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EURIPIDES THE MISOGYNIST?[1]

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We begin by going back in time almost two and a half thousand years: to 411 BC, and the first performance of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusai*. The scene: a street in Athens. The characters: the poet Euripides is speaking to an elderly male relative. 'I fear', says Euripides, 'that this day will be my last. The women have been plotting against me. And today, at the Thesmophoria, they're going to discuss my liquidation.'

'But why on earth ...?' responds the relative.

'They say I slander them in my tragedies.'

'Well, so you do. Serve you right if they did get you!'[2]

And so the Athenian women's supposed desire for revenge on Euripides, for all his slanders of them, sets in motion the events of one of Aristophanes' funniest comedies. But this play was to become, of course, one of the pieces of contemporary 'evidence' that led to Euripides' later reputation for misogyny.[3]

But can we in fact say, on the evidence of his extant plays, that Euripides really was a misogynist? The purpose of this chapter is to answer that question, and let me say at once that my final answer will be a decided negative: Euripides was certainly not a misogynist. But that is to anticipate the end before time.

There are, of course, various ways in which one might tackle this question, so first let me mention three possible approaches which I have chosen not to make. One could simply pick out passages which demonstrate Euripides' extreme sympathy with women's lot in life, and let them speak for themselves; passages like the famous speech by Medea that begins, 'Of all the creatures that have breath and intelligence, we women are the most wretched', and ends, 'Men talk of how our life is passed indoors, far from all dangers, while they go out and fight. Fools!

I would rather stand in the ranks of battle three times than bear a child once';[4] or indeed a whole play – the *Trojan Women* – which shows an intense sympathy for the fate of women in a war-torn, defeated city.[5] Or one could pick out some of Euripides' fine women, his noble, courageous, self-sacrificing women, and say that no man who puts such women on the stage could possibly be a misogynist: women like Alkestis, Makaria in the *Herakleidai*, Iphigeneia in the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*.[6] Or one could stress Euripides' acute knowledge and understanding of female psychology.[7] Each of these direct approaches could without doubt give a certain insight into Euripides' attitude to women. But I have chosen to take a rather less obvious approach: one that centres on Euripides' manipulation of myth and on the innovations that he makes in translating a traditional story into acted drama; one that investigates what these innovations mean for his play as a whole and for his women characters in particular. We shall concentrate on plays where Euripides puts bad women on the stage; women who do wicked deeds; the kind of females who actually earned him his reputation for woman-slander and misogyny; and try to demonstrate that here we have no misogyny at all, but in fact quite the opposite, with Euripides, by the very manner in which he portrays their 'wickedness', teaching compassion and an ultimate forgiveness for these women, and showing an intense pity for the ways in which mankind all too often is brought to grief.[8]

So let us begin by looking briefly at another scene from Aristophanes, this time from the *Frogs*, where we hear more about Euripides and his habit of putting bad women on the stage. This is part of the *agon* between Aischylos and Euripides in Hades, where another important theme is raised, the theme of the poet as teacher. Aischylos accuses Euripides not only of putting wicked women on the stage, but also of utterly failing in the poet's crucial duty of being a teacher to his audience. Aischylos is speaking:

> From the very earliest times the really great poet has been the one who had a useful lesson to teach ... I depicted men of valour, lion-hearted characters like Patroklos and Teukros, encouraging the audience to identify with these heroes when the call to battle came. *I* didn't clutter up *my* stage with harlots like Phaidra or Stheneboia. No-one can say I have ever put an erotic female into any play of mine.

'How could you?' responds Euripides, 'You've never even met one'; and then, later, 'And did I invent the story of Phaidra?'

'No', says Aischylos, 'No, such things do happen. But the poet should keep quiet about them, not put them on the stage for everyone to copy. Schoolboys have a master to teach them, grown-ups have the poets. We have a duty to see that we teach them what is right and proper.'[9]

Now sadly Euripides' *Stheneboia* and first *Hippolytos*[10] are lost to us except for a few fragments, just about enough for us to work out their plots.[11] Other plays with so-called wicked women are also lost, plays like the *Cretan Women* with Aerope, whom, Apollonios tells us, 'Euripides introduced prostituting herself'.[12] So we cannot use these plays as evidence one way or the other. The plays that I intend to use are three extant tragedies, where Euripides puts on the stage three women who cause great harm: Medea, who murders her children (431 BC); Phaidra, in the second *Hippolytos* (428 BC), who is in love with her stepson, and brings him to his death with her false accusations against him; and Agaue, in the *Bakchai*, written just before Euripides' death in 406, who tears her own son Pentheus to pieces. All of these are women whom the Aischylos of the *Frogs* would certainly have condemned, and ones who would have outraged the Athenian women in *Thesmophoriazusai*.[13]

Now, these three plays deal with stories taken from the traditional body of myth that had been passed down the generations; and in their *general* outline (I stress the *general*) would have been familiar to Euripides' audience: Medea, who has helped Jason to win the Golden Fleece, and then later avenges herself on him when he turns away from her to another woman;[14] Phaidra, who loves her stepson Hippolytos, and, when he will have nothing to do with her, makes lying accusations against him to Theseus which bring him to his death;[15] Pentheus, who refuses to accept the worship of Dionysos in Thebes, and is torn to pieces by the maenads.[16] But in each case Euripides adapts his traditional material so as to achieve the dramatic effect that he wants to create: he makes changes to the myths; he adds or subtracts elements for his own particular dramatic purposes. And it is, I suggest, these innovations to what we might call the 'given' myth, the places where he deliberately steps aside from the usual version and creates his own, which can throw most light on Euripides' unique tragic vision in any given play, and

therefore on his own attitudes – attitudes to many things, including, of course, women. So we shall look at each of these three plays with three questions in mind. What actually were Euripides' innovations here? What do they mean for the play as a whole? And what do they specifically tell us about his women characters? Let us start with the *Medea*.

First of all, Euripides has chosen a novel subject for a play. Other excerpts from the legend of Jason and Medea were familiar subjects for tragedies. Jason, with the help of Medea, wins the Golden Fleece at Kolchis – Sophokles wrote the *Women of Kolchis* on this theme.[17] They flee back to Iolchos, Jason's home, and there Medea kills old king Pelias with her deceitful promise to rejuvenate him that results in his death – Euripides produced the *Peliades* (one of his first plays, of 455) which contained this theme, and probably Sophokles' *Rhizotomoi*, the *Rootcutters*, also told this story.[18] The events at Athens, where Medea was living with king Aigeus and tried unsuccessfully to engineer the death of his son Theseus, were dramatized in plays by both Sophokles and Euripides, both called the *Aigeus*.[19] But only Euripides, it seems, produced a play with the particular events at Corinth detailed in his *Medea*.[20]

Here Medea and Jason have fled to Corinth after the murder of old Pelias. But, as the Nurse says in the prologue, νῦν δ' ἐχθρὰ πάντα, καὶ νοσεῖ τὰ φίλτατα (16), 'now all is hostility, and love has turned sick'; now Jason has deserted Medea and has married the daughter of Kreon, king of Corinth. The play centres on Medea's revenge: savage with jealousy and rage she at first plans to murder all three people who have wronged her – Jason, Kreon and the new bride (366–94). But the final revenge is more horrible: she certainly kills Kreon and his daughter, but also her own children by Jason, and she leaves Jason himself alive, to grow old, childless, and thus to suffer for ever the grievous results of his betrayal of her. Now, Euripides' innovation here was Medea's deliberate murder of her children. In earlier versions of the legend, the children had died, but for other reasons. In one version by Eumelos, Medea unintentionally killed them while trying to make them immortal.[21] In another, by Kreophilos, Medea killed Kreon, then left her children in the temple of Hera, where the Corinthians killed them and then spread the rumour that Medea was the murderer.[22] But Euripides made Medea herself choose to murder them as

part – indeed the most hurtful part – of her revenge against Jason. This is new;[23] and it perhaps sounds at first as if this might tell in favour of the idea that Euripides was hostile to women. But in fact it turns out to have quite the opposite result, because of the way in which Euripides treats his material.

This innovation has two very powerful dramatic effects: first, on the structure of the play, which is built around the one dominant theme of parent/child relationships; and, second, on Euripides' portrayal of his principal character, Medea. I shall deal with the more formal point first, that of the play's structure.

Children, and parents' love of children, lie at the heart of the whole dramatic action, and therefore also behind all that Medea feels and does in this play. The tragic action itself is first set in motion by Jason's desire to marry again, to have a Greek wife and to father legitimate children (547–67). Then, because of Medea's jealous and angry response to his new marriage, Kreon puts on her and her sons a sentence of exile: because he fears her, for his daughter's sake (282–3):

> δέδοικά σ'—οὐδὲν δεῖ παραμπίσχειν λόγους—
> μή μοί τι δράσῃς παῖδ' ἀνήκεστον κακόν.

Kreon says to Medea, 'I fear you – there's no need to wrap up what I say – I fear you may do my child some incurable harm.' This turns out to be, of course, a very justified fear. He tries to stand resolute against Medea's pleas to stay, but in so doing shows her the exact policy needed to get her own way (326–9):

> Μη. ἀλλ' ἐξελᾷς με κοὐδὲν αἰδέσῃ λιτάς;
> Κρ. φιλῶ γὰρ οὐ σὲ μᾶλλον ἢ δόμους ἐμούς.
> Μη. ὦ πατρίς, ὥς σου καρτα νῦν μνείαν ἔχω.
> Κρ. πλὴν γὰρ τέκνων ἔμοιγε φίλτατον πολύ.

'Then will you drive me out and have no heed of my prayers?' cries Medea.

'Yes, for I love my family more than you.'

'My country', she responds, 'How my thoughts turn to you now.'

And 'Yes', says Kreon, 'That is much the dearest thing to me – except for my children.'

So he shows Medea his one weak spot, his love for his children, and Medea attacks it, and appeals to him as a father. 'Pity my sons', she begs (I paraphrase); 'Let me stay one more

day to give thought to their future. You're a father; you know what it's like.' And Kreon gives in, of course, and grants her just one more day. But this one day will be enough to kill the daughter he loves so much, and Kreon himself too, because he loves her. His daughter dies in agony in the poisoned robe and crown that Medea sends her (and notice that here again is the child motif: it is the children who carry the gifts to the princess, the children who are the instruments of vengeance here too). And Kreon himself dies when he holds his dead daughter in his arms and grieves over her. 'Alas, let me die with you, child', he cries (1210); and die he does, because the poison from the robe has now contaminated him too. In fact it is possible that Euripides himself invented the robe as a tool of death, since there is evidence only of the crown in earlier tradition.[24] Perhaps he particularly wanted the daughter to be the means of death for the father, again to stress his dominant theme.

