

TETRALOGIES, DIVINE PATERNITY, AND THE PLAYS OF 414

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Little study has been made of tetralogies after Aeschylus.¹ Sophocles, we are told, espoused the single play as a unit.² Yet it is hard to believe that the dramatists submitted four disconnected plays; apart from anything else the task of adjudication would become almost intolerable unless each set of plays could be seen in some sense as a unity, and it seems likely that what Sophocles rejected was the use of the trilogy to present three extended acts of a single drama, and grouped his plays according to other and subtler principles.

In 438 Euripides presented *The Women of Crete*, *Alcmaeon at Psophis*, and *Telephus*, followed by the pro-satyrical *Alcestis*. Here we do well to heed Miss Dale's warning: "Only excess of zeal has enabled scholars to discern in these four plays some common underlying theme, or specially significant correspondences and contrasts; any four plays of Euripides taken at random could with a little goodwill be made into as significant a group."³ Still, Euripides did group these four together, and presumably had some reason, even if in the lack of three of the plays we cannot discern it. Agnosticism is not scepticism.

With the plays of 415 the matter is simpler, and the tetralogy has been excellently studied by Gilbert Murray.⁴ All the first three plays deal with the tragedy of Troy. In the first, *Alexander*, we see the tragic error of the Trojans, and it is an error arising from the compassionate humanity which let first a child and then a hero live, but at the same time corrupted him by removing him from the manly

¹ R. J. Walker, *The Ichneutae of Sophocles* (London 1919) 567-626.

² The *Suda*, s.v. "Sophocles."

³ *Euripides Alcestis* (Oxford 1954) vii.

⁴ "The Trojan Trilogy of Euripides," *Mélanges Glotz* 2 (Paris 1932) 645-56.

life of the shepherds to the decadent and unscrupulous life of the court. In the second, *Palamedes*, we see the tragic error of the Greeks, and it is a crime. In the third, *The Women of Troy*, the two come together and bring disaster upon the Trojans in their comparative innocence and the Greeks in their comparative guilt alike. We know too little about the satyr-play, *Sisyphus*, to see how it fitted in, but Sisyphus has links with Odysseus, an *agon* between Heracles and Sisyphus over Lycurgus' horses may have parodied the *agon* over the bull in *Alexander*, and, as Murray says, a play in which disillusion is treated ludicrously may well be the climax to a series of plays about disillusion.

The corrupt and fragmentary argument to *The Women of Phoenicia* by Aristophanes of Byzantium makes it virtually certain that this was the third play of a trilogy, following *Oenomaus* and *Chrysippus*. *Oenomaus* told of the way Pelops won Hippodameia by contriving the death of her father Oenomaus, who laid a curse on him. Of the play *Chrysippus* we know little, but there are two significant legends. Chrysippus was child of Pelops by a nymph, handsome, and his father's favorite. In one story he was abducted and raped by Laius; in another, which appears in various forms, he was murdered by his stepbrothers Atreus and Thyestes. We can readily imagine a diptych play, like *Andromache* or *Heracles*, which treats both stories. The curse of Pelops is laid upon those who have abused his favorite son. In *The Women of Phoenicia* we see the outworking of the curse on the house of Laius. The theme is Aeschylean, but with a difference. The curse is renewed from one generation to another; it is actually transferred from one house to another; and, to judge from *The Women of Phoenicia*, although the curse is in the background, it is the free choice of the individuals which determines what happens. Euripides stresses this, and deliberately leaves us in mid-air. Antigone in her turn must choose between Bacchus and Ares (1751, cf. 784).

A scholiast to Aristophanes' *The Frogs* (53) is surprised at an allusion to *Andromeda* rather than the more recent *Hypsipyle*, *The Women of Phoenicia*, or *Antiope*. *Andromeda* is dated to 412. The others are thus later, and can hardly be 411 or even 410. Aristophanes of Byzantium mentions Nausicrates as presiding magistrate for *The Women of Phoenicia*. No such magistrate is known, and it is better to assume manuscript confusion; Nausicrates may have been the show's

