

EURIPIDES' *HERACLIDAE*: AN INTERPRETATION

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THE last hundred lines of this puzzling and neglected play are full of disconcerting surprises. Athens has rescued the suppliant children of Heracles from the murderous hands of Eurystheus, who is defeated and taken prisoner in battle. Now, when the action seems all but over, Alcmena orders the fallen king's execution in bold defiance of Athenian law. The chorus, at first opposed to her plan, weakens and finally acquiesces in it. Eurystheus, in whom we have seen only the implacable and unprincipled foe of the Heraclidae, reveals himself as nothing less than a sacred hero, like Oedipus at the end of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, capable of rescuing Athens through the numinous power of his bones from the descendants of the very suppliants the city has just saved. We have been led to expect the just requital of vicious lawlessness; instead we witness an act of revenge as vicious and lawless as Eurystheus' own deeds. Athens has amply demonstrated her dedication to justice; now, through the chorus, she condones a profitable injustice. The nobility of the Heraclidae has been held up for our admiration, but their descendants stand convicted of base ingratitude. The legend by no means compelled Euripides to paint such a picture. Traditionally, Eurystheus died in battle; his capture may be the poet's own invention.¹

How the critic deals with these unexpected reversals depends, of course, on what he looks for in the play as a whole. One common approach has been to abandon "aesthetic" criticism entirely, in favor of treating the play as a repository of contemporary allusions. Whatever inconsistencies are found can then be explained as necessary to Euripides' *real* message, which has little or nothing to do with the action of the drama.² If Euripides sacrifices his play to condemn the Spartan killing of Athenian prisoners, or the Athenian execution of foreign envoys—very well, for the moment at least he is more interested in writing propaganda than drama.

1. For the ancient sources, see A. C. Pearson (ed.), *Euripides: The "Heraclidae"* (Cambridge, 1907), pp. xvi–xxiii, as well as Roscher *Lex. s.v.* "Eurystheus." Apollod. 3. 8. 1 and Diod. 4. 57 give Hyllus as the slayer; Paus. 1. 44. 10 and Strabo 7. 6. 19 give Iolaus. The only source besides *Heracl.* for Eurystheus' survival of the battle is Isoc. 4. 59, who may depend on Euripides, although Alcmena is not specifically made responsible for Eurystheus' death. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, "De Euripidis *Heraclidis* Commentatiuncula," *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1935), p. 71, is probably right to see as Euripides' point of departure the tradition (Apollod. 2. 8. 168) that Alcmena wrought her vengeance on the head of the dead enemy. Cf. G. Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester, 1955), p. 41, n. 2.

2. Recent examples of this approach in its extreme form are E. Delebecque, *Euripide et la guerre du Péloponnèse* (Paris, 1951) and R. Goossens, *Euripide et Athènes* (Brussels, 1962). Delebecque (p. 92) disposes of the difficulty involved in Alcmena's order to throw Eurystheus' body "to the dogs" (κυσίν, the MS reading at 1050) after her promise to give it to the Athenians for burial in these terms: "La contradiction est incontestable; mais on sait maintenant qu'une incon séquence n'arrête pas Euripide, surtout lorsqu'elle est le signe d'une allusion." Even a critic such as M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*² (Göttingen, 1954), 1:356, who is at pains to offer a just appreciation of the play's merits, can write unconcernedly that, in the final scene, "den Dichter ein ausserhalb des Stoffes liegendes Motiv bestimmt."

To take this line is to deny (or at best to ignore) the play's claim to be a work of art. In fact, since the days of A. W. von Schlegel, the *Heracidae* has had a most unenviable reputation.³ In particular, the ending has come under heavy fire, even from critics prepared to sympathize with the idea of a patriotic occasional piece dashed off in a white heat of "vaterländische Begeisterung."⁴ G. M. A. Grube's comments on Alcmene and Eurystheus are not untypical: "Alcmene appears so late that there is no possibility of depicting a gradual deterioration. . . . We are therefore expected to take for granted what we should have been made to feel. . . . The result is that her scene with Eurystheus, which could have made a magnificent climax to a tragedy called Alcmene, is too abrupt and merely horrible." In the case of Eurystheus, "the contradiction with what has gone before is too flagrant. . . . The story seems to require a bully at first and one noble enough to bless Athens at the end. But the pieces do not hang together."⁵

There is a hidden assumption here, an unstated canon of tragic propriety. It is at least worth considering the possibility that "the pieces do not hang together," at least by conventional standards of character development, because of their function in the play's overall design. Alcmene's revenge may be "abrupt and horrible" not through incompetence or oversight, but because only so can it achieve its full meaning within the dramatic context. To wish for a magnificent climax to some other tragedy is, perhaps, to do an injustice to this one.

While attempts to make dramatic sense of the final scene have not been entirely lacking, neither have they been particularly successful. F. Stoessl, for example, sets out to show that the *Heracidae* is a drama of "tragic reversal" in which the final scene is merely a further demonstration of the changes in men's fortune that fate and the gods decree. Like Macaria's

3. Schlegel damned *Herac.* as a "Gelegenheitstragödie" and few have cared to disagree. "À peine une oeuvre d'art," M. Delcourt (quoted by Delebecque, *Euripide et la guerre du Péloponnèse*, p. 93, who defends Euripides by arguing that he must have written in haste in order to make his political views known). "Privé de résonance tragique," A. Rivier, *Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne, 1944), p. 169. "Little trace of dramatic mastery," G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London, 1941), p. 176, who adds that the subject must not have appealed to the poet. "Lifeless," J. W. Fitton, "The Suppliant Women and the *Herakleidae* of Euripides," *Hermes* 89 (1961): 460. Such adverse opinion naturally has its influence on textual criticism, which depends to a large extent on judgments of literary values such as relevance and consistency. The suggestion that our text of *Herac.* is badly mutilated was first offered by G. Hermann in 1824 and elaborated by A. Kirchhoff in 1855. Wilamowitz, "Excuse zu Euripides *Herakliden*," *Hermes* 17 (1882): 336-64, gave this view its most influential form, arguing that a speech describing the death of Macaria and a scene of lamentation disappeared very early, and that our text shows traces of adaptation by a fourth-century producer to cover this lacuna. It is worth noting that Wilamowitz' hypothesis proceeds from aesthetic considerations, what he refers to as the "Ökonomie des Stückes": "Ein Kunstwerk soll ein *εὖ* sein." A different, and even less satisfying, solution to the problems of *Herac.* was offered by J. H. McLean, "The *Heracidae* of Euripides," *AJP* 55 (1934): 197-224, who simply excised the entire Macaria episode (475-629). The theory of mutilation seems now to have been laid to rest, thanks in large measure to G. Zuntz, "Is the *Heracidae* Mutilated?" *CQ* 41 (1947): 46-52.

4. The view of Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*², 1:358. W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, vol. 1.3 (Munich, 1940), p. 425, who treats the play as one of a group of "patriotic-political" dramas, calls the ending "dieser schlechte und matte Schluss." On the preceding page he offers us the ending Euripides should have written. "Aber dem problem- und antithesenfreudigen Dichter gefiel es anders."

5. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, pp. 175, 176.

sacrifice, the death of Eurystheus "erfüllt eine Förderung des Göttlichen und erwirkt Hilfe und Rettung für Bedrängte. . . . Er, der einstige Frevler, der Verfolger und Gottverächter, ist zum Besiegten und Wehrlosen, ist zum Leidenden geworden. . . . Wie tausendfältig wiegt sein Leid auf und tilgt, was vorher gefehlt!"⁶

Stoessl's view has two related defects. Focusing on Eurystheus' downfall, Stoessl avoids explaining the equally significant reversal in the roles of Alcmena and the chorus. He is aware of the total inversion of situation and theme involved in the scene, but he cannot fully account for it on the basis of a fated change in fortune, since Alcmena's revenge and the Athenian acquiescence in it are depicted in no uncertain terms as willful violations of sacred and secular law. The second difficulty is an extension of the first and involves the weight and thrust of the whole action. It is revealed in Stoessl's attempt to draw parallels between the *Heracidae* and the "tragische Lebens- und Schicksalsbild der grossen Schuldigen" represented by such plays as the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Richard II*. In those plays the downfall of the hero is the center around which all else turns; in the *Heracidae*, Eurystheus does not appear and his horrible end is not even suggested until the action of the play seems to be complete. Where Grube pictures the possibilities of a tragedy called Alcmena, Stoessl seems to be thinking of one called Eurystheus.

