REVIEW ARTICLE

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN EURIPIDEAN CRITICISM*

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This book has been awaited with impatience by all those who have read with profit and pleasure (though not necessarily with complete agreement) the author's articles on Euripides in the pages of this journal.[1] Their great expectations will not be disappointed. This is at once the most stimulating and the most important book on Euripides that has appeared in many years. It tackles the central problem posed by Euripidean drama (concentrating on the most problematical of the plays) and applies a method of analysis which, though it is not entirely original,[2] produces in Burnett's subtle, learned, and rigorous exploitation of its possibilities what is in effect a new set of criteria for the evaluation not only of Euripides but of Attic tragedy as a whole. This is not to say (as will become clear later) that these criteria are always and equally valid, nor that they are in every case correctly applied, but there is no doubt that she has opened up a rich new vein in what had seemed to be a largely worked-out claim.

The central problem posed by Euripidean drama lies of course in what we have come to call "tone"—"the attitude of a work as revealed in the matter rather than stated," to quote a convenient capsule definition.[3] Inseparable from this is the problem of the author's intention, which some modern critics have declared impenetrable and in any case irrelevant, but which can hardly be avoided in the case of state-financed competitive performances aimed at a mass audience. In the case of drama which works, as Plato put it, "through imitation" rather than through "the narration of the poet himself,"[4] the problems of tone and intention are especially difficult; in Euripides they appear, to judge from the critical literature, to be close to insoluble. Readers may often disagree about the attitude of the poet to his creatures and their actions in Aeschylus and Sophocles, but "disagreement" is far too mild a word for the polar contraries of reaction produced by such plays as the *Heracles* or the *Ion*. A cursory glance at a collection of critical essays such as that of J. R. Wilson on the *Alcestis*[5] is, to use Kitto's phrase, to "contemplate Chaos."[6] Even in the pitifully small number of plays by the two older dramatists which have survived the centuries, we can discern patterns of action, thought, and feeling which help us find our bearings in the interpretation of any single play. The Euripidean corpus, however, though we have almost three plays for each one by the other poets, gives us no such help; we are adrift, without map or compass. It seems impossible to establish agreement on the fundamental question: what effect did Euripides intend to produce on the Athenian audience for which these plays were designed? In the absence of such agreement, the field is wide open for every man to make his own Euripides —the rationalist, the irrationalist, the political dramatist, the philosopher, the feminist, the radical, the reactionary, or the mere bungler.

This disarray of modern critical opinion is partly due to the literary sophistication and artistic self-consciousness which distinguish

* *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal.* By ANNE PIPPIN BURNETT. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. Pp. ix + 234. $11.25.

1. *CP*, LV (1960), on the *Helen*; LVII (1962), on the *Ion*; LX (1965), on the *Alcestis*; LXV (1970), on the *Bacchae*. The first three are among the plays discussed in the book under review but the reader need not fear duplication of already published material; they are here treated from a different point of view, fully integrated in the structure of the book, and made to yield fresh insights.

2. Burnett acknowledges indebtedness to Lattimore and Friedrich (p. viii).

3. *A Dictionary of World Literature*, ed. J. T. Shipley (New York, 1943), *s.v.*

4. *Rep.* 394C.

5. *Twentieth-century Interpretations of Euripides' Alcestis*, ed. J. R. Wilson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968).

6. H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), p. 1.

Euripides' work. Aristophanes mocked his reliance on books for his plots, and Euripides was not above giving his actors lines which criticized the technique of his fellow dramatists or even made subdued fun of the tragic conventions in which they themselves performed. The irony of situation which Sophocles exploits with such demonic expertise, playing on the audience's knowledge of the outcome to invest his characters' ignorant pronouncements with tragic significance, becomes in Euripides an irony of form, which poses the all-too-human motives and actions of the characters against the audience expectation of the required heroic tone and counts on their familiarity with the conventional tragic plots and roles to ensure appreciation of his deformations, ranging from subtle to outrageous, of the norms.