financial backer. *Orestes* is firmly dated to 408,⁵ and most people tend to date *The Women of Phoenicia* to 409. But an anonymous work *On Comedy*, supported by Tzetzes, *On the Distinctive Quality of the Poets*,⁶ states that *Alcestis*, *Orestes*, and Sophocles' *Electra* were pro-satyr-ic. This categorical evidence has been strangely neglected. In the first place we know it to have been true of *Alcestis*; in the second, there are so few satyr-plays in our lists of Euripides' plays that there must have been other pro-satyr-ic plays; in the third, these are not the plays we would have selected had we been guessing, but rather *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians* and *Helen*; in the fourth, the arguments of those who reject the view on grounds of the length of the play or number of actors are *a priori* in view of our general ignorance about satyr-plays and particularly about pro-satyr-ic plays. In fact *Orestes* by following the other line of the curse to its fantastic conclusion would round off brilliantly the *Oenomaus* trilogy. *The Women of Phoenicia* leaves us with yet another choice and yet another prospect of the escalation of violence; *Orestes* gives us the sort of miracle which does not happen.

The work of Zielinski⁷ and Ceadel⁸ gives us a reasonable approximation to the order of the middle plays of Euripides. Zielinski's figures suggest: *Electra*, *The Women of Troy*, *Heracles*, *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians*, *Ion*, *Helen*; and the general order is sustained by Ceadel, who might place *Ion* before *Iphigeneia*. *The Women of Troy* is firmly dated to 415,⁹ *Andromeda* to 412,¹⁰ and *Helen* apparently to the same year and certainly not later.¹¹ *Electra* creates a problem. The Dioscuri say, "We are hastening to the Sicilian sea to protect the seagoing prows of the ships" (1347), and despite the arguments of Zuntz¹² it is natural to refer this to Demosthenes' expedition of 413. Stylometry

⁵ Schol. 371.

⁶ J. A. Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca* (Oxford 1839, rep. Hildesheim 1967) vol. I, p. 7 and p. 17.

⁷ *Tragodoumenon II, De Trimetri Euripidei Evolutione* (Cracow 1925).

⁸ "Resolved Feet in the Trimeters of Euripides and the Chronology of the Plays," *CQ* 35 (1941) 66-89.

⁹ Aelian, *VH* 2.8.

¹⁰ Schol. *Frogs* 53.

¹¹ Schol. *Thesm.* 1012.

¹² *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester 1955) 66 ff.

would place it in the first part of the decade. There is a simple explanation. The link between the Electra-plays of Sophocles and Euripides is clear, and despite Wilamowitz,¹³ it is likely that Euripides' was the later. If we date Sophocles' play to the early years of the decade we can assume that Euripides was stirred to write a rejoinder, but that he did not put it on until he saw some other plays with which it could be coordinated. *Iphigeneia* was obviously one such. If we were asked to name another we might be tempted to suggest *Helen*. The dating of *Helen* to 412 is not quite as firm as is generally thought. *The Thesmophoriazusae* was produced in 411; in that it is definitely stated that *Andromeda* belonged to the previous year (1060-61), whereas *Helen* is only said to be "recent" (850). The scholiast who states categorically that both plays belonged to 412 may only be making a too hasty deduction from the text before him.¹⁴ *Helen* parodies *Iphigeneia*, and the parody would be effective in consecutive plays. All three plays have striking recognition scenes. All three plays are to be seen against the background of war as protests against violence, and *Iphigeneia* and *Helen* both have as theme "The Great Illusion." It is possible that we can identify the fourth play. It may be right to associate *The Cyclops* with *Hecabe*.¹⁵ But here we have a fourth play on the aftermath of the Trojan War; there are important parallels with *Iphigeneia*, notably in the theme of hospitality and the whole interplay between *xenia* and *philia*; and in 413 the Sicilian setting would take on a grim significance.

This would place together in 414 *Ion* and *Heracles*, and immediately suggests a link in the theme of divine paternity. In his remonstrations with Apollo, *Ion* says (444-47):

Suppose—for the sake of argument, since it can't happen—
you were fined for your forced unions with human beings,
you and Poseidon and Zeus, the lord of the sky,
you'd strip your treasuries to pay for your crimes.

It is almost programmatic. *Ion* deals with an alleged child of Apollo, *Heracles* with an alleged child of Zeus, and we shall not hesitate to

¹³ "Die beiden Elektra," *Hermes* 18 (1883) 214-63.

¹⁴ Schol. *Thesm.* 1012.

