CHAPTER III

The Tragic Hero

The appearance of Herakles in the plays of the three great Greek tragedians reflects two important developments in his literary tradition. The first evidently is the entry of the Herakles myth into drama and this raises the question to what extent his portrayal was influenced by the particular exigencies of that genre. Did Herakles take on any new dimensions in Greek tragedy, did these changes leave an impact on the subsequent tradition, and can they be attributed to the intentions of the playwright rather than being the result of the new medium? Before we turn to these questions, a brief word must be said about Herakles' association with Athens, which found its literary fulfilment in the plays of both the tragic and the comic writers. The authors we have discussed so far were from Ionia, Boeotia, and Sicily, and local patriotism influenced the views on Herakles, for instance, of Stesichorus and Pindar. For the next century, from Aeschylus to Antisthenes, Herakles was entrusted to Athenian writers and the Athenian public. Were they in any way predisposed to him?

They were, and favourably so. Herakles did not belong to the earliest stratum of Attic religion and mythology and therefore his cult was not localized on the Acropolis, Athens' oldest cult centre.[1] He was, however, ardently worshipped in the suburbs, the Attic countryside, and, certainly by the fifth century, throughout the city. This latter situation prompted the question why Herakles was so widely recognized in cult and Theseus, Athens' national hero, so little. Euripides made a valiant attempt to explain it by saying that all precincts sacred to Herakles in the city formerly had belonged to Theseus, who gave them to Herakles out of gratitude for Herakles' saving him.[2] The truth of the matter was, of course, that Herakles was an older hero than Theseus,

and through the whole tradition of Theseus there runs the constant endeavour to model Theseus' feats and exploits on those of Herakles. In the second half of the sixth century Herakles was officially adopted as an Athenian citizen so he could be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries.[3] The Athenians' esteem for him is further reflected by their claim that they were the first to make him a god (D.S. 4. 39. 1).

Considering this popularity of the hero it may, at first sight, seem disappointing that his appearances in Greek tragedy are not more frequent. To explain his relative absence from the tragic stage, various suggestions have been offered. The most widely held view is that the Herakles myth did not lend itself to dramatic staging because of Herakles' frequent fights against monsters,[4] and what nowadays represents a cinematic attraction has been considered a handicap for the staging techniques of fifth-century Athens. This hypothesis, however, is immediately contradicted by Herakles' abundant appearance on the comic stage, most of the time in knockabout roles in which his physical exploits against assorted beasts and ogres figure prominently. If one takes tragedy, comedy, and satyr play together, Herakles appears with a frequency that reflects his great popularity with the Athenians.

The obstacles to Herakles' representation on the tragic stage lay in the nature of Greek tragedy rather than its technical exigencies. Greek tragic drama is not a spectacle that revolves around the 'factual' development of the plot, nor are the plot's various turns and twists designed to create surprise.[5] Either through the prologue or other plentiful hints in advance, the audience knows from the very start whither the plot will evolve. Rid of the obligation to focus their interest on the events, playwright and spectator can concentrate on their interpretation. Greek tragedy thus is basically a theatre of ideas and this explains why Herakles, whose physical, external associations still far outweighed any others, *a priori* was not an ideal protagonist. He had to be adapted to the genre and this means that the tragic poets continued and greatly intensified the process of internalization that had been heralded by the choral lyricists. Seen against this background, the fact that Herakles plays a major role in several plays of each of the great tragic poets, including four—Sophocles' *Trachinian Women* and *Philoctetes*, and Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Herakles*—that have been fully

preserved, is a remarkable testimony both to the imaginative power of the Greek tragedians and to the hero's own inherent flexibility.

Herakles played a significant part in Aeschylus' *Prometheia*. Only one play is extant, the *Prometheus Bound*, and scholarly controversy has raged over the question whether it was the first play in the trilogy, followed by the *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Firebearer*, or whether it was the second play, with the *Prometheus Unbound* as a sequel.[6] At any rate, by its very nature the *Prometheus Unbound* resolved much of the conflict that takes place between Prometheus and Zeus in *Prometheus Bound*, even if the consummation and details of this reconciliation were reserved for a third play, the *Firebearer*. It is predicted in the *Prometheus Bound* that Herakles, a descendant of Io, will free Prometheus after shooting the eagle Zeus sent to torment him (771–5, 870–2). Furthermore, we have several fragments from the *Prometheus Unbound* in which Prometheus addresses Herakles (frs. 195–201 N.). Hesiod had outlined the myth in the *Theogony* (526–34) where, as we saw earlier, Zeus' motive was to aggrandize Herakles' glory. Aeschylus discarded this conventionally heroic concept and made Herakles' function far more profound and meaningful.

To Aeschylus, Herakles represented a more advanced and enlightened kind of culture hero than did Prometheus. The dramatic conflict in the *Prometheus Bound* is between the stubborn righteousness and intractability of Prometheus, and Zeus' brutal, tyrannical use of his superior authority, might, and force. It is the personifications of the latter two, Kratos and Bia, who chain Prometheus to his rock. At the end of the *Prometheus Unbound*, a reconciliation came about and its fitting instrument became Herakles who, in the course of the previous literary tradition, had changed from the arbitrary perpetrator of excessive force to an ideally motivated and awesome advocate of justice. This is exactly the change that overcomes Zeus in the *Prometheus Unbound*. It was in the nature of its theme that much of the action of the *Prometheus Unbound* was parallel to that in the preceding play, although it is, as is so often the case in Aeschylean drama, a parallelism of inversion. In the *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus' resentment climaxes with the appearance of Io. She is persecuted by Zeus as is Prometheus; the sight of the unjustly suffering creature prompts Prometheus' most bitter outburst against Zeus and his prediction of Zeus' fall. He then goes

on to prophesy at length the wanderings of Io to the eastern and southern limits of the world. In the *Prometheus Unbound*, Prometheus is not yet reconciled to Zeus when Herakles appears, because he greets the latter as 'the most welcome child of a hateful father' (fr. 201 N.).[7] Then he goes on to issue to Herakles the prophecy—the formal counterpart to Io's—about the hero's wanderings to the north and the west. The wanderings of Io and Herakles, extending over the whole surface of the earth, manifest the worldwide power of Zeus. Whereas Io's wanderings were caused by injustice, Herakles', as Pindar had proclaimed, served a just purpose. In contrast to Io, Herakles will suffer his tribulations under the aegis of a compassionate Zeus. Prometheus makes this clear when he foretells Herakles' fight against the Ligurians on his return from his fight against Geryon (fr. 199 N.). The Ligurians will attack in great numbers, forcing Herakles to shoot off all his arrows:

> But then you shall not be able to take any stone from the earth there, because the whole place there is soft. And seeing you in your helplessness, Zeus will take pity on you. He will hold a cloud over you with a shower of round rocks (*πέτρων*) and will cast a shade over the place. And using these rocks as your weapons you will easily dispel the Ligurian army.

Prometheus, whom Kratos and Bia chained to high-towering rocks (*πέτραις*) at the outset of the *Prometheus Bound* (line 4)[8] at Zeus' request, now predicts, while he is still chained to the stone, that Zeus will deliver Herakles by means of rocks. From a later source (Hyg., *Astr.* 2. 6) we know that Prometheus went on to foretell that Herakles, who had been forced to his knees during this fight, would be set after his death among the stars in that image. Prometheus' prophecy therefore probably concluded with an allusion to Herakles' final reward for all his labours—his ascent to heaven. As the prediction to Io concluded with his birth, so the prediction to Herakles is likely to have concluded with his deification,[9] a theme, as we have seen, about which the Athenians felt some local pride.

Most importantly, Prometheus himself admits in this prophecy that Zeus is capable of compassion. His prediction that Zeus will have regard for Herakles, 'seeing his helplessness' (*amēchania*), is applicable

to Prometheus himself. At the beginning of the *Prometheus Bound* Kratos spoke of Prometheus' formidable ability to find a way even out of a helpless situation (κἀξ ἀμηχάνων; 59). Prometheus has found none, but Zeus has found one for him by means of Herakles, whom Pindar had invoked as the defender against helplessness (*N.* 7. 97). Since Prometheus is still hostile to Zeus at Herakles' approach, but is reconciled to him at the end of the *Prometheus Unbound*, the change of Prometheus' attitude must have come about as a result of his prediction to Herakles. Formally, this is suggested by the reversal of the stone image and the parallel, but reversed function of Prometheus' lengthy prophecies in the two plays: as his prediction to Io marked the culmination of his unbending resentment in the *Prometheus Bound*, so his prediction to Herakles marks his willingness to be reconciled with Zeus in the *Prometheus Unbound*. Prometheus now is aware—and Herakles may have pointed this out to him—that Zeus is a good and just god, for Aeschylus began to portray Zeus as such in the *Prometheus Unbound*.

So far from being the accidental instrument of the reconciliation, Herakles was so well suited for this task that he may have effected the reconciliation himself. He appears, of course, in the role of the *alexikakos*, and as such he will engage in all the tasks that Prometheus is predicting to him. These deeds will be done for the benefit of man—in other words, Herakles will continue where Prometheus left off. The spirit, however, in which Herakles will pursue Prometheus' work is very different. Prometheus defied the gods, Herakles is subservient to them; Prometheus was proud and impatient, Herakles is humble and enduring; Prometheus did good from unreasonable and imperious impulse, Herakles' actions are caused by the gods and aimed at establishing the *nomos*. Herakles is a universal culture hero like Prometheus, but he is a more mature culture hero because he works more unselfishly, more effectively, and with more discipline for the common good than Prometheus was able and willing to do.

And, we might add, because he is—literally—more human than Prometheus. Ever since the Romantic period we are accustomed to see in Prometheus 'the symbol of Man as opposed to God';[10] Goethe's Prometheus, to cite but one example, is made by the poet in man's image and then makes men in his. In ancient Greece, however, Prometheus the Titan was not the most obvious incarnation of humanity, whereas Herakles, the man who became god through his own efforts, was a more realistic and less symbolic model of the aspirations of mankind. Aeschylus therefore refrained from decking out his Herakles with the superhuman trappings of Hesiod's and balanced the divine causation of the *alexikakos* with that of Herakles' very human frailty. For Herakles had accidentally wounded the centaur Chiron, who was immortal, with a poisoned arrow. The wound caused Chiron such intolerable pain that he wanted to die and he therefore agreed that Herakles should offer him to Zeus as a substitute for Prometheus.[11] By supplying this motive, Aeschylus accomplished a twofold purpose. First, instead of gaining the heroic sheen of great glory, as in the *Theogony*, Herakles frees Prometheus in order to redeem himself for a previous lapse. Herakles' action is the result of his imperfection. In that sense, Herakles clearly belongs to the human race which Prometheus saved, thereby perpetuating all its weaknesses and imperfections, whereas Zeus wanted to create another, perfect race of men. Secondly, Prometheus now accepts the substitution of Chiron's undeserved punishment for his merited punishment. This signifies Prometheus' submission and acknowledgement of his guilt, which is underlined by his doing the voluntary penance of wearing a wreath of osier as a reminder of his fetters, and of enjoining mankind to wear the same wreath for all times to come.[12] In sum, Aeschylus strikes an exquisite balance between the human and near-divine aspects of Herakles, whereas much of the subsequent tradition would exploit their polarity.

