TRIBE AND CITY, CUSTOM AND DECREE IN *CHILDREN OF HERACLES*

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EURIPIDES' *Children of Heracles* is commonly thought of as a lifeless failure, a play that concerns itself with theories instead of with passions, and its rare critics have made this condemnation more specific by showing that the piece undermines its own intellectual pretensions. They find a banal "trend of discussion" that shapes the first four episodes, only to be incontinently reversed in the fifth, and conclude that the poet himself had grown tired of his hypotheses.[1] A quick reading of the play may seem to bear them out; nevertheless I should like to argue that this tragedy is other and better than it has seemed to be. The ideas expounded are not simple-minded; they are analyzed with considerable subtlety, and they lead to a theoretical statement which is quite different from the summarized versions of the "message" of this tragedy—a statement that is by no means destroyed by the events which end the play. It is true that *Children of Heracles* is not an imitation of the lives of unique men and women. Its personages are not psychological quantities at all; they represent aspects of communal life, but still I hope to show that there is conflict and development, suspense and even surprise as they move and meet. The masked abstractions are solemn and wonderful, funny and terrible, though they do not produce pity, and with their help the poet's ratiocination takes on much if not all of the inarguable force of Attic tragedy.

I

The "idea" that dominates *Children of Heracles* is supposed to be Athenian chauvinism, but this is a misconstruction that must be corrected at once. Isolated patriotic strains are to be heard now and then, it is true, but these are always either drowned out by others or used to swell the larger harmony. Insofar as it is an intellectual exercise, the play is a meditation upon divine and human law, and since the city is the secular body most directly concerned, there is naturally a city prominent here. There are indeed two cities, one enslaved to a tyrant and the other free, and of course the free city, represented by Athens, is shown to be superior to the unfree. However, neither the Athens of the *mythos* nor the free city of the play's more general speculation is the subject of the poet's unmixed praise, much less his adulation. Quite the opposite, for the ultimate achievement of the action is the displacement of Athens/city as the best agent and administrator of heaven's law on earth. Fiction and structure together cause Athens to sink as the Heraclids rise and even Athena makes way for Hebe and Heracles,[2] while

1. This summary is not intended to cover the opinions of G. Zuntz, whose complex and contemporary interpretation can only be appreciated in its full form; see *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester, 1955).

2. The initial presumption of Athena's decisive interest in the events of this day (350–52) is

the poet pursues his dramatic discussion of the surpassing merits of the tribe as the true interpreter and defender of the higher law.

As the drama progresses, its action works to discriminate and define the various kinds of law that are known to man. In the two great branches of divine and human regulation the difference between customary practice and statute or decree is marked (though no interest is shown in whether a law is written or not), and a second distinction, between law that prosecutes and law that protects, is hinted at as well. Examples of legislation from the various categories established by the permutation of these notions are put into conflict, and an incomplete ranking is established among them. This final hierarchy is the intellectual achievement of the play, but it is not one that recommends itself easily to a modern sense of law, and this no doubt is why *Children of Heracles* has so often been scorned or misread. Law, according to this piece, is not always the instrument of reason or of humanitarian interests; it is not even necessarily the tool of justice. Only in its lesser forms does it sometimes have these uses, and its lesser forms stand open always to abrogation from above.

The first test match between laws is of a textbook simplicity and it is cast in the least ambiguous of plot forms, that of suppliancy. A judgment scene is natural to this plot and so, with a kind of structural wit, the poet mounts a court case between divine and human law. Heaven's legislation is seen in its customary and general form, for it is represented by the *nomos* of sanctuary, a protective restriction that fosters human life. Human law, on the other hand, appears at its most specific and arbitrary, as a tyrant's decree that enjoins a multiple killing. The first law is embodied for the stage in a group of innocent exiles, children and old people who are the remains of a hero's family, the second in a cynical and violent individual, a man of maturity who speaks for the ruler of a powerful state. And in the judge's seat is the city at its best, an Athens that is pious and free,[3] represented by its curiously reduplicated king.[4]

Each of these almost allegorical figures states the rationale of his position and yet, as is so often the case in tragedy, the turn of the argument does not come just where logic indicates. There are no surprises, however, to be had from the representative of the secular decree. He is in pursuit of runaways (140), and he expects to enforce Argive law within the boundaries of Attica as he has done inside other states, no matter what the local views on extradi-

taken up by the chorus just before the battle, for reiteration (770 ff.), but it is corrected by the messenger who reports on which gods actually took part in the engagement (856–57). The chorus then tempers its claim, reminding us of the goddess' confirming but secondary part in the apotheosis of Heracles (920–22); she is his *epikouros* and she is repaid with the prosperous gift of the tomb of his enemy (1031).

3. Freedom is the essential characteristic of Athens in this play, first claimed, then confirmed: 62, 113, 198, 244–45, 287, 868, 957. The Heraclids exercise, through Macaria, a more private kind of freedom (547 ff.) and by so doing win for themselves an ultimate blessed freedom (873, 874) that is more than political.

4. The two kings are only part of a general doubling of roles which emphasizes the abstract nature of the opening conflict. The visible suppliants, Iolaus and the male Heraclids, are duplicated inside the temple by Alcmena and the girls; the present pursuer is the agent of the absent Eurystheus who will soon appear; the two kings are further repeated, as representatives of the local city, by the chorus of Athenian citizens.

tion may be (142–46). For him a man gains his identity from his state: Ἀργεῖός εἰμι . . . Ἀργεῖος ὤν, he says (134, 139), in proud contradiction of Demophon's suggestion that he is, or should be, a Hellene (130). His state is power, and the rule that it exports is τοὺς κρείσσονας σέβειν (25). At Argos, just actions are those which enforce the sovereign will of the powerful (142–43); justice is naturally punitive (143; cf. 60) and law is specific and secular. The authority of a state like this over its own citizens is absolute; it is not limited by time (punishment may precede crime) or by space ("We make our own justice at home and when we take it abroad, nobody resists," is the gist of the herald's boast, 142–46). The idea that some higher law might inhibit this state in its exercise of power is almost laughable and so, when the custom of sanctuary is explicitly cited against the Argive, his answer is, "That won't be ratified by the Mycenaeans" (ταῦτ' οὐ δοκήσει τοῖς Μυκηναίοις, 261). When he says that death has been decreed for the Heraclids "after the local fashion" (νόμοισι τοῖς ἐκεῖθεν ἐψηφισμένους θανεῖν, 141–42), his remark might seem to indicate that honor was paid at least to some traditional form of government at Argos which might theoretically control the state by defining it. It is not, however, the constitutional *nomos* of Pindar's Second Pythian (86) that he means, or even the habit of public virtue that Isocrates saw as a check to too much law (*Areop.* 41, *Paneg.* 78). This Argive *nomos* proves to be no more than the tyrant's will, for Eurystheus will later describe the same decree of death as an action of his own, taken by him to free himself from personal enemies (1003).

The herald inhabits an exclusively secular world. Even an altar is for him a secular place and he sees a suppliant as one in search of a civic, not a heavenly, ally (56). Unlike others who criticize the custom of sanctuary, he limits himself to worldly taunts (259); his skepticism is such that he cannot claim that the purity of altars is defiled by the presence of the guilty as, for example, the Furies do (*Eum.* 715–16; cf. *Ion* 1315). His material preoccupations make a thorough cynic of him; he assumes that all the world is interested only in profit (τί κερδανεῖς; 154; cf. 3 and 21–22) and so quite naturally he tries to bribe the judge. He would teach Demophon the ways of the tyrant city, urging him to abandon his Athenian foolishness and choose, not the helpless, but the strong and fortunate (175–78) who can make a fine return (155–57).[5] In the same sense he threatens retaliation, should the judgment go against him (160–61). Justice, for him, is achieved when two powerful parties feel neither shame nor harm while exploiting a weaker third (255); if Demophon is not strong enough to ignore his scruples, let him turn his gaze away while the altar is violated and the suppliants betrayed. The only wrong action is one that meets with punishment, and to be punished it has first to be observed.[6]

The Argive, then, speaks as we should have prophesied. It is in the speech for heavenly *nomos* that the unexpected is heard, or rather, the expected is

5. This bribe is transformed at the play's end by the oracle of Apollo, to become Eurystheus' promise of heroic protection to Athens against future attacks from Heraclid descendants (1043).