This familiarity with the conventions and "inner fictional imperatives" of the old stories recast as tragic plots is the base line of Burnett's attack on the problem. Tragedy had been a regular feature of the Athenian year since before the beginning of the fifth century. The audience was attuned to themes and variations; they were "veterans," as Aristophanes called them in the *Frogs*.[7] "The tragic plots were few, even the fictions were few, and the poet, choosing among them, knew that each would evoke once more a unanimous trained emotion and a wealth of predictable association" (p. 16). Though Burnett realizes the difficulty of isolating these "norms of tragic action" (which are "of course never to be found in a pure form"), she deduces "from surviving tragedy the general outline of six favorite hypothetical plots." These are three representatives of "negative overturn"—actions of punishment (of the principal), vengeance (exacted by the principal), and willing sacrifice (of the principal)—and three of "positive overturn"—plots of suppliants raised, of rescue, and of return. The expectations aroused by each of these plots are built on by Euripides as he combines two or more of them in each of the seven plays Burnett, after her introductory chapter, proceeds to discuss: the *Alcestis*, *Iphigenia Taurica*, *Helen*, *Ion*, *Andromache*, *Heracles*, and *Orestes*.

She establishes and isolates the basic components of each play and then uses them as a control to assess the "distorted and aberrant stage forms" which Euripides has created; she analyzes with insight, wit, and precision the kaleidoscopic changes of tone which are the results of their juxtaposition and interweaving. Though her method has its failures as well as its successes and though there are many details in her interpretation at which one reader or another may balk, these chapters open up new perspectives in Euripidean criticism and exploit in masterly fashion an aspect of his dramaturgy which has been widely ignored or at best dimly seen but must now take its place in the forefront of the critic's preoccupations.

Her analysis of the *Iphigenia Taurica* as a rescue play (with no fewer than ten examples of the rescue of human beings[8]), containing in its center a negative (interrupted) action, "technically one of vengeance," throws a revealing light on the dramatic rhythms of the play (as for example in her discussion of the two messenger speeches, pp. 61–62) and also on many details of action, motivation, and exposition which have seemed to many critics jarring or irrelevant but are here elegantly fitted into their exact position in the complex structure. Her summary of that structure deserves citation as a typical example of her keen insight and her gift for spare but eloquent formulation. The play "tells a story of two fraternal pairs, one divine and one mortal, a group of four who have so assorted themselves that the brother god Apollo is the patron of the mortal brother Orestes, while his sister Artemis stands in the same relation to the mortal sister Iphigenia. The final achievement of the play is double, as each brother rescues his sister in a mirroring pair of actions that are simultaneous and interdependent . . ." (p. 48). The *Helen* she sees as a "suppliant-rescue play"; the Theonoe episode constitutes an intrusive "tragedy of idealism and self-sacrifice"

7. *Ran.* 1113.

8. One of these, the rescue of Thoas "from his barbarity," might be quietly dispensed with.

which is "miraculously interrupted"—a reading of this strange scene which makes better dramatic sense than previous attempts to deal with it. The *Helen* is a drama in which everyone recognizes an artistic self-consciousness at work (or rather play), and Burnett's approach is fully vindicated by the frequent passages in which the actors seem to criticize their own roles or lines (e.g., 1056). Euripides here rings the changes on the dramatic stereotypes in virtuoso fashion almost to the point of parody, and Burnett's loving and witty analysis of his deformation of the familiar is a sure guide through this hall of distorting mirrors. The *Ion* is "a mixture of return, rescue and vengeance . . . but the vengeance plot is one in which the catastrophe is interrupted . . . The interruption of the vengeance plot and the fulfilment of the other two depend ultimately upon recognition and the play is so organized that when the heroine of the vengeance piece shall recognize the hero of the return, the rescue will come about and the plots will melt together . . ." (p. 101). Burnett's deft handling of these interlocking complications brings to a high polish many obscure facets of this jewel of Euripidean dramaturgy. The *Andromache* "begins with a suppliant tragedy played by a helpless heroine . . . and is followed at once by a rescue piece" which is "broken in on by a third drama, a tragedy of divine punishment. . ." (p. 131). In this chapter Burnett develops a useful concept, "the peculiarly Euripidean practice" of role-changing, the creation "of a kind of repertory situation in which a character may, while keeping the same stage name, appear now in one and now in another of the conventional parts during the course of the play" (Hermione, for example, is first a tormentor of the helpless heroine and then the helpless heroine herself). This chapter also contains, in Burnett's discussion of the "thumbnail rescue-piece" (the Orestes-Hermione scene, a notorious stumbling block for the critics), one of the best examples in the book of the way she uses the dramatic norms to put a disconcerting scene in perspective and so make it dramatically intelligible. Her analysis of the *Heracles*, where she finds three combined plots (suppliant drama, divine punishment, and rescue piece) instead of the usual two "halves" of the play which critics have deplored, tried to link thematically and symbolically, or hailed with enthusiasm as a deliberate "formal rift," is by far the most satisfying presentation I have seen of the mechanism of this extraordinary tragedy. In the *Orestes* (to which she devotes two chapters) she deals convincingly with "Euripides' most difficult play," sorting out its varied and transformed components into a suppliant action, a rescue, and a mixed rescue and vengeance action, "every one of which fails" (p. 184).

