, her misery comforted only by the sight of his. Her answer to his lamentations, perhaps the cruellest answer in Greek tragedy, is 'You do not

suffer yet, wait till you are old' (1396). For to a Greek living in his less sheltered world the ultimate misfortune was an old age untended by children and a death without offspring to perform the last offices and the cult at the grave. She refuses him the bodies of his children to bury. She will place them herself in the shrine of Hera Acraea. And she foretells his death, crushed by a timber of the rotting *Argo*.[26]

There are features here to perplex a modern reader. What has the chariot of the Sun to do with Medea? Since when was Medea a prophetess? If she had really possessed foreknowledge and had celestial chariots at her beck and call, half the obstacles which she overcomes in the play would have disappeared. This is a point of importance, and its right appreciation is vital for the understanding of other plays even more than for the *Medea*. Euripides' plays are often more about the present than the legendary period in which they are ostensibly placed, but the poet could not treat myth in this way without involving himself in contradiction. He cannot remove himself completely from the fabulous world from which his plots are derived. The direct and arbitrary intervention of the gods cannot be eliminated, nor can it always be forgotten that the human characters are themselves often nearly allied to the gods. In fact the reader must learn by experience what to discount, and wonder whether the ancient audience was always successful in getting the answer right. To a certain extent Euripides makes things easier for us by restricting the supernatural and the irrational to the Epilogue, and to the Prologue if this is spoken by a god. He cannot do this consistently, because the divine element in his stories is too pervasive, but he does it in the *Medea,* except that we must allow Medea to be a genuine witch with her mysterious drugs which consume her rival in unearthly flames and will, we must believe, give Aegeus the child he could not otherwise beget. About such things the hardiest rationalist can easily suspend disbelief. The Epilogue is on a different level from the rest of the play, which is virtually complete without it.

At the end of a play, Euripides liked to do two things, to tidy up, by informing us of the future destinies of the chief

characters, and to attach his story to some existing cult or worship. That is why Medea is given prophetic power; he wants to inform us of Jason's end. If he had introduced a god, as he often did, to speak the Epilogue, this could have been done quite naturally; since that is not convenient, he puts it into Medea's mouth. In the same way at the end of the *Hecuba* he puts prophecies into the mouth of a far less likely person, The Thracian king Polymestor. As for the linking up of the story with a contemporary institution, Aeschylus had done it, certainly in the *Oresteia,* probably in other trilogies as well. This was quite natural when it was with a procession from a well-known Athenian festival or the establishment of the great Court of the Areopagus that the drama ended, but Euripides had an affection for remote and obscure cults, which can hardly have been of interest to most of his audience. So here; there was a cult of Mermerus and Pheres, the children of Medea, in the temple of Hera Acraea at Corinth. The Corinthian children cut their hair and wore mourning in their honour down to the time of the capture of the city by the Romans.[27] Two stories were told in explanation of this procedure: one, that the children had taken sanctuary here after their mother's flight and had been sacrilegiously killed by the Corinthians, who had spread the story that Medea had murdered them herself; the other, that Medea buried her children in the temple immediately after birth hoping to make them immortal, but her magic miscarried. If it is true that Euripides invented the story of the child-murder as shown in this play, it is easy to see whence he may have drawn the hint.

Many plays of Euripides have endings like this. Perhaps he had antiquarian tastes and collected out-of-the-way tales for their own sake; it would not be the only way in which he anticipated the Hellenistic writers of a century and a half later. There is nothing to be done but to recognize the trait and admit that it is very odd.

'Passions spin the plot; we are betrayed by what is false within.' The *Medea* is the first play of which this is true. Not fate or an inherited curse or divine anger is the cause of this

tragedy, but the fact that Jason is both unscrupulous and self-righteous and that Medea will go to any length rather than be scorned. When she has to choose between forgoing her vengeance and killing her children, her lust for revenge is personified for a moment as an evil spirit, an *Alastor* (1333), such a one as well might, according to beliefs already fading, dog the murderer of a brother. Euripides slips into the traditional way of speaking, but such beings do not exist in the world of Jason and Medea, and the struggle is revealed as proceeding in Medea's soul. Perhaps the times were not quite ripe for this way of looking at things. Euripides gained only third prize that year and he wrote few other plays which were so remote from the myth, or revealed so much of the workings of the human soul.

The 'Hippolytus'

In the *Hippolytus* Euripides shows himself a greater poet than in the *Medea,* though not a greater dramatist. The divine is no longer hidden away in the Epilogue; the play is framed by two epiphanies, and the springs of action are apparently divine as well as human. Hippolytus himself, the child of Theseus and an Amazon mother, is something of a freak. He scorns Aphrodite and refuses her all honour. Aphrodite is both a person and the symbol of the creative force of the universe manifest in sex. Now sexual asceticism was not an ideal to which anyone in Greece at this time paid even lip-service. At the most it was a requirement of the ceremonial purity associated with certain worships. Attempts have been made to explain Hippolytus as a follower of Orphic principles,[28] but although Orphics, and Pythagoreans who were commonly confused with them, abstained from many things, love does not appear to have been one of them; on the other hand the Orphics tended to be vegetarians, and few vegetarians are, like Hippolytus, passionate hunters. This characteristic of Hippolytus must be accepted as one of the things given by the story, but it may not be irrelevant that his mother was one of the Amazons, traditionally haters of men, whose son might be indifferent to sex.

The story of the son of Theseus and his cult at Troezen, a city with which Athens had connections, must have been familiar to the audience if only from Euripides' earlier play on the same subject. The purpose of the rather bare Prologue is to show the angle from which the action is to be viewed, and to express a conception of Aphrodite. Aphrodite, like all gods, demands honour, and Hippolytus alone refuses to give it to her; this states in mythological language the fact of Hippolytus's virgin disposition. His worship is reserved for Artemis. Phaedra, his stepmother, is to be the tool which shall secure for Aphrodite her revenge: 'Phaedra is a noble woman, yet she must perish; for I do not count her suffering of so much weight that I shall forgo the punishment of my enemies which will satisfy my honour.' (48–50.) Hippolytus proceeds at once to illustrate what she has said by offering a garland to the statue of Artemis which stands at the side of the stage and by refusing, in spite of the good advice he receives, to pay his respects to Aphrodite who stands opposite. His old attendant, wiser than he, prays that his insolence may not be punished 'Youth should be pardoned, if out of high spirit it utters folly about you. Pretend not to hear; for in wisdom the gods should be superior to men.' (117–20.) These words, as Euripides saw, though he could not have so expressed it, reveal the problem which cannot be solved by a religion which is mainly animistic. Its powers are stronger than human and to that extent divine; but they are blind, and man will not for ever worship blind strength. The Dionysus of the *Bacchae* is just such another god.

It is the Chorus who reveal in their entrance song that Aphrodite has already struck. Phaedra is sick and has taken no food for three days, and they speculate on the causes of her sickness and readiness to die. We know enough to see that their guesses are wrong. Phaedra follows at once, borne on to the stage in a litter; only Euripides could have written this scene. Phaedra is delirious, and through her confused utterances we can discern, as those on the stage cannot, the passion which has brought her to destroy herself.

PHAEDRA. Send me to the hills; I will go to the pinewoods where the hounds are on the track in pursuit of the hinds with dappled coats. For God's sake, let me set on the dogs and hurl the Thracian lance poised beside my yellow hair, a hunting spear in my other hand!

NURSE. Why do you trouble yourself with such thoughts, my child? What have you to do with hunting? . . .

PHAEDRA. Artemis, Lady of the marsh beside the sea, and the galloping grounds of the horses, would that I were on thy plains, breaking in steeds of Enete! (215–31.)

We know that these apparently wild and random sayings are directed by the thought of Hippolytus, the hunter and horseman, that her long-concealed secret is finding an outlet as the strength necessary for self-suppression fails. When Sophocles showed Ajax mad he was possessed by an illusion; had the situation been as Ajax supposed, what he said would have been good sense. Euripides, here and elsewhere, reproduces something of the mental confusion which in real life afflicts those whose wits are disturbed, 'matter and impertinency mixed, reason in madness'. It is clear from this scene, and from the account of the frenzy of Heracles,[29] that Euripides felt a serious interest in abnormalities of the mind, the aberrations to which human beings are liable, and he was justly celebrated for his skill in representing them. But it is important to distinguish between this power to render the effects of certain conditions of mind and the power to portray character. We are accustomed to use the term 'psychological' in both connections, and to both the study of the human soul is relevant, but they are not the same. When we say of a writer that 'his psychology is primitive', we mean that he lacks perception of the way in which, as we suppose, human beings work, so that the responses of his characters are excessively simple. But though it may be necessary, in order to create satisfying characters, to have a conscious appreciation of the intricacies of the soul, such an appreciation is not by itself enough to ensure their creation. Euripides was certainly aware of much of which earlier writers were ignorant; he had

observed and reflected on passions and states of mind both normal and abnormal, and his attempts to understand them were, as far as they went, 'scientific' in spirit. But all this does not mean that he could portray character better than Sophocles, since it is not entirely, or even mainly, by psychological knowledge that character is portrayed. Phaedra's delirium is probably more like a real delirium than it would have been if Sophocles had been writing the play; it is also very effective dramatically, but it is not part of a profound character study; it is not revealing like the madness of Lear, rather it is appropriate like the madness of Ophelia.

By putting together what it has learnt from the Prologue and from the Chorus the audience can read Phaedra's secret, but the Nurse has to drag it from her. The firmness of Phaedra's resistance is the measure of the honesty of her purpose; her failure to maintain it is due in part to a trick of chance, like the beginning of Oedipus's discovery of himself. As there the accidental mention of the meeting of three roads, so here the accidental mention of Hippolytus's name is sufficient to start the revelation. Phaedra tells her story: love, a vain struggle to get the better of it, and the decision to die as the only way to maintain her self-respect and her children's good name. Her self-analysis is of the same pattern as Medea's but calmer and more complete: 'When love dealt me this wound I considered how best to bear it. At first my purpose was to hide my affliction and say nothing. . . . Further I proposed to endure my aberration not ignobly and conquer it by temperance. Last, when I could not subdue Cypris in this way, death seemed to me the best expedient—and who will say I was wrong?' (392–402.)

To speak of love as Cypris or Aphrodite did not imply in Greece any reference to a personal God; in an elevated style the name need mean nothing more than the abstract noun, though there is no doubt that in this play Euripides uses Cypris as a synonym for love more frequently than he would if he were not anxious to keep the audience in mind of the sinister personality already revealed in the Prologue. Indeed at one point he sacrifices consistency to dramatic

effectiveness and lets Phaedra speak as if she too were aware of Aphrodite's purpose, although elsewhere she regards her passion as a natural, though catastrophic, occurrence: 'But Cypris my destroyer I shall make happy by departing this life today.' (725–7.) The audience were probably no more conscious of inconsistency here than when Medea personifies her passion for revenge as an *Alastor*.

The Nurse is unwilling to let Phaedra die without an effort to secure the one remedy which, she supposes, might save her. In spite of Phaedra's direct prohibition she goes off and makes advances to Hippolytus on her behalf.[30] His voice is heard raised in anger, and Phaedra knows that all her efforts to escape with honour from her predicament have failed. Between her and Hippolytus no words pass, but she has to listen while her stepson rails at her in a fury, which is due partly to genuine shock and partly to injured pride that his celebrated purity has not protected him from her advances. The bitterness of Phaedra as she listens to the boy's discourse on the wantonness of women is past expression. She who would have died rather than compromise her honour, if only she had been left to die in peace, who has now lost, thanks to the Nurse's indiscretion, her own good name and her children's, must be lectured by a young man who does not very well understand what he is talking about. She goes and hangs herself, as well she might. But she leaves behind her a false accusation, that Hippolytus has offered her violence. It would be hard to imagine a more wicked action. Yet Euripides makes it comprehensible that a not ignoble woman could do such a thing. She has been cheated out of a death which would have concealed her shame, and baffled in her effort to save her children's good name. The pitiless denunciation by Hippolytus, based in part on a misreading of the situation, rankles, as is shown by the way she turns his last words against him, 'So let someone teach women modesty, or else let me go on railing at them' (667, 8). As she makes her last exit Phaedra says, 'But another will suffer in my death, that he may learn not to be puffed up by my misfortunes; this affliction he shall share with me and learn modesty' (728–31).

Sophrosyne, which I have translated by 'modesty', means duly restrained and moderated behaviour in general, as well as in sexual matters, to which Hippolytus had particularly applied it.

It is likely that we have here a reference to an idea which had been lately hit upon by sophistic thought and clearly expressed by Antiphon: 'He who has no desire for what is shameful or evil, and has no contact with such things, is not pure (*sophron*); for he has no occasion to exert self-mastery in order to behave decently.'[31] Phaedra may well argue that it is not for Hippolytus, who has never known temptation, to read lectures to one who has striven so desperately to overcome it.

So Phaedra dies, and for the reader the play loses some of its tension, but on the stage the scene which follows might have great power. Hippolytus returns to find Theseus arrived back from his mission and Phaedra dead. Her death cannot much surprise him, but he has no suspicion of the slander against himself which she has left behind her, and he does not at first perceive the meaning of his father's cold anger. But the set speeches, in which Theseus prosecutes and Hippolytus conducts the defence with up-to-date arguments based on probability, could hardly fail to chill a modern audience as much as they do a reader. They have much in common with those which find a more appropriate place in the History of Thucydides.[32]

The slander does its work; Theseus curses his son with one of the infallible curses given him by Poseidon, and sends him into immediate exile. As Hippolytus leaves Troezen his horses are miraculously startled; he is thrown and injured, and brought home to die. Here the miraculous element intrudes more into the action of the play than anything in the *Medea*, yet it does not really affect the rationalistic tone of the whole.

The end of the play is dominated by Artemis, whose appearance balances that of Aphrodite at the beginning, and more than one interpretation can be placed on it. She reveals to Theseus that his rash credulity has lost him his son, that

his wife has perished, in spite of her 'certain fashion of nobility' (1300), through the schemes of Aphrodite which all her efforts could not overcome. And before taking a reluctant departure, that her divine nature may not be sullied by the presence of death, she reconciles father and son, and Hippolytus's forgiveness releases Theseus from the dreadful guilt of kindred bloodshed.[33] Some have regarded this treatment of Artemis as hostile and contemptuous. She blames Theseus for not consulting an oracle before judging his son guilty, yet Euripides did not believe in oracles. She excuses her failure to protect her favourite from the malice of Aphrodite by alleging a principle of non-interference among the gods which makes curious theology (1328–30). She offers Hippolytus a piece of somewhat unedifying consolation, that she will slaughter Aphrodite's favourite mortal, meaning Adonis, by way of revenge. And she does not remain by his side to the end. Gods who cannot do more than this for their friends, it is suggested, are not worth much.

This is a formidable list of accusations, but all the same I do not think this is meant to be an attack on Artemis. The gods of popular belief were like this, and any detailed representation of them must involve certain inadequacies. But there is also poetry, and we need not suppose Euripides to have been insensitive to the beauty of conceptions which were part of the Greek tradition, even if he did not approve of them. In the life of Hippolytus, Artemis stands for something real, otherwise the striking scene at the beginning of the play, when Hippolytus presents to his divine patroness the garland culled from the sacred meadow, would supply a false scent. And at the end her radiant presence brings peace, and some measure of enlightenment; for we must accept her verdict that Phaedra was a victim of something stronger than herself and that Hippolytus does well to forgive his father's rashness.

