

ZEUS THE FATHER AND HERACLES THE SON IN TRAGEDY

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Inherent in much of the myth of Heracles is a questioning of the paternal feelings and responsibilities of his father Zeus, the type of questioning which must arise whenever the child or favorite of a deity is to have the opportunity to display his heroism. Had Zeus sheltered Heracles from every evil, there would be no labors of Heracles, just as there would be no *Odyssey* if Athena on every occasion had protected Odysseus. But, despite this, the question inevitably arises of how Zeus could allow the sufferings and, eventually, the death of his son. It is not surprising, given the importance to the Greeks of the father-son relationship, that the most intractable criticisms of Zeus in tragedy center upon just this problem.

These criticisms and the ways in which both Zeus and Heracles are presented in this regard afford an excellent opportunity to examine some aspects of myth and religion in tragedy. The two major dramatic treatments are Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Heracles Furens*.¹

¹ The following works will be cited by author's name and, where necessary, date. For the *Trachiniae*: Karl Reinhardt, *Sophocles* (translation [Oxford 1979] of *Sophokles* [Frankfurt 1947³]); C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951); I. M. Linforth, "The Pyre on Mount Oeta in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *UCPCP* 14 (1952) 255–67; R. M. Torrance, "Sophocles: Some Bearings," *HSCP* 69 (1965) 269–327; T. F. Hoey, "Ambiguity in the Exodus of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Arethusa* 10 (1977) 269–94; Charles Segal, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Myth, Poetry, Heroic Values," *YCS* 25 (1977) 99–158; P. E. Easterling, "The End of the *Trachiniae*," *ICS* 6 (1981) 56–74; P. E. Easterling, *Sophocles, Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982). For the *Heracles*: U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Euripides Herakles* (Berlin 1895²; reprinted Darmstadt 1969); L. H. G. Greenwood, *Aspects of Euripidean Tragedy* (Cambridge 1953); H. H. O. Chalk, "Ἀρετή and Βία in Euripides' *Herakles*," *JHS* 82 (1962) 7–18; A. W. H. Adkins, "Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Heracles Furens*," *CQ* n.s. 16 (1966) 209–19; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967); A. L. Brown, "Wretched Tales of Poets: Euripides, *Heracles* 1340–6," *PCPhS* 204 (1978) 22–30; Godfrey W. Bond, *Euripides Heracles* (Oxford 1981); Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony* (Ithaca 1985). Other: M. P. Nilsson, "Der Flammentod des Herakles auf dem Oite," *ARW* 21 (1922) 310–16; Victor Ehrenberg, *Aspects of the Ancient World* (New York 1946); Susan Woodford, "Cults of Heracles in Attica," in *Studies Presented to G. M. A. Hanfmann* (Mainz 1971) 211–25. To the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton I am indebted for the time and marvelous environment in which I prepared this study.

Sophocles portrays Deianeira's misguided attempt to secure her husband's love by sending to him a robe treated with what she thought was a love-charm but which in fact turned out to be a deadly poison. Euripides describes how Heracles first rescued his wife and children from the tyrant Lycus and then, in a fit of madness, killed them. In both plays Heracles suffers terribly and, as a result, criticisms of Zeus' paternal neglect arise. I treat these criticisms of Zeus not because I claim that they are the most important or unifying element of each play, but because they afford the opportunity to compare the differing ways, in terms of myth and religion, in which two poets, Sophocles and Euripides, come to grips with what is fundamentally the same issue.

Let us begin with the two poets' portrayal of Zeus. Euripides isolates one cultic aspect of the deity, Zeus Soter (Zeus the Savior),² and combines that, and that alone, with the epic Olympian Zeus. This Zeus Soter is a deity whose altar (and hence cult) on the stage itself has been established by Heracles (48–50; cf. 54 and 521–22). As so often, Euripides grounded his deity in contemporary fifth-century Athenian cult. The audience knew Zeus Soter as the proprietor of the Stoa of Zeus in the Agora, the deity who had "saved" their fathers from slavery in the Persian Wars. By assigning him the epithet Soter, Euripides points explicitly to a cultic function of Zeus and to his moral and, as it were, professional responsibilities to "save" his son and grandchildren.