6. His assumption is much like that of Antiphon *On Truth* 2. 40: τὰ οὖν νόμιμα παραβαίνων, ἢ ἂν λάθῃ τοὺς ὁμολογήσαντας, καὶ αἰσχύνης καὶ ζημίας ἀπήλλακται, μὴ λαθὼν δ' οὔ (I am indebted to George Walsh for this parallel).

not, for the supernatural quality of the sanctions in question is quite left out of the argument. The gods' interest in the custom of suppliancy has been stated already by the chorus (*εἰκὸς θεῶν ἱκτῆρας αἰδεῖσθαι, κτλ.*, 101 ff.) and by Iolaus (69–72). Those at an altar are under the protection of a Lady Justice (*πότνια Δίκα*, 104) and this means that a breach of sanctuary, even if it were peaceably arranged among the secular powers, would be an irreligious (*ἄθεον*) act (107–8). These facts are central to the case, but they are taken for granted by the suppliant chief as he makes his formal address to the court; there is no use repeating them, since the herald is so obviously an unbeliever and Demophon as plainly a man of piety. What the old man does instead is show that there is, in the case at hand, a breach not only of divine *nomos* but of a higher secular law as well.

Like Apollo in *Eumenides*, Iolaus' first move is a quick defensive stroke based on a quibble of jurisdiction. Eurystheus has no power over the Heraclids, he says, because the Argives themselves have put this tribe outside the reach of Argive law by confiscating their properties and denying their rights. They have done this by decree (*ψήφῳ δοκῆσαν*, 186) and in so doing have forced the exiles out into the realm of general Hellenic custom where true justice is (194). It is the custom of the gods that they do not allow anyone to interfere with their jurisdiction within the boundaries of a *temenos*, and it is the custom of the Greeks that no one shall interfere with the rule of local authorities within the boundaries of a given state. Something like this line of thinking brings Iolaus to the core of his argument, which is that it is in the best interests of any state that it should recognize certain theoretical limits to state power, since otherwise the rule of whatever state is strongest will extend over all of Greece, bringing another and less pleasing form of limitation (189–90). Athens must not only recognize her own obligation to the customary rules concerning exiles; she must also give those rules an active implementation, because if she does not she will in effect recognize and implement a decree of the Argive state, and so herself become unfree (198). A city that would be free, then, will necessarily admit restraint, but restraint from a source that is different from and higher than itself.[7]

The case for divine law is thus entangled with that for secular Hellenic custom, and a presumptive identity of interest is established between the gods and the city that wishes to be free. In this particular fictional situation the law of the gods is congruent with human law and with political advantage as well, and so Demophon, as he resumes all the points in favor of the suppliants, has an easy time as he makes his ruling. Recognizing powers and imperatives beyond those of the polity, he works down a scale of reasons for his choice of the Heraclid interest over that of Argos. He must aid the suppliants because they are at an altar of Zeus (238); this argument recognizes the absolute pre-eminence of divine over civil authority, in an instance that custom has defined. He will aid the suppliants because they are related

7. For the idea that submission to a general law is peculiarly Hellenic, cf. Hdt. 7. 104; Eur. *Med.* 536–38, *Or.* 487. There is a good recent discussion by J. de Romilly, *La loi dans la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1971), pp. 18–23, 40–43. For the second major argument of Iolaus, from kinship, see below, p. 14.

to him and because they can claim a return from him for Heracles' benefactions to Theseus (240); this argument expresses the group imperative of a tribal society. He cannot refuse to aid the suppliants because such a refusal would be a thing of shame (242); here is the individual imperative of aristocratic society, as the Greeks imagined it to have been. And finally Demophon cannot refuse, because if he did he could no longer claim to inhabit a free land (244–45). This is his political motive, but it must be observed that he does not say that if he gave in to Eurystheus he could no longer rule a free land, for Demophon is speaking here as citizen, not as king, of the city where freedom is.

In its broadest outline this case establishes the priority of customary divine law over statutory secular law, heavenly *nomos* over earthly *psephismata*. The scene offers no analysis of their relations, but it creates a strong supposition that earthly *nomos* will often be identical with the *nomos* of the gods[8] (they are inextricably confused in the choral summation at 362–70), and that together they provide a justice that protects the weak (329–30). A breach of the sacred prohibition that keeps altars inviolable and suppliants safe is at once πόλει τ' ὄνειδος καὶ θεῶν ἀτιμία (72; cf. 61–62, where the altar and the free city are the joint protectors of the Heraclids). This area of common interest between the two forms of customary law leads to a second unexplored supposition, that secular *nomos*, when it is independent of divine law, will yet be like that law and take precedence over secular decree. Certainly this was the trend of Iolaus' argument. And finally, the distinction between the free city and the tyrant's city leaves a strong presumption that the earthly decree of the first would be superior to that of the second. At this point in the play, then, we have a legal hierarchy that is clear and reassuring; reading from the top it runs: heavenly *nomos*, earthly *nomos*, (free city's decree), tyrant's decree. The state has recognized this order and has shown itself able to interpret and presumably to defend that higher law which, according to Edmund Burke, "it is not in the power of any community, or of the whole race of man, to alter" (*Works*, Bohn's British Classics, vol. 6 [London, 1856], p. 21).

The next contest of laws demands much more subtlety from the spectator. In it custom is once again pitted against a decree, but with altered definitions and a changed outcome, for this time it is the traditional law that must take second place. The custom in question is again jointly sanctioned by heaven and earth; once more it is a life-fostering proscription, and once again it is interpreted and defended by the city—the same free city that supported the rule of sanctuary. The single difference only intensifies these positive qualities, for the rule in question—that against shedding kin blood—particularly expresses the will to survive of the ancient, pre-political tribe. The only possible contradiction to such a law is the commanding voice of a sovereign god, and that is how the challenge comes in the second, sacrifice episode of this tragedy.

A unanimity of oracles and prophecies has announced with unquestionable clarity (403–5) that the coming battle between Athens and Argos (between sponsors of divine law and those who claim to set their own

8. A commonplace assumption: see De Romilly, *La loi dans la pensée grecque*, pp. 26–38.

decrees above that law) can be won only if a noble girl is sacrificed. Persephone is to be honored with aristocratic human blood, though religious and secular custom together (413–14), Hellenic practice and Athens' particular sense of civic virtue, all resist a killing of this sort (488–89). A divine decree that is the heavenly parallel to the decree of Eurystheus calls for death where ordinary practice would outlaw it. Both laws presumably express the will of god and so they cannot be inimical—no more are Macaria and Demophon—but they are certainly mutually incompatible. Each makes the other inoperative until one or the other can assert its priority. In dramatic terms this means a situation of deadlock broken, depicted in a scene where the dynamism comes, not from conflict, but from persuasion and agreement, as characters who are allies and friends work out the relative obligations inherent in custom and decree when both have their source in divine authority.

As this second scene begins Demophon has already heard the arguments of the two laws, the decree having been represented presumably by various priests and prophets, the custom by the voices of his noblemen and that of his own heart. He has judged, as he did before, in favor of the generally accepted religious rule (389 ff.), and he explains his reasons to the Heraclids, reasons that are observably more political now than they were before. External war he was prepared to face, but not internal stasis, and this not just because the commonwealth would suffer but because he himself might not be able to maintain his throne (415 ff.). The Athenian view of justice seems to have changed since the first episode, for earlier in the day there was a heavenly justice, *Potnia Dike* (104), that demanded a true regard for divine law, and there was also an abstract earthly justice built on Hellenic custom as well as upon reason, knowledge, and fairness (179–80, 252). The practice of this justice was meant to help the helpless (329–30), and before it a just deed could always be defended with words that would strike any fair-thinking man as fine (368–70). The morning's justice demanded protection of the suppliants; now the king, dismissing the same suppliants, says to them: "Save yourselves and this land, that I may not be subject to slander and rebellion. After all, I am not a barbarian tyrant; in order to be treated justly myself I must do only just deeds" (421–24). The continued protection of the refugees at Zeus's sanctuary is suddenly an "unjust" deed which he is afraid to perform because of public opinion. *Potnia Dike* and her laws have withdrawn into the skies and justice now is only what the nobles in an oligarchy like to think it is. Now, in direct contrast to the absolute statement that was made before (368–70), there comes a relative one: an action may be just and fine in the eyes of some, but folly in the view of other men (417).

