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Classics, Ecumenicism, and Greek Tragedy

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Classical studies in the United States have some of the advantages of American cuisine. That is to say, if you get tired of French or Italian you can try Russian, German, or British. At any given APA meeting devotees of Wilamowitz or Rostovtzeff rub shoulders with disciples of Syme, Vernant, Bakhtin, or Conte. This *mélange* does not always make for harmony; discipleship, more often than not, is less tolerant of variety than is connoisseurship in ethnic cuisine. But we profit as much from our exposure to a variety of points of view and methodologies as we do from our variety of choices in restaurants. American scholars publish in journals all over the world, and we know that our most inspired flights of imaginative brilliance will in due course receive sober appraisal in the down-to-earth pages of *Mnemosyne*, to say nothing of the eye-straining small print of *Gnomon*.

The arrival of a number of eminent German scholars in the exodus from Nazi Germany in the thirties and forties exposed large numbers of American graduate students to the German philological tradition.¹ It was an inspiring experience for a callow American undergraduate like myself to encounter the profoundly assimilated erudition of scholars like Werner Jaeger and Herbert Bloch at Harvard, to have opened before one, as if it were just yesterday, all the filiations of German classical scholarship, reaching back from Wilamowitz to Hermann and Lobeck, and to observe the traditional philologist's insistence on mastering every possible detail—linguistic, historical, philosophical, textual—in understanding an ancient work. My aim is not to indulge in personal reminiscence, but rather to emphasize the growing richness and diversity within American classical scholarship in our lifetimes, the change from a complacent parochialism to a world-wide perspective, and an increasing openness to many styles of doing Classics, including a wide range of European traditions, extending from the British Isles and Russia to the Mediterranean.

¹ For discussion and bibliography on the emigré scholars and their influence see Alessandra Bertini Malgarini, "Werner Jaeger in the United States: One Among Many Others," in *Werner Jaeger Reconsidered*, ed. W. M. Calder III, *ICS*, Supplement 3 (Atlanta 1992) 107–23.

Our traditions of attention to detail in our Germanic heritage and our respect for common sense in our British heritage lead us to insist on closer, more tangible correspondences between fact and theory than do our colleagues in the modern languages. In literary criticism, for example, we tend to feel that interpretation should bear a reasonable resemblance to the normal and precise meanings of words and the standard usages of language. We feel a loyalty and responsibility to the concrete and specific. When a distinguished scholar of the modern literatures like Julia Kristeva describes interpretation as “an act of desire and murder,”² a classicist is likely to object that a vital distinction between doing criticism and living life is being forgotten, as the critic becomes a kind of psychopath, ready to break into the headlines with her pen dripping bloody ink from unspeakable crimes against the father. We have our faults, of course, but they probably lie in the opposite direction: pedantry, excessive reliance on authority, the unimaginative repetition of received ideas, a suspicion of abstraction, generalization, or anything poetical. If Aeschylus, Pindar, Lucan, or pseudo-Longinus were reincarnated as classicists today, could they get an article published in *TAPA*?

Nevertheless, the center of gravity in the profession has shifted in important ways, although the young are still young and the old still old. Younger classicists perhaps read less *Wissenschaft* than their older colleagues but are more widely read in anthropology, aesthetics, linguistics, feminist criticism, and literary theory generally, and they are more inclined to experiment with a wide range of methodologies and disciplines. Although such experimentation may cause flutters of perturbation in some circles, it is a sign of health rather than deterioration in our field. We are increasingly aware of the assumptions and problems that surround the notion of the pure fact. We know that even the denial of methodology implies a methodology. Theory is indispensable for helping us to compare different ways of studying literature, to get perspective on our own approaches, and so to understand our presuppositions, aims, and point of view in approaching works of art. Those who regard theorists as Harpies befouling the fair banquet spread before us on the pages of ancient writers might be invited, if I may mix allusions, to look at the sack of assumptions on their own backs. In classical studies the debate between theorists and em-

² Julia Kristeva, “Within the Microcosm of the ‘Talking Cure,’” in *Interpreting Lacan, Psychiatry and Humanities*, vol. 6, ed. Joseph Smith and William Kerrigan (New Haven 1983) 33. Kristeva’s essay was originally published in *Nouvelle revue de la psychanalyse*, autumn 1979. Kristeva, one should add, is herself highly aware of terrorism and its implications for contemporary life: see her “Women’s Time” (1979) in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York 1986) 201–5.

piricists is nothing new and has taken various forms over the past two centuries, going back to the debate between Gottfried Hermann and August Boeckh over a hundred and fifty years ago.³

The tyranny of theory over literature has now reached a hitherto unprecedented intensity, due in part to the economics of publishing and professional advancement and of course to our modern Prometheuses and their gift of a magical ease and speed of diffusion and publication. One result is that young literary scholars in Classics and other fields now need to struggle for the freedom and independence from dominant fashions and jargons in order to find their own voices and to recover in their own spirit and writing a feeling for the primary effect and pleasure of literature.

The change from the Old to the New Criticism in the fifties was a reaction against the Romantic emphasis on the personality and personal emotions of the critic and, with T. S. Eliot's influential essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," a shift to the ideal of the poet as an impersonal element in a depersonalized entity called Literature (with a capital *L*) or the Literary Tradition (which, of course, meant only European literature).⁴ This move was welcome to professors of literature, who could claim to be practising more or less exact and exacting techniques on timeless artifacts and not just giving impressionistic appreciations of pretty verbal ornaments. Interpretation could now claim to be an objective quasi-science, and poems could become objects to be analyzed by elite specialists properly trained in these techniques.

Eliot would turn over in his grave if he were aware of the affinities between his notion of the impersonality of the creative process and some currents among later French structuralists, like Roland Barthes in his famous (or infamous) essay, "The Death of the Author."⁵ The structuralist and post-structuralist critics of the seventies and early eighties, especially deconstructionists and reader-response critics, have some points of contact with New Criticism's text-centeredness, but they leave far behind the New Criticism's assumptions of an authoritative center of interpretation, a stable tradition of literary history, and a neat cleavage between author and interpreter, text and reader, the word and its signification in the outside world. Instead of being a

³ For a useful discussion and bibliography see Daniel Selden, "Classics and Contemporary Criticism," *Arion*, 3d Series, vol. 1, no. 1 (1990) 164–66.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays*, new edn. (New York 1960) 3–11.

⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1968), in R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath (New York 1977) 142–48, especially 146–48. See Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 7, 9.

transparent window on reality or the expression of a real person's thoughts, feelings, or experiences, literature is seen as a construct of signs that refers primarily to itself and its own signifying processes. Other branches of contemporary literary studies show a similar shift, but for different reasons, away from the content to the medium. Narratology on the one hand and reader response criticism on the other study the text as communication—the organization of a verbal artifact, the sending or receiving of a message—rather than as an aesthetic creation or as a commentary on life.

It is natural, perhaps inevitable, that the information sciences, with their extraordinary achievements, should become models for literary study; and, when skillfully used, these models can give us valuable insights into the organization and internal coherence of texts. Deconstruction makes us aware of hidden assumptions about a simplistic mimetic correspondence between literature and "reality." It was, I think, the painter Renoir who said that the artist is always a thief, and this line of thought runs back to Hesiod, Solon, Pindar, and Gorgias. But in focusing exclusively on the semiotic processes of representation, we move too far from the reasons why it has been worthwhile to preserve, study, and translate these ancient texts. Words like pleasure, inspiration, or imagination have ceased to be part of the contemporary critical vocabulary.⁶ Truth and beauty are invoked only to be ironized or deconstructed. If I may adapt a verse of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, "The times, too sage, perhaps too proud, have dropped / These lighter graces" (1850 edn. 8.158–59).