ARTEMIS. And now farewell. For me it is not lawful to look upon the dead, nor to defile my gaze with the sight of those who breathe their last; and this I see is near you now.

HIPPOLYTUS. Fare you well too, blessed maiden, and go your way! Our friendship lasted long, but you leave it easily. And I forgo my bitterness against my father at your bidding, since before, too, it was my way to listen to your words. (1437–43.)

This is not an attack on an outworn theology; rather Euripides is using for his own purposes the pathos implicit in the old tales of friendship between men and immortals, each bound by the limitations of their own nature, the divine as well as the human. The serenity of the close affords a pleasing contrast to the snarling bitterness of the *Medea*.

The play is not primarily a warning of the dangers of inhibiting one's sexual urges. Hippolytus's indifference to Aphrodite can, no doubt, be translated not unfairly into modern psychological terms. Euripides would not have denied that a lack of balance is apt to lead to disaster, but the particular disaster which afflicts Hippolytus is not a natural consequence of his peculiarity of temperament. Once the anger of a personal Aphrodite is rationalized away, the effect loses all direct relation to the so-called cause. If all passions can be called Aphrodite, there is nothing unique about this one. So far as the body of the play is concerned the practical effect of the Prologue is to make the audience feel that there is somehing desperate and destructive about Phaedra's passion, not that it is a by-product of a divine intrigue. Nor has Euripides taken pains to reveal the inner workings of Hippolytus's mind; he is a straightforward character, not a study in morbid psychology. It was to the poet in Euripides that he appealed. The source of the impulse to write the play is to be found rather in Phaedra, the 'immoral heroine' whom he illuminates with his understanding. Perhaps he was attracted too by the contrast between the two sorts of *sophrosyne* illustrated by Phaedra and Hippolytus respectively.

In the three years which passed between the *Medea* and the *Hippolytus* war broke out. Attica was invaded, and the Athenians crowded within their walls were attacked by one

of the most appalling outbreaks of plague ever recorded, to which Pericles himself fell a victim. Nothing of all this has left its mark on the play.[34] Euripides is still absorbed in the study of the nature of the emotion which can overpower reason.

The 'Bacchae'

The *Bacchae* was written nearly a quarter of a century later, after Euripides had retired to Macedonia. But it is convenient to consider it next because it is the only other surviving play which is dominated by a god in the same way as the *Hippolytus*.

Dionysus was a nature god; wine was his special gift to men, but he was manifest also in the growth of vegetation and of animals, above all in the tremendous vitality of the bull. The process of his worship, some forms of it at least, was no decorous ceremonial, as with the established Olympian gods, but a mad communal revel, of which the climax was the rending in pieces of the animal victim and a sacramental meal of the raw and bleeding flesh in which the god's spirit was incarnate. Self-abandon, exaltation, and ecstasy were the accompaniments of this worship, and since women were conspicuous among the god's votaries the opposition of authority to what it regarded as a licentious orgy is easily understood.[35]

Greek legend contained a number of stories of the invasion of Dionysus and of the punishment of those who offered resistance to the commands of the new god.[36] The most famous instance was that of Pentheus, ruler of Thebes, who refused to accept the worship of the new divinity even though he was the fruit of a union between Zeus and his own aunt, Semele. In consequence the women of Thebes were driven mad and rushed off to Mount Cithaeron in frenzy, and there Pentheus was torn in pieces as he tried to spy on them; his mother Agave was their leader. These stories are probably a piece of genuine folk-memory. A new faith did enter Greece in those years, and after a struggle a compromise was reached, and a somewhat tamed Dionysus was numbered among the

accepted gods; he received from Apollo himself a share of his shrine at Delphi.

The rejection of the god by his own kin and his subsequent vengeance was a good theme for a dramatist, and others besides Aeschylus had already used it. Euripides' attention may have been drawn to the subject by his visit to Macedonia, where on the barbarian fringe the worship of the god was less restricted and emasculated than in Greece proper.[37] With what feelings of mixed attraction and repulsion the old poet may have looked on at the self-abandon of the northern Maenads it is hard to say. To over-civilized man burdened with an excess of self-consciousness the primitive can suggest release from many wearisome complications. But Euripides is far from representing the mass emotion and the submergence of individuality which were the prelude to the bloody rites of Bacchus as being wholly admirable. Nor indeed is the primitive ecstasy of the Bacchanal his real theme. The Chorus, and the Herdsman who describes the miraculous activities of the Maenads on Cithaeron, represent with marvellous force and sympathy the excitement, the happiness, and the strength of the worshipper made one with the god. But with bold disregard for the conventions of time Euripides introduces ideas which had no place among the savages who received the original revelation of Dionysus. To them the contest between faith and reason meant nothing, for rationalism as a self-conscious force was not to exist for some centuries. But Euripides introduces the controversies of his time in a double aspect: first the clash between tradition, with its claim to possess truths revealed in the first instance by the gods, and reason, which sets itself up as the sole judge of what can and cannot be; second, he shows rationalism employed in the defence of tradition to explain away those parts which by their crudity offend more sophisticated minds. In order to make room for all this in his play he does not hesitate to represent the religion of Dionysus as a new faith in a newborn god and, in the same breath, as a traditional belief so old as to be 'coeval with time' (201).

For Dionysus had come long ago, and his worship in

Greece had lost most of its old fire. But new faiths still presented themselves advertising bliss for their votaries here and hereafter. The growing inadequacy of the old state religion gave an opening both to scepticism and to more potent superstitions, just as was the case in Rome four centuries later. We hear enough of new cults at Athens at this time to justify us in assuming that their attractions and dangers were a subject of discussion. Since the Piraeus was the chief port of the eastern Mediterranean, it was natural that Athens should be particularly exposed to the advent of new faiths from Anatolia. The use of rationalistic explanations to water down ideas too improbable for advanced minds can be paralleled from the practice of the Stoics a century later and, in Euripides' own day, perhaps from the sophist Prodicus.[38] All this is not to imply that the play is primarily about the fifth century; the drama can stand by itself as the representation of a tragic action, but the calculated incongruity of letting Tiresias speak of the antiquity of the faith of Dionysus a few years after the god's birth can only have been intended to remind the audience that the play had a certain relevance to the present.

Dionysus in his anger has driven the women led by the princesses, the sisters of his mother Semele, in frenzy from their homes. He himself is disguised as a human missionary leading a band of worshippers, who are the Chorus. Cadmus, the aged father of Semele, and Tiresias, the no less aged priest, are prepared to accept the faith; their reasons emerge in the course of an argument with Pentheus, the young grandson of Cadmus to whom he had resigned the rule of Thebes. Pentheus is in a position not unlike that of Creon in the *Antigone*. But his objection to a form of worship which takes women revelling on lonely mountains is intrinsically more reasonable than Creon's to the burial of a traitor. He conforms in general to the type of the tyrannical ruler, but with great skill Euripides has allowed him one individual trait, an exaggerated and lubricious interest in sex. In reply to his angry remonstrances at their joining this impure and antisocial worship Cadmus urges the credit which will accrue

to the family from the acknowledgement of his nephew's godhead, Tiresias the importance and beneficence of the new god. As for such objectionable features as the unlikely story of his having been sewn up in Zeus's thigh, a rationalistic explanation can be provided. We may recall that the Chorus, who have already hymned the mystery of the double birth, (94–100) had felt no need of any explanations.

Pentheus is moved only to more violent anger. The stranger is brought in a prisoner, and his calm insolence rouses Pentheus to fresh outbursts. He is led off to prison, but an earthquake demolishes the prison and Pentheus is further humiliated. Again king and god confront each other, and Pentheus is given his last chance; one of those who had seen the revels of the Bacchanals in all their purity, and watched the discomfiture of the men sent to bring them home, recounts the train of miracles, but to no purpose. Pentheus does not relent. Dionysus now uses his divinity to impose his will on the king, attacking him at his weakest point, his morbid curiosity about the sexual activities of the Theban women. The eager instrument of his own humiliation, Pentheus dresses up as a Bacchanal, practises clumsily with the thyrsus, is vaguely pleased in an imbecile way with his new clothes, yet all the time preserves just enough of his old self to bring out the horror and cruelty of the divine mockery. The ancients did not doubt the right of an injured party to take revenge, and they had no inhibition about enjoying vengeance; as Odysseus in the *Ajax* of Sophocles shows, the man who denied himself such pleasures felt called upon to explain his peculiar conduct. Yet there can be little doubt that the god's indulgence in the pleasures of self-assertion is regarded as excessive. Euripides goes out of his way to give hints; as the victim departs to meet his fate, to be torn to pieces by the women he wants to spy on, we are reminded that he is still only a young man. And when all is done, and Cadmus mourns over the dismembered corpse he has painfully collected, the tale of his affectionate devotion to his grandfather brings it home to us that Pentheus was something else besides a tyrant.

Though our text lacks a large part of the final speech of Dionysus, now revealed as a god, enough is left to give us a fair chance of catching Euripides' meaning. There is no mitigation of the punishment; Cadmus, who had welcomed the new god, as well as Agave, who had led the Bacchanals when they tore her guilty son to pieces, go into hopeless exile uncomforted by the prospect of ultimate happiness which receives a perfunctory mention only because it was part of the story. Their lives are ruined and there is no future at Thebes or anywhere else.

DIONYSUS. Too late ye knew me, and when ye should ye knew me not.
CADMUS. True; but you are too heavy on us.
DIONYSUS. For I, a god, was by you blasphemed.
CADMUS. Gods should not be like mortals in their anger.
DIONYSUS. Long ago Zeus my father decreed that these things should be. (1345–9.)

With the utter lameness of the final answer the truth is clearly hinted. Dionysus is not a vindictive personal god, but a force. Was Pentheus wrong to resist the force? Was the fate of Hippolytus a consequence of one-sidedness in honouring one force of nature at the expense of the other? In neither case does the action of the play give a plain indication. But it did not lie in Euripides' hands to alter the traditional story. It may well be that he recognized in these deities forces with which man must come to terms, that Hippolytus's unbalance leads to disaster; that Pentheus, however justified he may have been in disliking a religion which involved so dubious a form of worship, was denying something which may not be denied. Aphrodite and Artemis represent two extremes; two other extremes are represented by the indignant denial of Dionysus on the part of Pentheus, and the complete submission to him on the part of the Chorus who praise faith at the expense of reason. For them *sophia*, 'cleverness', is merely a snare, and the only safety is to accept the traditional beliefs and practices, what is in effect a kind of revealed religion, though the revelation was of ritual rather

than of dogma. Just what he thought himself on these questions Euripides has not chosen to tell us; his purpose was to describe reality rather than to judge it. And if his description struck the old-fashioned Athenian as rationalistic and irreverent, there were others, devotees of the new wisdom, to whom he must have seemed to do more than justice to antiquated beliefs. If it is asked whether we can trace any change in the attitude of the poet in the quarter of a century which separates the two plays, there is no definite answer. It may be that the sympathy with the anti-intellectuals expressed in the *Bacchae* would have been beyond his range at the time when he wrote the *Hippolytus,* but we have no right to assert that it is so. Where we can perhaps detect a change is in his technique, his mastery of his material. In spite of its intentional inconsistencies the *Bacchae* is practically perfect, whereas some of the subject matter of the earlier play seems not completely digested, and the formal rhetoric of the courts is not so well adapted to the medium of drama.

The 'Heracles'

The date of the *Heracles* is uncertain, but if we assume it to have been written half way between the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae* we shall not be more than a few years out. According to the normal version of the Heracles myth, Heracles was driven mad early in his career, and the celebrated Labours were a penance and an atonement for the murder of wife and children which he had perpetrated while out of his mind. Euripides transferred this tragedy to the end of his life when, as in the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles, Heracles was at the summit of his glory and looking forward to the enjoyment of the fruits of his toils. He appears to have no mythical authority for doing this, so it should be possible to discover the motive which led him to make so important a change. Further, a new cause had to be found for the Labours to replace the atonement for murder. The choice is significant; his father, his human father,[39] Amphitryon, had been exiled from his home in Tiryns for an act of manslaughter. It was to purchase his father's

return that Heracles undertook the tremendous burden of the Labours. This Heracles is no hard Dorian superman, but a loyal and devoted son, and, as the course of the play will show, the tenderest of fathers.

During the absence of Heracles from Thebes to perform the most difficult of his tasks, the conveyance of Cerberus from Hades, there was a revolution in the city. A certain Lycus, again an invention of Euripides, seized power, and, in accordance with the normal principles of power politics, proceeded to strengthen his position by removing every possible source of future danger to himself, among them the family of the legitimate ruler, Amphitryon. The Thebans, though they owed much to Heracles, did nothing to help his wife and children in their peril; gratitude and its opposite are a recurrent theme throughout the play, though not the main theme.

The first part of the play reveals the situation. Amphitryon, Megara the wife of Heracles, and her children are suppliants at the altar of Zeus. Their supplication is in vain and they give way to the threats of Lycus that he will burn them alive on the altar if they will not leave it. So they resign themselves to death. In the nick of time Heracles returns from Hades, the tables are turned and it is Lycus who is put to death. All seems well, and the Chorus sing that Heracles is indeed the son of Zeus, that the gods care for justice and ensure its triumph. The word 'justice' is the cue for the beginning of an entirely fresh action. Without warning, Iris, the messenger of the gods, and Lyssa,[40] spirit of madness, make their appearance and deliver what is virtually a new Prologue. It is Hera's will that Heracles shall go mad, and murder wife and children. Now that the Labours have been accomplished, she is at last allowed to indulge her spite against the fruit of her husband's unlawful love. There is nothing in Greek tragedy resembling this sudden introduction of a new and unexpected action; no warning has been given to the audience, no such hint of coming events as is supplied in the *Medea* by the anxiety of the Nurse. Even the title of the play, *Hercules Furens*, with its suggestion that madness is part of the subject, has no ancient authority; in antiquity it was plain *Heracles*.

Accordingly the jubilant song of the Chorus on the triumph of divine justice which immediately precedes the catastrophe does not really correspond to the choral odes which Sophocles sometimes places in a similar position. For here there is no consciousness of irony. The audience are no more aware of what is to come than is the Chorus, while the effect of the Sophoclean odes is to reveal to an audience, which knows the future, the blindness which is the normal lot of mortals.

Hera's purpose is carried out; only Amphitryon is spared. Heracles slowly recovers his sanity, and, like Agave in the *Bacchae*, gradually learns what he has done. His first thought is to commit suicide, not so much because he has been dishonoured like Ajax, but because after such a calamity nothing is left. He is checked for the moment by the arrival of his friend Theseus. At the same time as he brought Cerberus up from Hades he had rescued Theseus, who was detained below in consequence of an ill-advised attempt to carry off Persephone. Now Theseus, hearing of the troubles at Thebes, has come hot-foot from Athens to see if he can be of any service to his benefactor. The contrast between Theseus and the ungrateful Thebans is clearly meant to be felt. But he shows more than gratitude; he shows a complete disregard for a convention commonly supposed of vital importance, and many of the audience must have felt their gratification at the admirable behaviour of the Athenian hero give way to a shudder of dismay at his unheard-of action. No impurity, no contamination, is so terrible as that caused by the shedding of the blood of kindred, and Heracles was very properly sitting with veiled head lest he should defile the pure rays of the sun by contact with his guilty infection. Creon, out of no personal malice, had rebuked Oedipus for not doing likewise.[41] But no sooner did Theseus learn the situation from the Chorus than he rashly placed his hands on the infected shoulders of his friend and stripped from his head the garment with which it had been covered. The divine, he argued, cannot be contaminated by anything human. Creon in the *Antigone* had used the same argument to defend his refusal

of burial to the dead, and on his lips it had been a rationalistic blasphemy,[42] but we must suppose that what Theseus here says comes from the heart of Euripides.