Günther Zuntz's defense of the play errs in the opposite direction, by making the final scene into a kind of minatory-monitory tailpiece to the action. Zuntz wishes to vindicate the *Heracidae*, along with Euripides' *Suppliants*, as an ἐγκώμιον Ἀθηνῶν, not indeed an encomium of the Athens of Euripides' experience, but of Athens as an ideal. Zuntz aptly describes Alcmena's brutal triumph over Eurystheus as a "spectacle of disgusting cruelty."⁷ He sees how much she has become like what Eurystheus was, how different he is from what we have been led to suppose.⁸ He points out how deeply the "meek and spineless" chorus is implicated in Alcmena's repugnant crime.⁹ Yet, for Zuntz, this is simply the "final confirmation *per negationem*" of the play's central theme, man's communal striving, "often obscured yet finally triumphant towards the right, the just and the noble."¹⁰ Alcmena, Eurystheus, and the Athenian chorus are actors in a drama. By treating their final words and actions as an epilogue detached from what has gone before, a mere illustration of the distance Athens must still traverse in order to fulfill its ideal, Zuntz reduces the drama to a set of abstractions and shies away from the consequences of his own analysis.¹¹

6. F. Stoessl, "Die *Herakliden* des Euripides," *Philologus* 100 (1956): 221. A similar point of view underlies the comments in Pearson's edition, pp. xxiii-xxx.

7. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 38.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

11. More recent studies are beset by analogous difficulties. A. Garzya, "Studi sugli *Eraclidi* di Euripide," *Dioniso* 19 (1956): 17-40, treats the final scene as a confrontation between the embodiment of *hybris* (Alcmena) and that of *sophrosyne* (Eurystheus), a schema that provides no convincing solution to the crucial problems of dramatic construction. It seems arbitrary to declare, for example, that when the figure of Eurystheus suddenly moves from one moral pole to the other, "il passaggio appare normale e accettabile" (p. 32), whereas the opposite shift renders the figure of Alcmena "in-

The central problem in interpreting the *Heracleidae* is one of dramatic form. The apparent rupture in the play's fabric, the harsh disjunction of the ending from the main body of the action, must be accounted for as a crucial component of its form. The relation of the final scene to the rest of the drama is one of tension rather than of harmonious fulfillment, but that does not mean that the relation is necessarily defective, that Euripides has lost control of his drama or has overturned it to make a political point. Rather, we shall look for signs that the ending is intended to correct, even to negate, the thrust of the main action. That action is universally held to represent an ideal of just conduct; the harsh, unsettling ending suggests instead that it is to be seen as an idealization. The moral paradigm of the suppliants' triumph is replaced by a moral paradox that casts a cold, uncomfortable light on everything that has gone before.

The initial scenes of the *Heracleidae* are extremely fast paced. In 350 lines, Euripides disposes of an action analogous to that of Aeschylus' *Suppliants*. The compression and ethical simplicity of this sequence become all the more obvious by comparison with Aeschylus' expansive development of the same issues. From a technical point of view, Euripides achieves a sense of rapid forward motion by combining the suppliants' plea to the king and the confrontations of both with the enemy herald (separate episodes in Aeschylus) into a single formal structure. Even more fundamental is Euripides' replacement of the Aeschylean chorus of suppliants by a chorus of local citizens. Although this chorus intervenes in the action during the parodos and again in the exodos, it is, like most choruses, largely limited to the role of commentator. To compensate for this change, the role of the suppliants' leader, limited in the *Suppliants* to giving advice and comfort, is here expanded to include most of the functions of Aeschylus' chorus.

The result is a radical change in tonality, the replacement of the lyrical elaboration of the *Suppliants* with rhetorically effective but somewhat prosaic rhesis. The extended ritual of supplication that forms the core of Aeschylus' drama is supplanted by a suppliant situation ready to be exploited in a few swift strokes. The emotionally charged lyrics with which the Danaids introduce themselves and their story (*Supp.* 1-175) give way in the *Heracleidae* to Iolaus' direct and relatively low-keyed prologue; incantation yields to explanation. In less than fifty lines we learn of Eurystheus' ceaseless persecution of Heracles' children, the threats that have closed the rest of

naturale e . . . burattinesco" (p. 30). D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 111-24, picks up and elaborates Zuntz's suggestion that the exchange of *charis* is the play's unifying motif, but, faced with its total reversal in the final scene, is content to fall back on the hoary notion of Euripides' lack of conscience in such matters (p. 120). H. C. Avery, "Euripides' *Heracleidae*," *AJP* 92 (1971): 539-65, usefully classifies the characters of the play as spiritual descendants or spiritual opponents of Heracles, but the end product seems rather a schema than a drama. Thus, for example, Avery documents the exchange of roles effected by Alcmena and Eurystheus in the final scene (pp. 560-62) without even suggesting that it raises problems of dramatic form and coherence. Fitton, "*Suppliant Women* and *Herakleidae*," p. 457, clearly sees the complex "reversal of our sympathies" in the finale, but finds no way to incorporate this in his interpretation of the play as a whole.

Greece to them, the desperate need that has brought them to Athens. Then, as if to confirm what Iolaus has said, the arrival of Eurystheus' herald dramatically interrupts the prologue.

As a type, the herald of the *Heracidae* is not very different from his Aeschylean counterpart—more articulate, but fundamentally the same unhappy mixture of self-assurance, impiety, and violence. He, too, is a barbarian among Greeks (130–31, cf. *Supp.* 911 ff.). But the mere fact that his attack on the suppliants occurs before the acceptance of their suit by the king radically alters the dramatic situation. In the *Suppliants*, Pelasgus meets the suppliants, hears their demands, and wrestles with the heart-rending dilemma they present before the enemy appears. Euripides' Demophon, on the other hand, deals with a concrete and intolerable misuse of force that cries out to be righted.

The herald immediately attempts to wrest the children from the altar, throwing Iolaus to the ground when he resists. The chorus intervenes, questioning both Iolaus and the herald, and keeping order until the king appears to judge the case. Thus, in place of Pelasgus' elaborate introduction of himself and his rule (*Supp.* 249–73), the chorus can simply announce that their king has arrived (118–19). In place of Pelasgus' tortuous interrogation of the Danaids (*Supp.* 274–347), the chorus can briefly tell Demophon who the suppliants are and what danger they face (123–29).

As in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the herald claims jurisdiction over the suppliants (139–43), but the argument is so weak that he makes no attempt to press it. Iolaus' reply that the Argives, having banished the suppliants, have no further claim on them (189–90) fully meets the case. But the herald's real point is a raw consideration of power (153–78): Argos is strong, the suppliants are weak. Like his Aeschylean counterpart, he carries this argument to its logical conclusion with the threat of war. Iolaus answers this point indirectly, with an effective evocation of Athens' reputation for independence and courage. To this he adds an argument cognate with the Danaids' claim of Argive descent, the special obligation (*ἀνάγκη*, 205) of Demophon to help the children of Heracles, linked to his family by ties of blood and the *χάρης* (220) won by Heracles' rescue of Theseus from Hades. This claim evokes a world of heroic values, in contrast to the political opportunism of the herald, that will play a large role in the drama as a whole.

Unlike Pelasgus, Demophon has heard both sides of the question before deciding the suppliants' fate. And unlike Pelasgus, he announces his decision to honor their suit without the slightest hesitation. Three considerations compel (*ἀναγκάζουσι*, 236) his acceptance: religious duty, the bonds of kinship and *χάρης* (241), and the upholding of Athens' honor—in short, he accepts Iolaus' claim *in toto*. Pelasgus' *ἀνάγκη* (*Supp.* 478) is the fear of Zeus's wrath that compels him to undertake a burden he would give anything to avoid. Demophon's *ἀνάγκη* is simply the sum of arguments religious, political, and personal, all pointing to the same conclusion. There is no sense here, as there is in Aeschylus, of harrowing doubts and fears, of a tragic

choice between evils. Demophon is quite unperturbed by the new challenge that awaits him.¹²

For all these differences, however, the first scenes of the *Heracidae* omit only one element of the action of Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the popular vote to confirm the king's decision. This omission is a further indication of Euripides' fundamentally different handling of the dramatic situation. In the Aeschylean drama, Pelasgus' recourse to the people testifies to the overwhelming burden he must shoulder. In the *Heracidae*, the case Demophon must decide is so clear cut that there would be no dramatic point to deferring judgment. The conflict between suppliant rights and political expediency is not so much the subject as simply the chosen framework for a unit of action. As in Aeschylus, the word *δίκη* and its derivatives are given much play,¹³ but where justice lies is never a real issue.

The leitmotiv of these scenes is the enemy's *βία*, continually contrasted with the twin concepts of sacred law and political freedom upon which it impinges. A few examples will suffice to show how these themes are juxtaposed:

70–72 (Iolaus):

ικέται δ' ὄντες ἀγοραίου Διὸς
βιαζόμεσθα καὶ στέφη μαίνεται,
πόλει τ' ὄνειδος καὶ θεῶν ἀτιμία.