Sophocles, rather than developing a single and unified conception of Zeus, introduces a wide range of Zeuses and then binds them together through the paternity of Heracles. We have Zeus the Protector of Oaths

² Not Zeus Soter, deity of the dead and recipient of the "third libation" whom Bond (on *HF* 48) and others must have in mind when they refer to Cook, *Zeus* 2.1123ff. and Fraenkel on *Ag.* 1387. Rather Zeus Soter as Eleutherios, "savior of Athens," whose statue and stoa (built at approximately the time of the production of the *Heracles*) were prominently situated on the west side of the Agora. His formal epithet was Soter, but he was commonly called also Eleutherios. For evidence see L. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford 1896–1909; reprinted 1977) vol. 1, 60–61 and R. E. Wycherley, *The Athenian Agora*, vol. 3 (Princeton 1957) 25–31, to be corrected by the recent discovery of the Stoa Basilios (*Hesperia* 40 [1971] 243–60).

Zeus Soter also had a major sanctuary in the Piraeus and there too had at his side Athena Soteira. See Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932; reprinted Hildesheim 1966) 174–76. According to Deubner's division of the evidence between the two cult sites, Zeus Soter of the Piraeus had a major festival, the Diisoteria, celebrated between Thargelion 19 and Skirophorion 20. The Zeus of the Agora received only a sacrifice by the Archon at the end of the year. This sacrifice, at least in the third century B.C., was an *εἰσιτητήρια* for the "health and safety" of the Boule and Demos (*IG* II² 689 and 690). The military aspect of both cults is obvious, with, e.g., the statue of Zeus of the Piraeus holding a Nike (Paus. 1.1.3) and Nikai forming the acroteria of the stoa in the Agora (see *The Athenian Agora: Guide* [Athens 1976] 80). In both sanctuaries (see Wycherley and Deubner) stood commemorations and dedications of military victories.

(Horkios, 1185–90), Zeus Sender of Lightning (436–37, 1086–88), Zeus of Ceneae (a cape on the northwest tip of Euboea, 237–41, 287–88, 750–54, 993–1003), and Zeus Giver of Oracles at Dodona (164–72, 1159–72) all expressly labelled the “father of Heracles” and thereby linked together and to the epic Zeus of Heracles’ myths. Other clearly definable Zeuses in the *Trachiniae* are Zeus Agonios (“Of the Contest,” 26), Oitaos (“Of Mount Oeta,” site of Heracles’ funeral pyre, 200–201, 436–37, 1191–1216), and Tropaos (“Of Victory in Battle,” 303–6), and they are surely also meant, though nothing is expressly said, to be subsumed under “the father of Heracles.” Of all these Zeuses four are defined primarily in terms of their functions (oaths, lightning, contests, victory in battle), two in geographical terms (of Ceneae and Mount Oeta), and one in both regards (oracles at Dodona). There are, moreover, numerous references to a Homeric Zeus who lacks cultic restrictions of function and place (e.g., 126–28, 139–40, 251–80, 499–500, 1021–22, 1278). The Zeus of Sophocles is a hybrid, an amalgam of various local cultic (Kenaos and Oitaos), functional (oaths, lightning, etc.), and mythological bits which were never found together in such a combination in practised religion. As such he is the type of deity commonly found in epic and lyric poetry, not in life. Euripides’ Zeus, however, has his roots more in the cult and religion of the Athenian audience.

In both plays Heracles has complaints against the gods, but it is not he who complains of Zeus’ paternal neglect. In the *Trachiniae* Heracles was attacked by Deianeira’s poisoned robe as he sacrificed at the altar of Zeus Kenaos, and Sophocles has him later invoke this very altar as a witness (993–1003) of the poor return (incurable pain and death) he received from the sacrifices he had made. But in this he makes no mention of Zeus as his father. It is Hyllus, Heracles’ son, who at the very end of the play condemns all gods who neglect their children: he advises his attendants to:³

Recognize the great lack of feeling of the gods over deeds like this. They beget children and are celebrated as fathers, but they look upon such sufferings.⁴ No one sees what lies in the future, but the current situation is pitiable for us and shameful for the gods. (1266–72)

³ μεγάλην δὲ θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην
εἰδότες ἔργων τῶν πρασσομένων,
οἱ φύσαντες καὶ κληζόμενοι
πατέρες τοιαῦτ’ ἐφορῶσι πάθη.
τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ’ οὐδεὶς ἀφορᾷ,
τὰ δὲ νῦν ἐστῶτ’ οἰκτρὰ μὲν ἡμῖν,
αἰσχρὰ δ’ ἐκείνοις.