There remains the question of the future; Heracles' first thought is to curse god and die; Theseus urges that this is the action of an 'ordinary man' and unworthy of a hero, the benefactor of all Hellas. Heracles argues in a set speech the unlivableness of life. Hera has been his foe from birth, and from its start there has been a flaw in the foundations of his life; now he will recognize the triumph of her petty jealousy and die. Theseus, the beginning of whose speech is lost, appears to counsel resignation, using the old argument that even the gods have to put up with misfortunes and men cannot hope to escape them. Finally he offers Heracles a home at Athens. The reply of Heracles is quite astonishing: 'I do not believe that the gods acquiesce in unlawful unions, and as for their binding each other with fetters, I have never thought that they did so, nor shall I ever be convinced of it, nor that one lords it over another. For the god, if truly a god, has need of nothing. These are the unhappy tales of minstrels.' (1341–6.) None the less, he will put up with what chance has sent him, and live, because it would be cowardly to die. Yet after all this he concludes his speech by describing his misfortune as due to 'Hera's chance'.

What are we to make of this extraordinary tangle, and what is the meaning of the sudden burst of enlightenment with which the conventional Heracles outdoes the free-thinking Theseus? What is the burden of the play to which this passage is the obvious climax? The answer is important, since the play poses in the most challenging form the problem of undeserved suffering. Heracles was traditionally the benefactor of mankind, who cleared the world of monsters; but traditionally too he was a violent and unbalanced character, more admirable than amiable. Euripides went out of his way to represent him as gentler and more humane than he was ordinarily conceived to be.[43] At the moment when he has achieved the most exacting of his Labours, and returned in time to save his family from imminent death, when he can

look forward to a little peace after a life of toil, he is suddenly overwhelmed by a disaster which is wholly unconnected with anything he has done himself, which appears to defy the elementary rule of drama that the events which happen later should be the natural consequence of those which have gone before.

It is interesting to observe that if we take the play at its face value, the senseless catastrophe which overtakes Heracles resembles the catastrophe of Oedipus as it would strike us if Oedipus's conduct had been uninfluenced by suspicions about his birth and by the warnings of oracles, and it had been suddenly revealed to him after years of rule at Thebes who and what he was. In both cases, we may say, an innocent man was stricken, but in the play of Sophocles the oracles give a sense of divine purpose, and Oedipus's efforts to avoid his destiny supply the play with a tautness in the structure which the *Heracles* lacks, at least if the relation between the two halves is one purely of juxtaposition.

Efforts have been made to show that there is a fault in Heracles which leads naturally to catastrophe, an excess of physical strength, which involves a fatal lack of balance resulting finally in self-destruction. Or again, that he violates the law of due measure by the excess of his anger with the Thebans for not coming to the rescue of his family, and that the shedding of Lycus's blood disturbs his sanity.[44] The first of these is a possible theme for a Greek play, but Euripides gives no indication that it is the play he was writing. The second implies a squeamishness about revenge wholly alien to Greek thought. Is it then a declaration of the utterly random quality of Chance, a reflection of a wholly irrational universe best given by an irrational plot? This is not an impossible view; at the time the play was written the old belief in the balance of good and evil in human fortune was breaking down into a mere sense of the vicissitudes of life, and the word 'chance' was more and more often heard on the lips of characters in plays and of men in real life. That we must accept what chance sends is the moral that Heracles himself draws (1357), and the introduction of the second half

of the play by a sort of new Prologue would be a not unnatural way of emphasizing the lack of causal connection between the two halves. The following lines from the *Hecuba* show that belief in the supremacy of a blind chance was a theme which Euripides might have used for a play. 'Zeus, what shall I say? That you have regard for men? Or is this a fond illusion, and Chance really supreme in the affairs of mortals?' (*Hecuba* 488–91.) Talthybius had been moved to ask this question by the sight of Hecuba's unmerited sufferings, and he hints at the answer. Perhaps the *Heracles* confirms it.

Yet this view is not altogether satisfactory. Again and again we hear of the malice of Hera as the source of Heracles' misfortunes; if they are really fortuitous, Hera is not an obviously appropriate symbol for the fact. The plays already discussed show that Euripides was very ready to use the gods to represent real forces. The reader familiar with the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae* is bound to feel that Hera cannot be dissociated from Aphrodite and Dionysus as they appear in those plays, even though it is not to be maintained that every god Euripides introduces can be made to carry a similar significance. Yet for Hera there is no such obvious equation as for Aphrodite or Artemis, and if Hera has as much significance in the play as the emphatic recurrence of her name suggests, then we have lost one of the clues essential to its understanding.[45] But we can make a not unplausible guess at the sort of thing Hera may have stood for. It is generally agreed that her worship in the Mediterranean goes back to long before the coming of the Greeks; she may be the 'mother' goddess who is conspicuous in Cretan remains; in Greece the centre of her worship was the Heraeum between Tiryns and Mycenae. A natural consequence of the Achaean immigration into Greece was a union between the northern sky-god Zeus and the principal deity of the conquered country. For the local gods were a real force, and the new-comers must make terms with them, even when they had reduced the old worshippers to slavery. But behind the union of the sky-god with the goddess of the country we shall expect to see signs of the previous discord; thus, although Hera was parent

of an adequate, and Zeus of an almost excessive, progeny, their union was all but barren. Ares was the only child of any consequence to be the issue of their marriage. On the other hand the notoriously unharmonious life of the divine pair is a reflection of the artificial nature of the combination.

It would be absurd to suggest that Euripides had any suspicion of the historical origins of the city's gods, but the tradition was not without influence on the way in which theological thought might develop. Myth represented Hera as perpetually trying to thwart her husband's purposes, at Troy, over the birth and life of Heracles, over Dionysus. So when Zeus came to be regarded less as the patriarchal head of a tumultuous family, more as the wise ruler of the universe, the power which tended to thwart him might reasonably become identified with that factor, whatever we choose to call it, which delays and obstructs the fulfilment of the good. I do not think we can point to any clear case where Hera is so allegorized, but in Virgil's *Aeneid,* where the old gods are half ornamental and half symbolical, Juno comes very near to playing this role. It is not impossible that in the fifth century, when the conception of Zeus as supreme ruler was already becoming familiar, a similar meaning should have been attached to his wife's efforts at frustration.

'For until he had accomplished his bitter toils destiny preserved him, and his father Zeus did not suffer Hera or me to harm him. But now that he has finished the tasks set him by Eurystheus, Hera wishes to fasten upon him the guilt of fresh bloodshed.' (827–31.) This is the explanation given by Iris of the sudden change in his fortune, and we can see through the rather crazy theology that Zeus is in some limited way the minister of fate, but his right to restrain Hera is conditional.[46]

If we accept some such solution as this the inner contradictions cease to be intolerable and the play acquires a coherent pattern. Such theology is not the main point of the play but rather a device to help Euripides to his real purpose. Until it is clear that the disaster which overtakes Heracles is due entirely to an external force and not to any

defect in the behaviour or character of the hero, we cannot attend undisturbed to the second half of the play. The fact that man can be overtaken by undeserved catastrophe is accepted, and the symbolical form in which the fact is clothed does not reveal why this is so; it may even be pressing the symbolism too far to conclude that this apparent injustice is due, not to blind chance, but to something in the structure of the universe which Euripides does not or cannot further explain. However that may be, the function of the last act of the play is now clear. It shows the conduct of a great and good man in the hour of utter disaster.

It is profitable to contrast the behaviour of two other heroes in comparable affliction. Ajax, who has been humiliated and lost his honour, kills himself. He does so not in the moment of realized despair, but after due reflection; and after pondering all the considerations which could persuade a right-minded man to choose life, Ajax chooses death because honour is more to him than wisdom. He is the simplest case. Oedipus finds himself in a plight even worse than Heracles; he has acted not in madness but in blindness; the nature of his acts is such as to cause more self-loathing than Heracles suffers, and in addition he is condemned by his own solemn curse. Like Heracles he recognizes at once the hand of a god in his affliction: 'It was Apollo who did this.' His self-blinding has a symbolic fitness, for when he possessed sight, he failed to see what was before his eyes. It is the only response he can make to a situation which needs a gesture, an expression of his horror at his violation of nature. But unlike Ajax and Heracles he has no moment of rebellion. He is appalled that the gods have seen fit to use him so, but he never doubts that it is for the gods to do what they will to men. That perhaps is why he never thinks of taking his own life; though he can live only as an outcast, it is for the gods in their own good time to relieve him of the burden of existence. Heracles by no means feels about Hera as Oedipus does about Apollo. Hera is an enemy, stronger than a human foe, but not morally superior; morality may even be irrelevant to her. Theseus has to remind him that to bear

a grudge against the gods is merely futile. At the same time he lacks Oedipus's motive for not committing suicide, for he has no such sense of an overriding divine purpose in which he must acquiesce. Under the mingled persuasion and rebuke of Theseus he responds to an ideal of conduct which is purely human. It may be said that he lives for the same reason as Ajax dies, because his code of honour requires it.

But the code has changed; it has become less hard and savage, yet to obey it requires a truer courage. Ajax can die because life without honour is intolerable, Heracles must live, however reluctant, because a loftier ideal of human conduct forbids a hero to acknowledge that he has not courage to live. But for this code there is no sanction but man's own vision of the highest and the demands of his own self-respect. He is akin to the Heracles whom Prodicus the sophist represented in his famous allegory as choosing Virtue rather than Pleasure.[47] It was over a century before the Stoic creed was formulated, but there is a natural and undoctrinaire Stoicism which is far older, and the Heracles of this play was one of its earlier followers.

Of the drama of Sophocles we may say that it reveals the working out of the divine purpose; there is hardly one of the surviving plays in which we do not see some prophecy fulfilled. His human characters are no puppets of fate, and their will is free, but we see the exercise of their will guiding the action according to the god's purpose. If we take these four plays of Euripides as representative of his work, as we are entitled to do by their obvious seriousness, is there any similar generalization to be made? At first sight the divine purpose is almost as conspicuous as in Sophocles; the action of the *Hippolytus,* of the *Bacchae,* and of the *Heracles* is dependent on the will of a god. Yet we do not feel these plays to be different in kind from the *Medea* in which only human purpose counts. And the reason is that what we feel in Sophocles to be a purpose in the background becomes in Euripides a force divorced from consciousness, so that there is no intrinsic difference between the passion of Medea which

is called passion, and the passion of Phaedra which is called Aphrodite. Heracles, Pentheus, and Agave are all deprived in the course of the play of the normal possession of their senses; Phaedra is delirious; Medea, though technically sane, speaks as though attacked by an external power which is once personified as an *Alastor*. Euripides in fact has turned his attention to the extremities of human emotional experience; but he lived at a time when men were only beginning to distinguish between the abnormal and the supernatural, and when ordinary language was inadequate for the description of the rarer sorts of psychological experience. Since the stories which he necessarily used as the subjects of his plays were full of divine action which could not be eliminated, there is naturally much ambiguity, which probably troubled the ancients nearly as much as it does us. But in spite of obscurity of detail it is true that Euripides devoted much of his best work to the attempt to describe and understand the human soul in rationalistic terms.

These are the qualities most manifest in the plays which I have selected for their seriousness. But Euripides was a writer with great range and versatility, and it is impossible to do justice to his varied talent without examining at least one play of a different type. The *Ion* will do as well as any to show his faculty of turning material to advantage, his wry sense of humour, and a lightness of touch which is not always appreciated.

The 'Ion' and Related Plays

The legend of Ion was a piece of pseudo-history invented to account for the origin of the Ionian branch of the Greek people; it had no associations, no connection with ritual, so that there was scope for the dramatist to use his powers of invention freely. Apollo loved Creusa, the daughter of the king of Athens; he violated her in a cave under the Acropolis, and when she had borne his child in secret she left it in the cave, whence it shortly disappeared; though she did not know it, her baby was taken to Delphi and laid on the steps of Apollo's temple, where his priestess found it and brought it

up as a temple servant under the name of Ion. Creusa was married to a foreigner named Xuthus, who had helped the Athenians in a war against Euboea. No child was born of the union, so they set out for Delphi to consult the oracle, and Apollo, so we are told, intends to give Ion to Xuthus as his own child and to make the boy known to Creusa only when they are back in Athens. This mildly discreditable arrangement is calculated to avoid the scandal of the god's making public acknowledgment of his wild oats; but it requires that the god should lie to Xuthus. Moreover the god of prophecy fails to foresee how things will turn out.

Creusa arrives at Delphi in a highly emotional state; she is visiting the home of her ravisher, and bitter memories are revived, but also the hope that the god will make amends by restoring the baby who vanished from the cave, who may, after all, not be dead. She meets her motherless son, and each learns something of the other's misfortunes. Creusa wants to ask the god about her baby's fate, and pretends that she is acting on behalf of a friend to whom she attributes her own misfortunes. Ion is shocked to hear of such goings-on in connection with the god whom he serves. When Creusa has gone, and while the question is being put to the oracle how Xuthus may acquire an heir, Ion addresses the god his master in these words: 'And Phoebus I must admonish. I do not know what has come over him. Does he do violence to maidens and then betray them? Does he beget children by stealth and take no heed when they die? This is no way for you to behave; as you are one of the rulers you should practise virtue. The gods punish a mortal who is wicked. How can it be right for you to make laws for mortals, and yourself be guilty of lawlessness? It will not happen, I know, but supposing you and Poseidon and Zeus, the greatest of the gods, paid damages to men for the rapes you commit, you would soon empty your temples of their wealth in atoning for the wrongs you do. You do wrong because you think only of your pleasure, never of the consequences. It is not right to blame men for doing as the gods do, but the gods for setting such an example.' (436–51.)

What exactly is the tone of this? Is it a denunciation of immoral deities intended to open the eyes of the audience to the inadequacy of their religion, a continuation of the good work started by Xenophanes? It has been commonly supposed that it is, but, I think, wrongly. The attitude of Xenophanes was by now familiar to those capable of being impressed by it, and as a mere restatement this would be rather laboured. It is, I think, very sophisticated, the beginning of an Alexandrian playfulness. It is highly piquant that this pure and ingenuous temple-slave should scold his master so roundly. The fact remains, of course, that the rebuke was justified, and those old-fashioned spirits who disliked Euripides' treatment of the gods would find it hard to make a case against him on purely rational grounds. But the passage is really intended for those who could enjoy a little cleverness at the expense of Apollo of Delphi, perhaps with the better conscience as his oracle was notoriously pro-Spartan. This is the beginning of something which reached its final development in Ovid, for whom the old gods were only elegant playthings. The view that Ion's disillusionment is a serious element in the drama need hardly be considered.