111–13 (chorus):

οὐκοῦν τυράννῳ τῇσδε γῆς φράσαντά σε
χρῆν ταῦτα τολμᾶν, ἀλλὰ μὴ βία ξένους
θεῶν ἀφέλκειν, γῆν σέβοντ' ἐλευθέραν.

243–46 (Demophon):

εἰ γὰρ παρήσω τόνδε συλᾶσθαι βία
ξένου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς βωμόν, οὐκ ἐλευθέραν
οἰκίην δοκήσω γαῖαν, Ἀργείων δ' ὄκνῳ
ικέτας προδοῦναι.

βία and its derivatives occur no fewer than 15 times between lines 47 and 286, coupled in almost every case by a thematic counterweight of just this sort.¹⁴ This emphasis is a further indication of the straightforward treatment of issues throughout the scenes. The very fact of the herald's violent interference with suppliant rights and Athenian sovereignty leaves him without a leg to stand on. The suppliants' acceptance is a foregone conclusion.

A certain amount of irony is implicit in the herald's role, since he comes to drag off suppliants and instead is driven off by their protector. This herald, however, adds to the irony with his own touches of sophistry. He is fond of using the value words *καλός* and *κακός* in ways that ring decidedly

12. Euripides transfers the tragic impasse from this scene to the next, as a way of introducing Macaria's sacrifice. See n. 17.

13. See lines 2, 60, 104, 138, 142, 143, 179, 187, 190, 194, 253, 254, 330.

14. See also lines 47, 64, 97–98, 101–3, 105–6, 127–29, 221–25, 247–49, 254, 285–87.

false, as in the neat antitheses of his first words (55–56) and at the close of his rhesis (177–78).¹⁵ The final irony is reserved for his departing blast. In the prologue, Iolaus had lamented his weakness (ἀσθενῇ μὲν τὰπ' ἐμοῦ, 23) in the face of Eurystheus' *hybris* (ὑβρισμ' ἐς ἡμᾶς ἤξιώσεν ὑβρίσαι, 18). Here the herald, having failed to budge the suppliants or their defenders, incongruously applies these suppliant commonplaces to his own situation. He admits his weakness (μῖᾱς γὰρ χειρὸς ἀσθενῆς μάχη, 274), but promises that his master will avenge Demophon's *ὑβρις* (280).

After the herald's departure, Iolaus turns to Demophon with words of grateful praise, and to the children with an injunction "always to keep in mind your saviors and friends" (312). Demophon, replying in kind, expresses his certainty that they will do so (334). The initial helplessness of the suppliants has been overcome, piety and civic virtue have triumphed over ruthless violence. The chorus's proud boast (ἀεὶ ποθ' ἤδε γαῖα τοῖς ἀμυχάνοις / σὺν τῷ δικαίῳ βούλεται προσωφελεῖν, 329–30) accurately reflects the first phase of the action. The dramatic and thematic concentration we have observed serves not only to achieve rapid forward motion, but also to produce a deliberate (and, for Euripides, atypical) simplification of the ethical and political issues implicit in the situation.¹⁶

The initial rescue of the suppliants seems to be leading directly to its natural sequel, the battle between their defenders and their enemies. The chorus sees the herald's exit as a sign that the Argive army will soon be at hand (288–91), and repeats its premonition after Iolaus' words of thanks (332). Demophon leaves to muster his forces and consult the seers (335–40). Iolaus chooses to remain at the altar to await Athens' success in the coming struggle (344–46). The stasimon 353–80, with its outraged defiance of Eurystheus and its confidence in Athenian might, further heightens the anticipation of an immediate clash of arms. Euripides contrives to extend this sense of expectancy for the first 25 lines of the second episode, and then suddenly confronts us with one of the surprises in which the *Heraclidae* abounds. When Demophon returns to the stage visibly distressed, Iolaus naturally assumes that the enemy is at hand, and the king confirms the fact, expounding at some length the preparations he has made for battle. But he is merely holding back the real cause of his distress, to let it explode in the midst of his description of the consultation of the oracles and prophets. All concur that a well-born maiden must be sacrificed to Persephone (408–9). Demophon is torn between his duty to the suppliants and the horror of this demand. The once united city is now split into factions, and to sacrifice an Athenian girl would mean civil war (411–19). He can only exhort the suppliants to find some way to save themselves and the city (420–22).

In one swift blow, the smooth surface of the first episode has been shattered, and the *soteria* won there overturned by legitimate concern for the

15. Other examples at lines 65, 109, 146, 165, 259.

16. We have not only the example of Aesch. *Supp.* to show how these issues could be developed, but also that of Euripides' own *Suppliants*, in which the question of the suppliants' claim on Athenian aid and the choice between war and peace that helping them entails are given a more characteristically complex treatment.

soteria of the city (402, 405).¹⁷ Iolaus accepts the reversal with considerable dignity, exonerating the king of all responsibility and reaffirming his gratitude to him (435–38), but the despair he feels is clear in his picture of renewed and ever more difficult flight (439–50). He can find no better remedy than the impetuous offer to surrender his own life in return for those of the children, an offer more noble than sensible, as Demophon politely points out (464). The impasse seems complete when Macaria, one of the daughters of Heracles who have taken refuge within the temple (cf. 41–45), steps out to resolve the dilemma. With becoming maidenly circumspection, she asks the cause of Iolaus' new laments. When she learns of the oracles, she immediately offers her own life. The crisis is overcome; Macaria reclaims the suppliants' lost *soteria* (cf. 588).

The starting point for interpreting this episode must be the fact (made much of by those who believe the received text to be badly mutilated) that it could be eliminated without altering as much as a line elsewhere in the play.¹⁸ This need not, of course, imply that the episode is dramatically otiose,¹⁹ but it does suggest that considerations other than mere exigencies of plot prompted its inclusion at this point. Many scholars have noticed that the thrust of the episode is to require that the suppliants effect their own *soteria* (cf. 421, 497), rather than merely accepting it from others, and thereby prove themselves worthy of the *charis* that Athens has bestowed upon them. Thus, Zuntz considers Macaria's sacrifice "the fulfilment of the obligation that rests upon the suppliant."²⁰ Iolaus, who clearly defines the suppliants' debt of gratitude to Athens (309 ff.), is careful to point out that it still continues (οὔτοι σή γ' ἀπόλλυται χάρις, 438) even if Athens can no longer carry out the promised favor (χάριν, 434). His offer to die for the children honors, if ineffectually, that obligation.²¹ Macaria explicitly invokes the obligation incurred by Athens' willingness to aid the suppliants (503–6), and its mirror image, the shame she would feel (αἰσχυνοῦμαι, 516) if she shirked that obligation.²²

Related to this argument is the theme of nobility, prominent throughout the play, and here Macaria's leitmotiv, much as violence was the herald's. Iolaus has already established its terms by invoking the figure of Heracles in his suppliant plea. The kinship of the line of Heracles and the line of Theseus, Heracles' heroic rescue of Theseus from Hades, are challenges to

17. In terms of dramatic technique, Euripides has postponed the tragic crisis from the initial encounter of suppliants and king (as in Aesch. *Supp.*) to an episode following their acceptance by him. Notice the emphatic repetition of ἀμήχανος and its derivatives to express the helplessness of the impasse (464, 472, 487, 492, 495; cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 379).

18. Cf. Wilamowitz, *Kleine Schriften*, 1:71.

19. This appears to be the view of Schmid, *Geschichte d. griech. Lit.*, 1.3:422: "der Dichter wollte . . . bühnenwirksame Motive, insbesondere den hier zum erstenmal vorkommende Opfertod einer Jungfrau, in die magere Handlung einflechten."

20. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 32.

21. Cf. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, pp. 113–14.

22. The notion of shame or dishonor has already made similarly emphatic appearances in Iolaus' plea to Demophon (ἡ γὰρ αἰσχύνη πάρος / τοῦ ζῆν παρ' ἐσθλοῖς ἀνδράσιν νομίζεται, 200–201) and in Demophon's reply (τό τ' αἰσχρόν, οὔπερ δέῃ μάλιστα φροντίσαι, 242; cf. 285).

the nobility of Theseus' son. Demophon's rescue of the suppliants is, for Iolaus, the product (302–3) and the proof (324–26) of that nobility. Now the changed circumstances test the nobility of Heracles' children. Persephone demands the sacrifice of a noble virgin (408–9, 489–90), and Macaria meets the demand in every way. She feels above all the importance of living up to her noble lineage (509–514, 563). She offers her life freely, for her brothers' sake and for her own, since such a death brings glory (530–34). When Iolaus suggests that the sisters draw lots to see who must die, Macaria insists on her own willing sacrifice (543–51). All who see her are struck by the manifestation of nobility in her deed and in her words (e.g. 537, chorus; 539–41 and 553–54, Iolaus; 567–71, Demophon). When Macaria has bid her family farewell and left the stage, Iolaus collapses in grief while the chorus sings an ode in praise of her glorious and noble acceptance of her fate (608–629). Just as Macaria's offer of *soteria* is a necessary pendant to that of the king, so her nobility and bravery worthily complement his.