In spite of his descent from the ideal to the real, however,[9] Demophon is clearly still meant to be admirable of his kind, as good as a ruler *can* be. Told that his city's material survival depends upon the virgin sacrifice, he yet believes that its survival as the sort of city it has been—one that is

9. J. W. Fitton, "The *Suppliant Women* and the *Herakleidai* of Euripides," *Hermes* 89 (1961): 454, notes the change in Demophon and sharply observes that this scene demonstrates a risk "that the objective morality emerging from the agon scene should disappear and we relapse into the prudential morality of contemporary Athenian politics."

Hellenic, humane, and free—depends upon his resisting that sacrifice. He chooses to try to continue the city in its ordinary customs, but the problem is more difficult than he realizes. Athens, now defined as the defender of heavenly *nomos* on earth, may very well be annihilated unless she herself can violate the sort of law she fights for. Demophon's second decision, though it seems to be in perfect accord with his first, is thus about to nullify his previous stand. As the fiction tells it, this means that in order to be itself—a city that is neither tyrannical nor barbarian—Athens will have to betray the suppliants to the mercies of a barbarian tyrant. Demophon will not hand the Heraclids roughly over to Eurystheus, but his persuasions and apologies are meant to turn them out of Attica.[10]

Athens is doubly in danger, for both its actual and its ideal constitutions threaten to crumble, and its king is paralyzed. Because he would regard one branch of divinely sanctioned custom, Demophon refuses to enforce a specific divine decree, and so makes himself powerless in respect to another of the gods' customary laws which he had promised, in Athens' name, to defend. He is saved, however, and his strength is restored to him and to his city by one of the helpless representatives of sacred law. Macaria cuts the stubborn knot by offering herself as one who willingly obeys the gods' decree. In a sense she sidesteps the legal issue, since she does not have to defy the tabu on kin bloodshed, but the poet-philosopher takes care of this point by making her ask Iolaus to defy that law (560). Quite unnecessarily she begs him to wield the knife, making it clear that, in her opinion, the call for a sacrifice takes precedence even over this most solemn tribal prohibition. (Iolaus of course refuses, thus proving his humanity and preparing the way for the exclusively feminine rite which Demophon will provide.)

Macaria also takes for granted the temporary abrogation of the ordinary laws of sacrifice, wordlessly, as part of her simple rush of spirit toward obedience to god and service to her kin. Like Iolaus in the previous episode, she leaves the mysterious and inarguable sanctions to justify themselves and explains her own decision to obey this divine decree on secular grounds. She could not be guilty of ingratitude toward Athens (503–4), nor would she wish to be charged with cowardice (517–19). She has certain fair fame within her grasp and she can also serve her family (588) and those who have befriended them (505–6). And in effect she does restore not only the power but the spirit of King Demophon, giving him back his old sense of justice as a thing that is easily recognized, balanced and beautiful. A fine response to a fine action is what he calls justice, after she has promised herself to Persephone (568–70).

Macaria's rescue of Demophon and Athens puts a new top term upon the hierarchy of law that was established in the previous episode. The overall pattern is now symmetrical, as a paramount divine decree at the summit answers to the secular decree that stands at the base of the scheme. The divine decree, like that of the human tyrant, has been a call for blood, while the exemplary custom was the civilized prohibition of a certain sort of

10. J. A. Spranger believed that Demophon had repented of his decision to help the suppliants and had rigged the oracles as a way of getting out of his promise; see "The Political Element in the *Heraclidae*," *CQ* 19 (1925): 123 ff.

killing, and so the precedent established in this test case is extraordinarily clear. It proves the absolute supremacy of the decree of a god, as such, independent of any quality of worldly benefaction or utility which its specific expression may or may not hold. Its priority is essential, emanating directly from the nature of the legislating power and not from the particular merits of the human matter involved.

The third moot case is once again explicitly legal in its ramifications, as the first was, but the second was not. The problem is posed in the realm of secular law this time, and at first glance it seems to be the original one restated.[11] It is not, however, another contest between general Greek custom and willful individual decree (though this is the way that Eurystheus tries to argue in his own defense). It is instead a contest between two sorts of secular decree, one a general and life-protecting decision of the city (the free city whose strength was described in the first episode, its limitations in the second), and the other the specific and punitive demand of an individual who represents the archaic family (the tribe that represented divine custom in the first episode and executed a divine decree in the second scene).

The fictional situation takes a bit of explaining. The first contest between heavenly *nomos* and secular decree has led to an open battle between Athens and Eurystheus, the battle that could not be won without obedience to a divine decree. That piece of heavenly tyranny has justified itself pragmatically, and not only has the secular tyrant been defeated but the original beneficiaries of heavenly law have proved to be much stronger than anyone could have supposed. They have fought in their own defense and they themselves, the erstwhile helpless, have captured the man who had pursued them with his Argive decree. Now, according to tribal practice, they have placed their captive in the hands of the chief of their family, whose right it is to decide whether he should live or die.

Alcmena is the oldest Heraclid and when the enemy is brought to her she decrees that Eurystheus shall die. In her view it is Justice herself who has captured him (941). The chorus leader objects; she cannot kill him (961) because there is an Athenian decree (*τοῖς . . . προστάταισιν . . . δοκεῖ*, 964; cf. *δοκεῖ πόλει*, 1019) which stipulates that an enemy captured alive must not be put to death, but is to be released (1019). It is important to notice the movement of the brief exchange which establishes this conflict of jurisdiction over the life of Eurystheus.[12] "Does some *nomos* stand in the way of his

11. L. Bergson, *Die Relativität der Werte im Frühwerke des Euripides* (Stockholm, 1971), p. 98, reports that Alcmena's action constitutes an attack upon the *nomos* of gratitude; cf. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 37, who speaks of the "*nomos* of human fellowship" and the rule of *charis anti charitos* as being negated in this scene. These descriptions are attractive for the apparent symmetry they seem to establish between the first and the fifth episodes, but they do not accurately describe the Euripidean situation. At this particular moment Athens and the Heraclids are quits in the exchange of benefactions, Macaria's death having repaid Demophon's initial support (503–6), and the two parties having then equally fought for their mutual defense and gained mutual advantages. Alcmena thus does not owe the Athenians a debt of gratitude. She is, however, instrumental in bringing about the heavenly benefactions bestowed on her erstwhile hosts by Eurystheus' death, and so Athens actually ends the play in the Heraclids' debt.

12. The assignment of voices is uncertain here (961–74). Both 962 and 963 reflect the Heraclid point of view and so 962 is often given to the messenger, 963 to Alcmena. However, unless one follows Zuntz (*Political Plays*, pp. 126 ff.) in making the whole exchange one between Alcmena and an extraordinarily arrogant and pro-Athenian Heraclid servant, this arrangement gives the messen-

death?" Alcmena asks (963). "Rather it has been proscribed by the authorities of this land" (964) is the Athenian answer, and the localism of the proscription is emphasized again a few lines later, when it is said that refusal to recognize this law would be an act of distrust toward the Attic land (968). Later (1009 ff.) Eurystheus will claim that this Athenian decree is reinforced by general Hellenic custom and that it has a religious sanction (1012). He seems to refer to the practice of clemency, which assumed that a captive who had been promised his life could not then be put to death,[13] but his citation is irrelevant since in the present case there has been no grant of mercy. The city whose decree is in question has neither taken him nor released him; instead, there has been a postponed decision by his Heraclid captor, giving the right to kill or spare to the tribal chief.[14]

A test of strength between a tribal and a civil decree has thus been cleanly prepared, but it is resolved in an unexpected way. It looks (1020 ff.) as if Alcmena and the tribe will be preponderant, once more on a point of jurisdiction. Let the city's decree apply to the corpse of the captive, her own to his life (1024–25) is the proposal the old lady makes, and the chorus is plainly ready to listen to persuasion (1021). From the first they have agreed that the survival of such a one as Eurystheus is a piece of injustice—the first injustice the tyrant had ever "suffered" (970)—and they have opposed his death only because their local statute obliged them to do so. It is not the tribe alone, however, that prevails over the city's law with its older justice, for at this point Eurystheus, the bone of contention, brings a new element into the contest. He experiences a sudden recognition, finding in this present moment all the elements predicted for the moment of his fated death, and this recognition changes everything. In the fiction, his discovery transforms Eurystheus from an unwilling to a willing victim, and in the realm of legal speculation it adds a supernatural sanction to one of the contesting laws. Alcmena's tribal decree of death for the Argive king proves to be identical in its content with Apollo's prophecy—a heavenly decree concerning Eurystheus before which the city's ordinance quite naturally gives way. It is to be noted, however, that Athens' decree and the city's respect for its observance are both parts of the necessary scheme predicted by the oracle; the statute of the *polis* is thus recognized by Apollo even as it is relegated to a subordinate place.