No one will read these chapters without occasional or even frequent disagreement, but no one can fail to learn from them, to acquire a fresh and sharpened sense of the mechanics of Euripidean drama and of the way the plays *work*. Indeed it is no small tribute to the efficacy of Burnett's method that in the adverse criticism of the following paragraphs some of the objections urged against her interpretation rest on details the critic would never have seen if he had not learned from her what to look for.

She sometimes seems to misread the results of her own method, and sometimes too the basic plot pattern she uses as a control rests on too flimsy a basis. Both failings (and also a success) are visible in her treatment of what is admittedly the most baffling play of the lot, the *Alcestis*. It is a combination of "a tragedy of willing sacrifice" with a "rescue piece." The ideal form of the sacrifice tragedy is described for us on pages 22–25. "The action in a sacrifice play is . . . openly identified with the concerned will of a god . . . Its causal beginning lies normally in an express divine command." It "describes the death of an appropriate victim, a perfect individual . . . There is no question of *hamartia* because this act of divine destruction . . . has . . . a positive, ritual purpose; it alleviates some evil abroad in the world . . . There is always a dissuader, for otherwise the decision of the principal cannot be depicted in action, but, if this character is seriously debased his true function is undermined, since there is no special glory in resisting the temptations of the craven." Burnett

applies these canons of the sacrifice plot to the situation and speeches of Alcestis and Admetus. She demonstrates, in a serried series of comparisons between Alcestis on the one hand and Macaria, Antigone, Polyxena, Iphigenia, Menoeceus, and Praxithea[9] on the other, that Alcestis is "given a strong outward conformity to that of her prototype," and that Alcestis' "sacrifice tragedy is apparently in perfect ethical agreement with other plays of the type." This is a valid and important demonstration; Burnett shows irrefutably the irrelevance of the complaints so many modern critics have made about the coldness and self-centeredness of Alcestis[10]—the realistic rehearsal of alternatives and the calculation of what her sacrifice will accomplish are both proved to be normal constituents of the principal's main speech in this type of play.

Admetus, however, is "the dissuader . . . whose character cannot be seriously debased," and, as before, Burnett tries to establish her claim by appeals to parallels. This time they are not so cogent. "He takes the part of an Iolaus or a Hecuba or a Clytemnestra and is the one who tries to keep the sacrifice from taking place . . . Like Iolaus he cannot quarrel with a god's command, but, like Hecuba and Clytemnestra, he bewails his own fate since he must lose a loved one, complaining that he is destroyed and begging the victim not to abandon him . . . Like Polyxena's mother, he would cling to the sacrifice and die with her and he must be told by others that this cannot be . . . Like Iolaus he hails the virtues of this female savior and promises to honor her . . . like him he is reluctant later to admit to an outsider that a victim has been sacrificed" (p. 27). But the lines of Admetus (420–21) which are cited to buttress the statement that "he cannot quarrel with a god's command" do not mean or imply anything of the kind. The chorus tells him that everybody has to die and he replies, "I know." And the "reluctance to admit that a victim has been sacrificed" is in the case of Iolaus (*Heracl.* 634) a matter of no consequence, a mere dramaturgical dismissal of the previous scene, whereas in the case of Admetus it is a major structural element, a deception of Heracles which makes possible the happy ending (and at the time earns him a harsh reproof from the chorus). But much more disturbing than these details is the inadequacy of the parallel as a whole. For Admetus is not and cannot be the "dissuader"; he has accepted the sacrifice long ago and it cannot now be reversed. In addition, he differs from the dissuaders cited to explain his case in the crucial fact that unlike them he is the beneficiary of the sacrifice, it is his own life which that sacrifice saves. At one point, speaking of the *Helen*, Burnett announces that Euripides expects of the audience "an almost Japanese finesse," but to think that they would not sense the jarring incongruity of Admetus' appeals to his wife not to die calls for an audience of almost Bradfordian[11] stolidity. In fact the resemblances (such as they are) between Admetus' speeches and those of Hecuba, Iolaus, and Clytemnestra seem to me to emphasize the incongruities; the audience's recognition of the convention to which Euripides is appealing could only have heightened their appreciation of the hideously false position in which the dramatist saw fit to place his hero. Burnett lays much stress on the fact that Alcestis gives her life not so much for Admetus as for the *oikos*, the continuity of the family, the inheritance of her children, and the argument has great force. But it is still humanly and dramatically true that the one person who cannot possibly beg Alcestis not to abandon him and beg to be buried with her is her husband Admetus. And there is one fairly regular element of the dissuader's role in the sacrifice play (not mentioned by Burnett) which is missing from the speeches of Admetus. Of the three examples cited of the "one who tries to keep the sacrifice from taking place" (Iolaus, Hecuba, Clytemnestra), two (*Heracl.* 451 ff., *Hec.* 385 ff.) offer their own lives in place of that of the sacrificial victim. It is easy