Even after these deaths, there still remains the climax of the revenge action: Medea's murder of the children themselves. I shall return to this when I consider Euripides' portrayal of Medea. But another occurrence of the child motif has given Medea the idea for their deaths. In the central scene of the play, king Aigeus of Athens calls at Corinth on his way back from the Delphic oracle, where he was looking for advice: on childlessness. He explains this to Medea (669–70):

> Αι. παίδων ἐρευνῶν σπέρμ' ὅπως γένοιτό μοι.
> Μη. πρὸς θεῶν ἄπαις γὰρ δεῦρ' ἀεὶ τείνεις βίον;

'I went to enquire how children might be born to me', says Aigeus; and Medea's surprised retort is: 'Ah god, all these years and still childless!'[25] This, reminding her of what childlessness means to a man, not only gives her an added motive for murdering the new bride, but also the idea of killing her own sons by Jason, as we see from her change of plan once she is alone (803–6): Jason's bride will die, as planned earlier, but now Jason's sons also, and Jason, instead of being killed (42, 163f., 374f.), will be left alive to suffer their loss. Thus her revenge will mean that Jason neither will see his sons by Medea alive for the future, nor will he father more children on his new bride, and thus will pass childless to a lonely and sorrowful old age.[26]

Two final points tie in with this theme of parent/child relationships. Medea promises to cure Aigeus of his childlessness if only

he will give her a home in Athens, and he agrees (709ff.). So because of his desire for children she gains a safe refuge after her murders. And at the end of the play she escapes to Athens on the chariot of the Sun, the chariot of Helios, her father's father (1320–2).[27]

This, then, is the effect that Euripides' innovative infanticide has on the structure of his play, with all the forward movement of the drama and the motives for Medea's subsequent actions being provided by different aspects of the parent/child theme;[28] and we now move to its effect on the character of Medea herself, in Euripides' new interpretation of the myth. He has changed Jason too, of course. In earlier legend Jason was the great hero who won the Golden Fleece;[29] here he is an ordinary middle-aged man, with ambitions for respectability and a concern for civilized values. And this reduction of a hero to ordinary human size is, of course, typical of Euripides. He does it with other great figures from legend: for instance with Oidipous in the *Phoinissai*, with Klytaimnestra in the *Elektra*, with Elektra and Orestes themselves. In Aischylos and Sophokles these all have great heroic stature. But in Euripides they are very ordinary human beings; and Jason too.

Now Medea also has been made intensely human (though far from ordinary), but in a quite different way. In legend she was a barbarian witch. But here Euripides has been at pains to omit any hint of magical powers in his Medea. In the usual legend she killed old Pelias using some kind of magic; in this play there is no reference to that. In lines 9–11 we hear that she 'persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father', κτανεῖν πείσασα Πελιάδας κορας πατέρα, before she came to live in Corinth with her husband and children; and in lines 486–7 that 'she killed Pelias, the most painful of deaths, at the hands of his own children, and ruined his whole house' (which is, incidentally, another occurrence of the child theme):

> Πελίαν τ' ἀπέκτειν', ὥσπερ ἄλγιστον θανεῖν,
> παίδων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, πάντα τ' ἐξεῖλον δόμον.

This is all, with no mention of magic. Medea is clever, certainly, as she herself admits – σοφή – a woman of great intellectual capacity (294ff., 539). And she has φάρμακα, drugs or poisons; so she has destructive powers with these φάρμακα, as any woman might have. But she seems to have no powers of creative magic,

else she would not be in the state she is, with a husband lost and a sentence of exile on her head. However, these destructive powers are not witchcraft.[30] Consider Kreousa's poison in the *Ion*, or Deianeira's poisoned robe in the *Trachiniai*: neither of these women is ever thought of as a witch, and neither is Medea a witch in Euripides, in this play at least – just very human.[31]

So, to recap briefly: we have seen how Euripides chooses a novel setting and a novel subject for his play, in Corinth, with Jason's betrayal and Medea's revenge. We have seen how his invention of Medea's deliberate infanticide as the crux of that revenge has had its effect on the dramatic structure, with the whole dramatic action revolving around children and child/parent relationships. The climax of this dramatic action must be the innovative infanticide itself; and this new murder is committed by a new and very human Medea. Thus we would expect a consideration of this new Medea, in relation to the child-killing, to throw most light on Euripides' intentions and attitudes in this play; and this we shall find, if we look at the infanticide from conception to completion, and beyond.

As we have seen, the idea for Medea's final revenge comes to her in her scene with Aigeus. She will pretend complete reconciliation with Jason, a complete change of heart; 'I shall speak soft words to him', she says (776). She, after all, will be content to go into exile. But she would like her sons to take gifts to the princess, to beg that they, at least, may stay in Corinth (780ff.). Then, having made sure by means of the poisoned robe and crown that the bride will bear no children to Jason, she will kill her own sons (791–6):

> ᾤμωξα δ' οἷον ἔργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον
> τοὐντεῦθεν ἡμῖν· τέκνα γὰρ κατακτενῶ
> τἄμ'· οὔτις ἔστιν ὅστις ἐξαιρήσεται·
> δόμον τε πάντα συγχέασ' Ἰάσονος
> ἔξειμι γαίας, φιλτάτων παίδων φόνον
> φεύγουσα καὶ τλᾶσ' ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον.

'I grieve at the deed I must do next. I shall kill my children. No one will take them from me. When I have brought down Jason's whole house I shall leave the country, flying from my dearest children's blood and burdened with this foulest sin.'

However painful this will be to Medea, the children must be

killed, because only by their deaths can she hurt Jason to the utmost (817):

> οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα δηχθείη πόσις.

'This is the way to deal my husband the deepest wound.'[32]

Jason is completely taken in by her pretences. He praises Medea for her change of heart, greets his sons, prays for their future lives, and speaks with pride of their growing into fine young men (916ff.). At this Medea weeps, and the audience understands her sorrow and the irony of her reply when Jason asks why and she answers, 'When you prayed that they might live, sorrow came over me in case this might not happen' (930–1). Nevertheless, despite these regrets, she persuades Jason to agree that the gifts be taken to his bride, and she sends her children off with them with no more apparent qualms: the qualms come later, when the Paidagogos returns with the children, saying that the princess has taken the gifts with delight. Now there is no going back, for the gifts must kill her. But must the children after all be killed as well?

At first it would seem so. Medea weeps at the Paidagogos' news, and he tries to comfort her: 'Take heart', he urges, 'Some day your children will bring you home.' 'Before then I shall bring others home', she grieves; and then, pathetically, 'Go indoors and get ready for the children their everyday needs.'

But then, with Medea alone on the stage with her sons, there follows her great monologue, with her anger at Jason, her hurt pride, her longing for a revenge as extreme as possible, her fear of being laughed at by her enemies, all battling with her love for her children and her rational knowledge that by killing them will come the greatest possible unhappiness for herself too. Consider what effect this speech, with all Medea's anguished indecision, would have had on that very first audience, who would not have known whether or not the children were to be killed at the end of it: they would have been on the edge of their seats.

Medea begins by grieving that now she must be parted from her sons: she must go into exile, while they, unknowing, are to die. All for nothing she bore them and brought them up, and they will never now look after her when she is old. These are the kind of things so often said in tragedy by a mother over a dead child.[33] 'What shall I do?' she cries. And then (I paraphrase), 'No, I can't do it; goodbye to my plans, χαιρέτω βουλεύματα. I

shall go, and take my children with me. Why should I hurt their father by hurting myself twice as much – δὶς τόσα κακά?' And again, 'χαιρέτω βουλεύματα'.

But then – 'What am I saying? Do I want to be laughed at by my enemies? I have to do it! How could I even entertain such soft thoughts!

'But no, my θυμός, don't do it, spare their lives.[34] Only if they live will they bring me happiness ...

'And yet I have no choice. Now the princess is already dying by her gifts. I *must* kill my sons before my enemies do so. I have to travel the cruellest of roads, and send these children on a crueller road still.'

Then we have the tearing anguish of her farewell to her children (1071–5);[35] and then, 'Go away, go away, I can't bear it any more'; and finally (1078–80):

> καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά,
> θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,
> ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.

'I know the horror of what I am going to do, but my passion, my θυμός, is too strong for my reason; and this is to blame for man's worst evils.'

This, as well as being surely one of the most moving speeches in Greek tragedy, is also essential both to the characterization of Medea, and to the meaning of the play. Here we have the two sides of Medea's nature battling with one another: her all-consuming desire for revenge in conflict with the clear knowledge that by killing her children she will hurt herself the most; her passionate, emotional side at war with her rational, logical intelligence.[36] In a sense, of course, the infanticide will come about because of the coupling, the uniting, of these two divided aspects of her nature: the infanticide is really her *passionate* desire for revenge carried to its *logical* conclusion, that which will hurt Jason most. The two aspects come together. But here Euripides draws with intense compassion the agonized conflict within this human being who, faced with this tragic choice, suffers such tortured self-division, such mortal tearing-apart. Without this insight into Medea's nature, without this genuine conflict, the play would become not tragedy but simply melodrama; and in fact the meaning of the play will lie in the results of Medea's final tragic choice.

The children go indoors, and the messenger brings the news of the horrible deaths of the princess and Kreon; the point of no return has been reached, and so Medea must kill her sons, and put her terrible decision into practice. These are her last words before she goes in to carry out her dreadful deed, and I quote them in full, since they paint so movingly Medea's resignation and grief at her own choice of action (1236–50):

φίλαι, δέδοκται τοὔργον ὡς τάχιστά μοι
παῖδας κτανούσῃ τῆσδ' ἀφορμᾶσθαι χθονὸς
καὶ μὴ σχολὴν ἄγουσαν ἐκδοῦναι τέκνα
ἄλλῃ φονεῦσαι δυσμενεστέρᾳ χερί.
πάντως σφ' ἀνάγκη κατθανεῖν· ἐπεὶ δὲ χρή,
ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν, οἵπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν.
ἀλλ' εἶ' ὁπλίζου, καρδία. τί μέλλομεν
τὰ δεινὰ κἀναγκαῖα μὴ πράσσειν κακά;
ἄγ', ὦ τάλαινα χεὶρ ἐμή, λαβὲ ξίφος,
λάβ', ἕρπε πρὸς βαλβῖδα λυπηρὰν βίου,
καὶ μὴ κακισθῇς μηδ' ἀναμνησθῇς τέκνων,
ὡς φίλταθ', ὡς ἔτικτες· ἀλλὰ τήνδε γε
λαθοῦ βραχεῖαν ἡμέραν παίδων σέθεν,
κἄπειτα θρήνει· καὶ γὰρ εἰ κτενεῖς σφ', ὅμως
φίλοι γ' ἔφυσαν—δυστυχὴς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή.

'Friends, my course of action is clear: as quickly as possible to kill the children and then leave this land, not delay and give my children over to be killed by another and less loving hand. They are bound to die in any case, and since they must, then I shall kill them, I who bore them.[37] Come, my heart, steel yourself. Why do I hesitate before this fearful yet necessary evil? Come, wretched hand, take the sword, take it; go forward to the point where life turns into grief.[38] No cowardice, no memories of your children, how dear they were, how your body gave them birth. For one short day forget your children – and then weep. For though you kill them, yet they were dear – and I wretched.'

There is no need to doubt Medea's sincerity here, her genuine grief. But in fact after committing this murder she becomes so changed, so hardened, that one doubts if she will ever weep again. For these are her last words in the play spoken on the human plane: the next time we see her, in her final bitter scene with Jason, she is in the chariot sent by Helios, her grandfather, high up in the air, on the divine plane where only the gods

appear. And in fact she has become something more than human. She appears where the gods appear; she speaks with a god's tone; she acts as the gods act, giving judgement, prophesying the future, announcing the foundation of a religious ritual.[39] It seems as if this act of infanticide itself has transformed her, translated her; she has forfeited her humanity by her tragic choice. In fact she has become utterly inhuman in her gloating over Jason's loss ('You don't know yet what grief is: wait until you're *old*' (1396)), and for the first time there is pity for him as well, who in his human grief and powerlessness acquires a certain stature, a tragic dignity which he did not have before.

Euripides has created this new Medea who chooses to kill her own children. He shows us with painful insight and utterly without condemnation the mind of the woman who has the ability to do such a murderous deed: the torment before the final decision, the ultimate grief, and, here in the final scene, the inevitable results. Medea is now finally untouched, untouchable by human hands (1320) and by human emotions; she has by her tragic decision destroyed herself, and has truly become as inhuman as the rock or the wave of the sea to which the Nurse likened her in the prologue (28–9).