1270

⁴ “And,” it is implied, “do nothing about them.”

Hyllus tempers his criticism just a bit, perhaps to avoid blatant blasphemy, by speaking of the gods in general, not of Zeus in particular, but he eliminates any doubt as to whom he means when he concludes his speech, and the play, with these words:⁵

There are many new and strange sufferings here, and there is nothing that is not Zeus. (1277–78)

Hyllus leaves open the possibility of a better resolution of the situation in the future (“No one sees what lies in the future”),⁶ but does it so tentatively and with so little weight that it offers no solace. Hyllus’ criticisms of the “lack of feeling” of the gods are crushing, in part because no similar criticisms up to this time in the play have prepared the audience for them, in part because there is no response to them. Placed at the very end of the play, and left hanging in the air as they are, they must be intended as a strong comment on the meaning of the myth and play. There is nothing comparable in Euripides or Aeschylus. The effect is so powerful that several critics would see in these lines Sophocles’ explicit statement of his own theology, i.e. a recognition of the gods’ lack of feeling and concern for human beings.⁷

⁵ πολλὰ δὲ πῆματα <καὶ> καινοπαγῇ,
κούδέν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεὺς.

Manuscripts and scholars are divided over whether lines 1277–78 are to be assigned to Hyllus or the chorus. For a summary of the problem see Easterling (1981) 69–70 and (1982) on *Tr.* 1275–78. No matter whether Hyllus or the chorus spoke them, lines 1277–78 direct the criticisms of 1266–72 more pointedly at Zeus.

⁶ Several scholars claim that Hyllus’ remark about the future and earlier references to Mount Oeta (200, 436–37, 633–35, 1191–1216) would have reminded the audience of Heracles’ apotheosis and cult on Mount Oeta, despite the fact that *nothing* is said of either anywhere in the play. The eventual apotheosis of Heracles, the argument goes, would demonstrate Zeus’ ultimate concern for Heracles and justice. The issues of this problem are discussed by Hoey 269–94; Segal 138–41; Easterling (1981) 64–69 and (1982) 8–12 and 17–18; and R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles* (Cambridge 1980) 215. On Heracles’ cult on Mount Oeta see Nilsson 310–16. Some scholars, e.g. H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1983²) 127–28 and B. M. W. Knox, *AJP* 92 (1971) 694–95, think a reference to Heracles’ apotheosis is unmistakable. Others, e.g. Hoey, Segal, and Easterling, accept it, but with some hesitation or a recognition of ambiguity.

I follow rather those scholars who deny to the mention of the pyre on Mount Oeta and to Hyllus’ words any allusion to Heracles’ apotheosis. On this see, e.g., Ehrenberg 156–57; Reinhardt 62–63; G. Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme* (Oxford 1972) 51–52; A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy* (translation [London 1967] of *Die Griechische Tragödie* [Stuttgart 1958²]) 110; Linforth 265–66; Torrance 301–4. If Sophocles had wished to introduce an event so momentous for the understanding of Heracles and Zeus as an apotheosis, he would have done so explicitly. Sophocles for his purposes occasionally suppressed familiar parts of major myths. I think particularly of the absence of the Erinyes in his *Electra*. In the *Trachiniae* he chose not to deify his Heracles.

⁷ See, e.g., Whitman 120–21; Torrance 301–4; and E. R. Dodds, “On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*,” *G&R* 13 (1966) 46.