9. This particular comparison is a little disturbing, since Praxithea is sacrificing not herself but her daughter.

10. For example, C. F. Beye, who speaks of the "lifeless and selfish grounds upon which Alcestis has chosen to die" (*GRBS*, II (1959), 124).

11. In the early decades of this century the city of Bradford in Yorkshire was known to the actors of itinerant companies —because of the imperturbability of its audiences—as "the comedian's grave."

to see why even Euripides did not put *that* offer in the mouth of Admetus;[12] it would have pushed the formal irony too far, to make the scene skirt the borderline of parody.

There is however one character in the play who calls a spade a spade, Pheres, the father of Admetus. In the sordid exchange of insults between father and son, Euripides throws on the husband's acceptance of his wife's sacrifice the spotlight of ordinary unheroic humanity's feelings about the individual's right to life. "I brought you into the world," says Pheres. "Do I have to die for you as well? . . . Lucky or unlucky, your life is your own . . . Don't die instead of me, I won't die instead of you." These are home truths indeed and it is hard to see why, if Euripides wanted the audience to see Admetus as the Iolaus or Hecuba of this play, he could have allowed himself to include so devastating a scene.

Burnett's ingenious explanation of the presence of Pheres in the play invokes the audience's understanding of the form of the second component of the *Alcestis*, the "rescue piece." This type of play "presupposes a victim immobilized and in danger from a threatening creature; . . . after a prologue of lament, the normal stage action begins with the arrival (properly accidental) of the hero . . . Since the true *agon*, the struggle with the monster, must occur offstage . . . it may be replaced in the staged action with a second encounter between the champion and someone who does not wish to release the victim even when the danger is past. The proper ending of the play is some form of translation . . . often associated with marriage" (p. 30). Much of this seems both well grounded and also germane to a discussion of the *Alcestis*. The Thanatos of the prologue is a "threatening creature" all right, the *agon* takes place offstage and the ending of the play is certainly a "translation . . . associated with marriage." But where is the "second encounter between the champion and someone more ordinary who does not wish to release the victim even when the danger is past"? According to Burnett, this scene "has not been left out but has been played by proxies in a substitute scene of conflict." It is the quarrel between Pheres and Admetus.

It seems unlikely that even Japanese finesse would have enabled the audience to deal with this set of Chinese boxes: Admetus and Pheres are "proxies" for Heracles and some hypothetical character in a scene which is a "substitute" for a "second encounter" which itself "replaces" the *agon* between Heracles and Thanatos. If Euripides really wanted the audience to feel that the Admetus-Pheres scene was meant to "replace, in the emotional economy" of the action "the struggle with the monster," he could surely have found some means less riddling than this; the appeal to scene typology here breaks down.