Aeschylus' treatment of Herakles in other plays need not detain us long. We have already quoted a fragment from the *Herakleidae* in which the chorus sang of Herakles' fight against Geryon and his 'unjust herdsmen'.[13] Taking his cue from Pindar and Hesiod, Aeschylus tendentiously wrote his account of this exploit in favour of Herakles. This is also consistent with his reference to Herakles in the *Agamemnon*. Clytemestra is trying to bully Cassandra into submitting to her slave's lot by sneeringly citing the precedent of Herakles (*Ag.* 1040–1):[14]

> They say that even Alcmena's son once was sold in bondage and endured to touch the bread of servitude.

Otherwise, Clytemestra says, she will use force and as Cassandra does

not reply, Clytemestra parts on the note of threatening her with violence. The process of de-emphasizing Herakles' violence has reached its culmination here: he is cited as a *paradeigma* for patiently enduring the injustice of a vile master. The passage also contains an allusion to Herakles' big appetite, a favourite theme in the Satyric drama, and we know that Aeschylus wrote a Satyr play about Herakles, the *Heralds*, in which the hero strutted about in the lion's skin (frgs. 108–13 N.).

Sophocles was frequently inspired by episodes from the life of Herakles. Among the titles that have survived we find an *Amphitryon*, a satyr play called *Herakles at Taenarus*—the legendary entrance to the underworld through which Herakles descended to fetch Cerberus—and another tragedy, *Athamas*.[15] Its central incident was Herakles' rescue of Athamas who was about to be sacrificed by his people because he had killed his own children. The parallels to Euripides' *Herakles* are interesting because Athamas, too, was victimized by Hera and struck with delusion that led to the murder, but the few fragments of the play amount to nothing more conclusive. The biographers have it that Sophocles built a shrine to Herakles. We would be ill-advised, however, to let this guide our interpretation of the *Trachinian Women* and the *Philoctetes*, for the dramatic treatment of Herakles in the two plays is radically different.

To understand the intent of the *Trachinian Women*[16]—and the same holds good of any play dealing with Herakles—we must start from the changes that Sophocles made in handling his mythological material. The genre, of course, restricted the action to one or two places and a few days, and this purely technical reason ruled out the dramatization of various labours. But Sophocles went further than that. The scene is Trachis, where Deianeira has been waiting, for fifteen months, to hear from or about Herakles. What occupies the spectator from the outset—Deianeira's prologue—is not the labours of Herakles, for they are complete, but the anguish Herakles has caused Deianeira by his frequent absences, which more often than not had nothing to do with his labours. Sophocles dwells in the most explicit way on the reverse of Herakles' adventures: the fears, the pangs, and the agony of his incredibly understanding and patient wife. Not once does she criticize him, for he delivered her from her suitor, the monstrous river god Achelous.

It was a fierce fight, and Zeus ordained well by having Herakles win—if he indeed ordained well (27), because Deianeira has been unhappy and fearful, on Herakles' account, ever since. It was a dubious sort of deliverance. In the course of the play it becomes increasingly clear that Herakles does not care about Deianeira except for satisfying with her—among many others—his prodigious appetite for sex. His fight against Achelous simply pitted one monstrous creature mad with lust against another.

This characterization of Herakles is reinforced when Lichas, the messenger, appears. As in Deianeira's account of the battle, Sophocles again starts out with a quick, clichéed sketch of the Herakles *kallinikos* which rapidly yields to a grim and quite different reality. Resplendent with victorious exploits, the hero is about to offer a huge sacrifice to Zeus at Ceneum as he had done in Bacchylides' sixteenth *Dithyramb*. A brilliant pageant is to wipe out the seedy memories of the past fifteen months. What had happened since Herakles left home? First, he got drunk at the court of Eurytus, king of Oichalia, and was thrown out of the banquet hall. Then, to avenge his hurt, he seized Iphitus, Eurytus' son, and dashed him to death from a tower. This is the same story that we found in the *Odyssey*, but Sophocles has accomplished the seemingly impossible by outdoing Homer in incriminating Herakles. If anything, the motive for the murder has become more petty and vindictive; Iphitus now does not even have any horses whose theft, though not justifiable, at least had some significance in the agricultural society of Homer's heroes. Moreover, the deceit with which Herakles prepared his crime is too much even for Zeus, his own father. If Herakles had wreaked his vengeance openly, Sophocles says (278–9), Zeus would have forgiven him as one who acted with justice,[17] but Herakles has become guilty of *hybris* (280), the cardinal 'sin' in Greek drama. So Herakles is given in bondage to Omphale for one year. After that, Herakles, with the logic of a brute, blames Eurytus for the whole trouble and sacks Oichalia. But the validity even of this motive crumbles quickly. Lichas has not told Deianeira the full story, but another messenger does, and every word in his account is emphatic and well chosen. Neither his servitude to Omphale nor the death of Iphitus made Herakles do this, but Eros—his love for Iole.

What follows is the story, so familiar to the Athenians and us from Thucydides' Melian dialogue, of the stronger man overpowering the weaker (359–64):

> Well, when he would not persuade (ἔπεισθε) the father to give him the girl so she might be his mistress, he devised some petty complaint as a pretext, made war upon her land—the land in which, as Lichas said, Eurytus was king—and he slew the prince, her father, and sacked the city.

It is as if Sophocles were answering Pindar here. A boor does not have the faculty of persuasion, no matter how hard Pindar had tried to impute it to him (*Ol.* 3. 16). But Herakles has read his Thucydides, even if only the preface: he comes up with a *casus belli* to justify archaic savagery and a slaughter of epic proportions.

What is Deianeira's reaction? What should be the reaction, as Kitto has put it so aptly,[18] of the lady of the house who one morning at her doorstep finds a beautiful young girl who from now on will occupy the front bedroom? Not too kindly, as the Athenians knew, but at least Agamemnon had been so considerate as to come along and explain the situation to his loving wife. Sophocles has taken pains to make Deianeira the total opposite of Clytemestra. Seeing the sad cortege—in a horror-stricken sadness that once more deflates the splendour of Herakles' actions—she gently addresses Iole. The reason for the latter's presence, one suspects, is quite clear to Deianeira. Once she has learned Iole's identity from the messenger, she insists that Lichas also tell her the truth. And when the truth is known, Deianeira's attitude is truly remarkable (457–69):

> And if you are afraid your fear is mistaken. Not to learn the truth—that indeed would pain me; but to know it—what is there terrible in that? Has not Herakles loved others before—more, alas, than any man alive—and no one of them has had a harsh word or taunt from me; nor shall this girl, although her whole being should be absorbed in her passion; for indeed I felt a profound pity when I beheld her, because her beauty has wrecked her life, and she, hapless one, all innocent, has brought her fatherland to ruin and to bondage.
> Well, those things must go with wind and stream.—To you I say: deceive whom you will, but ever speak the truth to me.

Several things stand out here. Deianeira is compassionate, and she empathizes with Iole. This is not particularly surprising: virtually all critics are agreed that Sophocles, throughout the play, portrays Deianeira in the most favourable way. She is meant to have our sympathy, and she has our attention in the first part of the play, which is three times longer than the part that centres on the appearance of Herakles. The point needs no labouring. But Sophocles also characterizes Herakles and Deianeira by contrasting them. When Deianeira hears the truth, she thinks of someone else, Iole; when Herakles hears it—Deianeira's innocence—he has no word for Deianeira but can think only of himself. Whereas Herakles makes no effort to learn the truth and Hyllos is barely able to get in a word, Deianeira unwaveringly searches for it, no matter how grievous it may be for her. In this resoluteness she anticipates Oedipus.[19] Sophocles, then, has changed the myth not only by presenting Deianeira as a mature, loving woman, who is a far cry from the rosy, bedroom-picture-like ingénue of Bacchylides, but also by making her courageous and undeterred. She sends off Lichas with the admonition to be truthful; the next time we hear about Lichas[20] Herakles has smitten him, who was completely blameless (773), against the rocks (781–2):

> He made the white brain ooze from the hair, as the skull was dashed to splinters, and blood scattered therewith.

Once before we witnessed a scene like this: when Pindar described the cruel perversion of the horses of Diomedes whom Herakles punished for ignoring the holy *nomos*. The point is symptomatic of Sophocles' treatment of the myth: he has turned it inside out. The saviour, the benefactor, is turned into the opposite, 'into a man who follows his own nature and desires without restraint, commits outrageous misdeeds, and thus becomes a danger and menace to other people. . . . The tales about the monsters he slew are almost forgotten, and his strength, his terrifying greatness have turned against other fellow-beings.'[21]

Are we too harsh on Herakles? Scholars, who are uncomfortable with the notion that the easygoing (εὔκολος; Arist., *Frogs* 82) Sophocles —of whom we have all of seven out of 120 plays—might have been more Euripidean than Euripides in treating the Herakles theme, have

objected that a great hero has to be outside the norm. As a result, these scholars argue, Herakles is bound to be misunderstood by the more domestic characters who have to live with him, and that is the whole point of the *Trachiniae*.

External and internal reasons contradict this view. The intellectual life of Sophoclean Athens was dominated by the sophists, one of whom, Protagoras, loudly proclaimed that man was the measure of all things. Herakles, who was strong enough to be a *nomos* unto himself, was cited in these sophistic discussions.[22] The Athenian audience would not merely look at Herakles, but they would judge him. So does Sophocles. He concludes the play by saying that 'there is nothing in all this that is not Zeus'. This is not a pious platitude, but Sophocles makes it quite clear in the play[23] that Zeus punishes Herakles for the killing of Iphitus. Herakles is not a law unto himself because he has violated *dikē*, Justice.