When all this has been said, however, a number of apparent difficulties remain. The incident is introduced so abruptly as to leave uncertain the connection of the sacrifice to the impending battle, and no reason for Persephone's demand is even suggested.²³ Macaria herself appears entirely without introduction, so that we only infer from her words that she is Heracles' daughter, and are never told her name.²⁴ Finally, as we have noted, Macaria simply vanishes from the play after this episode.²⁵ Freely chosen death is a recurrent motif of Euripidean tragedy, but no other instance (with the possible exception of Evadne's self-immolation in the *Suppliants*) has so many formal peculiarities.

23. Stoessl, "Die Herakliden," p. 214. Critics have occasionally tried to find the significance of Macaria's sacrifice in the revelation of a hidden and hostile power controlling man's destiny. Thus, H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*³ (London, 1961), p. 253, writes that "the tragic value of the incident lies in the disturbing fact, apparently, that Demeter [*sic*], whoever she is, should have made Demophon's duty harder by demanding such a sacrifice." But Persephone's role is so shadowy that it can hardly carry such a burden of meaning. Her function is simply to elicit Macaria's heroic response. Macaria offers up her life of her own free will; why this should be necessary, and to whom her death is consecrated, are not permitted to become important considerations.

24. The name Macaria, which appears in the list of *dramatis personae*, is confirmed by a variant version of her story in Paus. 1. 32. 6. There are substantial grounds for doubting the view of Wilamowitz, *Kleine Schriften*, 1: 62 ff., that the whole incident is Euripides' free invention; cf. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 111–13.

25. I leave aside, for the purposes of this discussion, an apparent reference to human sacrifice (λαϊμῶν βορέλων, 822), which may or may not allude to Macaria's death. On the one hand, her sacrifice is depicted as an unconditional necessity, and one would therefore naturally expect it to have taken place immediately after her exit. The suggestion that she has been kept waiting until Eurystheus made war inevitable by refusing Hyllus' challenge to single combat, although admirable from a humanitarian point of view, dramatically perhaps deflates her gesture. On the other hand, if the reference is to human sacrifice, it is hard to imagine that the victim could be anyone other than Macaria. Some scholars have tried to circumvent these difficulties by arguing that βόρεως here, and at *IA* 1083, is to be derived from βόρος, "gore," and understood proleptically; but nowhere else does βόρεως mean anything but "human." It appears unambiguously in this sense some 18 times in Euripides, and beyond the similarity to our passage, there is no reason it should not mean just this at *IA* 1083. For βόρεως = "gory," see Pearson's edition *ad* 822; Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, p. 170, n. 1; Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 153. Garzya, "Studi sugli *Eraclidi*," pp. 28–29 with n. 45, cites further bibliography. There is an extended discussion of the whole problem in A. Guzzo, "Rilettura degli *Eraclidi* di Euripide," *Studi in onore di Luigi Castiglione* (Florence, 1960), 1: 440–42.

One simple consideration adequately accounts for the anomalies: the entire episode is constructed as an idealized portrayal of self-sacrifice, an image of flawless nobility freed of everything that might detract from it or dilute its effect. It is for this reason that Macaria appears and disappears so abruptly; we need know nothing more about this maiden than we learn from her own words. She exists only in relation to her deed. It is for the same reason that the oracle is unexplained; an account of Persephone's wrath would only distract us from Macaria's perfect and unquestioning acceptance of her role. When Macaria's heroic moment is over, she vanishes amid the praise and laments of those she has saved. A report of her death would destroy the effect the episode is so carefully designed to achieve: the concentration of our attention not on the fact of death, but on Macaria's noble choice. We are asked to admire her courage and devotion in embracing death, not to pity her for dying. We are given perfect heroism and spared the bloody reality it entails. Macaria's sacrifice takes place in a realm of bold gesture and untarnished nobility, not in the world of common mortality.

The relation of this incident to the first episode should now be clear. There, Demophon's unhesitating response to the children's claim as suppliants, victims of lawless violence, descendants of Heracles, projected an idealized vision of personal and civic virtue. Here, Macaria's unhesitating choice of self-sacrifice extends the idealization to the suppliants themselves. By transforming Iolaus' cry of despair (449–50):

χρῆν χρῆν ἄρ' ἡμᾶς ἀνδρὸς εἰς ἐχθροῦ χέρας
πεσόντας αἰσχροῶς καὶ κακῶς λιπεῖν βίον

into a joyful boast of nobility and glory (533–34):

εὕρημα γάρ τοι μὴ φιλοψυχοῦς' ἐγώ,
κάλλιστον ἦρηνκ', εὐκλεῶς λιπεῖν βίον,

Macaria vindicates the assumption of heroic values in harmony with a satisfying (and apparently triumphant) moral order. In the next episodes, the play moves beyond idealization into a kind of heroic fantasy, with Iolaus' rejuvenation and the appearance of Heracles himself in battle.

The third episode returns to the preparations for battle. A servant enters to find Iolaus still collapsed in grief and almost too weak to rise. But the old man revives immediately at the servant's promise of good news, and calls Alcmena out of the temple to hear it with him. Alcmena's appearance at this point has caused much dissatisfaction. W. Schmid comments: "Die Anwesenheit der Alkmene in dieser Szene ist äusserst kümmerlich motiviert und völlig zwecklos für den weiteren Verlauf der Handlung. Sie kann nur den Sinn haben, die Überraschung, die ihr Auftreten am Schluss des Stückes erregen muss, etwas abzuschwächen."²⁶ Grube is in agreement, adding only that Alcmena repels the harmless servant here in order to prepare us for

26. Schmid, *Geschichte d. griech. Lit.*, 1.3:423.

her later violence.²⁷ In a similar vein, Zuntz attempts to motivate her entry by turning the brief scene into a full-fledged analysis of the psychology of fear that not only foreshadows but explains her revenge on Eurystheus.²⁸ But does this moment really foreshadow and therefore weaken the surprise of the final scene? Granted that part of Euripides' design at this point may be to bring Alcmena to our attention, the means he employs seem designed to provide a sharp contrast to her second appearance.

Alcmena has been presented to us as the fellow-guardian of Heracles' children (41 ff.); her function is no different from that of Iolaus.²⁹ Here, she is presented just as this fact would lead us to expect. She has suffered much at the hands of Eurystheus' minions and, believing the servant to be another such exponent of *bia* (cf. 647), speaks to him just as Iolaus addressed the herald (οὐκ ἔστ' ἄγειν σε τοῦσδ' ἐμοῦ ζώσης ποτέ, 650; cf. οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τοῦτ' ἐμοῦ ζῶντός ποτε, 66). If she is fierce, it is in defense of the children she believes threatened. Indeed, Alcmena's incongruous evocation of the suppliant situation, instantly resolved when she learns that the servant brings good news, is surely at least partly comic in its effect. Furthermore, although obviously no coward, Alcmena is fearful of being left alone by Iolaus (709–719).³⁰ She can hardly be called a virago at this point. Her brief appearance, far from foreshadowing her later brutality, makes it even more shocking by showing her first in the role of a stouthearted but overanxious defender of the suppliants.

Alcmena and Iolaus hear the good news that Hyllus, Heracles' oldest son, who has been abroad in search of support (cf. 45–46), has returned with a large contingent of allies. As Iolaus questions the servant about the preparations for battle, we feel his excitement mounting. When the servant says that he must leave to join the fight, Iolaus announces that he will go, too (680–81). This surprising decision meets with the servant's scorn, the chorus' disapproval, and Alcmena's dismay, but with each successive blast Iolaus' purpose becomes firmer. He makes the servant fetch armor and carry it for him while he hobbles off to war.

This scene is perhaps the most overtly comic in extant tragedy. The basis of its humor is the discrepancy between wish and reality, expressed in the antithesis δρᾶν / βούλεσθαι (691–92). Iolaus' decrepitude, not especially prominent earlier in the play,³¹ is now the center of attention. He himself introduced the theme when he was prostrate with grief (636), and the servant

27. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, p. 171.

28. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 36–37.