It is an insufficiently noted irony in the contemporary critical scene that the professional study of literature is becoming more and more arcane just as students' basic reading skills and interests in literature are diminishing. Some of the contemporary modes of criticism not only run the risk of alienating young readers who might otherwise become emotionally and personally engaged in the ideas and life-issues raised by great literary works, but can also confirm them in the suspicion that reading is painful, laborious, impersonal, purely cerebral, and "academic," and that there is a hopelessly impassable divide between any concerns of theirs and literary texts. Some of the new methodologies, of course, engage students in the contemporary social implications of literary works in exciting ways: feminist criticism is perhaps the clearest example. But there is always the danger of encouraging students to

⁶ See, for example, the eloquent protest by Ralph Johnson, "The Death of Pleasure: Literary Critics in Technological Societies," in *The Interpretation of Roman Poetry: Empiricism or Hermeneutics?* = *Studien zur klassischen Philologie* 67, ed. G. K. Galinsky (Frankfurt and New York 1992) 200–14, especially 200–7.

spend more time with the theory than with the literary work itself and so to substitute abstractions about literature for response to the literary work, where aesthetic form, feeling, and ideas are inextricably woven together in that mysterious web that makes the experience of “meaning” in the arts so complex, unpredictable, and profound.

One of the less fortunate results of the theory-explosion in recent years is that the young classicist today is less exposed to good non-classical literature for its own sake. The value of knowing Shakespeare, Shelley, or Wallace Stevens—or, for that matter, Dante, Goethe, or Baudelaire—may seem less immediate than knowing Lévi-Strauss on the exchange of women or Foucault on sexuality, valuable as these may be. For North Americans born after 1950 or so, reading has had to compete with television, with the dreadful erosion of literacy from which our whole society is suffering. This is an issue very little discussed, but it is at least probable that the turn away from literary values in recent scholarship and the reduction of literary scholarship to a branch of sociology—and I will not conceal my conviction that it is a reduction—has something to do with this change.⁷ The loss is immense. The classicist who has known from childhood, say,

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes . . .

(Shelley, *Ode to the West Wind*, 1–5)

not only has the pleasure of recognizing the modern mutation of Homer, Bacchylides, Sophocles, Virgil, and Horace; he or she also experiences the vital energy of the classical tradition and in her own tongue feels the rhetorical power of personifying nature and the almost Dionysiac thrill produced by combining an initial interjection with monosyllabic alliteration.

The task of interpreting a literature other than one's own is very difficult, especially a remote literature that can never be heard in its native accents and rhythms. For this task we need the insights and talents of many fields, including those of the literary theorist and the cultural anthropologist. All critics need and use theory and method whether they know it or not. This is good,

⁷ I sketched some of the implications of television for contemporary literary criticism in a still unpublished paper, “La tecnologia e l'interpretazione della letteratura classica” delivered at the conference, “Machina Multa Minax: Cultura classica e culture moderne,” Forlì, Italy, in November, 1991.

healthy, and in any case inevitable. But a feeling for literature begins with the great works in one's own language and culture, and the experience of great literature is contagious and transferable to other literatures.

Some recent developments in poststructural criticism pose a particular dilemma for classicists interested in contemporary literary theory. Works that for centuries were read as commentaries on moral and social life, on the passions, on the problems of evil and suffering are now seen as exercises in narrative strategies and theories of language. But in response we need not accept the choice between being ethereal, decentered postmodernists or reactionary, old-fogey humanists—a choice that is especially ugly, given recent attempts by the conservative right to coopt Classics for its own political agendas. With our strong historical roots and our field's commitment to logic and clarity, high standards of argumentation, and textual evidence, we are in a position to take advantage of the contributions of the new critical methodologies without falling into some of their worst excesses: jargon, pretentious and inflated rhetoric, obscurantism, solipsism, and removal from the moral and social concerns that have been such an important part of literary study of the Classics, from Aristophanes' *Frogs* through Plutarch and the Neoplatonists, and on to today.

The poststructuralist movement contains two currents of thought that often flow against one another. On the one hand, the de-centering of the interpretive self and the postmodern delight in the indeterminacy of meaning look like another belated, post-Romantic rejection of Enlightenment idealism and rationality as we respond to our incessant need to assert the distinctiveness of the modern.⁸ On the other hand, in its suspicion of universals and its self-consciousness about the ways in which critical discourse may subserve historically and socially conditioned ideologies, politics, or value systems, postmodern criticism also appears as a continuation of the Enlightenment critique of inherited truths, dogmas, and established hierarchies.⁹ The latter direction is particularly important and valuable, and one to which classicists can contribute and from which we can profit in exposing and reassessing the assumptions underlying our ways of selecting and interpreting literary texts. The perennial challenge of professing Classics is to elucidate and preserve what each of us sees as best in the classical tradition and to make this meaningful in con-

⁸ See Lionel Gossman, "Philhellenism and Antisemitism: Matthew Arnold and his German Models," *Comparative Literature* 46 (1994) 14.

⁹ See, for example, Lee Patterson, "Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate," in *New Historical Literary Study*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton 1993) 70–72.

temporary intellectual life. We have to remain open to the variety, difficulty, complexity, and even contradictoriness of the ancient texts. For all their beauty, they are not “the most noble food in the most noble form: golden apples in silver bowls,” as the enthusiastic young Hegel wrote in his essay “On Classical Studies,”¹⁰ but rather Proteus-like giants that we have to hold on to and make yield the truths that they have for us in our time and place as they go through their shifting, sometimes terrifying forms.

The contest between the ancients and moderns has a very long history; but in the culture of late twentieth-century America, the Dynamo, in Henry Adams’ sense, is more powerful than ancient traditions; and we classicists seem generally to be on the losing side. Ours is a culture that values above all the dynamism of a forward-looking, ever-advancing, ever-changing technology. In any culture, the study of the past, and especially the remote past, may seem unnatural.¹¹ Why should anyone turn away from the throbbing life of the present to the dusty relics of antiquity? But given our culture’s ethos of progress, the study of the ancient past seems especially anomalous. Even a thinker as steeped in the classical tradition as Ralph Waldo Emerson could use the ancient Greeks as his example of what is superseded by new growth:¹²

The Greek sculpture is all melted away as if it had been statues of ice; here and there a solitary figure or fragment remains, as we see flecks and scraps of snow left in cold dells and mountain clefts, in June and July. For the genius that created it creates now somewhat else. The Greek letters last a little longer, but are already passing under the same sentence, and tumbling into the inevitable pit which the creation of new thought opens for all that is old.

Emerson’s neighbor, Henry David Thoreau, viewed the American enterprise as a determined westward journey, away from the past and into the future:¹³

We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure. The Atlantic is a Lethean

¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, “On Classical Studies,” in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox and Richard Kroner (New York 1961) 324–25, quoted in Gossman (above, note 8) 5.