Before Herakles appears on the stage and the spectator will be able to see what the man is like, Sophocles adds one more touch to his characterization. At the beginning of Lichas' speech, which is permeated by Sophocles' proverbial irony,[24] Herakles is introduced as a man 'unburdened by disease' (235). Soon, however, Deianeira three separate times refers to Herakles' passion as a disease (445, 491, 544). She is not angry with him for it but Hyllus, in his passionate account of his father's agony, uses the theme of disease again so that one suspects that Herakles' new illness is merely a continuation of the old one.[25] Finally, Herakles himself describes its symptoms. He mentions the convulsions of which Hyllus had spoken earlier, with one important difference: the *spasmos* is a cause and, not, like in other writers, an effect.[26] The sickness is internal, not external, and it causes the *atē* (1082) which Herakles blames soon thereafter for destroying him (1104). This *atē* is his own work since he is guilty of *hybris* just as he was in the slaying of Iphitus. Sophocles changed the myth again by pointing out that the sickness which befalls Herakles from Nessus' robe is merely a manifestation of his own inward disease. This is the logical inversion of the Greek ideal that the beautiful body is an expression of a good and beautiful mind, and Herakles at the time was of course the ideal of that Greek incarnation of the *kaloskagathos*, the athlete.

Herakles' egomania, his most pronounced quality in the final part of the play, works against any sympathy one might have with him

and strongly suggests the limitations of his achievements. It is Herakles who tells of his labours and not the chorus as in Euripides' *Herakles*. Therefore his labours, which Euripides glorifies as labours in the *Herakles*, are reduced to mere individual achievements in Sophocles' play.[27] Hyllus eventually succeeds in telling Herakles that Deianeira is dead, but Herakles wastes no word on Deianeira, with whom the audience has suffered and sympathized during the entire play. Instead, he commands Hyllus to kill him by burning him on the pyre on Mount Oeta and to marry his father's most recent concubine, Iole. Hyllus protests vigorously against these impositions, the proposed match with Iole in particular. Herakles can persuade his son as little as he was able to persuade Eurytus. When Hyllus yields, he makes it clear that he yields only because Herakles is sick (1230). He is sick because he is maddened by avenging fiends (1235): the Erinys that Hyllus had misguidedly wished upon his mother (809) now is vexing his father. Herakles, however, looks at it differently: to him his command to Hyllus is holy and sanctified by the gods (1248). Hyllus, in turn, proceeds to indict these very gods for their cruelty (1267–8). He curses the gods who beget children (1268), for he and others are suffering from the monstrous deeds which god's own child has inflicted on them.

Finally, in making Herakles tell of the preparations for his burial on Mount Oeta, Sophocles changed the myth again. He knew that the audience—which has been followed in this by many modern scholars—would be prone to associate Mount Oeta with Herakles' apotheosis. But not only does Sophocles, unlike Pindar, make no mention of it, but he also does his best to counteract any such implications. According to the legend, Herakles did not die but rose from the flames to the gods. By contrast, Sophocles, by putting the words in Herakles' own mouth, insists on the finality of the man's death. Herakles realizes that this is the meaning of the oracles he received from Zeus' oak at Dodona (1169–73):

> It [the oak] said that, at the time which liveth and now is, my release from the toils laid upon me should be accomplished. And I looked for good fortune; but the meaning of it was only that I should die; for toil comes no more to the dead.

'I looked for good fortune'—this again is a cruelly mocking echo of Lichas' introduction of Herakles as 'a man of good fortune' (230–1). As Herakles was pronounced to be free from sickness and turned out to be thoroughly diseased, so his presumed good fortune has turned into its exact opposite. The rest from his troubles is not transfiguration, but death—'this is the end, the last end of Herakles' (1256). Throughout the play, Herakles has not been able to rise above his own nature, superman-like—in a negative way—as it is, and there is nothing that would justify his becoming a god. With the hope for a glorious existence in the other world gone, Herakles, like Dido, can concentrate only on a grandiose and splendid death.

The exact date of the *Trachiniae* has been subject to many a learned argument,[28] but the *Philoctetes* was doubtless written later (about 409 B.C.). The portrayal of Herakles is radically different here. He actually appears on the stage only shortly—much less even than in the *Trachiniae*—at the end of the drama. His 'ideal presence',[29] however, permeates the play. Herakles represents the ideal standard to which Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are trying to live up and against which they are constantly measured. The *deus ex machina* appears not to rescue a plot that has run amuck, but because he has been in and behind this play from the very outset. Sophocles makes this quite explicit, again by working freely with the mythological tradition.

According to the myth, Apollo gave Herakles the bow because of Herakles' *aretē* (D.S. 3. 4. 14). It was in this spirit that Herakles passed the bow on to Philoctetes who lit his pyre on Mount Oeta. 'It was by a good deed that I myself won it', says Philoctetes (670), not realizing that the bow was an obligation for further deeds of *aretē*. Sophocles saw the starting point for his drama here. In contrast to Aeschylus' and Euripides' *Philoctetes*,[30] Herakles appears only in Sophocles' and his bow is kept before our eyes and referred to throughout the entire drama. Whereas the other two dramatists, following the myth, treated Herakles' bow merely as the necessary instrument for the conquest of Troy, Sophocles was concerned with its spiritual implications. The bow, divine in origin, was the weapon of the culture hero Herakles. With it, 'he freed Prometheus, father of the arts, he slew the centaurs, wild monsters who refused their birthright to become men. This bow symbolized man's intelligence brought into action, to guarantee

man's domination of the earth.'[31] The bow is Herakles' legacy and a symbol of the man's achievement. He gave it to Philoctetes, the man whom he thought most able to carry on his work. Philoctetes in turn gives it to Neoptolemus. Both presume to be like Herakles, and each winds up as a Herakles *manqué*.

To make his intent clear, Sophocles again altered the mythological tradition by changing Philoctetes' homeland from the Megarian peninsula to the gulf of Malia, a country closely associated with Herakles. Odysseus emphatically introduces Philoctetes as the Malian, and only then does he give the name of the father, Poias—a highly unusual procedure (4–5). Furthermore, Philoctetes assents only once to his descent from Poias (263)—but only *after* he has stated that he is the owner of Herakles' arms. From then on, he persistently creates some ambiguity about the identity of his father and insinuates that his father is Herakles rather than Poias.[32] When he laments the loss of his bow, he becomes quite explicit about this by calling himself 'a miserable Heraklid' (1131–2). Since Neoptolemus keeps addressing Philoctetes mostly as 'son of Poias' the audience would keep Philoctetes' claims in perspective.

True, however, to his vision of himself as a Heraklid, Philoctetes tries to make Neoptolemus assume to him the same attitude as Philoctetes has been assuming *vis-à-vis* Herakles. Outwardly, Philoctetes has much in common with Herakles. He, too, suffers afflictions (*πόνον* 637; *πολύπον'* 777) from unjust persecution. In several passages that describe Philoctetes, Sophocles imitates the sleeping Herakles of the *Trachiniae*—in the similarity of Philoctetes' affliction to his (*Tr.* 980–1, 1010), the similar appeal for death (*Tr.* 1004–6, 1040–2), the similar warning not to wake the sufferer (*Tr.* 974–82, 988–91).[33] The services Philoctetes wants from Neoptolemus can be regarded as similar to those Philoctetes rendered to Herakles on Mount Oeta. 'By setting fire to Herakles' pyre, Philoctetes both saves Herakles from his suffering and "sends him home" to the gods.'[34] Philoctetes was a benefactor to Herakles (670) and expects Neoptolemus in the same way to be a benefactor to him. Moreover, just as Philoctetes attempts to picture himself as Herakles' son, so he acts towards Neoptolemus as if Neoptolemus were his own son. The lineage Herakles—Philoctetes—Neoptolemus is explicitly established in three passages that come within

150 lines of each other and appear at the very heart of the play. First, Philoctetes allows Neoptolemus to touch the bow of Herakles (667–70). He is given this privilege because of his *aretē* (669). Philoctetes defines *aretē* in the narrow personal sense we have just discussed, i.e. he was given the bow because he was Herakles' benefactor, and Neoptolemus is to follow suit. A little later, Neoptolemus receives the bow from Philoctetes and thus becomes its temporary possessor (776–8):

> There it is, my son, and pray to the jealous gods that it may not bring you troubles (πολύπον'), such as it brought to me and to him who was its lord before me.

At this very moment, however, Neoptolemus is more the son of Odysseus than the son of Herakles, for he received the bow by lying.

Finally, when he is racked by his agony, Philoctetes begs Neoptolemus to burn him just as Philoctetes once burned Herakles, and Neoptolemus is asked to keep the bow which Philoctetes once received from Herakles. The great symbolic acts that link Herakles and Philoctetes—the handing over of the bow and the lighting of the pyre—are purposely extended by Sophocles to include Neoptolemus.

Herakles' appearance at the end of the play, which takes up all the important themes and problems, sets an end to Philoctetes' and, to a lesser extent, Neoptolemus' pretensions to being Herakles' successors. He pointedly addresses Philoctetes as 'son of Poias' (1410), thus settling all the ambiguity Philoctetes has been trying to create about his descent. Then he holds out before Philoctetes his own labours (πονήσας . . . πόνους, 1419) and sharply sets apart his own goal from that of Philoctetes' labours: whereas Philoctetes' will bring him only fame (εὐκλεᾶ βίον, 1422) Herakles' labours brought him immortal *aretē*. This fame was something Philoctetes had craved throughout the play. In this respect, Philoctetes is the typical Homeric hero and Sophocles has been careful to portray him as such. Philoctetes' first bitterness comes when he hears that nobody knows about him (254–6). The appeal to this desire of Philoctetes is Neoptolemus' most powerful argument in trying to prevail on the man. After telling him of Herakles' oracle, Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes that if he goes to Troy he will be singled out as the *aristos* of the Greeks and win matchless fame (κλέος ὑπέρτατον; 1347). Neoptolemus fails because he had earlier lied to

Philoctetes and because Philoctetes is too recalcitrant to make up his quarrel with the Atreidae—almost like Achilles, the greatest of Homer's heroes.

Herakles repeats Neoptolemus' arguments in virtually the same words. Philoctetes will get his *kleos*, he will receive the trophies (*aristeia* 1429), and the army will single him out as being first in *aretē* (1429; cf. 1344–7). Yet this is not the less selfish, ethical *aretē* of Herakles, who endured all his sufferings and even turned them *pro bono publico*. It is the old-fashioned, self-centred *aretē* of the Homeric hero, and the contrast between these two forms of heroism and *aretē* is central to the play. Then Herakles makes it clear that Neoptolemus has no kinship with him either. He is Achilles' son (1433) and therefore, ironically, there remains some truth in Philoctetes' treating him as if he were his own son, because Philoctetes is more akin to Achilles than to Herakles. Having thus dissociated himself completely from his unworthy followers, Herakles sends them off to Troy. The duality Sophocles uses here (1436) emphasizes that Philoctetes and Neoptolemus have much in common, and their inability to be true successors of Herakles is one of these bonds. They will take Troy and reap all the outward glory a Herakles can ever get. Measured, however, against the more mature standards of another time, as represented by the Herakles *ethicus*, they go off as failures, because unlike Herakles, they were not able to grow beyond themselves and their human limitations. And this, of course, had been exactly the trouble with Herakles in the *Trachiniae*.