Jean Anouilh, in his 1946 version of the *Medea*, has Medea commit suicide in the flames of her children's funeral pyre after she has murdered them. Perhaps after such an act as this deliberate killing of her own children, which is the culmination of a mortal battle within Medea herself between passion and reason, the only two possible results can be death, as in Anouilh, or the kind of translation that Euripides gives us, with Medea transformed into something other than human. Or perhaps these two possible ends are in fact one and the same. As Schlesinger puts it: 'The granddaughter of Helios may stand in triumph on her dragon chariot, but Medea the woman is dead.'[40]

We now move to Phaidra in the *Hippolytos*. The essentials of this legend are always the same: Phaidra, wife of Theseus, falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytos; when he rebuffs her she accuses him to Theseus of rape or attempted rape; Theseus prays to Poseidon to kill him, and he is killed; Phaidra herself commits suicide.[41]

This is a common theme in legend: the married woman who

falls in love with a young man, tries to seduce him, and accuses him to her husband when he rejects her advances. We find it in the stories of Peleus and the wife of Akastos,[42] Bellerophon and Stheneboia,[43] and, in the Old Testament, of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar;[44] and there is no doubt that originally the legend of Hippolytos was in the same simple form.[45]

But around this traditional framework the playwrights of the fifth century BC made three very different tragedies. Euripides' second *Hippolytos*, produced in 428 BC and the only one of the three extant, was probably the last to be written, and certainly the most novel of the three in its treatment of the legend. In his first *Hippolytos* he apparently adopted the usual legend without change: Phaidra made a deliberate attempt to seduce Hippolytos, which he rebuffed, and she, in anger and self-defence, accused him to Theseus; Theseus cursed him, Poseidon sent the bull and he was killed; Phaidra's treachery was exposed, and she killed herself.[46] The play was a failure, and it may well be that Sophokles produced his *Phaidra* sometime later, had better success with it, and it was this that moved Euripides to write his second *Hippolytos*.[47]

Sophokles, in his *Phaidra*, kept to the basic lines of the story too, but made Phaidra less overtly shameless: 'We may assume that Phaidra had the virtue necessary for tragic stature', says Barrett (p. 12). Certainly it seems that Phaidra had some justification for her love, since Theseus had been gone some years and was believed dead, so her love was not in theory adulterous; and at the end of the play she apparently committed suicide not on discovery, but after confession and remorse.[48] So here there was the same story, but with a different slant on Phaidra.

Euripides' second *Hippolytos* is quite different; and he won one of his rare first prizes with it,[49] so the Athenians must have appreciated his changes. The fundamental change lies in Phaidra's character. She is now a virtuous woman, compelled into love by a powerful and pitiless Aphrodite to avenge Hippolytos' rejection of all this goddess stands for,[50] who strives to the utmost to conquer her love in silence. Aphrodite tells us in the prologue of her divinely inspired passion for Hippolytos (26–8):

> ... πατρὸς [sc. Theseus] εὐγενὴς δάμαρ
> ἰδοῦσα Φαίδρα καρδίαν κατέσχετο
> ἔρωτι δεινῷ τοῖς ἐμοῖς βουλεύμασιν.

'His father's noble [51] wife, Phaidra, saw him and was seized in her heart by a terrible love at my instigation.'[52] But Phaidra is now nobly and silently resisting the goddess's onslaught (38–40):

> ἐνταῦθα δὴ στένουσα κἀκπεπληγμένη
> κέντροις ἔρωτος ἡ τάλαιν' ἀπόλλυται
> σιγῇ, ξύνοιδε δ' οὔτις οἰκετῶν νόσον.

'Now, groaning and driven to frenzy by the goads of love, the poor woman is dying, and in silence. None of the household knows the secret of her disease.' And Phaidra will indeed die of it (47–8):

> ἡ δ' εὐκλεὴς μὲν ἀλλ' ὅμως ἀπόλλυται
> Φαίδρα.

'Phaidra, although she is honourable, nevertheless will die.'

Moreover Aphrodite as prologue speaker is quite possibly an innovation too, since the audience needs to know of Phaidra's love, and no one knows but Phaidra herself, and she cannot and will not tell them; so it must be a god who speaks. Notice that to Aphrodite Phaidra is 'poor woman' – ἡ τάλαινα (39) – but she will use Phaidra without compunction as the tool for her revenge on Hippolytos.

Phaidra too explains why she is striving to keep silence, when the Nurse tries to worm the secret out of her (331):

> ἐκ τῶν γὰρ αἰσχρῶν ἐσθλὰ μηχανώμεθα.

'I am contriving good out of my shameful plight.' So although she cannot overcome her passion, she will not speak of it.

Eventually she is too weak to keep it to herself; her resolution fails,[53] and the Nurse finds out what her sickness really is. Now, with the truth known, Phaidra is free to speak of what she has suffered, and we hear of the measures she has taken to deal with her plight. First of all she resolved to keep silence (393–4), hoping, presumably, that her passion would simply die down. When this did not work, she tried to overcome it with self-control (398–9). This too failed, so she has now decided that the best, the only, way out is to die (400–2). She could never put a bold face on adultery (413–14):

> μισῶ δὲ καὶ τὰς σώφρονας μὲν ἐν λόγοις
> λάθρᾳ δὲ τόλμας οὐ καλὰς κεκτημένας.

'I hate those women who are chaste in word, but who have secretly acquired dishonourable ideas of daring', she says, perhaps referring to her *alter ego*, Phaidra the willing adulteress of the first *Hippolytos*.[54] No, she must die; and again we see her concern for honour and her care for her family (419–21):

> ἡμᾶς γὰρ αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἀποκτείνει, φίλαι,
> ὡς μήποτ' ἄνδρα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰσχύνασ' ἁλῶ,
> μὴ παῖδας οὓς ἔτικτον.

'This very thing is killing me, friends, since I will never bring dishonour on my husband, nor on the children whom I bore.'

But she is not allowed to die by fading away nobly and in silence, since (and here is another innovation) the Nurse, seeking to save the life of the mistress she loves, approaches Hippolytos on Phaidra's behalf, despite Phaidra's pleas for her to do nothing of the sort.[55] Hippolytos responds to the Nurse's well-meant overtures with extreme and bitter rage against women in general and Phaidra in particular; and now Phaidra knows that her death must come about even more swiftly than she had planned (599–600):

> οὐκ οἶδα πλὴν ἕν, κατθανεῖν ὅσον τάχος,
> τῶν νῦν παρόντων πημάτων ἄκος μόνον.

'I know nothing except that a death as quick as possible is the only cure for what I'm suffering now.' But she can no longer die with honour as she had sought to do (687–8), since she believes that Hippolytos will speak of what has happened, so now a new plan is called for; and thus (yet another change) Euripides has his Phaidra commit suicide immediately after Hippolytos' bitter and unjust (again, unjust for the first time) accusations of her, and with the new motive of keeping herself and her children free from dishonour (716–18):

> εὕρημα δή τι τῆσδε συμφορᾶς ἔχω
> ὥστ' εὐκλεᾶ μὲν παισὶ προσθεῖναι βίον
> αὐτή τ' ὄνασθαι πρὸς τὰ νῦν πεπτωκότα.

'I have thought of something for this trouble of mine', says Phaidra, 'so as to provide an honourable life for my sons, and myself gain some benefit now that things have fallen out as they have.' So in a letter to Theseus, out of anger and shame, she accuses Hippolytos of rape as her one means of defending her

children against a disgrace which they do not deserve, and in so doing salvages what she can of her marriage.[56] Then she hangs herself from the rafters, despite the fact that they have witnessed no guilt of hers (cf. 415–18). Theseus will in due course learn of the falsity of her letter and the truth of what has happened, but Artemis will make clear to him that Phaidra was in fact honourable and that it was the Nurse who acted on her behalf (1298–1301, 1304–5):

> ἀλλ' εἰς τόδ' ἦλθον, παιδὸς ἐκδεῖξαι φρένα
> τοῦ σοῦ δικαίαν, ὡς ὑπ' εὐκλείας θάνῃ,
> καὶ σῆς γυναικὸς οἶστρον ἢ τρόπον τινὰ
> γενναιότητα ...
> γνώμῃ δὲ νικᾶν τὴν Κύπριν πειρωμένη
> τροφοῦ διώλετ' οὐχ ἑκοῦσα μηχαναῖς.

'I came here for this purpose, to reveal both your son's righteous heart, so that he may die in honour, and your wife's wild passion – or in a way nobility . . . . She strove to overcome Kypris with her reason, but schemes plotted against her will by her Nurse destroyed her.' As Barrett notes: 'Those who believe that Phaidra consented in the end to the Nurse's scheme are doing so in the face of the poet's own denial: Artemis has no axe to grind for Phaidra, and her judgement here is certainly the poet's own.'[57]

Thus Euripides has once again made fundamental changes to the legend. We have seen that, in the case of Medea, Euripides has made innovations to the myth which mean that she kills her own children, but has drawn his new Medea in such a way that even this dreadful deed must be viewed with compassion, not condemnation. In the case of Phaidra, Euripides has given us a woman of great moral integrity, and he takes all guilt from her by means of Aphrodite on the mythological level, and by the Nurse on the human level. He clearly means his audience to feel nothing but compassion for this new Phaidra, torn apart by the love imposed on her by a merciless goddess, fighting against it, failing and dying.[58] She is Aphrodite's victim, whatever we make of Aphrodite herself, whether she is, at one extreme of interpretation, simply a vengeful goddess whose worship has been neglected, or, at the other, a symbol of the force of physical love working within Phaidra herself.[59] Either way, Phaidra is her victim, as she herself says (725–7):

ἐγὼ δὲ Κύπριν, ἥπερ ἐξόλλυσί με,
ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαχθεῖσα τῇδε ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
τέρψω· πικροῦ δ' ἔρωτος ἡσσηθήσομαι.

'Today I shall be rid of life, and so shall give pleasure to Aphrodite, who is my destroyer. Bitter the love whose victim I shall be.'[60] Either way, Phaidra, like Medea, is victim of a force against which all reason, all rational behaviour, is powerless.

This similarity to Medea is emphasized particularly when Phaidra says (380–1):

τὰ χρήστ' ἐπιστάμεσθα καὶ γιγνώσκομεν,
οὐκ ἐκπονοῦμεν δ' ...

'We understand what is right and recognize it, but we fail to carry it out.' She is talking generally, but also of herself, of her own principles and her own weakness. Here is once again reason defeated by passion, as with Medea. This similarity has often been noted.[61] But in the words with which she faces that defeat there is another reminiscence of Medea, and of Medea's words as she goes in to kill her children. 'I go forward to the point where life turns into grief', says Medea; and then, 'I am an unhappy woman – δυστυχὴς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή.' Phaidra says (677–9):

... τὸ γὰρ παρ' ἡμῖν πάθος
πέραν δυσεκπέρατον ἔρχεται βίου.
κακοτυχεστάτα γυναικῶν ἐγώ.

'My suffering reaches the boundary of life, and the passing is cruel. Of all women I am the most unfortunate.' Euripides has refashioned the legends of both women: both approach a watershed in their lives that must lead to grief; they see it clearly ahead of them, but cannot avoid it. Medea in some sense dies of it; Phaidra dies in actuality. For both women, reason failing in the face of passion leads to their tragedy. This is what it means to be human; and let me quote here Reckford on Phaidra (1974, p. 328):

> In tragedy, it is no simple matter to escape from Crete. ..[62] Theseus, grown old, rages like the evil Minos; he invokes his father's promise, to destroy his son; and Poseidon once more sends a bull from the sea, like the one Pasiphae loved, as if to round off the tragic cycle of action and reaction.

> The monster is not just in faraway Crete. It is in Theseus' domain, and within our several hearts. We cannot escape evil by sailing into a safe harbor of Athenian reason and control: hence Phaedra's tragedy evokes terror as well as pity. We all have our appointment in Crete, unless a god's grace cancels it; replay and re-enactment of evil mock our every effort of intelligence and will to escape that fatal pull backward: yet we would be less than human, and much less than noble, if we did not (like Phaedra) try.