¹¹ For a suggestive contrast between the temporal orientations of the scientist and the humanist see George Steiner, “The Cleric of Treason” (1980), in *George Steiner: A Reader* (New York 1984) 198–99.

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *Essays, First and Second Series* (Boston and New York 1883) 1.282. I have discussed this and the following passage in a somewhat different connection in my essay, “America’s Classical Greece,” forthcoming in *IJCT*.

¹³ Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *Thoreau: The Major Essays*, ed. Jeffrey L. Duncan (New York 1972) 204; for discussion see Jeffrey C. Robinson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (Norman, OK 1989) 64–65.

stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions.

The passage may remind us of the *Aeneid's* pull between mourning a lost city and founding a new, but Virgil's hero would never welcome an "opportunity to forget" his old world. So it is that our mythology lies not in the distant past, but in the distant future, as readers of science fiction and viewers of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* know.

Classical studies, even with their new, more theoretical look, obviously cannot compete for immediacy of relevance with contemporary-oriented disciplines like sociology or political science or contemporary literature. And yet the dangers of forgetting about the past or destroying the past are just as great as are the dangers of idealizing the past. We might not want to live in fifth-century Athens, but we also have, or should have, doubts about what it would be like to live in a future shaped only by computer models and sociobiologists or genetic engineers. We would prefer, I think, to have city-planners who have given some thought to the questions about the good life and human happiness that are raised by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, and have absorbed at least a little of humankind's delight in the starry sky, bird-song, deep shade, or running water that fills so much of the poetry of classical authors, from Homer and Theocritus on to Virgil and Horace, Ausonius and Claudian, and through them has formed the Western idea of how to live in nature in ways that are both pleasurable and healthful.

It is a truism that nostalgia and romanticism about the past are built into the intellectual constitution of most classicists, as a kind of self-selective process. But as classicists we are also very much concerned with the present, for our field, like any field concerned with the study of the past, stands in a dialectical relation to both past and present. It is obviously important to understand the past in its own terms, for otherwise we can never see beyond ourselves. In the long run, respect for the alterity of the ancients is far more valuable than a facile assimilation to contemporary fashions or ideologies. Yet we can recognize and read this alterity, ultimately, only against our own situation. The past becomes accessible and interesting to us because we perceive it as telling us something, however indirectly, about ourselves, offering a perspective on our world and our behavior that we can get from no other source. If we do not bring the past to bear in some way on the present, the knowledge gained from historical study remains inert—information rather than knowledge. On the purely technological side of modernity, in fact, classicists have been very much up to date, quick to utilize computers, CD-ROMs and their

data-bases, e-mail, and all those other devices that begin to crowd out LSJ or the *OCD* on our desktops.

Toward the end of the Second World War, when the values of European civilization seemed especially precarious and so especially precious, T. S. Eliot, elder statesman of traditional European humanities, delivered a lecture before the Virgilian Society in England in which he looks back to Roman poetry, and especially to Virgil, as the defining center of this culture: "Thus Virgil acquires the centrality of the unique classic; he is at the centre of European civilization, in a position which no other poet can share or usurp."¹⁴ With the gradual disintegration of the hope for a unified European culture, an ever increasing global consciousness, and undiminishing evidence of the human capacity for brutality, cruelty, and destructiveness, we cannot easily return to Eliot's optimistic notion of "the Classic" as the basis of a Europe defined by civility of manners and maturity of expression. We are increasingly unsure if European civilization has a center, and at the same time our notions of civilization are becoming less narrowly European. And yet, as some of the great traditional religions narrow into intolerant or irrational fundamentalisms, as values become fragmented and confused in almost every sphere of life, and as profit-driven technology and the mass media gain increasing power, the classical tradition remains as important as ever, and there is still no adequate substitute.

We share with the ancient Greeks the assumption that we can make sense of the world by means of reason and intellect. We also thrill to the imaginative power, clarity, incisiveness with which their myths and poetry can frame essential issues of human life: the balance between political order and individual freedom, independent and collective endeavor, the relation between the sexes, the place of the passions and reason, and the questions of what constitutes civilization and can destroy it. As the author of a recent volume in the Sather Lectures reminds us, "[T]o learn about the Greeks is more immediately part of self-understanding. It will continue to be so even though the modern world stretches round the earth and draws into itself other traditions as well. Those other traditions will give it new and different configurations, but they will not cancel the fact that the Greek past is especially the past of

¹⁴ See T. S. Eliot, "What Is a Classic?" (1945) in his *On Poets and Poetry* (New York 1961) 52–74, especially 69–74; the quotation is on p. 70. For further discussion of the shifting role and meaning of the "classical" see my "Cracks in the Marble of the Classic Form: The Problem of the Classical Today," *Annals of Scholarship*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1993) 7–30.

modernity.” The author, by the way, is not a professional classicist but a philosopher.¹⁵

In our present situation we particularly need an aspect of the classical tradition that contemporary critics slight, perhaps for fear of being seen as Eurocentric or as universalizing or essentializing, namely a notion of common humanity, of a sympathy between men and women of different races and places. It is a sympathy built into Homeric formulas like δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι, “miserable mortals,” and of course enacted in the scene between Priam and Achilles that closes the *Iliad*. Such ideals are particularly important at a time when the growth of nationalism and various forms of fundamentalism tend to emphasize the differences rather than the common interests between humans.¹⁶ We should beware of absolutizing difference and remember that difference need not exclude large areas of common ground. Practically speaking, survival amid the shrinking resources of our ecologically stressed planet will eventually come to depend on a stronger notion of a common humanity than we at present possess.

As any scanning of library catalogues or recent periodicals will show, the humanities and social sciences today are obsessed with “difference” and its corollary, the construction of identity by specific cultural, historical, and social determinants. The political fragmentation of the modern world goes along with a profound fragmentation in notions of the person, a sort of balkanization of the self. Males and females, gays and straights, whites and people of color all want to affirm their distinctive identities, which often loom as more important definitions of their being than belonging to a common human race. “Humanism” has itself become a bad word, effectively unusable because of associations of secularism on the one hand and of political conservatism on the other. We need a new word—perhaps something like “philanthropism,” to borrow an Aristotelian term—to denote that broad area of human concerns and feelings that make it possible for a Westerner to respond to *The Tale of Genji* or an Asian to the *Odyssey*. We would include here, for instance, the compassionate moral sensibility and responsibility that Plato and Aristotle regard as fundamental to the “reasonably decent person,” the ἐπιεικής.

¹⁵ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Sather Classical Lectures 57 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993) 3.

¹⁶ George F. Kennan, “The Balkan Crisis: 1913 and 1993,” *New York Review of Books*, vol. 40, no. 13 (July 15, 1993) 3–7, especially p. 6, for example, suggests that the atrocities in the ex-Yugoslavia may be in part due to its removal from the ideal of European humanity, the notion of a “reasonably decent” person [cf. the Aristotelian ἐπιεικής] that has its roots in classical Greece.