29. Cf. H. Strohm, *Euripides, Zetemata* 15 (Munich, 1957), p. 18. Two further references to Alcmena associate her with the children and Iolaus (445–48, 584–86).

30. Alcmena's opposition to Iolaus' departure for battle suggests another possible motive for introducing her at this point in the action. By adding her objections to those of the servant and the chorus, she makes the skepticism universal even among the old man's intimates. In the context of the comic element so prominent in this scene, Alcmena's fears have ironic overtones; Iolaus seems hardly the man to defend her.

31. The only signs of weakness in the first episodes come when the herald pushes the old man down (67), and when Iolaus collapses in grief at Macaria's fate. In the first case, the emphasis is on the herald's insolent use of force, in the second on the effect of Macaria's nobility on those who love her. Neither can really be called a sign of decrepitude.

rings the changes on it in a manner suggestive of the insolent slave of comedy. Word play and ironic banter add point to the servant's deflation of Iolaus' braggart-soldier boasting:³²

ΙΟ. οὐδεὶς ἔμ' ἐχθρῶν προσβλέπων ἀνέξεται.

ΘΕ. οὐκ ἔστ' ἐν ὄψει τραῦμα μὴ δρώσης χερός.

ΙΟ. τί δ'; οὐ θένοίμι κἂν ἐγὼ δι' ἀσπίδος;

ΘΕ. θένοῖς ἄν, ἀλλὰ πρόσθεν αὐτὸς ἂν πέσοις.

The chorus challenges Iolaus' plan in a more respectful tone (although there is perhaps a playful note to the λῆμα / σῶμα antithesis of 702–3), solemnly warning the old man that there is no way to recapture lost youth. But when the servant returns, the comedy becomes almost grotesque. He tells Iolaus to arm, but then on second thought volunteers to carry the armor himself, since the old man will find it too heavy to bear (720–25). Even this is not enough, for Iolaus now asks the servant to place the spear in his hand, support his other arm, and guide his steps. “Am I to lead a warrior like some schoolboy?” (παιδαγωγεῖν, 729) snaps the servant. Humor and pathos merge as the old man, now completely caught up in his fantasy, hobbles off, ludicrously urging the servant to hurry and dreaming the while of the wonders he will yet perform.³³

What can have prompted this treatment of Iolaus' entry into battle? Even if we consider the rejuvenation of Iolaus a given of the legendary subject, Euripides need hardly have introduced it in this way. The infirmity of old age is one of his recurrent themes,³⁴ but that is no reason for its deployment here. The possibility that Euripides is parodying Aeschylus' lost *Heracleidae*,³⁵

32. Lines 687 and 684–86. Some rearrangement of lines 683–91 is clearly required, and that proposed by Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 113–14, seems to me the most satisfactory both for sense and paleographical plausibility. Pierson's θένοίμι and θένοῖς for the MSS σθένοίμι and σθένοῖς seem certain. Pearson in his edition *ad loc.* objects that “with θένοῖς, πρόσθεν is illogical, since we must supply τῷ θενεῖν.” That, however, is just the point of the servant's sarcastic wit.

33. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 29–30, while not denying the comic element in this scene, urges that during Iolaus' departure the servant suddenly becomes “as helpful and appreciative as before he had been scathing”; but the most one can fairly say is that the servant's annoyance is tempered by a certain sympathy (e.g., 737), although he remains as skeptical, and even sarcastic, as before (e.g., 729, 739). Zuntz argues further that Iolaus' final words put his strivings “in a completely different light,” and here he wins at least partial assent from Garzya, “Studi sugli *Eracleidi*,” p. 27, and Avery, “Euripides' *Heracleidae*,” p. 555. But lines 740–47 will hardly bear the weight these critics saddle them with. They contain Iolaus' wish for the return of his youthful strength, delivered in the best Nestorian manner as an apostrophe of his own arm, an accusation of cowardice against Eurystheus, and a concluding sententia on the mutability of fortune. Now, as we shall see, the wish does come true, the charge of cowardice and the prediction of a change in fortune are verified. But the speech itself must not on this account be ripped from the visual and verbal context, which Zuntz himself describes as grotesque. It is not the content or the tone of these lines that requires us to “imagine the old man . . . straightening up and walking off stage with vigor and confidence” (Avery), or to see even here “a high-spirited and impetuous devotee of the right” who “has battled on, forward to that point where the gods are bound to intercede” (Zuntz). What Euripides shows us, on the contrary, is a decrepit old man struggling simply to reach the battlefield. The full impact of the subsequent miracle depends on its total contrast to this picture. By the same token, the full impact of Iolaus' words depends on the later realization that what seemed self-delusion was really prophecy and has been fulfilled.

34. Cf. Tiresias and Cadmus in *Bacch.* (esp. 363 ff.); Peleus in *Androm.* 547 ff., 1076 ff.; and the old servants in *Elec.* 489 ff. and *Ion* 738 ff.

35. Cf. Pearson's edition, pp. xiii, n. 2; xvi.

even if it could be proved, would hardly be an adequate explanation. We must rather look to the next scene for an answer. Iolaus' departure, after all, is simply a prelude to the battle that culminates in his miraculous rejuvenation and his triumph over Eurystheus.

The battle report makes it clear that Iolaus was right and everyone else was wrong. The servant (690) and the chorus (704–5) were sure that no good would come of his desire to fight; Alcmene called him mad (709). Yet, just when he appeared most ridiculous, even pathetic, he was a prophet. When we hear the messenger speech, we realize that Iolaus' parting words, in context apparently more of his wishful thinking, foretold precisely what was to happen. Heracles did restore the youthful strength of his comrade's arm (*βραχιόνων* . . . *ἡβητὴν τύπον*, 858; cf. *ᾧ βραχίων* . . . *ἡβήσαντά σε*, 740). Eurystheus did prove a coward (*κάκιστος*, 816; cf. *κακός* 744), and Iolaus did capture him (859–63; cf. 743–44), putting an end to his good fortune (*εὐτυχεῖν* 865; cf. *εὐτυχοῦντα*, 747). Against all odds, the impossible has become reality.

In the light of Iolaus' miraculous rejuvenation, the comic departure for battle takes on a precise meaning. The whole story is a fantasy that partakes, as J. W. Fitton observes, of the "absurdity of the fairy tale."³⁶ Euripides has chosen not to rationalize the absurdity, but rather to exploit it by making the contrast between what Iolaus was and what he becomes as great as possible. To achieve the desired effect he emphasizes the incongruity of Iolaus' departure, briefly abandoning the idealization of the previous episodes in favor of a framework of comic realism. The ridicule and pathos are a means of heightening the marvel of this transformation of the stumbling dotard into a hero.³⁷ Derision is the springing point for the miraculous. And with the advent of the miraculous, idealization crosses over into fantasy.

The battle sequence that leads to Iolaus' triumph begins with a supremely confident ode, cast in the form of a prayer to Zeus and Athena (748–83). The justice of Athens' cause is once more in the forefront. The city has undertaken a great risk for the sake of the suppliants (756–58). Argos is powerful (*δεινὸν μὲν*, 759) but it would be cowardly (*κακὸν δ'*, 763) to abandon the suppliants at her behest. Zeus, patron of suppliants, will return the *charis* given them with *charis* of his own (766–68): *Ζεὺς μοι σύμμαχος, οὐ φοβοῦμαι, Ζεὺς μοι χάριν ἐνδίκως / ἔχει*. In the second half of the ode, the chorus turns to the city's patroness with similar faith in a victory of justice (cf.

36. Fitton, "Suppliant Women and Herakleidae," p. 455, n. 2. Cf. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*³, p. 252: "Iolaus makes us smile by climbing into armour which he can hardly support, and finally rides gallantly, a Greek Quixote, clean out of the play into fairyland." Avery, "Euripides' *Heracleidae*," pp. 553–55, attempts to minimize the miraculous in Iolaus' transformation, but his arguments do not bear close examination. Iolaus, he says, is Alcmene's grandson, and the oddity is not his rejuvenation but his initial old age. But this oddity emerges from perusing genealogical tables, since Iolaus' relation to Alcmene is never mentioned in the text of the play, where his old age surprises no one at all. Avery then calls Iolaus' rejuvenation "no more of a miracle than Demophon's decision to risk his country for a moral principle or Macaria's willing self-sacrifice." This merely clouds the issue. "Miraculous acts of morality and will" they may be—that is, rare and admirable—but there is nothing the least bit *odd* about them, as there is about an old man suddenly becoming young.

37. R. Carpenter, *Folk Tale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics* (Berkeley, 1946), p. 69, points this out as a technique characteristic of *Märchen*. "The lowlier the victim and the bitterer the humiliations of frustration, the more stirring the release and final triumph."