The two outbursts of criticism against Zeus in the *Trachiniae* are directed 1) by Heracles against Zeus Kenaïos (993–1003) and 2) by Hylus against a generalized, unspecified Zeus (1021–22, 1264–78). Those Zeuses of function (oaths, lightning, contests, oracles, and victory in battle) are spared the brunt of the attack. They do, in fact, escape almost unscathed, or perhaps even enhanced, with, for example, the prophecies of Zeus Dodonaïos coming true and the authority of Zeus Horkios reasserted in the final scene (1185–88). In short, those deities of function whom the Athenians actually worshipped in everyday life are never explicitly criticized in the play. Sophocles' synthesis or syncretism of the various Zeuses into one epic-style deity, father of Heracles, is artificial, literary, and also fairly unstable. The separate elements become distinct again as soon as criticisms are leveled at the mythological deity.

Sophocles introduces the attack on Zeus abruptly and offers no clear, explicit response to it. It is left to the audience to make what it can of it. In the *Heracles* Euripides lays out similar challenges to the gods, but, in contrast to Sophocles, he systematically interweaves them into the fabric of his play. Here Amphitryon, Heracles' mortal "father," raises the challenge against Zeus as a father, and Heracles attacks Hera for her role in causing his sufferings. Let us look first at Amphitryon's challenge:⁸

O Zeus, in vain then I had you as a partner in my marriage, and in vain was I celebrating you as a sharer in my son. You were less a φίλος than you seemed to be. In virtue I a mortal surpass you a great god, for I did not betray Heracles' children. But you knew how to come secretly into a marriage bed and to take another's wife, although no one granted you permission to do so. But you do not know how to protect your φίλοι. You are either an ignorant, unfeeling god⁹ or you are, by nature, unconcerned with justice. (339–47)

⁸ ὦ Ζεῦ, μάτην ἄρ' ὁμόγαμόν σ' ἔκτησάμην,
 μάτην δὲ παιδὸς κοινεῶν' ἐκλήζομεν· 340
 σὺ δ' ἥσθ' ἄρ' ἥσσοις ἢ δόκεις εἶναι φίλος.
 ἀρετῇ σε νικῶ θνητὸς ὦν θεὸν μέγαν·
 παῖδας γὰρ οὐ προύδωκα τοὺς Ἡρακλέους.
 σὺ δ' ἐς μὲν εὐνάς κρύφιος ἠπίστω μολεῖν,
 τὰλλότριά λέκτρα δόντος οὐδενὸς λαβών, 345
 σώζειν δὲ τοὺς σοὺς οὐκ ἐπίστασαι φίλους.
 ἀμαθὴς τις εἰ θεὸς ἢ δίκαιος οὐκ ἔφης.

On this passage see Wilamowitz on *HF* 347.

⁹ For the force of ἀμαθής as "ignorant" and "unfeeling" see Bond on *HF* 347. Bond properly prefers the emphasis on the intellectual element here ("stupid"), but one need not exclude the moral element entirely. *S. Tr.* 1266, θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην, of the same situation, also includes both the intellectual and moral elements.

Heracles himself raises the challenge against Hera:¹⁰

Hera has accomplished her will in twisting and overturning, foundations and all, the leading man of Greece. Who could pray to such a goddess? A goddess who, in her jealous anger at Zeus because of a woman's bed, destroyed the benefactor of Greece who was guilty of nothing. (1305–10)

Amphitryon's claim, forcefully expressed, is that Zeus knew how to appropriate for his pleasure another man's wife, but then failed to act as a *φίλος* in protecting his *φίλοι*.¹¹ *Φιλία* and respect for its obligations is a virtue, one particularly stressed in this play, and in this regard Zeus is inferior to both Amphitryon and, later, Theseus.¹² Amphitryon can only conclude that Zeus is either an "ignorant, unfeeling god" (*ἄμαθής τις εἰ θεός*) or is, by nature, unconcerned with justice (*δίκαιος οὐκ ἔφυν*).

Shortly after this challenge Zeus is given the perfect motive and opportunity to intervene, should he choose to do so. In 498–501 Amphitryon, in Zeus' sanctuary, prays:

Zeus, I cast my hands to the sky and tell you now to defend the children if you intend to do so, since soon you will be of no help. And yet you have been called many times before. I labor in vain.