We should not, of course, idealize the ancients, who had no strong, ethical notion of a brotherhood of man.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they did develop a cosmopolitan outlook in their literature; and, in our increasingly fragmented world, it is important to be reminded of this part of the beginnings of our culture. The first coherent world-picture in Western thought, Homer's *Shield of Achilles*, frames the works of humankind with the features of nature that are visible and constant for all humans: the earth, the heavens, with its constellations, and the sea (*Iliad* 18.483-89, 607). Carried by the hero who has placed himself in a marginal relationship to the Greek army and who at the end will transcend the division between Greek and Trojan in taking pity on Priam, the shield is the universalizing counterpart to the specifically Greek and Trojan geography in the catalogues of book 2. Its first human tableau pictures one of "two cities of mortal men," μερόπων ἀνθρώπων, in a scene that could take place at almost any time and almost in any city or village (18.490-93):

On it [Hephaestus] wrought in all their beauty two cities of mortal men. And there were marriages in one and festivals.
They were leading the brides along the city from their maiden chambers under the flaring of torches, and the loud bride song was arising.
(Lattimore's translation).

Only after this does Homer describe a more culture-specific juridical setting (18.496-508).

In the midst of our own society's dangerous pulls toward fragmentation, it is worth recalling the processes of assimilation, adaptation, and creative accommodation through which the Romans were able to draw such strength from the culture of their conquered subjects, the Greeks especially, and so achieve that long-lasting model of an international European civilization that permeates our way of thinking about the shape of our world even today. The collocation *orbi et urbi*, with its implicit notion of a great city at the center of the world, occurs first, I believe, in Ovid's *Fasti* (2.684).¹⁸ Ovid also greatly expands Virgil's image of a postwar world where Trojans can pity their erstwhile enemies; he has the Virgilian castaway Achaemenides revere Aeneas more than his own father (*Met.* 14.167-76, especially 170; cf. *Aen.* 3.607ff.). Virgil and Lucan lead us on journeys across the Mediterranean as Homer,

¹⁷ See the balanced view of H. C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought* (Cambridge 1965) passim, especially 4-5, 114-28, 200-3.

¹⁸ The collocation, if not the immediate juxtaposition, however, occurs earlier: e.g. Cic. *Catil.* 1.4.9, 4.6.11; Prop. 3.11.57. For significance see Philip Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford 1986) 364-66.

Herodotus, and Apollonius of Rhodes had led us over a more mythically colored *oikoumenê*. Lucretius adapts the local imagery of a Roman triumph to a philosopher's vision of the immensity of the universe, penetrating to the "flaming walls of the world." His thrill of intellectual discovery in the proem to his third book, with its mixture of awe and "divine pleasure"—*quaedam divina voluptas . . . atque horror*—looks beyond the earth to the entire universe (*DRN* 3.26f.: *nec tellus obstat quin omnia dispiciantur, / sub pedibus quaecumque infra per inane geruntur*). Seneca's geographical hyperboles reach to *ultima Thule* and to the Chinese (*Seres*)—although, in the latter case, aware of his rather shaky geography, he adds, *quocumque loco iacent* (*Sen., Med.* 379 and *Thy.* 378–79). Horace often uses the technique of setting his characteristically Roman concerns against distant places with exotic names, as in *Odes* 3.24, where Arabia, India, and Scythia are the foils to the luxurious Romans filling up the seas off Campania with their enormous villas. And his delicious priamel in the Pindaric Ode, 4.2, takes sublime flight into the lofty reaches of the clouds before finally circling down to Matinum, the Tibur, and the little bee gathering poetic honey on the thyme blossom.

Greek literature in its most studied periods, it is true, is intensely local, but it also shows the remarkable ability, from Homer on, to make the local meaningful in larger terms. This hardly means that we endorse all of its values or institutions. It is important to be aware that the ideals of freedom and cultivated leisure for the fifth-century Athenian citizen rested in part on holding slaves and on keeping women under male authority. We all know too of the pervasive misogyny of archaic and classical Greece and the ethnocentrism that even its greatest thinkers (like Plato and Aristotle) do not entirely escape. And yet another strand—the compassionate recognition of what the Other may feel and suffer—appears almost everywhere in Homer, Herodotus, and much of tragedy. It appears even in small details, as in the brief description of the captive women's lament over Patroclus in *Iliad* 19, where the omniscient narrator's editorial comment, "The women groaned in response: the occasion was for Patroclus, but each one grieved for her own sufferings" (19.301f.), acknowledges the hidden misery of the enslaved captive women in a way that is not required by the narrative *per se*.

Hesiod, both in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, and the author of the *Prometheus Bound*, whether Aeschylus or not, imply the history of *anthrôpoi*, of the human race as a whole, and not just of Greeks.¹⁹ The earliest

¹⁹ On the other hand, the race of humans has alongside it a "race of women" whose origin is marked as that of *anthrôpoi* is not: see Hes., *Theog.* 585–602, *Op.* 59–82, and Nicole Loraux,

extant tragedy, Aeschylus' *Persians*, follows the spirit of the *Iliad* in admitting the point of view of the defeated barbarian. He refrains from viewing the victory at Salamis merely for the greater glory of Athens, but instead focuses on the suffering of the invader and would-be destroyer of the Athenians' freedom, in order to suggest larger conclusions about the uses of power and the relation between mortal limits, the natural world, and the gods. Xerxes' defeat appears also as a tragedy of the human condition—how a powerful man is led by excess of confidence, pride, and folly to outrage the sanctities of nature and the gods. It is a situation that could apply to the Athenians themselves—and does come to apply to them a generation later as Thucydides suggests in a number of places in his *History*, notably in Pericles' final characterization of the Athenian Empire as a *tyrannis* (2.63.2).

The barbarian Other is of course regarded as the cultural and moral inferior of the Greek; but, along with remote myth, the barbarian also provides an imaginary space for examining the possibilities and the limitations of the human condition, the Greeks' equivalent, perhaps, to a space laboratory for human affairs. Herodotus' barbarians, however, are not merely the negative side of an antithesis. They are also surprisingly sympathetic human beings to whose sufferings we attend with horror but also with compassion, from Croesus on to Harpagus and the family of Masistes.

Even a play that has explicitly Athenian political concerns, such as Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, is part of a large inquiry into the nature of aggression, violence, and revenge, the justice of men and gods, and the foundations of law and moral sanctions. Thus the *Oresteia* remains a precious document in the history of the human spirit and not just an antiquarian testimony to a dead civilization or even just a monument of European civilization. Although Euripides celebrates Athenian political ideology in plays like the *Heracleidae*, *Erechtheus*, and *Suppliants*, his *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* take the side of the defeated barbarian rather than the victorious Greek.

Thucydides, for all the intensity of his involvement in the affairs of Athens, emphasizes the general quality of the human, *to anthrôpinon*, that forms the larger intellectual background of his thinking (1.22.4).²⁰ His immediate predecessors in political thinking had developed notions of "unwritten laws" that applied to all mankind. In a celebrated passage the Sophist Antiphon suggested that the body's biological processes of sustaining life constitute the basis for transcending the differences between Greek and

"Sur la race des femmes et quelques-unes de ses tribus," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 43–87, especially 44–49.