Why did Sophocles choose to portray Herakles as an ethical ideal in the *Philoctetes*? Part of the answer lies in the dramatic themes of the play. One is, as we have seen, the contrast between an archaic kind of *aretē* and a more advanced *aretē*, and the projection of anachronisms into the present can make for powerful drama. The other theme, very topical at the time, is the contrast between *physis*, nature, and *technē*, training.[35] The sophists proclaimed that everything could be taught whereas Sophocles, in this play, is firmly on Pindar's side. The machinations of Odysseus, who is the embodiment of the sophistic movement's vilest side, cannot overcome Neoptolemus' *physis*. Nor can Philoctetes and Neoptolemus claim to have changed their *physis* for the better by a mere technical device, i.e. the possession of Herakles' bow.

Here some training would be necessary, but not in the sophistic sense.

The chronological sequence of Herakles' negative and favourable portraits should not be over-interpreted. But there is no question that Sophocles found the tendencies at the close of the fifth century more congenial for a favourable characterization of Herakles than the earlier decades. Prodicus' moral view of Herakles' choosing a philosophy of life had made a strong impression. He was followed in this by Antisthenes, the 'founder' of the Cynic school.[36] At the same time, the rationalizing approach to the legend of Herakles, which had been begun by Hecataeus, was continued to the point of allegorical interpretation by the logographer and sophist Herodorus of Heraklea. He wrote the story of Herakles in seventeen volumes and can be considered the creator of the philosophical Herakles allegories, even though his *Herakles* was not organized from this point of view. While Herodorus mostly discussed the motley collection of Herakles myths from the rationalizing approach of ethnography and Ionian scientific inquiry, one fragment in particular[37] shows the allegorization of the myth, which launched a mighty tradition in European literature:

> They write that he is wearing a lion's skin and carrying a club and holding three apples in his hand. They tell as a myth that he took away these very three apples when he killed the dragon with the club, that is to say when he conquered the manifold calculations of stinging desire by the club of philosophy, having noble reason as a garb like a lion's skin. And he took away the three apples, that is to say three virtues (*aretās*): of not getting angry, of not loving money, of not being fond of pleasure. By the club of the strong soul (*psychē*) he overcame the earthly struggle of vile desire, living like a philosopher until his death.

Thus Herakles' life was viewed as a model worthy of being followed. That, and the failure of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus to do so, is much of what the *Philoctetes* is about.

Still, this ideal was little more than a kind of *noblesse oblige*. It was Euripides who created the most meaningful and thoroughgoing idealization of Herakles for his time and, we might add, for ours. He completed a development whose most eloquent spokesman had been Pindar, and against which Sophocles had rebelled in the *Trachiniae*—the purification of Herakles. Euripides went beyond Pindar, however, in his definition of Herakles' heroism. Pindar showed Herakles as being free from wantonness and violence, and as fighting assiduously *pro bono publico*. That was enough in the first part of the fifth century to justify reverence for the hero–god. It did not, however, make Herakles particularly relevant to the last part of the same century when the Olympian religion had become little more than formal and was not what we would call a living faith. To be sure, in Periclean Athens with its magnificent temples we find all the paraphernalia and outward splendour a traditional religion can provide. The only thing this religion was unable to supply any longer was inspiration and a deeper meaning for guiding people's lives. Euripides was keenly aware of this and took every opportunity to castigate the gods for the lack of these very qualities and for their obstruction of the effort of humans to work out their own destiny.

In dramatizing an event from Herakles' life, Euripides was at the crossroads himself. He had the choice to treat Herakles as a god or almost that, and thus put him into the pillory or, really, on to the shelf with the other Olympians. The alternative was to portray him in more human terms. Pindar, of course, had also concentrated on the earthly struggle of Herakles, but in his poetry Herakles is a divine agent and the hero's heavenly reward always looms just around the corner. This, after all, had been the traditional religious and ethical inspiration behind the Herakles myth: all human aspirations and exertions were finally crowned with divine reward and attainment of divinity itself. Whereas Sophocles, in the *Trachiniae*, debunked this meaning of the Herakles myth by denying Herakles his deification, Euripides chose to humanize it. In Euripides' play, Herakles does not become a god either, because that would have been a meaningless and merely external achievement. Rather, to Euripides, Herakles' accomplishment was something purely internal and human and therefore vastly more enduring and valuable. The *Herakles* is a reinterpretation of the meaning of the Herakles myth in those terms. This is made dramatically explicit by the division of the play into two parts. The first, in many respects, is the standard, deliberately run-of-the-mill drama about Herakles, the great doer of deeds, *kallinikos*, saviour, and all the rest of the conventional trappings. The second action is the

total opposite of the first, whose values it undercuts and revaluates. The *Herakles* is a purposeful *tour de force* whose two actions are related as point is to counterpoint.[38]

The humanization of the theme determined the changes Euripides made in his mythical material. Traditionally, Hera inflicted the labours on Herakles as penance for the murder of his children. In this play he murders them and his wife, Megara, after the completion of his labours, at the pinnacle of his outward success. The new motive for his labours is not divine retribution, but human, filial piety: he undertakes the labours to win back the country from which his father Amphitryon had been exiled for the murder of Elektryon (lines 17–20). The humane enlightenment of the Athenian citizenry, as exemplified by Theseus, takes the place of the burial on Mount Oeta; Herakles will receive honour and burial at Athens. The argument between the two divine minions, Madness (Lyssa) and Iris, which is the interlude in heaven between the actions, has the same purpose as had the argument between Kratos and Bia in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. It points up the profoundly unjust and cruel nature of the gods' repugnant treatment of the noble Herakles.[39] Unlike in the *Trachiniae*, Herakles' madness comes from without, and not from within the man: he is a tragic hero without having the Aristotelian 'tragic flaw'. Instead of the purposeful, Pindaric 'Necessity imposed by the father' Necessity is wantonly forced on Herakles in this play. A fourth change in the mythology, the invention of the tyrant Lycus who persecutes Herakles' family, serves to underscore Herakles' role as a family man and saviour and adds greatly to the tone of the first action.

That tone is melodramatic as Euripides is intentionally overdoing the clichés of Herakles' traditional role. The scene opens with the tableau of innocence oppress'd: the aged Amphitryon, helpless Megara, and her two infant sons are cowering as suppliants by the altar of Zeus in front of Herakles' palace at Thebes. As in the Herakles plays of Sophocles, the hero is absent but the play still is about him. His task, announces Amphitryon, was to civilize the world through his labours (20). This is conventional enough, but the word used by Euripides for 'civilize'—*ἐξημερῶσαι*—already prepared for Herakles' humanization. It has no Pindaric connotations of superhuman and bloody pacification,[40] but actually means 'to make tame' or 'gentle'. By contrast,

the incantation to Herakles as *kallinikos* (49) and noble-born (*εὐγενής* 50) is purely conventional. So is Amphitryon's conclusion of the prologue on the note of the Heraklids' utter helplessness (*aporia*) that calls for salvation. The theme of Herakles the deliverer from *aporia* was familiar enough from Pindar (*Nem.* 7. 96–7).

Megara's lament, which follows, adds some more touches to the hero's portrait. She wistfully reminisces about her early life of happiness (*olbos*), the very quality for which Herakles was invoked in the *Homeric Hymn*, and by Pindar and Bacchylides. To insure that no eye is left dry in the audience, Euripides then resorts to the most proven of all sentimental devices, the childrens' lachrymose questions about their father. Once more, however, the poet is careful to strike up certain notes that may seem quite trite in their soap-operatic context, but will be invested with greater meaning in the second action. Amphitryon does not give up his love of life and its hopes. Nothing is constant in human life, he says; if fate is good to you today (*εὐτυχοῦντες* 103), it will not be good to you in the end. To make the relevance to Herakles clearer yet, Euripides has Amphitryon sum up his sentiments with this phrase (105–6):

> He is the best (*ἄριστος*) man who always trusts in what hope he has.
> The bad man is the one who gives up.

Only a few moments later, Lycus sneeringly refers to Herakles as 'the best of men' (*ἀρίστου* 150), and his ability to overcome *aporia* was, as we have seen, traditional. It is not outward success, which is at the mercy of fate, that makes a man outstanding, but his internal courage and willingness to persist even in adversity.

After a brief choral interlude Lycus comes on stage. He is the villain in the melodramatic part of the play, but again, Euripides makes him into something more than that. Besides being the bully, Lycus uses the arguments of an Ionian logographer. The story of Zeus' paternity, he reasons, was concocted by Amphitryon—an empty boast, no more. As for the labours (151–4):

> What was your husband's awe-inspiring feat?
> To have killed a hydra in the marsh?
> Or the Nemean beast? That one he snared with nets,
> but he brags he choked him with his arms.

This is the sort of reinterpretation of the Herakles myth for which Euripides has scant sympathy. It amounts to little more than scholarly quibbling about what to Euripides were peripheral aspects of the Herakles myth. At the same time, he was aware of the frequency of this kind of criticism, and this confirmed him in his decision to make Herakles impervious to it by emphasizing that the hero's glory was based on internal achievement rather than external deeds.

As so very often, Euripides could not resist the temptation to beat the rationalizers at their own game. The result—as in so many other of his plays—is a full-blown rhetorical debate between Lycus and Amphitryon about the courage of a man who uses the bow, rather than the spear, for his weapon. Lycus denounces it as a coward's weapon, because it is not designed for the one and only martial encounter of true men, combat at close quarters. The argument would have troubled Pindar, who insisted that his man fought openly, but not Euripides. Amphitryon defends the use of the archaic weapon with the arguments of an Athenian sophist. In an age of individualism, dependence on your comrades in the ranks of the spearsmen would be foolishly anachronistic. The most profitable strategy in war is to protect yourself and hurt your foe, and therefore it is good to remain concealed. This alone is worthy of a wise man (*sophos* 189). The image of Herakles fighting with a primitive weapon is converted into that of the self-reliant individualist who is using his head rather than his brawn. Thus Herakles, an anachronistic warrior in Homer's epics, now is brilliantly adapted even in this respect to Euripides' time, and it is his turn to make the Homeric heroes look anachronistic.

Little more need be said of the melodrama's grinding to its seemingly inexorable end except that we must briefly focus on the attitudes of Megara and Amphitryon. They are facing extreme adversity, and so will Herakles later. He thus is characterized by contrast as well as by direct action.