Finally we come to the *Bakchai*, to another play about a god, a cosmic force, avenging himself on mortals who fail to honour him: Dionysos, who comes to Thebes, his birthplace, to manifest himself as a god. He drives the townswomen mad into the mountains, on to Kithairon, as maenads; and when their young king Pentheus persists in opposing him, he bewitches him on to Kithairon too, disguised as a maenad, and here Pentheus is torn to pieces by the women there, with his mother, Agaue, leading them. It is she who is the first to rend him. And this, I suggest, is what is new here: Agaue as the killer of her own son. (This again, as in the case of Medea, appears to be a factor in favour of Euripides' being a misogynist, but again turns out to be quite the opposite.) I take the evidence for this statement from two sources: from vase-paintings,[63] and from the text of the *Bakchai* itself.[64] I shall deal with vase-paintings first.

The death of Pentheus was a popular subject; but nowhere is Agaue identified on the vases. Indeed, on a red-figure psykter in Boston of about 520,[65] the maenad rending Pentheus' torso is named Galene; and the same name appears on a red-figure bell-krater of about 430, showing Dionysos with his maenads. Furthermore, on other vases from the latter part of the fifth century, we see Pentheus in armed combat with the maenads; or, in one case, an armed Pentheus hiding between two trees; or in another case, Pentheus setting out from his palace with net and hunting spears to hunt the maenads. So it does seem as if the vase-painters saw Pentheus as going armed against the maenads before being torn to pieces by them: no woman's dress, no madness, no Agaue.

Now, to turn to the literary evidence, this seems to have been the version of the legend which Aischylos also knew. He wrote a trilogy on Dionysos at Thebes, the plays being probably the

Semele, the *Xantriai*, and finally the *Pentheus*.[66] Only one fragment is left of the *Pentheus*, of no help in telling how Pentheus died. But Aischylos does refer to his death in a later play, the *Eumenides* of 458 (25–6):

> . . . Βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεός,
> λαγὼ δίκην Πενθεῖ καταρράψας μόρον.

'The god led out his army of Bakchai, contriving for Pentheus a just fate, the death of a hare.' The god was at the head of his maenadic army, and Pentheus was torn to pieces by them, as a hare is by hounds, we must assume. The most natural image conjured up by these words is one of armed conflict. There is no hint of Agaue's presence (though of course there need not be in so short a reference). But in Euripides' own *Medea* of 431 BC the chorus sing (1282ff.) of Ino as 'one woman, the only one, who in time past raised her hand against her own children'. Page notes that they might have added Agaue[67] – but not, of course, if this child-murder was a later innovation by Euripides.

Now, to turn to the text of the *Bakchai* itself: we have here references to a similar kind of outcome to that discussed above – Pentheus killed when he went into battle against the maenads with Dionysos leading them – but unfulfilled, because the end of Euripides' play was to be quite different in kind from this.

In the prologue, Dionysos outlines his plans (47–52):

> ὧν οὕνεκ' αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγὼς ἐνδείξομαι
> πᾶσίν τε Θηβαίοισιν. ἐς δ' ἄλλην χθόνα,
> τἀνθένδε θέμενος εὖ, μεταστήσω πόδα,
> δεικνὺς ἐμαυτόν· ἢν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις
> ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις ἐξ ὄρους βάκχας ἄγειν
> ζητῇ, ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν.

'Because of this [Pentheus refusing to honour Dionysos] I shall prove to him that I am a god, and to all the Thebans. When I have set all in order here, I shall go to another land and manifest myself. But if this town of Thebes in anger seeks to drive the Bakchai by force of arms from the mountain, then I shall lead out my army of maenads and engage them in battle [μάχην understood].' Now, this is not what happens, of course. Dionysos is opposed, Pentheus does decide in anger to take his citizens armed to Kithairon – ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις. But in fact Dionysos' revenge is subtler and more ghastly than his first plan,

and it falls on Pentheus alone – μόνος, twice repeated just before he goes to his death (961–4):

> Πε. κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός·
> μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ' ἀνὴρ τολμῶν τόδε.
> Δι. μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·
> τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὓς ἐχρῆν.

'Lead me through the midst of this land of the Thebans; alone of them I am the man who dares this', says Pentheus; to which Dionysos replies, 'Alone you suffer for this city, alone. Therefore your destined ordeal is awaiting you.' And it is a mad, degraded and pitiful Pentheus who alone dies, not the body of men implied in line 50, Θηβαίων πόλις. This is very odd, for we expect a god's predictions to be carried out – or, at the least, some reason to be given for a change of plan.[68] But Dionysos gives no hint of it, and the change of direction comes suddenly at line 810, out of the blue, and – significantly, I think – just after Pentheus has finally decided to go out and fight.

I suggest that the most satisfactory explanation of this strange discrepancy is that in the prologue Euripides was referring to the familiar version of the legend, and was leading his audience on to expect that as his conclusion too, so that his new version of Pentheus' death would have an even stronger effect. He continues to lead them on in this expectation in the following scenes as well. Pentheus, in his scene with Kadmos and Teiresias, threatens to hunt the maenads from the mountain and chain them up (228, 231–2):

> ὅσαι δ' ἄπεισιν, ἐξ ὄρους θηράσομαι . . .
> καὶ σφᾶς σιδηραῖς ἁρμόσας ἐν ἄρκυσιν
> παύσω κακούργου τῆσδε βακχείας τάχα.

'Those who are at large I shall hunt from the mountain . . . and soon put a stop to this Bacchic villainy by fitting them with iron fetters.' We must be meant to assume force of arms in the hunt. Then the chorus, singing of Dionysos' powers, says that he sends φόβος among an army (302–4):

> Ἄρεώς τε μοῖραν μεταλαβὼν ἔχει τινά·
> στρατὸν γὰρ ἐν ὅπλοις ὄντα κἀπὶ τάξεσιν
> φόβος διεπτόησε πρὶν λόγχης θιγεῖν.

'And he shares a certain portion of Ares' province, for sometimes fear strikes an army under arms and in its ranks with

panic, before the men have touched a spear.' This, on the surface, is very odd too, since this kind of terror was usually attributed to Pan, as our term 'panic' testifies.[69] Any connection between Dionysos and war was very tenuous, even paradoxical (consider the chorus at *Phoinissai* 784ff., where Dionysos and Ares are elaborately contrasted). But again this is easily explained if it is another reminder from Euripides to his audience of the kind of end they are expecting, with Dionysos intervening, and Pentheus and his army routed by the maenads.

In his long second scene with Dionysos, Pentheus finally decides to go and fight. But first he hears the messenger's story of the events on Kithairon, which should act as a warning to him if only he would listen. This tale is clearly meant as a doublet of later events, a foreshadowing of what will happen to Pentheus himself,[70] playing on the audience's expectations and full of ominous hints for the future. Here we have peace, rapidly turning to horror, flesh is torn and tossed, here that of cattle, later to be that of Pentheus. And what else do we find? The herdsmen on the mountain hide in ambush until they leap out at the maenads, and then are put to flight by the maddened women. This too, I suggest, is what the audience were expecting Pentheus to do: to hide in ambush, as on the vases, then to leap out, be pursued and (a direr fate than that of the herdsmen) finally to be killed.

Pentheus' immediate reaction to the messenger's story is decisive (778–85):

> ἤδη τόδ' ἐγγὺς ὥστε πῦρ ὑφάπτεται
> ὕβρισμα βακχῶν, ψόγος ἐς Ἕλληνας μέγας.
> ἀλλ' οὐκ ὀκνεῖν δεῖ· στεῖχ' ἐπ' Ἠλέκτρας ἰὼν
> πύλας· κέλευε πάντας ἀσπιδηφόρους
> ἵππων τ' ἀπαντᾶν ταχυπόδων ἐπεμβάτας
> πέλτας θ' ὅσοι πάλλουσι καὶ τόξων χερὶ
> ψάλλουσι νευράς, ὡς ἐπιστρατεύσομεν
> βάκχαισιν.

'Now close at hand blazes up like fire this outrage of the Bakchai, a great reproach to Greece. But we mustn't hesitate. Go to the Elektran Gate; bid all the shieldbearers and riders of swift-footed horses to muster, and all the peltasts and all who pluck the bowstring, and we shall march against the Bakchai.' (Such grandiloquent phrases, and so pathetic in their uselessness.)

Dionysos responds, 'Don't take arms against a god; Bromios will not tolerate your driving his Bakchai from the holy hills.' But again Pentheus cries (796–7):

> θύσω, φόνον γε θῆλυν, ὥσπερ ἄξιαι,
> πολὺν ταράξας ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς.

'I'll sacrifice woman's blood as they deserve; much of it I'll scatter in Kithairon's glens'; and Dionysos replies (798–9):

> φεύξεσθε πάντες· καὶ τόδ' αἰσχρόν, ἀσπίδας
> θύρσοισι βακχῶν ἐκτρέπειν χαλκηλάτους.

'You will all be put to flight. And it would be shameful, to have your shields of beaten bronze turned aside by the thyrsoi of the Bakchai.' Again: a reminder of what the audience are expecting to happen. All this is working up to Pentheus' final decision to march. The audience are waiting for it. And at line 809 it comes:

> ἐκφέρετέ μοι δεῦρ' ὅπλα, σὺ δὲ παῦσαι λέγων.

'Bring out my armour', cries Pentheus; and, to the god, 'And *you* stop talking.'

Here, at this significant point, there comes a dramatic break in the action, emphasized by a break in the metre with the single response of Dionysos: 'ἆ', he cries, the sign of readjustment; and makes a complete change of direction to a quite different and unexpected revenge, on a Pentheus suddenly transformed from military strength to womanish weakness.[71] He begins to take possession of Pentheus' mind.[72] This point marks the division between what had been familiar to the audience, and what was to be new and shocking; though they are still kept guessing just a little as to the final outcome when Pentheus seems to hesitate (836–8):

> Πε. οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν.
> Δι. ἀλλ' αἷμα θήσεις συμβαλὼν βάκχαις μάχην.
> Πε. ὀρθῶς· μολεῖν χρὴ πρῶτον εἰς κατασκοπήν.

'I couldn't put on woman's dress', protests Pentheus.

'But you will cause bloodshed if you join battle with the Bakchai.'

'You're right. First I must go and reconnoitre.' And at the end of the scene Pentheus says (845–6):

στείχοιμ' ἄν· ἢ γὰρ ὅπλ' ἔχων πορεύσομαι
ἢ τοῖσι σοῖσι πείσομαι βουλεύμασιν.

'I shall go in. Either I shall come out under arms – or I shall take your advice.' So the outcome still seems a little open. But Dionysos is to invade Pentheus, just as he did Agaue his mother (850–3):

... πρῶτα δ' ἔκστησον φρενῶν,
ἐνεὶς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν· ὡς φρονῶν μὲν εὖ
οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν,
ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται.

'First drive him out of his mind', he says, 'and put him in an inconstant frenzy. For never in his senses will he be willing to put on woman's dress, but driven out of his wits he will put it on.' And Pentheus comes on-stage after the next choral ode in woman's dress, now completely possessed by Dionysos' madness, 'dedicated', as he says himself (ἀνακείμεσθα, 934), to the god.[73]

Now he is ready for his venture into the mountains; ready, though he does not know it, for his final, fatal confrontation with his mother. The second messenger describes it. When, finally, the maenads have uprooted the tree in which Pentheus had been seated by Dionysos, and he is hurled to the ground with screams of terror, Agaue, 'priestess of slaughter' (1114), falls on him (1115–21):

... ὁ δὲ μίτραν κόμης ἄπο
ἔρριψεν, ὥς νιν γνωρίσασα μὴ κτάνοι
τλήμων Ἀγαύη, καὶ λέγει, παρηίδος
ψαύων· Ἐγώ τοι, μῆτερ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·
οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μῆτέρ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς.