Xuthus hears from the oracle that he has a son, the first person he will meet on leaving the shrine; he, of course, meets Ion. Here follows a piece of comedy of a different sort. Xuthus, coarse, clumsy, but not ill-natured, at once embraces his supposed son without even waiting to explain the reason for his outburst of affection. Ion, who does not much take to Xuthus, is highly suspicious of his attentions, and acquiesces with some reluctance in obedience to the oracle which he may not doubt. Then, while his emotions are still stirred by his meeting with Creusa and her tale of the childless maiden, he asks the obvious question, 'Who is my mother?' For this Xuthus is wholly unprepared. Ion in some irritation at failing to get an answer observes ironically, 'Then I suppose I am sprung from mother earth', to which Xuthus testily replies, 'The ground does not bear children' (542). As it was the particular boast of the royal house of Attica, into which Xuthus had married, that their ancestor Erichthonius had

precisely this origin and was born of the earth, the answer must have aroused many chuckles among the irreverent. So must the surprise of Ion that Creusa should have been allowed to marry a foreigner, even though he was a grandson of Zeus. Ion is not to be put off by his father's reticence, and extracts from him an admission that he had been to Delphi before, that he had been introduced to a *thiasos,* a company of Bacchanals, and indulged in holy drunkenness: 'So that is how I came to be begotten!' (554.)

Creusa has yet to learn what Apollo has said; it is to be kept secret for the present, and the Chorus are forbidden to tell her. It is clear that the news must be unpalatable. Her husband will no longer be her companion in misfortune; worse, a stepson will be master in her house, and a foreigner of dubious origin will be heir to the throne of Athens in default of a child of hers. But no one but herself can know what is to be the bitterest blow, the disappointment of the hope that her child might after all be given back to her.

The Chorus, who are her handmaids, tell her all in spite of their foreign master's threats. She is overcome. The old family slave tries to rouse her to take instant action to prevent this youth of unknown birth from being planted on the royal house. But Creusa is thinking of other things and does not hear him. When he has finished and we await her answer, she suddenly bursts into song; but her monody has nothing to do with the old man's arguments. She denounces Apollo in front of his temple in the city of his glory, and tells the story of his crime. 'I will cry your shame, son of Leto, under the light of day. I was gathering yellow flowers in the folds of my garment, to make a golden-gleaming wreath, and you came upon me, and your hair was ablaze with gold. You took my white wrists and led me to the couch within the cave, shamelessly, though I cried for my mother, and you, a god, as my lover, fulfilled desire.' (885–97.) The monody, a sort of operatic solo, was increasingly used in Euripides' later plays. Usually it is a somewhat hysterical and incoherent outpouring, well-fitted to display the virtuosity of the soloist but of little meaning to a reader. There is nothing hysterical about

Creusa's monody, and the outburst is more startling than if she had used spoken verse.

She now enters enthusiastically into the scheme for vengeance. She gives the old man poison which he volunteers to administer at the feast to be held in celebration of the discovery by Xuthus of his son. The plot fails; Creusa is driven to take sanctuary on the altar of her ravisher, and once again mother and son confront one another in ignorance. But there is an interruption; the priestess of Apollo gives Ion the cradle in which he was lying when she took pity on him; it is a clue which may help him to discover his mother, as indeed it does. For Creusa recognizes it and is able to pass an examination on the tokens it contains. Mother and son are united at last, but all is not yet plain sailing. As Ion had asked Xuthus for a mother so he now asks Creusa for a father, and the answer is Apollo. Ion in great perplexity at this gratifying reply is on the point of asking the god point-blank for an explanation, which would have included the awkward question why he had lied to Xuthus. This could hardly be allowed, so the play ends with the appearance of Athena, who reveals the excellence of Apollo's intentions and the future glory of the Ionian race.

Given in résumé this crowded plot can only sound jejune; actually the incidents are often handled with more dexterity and contrivance of suspense than a bald narrative suggests. Even so the contemporary English reader finds much to criticize. Coincidences which pass unnoticed in an *Oedipus* seem crude in this more realistic drama, and in spite of moments of psychological insight the plot takes charge of the characters too much. Creusa is a sympathetic character, yet she is an accomplice in an attempted murder of a more than usually unattractive kind. Ion's essential lack of sophistication is forgotten in the elaborate set piece where he contrasts the simple life of a temple-servant at Delphi with the difficulties which must confront an alien in high places at Athens (585–646). Character, in fact, is slurred for the sake of other considerations. But one reason why we are inclined to be unsympathetic towards the faults of this play

is that Euripides was here trying to do for the first time what has been done much more skilfully since. The great tradition of Greek Tragedy died away at the end of the fifth century, and its direct influence gave rise to nothing more than some Latin versions, now lost, and a number of learned imitations. But plays of adventure and coincidence like the *Ion,* with recognitions between parents and long-lost children, were the staple of the Middle and New Comedy, and belong to a tradition which has continuous links with our own. So it is natural that we should judge them by a different standard. But even if we are irritated by their obvious and crying defects, it is a pity not to recognize the large amount of good theatre and poetic charm that they contain. And only a poet of remarkable versatility could have written works so dissimilar as the *Ion,* and the *Heracles.*

It is important to remember the poetry as well as the versatility; it is what distinguishes the *Ion* from many more competent performances in the same vein, now lost and forgotten. The plot of the *Ion* is based on a rape, one of the more squalid forms of crime. So are many plays of the New Comedy, and the world of New Comedy, as Mommsen[48] pointed out with salutary vigour, is a spiritual desert in spite of its graces and refinements. The difference between the wooing of Creusa by the 'golden-gleaming god' and the sequel to a drunken party is the measure of the difference between Euripides and Menander. The moralist may object that if we 'plate sin with gold', the sin is the same beneath, but the moralist is rarely at his best when poetry is in question. Creusa's monody raises the *Ion* to a level which a Menander could never reach.

A quality conspicuous in the plays of this group is humour; it is not always supposed to be consistent with the dignity of ancient tragedy, and some readers are slow to give it its full value. Aeschylus and Sophocles were prepared to admit occasionally into tragedy characters from the lower classes whose homely speech was such as to raise a smile, but they did not allow either comic situations or sophisticated mockery of the mythical material, both of which are to be

seen in the *Ion*. In the *Helen* we meet something closer to the burlesque characteristic of the satyr-play when the bedraggled Menelaus, fresh from shipwreck, is repulsed by the portress of the royal palace. And in the *Electra,* which belongs in time and style to this group of plays, there is a more astringent humour which suits the grimness of the subject. It is an exposure of the full squalor of the myth of Orestes and the god who required a son to murder his mother, far more than any other play a downright attack on a tale which was part of the religious background of the conventional Athenian. Electra is a powerful character soured by the loss of the privileges which are the due of a princess; her pettiness is made slightly ridiculous by contrast with the worthy peasant to whom she has been married to prevent her having children of royal blood. Her one hope is that Orestes will come back from exile and restore her, and she has made for herself a wonderful idealization of a heroic and athletic brother. Orestes comes disguised, and it is suggested to her that he may have done so: 'You speak like a fool, old man, if you think my valiant brother would come here secretly out of fear of Aegisthus.' (524, 5.) But come in secret he has, and ready to slip over the frontier if he should be recognized. His dismay when he hears from Electra what she expects of her young brother is comically obvious (278–82). But there is nothing comic when by sheer ferocity she compels him to abet her in the murder of their mother.

3 SOME FEATURES OF EURIPIDEAN DRAMA

The outstanding difference between the drama of Sophocles and Aechylus and that of Euripides should by now be clear. Hardly ever does Euripides accept the myth and make it the subject of a straight play. The older poets were sometimes anachronistic because they did not try very hard to preserve a setting appropriate to the heroic age; past and present had a greater continuity for them than for us. Euripides is full of anachronisms because he is perpetually trying to escape from the heroic world into his own. This

attitude had consequences both for the form of Euripidean drama and for the effect it produced.

In spite of his considerable resource and dexterity Euripides is not among the masters of dramatic construction. This is partly because he put other things first; he may well have failed, at a time when drama was still a new form, to realize quite what its limitations were and the disastrous consequences of dissipating the unity of the action.[49] A play like the *Andromache,* in which the centre of interest is completely shifted during the action, can hardly be explained on any other hypothesis. But before we compare him with Sophocles to his disadvantage it is fair to remember that his subject matter was much less easy to put into satisfactory dramatic form. The felicity of Sophocles' drama is partly due to an outlook which is peculiarly suited to the form in which he gave it expression. The sense of an ever-present divine purpose itself lends unity to a theme and helps Sophocles to achieve the closely knit texture which is a mark of his style. Beginning and end are bound together when each is part of a single action, foreknown if not forewilled, by a superhuman power, and the interconnection is emphasized by the very fact that what is invisible to the actors is visible throughout to the spectators, a train of events leading to an appointed end without the knowledge, and even contrary to the intentions, of those who take part in them. It is only fair to Euripides to remember that when he abandoned this way of looking at things, he made the construction of his plays more difficult for himself. When, as in the *Bacchae,* his material helped, he was capable of taking full advantage of it.

There also ensued a corresponding change in the emotional effect to which his plays gave rise. For from motives which should by now be clear he reduced the stature of his characters. He removed them from the heroic world into one more like that of his own day. So long as drama is about those who, as Aristotle puts it,[50] are better than ourselves, our emotions may be strong as we watch their sufferings, but they do not take on the strength and vividness which they possess when they are called forth by the sufferings of those with

whom we can identify ourselves. We credit the heroic with a strength and endurance greater than our own, and even when they are struck down our admiration is not entirely replaced by pity. With the characters of Aeschylus we have not enough in common to be able to enter completely into their experience, and they are largely free from obvious human weakness. The men and women of Sophocles are closer to us, and we may feel active sorrow for a Tecmessa or a Deianeira. Yet pathos, the sense of acute and often painful pity aroused by suffering of the sort that is vivid to us in the light of experience, is not characteristic of Sophoclean drama.

But the rags in which Euripides dressed his heroes are a symbol of something far more important. These are persons with whom we can *sympathize* in the full sense of the word, share their sufferings. Now pathos is a very difficult emotion for a sophisticated writer to handle. Certain situations, those for instance connected with the sufferings of dumb animals or inarticulate children, are so appealing, evoke so immediate and so powerful a response, that it is dangerous to use them. They are a common stock on which only genius can leave the imprint of a personality. Homer triumphs with the dying Argus, the dog who lives long enough to wag his tail at his master returning home in the twentieth year, because Homer makes us feel that he is genuinely interested in the dog on its merits, and does not merely drag him in for the sake of effect, in order to tap a store of emotion. Euripides triumphs, it seems to me, when Medea says good-bye to the children she is going to kill; it is a necessary part of the play and Euripides handles it with sincerity.

Now the *Troades* contains a not less painful scene (686–798). The wretched captives await the order to sail away to servitude. Hecuba and Andromache console themselves at the moment of parting with the thought that Astyanax, the child of Hector and Andromache, may grow up to recover some of the glory of his house; they are interrupted by the herald Talthybius. The Greeks have decided to hurl the baby from the Trojan battlements, lest he grow up to cause them further trouble. The anguish of farewell is prolonged, and

at last Talthybius must take the child from his mother's arms, and Andromache departs into captivity. Then, after a scene of the most brilliant and brittle rhetoric, the trial of Helen before Menelaus, we return to Hecuba mourning over her murdered grandchild. Possibly it troubles a modern reader more than it should that Euripides borrows phrases from the *Medea* to use in Andromache's farewell. I cannot avoid a suspicion that Euripides, however skilfully, is exploiting his subject here, with a certain sacrifice of artistic integrity. Of course, if the play is strictly topical, there is no ground for complaint. If he felt he could best touch the conscience of Athens in this way, who shall blame him? *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a great work of art, but it did more good than many better books.

This emotion, which is so conspicuous in the *Medea* and *Troades,* is present in most of the plays of Euripides and is one of the causes of his wide appeal in later antiquity. Pity and fear, according to Aristotle,[51] are the emotions properly stimulated by tragedy, and Euripides is the richest in pity. In his own day he was less generally acclaimed, and to judge from Aristophanes, who devoted considerable space in his comedies to attacks on Euripides, of which some at least were serious, he was thought to be responsible for debasing the tragic art. We are not told precisely how he debased it, but I think Aristophanes felt, even though he did not say so, that the intense excitements which Euripides was the first to exploit were introduced at the expense of other more valuable emotions.

4 THE THOUGHT OF EURIPIDES

It is surprising, when we reflect that Attic drama was a corporate activity of a small community living precariously in unstable times and subject to violent alternations of disaster and prosperity, that it bears so few traces of the times and conditions under which it was produced. There were a few historical plays; and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, with its reference to the status of the Areopagus and weighty words

on the importance of discipline in the state, was topical, though it is hard to be sure of Aeschylus's attitude. One or two passages in the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus* of Sophocles would not exist in their present form had it not been for the speculations and the scepticism of the sophists. With Euripides it is different; there are not, it is true, many events which can be tied up with particular plays. The *Supplices* may be connected with the behaviour of the Thebans after Delium, the *Troades* with the expedition to Syracuse, and the group of romantic plays to which the *Helen* and the *Iphigenia in Tauris* belong may, like the *Birds* of Aristophanes, have been inspired by the need of the Athenians to have their thoughts diverted from their painful situation. But the ideas and controversies of the times are fully represented as they are not in the plays of Sophocles, and it is possible to get some impression of the attitude of Euripides himself, though it should be remembered that it is hardly likely that this attitude remained unchanged throughout his life, while the evidence is insufficient to allow us to trace the development of his thought.

It was in the nature of ancient tragedy to deal with the whole problem of the relation of gods and men, and here the position of Euripides seems fairly clear. The myths were inevitably his raw material, but he used them with great freedom and does not give the impression that he approached them with much reverence. Of course the essence of religion lay not in myth but in ritual, and we must suppose that, like everyone else, Euripides did not disdain to take part in the rites which were part of the texture of ancient life. In so far as myth supplied the picture of the gods who were the object of cults he plainly rejected it as inadequate; some gods who represented natural forces he accepted as convenient symbols without believing in them as individuals, though since they were realities in language and popular belief, he felt them as having a sort of shadowy existence, and it was an advantage for his art that he could use the poetry even when he rejected the theology. Probably a large number of the better educated citizens at the close of the century had ceased to believe in

the sort of god represented by legend, though they were divided about the importance of ritual and the validity of omens and prophecies. On this last question the plays give no clear hint, but my own guess would be that Euripides was as sceptical as Thucydides.[52]

There is one curious passage which deserves detailed consideration. The Chorus of the *Electra*, after telling the peculiar story of the golden lamb of Atreus which Thyestes stole, with the consequence that the course of the sun was reversed in the heavens, continues, 'So the story is told, but it wins small credit from me . . . but tales which strike terror into mortals are an encouragement to the worship of the gods' (737–45). And akin to this is a famous fragment of a play by Critias,[53] a leading oligarch and intellectual, friend of Socrates and one of the Thirty Tyrants, in which is described how the gods were invented by a thinker of unusual ingenuity, in order that men might be deterred from committing secret crimes by the belief in higher powers who could detect what might be concealed from men.

We find a hint of a similar attitude in an ambiguous passage in the *Hecuba* (798–805). Hecuba asks Agamemnon's help in punishing the crime of Polymestor, who has murdered her son and violated the sacred duty of a host. 'I am weak, but the gods are strong and so is *Nomos* (Law/Custom) who is greater than the gods (or, greatest among the gods). For it is through *Nomos* that we believe in the gods and live knowing right from wrong. Now *Nomos* is in your keeping. . . .' The face meaning of this is that we believe in the gods because of law, that is because justice prevails and the wicked are seen to be punished eventually, the conclusion that Herodotus, for instance, draws from some at least of the events of history. We find the converse of this at *Electra* 583: 'If injustice prevails it is time to cease believing in the gods.' But it is doubtful if the words 'we believe in the gods through *Nomos*' could have been spoken at this date without conveying also the suggestion that the belief in the gods is founded merely on convention. Nor does the run of the play give much support to the more hopeful view. Agamemnon gives way to

Hecuba, not out of respect for Law, but because he is ashamed to refuse the mother of a favourite concubine, and when justice is done it includes the murder of two innocent boys. As with Hecuba's prayer in the *Troades* the play supplies the commentary.