Megara lapses into pious resignation. It would be folly to wrestle with necessity, she says (282–3). To be sure, the reputation of her husband demands that his sons and wife die a better death, but one cannot fight necessity, even if necessity brings disgrace. Accordingly, Megara concludes that (309–11):

> The man who struggles out of fate inflicted by the gods
> shows zeal, but his zeal is foolish.
> No man can set aside the decree of fate.

With this, Megara becomes almost a foil for Herakles. It is clear that what she says is relevant to him. This relevance is made most explicit, on a verbal level, by her choice of the word 'to struggle out of' (ἐκμοχθέω) that had characterized his labours, of which the greatest is yet to come, from the outset.[41]

Amphitryon does not reply directly to Megara's argument that resistance to necessity is futile. Instead he lives up to his earlier maxim (105–6) by deciding to persevere and trust in whatever faint hope there is of saving Herakles' sons. He is fully aware that this is hoping against hope: 'I am in love, it seems, with what cannot be' (318). This lonely courage makes him, a mortal, superior in *aretē* to the god, Zeus (342), whom he angrily denounces as callous and unjust.

This suffices for anticipating the second action and Euripides quickly returns the first action to its conventional mould. The subsequent stasimon of the chorus is the longest preserved praise of Herakles' deeds in Greek poetry and combines several of his labours proper with some of the parerga such as slaying the centaurs and Cycnus. The hero's civilizing mission of ridding the world from monsters is the leitmotif. When Herakles unexpectedly appears, he is quick to reject this traditional role of the culture hero and the *kallinikos*. We learned at the beginning of the play that his labours were motivated by filial piety, and he emphatically reaffirms that this should be the only consideration (574–82):

> For whom should I defend more than my wife and sons
> and my aged father? Farewell, my labours!
> Vainly I wrought them, and did not help these.
> I should die defending these, if they die
> for their father. Or shall we call this a noble deed
> to have done battle with the lion and the hydra
> at Eurystheus' behest, and not to avert
> death from my sons? I shall be called no more,
> as in olden times, 'Herakles, the *kallinikos*'.

Because Herakles has already divested himself of his outward greatness, his life will not lose its meaning when the gods try to humiliate him. Before he leaves the stage, he is characterized as the completely domestic and loving family man, who in this respect is at least the equal of Sophocles' Deianeira.[42] He goes into the palace to thank the household gods for his safe return from Hades (607–9). He sets aside his bow and club so he can take his children by their hands (cf. Plate 2) and lead them in his wake 'like a ship that tows its little boats behind'. All men are equal in the love of their children, he says, and on this tender note the scene ends. Its visual impact has been carefully impressed upon the spectator and contrasts savagely with the next description we hear of Herakles—the messenger's terrifyingly vivid account of the hero's slaughter of his children and wife.

To add to the contrast, the chorus continues with the conventional praise of Herakles and attributes his return to the justice of the gods (813–14). Hardly have they finished these words when their living contradiction[43] comes on the stage in the persons of Madness and Iris. Madness resists at first by citing the achievement of Herakles' labours: he fought for the honour of the gods when it was trampled under by evil men. It is an impassioned paraphrase of the Pindaric concept of Herakles as the protagonist of the *nomos*, but it has no effect. Iris curtly rejects Lyssa's—the goddess of Madness!—appeal to the time-honoured Greek virtue of *sōphrosynē* and Herakles is struck mad. The deflation of the external aspects of his labours now becomes visual as he re-enacts during his fit some of the most typical scenes from his struggles. As he rages through the palace, he fancies himself riding on his chariot, attacking cities. and wrestling with an opponent—

> then he wrestled with no one
> and proclaimed himself the victor (*kallinikos*)
> to the shouts of no one (960–2).

The messenger sums up the story by saying that he knows of no man 'more miserable than Herakles'. Besides intending a reversal—one of the many reversals in this play—of the traditional phrase 'Herakles, the best of men', Euripides pointedly expresses 'more miserable' with the word *athliōteros* which is derived from *athla*, labours.

The next scene, in which the sleeping Herakles is brought upon the

stage, is reminiscent of the corresponding scene in the *Trachiniae* and points up the contrast between Euripides' and Sophocles' view of Herakles. In the earlier play, Herakles rants and raves and protests; here he comes slowly to his senses, asks for the truth, and learns it. His fame and reputation ruined, he is ready to take the conventional heroic way out by committing suicide. Here Euripides' redirecting of the myth is of course most evident. Theseus, whom Herakles had just saved from the underworld, appears, ready to give aid to Amphitryon. As in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, this Theseus is the noblest personification of enlightened, compassionate Athenian humanism. He tells Herakles that Herakles' misfortunes are no reflection of his quality. The inner man is what matters. Euripides makes this shift to internalization explicit by having Theseus define what a noble man really is: one who bears unflinchingly what heaven sends (1227–8). The word for 'noble' (εὐγενής) is the same which Megara (292) and the chorus (696) had used for praising Herakles' noble descent. Nobility of lineage now is replaced by nobility of spirit,[44] a spirit of perseverance.

The winning over of Herakles to this realization is the principal theme of the second action. To make this conversion of Herakles believable, the playwright has him struggle against it with the traditional attitudes for which Herakles was known. Thus even the old Homeric Herakles, the defiant fighter against the gods, makes his brief reappearance here. Herakles' misery towers to heaven, therefore he will strike heaven. And with even greater apodictic force he continues; 'Heaven has a will of its own. And so do I' (1243). When Theseus castigates him for being presumptuous, Herakles' mood changes abruptly: once more, he wishes to die. But now Theseus is not deceived by the 'heroic' veneer of such an action; rather, he calls Herakles' words those of an ordinary man. Herakles, who endured so much, has the obligation to endure this new trial also, even though it is of a different nature. Mankind's greatest benefactor and friend owes it to Hellas not to die foolishly.

Theseus' appeal to the duty of internal heroism incumbent on a great hero[45] goads Herakles into delivering a speech of magnificent bitterness. He discards his labours, because they were futile. Whereas he earlier put them second in importance to his family, they now are even more odious to him because he views the murder of his family

as their culmination. Actually, his last labour had been his descent to Hades, but now hell is within Herakles: 'I am like Ixion, bound for ever to a wheel' (1297–8). Once more, the force of traditional attitudes seems to oppress Herakles. He is accursed—similar to Oedipus—and is afraid that no one will receive him. Still, Theseus' arguments have left their mark. At the end of his lament, Herakles calls himself the first man of Hellas and Hellas' benefactor. Theseus therefore repeats his appeal to Herakles' obligation to persevere (1313–14). And he succeeds. Herakles now admits that even in his abject misery he asked himself whether suicide would not be the act of a coward (1347–8). He now realizes that it takes more courage to endure under the blows of fate than to fight against an enemy (1349–51):

> The man who cannot bear up under the blows of fate
> would flinch even from the weapons of a man.
> I shall await death steadfastly.

This new heroism is not without connection to his earlier life. Stripped of their external qualities, the hero's labours constitute a spiritual legacy to which Herakles must continue to live up (1353–7):

> For countless are the labours of which I have experience;
> never have I shrunk from any, never yet
> have I wept, nor had I ever thought
> that I should come to this: to shed tears from my eyes.
> But now, it seems, I must serve necessity.

Now that the labours are an example of internal fortitude and spiritual strength rather then external success, he remembers their noble purpose and quality even though the remembrance is mingled with the earlier bitterness about their tragic outcome (1368–70). For this reason, he also decides to retain the weapons with which he accomplished his labours, even though they remind him of the slaughter of his family. Re-emphasizing the pivotal theme of the play, Euripides has Herakles waver once more in his resolution. And again, Theseus reminds him of his labours, of the strength he mustered for them, and of the resulting fame. It takes no courage, Herakles agrees, to dispatch oneself to the literal Hades (1415); it takes real courage to bear one's own hell in this life. Strengthened by Theseus' unfailing friendship,

Herakles leaves the stage just as his children left the stage in the first action—'towed in Theseus' wake like some little boat'. His last words are an affirmation of the superiority of spiritual values, such as friendship, over externals:

> The man who would rather have wealth or strength
> than good friends thinks like a fool.

'To think', 'to have understanding' is Herakles' last word (1426), reminiscent of the debate between Lycus and Amphitryon about Herakles' reasoning.[46] Because his great deeds have been matched by and ultimately are based on this spiritual endurance, the chorus characterizes him, in the play's last line, not as the greatest of all men, as before, but as the greatest of all friends. Herakles has truly become a member of the human community.

We noted earlier that the humanization of Herakles was necessary to keep him from becoming divinely irrelevant. Whereas the gods, Hera in particular, act capriciously and compel Herakles and men to suffer without cause, it is the men who aspire to a standard which the gods do not care to attain. In the first action, this is exemplified by Amphitryon who rightly considers himself better in *aretē*—which we may translate in this context with 'moral force'—than Zeus. By persevering against the power that ruins him Herakles is the even more perfect son of his father. Euripides takes pains to stress that this father is the mortal Amphitryon and not, as in the legend and the tradition-inspired praise of the chorus, the god Zeus (1264–5).

In the history of the adaptation of Herakles in literature, Euripides' treatment of the theme marks a true turning point. On the one hand, it is the culmination of all the efforts to purge Herakles of his objectionable qualities and deeds. Characteristically, Euripides met the problem head on. He chose the most odious episode of Herakles' life and converted its consequences into the hero's greatest achievement. This had been so, of course, in the traditional myth, where the labours followed upon the murder. True to converting Herakles' outward achievement into an inward one, Euripides turned the myth inside out and reversed the order of events. The result is that Herakles' internal heroism literally takes the place of the external one. More importantly, by humanizing the hero's struggles and grandeur, Euripides gave him a

new dimension which went far beyond his ethical idealization by Pindar and others. Instead of the *kallinikos*, no matter how nobly inspired he may have been, we from now on will see Herakles cast more and more often in the almost archetypal role of the suffering and toiling hero. For Euripides and his contemporaries glorified, heroic humanism was enough of a reward; man, in a sense, was the measure of all things after all.[47] Euripides' basically optimistic humanization of the Herakles myth reflects, above all, the enlightened spirit of his time. His own, bold contribution was to make Herakles the dramatic symbol of that spirit.