'He tore the headband from his hair, so that wretched Agaue might recognize him and not kill him, and said, touching her cheek, "Mother, it is I, your son Pentheus, whom you bore in the house of Echion. Pity me, mother, do not, for my offences, kill your own son."'

So twice he calls Agaue 'mother', touching her cheek, but to no avail.[74] Foaming at the mouth, and with rolling eyes, she tears his arm out from the shoulder. The other Bakchai follow

on. Then, with Pentheus finally dead, Agaue fixes his dismembered head to the top of her thyrsus and carries it home in triumph, thinking it to be that of a lion killed in the hunt. Here, for the moment, we shall leave her.

The pre-Euripidean version of the legend perhaps also provides the reason why Euripides uses military imagery so frequently in his description of Pentheus' venture into the mountains as a maenad: for instance Pentheus is called κατάσκοπος, scout, three times (916, 956, 981), and we have κατασκοπή in line 838, both military terms.[75] In line 819 we have ἐπιχειρεῖν ὁδῷ, 'attempt a journey', as in Herodotos of a military campaign;[76] in 1159 Dionysos is called a commander, προηγητήρ;[77] the maenads attack Pentheus with spears and epic missiles χερμάδας κραταιβόλους;[78] and κόρυς, helmet, is the term used of Pentheus' hair by Agaue when she carries his head home in triumph (1186). Dodds translates this as 'crest', and says, 'κόρυς does not occur elsewhere in this sense.'[79] Pentheus' robing of himself, too, can be seen as a fantastic inversion of an arming scene so familiar from Homer. Perhaps these are all reminders of the old version of the legend, which are meant to set Euripides' innovations in deliberate contrast, to emphasize them, and – in the case of Agaue stroking her son's hair and calling it κόρυς, with a blend of the old and the new – to stress their horror and poignancy.

That, then, is an all too brief summary of the evidence which suggests that Euripides may well have innovated the death of Pentheus, mad and in woman's dress, at his mother's hands. Now, it might be objected that Agaue as killer of her son was a traditional part of the legend, because other myths of opposition to Dionysos have the same motif: Minyad mothers, for instance, kill their own children. But this is not always the case: take another Dionysos legend, that of Lykourgos. In an early version of this legend, in Homer (*Il.* 6.130ff.), Lykourgos hunted Dionysos and his 'nurses' into the sea, and was blinded as a punishment. In later legend this punishment changed: he was driven mad, and while mad killed his own son. Apollodoros (3.5.1) gives us the details. But this version was much earlier than Apollodoros, since the episode also occurs on vase-paintings, the earliest evidence being a hydria of about 440.[80] So it was current well before the *Bakchai* (it may be that Aischylos used it in his Lykourgos trilogy), and in fact it could have given Euripides

the idea of making Agaue also the killer of her own son. Or the idea may even have come directly from such Dionysiac myths as those of the Minyads, where mothers rend their children.[81]

So these are possible influences on Euripides' choice of material. But what was his motive in having Agaue kill her own son? Most of the work done in the past on the *Bakchai* has concentrated on the god, and asked: what is Euripides saying about Dionysos and his worship? Is it praise or is it condemnation? – and suchlike questions. But I suggest that this is not where Euripides' own concentration lay. If he did for the first time have Agaue kill Pentheus, then perhaps in fact his concentration was not so much on the god, but rather on his human figures – on Pentheus, and the fall of the house of Kadmos, and most of all on Agaue. So let us first of all move on to discuss what kind of characters Euripides has created in Agaue and Pentheus.

Both are inevitably drawn in very human terms. In the prologue we hear of Agaue's reason for doubting that Semele was mother to a god, which turns out to be a quite different reason from that given by Aischylos of divine intervention: in the *Xantriai* Hera enters Thebes disguised as a begging priestess with the express aim of stirring up opposition against Semele and her son.[82] But in Euripides, as Dionysos tells us in the prologue, Agaue and her sisters say that Semele became pregnant by a man, and tried to palm it off on Zeus – a very natural, rational reaction, one feels (26–31):

> . . . μ' ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἃς ἥκιστα χρῆν,
> Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι Διός,
> Σεμέλην δὲ νυμφευθεῖσαν ἐκ θνητοῦ τινος
> ἐς Ζῆν' ἀναφερειν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν λέχους,
> Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ', ὧν νιν οὕνεκα κτανεῖν
> Ζῆν' ἐξεκαυχῶνθ', ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο.

'My mother's sisters, who least of all should have done so, said that I, Dionysos, was not the son of Zeus, but that Semele had been seduced by some mortal and then – a subtle wile of Kadmos, this – ascribed to Zeus her loss of virginity; and they loudly claimed that this was why Zeus had killed her, because she lied about her marriage.' (Theirs is a commonsense interpretation of the facts: Semele said that Zeus had fathered her child, and then was struck by lightning – which must have seemed to

prove that she had lied sacrilegiously.) It is for this reason that Agaue and her sisters, together with the rest of the women of Thebes, have been driven mad by Dionysos on to the mountains (32–3):

> τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ᾤστρησ' ἐγὼ
> μανίαις, ὄρος δ' οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν.

'Therefore I have goaded those same sisters mad from their homes, and they are living on the mountain, their wits gone.'

We shall return to Agaue when the final scene of the play is discussed. But what about Pentheus? Primarily he is very young; young like the young god, his opponent; hardly more than a boy, as Dodds notes on 974, where Dionysos calls him νεανίας (974–6):

> . . . τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω
> τόνδ' εἰς ἀγῶνα μέγαν, ὁ νικήσων δ' ἐγὼ
> καὶ Βρόμιος ἔσται. τἄλλα δ' αὐτὸ σημανεῖ.

'I bring this young man to a great contest, and the victory will be with me and Bromios.'

We find νεανίας again in 274 and 1254; τέκνον, child, three times in Kadmos' speech of grief over Pentheus' corpse (1308, 1317, 1319); παῖς, boy, in 330 and 1226. And Agaue, when she carries Pentheus' head triumphantly in her arms, says over it (1185–7):

> νέος ὁ μόσχος ἄρ–
> τι γένυν ὑπὸ κόρυθ' ἁπαλότριχα
> κατάκομον θάλλει.

'The bull is young; his cheek is just growing downy under its crest of delicate hair.'[83] As Dodds says, he is hardly more than a boy. But he adds, on νεανίας in 974, that here is 'the first preparation for a shift of sympathy which the next two scenes will bring about'. This is not entirely true; this is very much the reaction of a man reading the play quietly in his study. True, Pentheus' youth is here made explicitly clear in the text. But we have to remember the performance: Euripides' audience had the mask to judge by, and it would obviously have been the mask of a very young man throughout. From Pentheus' first entry they would have been basing all their reactions to him on the fact that he was so young.[84] We ought to do this too. But instead of

this, Pentheus is all too often damned; judged as a mature man is judged and found wanting. Dodds calls him 'the dark puritan whose passion is compounded of horror and unconscious desire'; he accuses him of the 'sexual curiosity of a Peeping Tom', and of the 'traits of a typical tragedy tyrant'.[85] But this will not do. He is instead this very young king, very much aware of his responsibilities, taking his duties as a ruler very seriously. He comes home to hear that all the women of his city have deserted their homes (216–23):

> I hear of strange evils abroad in the city: that our women have left their homes on the pretence of Bacchic rites, and are gadding about in the dark mountain woods, honouring with dances this upstart god Dionysos, whoever he is; that full mixing bowls stand in the middle of their thiasoi; and that they creep, one here, one there, to solitude, to serve the lusts of men.

He has *heard* that these things are so – line 216, κλύω – just as he has been *told* about the actions of the dangerously seductive stranger: λέγουσι δ' ὥς τις εἰσελήλυθε ξένος ..., 'They say a stranger has arrived, a wizard enchanter from Lydia, with scented golden curls and the charms of Aphrodite wine-dark in his eyes, who day and night consorts with young girls, dangling before them his mysteries of joy' (233–8). He reacts accordingly, just as a prudent, rational and caring ruler would act: the women must be brought home, and his city saved from chaos.[86] He sees Teiresias as standing in his way with his sophistic arguments, and Kadmos as well, with his willingness to lie about the god out of false family pride (333–6), Kadmos whom he loves (250–4, cf. 1308–22), and who he feels should know better. He sees Dionysos too – or, rather, the Lydian Stranger who was, after all, in Pentheus' opinion simply trying impiously to introduce a new god (cf. 467)[87] – as doing the same with what are to Pentheus clever and bewildering quibbles (cf. 475, 479, 491, 650, 655, 800–1, 805). This is especially clear in the first scene between Pentheus and Dionysos, where they are speaking on two entirely different levels, Pentheus on the literal, Dionysos on the allegorical. Lines 506–7 in particular emphasize this contrast: 'You do not know what your life is, nor what you are doing, nor who you are', says Dionysos; and Pentheus, blind to

any deeper meaning, answers prosaically, 'Pentheus, son of Agaue, and my father was Echion'.

Then the first messenger, who tells of the peaceful maenads, goes on to tell of that peace wiped out by horror. It is small wonder that Pentheus tries to cling to rationality, confused as he is by Dionysos' verbal juggling; tries to be firm when he is uncertain and out of his depth, and calls for his arms: he must take practical action, in the only way he believes possible, against this new threat. And he is not a puritan, I think, not prurient, as so many say – simply a young boy with no sexual knowledge. Certainly the fact that he is so young and therefore has no sexual partner helps to emphasize his tragic loneliness throughout, which culminates in the μόνος – μόνος – μόνος of lines 962–3. His uncertain visualizing of the women on the mountain can also surely be explained as the product of his extreme youth and inexperience, and his anxieties about what they are doing up there become prurient fantasy only under the persuasion of Dionysos' madness (957–8). This is something altogether different in kind from what it would be in a full-grown man; and Euripides must have meant his youth to be continually borne in mind.

Moreover, as to Pentheus' purpose in actually going on to Kithairon: this is summed up by Kadmos, who, asked about it by Agaue, says that 'he went to mock Dionysos and your Bacchic rites' – ἐκερτόμει θεὸν σάς τε βακχείας μολών (1293) – and there is no reason to believe that his judgement is not Euripides' own. So his desire to see the women on the mountain (812) and convict them of debauchery can be put down to his wish to expose his hated enemy;[88] as indeed can his desire to hear the worst about their doings from the first messenger, as he himself specifically explains (674–6): 'The more terrible the things you tell me about the Bakchai, the sterner the punishment I shall inflict on the man who taught our women their wickedness.' The Pentheus in Euripides' text is in fact a rather different Pentheus from the one who is all too easily assumed if one comes to that text with modern psychological assumptions in mind.[89]

I have laboured this point in some detail, because our view of Pentheus' character must affect our response to his death; and a more sympathetic Pentheus than is normally acknowledged does, of course, make Agaue's killing of him even more repulsive and pitiful. So, of course, does the fact that he is so young, so close to

the age when her attitude to him would have been all protective love and care.[90]

And so to Agaue in the final scene: a mother has killed her son, and she comes on-stage in triumph, with his head in her arms, believing it to be that of a lion which she has killed in the hunt, and boasting of her prowess. This, we see, is what Dionysos can do to mortals who deny him. Agaue had rationalized Semele's pregnancy. Pentheus had tried to cling to rational solutions when bemused by Dionysos and his miracles.[91] But the rational world of Agaue and Pentheus was not enough. For both of them Kithairon was waiting, Kithairon which becomes in the play the symbol for the kingdom of Dionysos.[92] Here on Kithairon the maenads worship their god; here, though they do not know it, they wait for Pentheus. As Segal says, 'One does not return from that mountain quite the same person as one was in setting out.'[93] Moreover Kithairon and Thebes represent the two polarities of φύσις and νόμος, familiar from the debates of the sophists. Thebes, the city, stands for νόμος, the civilized life, with law and order, and personal responsibilities; Kithairon, the wild, for φύσις, the free life of nature, with no personal ties. The women have been forced to leave Thebes – their homes, their looms, their babies – to go as maenads into the wild (ἣ τὰς παρ' ἱστοῖς ἐκλιποῦσα κερκίδας / ἐς μεῖζον' ἥκω, θῆρας ἀγρεύειν χεροῖν (1236–7), boasts Agaue: 'I have left weaving at the loom and have risen to higher things, to hunting wild beasts with my bare hands'); having deserted their human babies, they suckle wild animals; they scratch springs of milk from the ground, and later kill the milk-giving cows made tame and useful for civilization. All this is by the power of Dionysos. Pentheus had tried to oppose that power, had tried to assert νόμος in the face of this φύσις; had failed, and was killed. Human rationality in the face of cosmic irrational powers; human desire for order; the power of λόγος; all, it seems, are futile. And this dramatized defeat of νόμος by φύσις culminates, and is embodied, in the killing of a son by a mother.[94] This, I think, is why Euripides gave Pentheus this new way of death.