Amphitryon's mention of his previous unsuccessful prayers to Zeus may not necessarily indicate that this prayer cannot and will not be answered, but it does not augur well. Only one successful prayer in tragedy (*E. Hel.* 1441–50)¹³ is accompanied by such a negative comment, and elsewhere such an attitude betokens failure (*E. Tr.* 1280–81 and *S. Ph.* 1019–20). It is all the more surprising, therefore, when 22 lines later Heracles suddenly returns from Hades and offers the hope that Amphitryon's prayer is to be answered. Should Heracles rescue his children from imminent death, one could view Amphitryon's prayer successful and his challenge to the justice and morality of Zeus refuted. Such is a common sequence in Euripidean plays, a sequence which this play seems about to

¹⁰ ἔπραξε γὰρ βούλησιν ἦν ἐβούλετο 1305
 ἄνδρ' Ἑλλάδος τὸν πρῶτον αὐτοῖσιν βάθροισι
 ἄνω κάτω στρέψασα. τοιαύτη θεῶ
 τίς ἂν προσεύχοιθ'; ἢ γυναικὸς οὐνεκα
 λέκτρων φθονοῦσα Ζηνὶ τοὺς εὐεργέτας
 Ἑλλάδος ἀπώλεσ' οὐδέν ὄντας αἰτίους. 1310

¹¹ This challenge is restated, in different forms, by the chorus (1087–88) and Amphitryon (1127).

¹² *Φιλία* encompasses both "friends" and "relatives" and has no English equivalent. In the *Heracles* Amphitryon represents the proper attitude and behavior of the "relative," while Theseus represents primarily those of the "friend" (1169–71, 1220–25, 1236, 1338–39, 1404; cf. 275–76, 305–6, 558–59, 585–86). See Chalk 7–18 and Adkins 209–19.

¹³ Even here the interpretation is uncertain. See Kannicht on *Hel.* 1443–46.

follow until the onset of Heracles' madness. Heracles rescues his children from Lycus, but then himself, suffering from divinely caused madness, slays them. In the end, then, Zeus has failed to protect his son and grandchildren, and he has not responded to Amphitryon's prayer. The challenge to his justice remains standing.

In contrast to Zeus, Hera is never prayed to and there is never a glimmer of hope that she will be appeased. She is the cause of Heracles' immediate sufferings (827–42, 1189, 1253, 1263–68, 1311–12, 1392–93) and all these events are her evil contrivances (855, 859). To underscore her unreason and wrath, Euripides has madness personified (Lyssa) speak against her plans in terms of fairness, wisdom, and moderation (843–61). Two cultic elements of Hera, common throughout tragedy, contribute to this picture of her: the first is her role as patroness of Argos, a city which itself is at enmity with Heracles and his father (13–21). The second is her function as protectress of marriage, the violation of which Euripides presents as the immediate cause of her hatred. Zeus violated his bond with Hera (and, incidentally, the marriage of Amphitryon and Alcmena) when he begot Heracles. Euripides follows the common literary device of casting the protectress of marriage into the vengeful "wronged-wife" persona seen, in its extreme form, in *Medea*. All this lies behind the personality and behavior of Hera, but Heracles' question remains unanswered: "Who could pray to such a goddess?"

As a result of Hera's wrath and Zeus' non-interference, Heracles suffers terribly. Such divinely motivated affliction in Euripidean drama usually comes upon a person at least in part because of impious action on his own part. Does Heracles commit, before the killing of his children, such an impiety? The pollution of homicide hangs rather heavily over him and his family. His "father" Amphitryon was polluted with homicide when he married his victim's daughter, Heracles' mother Alcmena (1255–60). Amphitryon was banished for this murder, and, in Euripides' version (13–21), Heracles performed the labors assigned to him by Eurystheus so that he and his father might return to their homeland. At the onset of his own madness Heracles is attempting to purify himself and the household from the killing of Lycus (922ff.). Heracles never completes this purification,¹⁴ and it is in the religiously charged status of an unpurified killer that he slaughters his own wife and children. Euripides deepens the texture of his description of Her-

¹⁴ On these rites of purification see Foley 153, note 11. She (17–64, 147–204) brings to bear upon this unsuccessful purification rite the full corpus of modern anthropological, sociological, and psychological theories of what sacrificial ritual meant, or might have meant, to Greeks. These, combined with the formidable critical tools of structuralism, symbolism, and irony, form the basis for her imaginative interpretation of the *Heracles*.

acles' madness by placing him in this abnormal religious status, but he does not, I think, thereby suggest that Heracles was impious in the killing of Lycus or in the rites of purification. Lycus was an immoral, impious (255, 567, 760) tyrant who deserved death.¹⁵ Heracles was performing his purifications properly and piously. The failure of them is the result, not the cause, of his (momentarily) god-abandoned status.