It is stated by Satyrus, who wrote about Euripides, probably within two centuries of his death, that he was 'extraordinarily keen on Anaxagoras', and three quotations are given, one of which is missing from our papyrus, to show how precisely he reproduced the philosopher's doctrine. Satyrus was in a much better position to judge than we are, though it is clear that he was wholly uncritical in his use of his material, and his surviving quotations are from the *Peirithous*, a play not certainly by Euripides.[54] It seems likely that Euripides did speak of *Nous*, Mind, the moving principle of Anaxagoras's system, in language appropriate to a god. Certainly the following fragment, not referred to by Satyrus, shows a keen appreciation of the Anaxagorean view of change: 'Of the things which come to be nothing dies, but things are separated off one from another and (combine to) show a different form.' (*Frag.* 839.) Though this is a scientific rather than a religious system to our way of thinking, the self-moving *Nous* need not be regarded as an automaton, but could perfectly well be a spiritual force. Perhaps it is so regarded in a famous passage of the *Troades*: 'O thou that art the stay of the earth and hast thy seat upon the earth, whoever thou art, hard to know, Zeus or natural Necessity, or Mind of man, to thee I pray; for going thy noiseless way thou conductest all mortal things according to justice.' (884–8.) These striking words are spoken by Hecuba in the belief that Helen, the source of all her woes, is at last to be punished; the belief is not justified in the sequel, and later Hecuba addresses the powers above with less confidence.

But it is likely that the Mind invoked in these passages is not so much that postulated in the system of Anaxagoras as the corresponding force in the system of Diogenes of Apollonia, who may have been his pupil. According to Diogenes the basic substance of the universe is air, in the language of

the poets *aether*. Air is the breath of life; it is also the intelligence which directs both the individual and the universe. Aether and Mind are the same thing under different aspects, and it is imperishable and so divine. It is significant that a sepulchral inscription which commemorates the Athenians who fell in the siege of Potidaea (432–30 B.C.) shows it as a familiar conception: 'The Aether has received their souls, the earth their bodies.' The idea of the Aether as divine and the stuff of which the soul is made is of frequent occurrence in the plays of Euripides, and the 'novel' prayer which Aristophanes puts into his mouth before the contest with Aeschylus in the *Frogs*, 'Aether, on which I live, and hinge of the tongue' (892), implies that his addiction to Aether was as familiar to the Athenians as his fondness for rhetoric.

This Aether, like the later fire of the Stoics, was the divine conceived in a more or less material form. The earth was enveloped in it, though it may have been regarded as distinct from the grosser air amid which we live. The soul was fashioned from it—'The mind in each of us is a god' (*Frag.* 1018)—and after death it left the body and returned to join the reservoir of the divine whence it came, itself imperishable but preserving no individuality. We cannot say whether Euripides considered the material world to be derived from it; he often speaks of the body returning to dust when the soul rejoins the Aether, as though both earth and Aether were elements, but this cannot be pressed. Nor is it easy to decide what was the relation between man and this pantheistic principle, but there is no need to exclude what we should describe as a religious emotion. 'You see the boundless heaven above, which holds the earth in its soft embrace? Think of this as Zeus, think this to be a god.' (*Frag.* 941.) And again, 'But it was the Aether which gave you birth, maiden, the Aether which men call Zeus.' (*Frag.* 877). The old faith is being purified into a monotheism, though the object of worship is in process of becoming a somewhat impersonal first cause.

Of what sort is the government of this Aether-dominated world? Does it care for the individual and procure him justice?

The many striking passages on the power of chance show that Euripides was at least well aware of the view that it does not. There would not seem to be much possibility of calling in another world to redress the injustices of this; yet in one place where he has no need to assert anything he asserts that there is a judgment to come. 'For there is punishment for these things both in the world below and for all men on earth. The mind of the dead does not indeed live, but it possesses immortal intelligence as it merges itself with the immortal Aether.'[55] (*Helen*, 1013–6.) With this may be compared a fragment from the *Melanippe*, 'Do you think that injustices fly up to heaven on wings, and then someone writes them on the leaves of Zeus's tablets, and Zeus looks on and allots justice? Not the whole of heaven would suffice to hold the record of men's crimes if Zeus wrote them there, nor could Zeus watch and punish each; but Justice is somewhere at hand, would you but see her.' (*Frag.* 506.) On the other hand the bitter cry of Bellerophon at the sight of injustice triumphant suggests a disquiet about the nature of things not easily to be set at rest. 'Does any say that there are gods in heaven? None are there, none, unless a man is fool enough to believe the old story. Look for yourselves and do not take my word for it. I tell you that tyrants slay many men and rob many of their wealth and sack cities in violation of their oaths; though they do so they are more fortunate than those who keep to themselves in righteousness day by day. I know of little cities which hold the gods in honour, which are subject to greater cities and wickeder, because they must bow to superior force.' (*Frag.* 286.) An uncomfortable thought to be expressed in the city whose empire was an acknowledged tyranny. Bellerophon tried to find the answer by mounting to heaven on Pegasus and asking, and he was blasted by a thunderbolt for his presumption. It is difficult to believe that this play left a pleasant taste in the mouth. We cannot conclude that Euripides had a steady faith in a divine intelligence which directs the world.

Closely related to the question of the justice or lack of it in the government of the world is that of human conduct.

As I have explained, the simple view that the ordinances of law and custom were based on the unwritten law imposed on men by the gods did not stand up very well to critical examination. How, on this assumption, could one thing be right in one place, something quite different in another? Protagoras[56] had suggested that man himself was the only measure of right and wrong. Euripides has strangely little to say on this vital topic. Macareus in the *Aeolus* seems to have argued that the objections to incest were purely conventional: 'What is shameful if to the doer it seems not so?' (*Frag.* 19.) And the refusal of Eteocles to keep his promise to Polyneices implies an acquaintance with the same ideas: 'If all men meant the same things when they said "honourable" or "wise", there would not be any disputes about them, but as it is there is no likeness or agreement among men, except that the words they use are the same, but an agreed meaning is lacking.' (*Phoenissae* 499–502.) And the beastly Cyclops is equipped with weapons from the sophistic armoury: 'As for those who have complicated life by inventing laws, they can go to hell!' (*Cyclops* 338.)

A greater than Protagoras, Socrates, was associated with Euripides, but he seems to have left even less direct impression. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the two are referred to as sitting side by side (1490), and in a lost comedy it was asserted that Socrates wrote his garrulous plays for him.[57] And there are various anecdotes of doubtful authority which connect the two figures. But it is nowhere possible to find clear traces of Socratic influence, and we should suppose that the 'irrationalism' of Euripides, the belief that it is possible for a man to recognize the better and choose the worse course, would have been uncongenial to Socrates.[58]

Direct allusions to political events, are, as I have said, unusual in Attic tragedy. But Euripides is full of allusions to political problems and political types; this is a natural consequence of bringing drama into contact with the things of every day, since politics was the breath of life to every true Athenian. The question which gives rise to the greatest

number of reflective passages is one of vital interest in any state which is beginning to draw its rulers from a new social stratum. The great houses with their inherited knowledge of the art of government continued to supply many magistrates long after office was thrown open to all. Had they an innate fitness to rule, or had they merely learnt what, given time and opportunity, anyone else could learn? In the plays, when a noble does well someone is bound to observe that breeding will out, and if a person of mean birth distinguishes himself, the moral is inevitably drawn that merit cannot be judged from externals. For example, in the *Electra* the heroine is married to a peasant in order that she may not have children of high birth who might be a threat to Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Orestes, a rather ordinary young man, is much perplexed by the delicacy and restraint of the peasant's behaviour: 'Well! There is no sure sign of a noble character, for human beings are all mixed up. Before now I have seen a son of an aristocratic father who was a nobody, and fine children of base-born parents, poverty of spirit in a rich man, and magnanimity in a poor man. How is one to distinguish them aright? By wealth? One will be using a bad test. By poverty? But poverty tends to debase, and teaches a man to behave ill by pressure of need. Shall I turn to military prowess? Who in the face of the enemy can bear witness which of his comrades is brave? The only thing is to admit that there is utter confusion.' (368–79.) This sentiment is said to have shocked Socrates so much that he left the theatre.[59] One would suppose Euripides to have been of the opinion that much can be taught, since he had learnt much himself, but no conclusion can be drawn from the many opposed generalizations in his works. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the Athenians were very ready to listen to generalizations on this subject.

It is the same with the great question of the right form of government. Euripides knows all the pros and cons as they were bandied to and fro in the discussions which he must often have heard. The *Supplices* contains a considered debate on the merits of autocracy and democracy; but the interest

lies not in these collections of arguments which are mostly commonplaces, but in the lines and phrases which seem to catch the very complaints and criticisms of ordinary men who watched the manœuvres of generals and politicians. Why should the general have all the glory? 'When the army wins a victory, they do not give the credit to those who do the work, but the general gets the glory; he was just one man wielding his spear along with thousands of others, but though he has done no more than anyone else he has the biggest share of reputation. They sit puffed up with authority and despise the common people, though they are nobodies.'[60] (*Andromache*, 694–700.) Again Thucydides tells us how many were moved to support the plan of a grandiose expedition to Sicily by the hope of getting something out of it. Euripides recognized the state of mind several years earlier. 'You brought your city to ruin because you let yourself be led astray by the young, who love to be put in authority and press for war without good reason and ruin their fellow-citizens, one that he may become a general, another in the hope of winning influence and lording it over others, a third in the expectation of profit. And they do not care what happens to the people.'[61] (*Supplices*, 233–7.)

In the same play we get a sample of the sentiments of the other side. The Messenger who tells the story of the prowess of Theseus in battle, and of his restraint in refusing to allow his victorious army to enter Thebes, adds: 'That is the kind of general to choose, one who is formidable in time of danger and hates the insolence of the common people, who if they meet with success want to climb to the topmost rung of the ladder, and throw away the prosperity they might have enjoyed.' (726–30.) Euripides was probably thinking of the failure to make peace after the victory at Pylos, but the Athenians were to fit themselves to the picture many times before the final defeat. Yet this same insatiable restlessness, which made Athens the scourge of her neighbours, has been praised a few lines earlier in the same play. Aethra wants Theseus to interfere in what was strictly no business of his, and procure burial for the fallen Argives: 'When your

country is abused for her imprudent policies, do you see with how fierce an eye she faces her abusers? She is made greater by her toils; cities which love tranquillity and do nothing to raise themselves from obscurity are of dim aspect thanks to their cautious policies.' (321–5.) Finally we have a pretty picture of the politician canvassing for office, which is made more ludicrous by being applied to Agamemnon trying to secure for himself the command of the expedition against Troy: 'When you were eager for the leadership of the expedition, you remember how humble you were, taking everyone by the hand and keeping open house to all the members of your deme, accosting everyone in order whether they liked it or not, hoping to win the prize of ambition by your ingratiating way.' (*Iphigenia in Aulis*, 337–42.)

Can we learn anything from all this of Euripides' own politics? Sometimes it seems almost as if he went out of his way to conceal his views. In the *Orestes* we have what is virtually an account of a meeting of the Assembly contained in the report of the trial. First Talthybius speaks, the typical hanger-on of influential men, then a regular demagogue, 'a babbler, strong in violence, relying on loudness of voice, stupidly outspoken' (902–3); after him an honest peasant of the sort that rarely comes to town, the kind that are the backbone of the state. After this high praise we expect the advice he gives to be good. Yet we cannot suppose that Euripides thought Orestes deserved, as the peasant said, a crown of honour for ridding Argos of Clytaemnestra. It is hardly likely that he favoured the extreme demagogues like Cleon, who prosecuted him; how far he went in the opposite direction it is impossible to say. The plays in which he wrote with most enthusiasm of his city were not the latest ones, but that is not enough to suggest that he had oligarchic sympathies in old age. There is, however, a passage in the *Frogs* which implies that he was known to be no enthusiast for the régime. Aeschylus is made to object that Euripides made all his characters, women and slaves included, equally garrulous. Euripides replies that it was done out of democratic spirit. Dionysus interjects, 'I should say no more about that,

my good sir. For you it is not a very happy theme.' (952–3.) A comedy is an unsure guide in such matters, but there must have been something in Euripides' reputation to give point to this remark; perhaps it was enough that he liked to sit alone in his cave.

There is one other subject on which Euripides was supposed to have strong and interesting views, women. The tradition represents him as a misogynist. The startling point of this tradition is probably to be found in his plays. Euripides presented on the stage many admirable women, and even those who were less admirable he portrayed with more sympathy and understanding than the other tragic poets, though his dramatic aims led him to lay more emphasis than they on sexual frailty. Some of them, Stheneboea for instance, or the Phaedra of the lost *Hippolytus*, may have been immoderately depraved. And there is no doubt that in the course of his plays some very hard things are said about women. Sometimes, as when Hippolytus rails at Phaedra, they are fully explained by the dramatic situation. But they are quotable and in quotation the context is often forgotten. Further, not all his generalizations arise directly out of the plot, and he makes his women say extraordinarily severe things about their own sex. This in itself was enough to give the comic poets a grateful hint, and anything which occurred in comedy might be copied out as fact by biographers living a century or two later. The *Thesmophoriazusae*, the funniest of the comedies of Aristophanes, is about the grievance of the women against Euripides, and this uproarious farce has clearly had an influence on the biographical tradition. Moreover it is stated in comedy and in the ancient *Life* of Euripides that his domestic experiences were unfortunate; these statements are very likely not independent, and in view of the deep-seated instinct to believe the worst about other people's private lives, they need not carry much weight. If there was any truth in them, the Comic Poets could be trusted to make the most of it. All the same, considering the drastic statements about women which are to be found not infrequently in the plays, Euripides would have no right

to feel aggrieved that his attitude towards women has been reconstructed from his biting generalizations as well as from characters like Alcestis and Iphigenia.

It is a natural consequence of the many-sidedness of Euripides that a great variety of opinions have been held about him. He has been seen as the enemy of gods and disturber of sound morals, as the liberal emancipator and friend of women, as pacifist and as patriot, as rationalist and as the discoverer of the feebleness of reason when opposed to passion. There is some warrant for all these views, though none of them represents the whole truth. The 'philosopher of the stage', far from being a philosopher in the technical sense, was an eclectic lover of wisdom ready to set himself in imagination within the framework of many different systems and unwilling to commit himself to any school. No doubt Amphion in the great debate in the *Antiope* on the merits of the practical and of the contemplative ways of life spoke for Euripides when he defended the way of the artist and philosopher. It is more helpful to look for the essential characteristics of Euripides not in this or that opinion which he may have changed a dozen times during his life, but in what we can recover of his temperament. Here we must part company at times from the support of evidence and risk some flight of the imagination. Perhaps it is not fanciful to see in Euripides a certain failure of resilience. Thought is no longer an adventure as it was for Aeschylus and, in a different way, for the early philosophers. Confidence in the outcome of the search was giving way to perplexity, and the stimulus of scepticism was being replaced by the burden of doubt. The strength of Aeschylus or the serenity of Sophocles awake in us admiration, and perhaps envy of the simpler world to which they belonged, but Euripides is closer to us, and his troubles and difficulties have something in common with our own.