The breakdown is revealed as even more serious when the evidence for the typology, especially that of the "second encounter" (which is vital for Burnett's thesis), is subjected to close scrutiny. In her outline of the normal sacrifice plot Burnett had evidence to spare, but the "second encounter" of the rescue plot turns out to have a name, but no local habitation. "Enough survives of the Euripidean *Andromeda* to allow certain general assumptions and to encourage a reconstruction of the satyr-play *Hesione* whose preparations are shown on the Pronomos vase . . . in addition we can recognize the rescue action in its masculine form in the *Philoctetes* and the satyr *Cyclops* and can use it perhaps as a hypothesis for the *Prometheus Luomenos*" (p. 30). These are, alas, slim pickings. Exhibit A, the satyr-play *Hesione* ("the parallel with the *Hesione* is the closest," p. 31), which is to be reconstituted on analogy with general assumptions allowed by the remnants of the Euripidean *Andromeda*, is already a desperate expedient even before one remembers that we have no evidence for the existence of such a play (except of course for a fourth-century comedy of that title by Alexis). The Pronomos vase does not name the play nor the heroine, still less give even the faintest idea of the

12. He does of course wish that he had the tongue and song of Orpheus, to charm the powers below, but this would still preserve his own life—and in any case wishes are not horses.

plot.[13] Even if we accept the archaeologists' stab in the dark that the play is about Hesione, Burnett's statement that, after being rescued by Heracles, Hesione "then had to be wrested from her ungrateful family" (so providing a substitute *agon*-scene for the hypothetical play), assumes a version of the story found only in late and notoriously unreliable mythographers;[14] in Homer the reward refused to Heracles was not the hand of Laomedon's daughter, but his horses. This substitute *agon* is in fact not fully substantiated anywhere in our texts; there seems to be some evidence for such a scene in the fragments of the *Andromeda* (but the reconstruction of lost Euripidean plays is a hazardous business, as Burnett herself demonstrated so incisively in her review of T. B. L. Webster's *Tragedies of Euripides* in *CP*, LXIII [1968], 310 ff.); the *Philoctetes* is not mentioned again; the lost *Prometheus Luomenos* gives us a Prometheus "rescued from the eagle by a champion, who still had to deal with Zeus" (but for the last seven words there is no evidence at all—perhaps it was Prometheus who had to deal with Zeus); and in the *Cyclops*, "since the monster may appear on stage ... there is no need for a second scene of resistance to the rescue action" (p. 31). The hypothetical second *agon* has for its base only a few uninformative fragments of the *Andromeda*; something much more solid is required, if the searing realism of the Pheres scene is to be effectively discounted.

The book has been discussed so far as if its only concern were an understanding of the dramatic conventions in which Euripides worked. But there is much more to it than this; it offers also a theory of fundamental intention, a Euripidean theology, or rather, a theodicy. "Each play shows human exertion to be blind and ineffective at best, sordid sometimes, and occasionally contemptible and cruel. And each play meanwhile depicts a divine pity and purpose that can, when it is ready, turn disaster into bliss" (p. 14). There is not too much to quarrel with in the first of these two sentences (though they hardly cover the cases of Alcestis and Theonoe), but the second is another matter.

Burnett fully justifies her statement for the *Alcestis* and *Helen*, and the brilliance of her analysis of the *Orestes* comes close to persuading even this skeptical reviewer that the "finale is meant as a fully functioning part of the drama and must be taken seriously" (p. 212). In the chapter on the *Iphigenia Taurica*, her explanation of the aborted escape—"Euripides has indulged in this play in an almost Pelagian celebration of the virtue and wit of man, but he has found, in the gigantic wave, a remedy for his near-heresy" (p. 68)—will appeal more to readers steeled in the school of old Aquinas than to the laity, but she does succeed in demonstrating the pervasive importance of Apollo in the play with a cogency that will cause those who have ignored or belittled it (this reviewer included) to reconsider the question. The apologia for Apollo in the *Ion*, however, leaves much to be desired. She makes a strong case for Apollo's guiding providential hand at work throughout (the dove, for example, is "the agent of Apollo,"[15] p. 118), but she has to

13. All the Pronomos vase tells us is that the play represented (if indeed one particular play *is* represented—the experts disagree) had a chorus of satyrs and two actors, one clearly identified as Heracles, the other an unnamed king (?) whose mask has an oriental tiara. It shows also a woman (not, therefore, an actor) holding a similar oriental mask. In the center are two figures, one identified as Dionysus, the other presumed (because she appears on the other side of the vase) to be Ariadne; most interpreters consider that these figures have nothing to do with the "play." The king (?) is generally taken to be Laomedon, the woman Hesione (though Bieber, for example, following Bulle, thinks she is *Paidia* holding the mask of Hesione). Buschor thinks that though the chorus represents a satyr-play, the actor-figures stand for "tragedy" (not a particular tragedy but "the higher spheres of drama"); Arias-Shefton, accepting this view, concluded that the "complete dramatic tetralogy is present"! The *Hesione* is clearly no firm foundation on which to build.