But even if this play is the single most important and influential treatment of the Herakles theme whose tone has been much imitated especially in the last century and ours, it did not discourage survivals of the earlier tradition. To a scholar like Apollonius, Herakles still was the primeval, archaic hero *par excellence* and Goethe, at least in his youth, was more impressed with the physical qualities of Herakles than the spiritual ones. On the other hand, the Stoics, while emphasizing Herakles' incessant toil, found divine reward more compatible with human greatness, and Herakles would be rewarded once more for his toils like Doctor Faustus—*wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen*. Finally, playwrights such as Seneca, Wedekind, and MacLeish would not be content with Euripides' optimistic humanization of Herakles' achievement but used the hero's labours for expressing their doubts about the validity of any human accomplishment. Being a product of fifth-century Athens, Euripides could believe in the greatness of man, whereas these writers and others could not. Whenever this happened, Herakles would be in search of his true character once more.

Several years before the *Herakles*, in 438 B.C., Euripides wrote the *Alcestis*, his earliest surviving drama. It was produced as the last play of a tetralogy, a place which was commonly held by a satyr play. The only complete satyr play that has survived is Euripides' *Cyclops*, and the *Alcestis* is far removed from the latter's burlesque humour and buffoonery. Without being a tragedy outright, the *Alcestis* is a play about tragic themes even though they are treated with a light touch. The tragedy is about Admetus rather than Alcestis. In the folktale, from which the material for this play was drawn, the young man accepts his wife's sacrifice and since nothing more is heard of him, he can be

expected to have lived happily ever after. By contrast, the starting point of Euripides' drama is not Alcestis' action itself, but its consequences for Admetus. Euripides' basic intent was to show what happens when the ideal, wishful world of a folktale is transposed into reality.[48]

For this reason alone, it was entirely suitable for Euripides to introduce Herakles into the story.[49] Herakles belonged to both worlds; traditionally the *Märchen* hero, he had been made relevant to real life especially by Pindar and Sophocles. Euripides' own *Herakles* was the culmination of the latter process, and we will shortly see that Herakles is associated in the *Alcestis* with the same themes that are treated as profoundly tragic in the *Herakles*. Furthermore, the introduction of Herakles made possible the psychological and ethical emphasis on the role of Admetus. Herakles is Admetus' foil and, throughout the play, his good-natured antagonist. Both by contrast and by direct confrontation with Herakles, Admetus' limitations become all the more obvious. In the first scene in which he appears, Herakles is characterized at the outset as willingly accepting what has been imposed on him. Euripides develops this theme at length in the dialogue between Herakles and the chorus. Herakles is on his way to capture the horses of Diomedes. The chorus repeatedly warns him of the danger; a fight will be necessary and Herakles may lose his life. Herakles' only answer is that he cannot refuse his labours even if this means death (489). Euripides is concerned only marginally with justifying Herakles' actions; what he wants is to impress upon the spectator that Herakles is not a shirker like Admetus.

Admetus then comes on the stage and prevails on Herakles to stay at the palace in spite of Herakles' protestations that it is not proper to banquet in the house of a mourning friend. Admetus' defence of his action to the chorus re-emphasizes his greatest limitation: he is a prisoner of convention. 'What else should I have done?' is the gist of his plea to the citizens of Pherae. 'You would have blamed me even more if I had sent the man away, who is my greatest guest-friend, and thus had given my house an inhospitable reputation.' And then he reveals that the motive for his *xenia* is not altruistic, but a scrupulous concern to live up to the principle of *do ut des* (559–60):

> For this man happens to be my best host
> whenever I go to Argos, which is a thirsty place.

'All good and true,' replies the chorus, 'but if this man really is your best friend, he will understand.' Admetus, however, reiterates his obsession with a social convention. Herakles has to be hosted properly; the death of Alcestis and the mourning are secondary.

So far from being his greatest virtue and saving grace, Admetus' excessive *xenia* is his most serious shortcoming. He is so preoccupied with its external aspects that he completely ignores that it is no more than a means to the end of establishing a genuine trust and friendship between two persons. This is what *xenia* at its best meant in Homer, and the ideal continued to be relevant in the fifth century. Looked upon merely as a formality, it could become meaningless and be abused as, for instance, by the suitors in the *Odyssey*. This is precisely Admetus' mistake and it makes him a timeless character; the king of ancient Pherae today would be well reincarnated as the Organization Man. He is so obsessed with social conventions, the approval of his peers, with 'doing the right thing' and doing things 'properly' that he incapacitates himself for reacting spontaneously, on the basis of human and humane feeling and instincts. T. S. Eliot summed this up perfectly when he has Harcourt-Reilly, the Herakles of the *Cocktail Party*,[50] say to Edward:

> You are nothing but a set
> Of obsolete responses.

It is in this respect that Euripides contrasts Admetus most expressly with Herakles. The lengthy complaint of the servant (747–72) serves only one purpose: to show that Herakles has violated every rule in the Golden Book of etiquette. But the moment Herakles finds out that it was Alcestis who died, he reacts with spontaneous grief, and without Admetus' hesitation, selfishness, and ambiguity. His first reaction, of course, is to ask incredulously whether all this was going on while he was being hosted. The servant attempts to lead Herakles on to praising Admetus' *xenia* (823):

> He could not bear to turn you from his palace

but Herakles' first concern—as Admetus' should have been—is Alcestis:

> Wretched Admetus, what a wife and companion you have lost!

Now it is the servant who follows Herakles' lead and admits, even if by overstatement, what Admetus did not want to admit to himself—

'we all have perished, not only she'. Herakles proceeds to blame himself for listening to Admetus in spite of his premonitions, and for turning his own, traditional *bia* against himself. Then he decides to save Alcestis, and only in the end does he praise Admetus for his great guest-friendship.

We can see now why Euripides chose Herakles as a foil for Admetus. Herakles was the archetypal 'man of nature'—a concept that Goethe was to express so eloquently—who would not be inhibited by conventions. Homer had stressed the bad aspects of this by pillorying Herakles for his gross violation of *xenia* in killing his guest-friend Iphitus. Pindar, as we saw earlier, cleared away this image of Herakles by depicting him as the protector of *xenia*, and Euripides went even further: Admetus imposes *xenia* on an unwilling Herakles.[51] More importantly, however, Herakles' traditional, relaxed attitude to social conventions shows up here in a most positive light. Herakles abides by them, but is not dominated by them. He therefore preserves his natural impulses and vital humanity. His values are not warped as are Admetus': to him people come first and social niceties second.

Euripides' *Alcestis*, then, and Herakles in particular are that playwright's reaction against the trend to over-civilization which made itself felt in the highly refined and complex society of fifth-century Athens. It was a theme to which Euripides remained faithful to the end of his life for he treated it, far more grandiosely, in his last play, the *Bacchae*. One need only look at Plato's and others' descriptions of a symposium to see that even these occasions for convivial relaxation and gaiety had in many respects become a very stylized affair, which followed strict rules. This is a far cry from the unspoiled vitality with which Herakles bursts on the scene and which he—like Dionysus later in the *Bacchae*—represents throughout the *Alcestis*. The same desire for a simple and less shackled life force led the Cynics to adopt Herakles as their hero, even if in a more austere manner.

Before discussing Herakles' drunken speech, which so many later authors and critics have found objectionable, let us turn to the play's final scene in which Herakles prevails on Admetus to accept the veiled woman that is Alcestis. This scene is an inversion of the first Herakles–Admetus scene. Now Herakles lies to Admetus and tries to persuade him although Admetus resists and protests. By subtly inverting the

former situation, Herakles is able to play on and mock the conventions which for his host have become the essence of life. This alone shows the quality of Herakles' humour. It is that of the *homo ludens*, who is delighted with playing his game. There is nothing crude and distasteful in Herakles' teasing. Superior as it is, his humour is good-natured, sophisticated, and urbane.[52] For a moment, even his traditional role as the enduring and suffering hero is reversed. The chorus piously counsels Admetus to 'endure what the god gives' (1071), and Herakles says wistfully he would like to be strong enough to bring Alcestis back (1075–8):

Adm.: I know that this was your desire. But how can this be done?
The dead cannot return.
Her.: Don't overdo it, then, but bear it as is fit.
Adm.: Easier to exhort than to suffer and endure.

Throughout the scene Admetus tries to show that he is a decent man who is worthy of Alcestis. But he is not, because the concern for the proper and socially acceptable thing to do still is uppermost in his mind. Just before Herakles returns, Admetus recognizes his own wretched situation, but he does not change. He says virtually nothing about Alcestis except that she has her glory and is free from much trouble now that she is dead (938). Admetus spends infinitely more time commiserating with himself. He does not feel miserable because of grief for Alcestis, but because he is terrified by the prospect of what other people might say about him. Our other-directed king is greatly worried that society might reject him. Herakles' first words therefore are designed to meet the peculiar requirements which Admetus' mentality imposes on anyone who wishes to communicate with him. Herakles cannot allow himself a sincere, spirited expression of sorrow as he did in his dialogue with the chorus. Rather, since he deals with Admetus, he first addresses him with a lecture on manners, chastising him for the misguided social favours that Admetus had bestowed on him. After thus establishing a rapport with Admetus, he asks him for the favour of keeping the girl in his absence.

When Admetus states his two objections, he predictably mentions first the blame he might incur from his countrymen, and only then the reproaches of his dead wife. Before thinking even of these possibilities

Admetus has discussed the technicalities of putting the girl into someone else's house and dismissed this solution on equally technical grounds.[53] After these external arguments have been dealt with, Herakles begins to lead Admetus to the heart of the matter. For once, Admetus rises to the moral occasion. He refuses Herakles' appeals to his loneliness and even his habits of hospitality, although Herakles is at his coaxing best, far surpassing the Pindaric precedent in subtlety.[54] Admetus promised Alcestis celibacy, and he will honour that promise even if it means death (1096). At the very moment, however, when it appears that Admetus has finally overcome himself, he suddenly reverts to his more familiar character. He is afraid that Herakles, his friend, might be angry with him if he keeps refusing (1106). Herakles does not answer to that, but hints that something unknown to Admetus makes him so insistent, and Admetus obeys. His concern not to incur the displeasure of a friend wins out as it did in the first Herakles–Admetus scene. Admetus cannot shake off his self-imposed habit of paying excessive respect to social obligations.

By contrast, Herakles states his own philosophy of life in the drunken scene which later writers, who adapted the theme, considered so embarrassing and incongruent that they either eliminated it or rewrote it.[55] Herakles' first remarks again are designed to set in relief the difference between him and Admetus. Death, he says, is an obligation which we all must pay (782). His acceptance of death had been the keynote of his first appearance. Now, however, Herakles goes on providing a reason for it. He does so in a tipsy and jolly mood—one might think of Sir Toby Belch talking to Malvolio—but the implications are serious and Euripides was to develop their tragic nature in the *Herakles*. Our lives, says Herakles, are at the mercy of Tychē, Necessity (785–6):

The ways of Tychē are out of our sight.
We cannot learn the ways, nor can we make them ours by craft.