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ger just one line, then leaves him silent in what he has made a three-way exchange. Alcmena could speak both 962 and 963, before the stichomythy settles down, but the two questions are awkward if they come from the same mouth. For these reasons it seems best to assume that the messenger leaves at the end of his speech and that a line is lost after 962 in which the answer is something like, "Yes, in vain, if your only desire is to kill." At 967 Zuntz objects that the chorus could not know what had happened on the battlefield; indeed it could not, and that is why it cannot answer Alcmena's question about Hyllus directly. The chorus leader has to take refuge in an oblique sarcasm.

13. Compare Thuc. 3. 66. 2, where the Plataean killing of Theban captives, *to whom life had been promised*, is done παρανόμως, and 3. 67. 6, where the Spartans are asked to avenge them: ἀμύνατε . . . τῷ τῶν Ἑλλήνων νόμῳ.

14. Eurystheus' argument belongs to the ironic dramatic action, not to the theoretical analysis of law, for with it the poet has made a man who was ready to violate customary law in its most sacred form finally turn to that same law when he himself needs saving; in the same way, he who has persecuted the Heraclids, though they were his kin, tries to call upon kin solidarity, to save his own life (987–88).

The one to die assents to his death and the ones to kill (an anonymous group of Heraclid servants, 1050–51) do so with the citizens as formal witnesses (1053), though the victim and the slayers all come from beyond the city's bounds. In disputing and then finally arranging this death that heaven has decreed, the chorus and Alcmena thus stand to one another very much as Demophon and Macaria did in the second episode. Once again there is something which the city cannot do, according to its principles, and which it yet must do, if it is to survive to practice those principles. Athens cannot defy its own particular decree and remain Athens, and yet Eurystheus must die if the city is to be strong and virtuous in the sense of rewarding its friends and punishing its enemies. In this special case, if Eurystheus should be allowed, according to the city's decree, to return to Argos, the whole achievement of the battle just fought (of the sacrifice just offered) would be thrown away. Freedom from invasion had been won for Athens (867–68), freedom to return to parental properties and rights for the Heraclids (873–78), but neither of these saving advantages will endure if this king of Argos lives. Even when Eurystheus' death proves to be an event enjoined by god, the city remains tangled in its obedience to its own law and helpless to administer heaven's command. The deadlock is broken, as it was before, by one who does not belong to the city and is not touched by its decrees. Alcmena, a Heraclid and an alien, dares to act where Athens does not dare, and in so doing she ensures the continuation of the profits that her granddaughter's deed had won provisionally. For a second time a divine decree has imposed duties which the city cannot carry out, and for a second time the female representative of an ancient tribe has been able to respond obediently.

This final conflict of laws seems to establish the tribal decree as superior to the city's decree, though the fiction avoids a sharp statement of this order of rank. The lowest category of law, that of the secular decree, is thus by inference divided into three. The law of the tyrant is at the very bottom, the law of the free city next, and the law of the tribe above, closest to the next general category, that of customary law. The final schema can be illustrated in this way:

Divine Decree (life-destroying)
Persephone's demand
Apollo's oracle

Divine Nomos (life-fostering)	=	*Secular Nomos* (life-fostering)
sanctuary		asylum
rules of animal sacrifice		respect for boundaries
tabu on kin bloodshed		(clemency)

Secular Decree
- of tribe (life-destroying)
  Alcmena's vengeance
- of city (life-fostering)
  Athens' return of captives
- of tyrant (life-destroying)
  Eurystheus' execution of potential rivals

The free city that so proudly championed the customary law of heaven has been found to be less able than the tribe in the enforcement of the more august divine decree. But this is only natural. Heavenly commands that have "mellowed into legality," rules that have undergone the rationalizing process of long observance, that have survived because they are socially useful, are well defended by a rational and socially useful institution such as the city is. These, however, are not the only laws of heaven, and justice is not always the humane and reasonable process, mutually satisfactory to heaven and earth, that it appears to be in the first episode (179–80). Sometimes justice will take on instead the massive and inscrutable form of the providential plan (as with the benefits to be bestowed by Eurystheus' tomb) and sometimes it will demand, like Pindar's *Nomos Basileus*, that high-handed violence must be done (Frag. 169 Sn.). When law comes in this way, fresh and incomprehensible from god, its miraculous and arbitrary decrees may seem to threaten the rational institutions of society. The city, paralyzed by its own smaller justice, will be unable to respond, but the passionate code of the more savage tribe may allow *it* to obey.

II

This is the "statement" of *Children of Heracles*, insofar as it is a meditation upon the various forms of law. Insofar as it is truly a drama, its subject is this tribe that can listen to heaven and save the city from its own necessary humanity. The hero of the play is the *genos*, and this is what the principals—Iolaus, Macaria, the invisible Hyllus, Alcmena, and the two groups of children who are seen but not heard—represent in their exuberant multiplicity. Iolaus spells it all out in his opening speech. The best man is δίκαιος τοῖς πέλας (2);[15] he is so by blood and birth (πέφυκ', 2), and being so he is useful to his city and pleasing to his friends. The inner group that is not quite synonymous with city or friends, the group toward which one's most essential duties are felt, is the tribe (41, 45). Iolaus himself has chosen it over city and property (14), freely joining in the Heraclid exile (7) because of his sense of kinship. Indeed, the first rule of this old man is σέβειν τὸ συγγενές (6);[16] in following it you cannot expect profit (3) but as a just and loyal man you never feel ashamed (28–30). His rule of reverence for the tribe is contrasted with that other rule of reverence for the strong that Argos has been teaching (τοὺς κρείσσονας σέβειν, 25).

The mixed band of Heraclids feels the tragic overturn of this play, providing a many-faceted principal for its shifting temper and its complex tale. This tribe begins as a persecuted exile and ends as the honored ally

15. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, pp. 109–110, argues that a line has dropped out after line 2, and that the shape of Iolaus' remarks is as follows: "A just man is an asset to his neighbors ⟨at great cost to himself⟩ whereas the man of profit is useless to the city and harsh to his associates, but serves himself very well." If, on the other hand, the passage is complete, with the whole of the second element intended to be read back into the first, then its tenor is: "One man is by nature just to his kin, another gives himself up to gain and this second (unlike the first) is useless to the city, harsh to his associates, while he does the best for himself." The assertion about the just man is not that he suffers, but that he is useful to city, good to associates, but does not serve himself.

16. Cf. lines 26–27, where four συν-compounds give a preliminary emphasis to the συγγενές at line 30, describing what kinship really means: life led in common, evils as well as goods being shared.

of the *polis*, about to reclaim its own confiscated powers in its paternal homeland. Appearing now as old, now as young, now as male, and now as female, it runs almost the entire gamut of tragic experience as it moves from dependence through self-help to the salvation of others and then on to the final destruction of an enemy. It plays at the center of two actions that turn up into good fortune and two that sink down into bad as the poet transmutes a suppliant plot to produce a praxis of return,[17] making the change by way of a sacrifice, a recognition, and a vengeance deed.

In the first 350 lines a miniature suppliant play is performed, its scale so delicately reduced that the entire action of the Aeschylean *Suppliants* fits without a squeeze. Only the arrival of the pursuer in what is still the prologue betrays the poet's haste. One thing, however, is missing: the tableau of rescue completed is never staged, either here or later in the play. The champion ought to mark his final substitution of political for religious asylum by solemnly raising the suppliants and moving them into his own civil realm, but here this clinching gesture never occurs. As a matter of fact its reverse is played, for Demophon proposes that the Heraclids should move into Athens (340–41) and they refuse (344–45). Their rejection of the city as their haven leaves them, of course, on stage to continue as the drama's principals, but it also leaves the suppliant plot in suspension, and it strongly suggests that the city will not, in the end, be the savior of this tribe.

In this first episode the passive tribe is persecuted by the tyrant's city and temporarily saved by a free city because this host-city practices the virtues of the tribe. Through Iolaus the *genos*, honoring kin ties (τὸ συγγενές, 6, 30) and coming from a father who was γενναῖος (53), makes its case on the basis of *genos* and τὸ συγγενές (209, 213, 224, 229). Demophon admits the claim (240, 305) because their εὐγενεία (233) is mirrored by his own (302, 324; cf. 825). Indeed, Iolaus treats the rescue of the suppliants as if it derived more directly from the *eugeneia* of the king than from the sanctity of the sacred refuge (324–25). This ruler knows piety, reverence for kin, and gratitude, and he sees that these ancestral values add to his city's strength, since without them it would cease to be free. In the next episode the city's crucial need for the virtues of the tribe is demonstrated in a different and more dangerous way, as Athens is forced to turn to the alien tribe for its own salvation.