And so in the final scene the mad Agaue comes on-stage with her son's head in her arms. φύσις, it would seem, has triumphed. But no: φύσις may have taken over temporarily, a mother may have killed her son in madness; but in this final scene there is a reassertion of human values, personal affections, personal

responsibilities, and all centred on the figure of Agaue herself. It is interesting that Pentheus has no *kommos*, no lyric song with the chorus, which all major characters normally have (and which Agaue, of course, does have). Perhaps this is because the chorus are hostile to him, so such a *kommos* did not seem dramatically feasible to Euripides. But it may also be because the greater concentration was always meant to be on Agaue, despite the fact that we are aware of her only 'in the wings', as it were, for the greater part of the play.[95]

In this final scene Kadmos gently, and with a quite amazing forbearance, brings Agaue back to sanity, to recognize whose head she holds in her arms – perhaps the most moving ἀναγνώρισις in Greek tragedy. ὁρῶ μέγιστον ἄλγος (1282), she cries, 'I see the greatest anguish.' But there is worse to come. 'Who killed him?' she asks; and she has to hear 'σύ νιν κατέκτας', '*You* killed him' (1289). And then, I think, she achieves a real victory, a genuine triumph in contrast to her earlier mad imaginings, because she now accepts fully her own responsibility for what she has done (1301):

Πενθεῖ δὲ τί μέρος ἀφροσύνης προσῆκ' ἐμῆς;

'What part did my madness have in Pentheus' fate?' she asks; and she uses the term ἀφροσύνη – not μανία, which could be sent by a god, but ἀφροσύνη, with all its implications of her own responsibility. Sadly her speech over the corpse of Pentheus has been lost, though we know that she grieves over his fate, blaming herself for his death, and reassembles his broken body.[96] But it would have reinforced even more her grief and self-reproach for her child-murder, and would have been a kind of reintegration, a reassertion of the essential human values in the face of suffering and death.

The play ends with an anguished farewell between Agaue and Kadmos before they go off into separate exile, each in their mutual embrace both giving and seeking comfort (1363–7), which gives an assertion of human concern and love in contrast to the attitude of the pitiless god.[97] As in the *Hippolytos*, the stage is left to the human sufferers, and the god, having done his worst, no longer seems important. Agaue's last words are a rejection of Kithairon and all it stood for, the beauty and the horror, which voices the similar rejection that Euripides

must have meant his audience to be feeling, and which finally reasserts human values (1383–7):

ἔλθοιμι δ' ὅπου
μήτε Κιθαιρὼν <ἔμ' ἴδοι> μιαρὸς
μήτε Κιθαιρῶν' ὄσσοισιν ἐγώ,
μήθ' ὅθι θύρσου μνῆμ' ἀνάκειται·
Βάκχαις δ' ἄλλαισι μέλοιεν.

'May I come where neither unclean Kithairon may see me, nor I see Kithairon, and where there is no dedicated thyrsos to remind. Let other Bakchai care about them.' So although νομός would seem to have been defeated by φύσις when a mother, blinded and maddened by the god, turns on her own son and rips him to pieces, although the rational world of Pentheus and Agaue was not enough to allow them to escape catastrophe, nevertheless that world, with its human ties and affections and responsibilities, does in the end survive, and even win a kind of triumph.

So, to sum up all of these three plays, Euripides seems to have taken a traditional myth, and has asked himself what that myth means in human terms, what it says about the human predicament. The answer is always, it seems, suffering; and he gives that answer by the changes that he makes to the given legend, changes which are centred on his female characters. Certainly in the *Medea*, there is at the end pity for Jason in his sorrow. But tragic concentration is on the Medea who has destroyed herself, through the way in which Euripides has drawn the conflict of passion and reason in the human heart which leads to such terrible results. 'I know the horror of what I am going to do, but my θυμός is too strong for me', says Medea; and, as she goes in to kill her children, 'I go forward to the point where life turns into grief.' Hippolytos' fate wins pity; but Phaidra, as the instrument of that fate, is the well-intentioned, innocent victim of his rejection of Aphrodite, fighting a futile battle with her god-driven love for him: 'I understand and recognize what is right, but don't carry it through'; and later, 'My suffering reaches the boundary of life, and the passing is cruel.' In the *Bakchai* there must be great pity for Pentheus' terrible death. But he knew only briefly the tragedy that was coming to him. Agaue learnt of it, accepted fully the blame for it, and had to bear the knowledge of what she had done, the truth of those terrible words σύ νιν κατέκτας, for ever.

Euripides has drawn three women, three 'wicked' women, who cause great harm. But he has drawn them without blame or condemnation, and instead with clear insight and an intense compassion for their predicament, as they are brought to tragedy against all reason. We have looked at only three plays, but I am willing to wager that if we possessed Euripides' lost plays – even his *Stheneboia*[98] and his first *Hippolytos*[99] – we should find there this same understanding of what it means to be human, this same plea for compassion, when he dramatizes the stories of other abandoned women, other so-called wicked women.

And so I should like to reconsider the passage from the *Frogs* that I quoted near the beginning of this chapter. 'A poet should teach', says Aischylos; '*I* taught courage with *my* characters'; and to Euripides, by implication, he says, '*You* didn't teach anything worth anything.' Wrong: Euripides felt, and for any thinking member of his audience he taught, a supreme compassion for the painful precariousness of the human condition; and he taught it most of all through his women characters. In no way can he be called a misogynist.

NOTES

1 This chapter, despite its general title, in fact treats only three of Euripides' plays in detail: the *Medea*, the *Hippolytos* and the *Bakchai*. Nevertheless, this seems to be an appropriate place to include a general bibliography of contemporary work on women in Greek tragedy in general and on Euripides and his female characters in particular (especially works referring to the plays with which I am most concerned), which together offer a variety of approaches to the subject (see pp. 74–5). Some of this literature I shall refer to, but not all, since in this chapter my own approach to the question of Euripides' views on women is, as will become clear, from an angle quite unrelated to most current work in this field; and here I must extend my warmest thanks to Mr Richard Hawley, of St John's College, Oxford, who is working specifically on women in Greek drama, and who supplied me with many useful references for the bibliography.

2 Ar. *Thesm.* 100ff. Penguin translation: Aristophanes, *The Frogs and Other Plays*, translated with an introduction by David Barrett (Harmondsworth, 1984).

3 And quite wrongly, of course, since in fact the laughter is directed quite as much against the women themselves as it is against Euripides, who through the whole play is treated with sympathetic

affection (as are his works). Aristophanes suggests that the women deserve Euripides' slanders, that they are in fact angry simply because he has exposed truths that they would rather have kept concealed. See also n. 13 below.

4 *Med.* 230–51. This is perhaps the passage most quoted as evidence for Euripides' sympathy with women, which it certainly seems to show. But, in general, single passages should not be taken out of context and judged as *necessarily* representing Euripides' own views, neither Medea's words here, on the one hand, nor, on the other, such passages as Jason's condemnation of women generally in lines 573–5, nor (perhaps the most misogynistic passage in the whole of Greek tragedy) Hippolytos' bitter rage against women in *Hipp.* 616–48. Furthermore, I suspect that lines 248–51 here are meant to be saying quite as much about Medea herself, ready and able to act like the traditional male hero – Knox 1979b (see Bibliography which follows these notes), pp. 296–302 – as they are about Euripides' sympathy for women in general (and far more, incidentally, than they are about what women in general would themselves have felt).

5 See Elizabeth Craik's chapter in this volume.

6 This is too simple an approach, since all these characters can be balanced by others less sympathetic, like Elektra in the *Elektra*, or Hermione in the *Andromache*. What these fine women do perhaps show is that Euripides could not have been an out-and-out misogynist.

7 This is demonstrated throughout the whole corpus of Euripides' works, and it does, of course, suggest (though not prove) that Euripides had a strong sympathy with the female sex. It is also, perhaps, significant that, as Dodds points out, 'it is a peculiarity of Euripides that his thinkers are nearly always women' (E. R. Dodds, 'Euripides the irrationalist', in *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford, 1973), p. 80). For a particularly sympathetic investigation into Euripides' attitude to women, see Vellacott, 1975, ch. 4, *passim*. I do not always agree with him when he detects irony in any particular context in the plays. Nevertheless, he makes some good and sensitive points generally about Euripides' depiction of women; for instance, '... much of what Euripides had to say about women is directed not to peculiarities of his own society and age but to those features of it which are hardly less familiar to us today – to the almost (though not quite) universal and timeless elements in the relative situation of men and women' (p. 82).

8 Perhaps this is the place to mention how unsure I am that Euripides (or any other ancient tragedian) saw women as the race apart which so much work on women in antiquity seems to assume. This clear-cut dichotomy of male/female, active/passive, etc., is a modern concept, and its application too often results in a simplistic and even false analysis. Let me take two examples from Lefkowitz 1981. It is unjust to speak of the *Iliad* as showing an 'essentially female' pattern of acquiring knowledge passively 'through observation and through loss' (p. 4). Yes, women do watch their young men die in battle, they do mourn, showing what Lefkowitz calls a 'passive heroism'; but so do men: the figure of the mourning father (who is not necessarily an *old* man) is quite as frequent as that of the mourning woman. There are many examples throughout the whole work (e.g. 5.152–8; 11.328–34; 13.643–59; cf. 23.222–3), which culminate in old Priam of Book 24, who has lost sons and grieved, but is also heroic in his venture into the Greek camp to win back Hektor's body. Nor in tragedy does Hippolytos show 'a heroine's capability to understand and forgive' (p. 10), since understanding and forgiveness should not be thought of as simply female prerogatives (consider also, for instance, Kadmos in the *Bakchai*). These kinds of fashionable polarities often prove to be very unilluminating tools of analysis (see the careful discussion in Foley 1981, pp. 140–63), and it should certainly not be assumed that Euripides viewed the world in this way, nor that he saw the human race as being divided into two separated halves. (See also my comments on Shaw in n. 36.) Rather, I think, Kitto's judgement was nearer the mark, although made nearly fifty years ago: 'In the last analysis Euripides' tragic hero is mankind' (H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London, 1939), p. 195).

9 Ar. *Frogs* 1030ff. Penguin translation. On the poet as teacher, see now Malcolm Heath in 'Political Comedy in Aristophanes', *Hypomnemata* 87 (1987), pp. 18ff.

10 It must be the first *Hippolytos* referred to here: see W. S. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 30–1; T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), p. 65.