In the *Herakles*, Amphitryon would point out that the man who has good Tychē today stands not to have it for the rest of his life. The advice Herakles gives the sour-looking servant is based on the same realization (787–9):

> Now that you have heard me and have learned from me, make merry, drink, reckon the life you live today your own, but only that —the rest belongs to Tychē.

A girl and a few drinks are the best remedy against the present necessities (*tychas* 796).[56] There is no point worrying constantly about Tychē because life, in that case, would not be life, but a disaster (802). To live in the face of ever-threatening Tychē is our human condition (799). Herakles' joyful acceptance of this condition is a far cry from shallow hedonism and, as is clear from the contrast with the other personages in the play, shows real strength of character. In the *Herakles*, only the accent is different as it shifts to tragic human heroism. In the *Alcestis*, Herakles professes to teach wisdom by expounding on this view of life. In the *Herakles*, there is even more emphasis on the use of his mind and his wisdom.

To suit his dramatic purpose, however, Euripides has Herakles in the *Herakles* gradually come to the realization of which he is already cognizant in the *Alcestis*. His situation in the *Herakles* therefore is analogous, in some important respects, to that of Admetus. Both are responsible for the death of their wives.[57] In the *Herakles*, Herakles also is intensely preoccupied with what society will think of him and do to him. Like Admetus, he expresses doubts about the usefulness of continuing his life and argues in favour of an accepted convention, suicide. The difference is of course that Herakles, who was so superior to Admetus in the *Alcestis*, proves his superiority when he is tragically confronted with the same problem as Admetus. Admetus' nobility[58] remains external; Herakles' does not.

Sublime and moving as the *Herakles* is, we should note that Euripides' portrait of Herakles in one respect is a regression from the *Alcestis*. In the *Alcestis*, Euripides made the eminently successful attempt to put on the stage an integrated Herakles. Herakles had his comic and his serious sides, and they are combined in the *Alcestis*. Herakles here is the boon companion and good-natured helper of the folktale tradition, but his portrayal nowhere degenerates into gross caricature or buffoonery. His view of life is serious and his standards are superior to those of his host, but there is no heavy-handed moralizing and the tragic situation is handled with wit and ease. The peculiar form of the drama—

a mixture between tragic and comic which defies ultimate definition—is consistent with Euripides' view of Herakles' character. From then on, most writers would stress only one aspect of Herakles' complex personality. To some extent this was the result of the tradition, which made Herakles an increasingly more composite and complex character. In Euripides' day it was less difficult to create an integrated portrait of the hero, whereas later poets who harboured this ideal—notably Ronsard, Goethe, and Spitteler—had to give up in despair.

Whatever the specific reasons, the one-sided view of Herakles took its toll on the most important adaptations of the *Alcestis*.[59] In Wieland's and Alfieri's versions he becomes the epitome of non-alcoholic virtue, and the drunken scene disappears. In Hofmannsthal's *Alcestis* Herakles still is quite drunk when he comes on stage, but sobers up completely and gives a long, melancholy speech on the relation between death and drunkenness. This romantic, presumed sublimation impoverishes the Euripidean concept of the tragic Herakles as it takes the place of Herakles' remarks on Tychē. We are finally left with an attenuated bumpkin rather than an idealized Herakles. Browning's Balaustion, in turn, rids Herakles of his humanity and spends scores of lines, which are not even suggested by Euripides' *Alcestis*, on glowing depictions of the heavenly, magnificent, shining, and victorious aspects of Herakles, who is cast as a superhuman demi-god. The hapless servant, who dares to criticize Herakles' drunken behaviour, comes in for a merciless tongue-lashing from the romantic author. He is denounced as a court bureaucrat, who suffers from all the concomitant spiritual limitations:

> Stupid? Nay, but sagacious in a sort:
> Learned, life-long, i' the first outside of things,
> Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath,
> And needs a nail-scratch ere 'tis laid you bare.
> (*Balaustion's Adventure* 1626–9)

This antithesis may have been suggested to Browning by the long tradition of the sensitive, perceptive Herakles whose earliest proponents were Euripides and Isocrates. In a long tirade, Browning-Balaustion then goes on castigating the servant for not volunteering his life for

Alcestis. Nor is this all. Balaustion rallies to Herakles' defence with yet another argument:

> Herakles
> Had flung into the presence, frank and free,
> Out from the labour into the repose,
> Ere out again and over head and ears
> Is the heart of labour, all for the love of men:
> Making the most o' the minute, that the soul
> And body, strained to height a minute since,
> Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,
> For man's sake more than ever; till the bow,
> Restrung o' the sudden, at first cry for help,
> Should send some unimaginable shaft
> True to the aim and shatteringly through
> The plate-mail of a monster, save man so.
> (1722–34)

Browning thus continued the literary tradition of Herakles' justification in his own high-blown, romantic manner.

Most characteristic of the difference between Euripides' and Browning's Herakles is, as we already noted, Browning's conception of him as the divine, glorious son of Zeus. His setting out for the rescue of Alcestis is put in terms of almost cosmic significance. Herakles' deed suggests the eternal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and this cycle in turn takes place within Herakles himself:

> So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh
> Approved of his human progeny,—
> One summons of the whole magnific frame,
> Each sinew to its service,—up he caught,
> And over the shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
> Let the club go,—for had he not those hands?
> And so went striding off, on that straight way
> Leads to Larissa and the suburb tomb.
> Gladness with thee, Helper of our world!
> I think this is the authentic sign and seal
> Of godship, that it ever waxes glad,

> And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
> Into a rage of suffer for mankind,
> And recommence at sorrow; drops like seed
> After the blossom, ultimate of all.
> Say, does the seed scorn earth, and seek the sun?
> Surely it has no other end and aim
> Than to drop, once more to die into the ground,
> Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:
> And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,
> More joy and most joy,—do man good again.
> (1909–27)

With this, Herakles stalks off in monolithic splendour. Browning's characterization of him has been of one piece throughout, and the time-honoured clichés of the saviour and the helper have been rapturously blown up to the point of bursting. But as rhetoric and bombast have grown, so the fullness of Herakles' role has declined. Whereas his characterization in Euripides' *Alcestis* was a finely balanced whole of the hero's many traits, Herakles becomes a monolinear and simplistic figure in the poetry of the adaptors. The romantic tendency, which still is so influential in the criticism of classical literature, and the 'scientific' method of lingering nineteenth-century classical scholarship with its insistence on 'logical', consistent character delineation have led to the same result by imposing an equally one-sided interpretation on this Euripidean Herakles. In fact, however, the *Alcestis* presents one of the few complete portraits of the hero that was ever attempted in creative literature. With so many-sided a hero, detailed filigree was impossible, and Euripides therefore contented himself with sketching Herakles' portrait with a few, vigorous strokes of the brush.[60]

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. For details, see Farnell 107–10.
2. Euripides, *HF* 1328–31; see also Philochorus *FGH* 328 F 18 (= Plut. *Theseus* 35. 2) and Jacoby's commentary ad loc.
3. Plutarch, *Theseus* 33. 2. H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Heracles at Eleusis: POxy 2622

and P.S.I. 1391', *Maia* 19 (1967) 206–29 discusses some papyrus fragments which make reference to this initiation; the author may have been Pindar.

4. So, e.g. Conradie 134 and Léon Parmentier, *Euripide* 3 (Paris, 1965) 4.
5. In Coleridge's terms, this would be the superiority of expectation to surprise (*Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare* [Everyman ed., 1907] 52–3).
6. A good summary of the basic arguments is found in N. Wecklein, *The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus*, trans. by F. D. Allen (Boston, 1891) 13–22. Cf. C. J. Herington, *The Author of the 'Prometheus Bound'* (Austin, 1970) 123–6.
7. This rules out the possibility that Ge effects the reconciliation because, parallel to Okeanos in *Prometheus Bound*, she appears prior to Herakles in *Prometheus Unbound*.
8. Various forms of *πέτρα* recur in lines 31, 56, 242, 269, 447, 760, 970; cf. 300, 561, 1021. It is a motif that is well established in the *Prometheus Bound* and this is pertinent to the use of the word in the *Prometheus Unbound*.
9. See G. Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (London, 1946) 335. Thomson believes that the *Prometheus Unbound* was the second play of the trilogy, but he overshoots the mark by postulating that the plot of the third play was concerned with the future of Herakles and Herakles' continuation of Prometheus' work.
10. So David Grene in the introduction of his translation of the *Prometheus Bound* in D. Grene and R. Lattimore, eds., *Aeschylus* 2 (Chicago, 1956) 134.
11. See *Prometheus Bound* 1026–9, supplemented by Apollodorus 2. 5. 4 and 2. 5. 11.
12. Wecklein (note 6, above) 13, with reference to Athen. 15. 674d and 15. 672e.
13. Fr. 74 N.; see p. 34.
14. *Pace* Fraenkel, I do not believe that Clytemestra's remark is well-intentioned.
15. The fragments and a commentary on the lost plays are found most conveniently in R. C. Jebb and A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* 1–111 (Cambridge, 1917).
16. Sophocles has captured the attention of twentieth-century critics more than the other two tragedians. I have benefited from consulting the relevant chapters in K. Reinhardt, *Sophokles*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt, 1947); C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1945); A. J. A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1951); C. Whitman, *Sophocles. A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951); S. M. Adams, *Sophocles the Playwright* (Toronto, 1957); G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca, 1958); Stoessl 39–57; Pohlenz 198–208. I have built mostly, however, on Gilbert Murray's essay, 'Herakles, the Best of Men', *Greek Studies* (Oxford, 1946) 106–26; V. Ehrenberg, 'Tragic Herakles', *Aspects of the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1946) 144–57; H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966) 154–99 and, of course, Sophocles' *Trachiniae* as edited by R. C. Jebb (Cambridge, 1908). For the opposite view of the one presented here see especially Bowra and Adams, followed by Waith 20–6.