²⁰ On this aspect of Thucydides' thought see Baldry (above, note 17) 45–47.

barbarian: “In this we have all been made barbarians to one another (βεβαρβαρώμεθα), since by nature we are all disposed alike in all respects, both barbarians and Hellenes . . . For we all breathe into the air with our mouths and nostrils . . .” (*FVS* 87 B44, frag. B, col. 2.7-33, vol. 2, pp. 352f.). Whatever the place of this passage in Antiphon’s application of the *nomos-physis* theory to his notions of law and justice, he nevertheless has a clear sense of a common ground of humanity. As Jacqueline de Romilly comments, “. . . in the Greece of the city states, a Greece still proud of its victory over the barbarians, [this] was an astonishingly bold statement to make. It was the first time that the thesis of a brotherhood of man had ever been put forward.”²¹ The roots of these ideas, however, already lie in Homeric expressions like “mortals who eat the fruit of the earth” (βροτῶν, οἱ ἀρούρης κάρπον ἔδουσιν, *Iliad* 6.142) or “men who work for their livelihood” (ἀνέρες ἀλφισταί). They also have numerous reverberations in tragedy, as in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, where the protagonist—a barbarian, a woman, and a slave—likewise appeals to what is sacred among *anthrōpoi* and transcends the difference between slave and free (798–805).²² The fact that both Antiphon and Euripides’ heroine use these arguments for specific purposes of their own only confirms their wide diffusion at the time.

With the invention of dramatic performance in the theater comes also a double perspective of space and time, in which the audience is forced to imagine their present moment as something other than where they are. Shakespeare gave eloquent expression to the effort of imagination required by the theatrical experience:

Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
that did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder. [. . .]

²¹ Jacqueline de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens* (1988), trans. Janet Lloyd (Oxford 1992) 115. See also Baldry (above, note 17) 44–45

²² On the relation of Greek and barbarian and the validity of a common law for both in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, see C. Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* (Durham, NC 1993) 170–72, 186–90, 191–213.

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth . . . (*Henry V*, Prologue)

An ancient equivalent would be, perhaps, the prologue of Sophocles' *Electra*, where the tragic poet does not, of course, address the audience directly. Nevertheless, the Athenians, sitting on the southwest slope of the Acropolis, hear the Paedagogus instruct Orestes (4–10):

Here is ancient Argos that you longed for, the grove of Inachus' daughter, driven by the gadfly. And here, Orestes, is the agora Lykeios named after the wolf-slaying god; and here on the left is the famed temple of Hera. And the place we have come to is Mycenae rich in gold—you may be sure that you behold it—and this house of the Pelopids rich in destruction . . .

Because tragedy creates a constant and fruitful tension between the real (the circumstances of the performance) and the imaginary, the contemporary and the mythical, its action is open to two planes of meaning at almost every point. This dynamic potential is inherent in the very circumstances of the theater, which requires an act of projecting oneself into a fictional place and time, and this imaginative extension continues to be operative for the plays long after their initial performance. For this reason, contemporary audiences all over the world have no trouble in responding to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Medea*, or the *Lysistrata*. The enabling power behind tragedy's wide appeal is already fully developed in Homer, namely a way of telling the tales of the past that makes them speak about the condition of all men and women at all times. This ability is what we call "classical."

Recent criticism, following a trend reinforced by the so-called New Historicism, has tended to emphasize the particular Athenian political ideology of the plays. Important as this is, we should not forget these plays' meaning for a larger audience—as indeed Aristophanes reminds his Athenian spectators when he contrasts the cosmopolitan setting of the Greater Dionysia with the more private atmosphere of the Lenaia (*Acharnians* 502–6). This awareness of a larger audience probably became even stronger with the spread of literacy and the diffusion of Attic tragedy all over the Greek world by written texts and by word of mouth. One recalls the anecdote about the Athenian prisoners at Syracuse after the débacle of the Sicilian Expedition.

One of the achievements of Attic tragedy, made possible by Homer, is to have recast the ancient myths and cults of Mycenaean and Dark Age Greece into forms that were not only relevant to Athenian society but were also potentially meaningful far beyond the original occasion of their presentation. I mention here (for example) tragedy's boldness and breadth of conception in

framing the questions of justice and order with cosmic scope (especially in the *Oresteia* and *Prometheus*); the belief in reason and responsibility alongside the full recognition of the power of the passions and the irrational; the concern with universal laws and with a general definition of the human; the central position of human action and decision alongside the recognition of the weakness and mutability of men and women; and the recognition of forces above or beyond human control.²³

Tragedy's capacity to generalize meaning from the local to the universal operates even in the smallest details of language. The parodos of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, depicts the chorus of Theban elders in their specifically Theban setting, surrounded by the temples of their gods whom they call upon in their local cult settings, beginning with Athena and Artemis "who sits upon her round throne in the agora" (159–62). A little later the chorus describes the wives and mothers of the city, young and old, sitting and lamenting as suppliants "at the altar's edge," literally the "altar's shore" or "coast," ἀκτὰν πάρα βώμιον (184). We can easily visualize the scene and perhaps even reconstruct a stage action in which the chorus would imitate the act of supplication by moving with suppliant gestures to the altar in the center of the orchestra. But only five lines before, the chorus used this same metaphor of the "shore" for a place not on earth, in the visible space of the city, but in the bleak world of the dead as they describe the shades of the plague's victims flying off like birds, "one after another . . . to the shore of the Western god" (ἀκτὰν πάρα ἑσπέρου θεοῦ, 178).²⁴ Thus the specific sacred space delineated by the "altar's shore" (ἀκτὰν πάρα βώμιον) is also brought into relation with the *invisible* realm that awaits all mortals. It is not surprising, then, that Virgil and through Virgil Dante should echo this passage in their descriptions of the generality of death (See Virg., *G.* 4.472–74; *A.* 6.309–12; Dante, *Inferno* 3.112–20).

This movement from the local to the universal is even more spectacular at the end of the *Antigone*, where the chorus, in the fifth stasimon, invokes Dionysus as the protective divinity of Thebes, child of Semele and Zeus, who "dwells by the stream of Ismenus and at the sowing-place of the serpent" (1121–25). The chorus envisages the god's coming to Thebes from the slopes of Parnassus to the west or over the waters to the east (1144–45). But they conclude with a prayer for his epiphany as "chorus-leader of the stars that breathe

²³ See Christian Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy* (1988), trans. A. Webber (Baltimore 1993) 208–16; see also my review of Meier, forthcoming in *IJCT*.

²⁴ The passages are further connected by the echo of ἄλλον δ' ἂν ἄλλα in 175 and ἄλλοθεν ἄλλαι in 184.

fire, overseer of the voices of the night” (ἰὸ πῦρ πνεόντων / χόραγ’ ἄστρον, νυχίων / φθεγμάτων ἐπίσκοπε, 1146–48). This ode, as has often been observed, clearly harks back to the parodos, where the chorus celebrates their city’s survival in a local *pannychis*, or all night festival, in honor of Dionysus (148–54). Here Dionysus appears in his role as the divinity of the city’s characteristic form of collective self-expression, choral song and dance.²⁵ The fifth stasimon evokes Dionysus’ Eleusinian connections that are relevant for other aspects of the play. The end of the ode relocates the nocturnal festival and its chorus not inside the city but in the vast spaces of the sky and its remote celestial fires—the sky that brought the news of the disturbances between gods and men in the dust storm after Antigone’s defiant act of burial and later in Teiresias’ account of the pollutions in the city at the peripeteia. In this passage, as also in my example from the parodos of the *Oedipus*, Sophocles’ poetical language makes the public spaces of a particular city—including the space of the theater itself—into a larger zone of contact between humanity and divinity. And this process can serve as an emblem, in miniature, of what the Athenian theater does in general with the local cults, myths, and settings of its plots.