14. The main source is Hyginus, on whose reliability as a basis for reconstructing lost plays Rose justly remarks: "vix ulla est earum fabularum quin aliqua saltem ex parte a tragoedia quam aut nunc habemus aut qualis fuerit ex fragmentis dispicere possumus, discrepet" (H. J. Rose, *Hygini Fabulae*[3] [Leyden, 1967], p. x).

15. Her account of this episode is, however, a little fuzzy. This "redeeming bird" is recognized as the god's contrivance to save Ion's life—its "death purchases a new life for him." But his life was saved not by the dove but by the ill-omened word which prompted him to pour the poisoned wine on the ground (or by the piety which inspired that action). The dove's function is to reveal the murder plot.

admit that "the plot does seem, by its very structure, to question his absolute foresight and control." Her attempt to palliate this awkward aspect of Euripides' presentation of the god of prophecy *par excellence*—"he can foresee the massive shapes that loom in the future" (the coming history of the Aegean)[16] but not "mortal actions"—is self-defeating. An Apollo who "does not know the strength of passion in the human heart" and so produces obstructions to his plan which "he has in a sense created but seems not to have foreknown" cannot be the god whom Greeks and barbarians made long journeys to consult about the future results of their "mortal actions," and who foresaw that Oedipus would be born, survive exposure, kill his father, and marry his mother. The *Andromache* is also a difficult play to reconcile with Burnett's formula: the murder of Neoptolemus has to be justified by reasoning which will leave many readers unsatisfied. True enough, Neoptolemus is a *theomachos*, like Pentheus (p. 152); he once demanded satisfaction from Apollo for his father's death. But he has "changed his mind" (*Andr.* 1003), and when he goes to Delphi in the play it is to offer an apology for this fault. His assassination in the god's temple with the god's encouragement is, as Burnett says, "a cruelly ugly thing," but she justifies it by claiming that "even in his attempted conciliation he re-enacts his first ineradicable crime." The explanation of this enigmatic statement is that "his very prowess serves to remind us of the Neoptolemus who outraged Priam and Astyanax" (matters on which Euripides is silent)[17] and that his prowess "once again involves him in acts of desecration." These, it appears, are "actually 'sacking' Apollo's shrine (note *katharpasas* 1121–22, cf. 1095), seizing arms that had been dedicated to the god and using them in a battle with Apollo's priests. He sweeps the sacred objects from the altar and takes his stand upon it and . . . fills the peaceful shrine with a rowdy ill-omened din (1144–45)." Since Neoptolemus is under attack by an armed lynch mob encouraged by the god in his "peaceful shrine," one can hardly call all this a "new crime"; Burnett would have done better to rest her case on the ineradicable nature of the first one.

The play which above all others challenges Burnett's assumption of a "divine pity and purpose that can, when it is ready, turn disaster into bliss" is of course the *Heracles*; here she has taken on a task worthy of the hero himself. I do not think she has succeeded; it is here that her arguments are at their most subtle and least convincing. There are two main problems: the deaths of Megara and the children (among the most ghastly in Greek tragedy), and the suffering of Heracles who, seized by god-sent madness, slaughters his wife and sons. Both of these fates must, to sustain Burnett's thesis, be shown as in some way deserved. She does not tackle the problem of the hideous deaths of the children (and in any case they are not characterized and their fate is a pendant to those of Megara and Heracles), but she has harsh words for their mother and only slightly less harsh words for Amphityron. Their fault is that they "easily agree to leave their sanctuary" (p. 159). They refuse the "essential suppliant choice—to die, if die one must, as a consecrated being and as a sure agent of destruction for the enemy." They "willingly divest themselves of all their supernatural force and choose to die as ordinary secular victims" (p. 161).