¹⁵ E.g. W. Arrowsmith in D. Grene and R. Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago 1959) 3.224.

identify the third play as *Alope*, whose theme was an alleged child of Poseidon.

The ambiguity of Heracles' parentage is seen in the words with which Amphitryon opens the play (1-3):

Who doesn't know me, the man who shared marriage with Zeus,
Amphitryon of Argos, son of Alcaeus,
grandson of Perseus, father of Heracles?

This ambiguity extends all through the play; is Heracles son of Zeus or Amphitryon? The statue and altar of Zeus confront us throughout the play. The first characterization of Zeus is as Savior (48, cf. 521), and Heracles does indeed save before he destroys. Perhaps, though only perhaps, at the end of the play with its stress on friendship, we should remember the cult-title of Zeus, God of Friendship. But Heracles' name means "Glory of Hera," and Hera is a part of him as is Zeus. What is Hera? We learn three things about her: Amphitryon thinks of her as necessity or destiny (*chreôn*, 21); Iris describes her as having no truck with moderation and saving wisdom (*sôphronein*, 857); Heracles says that the disasters have come from a single unlucky hit from Hera (*tyché*, 1393). The play is full of rationalization about the gods; improper myths are rejected; and there is agnosticism about the ultimate power. With *Hippolytus* behind us we may suspect that Euripides means by the gods forces which are inherent in man himself, which sometimes seem too powerful for him to control. Can we apply this here? I think that we can. Zeus is the life-affirming element in man, and Hera the life-denying. Both are in us. Zeus, detached from man, symbolized in the statue and altar, does not save; Zeus in Heracles does, till Hera takes over. We cannot escape from Hera; we may not deny Zeus. Heracles tries to in declaring Amphitryon his father, but he accepts the role of benefactor. He is indeed the child of Amphitryon and Alcmene; but Zeus is also his father and Hera part of his inheritance. The life-force is in him, and the power of death and destruction. There is a continuing parable here for the generation of men that holds the secret of atomic power. For Euripides makes it clear that our salvation lies in our own hands. There may or may not be an ultimate god, but we men must learn to behave better than the gods of legend. At the last it is by

man, by a man who denies supernatural pollution, and shows human friendship, that the conflict is resolved and salvation comes. We have been reminded of Zeus the Savior; we recall Zeus God of Friendship; but Theseus is the friend who saves.

What then of *Ion*? The play is a whodunit, "it" being Ion. It is important to see that Euripides does not give an unequivocal answer to the question "Who are Ion's parents?" For Hermes and Athene alike do not speak for themselves. Both say what Apollo tells them to say, and Apollo, however Creusa may forgive him, is discredited. He is discredited not so much because of his treatment of Creusa as because he, the god of prophecy, fails to foresee the course of events. We may reflect that this was the very thing that happened in the Persian Wars, when Delphi, to put it crudely, backed the wrong horse.

There are three candidates for the position of Ion's mother. The first is an unknown Bacchante. This possibility we can dismiss. Xuthus never admits such an affair; he admits intoxication. It is Ion who jumps to conclusions. The second is the Priestess. This was Verrall's view, and it is by no means a foolish one. Her maternal relationship to Ion is stressed in the dialogue. Over and above this is the problem of the tokens. Euripides goes out of his way to stress that they are as good as new, and that the olive-branch is still fresh and green. It certainly does look as if the tokens are somehow contrived by the Delphian officials; at the very least the gratuitous emphasis upon their apparent newness must be intended by the dramatist to arouse our suspicions in exactly the same way that a writer of detective stories strews false clues and red herrings across the trail. Nonetheless it is not easy to believe that the Priestess is the real mother. For though the tokens may be contrived by Delphi, this tells us nothing about the parentage, and the mother-relationship with Ion is partly designed dramatically for Creusa's despair, and partly to show that Ion is indeed spiritually the child of Apollo through the upbringing of his Priestess. We are left with Creusa as the mother.