The double role of Dionysus as a local and as a universal divinity and the resultant mixture of the local and the cosmopolitan are perhaps most intense and most problematical in the *Bacchae* of Euripides, a work produced, like Thucydides’ *History*, by a man intensely involved with the political and social life of Athens and also, at the time of writing, an exile. It is with this inexhaustibly rich, meaningful, and difficult work that I want to end.

Many elements in the *Bacchae* point to a wider world. In the prologue the god describes how a non-Greek cult makes its way from Bactria, Arabia, Persia, and Lydia to Greece (13–17, 63ff., 86ff.) and mingles Greeks and “barbarians” in the cities of Asia Minor (18). The underlying message is the universal power of the new god as he reaches Thebes, his first stop among the Greek cities on the mainland. With its wide geographical horizons, the play self-consciously juxtaposes Greek and barbarian, European and Asian (cf. 483ff.), but just this fact also produces the paradoxical situation of a chorus of Asian maenads claiming a gnomic wisdom applicable to “all mortals” (e. g., 387–402, 876–81 = 897–901, 902–11; cf. 861).

²⁵ See for example, my *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*, Martin Classical Lectures 26 (Cambridge, MA 1981) 200–6, especially 204; Anton F. H. Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie* (Tübingen 1991) 129. On the geographical range and complexity of Dionysus in this ode, especially the Italian, Theban, Athenian, and Eleusinian connections see Albert Henrichs, “Between Country and City: Cultic Dimensions of Dionysus in Athens and Attica,” in *Cabinet of the Muses* (Festschrift T. G. Rosenmeyer), ed. M. Griffith and D. J. Mastronarde (Atlanta 1990) 264–69.

There are so many important issues in the *Bacchae* that the relation between the local and the cosmopolitan aspects of Dionysus is not usually considered a major problem. The fascination of the psychological and the tendency to concentrate on character draw contemporary critics to the disintegration of Pentheus and the interplay between sanity and madness, normality and the god's ecstasy. But the *Bacchae's* view of Dionysus as a god who simultaneously moves between barbarians and Greeks and also has a special place in Thebes has implications for the universalizing claims of tragedy itself as a genre.

The gods of tragedy regularly assert their dominion over the whole world, as Aphrodite does in her opening lines in the *Hippolytus*, but they rarely do so with such a paradoxical combination of fierce local pride and barbarian affinities. In the passage of the *Antigone* that I just discussed, for example, the local and cosmopolitan Dionysus coexist happily, and there is no particular tension between his two constituencies. In fact, the vast geographical extent of his power serves only to confirm his potential helpfulness for the city of his birth (*Antig.* 1137–45). At the end of the *Bacchae*, however, the Dionysus who has been so concerned with establishing his Theban identity is silent about his Theban ties. He identifies himself here only as the son of Zeus (1349), not the son of Zeus and Semele, the point that had been so important for his claims on Thebes in the first part of the play.²⁶ This ambivalence may have something to do with Euripides' own relation to his native city. He is still an Athenian writing for Athenian audiences, but living as an exile at the fringes of the Greek world. A biographical explanation, however, cannot account for whatever transformations Euripides has made of his personal circumstances in the play.

In the *Antigone* the polis, though divided and threatened by the fratricidal war, remains as a stable force to the end. The Theban elders, who are Creon's interlocutors in the final scene, endure as a voice of the civic solidarity of the polis, despite the catastrophe that has overwhelmed the royal house. In the *Bacchae*, the collapse of the royal house leaves nothing except the private lamentation between the survivors, Cadmus and Agave, both of whom are condemned to leave the city for exile. The Theban elders who comprise the chorus of *Antigone*, to be sure, indulge a tragic version of "I told you so"—after all, Creon threatened and bullied them—but they are not entirely without compassion. They are firm about Creon's own responsibility for the disaster that his mad folly, *atê*, has caused (1259f.), but they also place his suffering

²⁶ E.g., 2f., 27ff., 41, 375f., 468, etc. See G. Ierandò, "Zeus e Dioniso: in margine a Eur. *Bacch.* 1349," *RFIC* 120 (1992) 286–91.

into the larger frame of mortal woes in general (1337f.): “Do not pray for anything more, since mortals have no escape from a doom that is fated.” Such statements may not be particularly helpful and, to our ears, perhaps offer scant comfort, but they do nevertheless continue a communal voice that tries to make sense of this suffering, unsatisfactory as that sense may seem. The gesture is not as compassionate as the chorus’ call to a “common grief for all the citizens” at the death of Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 1462–66) or the chorus’ evocation of pity and mourning as Heracles and Theseus exit together at the end of the *Heracles* (1427f.): “We depart, full of pity, much lamenting, having lost what is greatest among that which is dear” (στείχομεν οἰκτροὶ καὶ πολὺκλαντοί, / τὰ μέγιστα φίλων ὀλέσαντες. Nevertheless, in both of these Euripidean plays of the 420s the choral voice is still the voice of a community that enables a private grief to resonate compassionately (if severely) against a wider public order.

In the *Bacchae* the communal, civic voice has disappeared. The chorus of Lydian maenads who make up the chorus occupy a situation almost unique in Greek tragedy, namely hostility to the city.²⁷ To be sure, this hostility develops gradually in the course of the play and becomes extreme only after Pentheus’ violent response to Dionysus. Nevertheless, the effect is to remove that voice of communal sympathy, whether of the house or of the city, that is an essential part of the majority of Greek tragedies. This chorus is closely bonded to its leader-god, Dionysus, and rarely addresses any of the mortal characters who constitute part of the polis. They interact with the citizens of the polis far less than do most choruses in Greek tragedy, and in fact they speak only thirteen iambic trimeters in the extant portion of the play.

Most interpretations of the play emphasize the invasion of Thebes by a wild, exotic band of barbarian women and their leader. But viewed in a slightly different perspective, this use of a non-Greek, maenadic chorus also creates a major gap in the usual dynamics of a Greek tragedy. It marks the lack of a collective persona, a voice that can speak in behalf of the community as a whole. The play thus shows the collapse of a civic and communal solidarity by an absence from *within* as well as by an unexpected presence from without. The use of a maenad-chorus removes the city’s strongest visual representation of a community on the stage, the voice that most facilitates the citizens’ identification, *qua* citizens, with one another’s suffering.

One of the play’s most striking transformations of the chorus’ traditional role occurs at Agave’s entrance from the mountain carrying the head of Pen-

²⁷ On this chorus from a different point of view see my *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae* (Princeton 1982) 242–47. I plan to discuss other aspects of this issue in “Chorus and Community in Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” forthcoming.

theus (1168–99). We can fully appreciate this scene when we recognize how it recasts the familiar tragic *kommós* of shared lament, that is, an antiphonal exchange between women at a moment of overwhelming disaster. This kind of responsive lament has a long history in Greece, from Homer to the present day. There are numerous examples in Greek tragedy, from Aeschylus' *Persians* through Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.²⁸ But, just at the point where one would expect the traditional and ancient form of antiphonal lamentation between women, this chorus, as it says, performs a victory song and a revel of celebration, a *kômos*. By superimposing the traditionally male *kômos* and *epinikion* upon the traditionally female antiphonal lament, Euripides creates a disturbing inversion both of gender roles and of the expected emotional response.