The responsibility for this choice is Megara's; she persuades Amphityron to yield. "She is wanting in the primary quality of the suppliant, awareness of the divine . . ." She is "a materialist" (p. 162); "her doctrine of Necessity and her conversion of Amphityron are reminiscent of Jocasta's temptation of Oedipus in the *Tyrannus*" (p. 166). Burnett does not actually say in so many words that the deaths of Megara and her children are their punishment for these "offences," but this

16. Which is, however, prophesied by Athena.

17. The murder of Astyanax is mentioned by Andromache (vss. 9–10), but she does not attribute it to Neoptolemus. If Euripides had wanted his audience to think of Neoptolemus as the killer of the boy, he would have mentioned it in Hermione's tirade against the *amathia* of Andromache. It would have been even more rhetorically effective than what she does say: "You sleep with and bear sons to the son of the man who killed your husband" (170 ff.).

is clearly implied in her statement that Heracles punishes the offences of his family against the gods (p. 171) and in her interpretation of the messenger's account of the slaughter inside the house. "The poet has unobtrusively insisted that this fate was not only necessary to heaven but truly chosen by those who have suffered it." That insistence has never been more unobtrusive appears from her explanation. "He has imaged Heracles like an Erinys with a torch (928)" [there is no mention of the Erinys in the text and the torch is a normal instrument of the sacrifice] "and has made him call up the very *Keres* that Megara has chosen for her sons (870, cf. 481)" [but Megara did nothing of the sort—she claimed that *Tyche* assigned the *Keres* instead of the portions their father had intended for them]; "he has also shown the principals of the first action now vainly hiding at an altar (974, 984)" [but both passages refer to the children who are hardly the "principals"] "or vainly supplicating the mortal champion they had preferred to Zeus Soter (986 ff.)" [one of the children again, who had no voice in the decision]. It is clear that here Burnett is building with straws, and one indication of the dilemma to which her argument has brought her is her elevation of the barely sketched figure of Megara (whose "doctrine of Necessity" is a bundle of tired clichés) to the status of Sophocles' Jocasta, who is not only an unforgettable dramatic creation but also the spokesman for a "doctrine" of *Tyche* which for the first time in our literature envisages a meaningless, accidental universe.

A similar exaggeration is to be seen in the claim that the suppliants' fault is to leave sanctuary prematurely. For these suppliants are in the most desperate case in all Greek tragedy. They are without food, water, or clean clothes; they sleep on the bare ground (*HF* 52). Their one hope of rescue has gone, not to some place from which it might be hoped that he will return, but to Hades. They are not, as Andromache was, merely threatened with death by fire; the orders are given on stage and no one doubts that the tyrant Lycus will see them carried out. And they have the children with them. (Andromache defied Hermione's threat to burn her alive, but her child—so she thought—was safe.) In these extreme circumstances Megara's wish to die with dignity and less painfully seems understandable. Even though it does display a certain lack of faith in divine providence, this does not seem an adequate justification for the horror which ensues. One does not of course expect the justice of a Greek god to be tempered with mercy; one should in fact expect it to be harsh, especially where the god's prerogatives are threatened or his *timê* denied.[18] But so extreme a disproportion between offense and punishment suggests that Euripides was not here thinking in such terms—a suggestion supported by the fact that, as we learn clearly from the divine creatures who later walk the stage, the deaths of Megara and the children are merely incidental, part of the attack on Heracles. One cannot help suspecting that these suppliants have offended not so much against the gods as against Burnett's Rules of the Drama, and this suspicion is confirmed by a phrase of the author herself: "their movements are in glaring violation of the rules of the suppliant plot" (p. 160).

But the main problem is what happens to Heracles. What has he done to deserve, in any dispensation that can be thought of in terms of justice (there is no question of turning "disaster into bliss" in *this* play),[19] the madness that impels him to slaughter his wife and children? The first count against him in Burnett's explanation is the killing of Lycus, a "crime

18. See now the wide-ranging and masterly discussion of this problem by H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971).