The battle demanded by the suppliant plot may be lost unless a well-born virgin dies, and the whole initial agglomeration of suppliants and protecting city discover that their common survival depends upon one of the Heraclids. It is the king of Athens who now speaks like a suppliant, lamenting his *amechania* (466, 472; cf. 148, 329, 487, 492 for the *amechania* of the formal suppliants), and it is the girl who ends his weak passivity with her heroic decision. Through her the *genos* performs actions that are *gennaios*, proposed in noble words (537, 552; cf. 464 of Iolaus); the *genos* stands behind Macaria's action (479, 545, 590); she is the proper victim because she comes from

17. The return is first hinted at in 310–11: ἦν δ' οὖν ποθ' ὑμῖν νόστος ἐς πάτραν φανῇ, κτλ. It is briefly stated as the Heraclid purpose at 347, resumed by Macaria at 586–87, then made a particular concern of Alcmena's at 645, as it is identified as the promise of Hyllus. Alcmena triumphantly announces return as the fruit of the battle (873–78), and security in that return as the final achievement of the action which terminates in Eurystheus' death (1051–52).

a πατὴρ εὐγενής (409), and this same fact gives her her imperative (513; cf. 509). Her descent enables her to perform worthily in respect to her father and to her own nobility (626–27).

With her death Macaria can repay the champion city (503 ff.) and serve her family as well (590), and so her sacrifice is both city-oriented, like that of Menoeceus, and made for love, as Alcestis' was. (Note the choral πρό τ' ἀδελφῶν καὶ γᾶς, 622—"for your brothers and our land.") With such a reduplicated motive the girl can hardly hesitate, and the poet exaggerates the ease of her decision by taking every difficulty out of her way. There has been an unprecedented consensus among the mantic sources as to the need for a victim, and the sacrifice is to be made to a goddess universally revered, so that no fault can be found with the rite itself, though it is extraordinary. Macaria does not know Iphigenia's wrenching taste for life and she does not have to listen to an Ismene who tells her that her deed will be shameful and unwomanly. She meets with nothing but praise and encouragement as she moves directly and smoothly from the altar of her refuge to the altar of her death, reminding us that a suppliant is already in a sense god's property. The single small frustration of Iolaus' refusal to officiate is quickly covered by the magnificent costume and decor that Demophon promises for the exclusively feminine rite (567 ff.), and Macaria's exit thus becomes the spectacular high point of the tragedy.[18] The chorus of old men sings its praises,[19] her brothers (perhaps her sisters, too) mime their farewells, and the women of the city come to meet her—she cannot leave the stage alone—and to robe her, before they lead her off to Kore's shrine (cf. 528–29).

There has been no question about what Macaria's death would purchase; she has bought strong hope for Athens and the Heraclids and eternal fame for herself by walking the straight path that the drama has prepared for her. Her decision is so easy that it is almost nontragic, but this is not by the poet's fault or oversight.[20] Macaria is not the lone principal of a full-scale sacrifice tragedy; she is instead one of a ring of figures who will pass this dramatic action from one to another, twisting its ribbons into a rope. Macaria has been denied the pathos of an Alcestis and the alienating strength of an Antigone because she represents the triumphant Heraclid tribe, a tribe which is not sacrificing itself but is rather demonstrating its revival through her decision to die. She has been made, in moral stature, the exact equal of the king of Athens of the first episode, and as she goes to her death she radiates something like the near complacency with which he at first faced his battle. She has been built to the same scale as that initial champion because her figure is meant to blot his out. She is now the champion of the Heraclids, one of their own blood who has replaced the foreign savior

18. The exit is so filled with honor for Macaria that there is no need to posit a lost scene to account for the report of the Argument: ταύτην μὲν οὖν εὐγενῶς ἀποθανοῦσαν ἐτίμησαν.

19. The chorus in its praise adds another to the list of σέβειν phrases; to the cynical τοὺς κρείσσονας σέβειν, the familial τὸ συγγενὲς σέβειν, and the political γῆν ἐλεύθεραν σέβειν, they append a moral and pedagogical θανάτους ἀγαθῶν σέβειν (627–28).

20. Most critics remark the flatness of the scene and complain of Macaria's failure to engage their sympathies, charging these flaws to poetic lassitude. One, however, was so outraged by what he called the "awful weakness and abysmal bathos" of Macaria's lines that he refused to admit Euripidean authorship, arguing that the whole sacrifice action was a late interpolation; see J. H. McLean, "The *Heraclidae* of Euripides," *AJP* 55 (1954): 197–226.

(compare 586–87 to 310–11). More than this, Macaria has become the savior's savior, for she rescues the Athenian king from the threat of military defeat as well as from the embarrassment of his political *amechania.*

Thanks to Macaria the children of Heracles occupy a new position in their tragedy, for they are no longer the passive receivers of aid. In her final instructions, their sister says to them, "Try to save yourselves from death" (577), and she suggests that they may yet return to Argos (586–87). Through her they have begun to act upon their own fates as architects of their own release; they are coming of age as true Heraclids, and this is just what Iolaus says of their agent, the girl who is to die. The seed of her resolve is to be found in Heracles' engendering—she is his and the child of no other (539; repeated by the chorus at 626–27). The sacrifice has been arranged with a lulling smoothness, but, nevertheless, the change that it works in the essential character and activity of the principals leaves the structure of the tragedy in a precarious state. If, instead of being female, childish, or ancient, the Heraclids continue to change and arrive at male maturity, their helpless attitude will no longer be suitable. Can they return to their proper passivity, now that they have participated in a heroic decision, and can the Demophon who had to be saved by a girl reassert himself as champion, so as to finish the suppliant plot by saving them? These are questions that the audience at a suppliant play did not expect to face, and so the scene that follows Macaria's exit becomes the focus of an unusual anticipation. It should offer resolutions to some at least of these unfamiliar fictional and structural concerns.

In Attic tragedy the final departure of a victim to his sacrifice, like the exit of a pursuer of suppliants who has threatened war, means, as a rule, that a messenger will next appear. At this point in our play there would ordinarily be an account of Macaria's final words and gestures, with a discussion of burial plans with a grieving relative, or else there would be a report of the battle that both the suppliant and the sacrifice actions have prepared. Neither is supplied; the battle description is postponed, and about Macaria there is total silence once the girl has gone.[21] With both plots waiting for a messenger, we get instead another creature entirely, one who belongs to neither of the playlets already viewed and who enters from a scene of action we had known nothing of.[22]

The stranger is a servant of Hyllus, and with his first gesture he sketches an answer to the question of whether or not the Heraclids will continue as feeble suppliants. He brings news from an absent branch of the clan, but

21. Zuntz has shown that the once popular theory of a missing scene is to be rejected; see "Is the *Heraclidae* Mutilated?" *CQ* 41 (1947): 48 ff. A softened modern taste had called for a report of Macaria's death, and for lamentations by Alcmena, but such a scene, useful in *Hecuba* or *Troades*, would here have confused the play's close. Wilamowitz wanted Alcmena's vengeance upon Eurystheus to be motivated by, even justified by, Macaria's death, but the woman herself thinks more clearly than this. She would punish Eurystheus for deeds that originated with him, not for those Hera asked him to perform, and certainly not for a demand that came from Persephone and had nothing to do with him at all. Zuntz insists ("Is the *Heraclidae* Mutilated?" p. 51) that Alcmena does not even know of Macaria's death; better perhaps to say that her knowledge or lack of it is not an element in the drama, as Euripides presents it.

22. At 45 it is said that Hyllus is searching for another refuge for the suppliants, should this one fail; there is no suggestion that he might be raising an army, though πύργος has metaphorically a military sound.

before he even identifies himself he delivers the line that should have been spoken by Demophon. "Raise yourself," he says to the chief of the suppliants, using the phrase of the formal champion (635; cf. *Andr.* 717), and Iolaus, almost as if he recognized the convention, asks at once if Hyllus is coming as their savior (640). The servant's affirmative shows that he had a right to his gesture; he behaved as one who raises suppliants because he represents a brother of Macaria's who is now in his turn elbowing Demophon out of the role of champion. There is a promise of self-wrought good fortune for the Heraclids now, for Hyllus has not been fearfully looking for yet another refuge, but has instead been raising an army, proving that the tribe is no longer helpless and dependent upon the city of Athens. Macaria's sacrifice seems to have bought even more than she bargained for, since Heraclids have quite suddenly become warriors who can fight in their own cause (664). The unlikely transformation of its tribal principals alters both the structure and the mood of the tragedy, and Euripides has marked the point of change with a scene of lightweight parody.