11 For these reconstructed plots, see Barrett (n. 10), pp. 11–12, 18–45; Webster (n. 10), pp. 64–71 (*Hipp.*), 80–4 (*Sthen.*).

12 Schol. Ar. *Frogs* 849; see Webster (n. 10), p. 38, Vellacott 1975, p. 95.

13 But we must remember that these are *comedies*, and not take them as serious statements of how Aristophanes himself, and Aischylos, had he been able to, would, as artists, have reacted to Euripides' plays. Euripides' choice of plots (*not* his treatment of women in them) would have been quite enough to raise in Aristophanes' mind the comic idea of Aischylos' condemnation in the *Frogs* and of the women's rage in *Thesmophoriazusai*.

14 For earlier versions of the legend, see D. L Page, *Euripides: Medea* (Oxford, 1952), pp. xxi ff.

15 For the legend before Attic tragedy, see Barrett (n. 10), pp. 6–10.

16 For earlier versions of the Pentheus legend, see E. R. Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford, 1960), pp. xxv ff.

17 For a discussion of the fragments, see A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* (Cambridge, 1917), vol. II, pp. 15–23; D. F. Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (Lanham, New York, London, 1984), pp. 32–3.

18 See Pearson (n. 17), pp. 172–7; Sutton (n. 17), pp. 117–18 (Soph.); Webster (n. 10), pp. 32ff. (Eur.).

19 See Pearson (n. 17), vol. I, pp. 15-21; Sutton (n. 17), pp. 5–6 (Soph.); Webster (n. 10), pp. 77ff. (Eur.).

20 For Neophron's later *Medea*, see below, n. 23.

21 Paus. ii. 3. 10: Eumelos fr. 3 Kinkel; and see the discussion in Page (n. 14), pp. xxii ff.

22 See the discussion in Page (n. 14), pp. xxiii ff.

23 For an analysis of the fragments of Neophron's *Medea*, where again Medea intentionally murders her children, see Page (n. 14), pp. xxx ff. His arguments for dating this play after 431 BC are convincing. Lesky agrees with Page, and summarizes the debate over the dating (A. Lesky, *Greek Tragic Poetry*, 3rd edn (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1972), p. 220). On the infanticide generally, see P. E. Easterling, 'The infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*', *YCS* 25 (1977), pp. 177-91. S. P. Mills ('The sorrows of Medea', *CP* 75 (1980), pp. 289–96) shows how the story of Jason and Medea in this play follows the pattern of the Ino/Prokne myth: was this myth, perhaps, Euripides' inspiration? For a good discussion of the audience's expectations in the play, see T. V. Buttrey, 'Accident and design in Euripides' *Medea*', *AJP* 79 (1958), pp. 1–17.

24 For details of this part of the legend, see Page (n. 14), p. xxvi. See also Mills (n. 23), p. 291 esp. n. 12.

25 See Page (n. 14), ad loc., and pp. xxix f.; also Schlesinger 1968, p. 88.

26 The implication is that Jason will never marry again and acquire more children in that way. Indeed, what woman, knowing his history, would be willing to take him on as husband, particularly with Medea still in the background?

27 The sudden arrival of this chariot, in every sense out of the blue, must have been deliberately meant to shock. The audience, at lines 1313–16, would have been expecting the doors to open and the corpses to be displayed, as usual, on the ekkyklema; instead, in comes Medea on this completely unanticipated chariot. The intense drama of this moment was splendidly emphasized in the excellent production of the *Medea* by University College, London, in March 1988: for a few seconds the lights were shone dazzlingly at the audience, so that all stage business was effectively blacked out. When the lights were once more aimed at the stage, there was Medea, high above the palace in her dragon-chariot, set magnificently godlike against a background of streaming clouds. Euripides, I felt quite convinced, would have applauded. (And how dearly we would love to know how he achieved his own *coup de théâtre* in 431 BC!)

See also N. E. Collinge, 'Medea *ex machina*', *CP* 57 (1962), pp. 170–2.

28 This theme is emphasized also in the choral ode at 1081ff., at the key point in the play when Medea, after agonized debate, has decided finally to kill her children.

29 See, for instance, the heroic depiction of Jason in Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.

30 On this, see Reckford 1968, *passim*; Knox 1979b, pp. 306–9.

31 Many of the audience would, of course, have been aware of Medea's reputation in traditional myth. But that does not alter the fact that Euripides has chosen not to mention it, let alone stress it, in this play.

32 There is, I think, no need to doubt the sincerity of Medea's love for her children. But her need for revenge is stronger. See also n. 37 below.

33 As, for instance, by Andromache over Astyanax: Eur. *Tro.* 740ff., esp. 758–60.

34 Medea addresses her *thumos* as though it were something quite outside herself. See Dodds (n. 7), p. 81: 'It is the traditional appeal of the victim to the tyrant: only here victim and tyrant are bound together in one personality – which is, nevertheless, in some dreadful way not one but two. Jason, like the conventional Greek he is, would fain put the blame on an ἀλάστωρ (1333), but Medea is *her own* ἀλάστωρ.'

35 I do not quote these lines here, since any translation of them must fail, I think. In the Greek they are simple and moving (how like Euripides to bring in the detail that little children smell so sweet), in English sadly maudlin.

36 I do not find Shaw's discussion (1975, pp. 258–64) of the aspects of male/female within Medea very convincing. He claims that 'the pure female [Medea] meets the pure male [Jason], and there is an impasse. Next, the female intrudes into the male domain, and the male image is reformed. . . . When Medea begins to avenge herself on Jason, she becomes a man'. He adds that Medea's monologue is a 'war of male [who has decided on murder] and female [who pleads for the children's lives] within the heart of Medea'. But Medea is what she is, this combination of passion and reason, from the very beginning: contrast her shrieks of rage and grief from within the house at the start of the play with the calm reasoned intelligence of her first speech outside the house, where she seeks to win the female chorus over to her side so that they back her revenge. See also my more general comments on this type of approach in n. 8 above.

37 This, to me, is one of Euripides' most moving insights into female reactions: he means there to be, I think, truly no choice about the children's fate at this point – because of the now certain royal murder they have to die one way or the other – and so the mother, out of love, takes on herself the task of killing them. (This is in a sense quite independent of the fact that it is Medea herself, by her decisions and actions, who has brought them all to this point of crisis.)

38 See Page (n. 14) ad loc. on πρὸς βαλβῖδα λυπηρὰν βίου.

39 See Knox 1979b, pp. 303–6; also p. 316: 'The energy she had wasted on Jason became a *theos*, relentless, merciless force, the unspeakable violence of the oppressed and betrayed, which, because it has been so long pent up, carries everything before it to

destruction, even if it destroys also what it loves most.' See also n. 27 above on the drama of Medea's appearance here in the chariot.

40 Schlesinger 1968, p. 89. And see M. P. Cunningham, 'Medea ἀπὸ μηχανῆς', *CP* 49 (1954), pp. 151–60: 'The final scene of the play presents visually and strikingly the dehumanising effect upon Medea of what she has done' (p. 159).

41 On the general legend, see Barrett (n. 10), pp. 6–7.

42 See, for instance, the *Catalogue of Women*, frr.208 and 209; Apollodoros, 3.13.3ff.

43 See, for instance, *Il.* 6.155–70. For Euripides' own *Stheneboia*, see Webster (n. 10), pp. 80–4.

44 Genesis 39.

45 See Barrett (n. 10), pp. 30–1.

46 For this probable plot, see Barrett (n. 10), pp. 11–12, 18–45; Webster (n. 10), pp. 64–71; Reckford 1974, pp. 309–13. On the character of this early Phaidra, see also n. 99 below.

47 As Barrett (n. 10) suggests, pp. 12–13; see also Webster (n. 10), p. 75.

48 For the arguments behind this reconstruction, see Barrett (n. 10), pp. 12–13, 22–45.

49 Ar. Byz., in *arg. Hipp.* 25. See on this Barrett (n. 10), p. 29.

50 A punishment by a god or goddess for a neglected honour of some kind is a very frequent theme in myth: see, for instance, the myths of Meleagros (*Il.* 9.529–49), punishment by Artemis, and of Helen and her sisters (Stesichoros, fr.223 (*Poetae Melici Graeci*, ed. D. L. Page, Oxford, 1962), cf. *Catalogue of Women*, fr.176 MW), punishment by Aphrodite. It seems likely that Euripides was the first to apply this theme to the Hippolytos myth.

51 See on this, Barrett (n. 10), p. 159: 'εὐγενής is not mere padding: ... the feeling that she must not let herself or her family down is a leading trait in Phaidra's character and a prime motive of her actions in the play.'

52 See D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (London, 1967), p. 27: 'Phaedra's passion, ... and her own reflections on it, are treated in terms so realistic and rational that we seem justified in viewing her part in the action in natural, as opposed to supernatural, terms. Nevertheless, if we ask why Phaedra has fallen helplessly and hopelessly in love with Hippolytus, we must accept the only answer which is given to us in the play: the mythical answer of the prologue, that Aphrodite has caused this as a means of vengeance on Hippolytus. ... Nevertheless, it may be possible to restrict the helplessness of Phaedra to the simple fact that she is incurably in love with Hippolytus. In what she elects to do about it, she seems to show her own moral personality.'

53 See R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Hippolytus: A Study in Causation*, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens, vol. vi (1960, pp. 172–97); p. 181: 'At 335 she responds simultaneously to the appeal of the suppliant, to the desire for outward recognition, and to the deepest cravings of her love-stricken heart.'

54 See Reckford 1974, *passim*, for other echoes of the first *Hippolytos*. I cannot agree with him in seeing the second Phaidra as coming to a moral ruin that in fact equates her with the first Phaidra (see also Barrett's comment on 1305, p. 47). But I feel that he makes many fine and sensitive points in his reading of the play. On the second play's functioning as a mirror reversal of the first, see Zeitlin 1985, pp. 102–6, esp. n. 107.

55 Phaidra 'has gone through the cycle of conscious choice, first silence, then speech, and come at last to abandon choice all together, and entrust her destiny to another. And the result will be, as she said herself, destruction' (Knox 1979a, p. 212). This perhaps reverses the set-up of the first *Hippolytos*, where it was quite possibly the Nurse who tried to dissuade Phaidra from her decision to approach Hippolytos herself (see Reckford 1974, pp. 310–11).

56 On Phaidra's death as the conclusion of her wedding journey, see Burnett 1986, pp. 175–6.

57 Barrett (n. 10), ad loc. See also Segal 1965, pp. 180–2.

58 Whether in fact he completely succeeded is perhaps uncertain: see Vellacott's (1975) comments, pp. 234–6; for instance, '[In the *Frogs*] it is demonstrated that the Athenian public knew Phaedra was a whore and would never have any other opinion, however often they listened to the first episode of the *Hippolytus*' (p. 235). But see also n. 99 below.

59 On the nature of Aphrodite in this play, see, for instance, Dodds (n. 7), p. 87, Conacher (n. 52), pp. 50–3, Segal 1965, pp. 165–70.

60 As Conacher (n. 52) comments, p. 341: 'In the *Hippolytus*, the whole logic of theme and action alike is predicated on the idea of Hippolytus as tragic hero; yet who has "taught" the play on this premise without having to explain too insistently for comfort how the more interesting, more moving, but non-tragic, characterisation of Phaedra is really ancillary to the tragedy of Hippolytus?' He makes the point earlier (p. 30) that it is Hippolytos' relation to Phaidra, in his reaction to the suggestions made by the Nurse, which is crucial to Euripides' characterization of Hippolytos himself: 'It is for this reason that the dramatist takes such pains with the Queen's character and situation; while the nature and fate of Hippolytus form the central issue of the tragedy, it is only by an intimate and sympathetic understanding of Phaedra and her plight that we can see the culpable and fatal aspect of Hippolytus.'