19. Burnett tries to introduce some bliss by claiming that once the play is over "then the spectator begins to recall once more all that he knows about Heracles' life on Olympus"; she illustrates by quoting some lines of Hesiod which mention among other blissful details that Hera now loves Heracles and honors him far above all the rest. (Bentley, one cannot help remembering, changed the last words of *Paradise Lost* from "their solitarie way" to "with Heavenly Comfort cheered.") She has to admit, however, that the play itself hardly encourages the audience to put on rose-tinted spectacles as the chorus marches off; to counter what she truly calls "the desolate effect of the final exit of the principal" she can marshal only the "muffled hints" (some of them effectively muffled to the point of inaudibility) enumerated in note 30, p. 182.

against the suppliant plot" (p. 177) which "ends in the villain's defeat but not as a rule in his death" (p. 165). Burnett admits, however, that this action "was, in a primitive sense, just" and proceeds to explain that "he then made a parody of that deed, with all its violence and unreason highly exaggerated, in the 'Mycenean' killing of Eurystheus and his sons" but this "is at best only a symbolic crime and is plainly the effect not the cause of the heavenly intervention." The real reason is the wrath (*cholos*) of Hera, announced (and shared) by Iris. This wrath, according to Burnett, has nothing to do with Hera's jealousy as a deceived wife (Heracles specifically claims [1309–10] that it has, but Burnett is not impressed, since he utters these words at "his most faithless point of despair"); it is "the magnificent almost personified wrath that sometimes comes upon a Homeric hero from outside." The wrath is in fact theological in origin: "Hera's general intention is to defend the grandeur of the gods by defeating an attempt at grandeur on the part of man (841–42) . . . such a punishment presumes a Heracles whose constant good fortune and freedom from stain constituted a kind of conspiracy against Olympus." The nature and purpose of this conspiracy are left to the reader's imagination; perhaps they can be deduced from a later passage: "His deeds, his aspect and his singular good fortune constitute a threat in themselves, for if they are thought to be attributes of his mortal part, he will inspire, as Megara's example shows, a Pelagian worship of man and spread the godless doctrine of Necessity" (p. 179).

This is subtle doctrine, but the text of the play offers little support for it. If these were Hera's reasons for destroying Heracles, why did she try to kill him in the cradle, before he attained such threatening stature (1266 ff.)? His "singular good fortune" consisted of a series of dangerous labors that even Iris calls "bitter" (*pikrous*, 826), and we have it from no less an authority than Lyssa that one reason she is reluctant to carry out Hera's orders is that Heracles in the course of his labors "single-handed restored the worship of the gods which had been overthrown by impious men" (852–53)—a strange activity for a Pelagian hero. It may be true that the word *cholos* "has nothing of sexual vindictiveness in it" (though it is used six times by and about Medea) and that Heracles' reference to Hera's jealousy comes from the depths of despair, but these are not reasons to dismiss so lightly, in favor of fine-spun metaphysics, a motive stated in the play with such dramatic and rhetorical force. "Let the glorious wife of Zeus stamp her foot in the dance . . . for she has accomplished her purpose, brought down the foremost man of Greece in ruin. Who would pray to such a goddess? Jealous of Zeus, for his union with a mortal woman, she has destroyed the benefactor of Greece, though he gave her no cause" (1303 ff.). I do not know any fully satisfactory way of reconciling these sentiments with the famous passage which follows much later in which Heracles repudiates tales of adultery and violence among the gods as the lies of the poets, and it is one of the merits of Burnett's chapter that she tries to do so; but her explanation as a whole demands a resolute determination to see unmerited evil as incomprehensible good, an attitude which is to be seen at its most tragic and religious in Claudel, at its most comic and secular in Doctor Pangloss,[20] but nowhere, so far as I can see, in any writer who used the Greek language before the triumph of Christianity.

It is in the nature of the critic's function that he should attack weak points as well as celebrate strengths; it is also inevitable that the attack should occupy a disproportionate amount of his space, for it demands detailed discussion and the citation of chapter and

20. I am not dragging Doctor Pangloss in by his coattails; Voltaire is invoked by Burnett herself in her discussion of the view that the play is "the poet's open satire on the gods": "it is surely a mistake in method to attribute this Lisbon earthquake style of thinking to a poet who has never for a moment shown that he found the existence of evil on earth incompatible with the idea of the existence of a god in heaven" (p. 176 n. 24). She is right to dismiss the idea that the play is a satire or a rationalist tract, but the question at issue is not the *existence* of gods but the nature of their dealings with humanity, specifically, the reasons for Hera's ferocious intervention.

verse. It will perhaps redress the unavoidable imbalance of this review to end by saying that Burnett's book will delight the discerning reader by the wit and concision of its prose and command his unremitting concentration by the logic of its argument and the learning with which it is supported. For any serious student of Euripides, the book's originality and real achievements make it, quite simply, indispensable.

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