Euripides, in fact, leads us to expect an antiphonal *thrênos* between women in this scene, particularly when the maenad-chorus utters a rather unexpected word of sympathy, *tlamon*, as they enter into their lyrical dialogue with Agave (1184):

Αγ. μέτεχέ νυν θοίνας. Χο. τί; μετέχω, τλᾶμον;

Agave. Now take your share in the feast.

Chorus. What? Shall I take a share, wretched woman?

In the strophe just preceding, in fact, the maenad chorus addresses the “bacchantes of Cadmus”—that is, Agave and her sisters—and sings of the wail of female lamentation, the *goos* (the most likely reading for *P*’s *gonon*) and tears (*dakrua*, 1162) that have now been replaced by the victory song (1160–62):

Βάχχαι Καδμεΐαι,
τὸν καλλίνικον κλεινὸν ἐξέπραξατε
ἐς γόον [γόνον, P], ἐς δάκρυα.

Theban Bacchantes, you have accomplished the glorious victory song
for lamentation, for tears.

They thus remind us, indirectly, of the absence of the lamentation—the *goos* and the *dakrua*—that a “normal” chorus of Theban women would now be

²⁸ For further discussion see my “Female Mourning and Dionysiac Lament in Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” in *Orchestra: Drama Mythos Bühne* (Festschrift for Helmut Flashar), ed. Anton Bierl and Peter von Möllendorff (Stuttgart 1994) 12–18, especially 13–15, and in general Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974) 134ff., especially 138f., for indications that this antiphonal form of lamentation has great antiquity; also C. Nadia Serematakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (Chicago 1991) 99–125.

sharing with Agave. If these Theban women were not in fact “Cadmean bacchants” raging on Mt. Cithaeron, they would be commiserating with Agave in the city and the house.

One further point needs to be added in support of this view of the scene, namely the fact that the paroxysms of intense female grief in Greek tragedy and in several other plays Euripides are regularly described as “bacchantic” or “maenadic.”²⁹ In *Hecuba* the protagonist begins “a bacchic tune” when she finds her last surviving son, Polydorus, washed up on the shore dead (*Hec.* 684–87). In the *Suppliants*, Evadne rushes out in bacchantic fury when she first learns of her husband’s death (1038f.; cf. 1065). Antigone, mourning over her dead brothers and mother in the *Phoenissae*, calls herself “a bacchant of Hades” (1489f.). Here in the *Bacchae* Euripides uses the bizarre situation of Agave’s madness and the maenad chorus to reveal and exploit the interchangeability between bacchantic exultation and bacchantic mourning. Both embody women’s collective release of violent emotions in contexts when they are outside of male control and thus threatening to the order of the polis, or what a fifth-century Athenian male citizen would regard as threatening to the polis. In this scene of the *Bacchae*, then, Euripides obtains a shocking *coup de théâtre* by replacing what might have been a scene of choral lamentation shared between the mother and a chorus of women with a scene of maenadic exultation in hunting and bloodshed. The substitution is part of the gender reversals that run throughout the play; but it also enables us to register the hollowness at the center of this city in the absence of a collective mourning for the disasters.

The funeral for Pentheus that Agave and Cadmus perform after her return to sanity is an equally outrageous version of even the most emotional scenes of lament. Instead of washing, keening, and caressing the body, as do the female mourners of the *Iliad*, Agave has to handle piece by piece the limbs that she has herself torn off. The closest parallel is the mourning of Hecuba over the body of Astyanax at the end of the *Trojan Women*. That scene has the pathos of the lacerated body whose separate limbs are enumerated and an old woman burying a child; but it is not the extreme situation of the dismembered corpse whose parts (presumably) are put in place, one by one; nor is the mourner herself responsible for the killing as Agave is.

²⁹ See R. Schlesier, “Mixtures of Masks: Maenads as Tragic Models,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. T. H. Carpenter and C. A. Faraone (Ithaca, NY 1991) 89–114, especially 99–103; Richard Seaford, “Dionysus as Destroyer of the Household: Homer, Tragedy, and the Polis,” *ibid.* 119–20 and 125–26, who, however, is primarily concerned with negated wedding ritual and destruction in the household rather than rites of mourning.

There is a male role in this funeral too, and the equivalent of an *epitaphios logos* is pronounced over Pentheus by his grandfather, Cadmus. This is a speech, however, not over a warrior who has fallen in battle but over a foolish “young man,” as he is several times called, who has failed to make the transition to full male adulthood and dies at the hands of his mother in a context that in fact suggests regression to infancy. There are no martial deeds or civic virtues to extol, but only domestic incidents that seem to consist mostly of threats to punish anyone who has wronged or even been a nuisance to the old man (1320f., especially τίς σὴν τaráσσει καρδίαν λυπηρὸς ὢν; 1321). The speaker, furthermore, is not the powerful man of the city who should deliver the *epitaphios*, but the victim’s grandfather (the point is twice emphasized, 1309f., 1328), a superannuated victim who had already surrendered his authority to the dead ruler and is himself on the verge of exile.

It is instructive to go back to the *Antigone* and compare the scene of lamentation that closes that play. In *Antigone* the funerary rituals that are a relatively minor issue in the *Bacchae* function as the main area of the conflict, which is also articulated in part as a conflict of male and female roles and attitudes toward funerary lament.³⁰ But the Dionysus envisaged by the *Antigone* is still a god of the city, a god whose nocturnal festivals will celebrate the new victory and a god who can purify the city of its threatened pollutions. His connections with remote places here only enhance his possible value and helpfulness to the city, as the fifth stasimon makes clear. The *Bacchae*, on the other hand, envisages a world where the mental and the geographical boundaries of the Greek polis are no longer adequate to the experiences it describes. The relation between the local Theban affiliations of Dionysus and his role as a universal god is left ambiguous at the end of the play.

The *Bacchae*’s hesitation between a local Theban god and a universal god whose power extends over all peoples, I suggest, has something to do with Euripides’ perception of tragedy at this late point in his career. The loss of a local, civic, choral voice has as its other side a universalizing point of view that anticipates something of tragedy’s new role in the century to come, hints of which may be found also in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Like Euripides, Aristotle faces both forward and back, and like him stands at the threshold of a wider world, a world whose horizons reach beyond those of the Greek polis.

When Aristotle in the *Poetics* insists on the universality of poetry and thereby of tragedy, he is responding, in part to this detachment of tragedy

³⁰ For this issue and recent bibliography see C. Segal, *Sophocles’ Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, and Society* (Cambridge, MA 1995) chapter 5, forthcoming.

from its civic context that is adumbrated in the role of the chorus in the *Bacchae*.³¹ The end of the *Bacchae* transfers into the terms of individual emotion the “common grief of all the citizens” that closes the *Hippolytus*. This shared grief of the earlier play mirrors back to the Athenian audience its own solidarity in the civic space of the theater of Dionysus beneath the Acropolis.³² Both the *Bacchae* and Aristotle’s interpretation of tragedy in the *Poetics*, with its neglect of the ritual dimension of tragedy, begin to speak to a world where there is a weakening of the close communal bonds of the polis and the accompanying ethos of collective sharing of suffering. As in so many things, Aristotle looks forward as much as backward, away from the world of the fifth-century city-states and forward to the larger conglomerates of the Hellenistic era. As the intense civic solidarity of fifth-century Athens is gradually attenuated, the individual life, private emotions, personal happiness and personal suffering become increasingly important for the meaning of life, as one sees, for instance, in the plays of Menander or the philosophy of Epicurus.