First there is an instant of absurdity as Alcmena, making her initial entrance, mistakes the friendly servant of her grandson for an agent of Eurystheus and threatens him with all the wrath of her quavering antiquity (646). Then, like some Merope or Creusa writ small, she recognizes her mistake and is ready, not fifteen lines later, to embrace the man she shook her fist at. Next comes another postage-stamp replica of a familiar tragic movement as Iolaus decides to go to war. The servant tries to dissuade him and so creates a vignette that has an irreverent likeness to the most highly charged instant in the Aeschylean *Seven*. There, the exchange between a dissuading chorus and a determined soldier builds toward a call for armor, the onstage arming of the warrior, and his exit toward the battle site; here also the exchange terminates in a call for arms. When the servant asks Iolaus how he expects to fight without equipment, the old man sends him to bring the votive weapons from the sanctuary.

With the servant temporarily gone from this three-actor scene, the two who remain engage in a significant bit of dialogue in which the poet moves straight to the subject of Zeus. Iolaus, reassuring Alcmena about being left alone, explains, "I know that Zeus will watch over your affairs" (717). "Pheu!" says the old lady, disregarding reverence and metrics equally. Then she continues: "Zeus will not hear me speak open blasphemy, but he knows whether or not he has dealt reverently with me!" (718–19; cf. *Alc.* 10 for the same notion that a god might or might not be *hosios* in his dealings with a mortal). Creusa attacks Apollo in much the same way, and the similarity continues, for Alcmena, like Creusa, will admit, before the play is over, that her divine lover has after all served their son well. Even at this point her surly insinuations fall short of true solemnity; the "girl betrayed by a god" becomes inevitably comical when portrayed by an octogenarian.

The last brief section of this transitional third episode is reminiscent of the Teiresias–Cadmus scene from the *Bacchae*. Iolaus, faced with the weight of the sacred arms, agrees that it will be best not to put them on but to have the servant carry them (726–27). He asks for a supporting arm as well (727–28), and, like the two old Thebans, he would surely call a carriage

if there were one to be had. His request for help lets the slave ask whether such a doughty warrior needs a tutor to lead him (729) and it gives the old fellow a chance for some comic business. He rattles his ancient parts and apostrophizes his flabby arm (740), much as Creusa's foolish old servant apostrophizes his foot before beginning his bold deed (*Ion* 1041). Then, supported by the other, this companion of Heracles sets out for the battlefield. He and through him the Heraclid tribe have been treated with a happy irony, for all have been as blind to his coming upset into youth and strength as tragic characters usually are to a coming fall.

The fact that the tragedy has changed its course is choreographically marked by the departure of the major suppliant from his place of refuge; it had been indicated already by the unachieved onstage costume change that was the subject of so much playful attention, for Iolaus will certainly have put down his ritual branches and removed his suppliant tufts while considering the armor of his new condition.[23] The woman and the children remain, but the old man who has been most sharply identified as a figure for the tribal principal has left the altar's protection, not for that of an Athenian champion, but in order to join the warriors of his own clan. He has ceased to look for safety and has gone in search of danger instead, meaning to exercise the strength and courage of an active man (711). The tribe itself will fight, and not just for its life, but as heroes do for honor and property and the safety of the weak. The aim of its action is no longer survival; it is power, that enemies may be punished and a place in the paternal city regained, for these erstwhile suppliants now mean to play out a drama of return.

The chorus tries to recapture the play for Athens and for suppliancy, however, by singing a song in which the coming battle is still defined according to the original situation. They still think that their city will fight unaided in behalf of weak and fearful Heraclids (747 ff., especially 755 f. and 763 f.), but their inflated sense of Athens' military role is in no way supported by the messenger speech which is at last delivered. The servant from the comic episode returns to tell the story of the battle, and in his report the preeminent victor is Hyllus the Heraclid until the very end, when even that young man is eclipsed in bravery by his father's aged friend. The Athenian army is hardly allowed to have been present and Demophon is not mentioned.[24] (A nameless ἄναξ Ἀθηναίων, 824, appears once, before the fighting has begun.) The messenger makes the climax of the battle come, not when the mass of the Argives fall back, but later, when Iolaus and Eurystheus come face to face. The mythic clash of the two armies is lost behind this moment of single combat, for the speech begins with a long description of Hyllus' initial challenge (800–818) and ends with the fulfillment of that challenge by Iolaus as he humiliates the cowardly enemy king (843–66). Between these two taut and lengthy reports the battle proper sags in

23. This will be the second symbolic costume change, if Macaria's ritual robing was begun in view of the audience, as a part of the dance of her departure.

24. Spranger, "The Political Element in the *Heraclidae*," p. 125, argued that the Athenians took no part at all in the battle but held back and let the Heraclids fight it out with the invading Argives. He claimed that there was thus no battle represented between Athens and Argos, and that the play should be dated to 419, during Alcibiades' Argive alliance.

obscurity, a jumble of moans and cries that is only ten lines long (830–40), for the day is truly won, the drama truly advanced, when Iolaus stops the chariot of Eurystheus, binds his enemy, and leads him off as his battle prize.[25] With one last touch Euripides confirms his intention of dimming the fabled glory of Athens beside this blinding Heraclid fame, for he unexpectedly places Iolaus' exploit at the Skironian rocks. Theseus himself must retire before this companion of Heracles, as the role of mortal savior that passed from Demophon to Macaria to Hyllus is taken now by its ultimate interpreter.

Salvation, of course, is finally the business of the gods, and Iolaus himself is rescued and restored by the direct intervention of divinity. He has fought through the whole of the battle unaided, his own youthful courage (703) still encased in the aged body that wears the heavy armor of Zeus, but his final exploit is performed with supernatural aid. He calls on Zeus and Hebe (851), asking for strength to punish his enemies (852), and a wonder at once occurs. The feeble arm so absurdly addressed in the previous scene (740) is the first of his parts to receive the reviving sign (857–58), but then the whole man feels the change and he becomes ὁ κλεινὸς Ἰόλεως (859), the true author of the Argive defeat. The miracle that follows the old man's prayer does much more than cause the capture of Eurystheus, however, for it proves that this mortal tribe can claim kinship with the gods. Zeus stands behind it all, and Hebe gives her special gift,[26] but the apparition of the stars is in its most powerful effect an appearance of Heracles, the first time since his death that he has shown himself as a divinity. The elevation of an old and dishonored man thus becomes the mark of his characteristic power, just as the destruction of a young and magnificent one was Dionysus' sign, in another tragedy.

The central battlefield miracle is thus a double proof of paternity having a double impact upon the characters of the play. With this marvel Heracles demonstrates his fatherly concern for the children he has left, and his interest in their victory over their persecutor. At the same time and with the same marvel Zeus announces that his son is indeed his own, and has become a god. Heracles has escaped death and found a home on Olympus in an overturn of fortune that is parallel to that of his children, and this central fact of divine history gets explicit recognition not only from the chorus (ἔστιν ἐν οὐρανῷ, κτλ., 910 ff.) but also from the mortal who most doubted it. Alcmena recants, insofar as her character will permit, and she says to the Zeus she had blamed (869–72), "Concern for my sufferings, after such a time! / Well, I am grateful for the things you've done. / I disbelieved before that my son lived in company / with gods, but now that truth is plain to me."[27] The Heraclids now know themselves as Zeus's grandchildren, and Alcmena knows Zeus as a god who is, after all, *hosios* in his dealings with men.

This is the theological achievement of the battle and the play. The divine ancestor of the tribe is securely placed in heaven and shown to be in direct

25. The herald's speech at 163–65 looks forward, with a happy irony, to this Heraclid victory.

26. The work of Hebe and Iolaus during the battle gives the lie to the herald's words at 171–72: κακῶς . . . οἴδ' . . . μάχοιντ' ἂν ἠβήσαντες. Cf. also 282.