What then of Ion's father? Hermes and Athene answer "Apollo." But they have only Apollo's word for it. And, to Euripides' rationalizing mind, who is Apollo? He is the power of the Delphic Oracle. He does not appear. He does not appear because he does not exist. The Delphic Oracle and its staff exist; they are, in the current jargon,

"operators," and on this occasion, as Athene points out, everything works out all right in the end. The whole plot suggests not the controlling power of a god, but a plot from Plautus, Goldoni, or P. G. Wodehouse, in which each operation leads to new complications, until the operator pulls his final rabbit out of the hat. No doubt Athene, goddess of Athens, is pleased to have the son of an Athenian princess as future ruler, giving Athens the eponymous leadership of the Ionians; but there is too much said discrediting the myths of divine seducers to leave us with Apollo as father.

Who is left? "Some man" says Ion (341). But who? The answer is in fact simple. It is the obvious answer; it is the answer of New Comedy, as in Menander's *The Arbitrators*; it is Xuthus, and Euripides goes as far as he can to telling us so directly without removing all ambiguity and spoiling the excitement. First, the oracle of Trophonius, which is not a subsidiary of Delphi, says quite explicitly that neither Xuthus nor Creusa will return home from the oracle without a son (408). There is no qualification; the words can only mean that the son who is found is son of Xuthus and Creusa. There are two other clues. Xuthus means "red" and suggests that its bearer is redhaired. "Apollo" as he appeared to Creusa had the gleam of gold in his hair (887). We do not know at what time the incident took place, but as there was no one about and Creusa was picking flowers, we may suppose the half-light of morning. Euripides is at pains to establish Creusa's impressionable and superstitious nature: a figure with gleaming hair at dawn would be for her the sun-god. The third clue lies in the conversation between Xuthus and Ion (545-49):

ION: Did you have some love-affair?

XUTHUS: I was young once and foolish.

ION: Before you took Erechtheus' daughter? [—irony!]

XUTHUS: Yes; never since.

ION: So that would be how you begot me?

XUTHUS: The time tallies.

ION: But then—it's a long way to Delphi: how did I come here?

XUTHUS: I can't imagine. I feel bewildered.

The arm of Delphi is long. The point is, first that Ion's age corresponds to the time shortly before Xuthus' marriage; secondly that

Xuthus has clearly in mind some actual episode which took place away from Delphi at about that time. It is Ion, not Xuthus, who sheers off to the Bacchante at Delphi; Xuthus has no memory of a love-affair there: it is elsewhere that he is thinking of. Where was he at an appropriate interval before his marriage? The answer is "Athens." For Xuthus was an ally of Athens against Euboea, and no doubt was in Athens for a period before the campaign. The child would be born during the campaign, and he would return to a bride, older and matured from the girl he had seen only in the dawn-light without knowing who she was. Here we have added point to the jibes at Athenian autochthony and their insistence on citizens having Athenian parents on both sides; the national hero had a non-Athenian father; but that father himself, as Euripides carefully preserves, was descended from Zeus. We may add that in *Melanippe the Wise*, Ion was unequivocally son of Creusa and Xuthus.

Divine parentage in this play is treated differently from that of Heracles in *Heracles*. In both the human parentage is left open. Here the rationalizing element is stronger, the spiritual aspect of divinity weaker, precisely because Euripides does believe in some kind of life-force which he can name Zeus, and hardly believes in Apollo in the same way. Yet is it so much weaker? For Ion in being the servant of Apollo has been the child of Apollo (*pais*), and, growing up with the façade of piety, still shows himself, like the oracle, something of an operator who will set aside the laws of sanctuary at convenience; his joy in believing himself to be Apollo's son is part of his spiritual nature. In fact Ion says this himself, and gives us the key to this aspect of the play (1287): "I did become my father's; I mean what I really *am*." Here Euripides is being genuinely philosophical. For what this means, in cold terms, is that it does not matter that Ion is physically Xuthus' son; what matters is that he is spiritually bound up with Apollo. We can extend this. He does not need to be physically Apollo's son, any more than Heracles needs to be physically Zeus' son. What counts is what they really are. And here Euripides drives his point home, and we see why in this play the putative father is Apollo. For the two focal characters are human in their frailties: Creusa with her warmth, her romanticism, her loving heart, is ready to connive at murder; Ion with his attractive openness, his

sympathy, his piety, is ready to kill a woman in sanctuary. Euripides does not idolize or idealize. Yet each is of stronger moral fibre than the god in whom they both believe. It is what we really are that makes life, and it is an irony of life that they agree out of kindness to deceive Xuthus into believing—the truth.