Aristotle’s lifetime sees the large-scale export of Athenian drama from its intensely local setting in the Periclean theater in Athens to the rest of Greece. In the fourth century, new theaters are constructed at places like Epidaurus, Mantinea, Tegea, and later throughout the Greek world. This expansion of the audience from Athens to the rest of the Greek *oikoumenê* requires a new mode of interpretation for tragedy, a new horizon of expectation. Tragedy ceases to be Athenian tragedy and becomes Hellenic tragedy and eventually world tragedy. Euripides’ own life, in his self-imposed exile to the court of King Archelaus of Macedon, already prefigures this trend.³³ We should recall too the other great play about Dionysus at this time, the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, where the god is also the focal point for the problem of the detachment of tragedy—and by implication of comedy also—from Athenian civic life and civic ideals.

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle indicates that fourth-century tragedians could envisage an audience of readers as well as spectators (3.12, 1413b12ff.), and this too reflects the gradual change from an audience responding to the plays in their immediate performative contexts to an audience who may have access to

³¹ This diminution of the civic voice of the chorus is also visible in the last two extant plays of Aristophanes in the following decade, *Eccl.* and *Plut.*

³² See my *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow* (above, note 22) 120–35.

³³ Aeschylus’ possible composition of his Prometheus trilogy during his exile in Sicily—a work set at the limits of the world and concerned with world-order rather than polis-order—may offer some analogies in an earlier period.

them in the more private and widely diffused form of written texts.³⁴ As a poet living in exile in the last years of his life, Euripides may have been even more strongly influenced by writing as a mode of composing and transmitting his work.³⁵ Writing at a distance from an audience whom he did not expect to see in person and writing in old age and in exile may have contributed to the diminishing of the communal role of the chorus in the *Bacchae* and to the lack of a strong sense of civic community in general, although it is unlikely that Euripides would entirely forget his audience in Athens, where in fact the plays were performed posthumously.

In different ways and to different degrees, then, Euripides' *Bacchae* and Aristotle's individualizing approach to tragedy are prophetic of tragedy's role not only in the Hellenistic world but also in our own time, where the theater becomes increasingly (if not exclusively) the arena for the arousal and exploration of personal emotion rather than the setting for expressing the community of fellow-citizens sharing a common enterprise. Aristotle shifts his emphasis from the civic solidarity expressed by Athenian tragedy as an intensely political and communal form to its universality as a dramatization of the sufferings and uncertainties in the lives of all of us as fellow-mortals who share a common humanity. This shift also raises the question of whether the more universalizing view of the human condition can coexist with the intense communal involvement of the archaic and classical city-state, and whether the development of the one necessarily weakens the other. It is a painful paradox that is very much with us in the modern world, namely that as our horizons widen to a truly global perspective we seem to become more intent on private and personal experience.

For Euripides, born a century before Aristotle, the polis-ethos is still a vital force. Hence the tension in the *Bacchae* between the universalizing claims of the Asian chorus and their indifference to the sufferings of the Thebans who oppose their god is particularly disturbing. Even after Dionysus' arrival teaches the royal house of Thebes its terrible lesson, the Asian maenads of the chorus and the Theban women who rage destructively on the mountain still live in different, mutually exclusive worlds. The vision of the age of Alexander that would bring them together still lay in the future. Euripides could not, of course, have guessed that his Macedonian hosts would reverse the direction of

³⁴ See my "Greek Tragedy: Truth, Writing, and the Representation of the Self," in *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry Text* (Ithaca, NY 1986) 77f.

³⁵ Another play of this late period, the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, contains a scene in which Agamemnon writes a letter in the middle of the night and in the privacy of his tent (115ff.). See Segal (above, note 34) 95.

the mythical Dionysus and eventually bring the god to the limits of the Greek *oikoumenê*. And yet the *Bacchae* also prefigures the vast expansion that the cult of Dionysus will enjoy in this ecumenical civilization.³⁶ Here the civic choruses, though not silent, will be less important, and the Bacchic *euoi* that can excite both Greek and barbarian in the prologue to the *Bacchae* will leap the walls between cities and countries as easily as it crossed the walls of Thebes (cf. 18 and 653f.).³⁷ The tragedies of Euripides' small city-state have continued to cross these boundaries of territory, culture, and language more widely than either Euripides or Aristotle could ever have imagined.

The logical extension of this development within the Greek world is the Stoic notion of the world itself as a kind of vast theater in which we humans are the privileged spectators. This concept gives "Longinus" (the author of *Peri Hypsous*) his crowning encomium for the sublime in literature (c. 35).³⁸ In his idealizing classicism, Longinus finds sublimity in his "godlike" (*isotheoi*) writers of the past—Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Plato, Demosthenes—because they bring us into contact with the greatness of nature, to which our own nature, in the greatest spirits, is akin (see 38.3). After comparing us to spectators of the whole universe, Longinus goes on (35.2-3),

Nature breathed into our souls an invincible love for whatever is always great and more divine than ourselves. Not even the whole universe, therefore, suffices for the reach and energy of human contemplation and intellect, but man's thoughts often go beyond the boundaries of the surrounding world; and if any one should look around in a circle at life and see by how much what is extraordinary and great and noble (*to periton kai mega kai kalon*) predominates in all things, then he will soon know for what we have been born.

This passage brings me back to T. S. Eliot's lecture "What Is a Classic?" that I discussed earlier and to the problem of the Classics and classical criticism at the present time. "If anyone should look around in a circle at life," Longinus wrote, "and see by how much what is extraordinary and great and noble pre-

³⁶ See Albert Henrichs, "Greek and Roman Glimpses of Dionysus," in *Dionysus and his Circle: Ancient through Modern*, ed. C. Houser, Fogg Art Museum (Cambridge, MA 1979) 8–11, with further references there cited.

³⁷ On the importance of walls and boundaries in the play see my *Dionysiac Poetics* (above, note 27) 88–106.

³⁸ For the Stoic idea of the theater of the universe see Cic., *ND* 2.56.140 and A. S. Pease, ed., *Marci Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum* (Cambridge, MA 1955, 1958) ad loc.; also D. A. Russell, ed., "Longinus" on the Sublime (Oxford 1964) ad 2.35.2–36 (p. 165) and Hardie (above, note 18) 171.

dominates in all things . . .” Could anyone “looking around at life” today agree with Longinus?

Eliot delivered his lecture before the holocaust and the concentration camps were fully known and before two atomic bombs were dropped on Japanese cities. As the meaning of these and countless other horrors was absorbed, it became hard to believe in the grandeur of the human spirit, and it is probably even harder today. We all know what atrocities can be committed in the name of abstractions like humanity or freedom—or democracy: *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*. For our hope in the future we still need idealizing views like those of the Platonizing Stoics as much as we need the more pessimistic realism of, say, the *Iliad*, or most of Sophocles and Euripides, or Thucydides and Tacitus. There are many portraits of humanity, from the regular profiles and proportions of the Parthenon frieze to the warts and moles of a Dürer portrait, the demonic monstrosity and cruelty of a Bosch, the fantasies of a Borneo mask, the abstraction of a Yoruba bronze, or the fragmented planes of a Picasso face. Few of us, I think, would be satisfied with any single one of these depictions of mankind or womankind. But to keep the picture complete we cannot do without the Parthenon or Longinus either.