27. Compare Creusa's words at the end of *Ion* (1609–10).

and salubrious contact with the members of his race. As soon as the messenger has finished his speech, the chorus marks the political achievement of the encounter at Pallene. Thanks to the victory of the conspicuous Heraclids and their obscured Athenian allies, there is freedom now from fear of foreign domination, to be enjoyed by all Athenians (867–68). Now and only now is Athens truly the free city that she seemed to be at the beginning of the tragedy, and it is expected that the same freedom will characterize the new secular status of the Heraclids. They are said to be ἐλεύθεροι πόνων (873; cf. 586), almost as if they had been initiated at the lesser mysteries, and more specifically they are free now from the threats of Eurystheus, free to look upon their fatherland, free to take up plots of land and to sacrifice to their paternal gods (874–78). Even the slave of Hyllus will now be free (890). The tribe has won for itself a return from wilderness to a city of its own, and so a repossession of the added power and identity that the true *polis* can confer. City and tribe in collaboration have thus established one another, victorious together over the impiety and injustice of organized political violence.

When all this has been made perfectly clear, the chorus announces that it is delightful to look upon the unexpected happiness of friends (895–97), and Aristotle himself could not better have defined the essential emotion of the tragedy of good fortune. The poet introduces this (intentionally) premature summation with a set of joyous terms (χορὸς . . . ἡδύς, χάρις, εὔχαρις, 892–93) that lead to Aphrodite's name (894–95), and then he makes the old men draw the moral of the action so far. The way to justice is the way of reverence, they say (901–3), and their optimism is especially alluring because the vision that they offer of Heracles and Hebe bedded down together on their golden couch (915 ff.) enforces a sense that this song might be the finale for a genuine comedy. "O Hymen!" they cry for the nuptial pair (917), just as another chorus does for Trygaios and Oporia as the *Peace* comes to its jolly close. The helpless ones have raised themselves; they have themselves procured divine aid and fought the battle that means a return to their own city. Above all, the whole universe now knows of their kinship with a god. The tribe that they represent seems at this point to combine the soft and self-sustaining virtues of a Macaria with the hearty, comradely courage of the genial Iolaus and to have won its brilliant reward with ease; but the play has something more to say about this primitive blood community.

In the fifth and final episode the smile disappears from the face of this tragedy. The tribal principal again takes female form as the plot returns to a negative pattern and Alcmena, the consort of Zeus and the mother of Heracles, steps forward to cap the happy salvation of her clan and the rescue of their Athenian friends with the killing of Eurystheus. In its pragmatic effects Alcmena's deed belongs to the category of vengeance: she is a "doer" and not one who is "done for"; her motive is retaliation (958–60),[28] and when her episode is finished a death has been arranged. By inten-

28. Alcmena's vengeance is not exacted for Eurystheus' treatment of Heracles; that was done on Hera's orders and so, though it is mentioned for rhetorical effect, it is set aside (951–52). What she avenges are his multiple crimes against the Heraclids (953–56): he has stolen their property and

tion and achievement she is an avenger, but her drama is so contrived that she never takes the stance of a hero of revenge. She does not seek out her enemy; he is brought to her and presented as her prize.[29] She does not use tricks or secrecy; she argues openly for her right to kill. She makes no intrigue and has no accomplice; she is not shown with a weapon in her hand, nor does she steal upon her enemy. She behaves, in fact, like one invested with a public responsibility. And finally, in complete defiance of the rules of her role, Alcmena does not, within the boundaries of her play, either kill her victim or cause him to perish by another's hand. Never was Aristotle's dictum about the importance of where a tale is cut so sharply illustrated, for the cut here, just before the killing, lops off the definitive vengeance tableau, depriving the play of corpses and of a bloodstained principal.

In this way the last episode of *Children of Heracles* works the punishment of an enemy without introducing the scenic or the ethical motifs that generally accompany tragic revenge. The deed of this final movement is necessary to the largest praxis of the play, return, but it is opposed in spirit to the lesser actions of suppliancy and sacrifice, and so the poet has arranged that, though the matter of vengeance is here, the emotions that ordinarily accompany it are not evoked. He has tempered the guilty spirit of the revenge as much as possible, and then he has depicted it in a pair of scenes borrowed from the two plots of innocence, so that there might be at least a structural harmony in all the parts of his tragedy. He stages another judgment, much like that of the opening suppliant phase and then, by introducing the ancient oracle of Apollo, he modulates this scene to make it one typical of an action of sacrifice, one in which a death is called for and claimed by the creature who must die. And meanwhile he strictly abjures the characteristic intrigue of the vengeance plot.

Euripides has amused himself, in this second judgment scene (928–1025), by putting his Argive where the Heraclids were before, in the posture of weakness, while he places the mother of Heracles in the attitude of bloodthirsty pursuit which the Argive herald had earlier assumed with such gusto. (The third party, the judge, should be represented by Demophon, as before, but the very name of that king has disappeared from the play and so the old men of the chorus have to do the best they can, though they clearly have no power to enforce any decision they might be able to reach.) The reversal of the major roles perfectly fulfills the essential vengeance impulse, which is to make the enemy suffer exactly the pains he has imposed, but unfortunately this formal remuneration of the suppliants has seemed to some critics to amount to a moral nihilism on the poet's part. If Alcmena's pursuit is justifiable now, they argue, then Eurystheus' was as well; or if his

condemned them to death; in addition he has repeatedly scorned the laws of sanctuary and has persuaded weaker states to join him in his persecutions. This is why Alcmena says that he would have to die more than once, if restitution were really to be made (959–60).

29. Eurystheus died in the battle, according to tradition; his survival thus constitutes a major innovation (and incidentally makes it very hard to explain why his tomb was so far from Marathon). Clearly it was important to the poet to attribute this death not to military chance but to a tribal decree. Through Alcmena the tyrant is given a death that will give particular joy to his enemies (939; cf. 444), and through her he is proved wrong in his calculations, since his persecutions were made on the assumption that his enemies would arise from the younger Heraclids.

action must be labeled as an evil one then so must hers be, and the *Children of Heracles* becomes the celebration of violence resurgent, its moral being that victims will become bullies, if they get the chance.[30]

Have Alcmena and Eurystheus really been made twins in a "disconcerting finale"? Are they really both shown to be "corrupt, unhappy, luckless; not supermen but cranks"?[31] Those who believe so may have fallen into a dramaturgical trap. Certainly there are two pursuers here, and two situations that are formally similar, but the poet would more truly seem to have set up the comparison to prove, not that the twos are equal, but that there may be an absolute moral difference in scenes that look alike. The first pursuer, herald/Eurystheus, and the second, Alcmena, standing as they do for tyrant city and for tribe, are cleanly distinguished from one another by a pair of opposing concepts, for the first is identified with *bia* and the second with *peitho*. They are distinguished again by the course of the action, since the deeds of the first lead to war, those of the second to the end of that war; and they are distinguished finally by signs from above, since the intentions of the first are defeated by a miracle while those of the second find confirmation from an oracle.

In the opening episode of the play the male and physically powerful Argive tries, as pursuer, to violate the religious law of the Greeks and the secular autonomy of the Athenians, and he would do this by force. Iolaus, in his cry for help, says it all: ἱκέται δ' ὄντες ἀγοραίου Διὸς / βιαζόμεσθα καὶ στέφη μιαίνεται· / πόλει τ' ὄνειδος καὶ θεῶν ἀτιμία (70–72; cf. 79). The fact that the Argive stands for force is established not merely by verbal repetition (16 *bia* words in 350 lines: 13, 18, 64, 67, 71, 79, 97, 102, 112, 127, 221, 225, 243, 254, 286, 366, summed up at 924–25 where the victory of the Heraclids and Athenians has put a stop to the *hybris* of one ᾧ θυμὸς ἦν πρὸ δίκας βίαιος), but also by staged action. Every spectator is witness to a deed of violence as the herald tries to drag Iolaus from his sacred place (67 ff.) and then repeats the attempt in Demophon's presence, to see if the king is truly determined to resist him (269 ff.).[32] And while this pursuer is thus characterized by arrogant violence (ὕβρισμ' . . . ἠξίωσεν ὑβρίσαι, 18), the pursued are portrayed as innocent sufferers who are physically helpless and morally without a spot.

Everything about Alcmena in the final episode offers a contrast to her Argive counterpart. She is an old, old lady who could not, if she wished, convey the impression of personal *bia*. (The arming scene has emphasized her age and touched her with the lightest trace of comedy.) She does not threaten or gesticulate, and no syllable of hers or anyone else's suggests that she, like the herald and his royal master, has been guilty of a series of crimes in the past. The worst the chorus leader can say of her is that, if she has her

30. See, for example, the conclusion of Fitton, "*Suppliant Women* and *Herakleidai*," p. 457: "Alcmena . . . seems spiritually hardly better than her persecutor." Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 36, exclaims: "The persecutor and the persecuted, how alike they are!" Of Alcmena he observes: "The law of lawlessness has been used against her and she uses it in return when her chance comes" (p. 37).

31. Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 38.

32. In addition, H. Strohm, *Euripides* (Munich, 1957), p. 19, notes that the archaic plot sequence in which the pursuer arrives before the champion necessarily emphasizes violence.

way now, she will be blamed (974).[33] There is no condemnation in his words; on the contrary, he is eager to assure her that her anger is well grounded and that her aims command his sympathy (981–82). Tribal practice has awarded an enemy to Alcmena to do with as she pleases, and this to her understanding is justice (941); but when she learns that, were she to kill him, she would infringe upon the express will of Athenian magistrates, she stops. She proposes to influence the local government by persuasion, and this with its citizens' permission (1020, followed by her διδάξω at 1022); she does not try to proceed by force.

Alcmena is angry, unafraid, and stubborn (973), for she has the temper of a Heraclid; but though she means to see one special act of violence done, she would not violate the custom, law, or opinion of her Athenian hosts (975). Meanwhile, the man she pursues confirms his old reputation[34] by attempting, like Polymestor, to justify his former cruelty on the grounds of statecraft.[35] Gesturing toward the small boys who are still gathered at the altar, he speaks like an Athenian before the Melians, admitting his crimes with cowardly bravado: "Was it not a necessity, once Heracles was dead, that I who was loathed by these [children] and who knew all too well what their father's hatred had been, should not leave a stone unturned but should kill them and exile them and set up plots against them?" (1000–1004). This is the ultimate portrait in action of Argos, the city which was in truth only a single tyrant wearing the mask of a commonwealth. Eurystheus' disregard for the ordinary rules of humanity is shown to be as exaggerated as was his scorn for the laws of piety, and the whole aim of Argive "policy" turns out to be nothing grander than the comfort of his single physical self. Hera had set him against Heracles (990), but his private persecutions of the Heraclids were carried out so that, in spite of his guilt, he might sleep quietly at night (994–96).

Alcmena, as she attempts to destroy this man, is no more like him than Demophon was like the herald he opposed;[36] she is no more like him than

33. His failure to speak of any punishment for a breach of the law reminds one of the mildness of the herald in the questionable close of the *Seven*, another scene in which a woman successfully sets herself against a local decree.

34. Eurystheus as coward and tyrant: 353 ff., 387–88, 423, 456–58, 744, 813 ff., 933.

35. Eurystheus has proved unaccountably attractive to some: A. Garzya, *Studi su Euripide e Menandro* (Naples, 1961), p. 93, speaks of his "accenti virili"; Spranger, "The Political Element in the *Heraclidae*," p. 122, refers to his "frank and manly statement"; Fitton, "*Suppliant Women* and *Herakleidai*," p. 457, finds him "almost pitiable"; and Zuntz, *Political Plays*, p. 35, defends him by asserting that "all he wanted was 'security'—that he might sleep without fear at night." The old notion that an unjust deed done in passion is less reprehensible than one done in cold blood is forgotten by these sympathizers, and calculated acts of violence perpetrated upon innocence receive their apology because these crimes wear the guise of reason, i.e., "statecraft." On the other hand, the impulsive demand for vengeance, just because it is undisguised, is condemned as irrational —as obsessive hatred or "furiosa cieca crudeltà."

36. Demophon, in a telling bit of business, tries to strike the herald but is restrained by the chorus (271–72). He, as an individual, is moved to what he considers a just action—the forcible interruption of an injustice—but Hellenic custom prohibits his interference and the city enforces that prohibition. Must a higher justice lead, then, to helplessness in the face of immediate violence? It might, if the state were the only form of social organization, but, according to this play, it is not. The situation of overt injustice which enjoys the protection of formal justice is repeated in the final episode and there resolved in a more satisfactory way. The city is again self-restrained (according to its own law, this time, not according to a general custom), but the tribe is able to strike the wrongdoer.

Hyllus was when he challenged him to a single combat, or than Iolaus was when he dragged him from his chariot. Iolaus' prayer, after all—the prayer that Zeus so notably deigned to hear—was a prayer for the punishment of this enemy (851–52) and Alcmena's action is thus a part of its fulfillment (note the echo to Iolaus at 882). As a sign from heaven had authorized the battlefield victory over Eurystheus, so now another sign confirms the completion of that victory as words of Apollo's from long ago mix with Alcmena's present demand. Eurystheus himself conveys the sign, demonstrating how all mortal values and positions change, when the will of god is known. Pleading for his life (in spite of 1016–17, what else is he doing?), this tyrant who was above all law throws himself upon the common practice of the Hellenes and upon the local Athenian decree. His words are irrelevant to the immediate case and seem to have no effect upon the judging chorus (1019 merely repeats 968), but certain isolated phrases reach his own ears with a mysterious force.

Eurystheus had been told at Delphi long ago that he would die in a city that left him free (like a sacrificial beast, 1027, echoing 1012), one that could not kill him, out of reverence (1027), and by these tokens he recognizes Athens as that place. His new understanding makes him ready for death (1026), and his tomb will confer benefits upon the Athenians (1032 ff.), but still fate and the god have played their trick. The paradox of the city that cannot do what it is fated to do is ever more mockingly fixed by this oracle since Athens, should she move to fulfill Apollo's words, would automatically cease to be the place that the god had referred to! The Heraclids must provide the knife, just as earlier they provided the victim, for a sacrifice, and by Alcmena's closing command they do exactly that.[37] The will of the gods and the advantage of the city are both served by the tribe in its vengeful victory and Alcmena, like Macaria, is in this way able to repay Athens once more for its aid, though hers is a *charis* of violence.[38]

In the triumph of Alcmena, the largest theme of the play—the fruitful interaction of ancient tribe and modern city—is for a fourth time given a dramatic form. Alcmena herself is almost a symbol for this interaction since it is through her that the Heraclids are linked to the citizens who are ruled by descendants of Theseus (209–11). Her success finishes the portrait of the *genos*, and the tribe, thus exemplified, proves to be remarkably like the "good" faction that Thucydides indirectly describes (3. 82. 5–7). In it τὸ ξυγγενές is valued; its purpose is ὠφελία μετὰ τῶν κειμένων νόμων; it is held together by ὁ θεῖος νόμος; when it acts towards an enemy it does so with a

37. Alcmena's stage movements have been those of a priestess; she has made her entrances from the temple of Zeus and she has returned into the temple, for it is her residence during this imaginary time. Her costume too will indicate that she is temporarily dedicated to this shrine.

38. Unnecessary difficulties have been made over the contradictory statements about the disposal of Eurystheus' corpse. The Athenian decree ordered that, as captive, he should be returned to his own city (968); Alcmena proposed to abide by the letter and send his body back (1023); the divine decree stipulated that the corpse should remain and be buried in Attica (1030–31), and this is its decided fate at the play's end, whether or no we take literally Alcmena's cry (1050–51) that it should be tossed to the dogs (it may be hyperbole, since she has also said that he should die more than once, 959–60). Her servants are to kill but not to bury; the state will bury the body according to the oracle.

characteristic γενναιότης, and its aggressions are performed not ἀπάτῃ but ἀπὸ τοῦ προφανοῦς.

Alcmena's deed also completes the picture of the god who has been the second subject of imitation here. The full nature of that divinity now stands revealed. Heracles is savior, in times of difficulty, and so he is shown to be through his daughter, Macaria. He is athlete and warrior and patron of ephebes, qualities reflected in this tragedy by Hyllus, who is his son. He is healer and life-giver and husband of Hebe, as he has proved on this day by entering into the feeble arm of his old friend, Iolaus. And finally he is a monster-killer and, like all gods, violent and vengeful when he needs to be, and this truth is proudly proclaimed by Alcmena's part in his epiphany. We do not like to be told that this is the nature of god, that the decree of such a one is the highest form of law and that it rests outside any definition we can make of justice. We dislike the idea that men have irrational obligations to the supernatural and that the state, just because it is the expression of man's reason, is powerless to fulfill them. We have forgotten what a tribe is, and so we are not encouraged by the assertion that this primitive part of the community still can have the strength, sometimes, to satisfy the gods. Nevertheless, these are the teachings of the *Children of Heracles*.

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