EPILOGUE

WHEN in the spring of 406 B.C. Sophocles produced his last plays, he dressed his Chorus in mourning at the preliminary parade, for the news of the death of Euripides in Macedonia had reached Athens not long before. Perhaps he suspected that their black clothes could well symbolize grief not only for the death of a great poet, whom he must soon follow, but mourning for tragedy itself. He must have known that, though Athens had tragic poets in plenty, there was among them no successor to himself or Euripides. Agathon, the best of them, had gone off to Macedonia. It was not without reason that Dionysus went down to Hades to fetch a real tragic poet at the Great Dionysia of the next year, when Sophocles too was dead.

Yet in the following century there was no lack of tragedies. Theatres became more numerous throughout Greece, and tragedy, which had been almost confined to Athens, became a regular institution in many cities. New subjects were found, for instance the Adonis myth, which had not been used by the poets of the fifth century, and there was a slight revival of the old practice of writing on contemporary events. Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, sent his plays across the sea to compete at Athens, and just before his death secured a victory at the Lenaea.

But in spite of this illustrious patronage something had gone out of tragedy. It was no longer the natural means of expression for the best and acutest minds. Anyone with something new to say said it in prose, even if, like Plato, he began by writing prose dramas. Thought had reached the stage when it had outgrown poetry and the myth, and Greece produced no more poetry of supreme excellence, for it had ceased to be the most serious form of literature and a vital part of the life of a community. Soon two symptoms appeared which showed that the great days of tragedy were gone; the actors began to be more important in popular estimation than the plays, always a sign that the creative period is passing, and the past began to dominate the present. It is true that

some time after the death of Aeschylus a law was passed permitting his plays to compete in the theatre with those of living playwrights, but this permission does not seem to have been very freely used, and no one could call the age of Sophocles and Euripides an age of revivals. But soon old plays became a regular feature of the Athenian festivals, and in the second half of the century the order of proceedings at the Dionysia was revised. It now began with a satyr-play followed by an 'old tragedy', usually a play of Euripides, sometimes of Sophocles.

If we possess a specimen of fourth century tragedy it is the *Rhesus*. There is no doubt that Euripides, early in his career, wrote a play of this name, but whether the play which has come down to us is his was questioned in antiquity. It is a competent dramatization of the night warfare described in the tenth book of the *Iliad*. There is nothing in language or metre conclusively un-Euripidean; the real question is whether Euripides could ever have written a play so destitute of ideas. Could the dramatist whose instinct it was to overload his work with epigram and generalization have concealed so completely the liveliness of his mind? It would be as easy to imagine Bernard Shaw writing a play that was intellectually null.

A much discussed fragment, which probably belongs to a play of this, or even of the next, century, was first published in *Proceedings of the British Acadamy*, Vol. 35 (1950). The play was a dramatization of the story of Candaules and Gyges told by Herodotus. The first editor believed it to be archaic work and made a tentative attribution to Phrynichus,[1] but the majority of scholars prefer the later dating. But to whatever century it may belong, the existence of such a play is a complete surprise and shows how insufficient is our evidence as a basis for confident generalizations about Greek drama. But probably the best testimony we possess as regards the character of fourth century drama[2] is the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Tragedy was still at this time very much a living art, and Aristotle's treatise, besides attempting to explain the theoretical basis of the arts, gives numerous hints to the writer

of tragedies as to what he should aim at and what avoid. It is quite clear that Aristotle's favourite tragedy was an exciting affair with recognition scenes and last minute changes of fortune. He often mentions with admiration the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, but one may suspect that what attracted him was not so much its poetic and spiritual greatness as its dexterity in the management of a complicated plot, not what is unique in it, but what it has in common with the *Ion* or *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

In this respect the true heir of tragedy was the New Comedy of Menander, which abandoned the use of myth and constructed complicated plots which preserved the old motifs, the exposed baby begotten at some not too sober festival, born in secret, and recognized at the crucial moment by its trinkets. But tragedy in the grand style continued to be written even when Athens had ceased to be a free city-state and become a university town insignificant except for its past. Though the plays enjoyed little celebrity they seem to have been written and produced right down to imperial times, while the masterpieces of the older poets were still performed wherever Greek culture penetrated in the East, even beyond the frontiers of the empire in barbarous Parthia, where the severed head of the Roman general Crassus was once made to serve as a stage property at a performance of the *Bacchae*.[3]

More significant perhaps than the dramatic exercises in the classical manner were the versions of Greek plays which were produced in considerable numbers on the Roman stage for nearly two centuries. When Ennius began to write Latin tragedies about 200 B.C. there were men alive who could remember the days when Athens had still been a real city-state, preserving even in decline some of its old corporate spirit and corporate life. But his versions of the Greek masterpieces, and those of Accius and Pacuvius after him, though both faithful and spirited, were only tragic entertainment in much the same sense as we know it. Rome was already ceasing to be a true city-state, and in the life of Rome the arts were never more than an elegant accomplishment, a worthy ornament for the conqueror of the world. The unique tragic

contests which had been so important a part of the life of the Athenians in the days of their greatness have had no counterpart since. Never has dramatic poetry been so closely bound up with the life of a people.

NOTES

The following abbreviations sometimes occur:

C.A.H. Cambridge Ancient History.
C.Q. Classical Quarterly.
C.R. Classical Review.
J.H.S. Journal of Hellenic Studies.

Diels-Kranz refers to the *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th edition. The passages are translated in K. Freeman's *Ancilla*, Oxford, 1948. References for fragments of the tragic poets, except Sophocles, are to Nauck's *Fragmenta Tragicorum Graecorum*, Leipzig, 1889; for Sophocles to Jebb-Pearson, *Fragments of Sophocles*, Cambridge, 1917; for comic poets, to Kock's *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, Leipzig, 1880.

CHAPTER I

Books suggested for further reading:

General

Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, London, 1957.
Kitto, *The Greeks*, Penguin Books.
Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. I, English Trans., Oxford, 1944.
Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, 1951.
Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, London, 1950.

Political and Social

Andrewes, *Greek Tyrants*, London, 1956.
A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy*, Oxford, 1957.
Glotz, *Ancient Greece at Work*, English Trans., London, 1926.
Ferguson, *Ancient Imperialism*, London, 1913, especially Chapter II.
Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. V, Chapter I.

Religious

Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, London, 1935.
—— *The Greeks and their Gods*, London, 1950.
Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, Oxford, 1949.
—— *Greek Piety*, Oxford, 1948.
Rohde, *Psyche*, English Trans., London, 1925.
Nock, *Conversion*, Oxford, 1933, Chapters I and II.
Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*, Cambridge, 1932.

Notes (pp. 1–25)

[1] Kings ruled in Cyrene down to about 460. Macedon was a monarchy but by Greeks was never felt to be Greek. The dual kings of Sparta were kings only in name.

[2] Statistics of ancient populations are in the highest degree uncertain. It is a reasonable estimate that at the time of the Persian wars the adult male citizens numbered about 30,000, and that this number was doubled by the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, falling rapidly thereafter owing to the plague and war casualties. See A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy*; A. W. Gomme, *Population of Athens* (Oxford, 1933).

[3] For the actual working of the Athenian democracy see Jones, op. cit., Ch. 5.

[4] In this at least Isocrates seems to have agreed with Plato: 'This it was which was the original cause of the confusion in which we now live, and destroyed the old democracy under which our forefathers were the happiest of the Greeks. . . .' *De Pace* 64.

[5] The exact social status of men like Cleon, Hyperbolus and Cleophon is hard to define. Though not necessarily of humble origin they were distinguished from the old aristocratic leaders by their manners and methods. Cf. Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, Ch. 28.

[6] Demosthenes 42, 20, Xenophon *Vect.* 4, 22.

[7] The tendency today is towards the lower figure. The only firm figure is the number, 20,000, of the Athenian slaves who deserted after the establishment of the Spartan post at Decelea. They were an appreciable proportion of the whole. Cf. Jones, op. cit., 16–17, 76–9.

[8] I am gratified to find some support for this rather adventurous statement in Jones, op. cit., p. 20. The Spartans alone were exempted as a body, thanks to slave labour, from earning.

[9] The reason for this perverse stipulation may have been that a slave, not being a member of the community, could not take the oath by the city's gods, and torture was the only substitute for the security of the oath.

[10] Isaeus 3, 64, etc. See Wyse's note.

[11] On divorce see J. W. Jones, *Law and Legal Theory among the Greeks* (Oxford, 1956) 181–5, and 'Antiphon the Sophist', *Frag.* 49, Diels-Kranz.

[12] Thucydices 2, 45. Even more depressing are passages like *Troades* 645–55 where Andromache expresses her (or Euripides') ideal of wifely conduct. Cf. *Trach.* 459–62 and *Andr.* 222–7.

[13] Homosexuality is sometimes mentioned in this connection. There were circles in which the practice was viewed with more geniality than has been customary in most societies, but modern impressions of the Greek attitude have been unduly influenced by the accident that Plato was connected with such a circle. So far as extant tragedy

is concerned homosexuality can be ignored ; it affects only the beastly Cyclops. It appears to have been the theme of several satyr-plays, but in tragedy proper it appeared only in the *Myrmidons* of Aeschylus and the *Chrysippus* of Euripides among plays whose content is known to us.

[14] Themistocles ; Thucydides 1, 138 ; Antiphon and Phrynichus ; Plutarch, *X Orat.* 834B and Lycurgus, *Leocr.* 113.

[15] Thucydides 4, 44.

[16] *Troades* 1084 seems to refer to the notion that the unburied dead are homeless wanderers.

[17] Herodotus 8, 41.

[18] Thucydides 2, 38. According to Lysias 30, 19 a certain Nicomachus set to copy out Solon's laws sought to make life easier for himself and others by inserting new sacrifices to the great loss of the exchequer.

[19] [Demosthenes] 59, 72.

[20] Andocides 1, 12.

[21] Sophocles, *Frag.* 837 ; cf. Isocrates, *Paneg.* 28, and Diodorus Sic., 5, 49.

[22] This is a summary of the conventional view, but the reader should be warned that the myth of Dionysus and the Titans is less conspicuous in ancient literature than its apparent significance would lead us to expect. In fact there are only two possible allusions to it. Plato *Laws* 701 C and Pindar *Frag.* 133 (Snell); neither is accepted by all scholars. Cf. Linforth, *Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley, 1941) 307 ff., especially 339–50, and Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational,* 155.

[23] Herodotus 8, 77. Cf. the similar assertion of faith in the epigram on the Athenian dead at Coronea, 447 B.C. Bowra, *Problems of Greek Poetry* (Oxford 1953), 93 ff.

[24] Had the gods been conceived of as the creators of the universe, the assumption of a moral purpose might have arisen sooner. But the universe was older than, at all events, the ruling generation of gods.

[25] In the *Iliad* Zeus appears as guardian of justice only in a simile, 16, 386–8.

[26] Thucydides 7, 18.

[27] 1, 124.

[28] It was over signs and omens, especially the interpretation of celestial phenomena, that a clash between the rational and the superstitious was most likely to arise. To ignore an eclipse might offend the powers, and the violence of the reaction to the mutilation of the Hermae shows that the Athenians were not prepared to risk anything in that direction.

[29] Sophocles, *Trach.* 126–30.

[30] *Troad.* 884–8, where Hecuba's profession of faith is not borne out by the event.

CHAPTER II

Books suggested for further reading:

Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy,* Oxford, 1927.

—— *The Theatre of Dionysus at Athens,* Oxford, 1946.

—— *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens,* Oxford, 1953.

Webster, *Greek Theatre Production,* London, 1956.

Flickinger, *The Greek Theatre and its Drama,* Chicago, 1936.

Lucas, F. L., *Tragedy,* London, 1957, with special reference to the *Poetics.*

House, *Aristotle's Poetics,* London, 1956.

Henn, *The Harvest of Tragedy,* London, 1956.

Notes (pp. 26–52)

[1] Pickard-Cambridge's *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* gives all the evidence and a sober discussion of it.

[2] *Poetics,* Ch. 4. Traces have been detected of a rival Alexandrian theory which explained the word τραγῳδία as a contest for a goat as prize (cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica,* 220 ff.), denied all Dorian origins, and considered the satyr-play as subsequent to tragedy.

[3] Themistius, *Or.* 26, p. 316 D, attributes to Aristotle the statement about Thespis.

[4] *Il.,* 22, 430, etc. Equally relevant is an example from Aristotle's contemporary, Heracleides of Cumae: καὶ μία μὰν ἐξάρχει, αἱ δ' ἄλλαι ἀθρόως ᾄδουσι Athenaeus 145A.

[5] The actor, ὑποκριτής, can be explained either as the 'answerer' or as the 'interpreter'. Most likely there is a reference to the actor's early role as messenger who reports action and explains the situation to the chorus.

[6] *Frogs* 1004, quoted by the ancient *Life* of Aeschylus.

[7] The metre was increasingly used by Euripides in his later plays as a more animated alternative to iambics.

[8] 1449a 37. This is sometimes taken, quite unjustifiably, to mean that Aristotle claims positive knowledge of the development of tragedy from its earliest stages. It refers more naturally to such things as the introduction of the second and third actor.

[9] I keep the traditional title, though Suidas, more correctly the *Souda,* is the name of a work not of a man.

[10] *Fr. Incert.* 6, quoted by Strabo, 471.

[11] The passages cited are Aeschylus, *Fr.* 207, Sophocles, *Ichneutae* 357, and Euripides, *Cycl.* 72–82. The first is the most convincing, but none are decisive.

[12] The interesting painting of a satyr chorus, on the Pronomos vase is reproduced in Pickard-Cambridge, op. cit., p. 152, in the same

author's *Dramatic Festivals*, p. 178, and in Webster's *Greek Theatre Production*, plate 8.

[13] Professor Wisdom, discussing the relation of religious assertions to the statement of facts in the *Cambridge Review*, 9 June, 1956.

[14] *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1950).

[15] E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Cambridge, 1935), p. 313. For modern attempts to make use of classical myth in drama see the chapter 'The Transmigration of the Greeks' in Henn's *Harvest of Tragedy*.

[16] For Dionysiac worship see Introduction to Dodd's *Bacchae* and his article 'Maenadism in the Bacchae', *Harvard Theological Review*, 33 (1940), 155. Further references to some surprising literature dealing with orgiastic consumption of raw flesh in modern times will be found in Jeanmaire's *Dionysos* (Paris, 1951), p. 490.

[17] The number of comedies was three during the Peloponnesian War. It was raised to five after the war, and may have been five before the war began. The results of the contests, when we know them, are sometimes surprising. Sophocles' *Oedipus* did not win first prize. It is to be remembered that we usually possess only one of the four plays with which each poet competed, and that skilful production and lavish mounting might affect the decision. If we can trust fourth-century orators, the judges were not indifferent to personal considerations. See Lysias 4, 3. For a full account see Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*.

[18] Ferguson, *Greek Imperialism*, p. 60.

[19] See in general Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus*, and Webster, *Greek Theatre Production*.

[20] It has been argued with some success that ἀπὸ τῆς σκηνῆς need not mean '*on* the stage'. See Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*, p. 73. But now that the shock of discovering that the theatre did not have a stage according to Vitruvius has passed, the possibility that σκηνή may have been used as early as the time of Aristotle for the low wooden stage is again being considered, as in Schneider's article ὑποκριτής, Pauly-Wissowa, SpB VIII (1956).