Rabinowitz' (1987) conclusion that 'the ending of the play ... by founding its resolution on the basis of the father/son reunion' indicates 'that Phaedra is merely important in relation to the men' (p. 136), and the inferences on male/female attitudes that she draws, all combine, I feel, to give a distorted reading of the play. For instance it is, I suggest, not true that in Phaidra's noble attempt to reject her love 'she accepts what her culture and its misogynistic representative Hippolytus says is appropriate for a woman and seeks to repress her desire without speaking', that she accepts 'the

values of the patriarchy and her place in it' (p. 130). Phaidra has been compelled by Aphrodite into an illicit love – physical lust – for her *stepson*, and there is no reason to believe that Euripides would have portrayed a man, similarly smitten with lust for a stepdaughter, as *necessarily* with different reactions to his feelings, different attitudes as to what was right.

61 See, for instance, B. Snell, 'Passion and reason: Medea and Phaedra in *Hippolytos* II', in *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1964), pp. 47–69.

62 '"Crete" . . . comes to stand metaphorically for evil itself, for the pull backward into the subhuman past that contradicts, as it frustrates, all the designs of mind and spirit.'

63 Webster (n. 10), pp. 268–9, suggests on the evidence of vase-paintings that perhaps it was Euripides who first had Agaue kill Pentheus, but he does not develop the idea further.

64 This evidence, and the conclusions that I draw, are presented fairly briefly here. See, for much more detail, my article 'Euripides' *Bakchai*: a reconsideration in the light of vase-paintings', *BICS* 36 (1989). I thank the Editor for his permission to reprint certain parts of that article here.

65 For details of this and the other vases mentioned here, see my article (n. 64) in *BICS*.

66 For these earlier Dionysiac plays, see Dodds (n. 16), pp. xxviii–xxxiii.

67 Page (n. 14), p. xx n. 8.

68 The only other extant play where a god's predictions in the prologue do not come true is the *Ion*, but here reasons are given (see 1563ff.).

69 See Dodds (n. 16), ad loc.

70 Cf. 737, 740, and 747, with its suggestion of the closing of the eyes in death. 'The first messenger speech gives Pentheus the precise scenario for his own death and a chance, by learning through presentation, to avoid it': Foley 1985, p. 244.

71 See on this Anne Pippin Burnett, 'Pentheus and Dionysus: host and guest' (*CP* 65 (1970), pp. 15–29), pp. 23–4: 'Quite suddenly a prophet who has been kind, effeminate, languid, weak, scorned and threatened with death, imaged as a hunted animal, becomes hard, bull-like, energetic and powerful, one who controls the lives of others and is described as a hunter is. In exactly the same moment a ruling prince undergoes the reverse transformation; forgetting his cruel, masculine strength, his contempt, and his public role, he becomes a creature who is pliable, womanish and weak, who is scorned, disguised and hunted like a beast. All this happens in a swift and magical pause that is marked by a break in the stichomythia. . . .'

72 Winnington-Ingram describes this as 'a process comparable to hypnotism': *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge, 1948, repr. Amsterdam, 1969), p. 160. Rosenmeyer argues convincingly that this point marks a kind of death: 'The truth is that the change is not a transition from one phase of life to another, much less a lapse into sickness or perversion, but quite simply death. When a tragic hero in the great tradition is made to reverse his former confident choice, especially if this happens at the instigation of the archenemy, the role of the hero has come to an end. We remember Agamemnon stepping on the crimson carpet, after Clytemnestra has broken down his reluctance. The blood-colored tapestry is a visual anticipation of the murder. Instead of the corporeal death which will be set offstage, the audience watch the death of the soul. With Agamemnon slowly moving through the sea of red the contours are blurred and the king of all the Greeks is annihilated before our eyes. Aeschylus uses a splash; Euripides, less concretely but no less effectively, uses a change of personality.' (T. G. Rosenmeyer, 'Tragedy and religion: the *Bacchae*', in *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, ed. E. Segal (Oxford, 1983, pp. 370–89), p. 387.)

73 And it must follow that if the usual version until Euripides had been Pentheus in armed combat with the maenads, then this Pentheus in woman's dress must be new too (see further on this in my article (n. 64) in *BICS*). So perhaps Ovid was drawing directly on the pre-Euripidean version of the legend for his account in *Met.* 3 of the military Pentheus going to his death on the mountain.

If Euripides meant the costuming of Pentheus by Dionysos to be part of a 'play within a play' as Foley, for instance, argues (1985, pp. 205–58), then this would suggest a theatrical self-consciousness appropriate to the later fifth century (p. 206), and thus too an innovation by Euripides himself (possibly inspired by the toilet scene in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusai*, suggests Foley: see p. 228).

74 See Gould 1987, p. 37: 'There is a terrifying emptiness as the god vanishes and mother and son are left to come face to face, watched by the horrified messenger, and through his eyes by us: whatever else was hallucination in this play, this is not.'

75 Richard Hamilton ('*Bacchae* 47–52: Dionysus' plan', *TAPA* 104 (1974), pp. 139–49), p. 144, points out that Euripides uses this terminology only in the *Bakchai*, the *Rhesus* (nine times!), and once in the *Hecuba*, and that it is always clearly military. (Hamilton in fact sees Pentheus' foray into the mountains as the engagement which Dionysos predicted in the prologue.)

76 Hdt. 7.43.

77 See Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.1, 4.2.27.

78 On this see Hamilton (n. 75), p. 144.

79 Dodds (n. 16), ad loc.

80 Cracow 1225; ARV^2 1121.17; *CV* pl. 12, 1.

81 Other possible influences on Euripides are from religion and ritual. Richard Seaford has argued that many details in the *Bakchai* derive from the ritual of mystic initiation: see 'Dionysiac drama and the Dionysiac mysteries', *CQ* 31 (1981), pp. 252–75, and 'Pentheus' vision: *Bacchae* 918–22', *CQ* 37 (1987), pp. 76–8. He notes that in the myth of the death and rebirth of the child

Dionysos, the god's torn limbs are reassembled by his mother (*CQ* 31, p. 267): perhaps this suggested the moving recomposition onstage of the limbs of Pentheus, Dionysos' victim, by Agaue, and thus the actual *sparagmos* of the son by the mother herself. This would have perhaps seemed especially suitable for performance at a festival expressly designed to honour Dionysos (see on this Seaford, pp. 266ff., and P. E. Easterling, 'Putting together the pieces: a passage in the *Bacchae*', *Omnibus* 14 (1987), pp. 14–16).

82 See Dodds (n. 16), p. xxx.

83 Dodds' translation.

84 And, as Dodds (n. 16) says (p. 197, with references): 'That is the one plea which a Greek audience would accept in extenuation of his conduct. The Greeks were very susceptible to the pathos inherent in the rashness of inexperienced youth.'

85 Dodds (n. 16), pp. 97–8. Others who take similar lines are, for instance, Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 204–5; W. Sale, 'The psychoanalysis of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides', *YCS* 22 (1972), pp. 63–82. For a more sympathetic view of Pentheus, see E. M. Blaiklock, 'The Natural Man', *G&R* 16 (1947), pp. 49–66; Rosenmeyer (n. 72), esp. p. 385; H. D. Rankin, 'Pentheus and Plato: a study in social disintegration', Inaugural Lecture at Southampton University (1975); Justina Gregory, 'Some aspects of seeing in Euripides' *Bacchae*', *G&R* 32 (1985), pp. 23–31; and, most of all, H. Oranje's careful discussion in *Euripides'* Bacchae: *The Play and its Audience* (Leiden, 1984), pp. 34–98. Seaford (*CQ* 31 (1981), p. 268) notes that Pentheus' youth is untypical of the tyrant of tragedy.

86 Gregory (n. 85) is right to warn that we must 'recognise that what strikes us as sexual pathology in Pentheus, for example, might not have appeared in that light to an audience with different cultural references. It is salutary to recall that to the late Victorian J. E. Sandys Pentheus' concern for the virtue of the Theban women – in the view of modern critics a symptom of neurosis – was [and to Euripides' audience also, I suggest] "a redeeming part of his character".' This same careful attitude towards women can be seen also in such a passage as *Andr.* 590ff., where Menelaos is condemned by Peleus for taking no precautions (bolts and slaves) to see that Helen was suitably guarded and watched over.

87 Pentheus is certainly not a *theomachos*, he is not against gods as gods, for Dionysos himself mentions his worship of others (45–6): he is just against *one* god, one new god, whom he has not recognized as a god.

88 See also Hans Diller, 'Euripides' final phase: the *Bacchae*', in *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, ed. E. Segal (Oxford, 1983, pp. 357–69), p. 365.

89 I realize that in this modern era it can be difficult to take a character in Greek tragedy at face value, without taking current psychological assumptions into account. Nevertheless, if we mean to seek out what the dramatist consciously intended, it should be done – if at all possible. Sometimes it is almost impossible: consider Iokaste's statement at *O.T.* 981–2 – 'Many a man before this has in dreams lain with his own mother.' How can we ever forget what we know of Freud and persuade ourselves back two and a half thousand years to imagine either the state of mind that wrote those lines or the way in which the audience responded?

90 And he does of course have other sympathetic characteristics, such as his conspicuous loyalty to his grandfather (see Kadmos' lament, 1302ff., and Dodds' comments, on 251, on Pentheus' affection for Kadmos).

91 'Miracles cannot happen in Pentheus' ordered world': Blaiklock (n. 85), p. 56. As Gregory (n. 85) comments, p. 29, 'Both his perceptions and his responses are drawn from the realm of the secular and of the everyday'.

92 Lines 62, 797, 1142, 1177–8, 1219, 1292, 1384–5, 726–7, 1084–5, and ὄρος throughout.

93 Segal (n. 85), p. 304. To digress: those words always put me in mind of Lob's wood in J. M. Barrie's *Dear Brutus*.

94 On the emphasis on mothers in the play, see Gould 1987, *passim*. He notes that the day of the first performance of the *Bakchai* was also the day of the first performance of the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, where again there is dramatic importance laid on the mother's relationship with her child.

95 And the play is called the *Bakchai* – of whom Agaue is one.

96 For its known contents, see Dodds (n. 16), pp. 234–5. On Agaue's self-accusations and the reassembling of Pentheus' body, and what they mean for the play, see Pat Easterling (n. 81), *passim*.

97 Dionysos' revenge may have been 'just', but on this 'justice' see Dodds (n. 7), p. 89: 'It is the justice of Kypris, the justice of Dionysus, an unpitying, unreasoning justice that pauses for no nice assessment of deserts, but sweeps away the innocent with the guilty, Phaedra with Hippolytus, Cadmus with Pentheus.'

98 See Vellacott 1975, pp. 93–4 ('... I do not believe ... that the creator of Phaedra had no profound moral concept underlying his depiction of Stheneboea ...').

99 Perhaps, as Conacher (n. 52) suggests, p. 342, Phaidra was here a full-scale tragic figure, no longer 'pegged' by Aphrodite, but a woman who freely, if inevitably, chose her own passion and her own destruction.

The impropriety of Phaidra's *actions* was clearly condemned by Euripides' audience. But the very strength of their reaction suggests that Phaidra as a *character* was drawn with sympathy (an utterly immoral and unsympathetic character would not, one feels, have had anything like the same effect). Certainly it seems that sympathy can be detected in the few fragments of the play that we possess: from what are probably Phaidra's first words (Barrett fr. A, p. 18), when she numbers herself among the ill-starred (τοῖσι δυστυχοῦσιν), and from what is perhaps a final judgement on

Phaidra and her god-driven ills (Barrett fr. S, p. 22, θεηλάτων κακῶν). It seems too that Theseus was drawn in an unfavourable light (Barrett fr. B, p. 18, τὰς ἐκείνου παρανομίας), which would therefore have increased sympathy for Phaidra.

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