In all other regards Heracles is exceptional, even exemplary, in his piety. In mythological terms Euripides' Heracles had supported the gods in their battle against the giants (177–80, 1190–94). Several of his labors, e.g. the slaying of the Nemean lion (359–63), the slaying of the hind (375–79), the slaying of the ξένος-killing Kyknos (389–93), and his stint at holding up the sky (403–7) directly benefited the gods.¹⁶ In terms more characteristic of popular piety, he had erected an altar (thereby establishing a cult) of Zeus Soter as a victory dedication. He had even been initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries (613). His whole career is viewed by Lyssa as one of singlehandedly restoring the honors of the gods, honors which had been overthrown by "impious" men (852–53). In this play Heracles is never accused or shown to be guilty, in his rational moments, of *any* impiety.¹⁷

But, in addition, Heracles expresses at the end of the play a conception of deity which goes beyond traditional mythological and popular ideas and is based rather in philosophical speculation. He rejects Theseus' somewhat tentative ("If the stories of the poets are not false") claim in 1314–19 that the gods practise adultery, fight to gain tyrannical rule, and, more generally, "sin":¹⁸

I do not think the gods enjoy illicit love affairs. I have never thought it right nor will I ever believe that they tie up one another or that one god is master of another. For god, if he properly is a god, lacks nothing. These are the miserable tales of poets. (1341–46)

Heracles, the very product and victim of divine illicit sexual affairs and Olympian politics, rejects the very existence of the divine schema upon

¹⁵ By killing Lycus Heracles actually answers by action Amphytrion's challenge to Zeus' "justice" in 209–12: Amphytrion to Lycus, "But this is annoying to us, if because of your cowardice we shall die. You ought rather to be killed by us your betters if Zeus had 'just thoughts' towards us." Lycus' impiety is reflected in his intention to drive out or kill by fire suppliants at an altar (240–46; cf. 716, 722–24) and to kill children (323). The death of the impious Lycus is presented almost as an exemplum of the argument that "the gods have might" and are concerned with unjust and holy acts (757–73). On this see Bond xxi and on 757–59.

¹⁶ Cf. 849–50.

¹⁷ For a discounting of the possibility of hybris in Heracles, see Bond on 841.

¹⁸ For parallels to Theseus' statements, see Bond on 1314–22.

which his sufferings are based.¹⁹ We must either dismiss this speech as a bit of Euripidean philosophical and rhetorical digression, or we must look much deeper and see it as a response to the dilemma of the Heracles-Zeus myth, the dilemma which is formulated but unsolved at the end of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. The mythological tale, as Euripides presents it, presumes that gods could have an illicit love affair, could forsake their children and grandchildren, and could have overwhelming hatred. The consequences of such a conception are worked out in detail. They are articulated in the unanswered challenges to the morality and justice of Zeus and Hera. In the context of the myth there are simply no responses to these challenges, as is apparent in both Sophocles' and Euripides' plays. The reply of the truly pious person—a person like Heracles—is not the moral relativism and mythological traditionalism of Theseus, but a rejection of the tale itself.²⁰

In the *Heracles* Euripides works out with all its awful details the implications of one such poetic "tale." His Heracles, a pious man, responds simply that if such are the implications, the tale must be false: "These are the miserable tales of poets." We have a man who is pious in the traditions of popular belief but one who rejects some elements of the mythological portrayal of deity in favor of more elevated philosophical concepts of deity. We have, in short, a precursor of Plato.²¹ In this play, then, the strong challenges to the justice and morality of Zeus and Hera are answered, but in a totally unexpected way. The challenges are legitimate in terms of the story *told by poets* (including, of course, Euripides), but the story is false, and therefore the challenges lose their force.