[21] Sophocles, *El.* 324, could suggest that Electra was in the Orchestra with the Chorus when Chrysothemis entered, and Euripides, *Hel.* 543, would do well with the altar in the Orchestra, but Pentheus's entry in the *Bacchae* (215–47) shows how dangerous it is to assume any degree of realism in such situations.

[22] See Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*, especially pp. 100–22, and Webster, op. cit., 17 ff.

[23] Schneider in the article mentioned above guesses that Aeschylus added a sole to the cothurnus but not a very thick one.

[24] This seems to me the essence of what Aristotle has to say about tragedy, but it is all highly controversial, and anyone who wishes to make use of Aristotle's name would be well advised to read his own

words. In particular, many scholars believe that in Chapter 13 *hamartia* is to be understood in connection with the requirement that the tragic hero must not be wholly admirable or his fall will be merely repellent, i.e. there must be a 'flaw' in his character which gives occasion for his downfall, and accordingly the word has a more or less definite moral implication. Whether 'flaw' is ever a fair translation of the Greek word seems to me to be questionable. See F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy*; Humphrey House, *Aristotle's Poetics*.

[25] There is *anagnorisis* in the sense of realization of the true situation, which is the climax of this as of many plays. But though Aristotle allowed this use of the word, all the examples he gives are realizations of identity, perhaps because it goes without saying that a *peripeteia* must be accompanied by realization.

[26] For examples of theories of this type see T. R. Henn, *The Harvest of Tragedy*, p. 282, and his quotation from Whitehead: 'Tragedy communicates, through suffering, a supreme sense of harmony with the universe.'

CHAPTER III

Books suggested for further reading:

Aeschylus translations

(i) *Prose*

Headlam (Bohn's Library), London, 1909.
Weir-Smyth (Loeb). Supplement containing recent fragments by Lloyd-Jones in the 1957 reprint of Vol. II.
Page, *Greek Literary Papyri* (Loeb) contains fragments from *Niobe* and *Dictyulci*.

(ii) *Verse*

L. Campbell (World Classics).
Gilbert Murray, London, 1952.
J. T. Sheppard, *Oresteia*, Cambridge, 1933.
Vellacott, *Oresteia* (Penguin).
The Complete Greek Tragedies, University of Chicago: Aeschylus, in two vols. from various hands.
F. L. Lucas, *Greek Tragedy for Everyman*, London, 1954, containing *Agamemnon, Prometheus* and extracts from the remaining plays.
MacNeice, *Agamemnon*, London, 1936.

Editions, etc.

Oresteia: Headlam-Thomson, Cambridge, 1938, with verse translation.
Prometheus: G. Thomson, Cambridge, 1932, with verse translation.

Agamemnon: Denniston-Page, Oxford, 1957.
Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus the Creator of Tragedy*, Oxford, 1940.
Méautis, *Eschyle et le Trilogie*, Paris, 1936.
J. T. Sheppard, *Aeschylus and Sophocles* (Our Debt to Greece and Rome).
Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, London, 1956.
Weir-Smyth, *Aeschylean Tragedy*, Berkeley, 1924.

Notes (pp. 53–119)

[1] Plutarch, *Life of Solon*, Ch. 29. See Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb*, 107.

[2] See page 129.

[3] This statement is commonly made, but it is doubtful if the famous Themistocles was old enough to be archon in 493.

[4] *Eumenides*, 723–8. It is only a guess, though it is likely, that Phrynichus used this version.

[5] Herodotus, 8, 109. The sentiment may be more sincere than the speech in which it occurs.

[6] Plutarch, *Mor.* 79 B. See p. 137.

[7] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 3, 1, 17.

[8] Aeschylus and the Athenians, 807; his prayer, 886–7.

[9] Cicero calls Aeschylus a Pythagorean, *Tusc.* II, 23. But we do not know on how good authority.

[10] See p. 19.

[11] *Ag.* 1434–6: *Ag.* 763.

[12] *Ag.* 160–2. Also it was important to address a god in prayer by the right name.

[13] See Powell, *New Chapters in Greek Literature*, III, 69 ff. (Oxford, 1933).

[14] *Oxyrhyncus Papyri*, Vol. 20, 2256, fr. 8. Cf. E. C. Yorke, *C.Q.*, N.S. 4 (1954), 183; Lloyd-Jones in Appendix to Loeb *Aeschylus*, Vol. 2 (1957).

[15] It may be asked, how was it known that Aeschylus won these victories posthumously unless it was mentioned in the *didascaliae*? It may have been mentioned, though not in our extract. Alternatively it might have been recorded by Alexandrian scholars (Callimachus's *Pinakes*?) from a statement in an *Atthis*, e.g. of Philochorus.

It is of interest that the early dating of the *Supplices* was not quite universally accepted. Nestle suggested a date about 460, see *Gnomon* 1934, p. 409, and Brommer *Satyrspiele* (Berlin, 1944) thought that the first production was soon after the death of Aeschylus because of the frequent occurrence of scenes from the *Amymone* on vases dating from about 450.

[16] A quaint attempt to explain away the difficulty is to be found in Plutarch, *Coriolanus*, 32, 299 B.

[17] Ed. Fraenkel, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1942. For the text of this important and controversial fragment see Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, 2 ff., and Lloyd-Jones in Appendix to Vol. 2 of the Loeb Aeschylus (1957).

[18] A more Calvinistic interpretation is to be found in Page's Introduction to the *Agamemnon*, ed. Denniston and Page (Oxford, 1957). See also Lloyd-Jones in *J.H.S.* 1956, p. 55, 'Zeus in Aeschylus'.

[19] *Elegy and Iambus*, Loeb, Solon 13, 27–32, though the last couplet suggests some incipient dissatisfaction with the idea.

[20] The Chorus and their panic are not to be regarded purely as a poetic convenience. The women were no doubt a real problem in an ancient siege, when there must have been considerable congestion in the small area enclosed by the walls of most cities and dismay must have been readily infectious. Admiral Coligny, confronted with the same problem at the siege of St. Quentin, locked the women up in the Cathedral.

[21] Quintilian, 10, 1, 66, says that 'corrected' versions of the plays of Aeschylus were produced at Athens after his death. That the case against the end of the play has been accepted too readily is suggested by Lloyd-Jones, *C.Q.* IX (1959), 1 ff.

[22] The manuscripts have ὤνοιτο which can be amended to ὄνοιτο or ὠνοῖτο. Reading φιλουσ' ὄνοιτο it means 'who, if they loved their masters, would find fault with them?' That is to say their objection is based not on law but on dislike. But the next line is then a *non sequitur*, and it is necessary to suppose that some lines are lost. If we read φιλους ὠνοῖτο the sense is as I have given it, but it should be remembered that it depends on an emendation.

[23] In the lost epic on the subject, which was probably known to Aeschylus, there seems to have been a war in Egypt.

[24] This again is an emendation of a meaningless text.

[25] Cf. Sappho, *Frags.* 104, 105, 114, Lobel-Page, and Catullus 62, an imitation or translation from the Greek.

[26] 230–51.

[27] It will be noticed that in addition to the Chorus proper there are supplementary choruses of Egyptians and of Handmaidens. Whatever the numbers in each may have been, their evolutions must have presented a striking spectacle. Supplementary choruses are not unknown elsewhere, e.g. in the *Hippolytus*, and we are told there was one in the *Alexander* of Euripides.

The presence of this Chorus of Handmaids is an inference which is not universally accepted. It is worth pointing out that the original papyri did not give the identity of speakers and merely marked a change of speaker by a dash. Accordingly attributions given by medieval manuscripts have negligible authority.

[28] See p. 59.

[29] See D. S. Robertson, *C.R.* 38 (1924), 31. The way in which the 48 remaining Danaids were married off in a single morning is described by Pindar (*Py.* 9, 112).

[30] A theory which has a bearing both on the *Supplices* and the *Eumenides* was put forward by Ridgeway in *Cambridge Praelections*, 1906, and in a more reasoned form by G. D. Thomson, especially in his *Oresteia*, II, 341–4. It is suggested that the Greeks, like everyone else, had once lived in matriarchal communities in which children took the mother's name, and property, when there was any, passed to the daughter. The change to a patriarchal society coincided with the growth of private ownership, and the smaller family units into which the old clans broke up were passionately concerned to keep the property in the family. This was the motive for the restrictions on the freedom of heiresses which, as has been mentioned, were carried to extreme lengths at Athens. On this supposition the point of the *Supplices* would be that the final union of Hypermnestra and Lynceus, blessed by Aphrodite, was the vindication of the principles of marriage within the family, and the *Eumenides*, by asserting the superior importance of the father-son to the mother-son relationship, would also serve to support the new system.

This theory has the merit that it introduces logic in places where it is lacking. The great objection to it is that it assumes that the Athenians were still generally conscious of at least some of the facts and implications of a change which took place, if at all, a long time before. Herodotus, who was interested in strange customs and far better informed about them than most Greeks, mentions (I, 173) that the Lycians, who lived around his native Halicarnassus, were unique among men in that they took their mother's names. If Herodotus only a generation after Aeschylus was so completely unaware of traces of matrilinear descent at Athens, it is hardly credible that it can be the key to a play of Aeschylus.

[31] See Demosthenes 47, 67–72; Jones, *Law and Legal Theory*, 252.

[32] So Page in the Denniston-Page edition, xxiii ff.

[33] There is a further hint of excess in that the stuffs are either sacred or of such preciousness that they are suitable only for use in religious ceremonies: 922, 946.

[34] The antithesis ἔργῳ κοὐ λόγῳ, 336, is unique in Aeschylus.

[35] *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, London, 1907, p. 146. See also, Garton *J.H.S.* 77 (1957).

[36] *Poetics* 15, 1454a 17.

[37] Jane Harrison, quoted by Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, p. xi.

[38] For Aeschylus's style see W. Headlam, *C.R.* 16 (1902), 434 ff.; Stanford, *Ambiguities in Greek Literature*, Oxford, 1939; *Aeschylus in his Style*, Dublin, 1942; Earp, *The Style of Aeschylus*, Cambridge, 1948.

CHAPTER IV

Books suggested for further reading:

Translations. The only accessible prose version is that in Jebb's seven-volume edition of the plays with commentary (Cambridge 1887–94).

Verse, translations, editions, etc.

Sir George Young (Everyman).

Gilbert Murray: *Antigone, Trachiniae, Oedipus T., Oedipus C.*

Complete Greek Tragedies, University of Chicago; two volumes from various hands.

F. L. Lucas, *Greek Tragedy for Everyman,* London, 1954: *Antigone* and *Oedipus T.* and extracts from the other plays.

Ichneutae and other papyrus fragments in Page's *Greek Literary Papyri* (Loeb).

J. T. Sheppard, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Cambridge, 1920), with valuable introduction and dramatic commentary.

Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1944); The fullest discussion of the plays and their problems.

Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles* (Oxford, 1936).

Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1951).

Whitman, *Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951). Often eccentric.

Knox, *Oedipus at Athens* (Yale, 1957); applies modern critical methods, as does Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone* (Princeton, 1951).

Earp, *The Style of Sophocles* (Cambridge, 1944).

Notes (pp. 120–172).

[1] For the trial of Anaxagoras and the question of its date see A. E. Taylor in *C.Q.* XI (1917), 81; J. A. Davison, *C.Q.*, NS 3 (1953), 33.

[2] Plutarch, *Pericles,* 6.

[3] From his treatise on Truth. It is probable that by 'man' he meant the individual and not mankind in general. But he did not attack morality, or he would hardly have been asked to prescribe the laws for the new city of Thurii.

[4] Diels-Kranz, *Frag.* 44.

[5] *Gorgias,* 483 B.

[6] Xenophon, *Hellenica,* I, vii. 15.

[7] Striking examples in Euripides are *Hipp.* 983–1035, especially 1013–20; *Troad.* 914–1032; *Ion,* 585–647. Sophocles shows the same tendencies though in a less exaggerated form, *O.T.* 583–615, *El.* 520–609. See J. H. Finley, *Thucydides* (U.S.A., 1942), 49, 63, 96, 285.

[8] 10, 1, 67.

[9] Most scholars think Sophocles' play the earlier, and I agree, but if proof were to turn up that Euripides wrote first, no one would have the right to feel much surprise.

[10] Tradition records a connection between the two writers and there are clear traces of the influence of Herodotus's history in the plays, e.g. Herodotus 2, 35 and *O.C.* 337–41; Herodotus 3, 119 and *Antig.* 905 ff.

[11] The generals who were responsible for most of the war against the Samians were elected some time after the Dionysia of 441, when Euripides won his first victory.

[12] Roughly the equivalent of a consular representative, but always a native of the city in which he resided, not of that which he represented.

[13] Athenaeus, 603; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3. 18, 6. There is no evidence that Sophocles showed any lack of competence in office. Indeed, Ehrenberg, *Sopochles and Pericles* (Oxford, 1954), shows reason to believe that Sophocles was chairman of the Board of Hellenotamiae in a particularly important year.

[14] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1460b 33. This is probably the correct translation. Even if it means 'as they ought to be portrayed', it comes to much the same thing.

[15] It deals with the story told in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*. See Pearson, *Sophocles' Fragments*, I, 224; Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, I, 26.

[16] Plutarch, *Quaest. Conviv.* 1, 10.

[17] Cf. M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London, 1956), pp. 120 ff.

[18] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 8. 8, 2.

[19] Unabashed glee at the discomfiture of enemies was the rule. It is the thought of this γέλως to be enjoyed by her enemies that drives the Medea of Euripides to her atrocious crime. For a fourth-century example see Aeschines 2, 182.

[20] Plutarch, *Mor.* 79B. See Jebb, *Trachiniae*, p. xlvi, and Bowra in *American Journal of Philology*, LXI (1940), 385; *Problems in Greek Poetry*, 108.

[21] For a paradoxical interpretation of the play more in favour of Ajax see Whitman, *Sophocles*, pp. 59 ff.

[22] See chapter 1, note 14.

[23] 904–20. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3. 16, 9.

[24] Kitto, *Tragedy*, p. 127.

[25] 'Not Zeus it was who made me this pronouncement, nor Justice either, companion of the gods below, who made these laws for men to obey; nor did I attribute such validity to your pronouncements that the firm, unwritten ordinances of the gods could be superseded by a mortal; not now, nor yesterday, but from all time they live, and none knows when they came.' (450–7.)

[26] For discussion of Heracles, here and in Euripides, see G. Murray, *Greek Studies* (Oxford, 1946), 'Heracles the Best of Men', and Ehrenberg, *Aspects of the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1946), p. 144.

[27] It has been argued with equal persuasiveness both that the account of the plague (151–215) must have reference to the one which

afflicted Athens in 430, and that any reference to such a reality would have been too painful to be tolerated. The Theban plague affects crops and animals as well, a traditional feature of such tales.

[28] A more interesting example of the same sort is concealed within the play. With the arrival of the Messenger from Corinth our attention is diverted from the question of Laius's murder to that of Oedipus's parentage. Although it is natural enough that Oedipus should be much disturbed and excited by the discovery that he does not know who his parents were, it is strange, if we stop to think, that he should forget so completely his preoccupation with the murder of Laius and the terrible consequences for himself which seem to be emerging. But in fact the audience is untroubled.

This shows how great an advantage it may be for a dramatist to use a well known story. Had the audience not been familiar with the myth of Oedipus, it would have felt the news from Corinth to be something strange and unconnected with the plot. But since it has known all along that Laius was really the father of Oedipus, it realizes at once that the seemingly irrelevant news brings the catastrophe nearer, and that the two apparently separate themes will merge into one.