773, 776), and similar confidence in the reward of their devoted attention to Athena's cult (777–83). There is none of the doubt and distress that characterize the "battle stasima" of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* and Euripides' *Suppliants*, and no feeling of real danger, for the terms in which the struggle has been presented from the beginning of the play leave little question about its outcome.

The messenger speech conveys a sense of righteousness triumphant in its every detail. The triumph belongs to the suppliants themselves; the massed combat of the opposing armies is described in very general terms (830–42), and Demophon is allowed only a brief word of encouragement to his men (824–27). Instead, the messenger concentrates on two incidents that pit the suppliants against Eurystheus. First Hyllus proves his nobility and courage by offering to meet Eurystheus in single combat (800 ff.). The king's failure to respond in turn reveals his cowardice. Then Iolaus' miraculous rejuvenation and heroic capture of Eurystheus put the seal on the triumph of Heracles' clan (843 ff.). The appearance of the new deity with his heavenly bride Hebe in answer to Iolaus' prayer serves not only as an explanation of the old man's amazing feat, but also as a culmination of the theme of nobility so prominent in Macaria's sacrifice.³⁸ Heracles' appearance is the proof of his divinity and therefore of the greatness of his line. Furthermore, this is a fitting final exploit, the subjugation of his ancient enemy.

The jubilant responses of Alcmene and the chorus to the messenger's news round out the battle sequence. Alcmene, who had long nursed doubts about Zeus's dealing with her (cf. 718–19), now accepts the proof that her son is a god, and offers Zeus her thanks (χάριν, 870) for ending her troubles at last. The stasimon (892–927) draws from the outcome of the battle the twin lessons of the mutability of fortune and the ultimate victory of justice. Athens is on the path of justice (ὁδὸν . . . δίκαιον, 901) and must never swerve from it, for god ordains the defeat of the unjust (τῶν ἀδίκων, 908). A sense of cosmic order emerges from the exempla of Heracles and Eurystheus. As Athena aided Heracles, so her people have protected his children from a violent and unjust enemy (919–27).

A word must be said at this point about the role of the gods in the *Heraclidae*, for the scenes we have just reviewed raise a number of questions. The play is by common consent remarkably "orthodox" in its treatment of popular religion, less questioning, more straightforwardly affirmative than any other Euripidean drama.³⁹ The miracles—Heracles' appearance with Hebe, Iolaus' rejuvenation—are indisputable facts for the play.⁴⁰ The gods

38. Cf. Fitton, "Suppliant Women and Herakleidae," p. 455.

39. Cf. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*², 1:358: "Nie wieder hat Euripides so warme religiöse Töne angeschlagen wie in diesem Drama, nie so positiv zur Volksreligion Stellung genommen."

40. The messenger's statement that he did not witness the miracles (847–48) is sometimes offered as evidence of the poet's "skepticism" concerning them, e.g., in the Budé edition of L. Méridier, *Euripide*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1925), p. 194. It seems clear, however, that the remark is simply a kind of dramatic punctuation, setting off the miraculous conclusion from the rest of the fighting by setting it off from the preceding narration. In any case, since Iolaus does capture Eurystheus, his transformation must be accepted as real for the play. The account of the miracle is presented without irony and never subjected to doubt thereafter. Cf. Fitton, "Suppliant Women and Herakleidae," p. 455.

can and do intervene in the world of men. A similar conception underlies Persephone's unexplained demand for a victim, which not even those victimized think for a moment of circumventing; Iolaus' curiously archaic-sounding view that Athens will defeat Argos because Athena is stronger than Hera (347–52); and the chorus' reminder to Athena that, in effect, she owes the Athenians something on account of their attention to her cult (777–83).

Divine intervention, however, is not haphazard. The gods, and Zeus in particular, enforce a law of justice whose working the chorus describes in the odes that frame the battle report. Reward for adherence to that law is the principle upon which the chorus rests its hopes (776–79), and which seems fully vindicated by Eurystheus' defeat (901–9). Even fate (*Μοῖρα τελεσιδῶτειρα*, 899) is coextensive with divine justice, for in time it has restored the good fortune of Heracles' line and overturned the base Eurystheus. The *μοῖρα* (612; cf. 615) of Macaria finds its pendant, and its explanation, in this new *Μοῖρα*.⁴¹ Like Heracles, virtue must undertake its labors (625); like Heracles, it triumphs in the end. The analogy of his reward is close at hand (911–18). Even Alcmena, the skeptic of the piece, realizes that her doubts were unfounded.

The *Heracleidae*, it is fair to say, is not a play that delves deeply into the nature of the divine or of man's relation to god. Divine justice is not so much an issue as an assumption. Nevertheless, it is in many ways the crucial assumption of the play. It is idle to speculate whether Euripides really believed in the presence of god's just hand in human affairs at this stage of his career (although our analysis of the final scene will suggest that any such explanation would be far too simple). What counts is the function of the affirmation in the dramatic context: it permits the thoroughgoing idealization we have seen as the central thrust of the play to this point. Such an idealization is possible only where god and man are united in an ordered universe in which the just are rewarded and the unjust punished, the noble vindicated and the base disgraced. Only in such a world can right and wrong be totally unambiguous and choices completely clear. Only in such a world can fantasies be completely satisfied and miracles accepted at face value.

But is this, finally, the world of the *Heracleidae*? If the play ended at line 927 one would be compelled to say so, but it does not. Moral certitude, and the assumption of divine justice that underlies it, are brought sharply into question in the final scene. Euripides constructs, as the greatest surprise of this surprising drama, a brief coda that unflinchingly reverses every major theme of the play, reopens every question, challenges every conclu-

41. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, p. 116, argues that lines 608–617 reveal an ambiguous attitude toward fate and the gods, but the apparent ambiguity fades on closer examination. The mutability of fortune is identified with fate (*μοῖρα*, 612), and fate in turn with the gods' will (*τὰ θεῶν*, 608, 618). The consolation that the chorus offers is based on this identity: fate is in the gods' hands. Macaria's fate, they go on to say, is a "glorious share of death" (621), freely given for her family and country, worthy of her father, winning honor among men. Thus, what might be in another context a token of divine injustice is here subsumed into a pattern of providential harmony. Compare the parallel roles of fate in raising the children up (899) and the gods in humbling Eurystheus (907).

sion. These 127 lines constitute a new action of tremendous power and brutality that stuns us and leaves us gasping for breath. Without this new action, we would be forced to conclude that the *Heracidae* is the tame patriotic effusion many hold it to be, but at least its thrust would be clear and its unity unquestionable. The final scene makes for a far more complex, and far more difficult, play.

This virulent finale comes unexpectedly, but in retrospect one can see how carefully the ground has been prepared. Alcmena's response to the news of Eurystheus' capture contains a sinister strain whose significance becomes apparent only later. The messenger speech itself ends with a reflection on the transience of human fortune, fitting enough in context but even more appropriate to the final scene—especially the Herodotean tag, "Let no one envy the man who seems fortunate until he sees him die" (865–66). Alcmena calls Eurystheus *τοῦ κακῶς ὀλουμένου* (874), which is understood simply as "accursed" rather than as implying a threat,⁴² but which quite literally foreshadows her intentions (cf. *δεῖ σε κατθανεῖν κακῶς*, 958). Similarly, her questioning of Iolaus' wisdom in sparing Eurystheus' life, although hardly a clear indication that she is to become his executioner, amply demonstrates her attitude toward the enemy (881–82): *παρ' ἡμῖν μὲν γὰρ οὐ σοφὸν τόδε, / ἐχθροὺς λαβόντα μὴ ἀποτείσασθαι δίκην*. The messenger replies, in an echo of this phrase, that Eurystheus was spared so that Alcmena could confront him and mete out his penalty (*δοῦναι δίκην*, 887).⁴³

This, however, hardly decreases the shock of the spectacle to come. Indeed, the final scene begins on the expected note. The servant who leads in Eurystheus comments that a *δαίμων* (935) has humbled this man as one *μείζω τῆς δίκης φρονῶν* (933; cf. 925). Alcmena identifies the daemon with the goddess Dike (941) and rehearses all the old charges against the fallen king. Out of this passionate denunciation comes the sudden turn in the action. Carried away by her fury, Alcmena cries out that Eurystheus must die, that one death is not enough for him (958–60), but the chorus intervenes to forbid his murder.⁴⁴ In a brief stichomythy (961–74), these Athenians

42. Cf. Pearson in his edition *ad loc.* The same phrase is clearly no more than a curse at Eur. *Cyclops* 474.

43. Similar hints may be felt in the phrase *πρὸς βίαν ἔξενε' ἀνάγκη* (885–86), which extends to Eurystheus' captors the terms so closely associated with his crimes; and in *σῆ* [i.e., Alcmena's] *δеспотούμενον χερί* (884), which suggests the reversal of Eurystheus' former despotism over the *Heracidae* (cf. 99).