17. Contrast this with Pindar, *Ol.* 10. 30 as discussed on p. 32.
18. Kitto (note 16, above) 168.
19. This has rightly been stressed by A. Beck, *Hermes* 72 (1953) 19.
20. The deliberate contrast between Herakles' and Deianeira's treatment of Lichas again could not be more extreme. For further examples of Sophocles' technique of contrast see especially Kirkwood (note 16, above) 110ff.
21. Ehrenberg 154.
22. For a favourable view of Herakles by sophists see Plato, *Symp.* 177B, for its opposite, *Gorgias* 484B–C. Prodicus' parable related by Xenophon, *Mem.* 2. 1. 21ff. is discussed on pp. 101ff.
23. Especially by developing, on no fewer than three occasions, the implications of Herakles' sacrifice to Zeus; see Kitto 175ff.
24. Aside from the examples mentioned here, consider the very beginning of it (229–31): 'We are happy in our return, and happy in our greeting, lady, which befits the deed achieved; for when a man has good fortune, he by necessity must win good welcome.' There is an echo here of line 57 where the Nurse enjoins Deianeira to send Hyllus to find out about Herakles' 'good fortune'. The pious *a priori* assumption that Herakles' fortune always turns out well is completely destroyed in this play.
25. So Whitman (note 16, above) 116.
26. *Trach.* 1082: *ἔθαλψε μ' ἄτης σπασμὸς' ἀρτίως δὲ' αὖ*. See A. A. Long, *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (London, 1968) 134–5.
27. H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961) 314.
28. See, most recently, E. R. Schwinge, *Die Stellung der Trachinierinnen im Werk des Sophokles* (Göttingen, 1962) and S. G. Kapsomenos, *Sophokles' Trachinierinnen und ihr Vorbild* (Athens, 1963). Many details of my interpretation of the *Philoctetes* are based on H. C. Avery, 'Heracles, Neoptolemus, Philoctetes', *Hermes* 93 (1965) 279–97. Also helpful are A. Spira, *Untersuchungen zum deus ex machina bei Sophokles und Euripides* (Kallmünz, 1960) 12–30 and P. W. Harsh, 'The Role of the Bow in the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles', *AJP* 81 (1960) 408–14.
29. This is Reinhardt's phrase (note 16, above) 200.
30. These plays, along with Sophocles', are summarized, even if sketchily, by Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 52). The artistic and other literary evidence about Euripides' *Philoctetes* has been compiled by T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967) 57–61.
31. Harsh (note 28, above) 412.
32. Especially by references to his Oetan homeland or father: 453, 479, 490–9, 664, 721–9.
33. This has been noticed by D. M. Jones, *CR* 63 (1949) 85 who comments: 'By such reminiscent touches is built up the importance of Herakles as an ideal in Philoctetes' mind and as a power behind the action of the play, while preparation is made for his epiphany at the end.'
34. Avery (note 28, above) 290.

35. Cf. Spira (note 28, above) 16. Philoctetes thus calls Odysseus 'the most hateful *technēma* of clever villainy' (928).
36. See pp. 106f. The popularity of the Herakles myth at the end of the fifth century is attested, among others, by Socrates' comparison of his search for the true meaning of the Delphic oracle to Herakles' laborious wanderings (*Apol.* 22a), and by the references to prestigious descent from Herakles in Plato's *Thaetetus* 175A and *Lysis* 205C.
37. *FGH* 31 F 14. More details on Herodorus, whose *floruit* usually is given as 400 B.C., can be found in Jacoby's commentary ad loc. and in his article 'Herodorus' in *RE* 8. 980–7. Another allegorical interpretation of one of Herakles' labours—his fight against the Hydra—is found in Plato, *Euthyd.* 297C; this particular allegory found a great echo in the Renaissance (see pp. 193 and 195).
38. For this basic division of the play see already Wilamowitz 113ff. For good, literary interpretations of the *Herakles* see especially W. A. Arrowsmith's introduction in D. Grene and R. Lattimore, eds., *The Complete Greek Tragedies* 3 (Chicago, 1959) 266–80; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto, 1967) 78–90; Conradie 50–8, 83–94, 113–33; and the introduction by L. Parmentier to the Budé text (note 5, above) 4–19. Cf. Ehrenberg (note 16, above) 158–66, and Kitto (note 27, above) 248–61.
39. For the dramatic effect of this scene compare also the argument between the two murderers in Shakespeare's *Richard* III, 1. 4 and Tyrrel's description of the murderers' feelings in IV. 3.
40. Pindar uses the term in *Isth.* 4. 75 (ναυτίλιαισί τε πορθμὸν ἡμερώσαις), but the connotations are clear from *Nem.* 3. 23–6.
41. 22: ἐξεμόχθησεν πόνους; 1369: ἐκμοχθῶν βίου εὐκλείαν.
42. The domestic aspect of Herakles is re-emphasized in the second action where the hero pays glowing tribute to his faithful wife and her many vigils in his absence (1371–3).
43. The inversion is underscored by the verbal echo of τὸ δικαῖον (813) in Iris' phrase μὴ δόντος δίκην (842).
44. Both are combined in Amphitryon's referring to Herakles as 'my noble child' (50), which is the first occurrence of *eugenēs* in the play.
45. Conacher (note 38, above) 86.
46. Compare also Theseus' injunction that Herakles should not die through folly (*amathia* 1254).
47. Cf. Ehrenberg 164.
48. So von Fritz 320. Von Fritz' essay is by far the most stimulating discussion of the play and its modern adaptations. Valuable also are the introduction in A. M. Dale's edition of the play (Oxford, 1954) and J. R. Wilson, ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Euripides' Alcestis* (Englewood Cliffs, 1968). The folktale background has been explored comprehensively by A. Lesky, *Alkestis: Der Mythus und das Drama. Sitzungsber. Akad. Wien* (Phil.—Hist. Klasse) 203. 2 (1925) 1–86.
49. The great probability that Euripides introduced Herakles into the story is supported, with different arguments, by H. L. Ebeling, *TAPA* 29 (1898) 65–85, esp. 74–7, and Conacher (note 38, above) 332–3. The contention that Herakles did not appear in Phrynichus' earlier Alcestis drama is more than an *argumentum ex silentio.*

50. Since this book is about Herakles, and not Herculean characters, a discussion of this interesting play is beyond our scope. Suffice it to say that the contrast between convention and uninhibited vitality recurs in *The Cocktail Party*, even if in a different manner; for a recent, sensible discussion see K. J. Reckford in *Comp. Lit.* 16 (1964) 1–18, esp. 4, 8–10. In Thornton Wilder's *Alcestiad* (see pp. 218ff.) Herakles blames Admetus for failing to realize that guest-friendship is for guests, but not for brothers and friends.
51. A passage in the *Odyssey* (15. 68–74; cf. 195–201, 209–14) provides a definite indication that, in the courtly tradition, it was not proper for the host to overstep the limits of generosity in such a way as to encumber the guest. Menelaus tells Telemachus: 'I should blame even another man who, as host, loves too much or hates too much; everything is better in moderation' (69–71). This is very relevant to Admetus' behaviour, although Euripides takes it one step further and blames Admetus chiefly for the motive that leads him to excess. The *Odyssey* passage has been discussed by H. L. Levy in *TAPA* 94 (1963) 150; most modern interpretations of the *Alcestis* are flawed by the assumption that Admetus' excessive concern for *xenia* is his saving virtue. Nor does it follow that Herakles would otherwise not have rescued Alcestis.
52. Cf. Kitto (note 26, above) 327: 'Needless to say, in the urbane and sophisticated *Alcestis* there is not a trace of the satyric.'
53. For Admetus' inadequacies in the final scene see the spirited discussion by A. W. Verrall, *Euripides the Rationalist* (Cambridge, 1913) 69. Verrall, however, overlooks that Admetus temporarily gains new strength of character, which has been emphasized by W. D. Smith in *Phoenix* 14 (1960) 144–5.
54. *Ol.* 3. 16; see p. 31.
55. See Chapters 9, 10, and 11 for detailed comments on the versions of Wieland, Alfieri, von Hofmannsthal, and Browning. Voltaire's reaction sums it up well enough: 'Il ne faut pas disputer des goûts; mais il est sûr que de telles scènes ne seraient pas souffertes chez nous à la foire' (*Dictionnaire philosophique* 1, s.v. 'Anciens et Modernes'). But no such uproar has accompanied Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* IV. 4, where Peter jests with the musicians while Juliet lies dead in the next room.
56. The emphasis on Tychē is one of the leitmotifs of the *Alcestis*; cf. 213 (setting the tone for the choral ode), 240, 695, 889 (where Tychē is termed 'hard to wrestle against'—an obvious reference to Herakles' wrestling match with Death), 926.
57. Pheres says explicitly that Admetus killed Alcestis (696) because he overstepped his *tychē* (695).

58. *To eugenes* (600); with this compare the references to Herakles' *eugeneia* in the *Herakles* as discussed above.
59. Cf. note 55, above. For a listing of other adaptations, in music and literature, see H. Hunger, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, 2nd ed. (Vienna, 1954) 20. To it should be added the poem of Theodore Morrison, *The Dream of Alcestis* (1950), on which see pp. 285f.
60. Aside from the *Herakleidae*, which contains various conventional descriptions of Herakles, Euripides' *Alcmena* and *Auge* are drawn from the Herakles cycle. The fragments from the *Auge* show a surprising number of parallels with the *Herakles*. The hero again is a family man who loves his children and prefers them to his labours (frs. 264, 272 Nauck); he bursts out against tyrants (fr. 275 N.) as he and Amphitryon do against Lycus; and someone remarks on the reversals of Fortune (fr. 273 N.). For Herakles' treatment in the minor Greek tragedians see Des Essarts 104–6, and in Euripides' *Licymnius*, p. 106.

CHAPTER IV

The Comic Hero

The length of our discussion of the tragic Herakles may satisfy our desire, which is assiduously instilled into the student of the classics in both secondary school and college, to see something very profound and meaningful in every extant piece of classical literature. It is completely disproportionate, however, to the frequency of his appearance on the comic stage.[1] The number of serious dramas in which he has a part is a small trickle compared to the torrent of satyr plays, farces, and comedies in which Herakles kept entertaining his audiences, and their delight with him does not seem to have known a saturation point. It was in this role that he was known best to the Greeks of both the mainland and the western colonies, and seen in this light, his philosophical and tragic manifestations seems all the more remarkable. The reasons the latter are generally dealt with in more detail are easy to see. Humour, especially when it is not of the subtle kind, does not become funnier when it is being discussed, and ancient comedy was never meant to be pored over and dissected by scholars. Furthermore, only a very few of the comedies in which Herakles appeared are fully preserved. The numerous fragments and titles of plays, however, give us a good, if somewhat monotonous, idea of Herakles' comical qualities. They are fortunately supplemented by a host of artistic evidence, mostly in the form of vase paintings.

From these it appears that Herakles was the most popular character of the satyr play.[2] The satyrs of course were the followers of Dionysus, and Herakles' association with Dionysus may have contributed to the importance of his role in this genre. According to legend, both Herakles and Dionysus were sons of Zeus and mortal women, both were persecuted by Hera, and both were known as great, warring civilizers,

THE HERAKLES THEME

The Adaptations of the Hero
in Literature from
Homer to the Twentieth Century

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