But there is a further point. It increases the effect of the climax if Oedipus passes from innocence to the realization of total guilt. Sophocles may have relied on a little confusion at the back of the minds of the audience. Apollo had prophesied that Oedipus would kill his father. For a moment, it seems to Oedipus that Apollo has been proved wrong, since Polybus, his supposed father, is dead. Since Oedipus now appears untroubled by fear of guilt, the audience, who are too excited to stop and think, may take it that he thinks Apollo's error to extend to Laius's death as well, though he does not yet know that Laius is his father.

Tycho von Wilamowitz called attention to the irrelevance, from a logical point of view, of the doubts cast upon Apollo's oracle. His brilliant, though one-sided, book on the dramatic technique of Sophocles has not been congenial to the taste of English scholars, and has had less influence than it deserved.

[29] Whitman, *Sophocles*, 149 ff.

[30] E.g. 46–8.

[31] For a persuasive exposition of different views, see J. T. Sheppard in *C.R.* XLI (1927), 2, 163: Winnington-Ingram, *Proc. Cambridge Phil. Soc.*, 1954–5 (N.S.3), p. 20.

[32] *Orat.* 52.

[33] Bowra, *Sophocles*, 265 ff.

[34] Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow* is an interesting attempt to make a more modern kind of sense of the play.

[35] See Rohde, *Psyche*, Ch. IV.

[36] Strabo, 377.

[37] See note 20.

[38] [Longinus], *On the Sublime*, 15, 4.

CHAPTER V

Prose translations

Coleridge (Bohn's Library, 1900).

D. W. Lucas: *Medea, Ion, Alcestis, Electra,* London, 1949; *Bacchae,* Cambridge, 1930.

Verse translations

Gilbert Murray, *Medea, Hippolytus, Electra, Iphigeneia in Tauris, Rhesus, Bacchae, Troades, Alcestis, Ion.*

J. T. Sheppard, *Hecuba, Helen, Cyclops.*

F. L. Lucas, *Greek Tragedy for Everyman,* London, 1954, containing *Hippolytus and Bacchae* and extracts from other plays.

Meredith, *Hecuba, Heracles, Andromache, Orestes,* London, 1937.

The Complete Greek Tragedies, University of Chicago, three vols. containing twelve plays so far published.

Vellacott, *Hippolytus, Iphigeneia in Tauris, Alcestis* (Penguin).

Editions, etc.

Page, *Medea,* Oxford, 1938.

Denniston, *Electra,* Oxford, 1939.

Dodds, *Bacchae,* Oxford, 1944.

Dale, *Alcestis,* Oxford, 1954.

All with valuable introductions. The Budé edition contains a French prose translation and introduction to each play. Five volumes containing fifteen plays so far published.

Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and his Age,* London, 1913.

Grube, *The Drama of Euripides,* London, 1941.

Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus,* Cambridge, 1948.

Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides,* Manchester, 1955.

For lost plays see Powell, *New Chapters in Greek Literature,* Third Series, Oxford, 1933, 105 ff; Page, *Greek Literary Papyri* (Loeb).

Notes (pp. 173–243)

[1] Athenaeus, 3.

[2] See p. 238.

[3] Satyrus. See Powell and Barber, *New Chapters,* I, 144.

[4] Plutarch, *Nicias,* 17.

[5] Plutarch, *Nicias,* 29. Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure* is based on this story.

[6] Probably from Alexander of Pleuron, third century B.C., quoted by Aulus Gellius, 15, 20, 8: Aristophanes *Frag.* 676 b.

[7] οὐδεμίαν φιλοτιμίαν περὶ τὰ θέατρα ποιούμενος. *Life.*

[8] The Piraeus Stone contains part of a list of the plays arranged in a similar way. *Corpus Inser. Attic* II, 992. The chronology of the plays can be established within reasonable limits, since various metrical

features, especially the use of resolved feet in iambic verse, display a regular, progressive development. See Zielinski, *Tragodoumenon Libri Tres* (Cracow, 1925), Lib. II: Ceadel *C.Q.* 35 (1941), 66.

[9] Hence the tendency of characters to deny responsibility for their actions in retrospect, e.g. *Agam.* 1497. For the irresistible force of eloquence cf. Gorgias, *Defence of Helen.*

[10] *Hippolytus,* 443–61.

[11] *Troad,* 924–54.

[12] Page, *Greek Literary Papyri,* I, 70.

[13] Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 462.

[14] See two notable articles by Dodds, *C.R.* XLIII (1929), 97; XXXIX (1925), 102, and the same author's *The Greeks and the Irrational,* Ch. VI.

[15] There is a mystery about this play. We are told it did not occur under Euripides' name in the records of performances of tragedies at Athens (Didascaliae), and it may therefore have been written for some special occasion. It seems to have political implications. See D. S. Robertson, *C.R.* XXXVII (1923), 58.

[16] Miss Dale's introduction rightly stresses the unusually wide emotional range of the play and the danger of over-subtle interpretation of character.

[17] For a warmer appreciation of this play than most readers are likely to approve see Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides.*

[18] Xenophon *Hellenica,* III, v. 23. Compare Clarendon's account of a similar incident in the Great Rebellion after the skirmish on Hopton Heath when the Roundheads withheld the body of the Earl of Northampton.

[19] Wecklein gives a hint of this view, though I have not seen it developed. For a curious attempt to identify the heroes with Athenian politicians see Giles in *C.R.* IV (1890), 95. Recent discussion by Zuntz, op. cit. note 17.

[20] Xenophon, *Hellenica,* II, ii. 3.

[21] *Mor.* 998 E.

[22] Similar were the *Hypsipyle,* of which about a fifth is preserved on papyrus, in which an enslaved mother is rescued after recognition by her two sons; the *Melanippe Desmotis,* another case of twins; and the *Alexander* dealing with the recognition of Paris by Hecuba, as well as the *Auge* and *Antiope.*

[23] Cf. Lucian's story of the effect of a performance of the play on the people of Abdera. It is paraphrased by Sterne in *A Sentimental Journey, A Fragment.*

[24] This approach owes much to M. Rivier's *Essai sur le Tragique d' Euripide,* though I cannot agree with him that the *Iphigenia in Aulis* is one of the crucial plays.

[25] Cf. Chapter I, Notes 10, 11.

[26] According to the scholiast Jason dedicated a timber from the prow of *Argo* in the temple of Hera, and it was this that fell on him.

[27] Pausanias, II, 3.

[28] See my article in the *C.Q.* XL (1946), pp. 65 ff.

[29] *Heracles*, 928–1000. The same nightmare mixture of illusion and reality appears in the *Bacchae* when Dionysus deprives Pentheus of his reason.

[30] The Nurse softens the resistance of the reluctant Phaedra by reference to some sort of love-charm. Stanford in *Hermathena* 63 (1944) suggests that this was a charm to cure her love, not to win the love of Hippolytus. This seems the less natural assumption, and requires the omission of 513–15, though it would be more to Phaedra's credit.

[31] Diels-Kranz, *Frag.* 59.

[32] The contest (*Agon*) in which a case is argued in two long speeches of roughly equal length tends to become a special feature of the plays, and in it the charms of rhetorical technique are exploited at the expense of character. That Phaedra was comparatively plain (1009) is an argument which would be more in place in the courts than in this plea of a son to his father. *Troades* 914–1032 is perhaps the extreme instance of a debate in which the character of the characters is in suspense. The *Agon* in Sophocles' *Electra* (516–609) is not entirely uninfluenced by this development. Cf. *Frag.* 189 from the *Antiope*.

[33] In Attic law the forgiveness of the victim releases the next of kin from the obligation to prosecute. Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 114 A. Demosthenes, 37, 59.

[34] An allusion to the death of Pericles has been detected in lines 1459–61, but it is highly improbable.

[35] See Dodds, *Bacchae* (Oxford, 1944), Introduction; Rohde, *Psyche* (Trans. London 1925), Ch. VIII; Jeanmaire, *Dionysus* (Paris, 1951), Ch. IV, V.

[36] Lycurgus; Homer, *Iliad*, 6, 130. The Proetides, Hesiod, *Frag.* 18.

[37] Though the revels of the Delphian Maenads were celebrated, and seem to have been no mere formality, since the revellers had once to be rescued from the snow on Parnassus, there was nothing of the sort in Attica in the fifth century, except possibly at the festival of the Lenaea. Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 26–32.

[38] Explanations on more or less allegorical lines were put forward in the fifth century in an effort to get rid of objectionable features in Homer and the myths. The method was familiar by this time; Socrates refers jokingly to an interpretation of the story of Circe and Odysseus as the triumph of temperance over appetite. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, iii, 7.

[39] The facts seem to be given by Amphitryon who says to Zeus, 'You know how to find your way in secret into another man's bed.'

(344.) Doubt is cast at times on the divine paternity, by Lycus (148), and less strongly by Iris (826), but it cannot be maintained successfully that any rationalistic theory of Heracles' birth is implied in the play.

[40] Already put on the stage as a personification of madness by Aeschylus in his *Xantriae, Frag.* 169.

[41] *O.T.* 1424–8.

[42] *Antig.* 1039–44.

[43] Note especially the extraordinary tenderness of 623–36 which is not, I hasten to add, a sign of incipient insanity.

[44] See J. T. Sheppard in *C.Q.* X (1916), 72, and the hint given in the apparatus to Murray's Oxford Text at 575. The dangers of bloodshed are mentioned by Amphitryon at 966, but it is not a passage of such weight that it can well be the key to the play.

[45] Cf. Meredith, *Four Dramas of Euripides,* 26: 'The effect (of the play) is bound up with the mental attitude of the audience to Heracles and his story: we do not know what that attitude was, and in any case no modern audience could have it.'

[46] It may be no accident that both Hera and Zeus are equated with Destiny, τὸ χρή, Hera in the Prologue (1. 20), Zeus in Iris's speech which is virtually a second Prologue (1. 828). Man may resolve Destiny from his own point of view into powers that are hostile and powers that are friendly. In reality they are one, but we may ask whether τύχη is in the last resort no more than chance, or whether it is purposeful in ways man cannot perceive.

[47] See Xenophon, *Memorabilia,* 2, 1, 21.

[48] *History of Rome,* English ed. III, 141–7. Written before the new Menander discoveries, but not obsolete.

[49] Norwood, Cf. *Essay on Euripidean Drama* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 11.

[50] Aristotle, *Poetics,* 1448 a 16.

[51] Aristotle, *Poetics,* 1449 b 27.

[52] The plots of many plays require that omens and oracles shall be treated as valid, the *Ion* for instance. This is more than outweighed by the gratuitous and comprehensive attack put into the mouth of the Messenger at *Helen* 744 ff., even though Theonoe in this very play is possessed of most peculiar sources of information. *Frag.* 795 is highly sceptical in tone, but we lack the context.

[53] From the *Sisyphus, Frag.* 1.

[54] See Powell, *New Chapters,* III, 148–51; Page, *Greek Literary Papyri,* 120–3.

[55] There is of course no uniformity in the views expressed about the fate of the soul after death. Two striking fragments (638 and 833) suggest that the after-life may be more truly life than the one we experience on earth, probably a Pythagorean idea.

[56] See Note 3, Ch. IV.

[57] Telecleides, *Frag.* 39. Cf. Aristophanes, *Frag.* 376.

[58] See p. 178 ff.

[59] Diogenes Laertius, 2, 33.

[60] It was with these lines that Cleitus taunted Alexander the Great in their last drunken quarrel. Alexander was so provoked that he killed him on the spot.

[61] Lamachus in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* is an example of the type. Cf. also 481–5 of this play.

EPILOGUE

Notes (pp. 244–7)

[1] Cf. Page, *A New Chapter in the History of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1951).

[2] See Webster, *Art and Literature in Fourth Century Athens* (London, 1956), p. 30 ff.

[3] Plutarch, *Crassus* 33.

AESCHYLUS

B.C.	AESCHYLUS	EVENTS OF LITERARY INTEREST	POLITICAL EVENTS	B.C.
	Aeschylus b. 525 (?)			
500	First Production?	Anaxagoras b. (500?)		500
			Outbreak of Ionian Revolt against Persia (499)	
		Sophocles b. (495?)		
		Phrynichus' [*Capture of Miletus*] (493)	Fall of Miletus: failure of revolt (494)	
		Herodotus b. (492?)		
490			Marathon (490)	490
	First Victory (484)	Euripides b. (484 or 480)		
480			Salamis (480)	480
			Plataea (479)	
	Visit to Sicily	Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* (476?)	Foundation of Confederacy of Delos (478)	
	Persae (472)			
470		Socrates b. (470?)		470
		Sophocles' first play victorious (468)		
	Septem (467)			
	Supplices (463?)			
			Murder of Ephialtes, rise of Pericles (462)	
460	*Prometheus*?	Thucydides b. (460)		460
	Oresteia (458)			
	Died in Sicily (456)		Athenian disaster in Egypt. Confederacy of Delos is becoming an Athenian empire (454)	
		Euripides' First Production [*Peliades*] (454)		
450				450

Chronological Table B

SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES

B.C.	SOPHOCLES	EURIPIDES	EVENTS OF LITERARY INTEREST	POLITICAL EVENTS	B.C.
	Sophocles b. 495? First Production and Victory 468	Euripides b. 484 or 480 First Production [*Peliades*] (454)			
450	*Ajax*?		Building of the Parthenon begun (447)		450
			Aristophanes b. (447?)	30 years' peace between Athens and Sparta (445)	
			Protagoras made code of laws for Thurii (444)	Power of Pericles at its height (443)	
	Antigone (442?)	First Victory (441)		Revolt of Samos from Athens (441-39)	
440	Elected general (440)	*Alcestis*: [*Telephus*] (438)	Pindar d. (438?)		440
	Trachiniae?			Outbreak of Peloponnesian War (431)	
430		*Medea* (431) *Heracleidae*?		Great plague at Athens	430
		Hippolytus (428)	Herodotus d.? Plato b.? Aristophanes' first play (427)	Pericles d. (429)	
	Oedipus T?				

		Andromache?	Visit of Gorgias to Athens (427)	Rise of Cleon
			Acharnians (425)	
		Hecuba (423?)	Thucydides defeated and exiled (424)	Cleon killed (422)
			Clouds (423)	Peace of Nicias between Athens and Sparta (421)
420				420
		Supplices?		
	Electra?			
		Heracles?		Enslavement of Melos (416)
				Athenian expedition to Syracuse (415)
		Troades (415)		
			Birds (414)	Athenian force at Syracuse destroyed (413)
	Appointed *Proboulos* after Sicilian disaster (412)	*Iphigenia T.*: *Ion*?		
		Helen: [*Andromeda*] (412)	*Thesmophoriazusae* (411)	Revolution of the 400 (411)
				Democracy restored
410		*Phoenissae*		Alcibiades recalled (410) 410
	Philoctetes (409)	*Orestes* (408)		
		Euripides went to Macedon d. (407?)		Victory at Arginusae.
	Sophocles d. (406?)	*Bacchae*: *Iphigenia A.* produced (406?)		Trial of the Generals (406)
			Frogs (405)	Loss of fleet at Aegospotami (405)
				Fall of Athens (404)
				Revolution of the 30
			Thucydides recalled?	Democracy restored (403)
	Oedipus C. produced (401)			
400				400
			Socrates d. (399)	

INDEX

Names marked with an asterisk are those of plays which are no longer extant