44. The distribution of parts of 961–72 presents a difficult problem. There is useful but inconclusive discussion in Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 125–28; Stoessl, "Die *Herakliden*," pp. 231–33; and Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, p. 119. The MSS give the exchange to the servant and the chorus; Tyrwhitt assigned the chorus' part to the servant, Barnes the servant's part to Alcmena. The two proposed substitutions must be examined separately, for they involve different kinds of problems. The chief reason for substituting the servant for the chorus seems to be that the chorus could not know, as the servant would, what the Athenian leaders and Hyllus had decided concerning Eurystheus' fate. But the question is one of Athenian law, which the chorus would well understand, and it hardly imposes on our credulity to suppose that they have learned that their leaders and Hyllus have specifically confirmed it in this case. The alternative, that the servant who takes such delight in Eurystheus' discomfiture should suddenly be unnerved by the thought of a breach of Athenian law, seems far less plausible. Other objections to the chorus are less troublesome: their use of the third person is due to the fact that they are reporting the views of their leaders (*προσταταῖσιν*, 964); their slide from opposition to Alcmena's plan here to sympathy, and finally to acquiescence,

assert in the strongest possible terms that Athenian law forbids the execution of prisoners of war; their rulers have decided to spare Eurystheus, and Hyllus, as leader of the Heraclidae, has accepted this decision. Suddenly, the issue has shifted from the requital of past wrongs to the preparation of a new outrage.

This surprising change of focus is carried further in Eurystheus' first speech. The man whom we have heard of only as a despicable and cowardly tyrant turns out to be brave, reasonable, and composed. He refuses to incur the charge of cowardice by pleading for his life (983–85). He indicts Hera for making him undertake a struggle of which he wanted no part and which he views as a sickness (*νόσον*, 990). Once the feud had begun, fear drove him on; he realized that he would never be safe so long as his enemy's children survived (1004). This self-defense, the power of Hera to compel him to become Heracles' enemy to the death and beyond, might in another context be merely an excuse.⁴⁵ Here, no one disputes it, and the play's assumption that the gods do intervene in human affairs gives it added weight. Iolaus has already depicted the battle between Argos and Athens as a struggle between Hera and Athena (347–52), and a similar conception returns here to produce a very different effect.

The tables are now completely turned. Not only does Alcmene wield, and exult in, the same power of life and death Eurystheus once held over her (944), but she has inherited his brutal intransigence as well. She clearly subscribes to the servant's view that nothing is sweeter than to see one's foes suffer (940). Hatred for Eurystheus has become her ruling passion, for which love of the city that saved her is no match (975–77). In effect she has become another Eurystheus.⁴⁶ She puts into practice here the same unrelenting hatred of the enemy that he practiced so long. Like Eurystheus' herald in the first episode, Alcmene sees the defeat of her enemy as the standard of *to kalon* (*ἐχθροὺς . . . οὐ καλὸν κτανεῖν*; 965; *οὐκ οὖν ἔτ' ἐστὶν ἐν καλῷ δοῦναι δίκην*; 971). Even her defiance of criticism (*πρὸς ταῦτα τὴν θρασεῖαν ὅστις ἂν θέλῃ / καὶ τὴν φρονοῦσαν μείζον ἢ γυναικα χρῆ / λέξει*, 978–80) is reminiscent of the servant's condemnation of Eurystheus (*μείζω τῆς δίκης φρονῶν*, 933).

Eurystheus' self-defense is strengthened by its contrast with Alcmene's violent attack. He is capable of respect for his enemy (998–99), something completely impossible for Alcmene, and he remains dignified while she abandons herself increasingly to her passion. Most telling of all, Eurystheus wins our assent when he insists that Alcmene would have acted just as he did, had she been in his position (1005–8). He was merely dealing in the same unrelenting hatred of the enemy in which Alcmene believes, and which

seems a clear part of Euripides' design. The choice between the servant (MSS) and Alcmene is essentially a question of dramatic effectiveness. Why should the servant take over for his mistress at this crucial point? A possible answer might be that Alcmene's announcement that she will kill Eurystheus if no one else is willing (973) is meant as a haughty interruption of the proceedings, but I feel no great certainty on this point.

45. Contrast, for example, the agon in Eur. *Tro.* 914–1032, where Helen's claim that Aphrodite made her follow Paris to Troy is very effectively disputed by Hecuba.

46. Cf. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 36; Avery, "Euripides' *Heracleidae*," pp. 560–62.

she now insists on carrying to its conclusion. For Eurystheus, the children of Heracles were first and foremost just that, “hostile offspring of the enemy lion” (ἐχθροῦ λέοντος, 1006), therefore themselves enemies (ἐχθροὺς, 996; cf. ἐχθραν πατρῶαν, 1002), to be feared until eliminated. Alcmene, as we have seen, finds it only natural that enemies (ἐχθροὺς, 965) be killed; she will specifically justify execution of Eurystheus by branding him an enemy (ἐχθρός, 1049). There is, however, another possible attitude toward the enemy. Eurystheus reminds us of it when he praises Athens for having spared his life. Alcmene will not, as he did not, act prudently (σωφρόνως, 1007) by sparing an enemy, but the prudent city (πόλις . . . σωφρονοῦσα) has done so in Eurystheus’ case, placing piety above enmity (τὸν θεὸν / μείζον τίονσα τῆς ἐμῆς ἐχθρας πολὺ, 1012–13). The life of Eurystheus is sacrosanct under Hellenic law (1011).⁴⁷ Alcmene, however, is now as unwilling to abide by that law as Eurystheus was before. Her whole being centers on revenge.

The chorus’ resistance to Alcmene’s fury is now all but spent. They ask her circumspectly for “a small favor” (1018), the release of Eurystheus ordered by the city; but when she suggests that she can kill him and obey the city as well, they allow that “this would be best” (1021). Alcmene’s “obedience” turns out to be a cunning sophistry (1022–25):

κτανοῦσα γὰρ
τόνδ’ εἶτα νεκρὸν τοῖς μετελθοῦσιν φίλων
δώσω· τὸ γὰρ σῶμ’ οὐκ ἀπιστήσω χθονί,
οὗτος δὲ δώσει τὴν δίκην θανῶν ἐμοί.

This almost punning solution to the dilemma that the demands of *xenia* impose rings shockingly false.⁴⁸ In such a context, δώσει τὴν δίκην (cf. 881, 887, 971) cannot but reflect on the nature of the *dike* that Alcmene is dispensing. Eurystheus himself settles the issue by declaring his readiness to die and revealing that in death he will become a sacred hero. With the dying hero’s prophetic voice, he announces that his bones will protect Attic soil from a future invasion of the Heraclidae’s descendants. Alcmene’s reaction to this news is a further instance of her desperate cleverness. Totally ignoring the import of Eurystheus’ prophecy for her own line, she seizes on his offer of aid to Athens as the best way to win the chorus’ compliance in his death (1045–49). In a final burst of rage, she orders Eurystheus killed and his body thrown to the dogs, thus withdrawing even the small concession

47. *προστρόπαιον* (1015) may suggest indeed that Eurystheus is now a suppliant of the Athenians, like the children and Alcmene herself while he still threatened them. This would conform to the regular use of the word in tragedy (Aesch. *Supp.* 362, *Ag.* 1587, *Eum.* 234 and 445; Soph. *Ajax* 1173, *Phil.* 930), but (1) there is no further indication of Eurystheus’ suppliant status in the text; and (2) the phrase refers to the future (*ἐντεῦθεν*, i.e., after Eurystheus’ death) rather than to his present condition. It seems likely, then, that the word is here used as at Aesch. *Cho.* 286, and refers to Eurystheus as a spirit calling out for vengeance, as the future avenger of the Athenians for wrongs suffered at the hands of the descendants of the Heraclidae (cf. 1032 ff.). See Pearson’s edition, pp. 148–50, for a survey of the various possible interpretations of this line.

48. Fitton, “*Suppliant Women and Herakleidai*,” p. 456, points out that the sophistry and the “fascinating combination of cleverness and animality” characterize other Euripidean revengeful women as well (Medea, Hecuba in both *Hecuba* and *Troades*).

she had made to her hosts. The chorus, now thoroughly acquiescent, closes this repulsive spectacle somewhat limply with a remark to the effect that Athens, at least, will be free of bloodguilt.⁴⁹

The reversal of situation has been carried to the limit. Alcmene, the suppliant ready to die for her brood (650), has become the ruthless slayer of a suppliant. She has violated the law and flaunted the will of the city that saved her. Even more importantly, Eurystheus reveals that the suppliants' descendants will one day march against their Athenian protectors, betraying the favor granted them (309–319). Thus, the noble line of Heracles has been vindicated only to prove itself false. "Such are the *xenoi* you have championed" (1036–37).