The two poets also present quite differently the ultimate fates of their Heracleses.²² Sophocles' hero will die on the pyre on Mount Oeta in northern Greece, and there is no clear mention of the cult myth, commonly known at the time, that on this pyre he experienced apotheosis. Sophocles must have intentionally suppressed this familiar element of the Heracles myth. But even if one should grant that some in the audience thought of the Heracles cult on Oeta as they watched the final

¹⁹ For discussions of the speech which are helpful but not all necessarily in agreement with my interpretation, see Wilamowitz on *HF* 1346; G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (New York 1941) 57–59; Greenwood 59–91; Conacher 88–90; Brown 22–30; and Bond on 1341–46.

²⁰ Cf. Bond on 1307–10 and Greenwood 59–91.

²¹ The "Platonic" character of Heracles' condemnation of tales of immoral behavior of the gods lies not in the method by which he reaches this conclusion, for which Kitto (*Greek Tragedy* [London 1939] 246) properly labels him "a very imperfect Platonist." The argument itself is much more in the manner of Xenophanes (see Bond on 1341–46) than Plato. What foreshadows Plato here is that Heracles combines criticism of *some* myths with respect for traditional cults and piety.

²² For a comparison of the personalities of the two Heracleses, see Ehrenberg 144–66 and Foley 188–92.

scene of the play, that was still, to Athenians, a foreign myth, not one of their national history, and a foreign cult, not one in which they participated. In terms of myth and religion, the Heracles of the *Trachiniae*, like its Zeus, is largely panhellenic and literary. He is, most definitely, not Athenian.²³ Sophocles made no effort to link Heracles, his adventures, or his cult to Athens. Euripides, however, plants his Heracles solidly in the soil and national history of Athens.²⁴ Heracles had rescued Theseus, king of Athens, from the underworld, and Theseus comes to Thebes expressly to repay to Heracles the favor he received. Heracles becomes, like a host of other figures of tragedy, a beneficiary of Athenian willingness, even eagerness, to give help and sanctuary to people in distress. He is to reside in Athens and receive precincts of land which the Athenians have set aside for Theseus. When Heracles dies these precincts will become centers of his cult. These sanctuaries were those at which the Athenians of the fifth century regularly worshipped and celebrated festivals.²⁵ The Heracles whom Euripides presents in the *Heracles* becomes their Heracles, a resident of their land. Euripides is dramatizing an aetiology²⁶ of how Heracles came to be in Athens and why he is worshipped in the places he is. The Heracles of Euripides, like his Zeus, is much closer, both physically and religiously, to the Athenians than is his Sophoclean counterpart.

Sophocles chose to portray Zeus and Heracles primarily in panhellenic form, a form characteristic of poetic literature since Homer. Through Hyllus he formulated the problem of the god's neglect of his son, but he offered no solution, no justification for Zeus' behavior. Euripides, while not disregarding the epic Zeus and the panhellenic side of Heracles (e.g. 348–435, 1306) drew his story much closer to contemporary cult and religion. In that context the problem of Zeus' treatment of his son, the Athenian Heracles, seems in more urgent need of solution. To find this solution Euripides reaches beyond myth and even cult into the realm of recent and contemporary philosophical speculation.

²³ [Lucian] *Am.* 54, which is discussed by Nilsson 313, does not establish an imitation of the Oetean cult and rituals in classical Athens.

²⁴ Euripides' version of Heracles' killing of his wife and children, even in some of its details, is rooted deeply also in the cult of Thebes. In Thebes were the tomb of his children and even the stone hurled by Athena to stop him from killing Amphitryon (*HF* 1002–6, Paus. 9.11.2). There too was the tomb of Amphitryon (Pindar, *P.* 9.81–83 and *N.* 4.19–20). On this and other aspects of Heracles' cults in Thebes, see Nancy H. Demand, *Thebes in the Fifth Century* (London 1982) 49–52. Zeus Soter is not, however, attested in Thebes, and Euripides may have introduced him as a bridge to Athenian cult.

²⁵ On the numerous sanctuaries and altars of Heracles in Athens, see Woodford 211–25.

²⁶ An aetiology which, whether invented by Euripides or not, soon was widely accepted. See Philochorus, *FGrH* 328 F 18 and Jacoby ad loc. Foley (174–75, 194) views the play as also explaining why Heracles was thought suitable to be a patron of the young men in Athenian cult.