Eurystheus, contrary to every expectation, becomes the *κέρδος* (1043) that Athens' efforts have won. Iolaus began the play with a distinction between the just man and the seeker after profit (*ὁ δ' εἰς τὸ κέρδος λῆμ' ἔχων*, 3) and Athens rejected the profit offered by Eurystheus' herald (*τὶ κερδανεῖς*; 154) in favor of justice. Now, ironically, Alcmene's betrayal of that honorable act gives Athens a profit she never sought, *σωτηρία* (1045; cf. 1032) against those she once saved. And this reversal makes of Eurystheus, once despised for his baseness, a hero whom Athens will have cause to call noble (*γενναῖον*, 1015).

Athens' role, too, is transformed by the chorus' timid acquiescence in Alcmene's vengeance.⁵⁰ Until the final scene, the city seemed unflinching in its devotion to law, valiant champion of justice. Now the chorus yields to Alcmene's violent passion, destructive of the legal and moral order Athens has fought to defend. The city does not share in Alcmene's bloodguilt (cf. 1012–13, 1032–33, 1054–55), and stands to gain protection from Eurystheus' tomb; but this can hardly justify a lack of integrity that contrasts so sharply with Athens' former moral sensitivity. The play ends on a note of self-serving "legalism" poles apart from Athens' earlier dedication to the underlying principles of law. If this is so, the view that the final scene of the *Heraclidae* is simply a patriotic addendum collapses. The descendants of the Heraclidae are, of course, the Spartans, and the Peloponnesian War

49. Lines 1054–55 admit of at least three different interpretations: (1) "as far as *we* are concerned our kings will consider *us* free from guilt" (Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 42; cf. Stoessl, "Die *Heracliden*," p. 234); (2) "the acts which proceed from us shall not implicate our princes in blood-guilt" (Pearson's edition, *ad loc.*); (3) "the kings shall see that the proper expiatory rites are carried out" (Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, p. 173). The difficulty of choosing among these versions on grounds either of sense or grammar suggests that all is not well with the text as it stands. There is no reason to suppose corruption, but a few lines may be missing that would have clarified the sense of the chorus' last words. An additional hint of this is the fact that Alcmene's grim order to throw the corpse to the dogs meets with not the slightest objection. There can be, I think, no doubt that this is what Alcmene says; attempts to square 1050 with her sophistic concession in 1023 (e.g., Elmsley's *πορὶ* or Housman's *κόρε* for *κυρίν*) are hardly necessary in view of her vindictive brutality and obvious lack of sympathy for Athenian scruples throughout the scene. On the other hand, we would expect even this acquiescent chorus to react to Alcmene's announced intention. I suggest, therefore, that Hermann was probably right to posit a lacuna after 1052, and that this contained some countermanding of Alcmene's order to desecrate the corpse which fixed the meaning of the last two lines. An insistence on proper burial would continue the chorus' concern for propriety without altering the central fact of their moral weakness.

50. Cf. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 41–42; Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, pp. 118–19.

had just begun when the play was produced. But if Euripides “invented this part of the plot himself for the purpose of glorifying Athens,”⁵¹ he chose a very strange procedure in pitting the spinelessness of the Athenian chorus against Alcmene’s fury.⁵²

The questions raised by the final scene go deep. Eurystheus’ fate and his prophecy reopen the issue of justice that seemed settled beyond all doubt by his defeat. The comforting triumph of the just over the very figure of *hubris* yields to a vengeance that reduces those who triumph to the same level of brutality. The *dike* with which the *Heraclidae* closes is not the simple justice with which it began. It has become the stern, self-perpetuating, and apparently endless cycle of retribution. Alcmene, enforcing this *dike* on Eurystheus, continues, but does not end, the cycle. Ironically, the murder of her enemy raises him up as an avenger of her own descendants, who will, like her, betray the *charis* of the Athenians. The tidy lesson that the main action seemed to offer has been thoroughly undercut. The final outcome is not a morally simple or final victory, but rather the bewildering triumph of ἔχθρα πατρώα (1002), in which Athens sees her friends becoming foes, her enemy a friend.

The meaning of the idealization verging into fantasy that characterizes the main body of the play only becomes clear in the final scene. Until that scene, the chorus’ easy conclusion (συνφέρεται τὰ πολλὰ πολλοῖς, 919) seems clearly right. The assumption of a morally satisfying *kosmos*, harmoniously sustained by gods and men, prevails over every challenge from the realm of daily experience—violence, fear, pursuit of gain, the threat of civil disorder, the very frailty of age. In the end, however, the conclusion must be revised. Everything hangs together, indeed, but not in the way we have been led to expect. From one point of view, the “realism” for which Euripides is famous may be said to reassert itself with brutal force to counteract the prevailing idealization. From another, it would be more accurate to say that the leading terms of the idealization are simply carried to their logical conclusion. The assumptions of the heroic world, in which the gods intervene to protect their favorites and destroy their foes, culminate in a “heroic” morality of fierce and protracted enmities, with no end in sight. The simple moral distinctions of the main action are obliterated. Violence and nobility, profit and justice, piety and gratitude, the terms on which the idealization rested, no longer have unequivocal referents and fixed meanings. Their application to the action as a whole has been shown to be disconcertingly complex, and with this demonstration comes a redirection of our moral bearings.

51. Pearson’s edition, p. xxii. Cf. Wilamowitz, *Kleine Schriften*, 1: 79–80, who believes Euripides invented the episode as a way of expressing hatred for the Spartans.

52. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, p. 120, offers the curious argument that, since Eurystheus has to die on Attic soil to become a sacred hero, the poet had no other choice than to “be satisfied, owing to the exigencies of the drama, with the poor sop to Athenian honour which Alcmene offers.” But what compelled Euripides to stage the final scene in anything like these terms? He might, for example, have followed the tradition and allowed Eurystheus to die in battle, leaving the messenger to report his prophecy, and the Athenians to attend to his burial.

The unity of the play lies in this necessary correction of an idealism too facile and too schematic. It is not a comfortable unity, nor is it meant to be. The idealization is not so much directly destroyed (its chief representatives, Demophon, Macaria, and Iolaus, simply disappear from sight) as broken off, outrun by the shocking reversals of the finale. The peripeteia is not merely the promised reversal of fortune, but the disquieting revision of the play's guiding assumptions. Euripides uses an analogous technique elsewhere, but never in quite the same way.⁵³ Indeed, the *Heracidae* is unique in its breathtaking undermining of a carefully constructed edifice of action and conception. Whether the result is convincing, whether two movements so unequal in length and so contradictory in purpose coalesce into a successful drama, is open to question. But we ought to recognize the daring experiment for what it is.⁵⁴

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53. T. V. Buttrey, "Accident and Design in Euripides' *Medea*," *AJP* 79 (1958): 1-17, demonstrates the upheaval of the spectator's moral sympathies produced by Medea's terrible renunciation of motherhood. A more obvious parallel to *Herac.* is *Hec.*, where we find the heroine transformed from suffering queen to murderous bitch and, in the final scene, Polymestor exiled to a desert island after uttering a prophecy. Hecuba, however, like Medea, dominates her play, and we see her burden of sorrow mount until she breaks under it. The reversal is therefore not nearly so abrupt as in *Herac.* Perhaps closest of all to our play in technique is *HF*, in which a highly melodramatic suppliant action is succeeded by a second movement of extraordinary tragic intensity that undoes the *soteria* accomplished in the first movement and then passes far beyond it. The reversal there, however, is abrupt and completer than in *Herac.*, the balance of the movements far more even, their relation far more complex. For a recent discussion of the structure of *HF*, see A. P. Burnett, *Calastrophe Survived* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 157-82.

54. This article was accepted for publication in 1974, and it has not proved possible to incorporate in it discussion of the most recent work on *Herac.* I regret this particularly in the case of the contributions of R. Guerrini in "La morte di Euristeo e le implicazioni etico-politiche negli *Eraclidi* di Euripide," *Athenaeum* 50 (1972): 45-67 and "La morte di Macaria," *SIFC* 45 (1973): 46-59, and of Anne Burnett in "Tribe and City, Custom and Decree in *Children of Heracles*," *CP* 71 (1976): 4-26. I find many points of agreement as well as some significant dissent among us; had I known their work before writing my own, my formulation of certain points might have been improved, but my central thesis would have remained what it is.