The peripety of the *Heracles* begins with a purificatory ritual that becomes a perverted sacrifice in which the divinely maddened hero destroys his own wife and children. The language of the play represents Heracles’ crime not only as a perverted sacrifice but also as a monstrous *agōn* and as a terrifying unmusical song or Dionysiac ritual. The failure of the sacrificial ritual succinctly expresses a crisis in the relations between gods and men; the perverted *agōn*, a shattering of the relation between hero and community; and the unmusical Dionysiac song and dance, a disruption of the relation between singer and heroic subject without which choral celebration cannot proceed.\(^1\)

As I argued in Chapter I, sacrifice, *agōn*, and festal molpē (including dance, song, and, for Dionysiac festivals, drama) are fundamental to the conduct of Greek public life. All of these ritual forms function to unite men in a community, to define man’s relation to the gods, and to control and contain violence internal to a community. Pollution sacrifice such as that initiated by Heracles in this

A shorter version of this chapter was originally presented at a workshop on problems in Euripides in Victoria, British Columbia, in October 1978. I wish to thank the participants in the seminar, the commentator, M. J. Cropp, and the organizer of the workshop, Professor S. E. Scully, for their comments.

\(^1\)Arrowsmith 1954: 141–56 and, more briefly, Bond 1981 take note of the Dionysiac and athletic imagery used here but do not offer an interpretation of it. (See also Zeitlin 1970a: 102 on the Dionysiac imagery.) Girard 1977: 39–41, 44, and 47 is the only critic I have found who tries to explain the failed sacrifice.
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play is a form of justice by which gods purify a murderer and/or his environment of the effects of violence and define and re-establish his relation to his society.

Similarly, Heracles’ agônes, the agônes of war, and the Greek athletic agônes ideally use physical force and competition in the service of civilization, not to undermine it as in this play. The victor in a fifth-century agôn might approach a near-divine status at the moment of victory, but he must perform his feat in accordance with the regulations of his polis and for its benefit and glory as well as his own. Epinician poetry, mediating between victor and community, used the victor’s success to create communal bonds. Athletic games may originally have been performed, like the games for Patroclus in Iliad 23, as part of a funerary ritual for heroes that revitalized the community after an important loss. Meuli and Gernet, however, see affinities between justice and the games. The former argues that the games originated in duels to determine for the community the party responsible for a third party’s death; the violent combat forestalled further revenge. The latter less speculatively emphasizes the similarities between legal procedures and those of the Homeric games. Both views reflect a general coherence of archaic culture; indeed, agônes, pollution sacrifice, and in addition all poetry that offers praise and blame can be compared with other means of dispensing justice.

Festivals in honor of the gods suspend the hierarchies and limits imposed on citizens in everyday life. The result, as Plato suggests at Laws 653d, is a temporary release of potentially dangerous tensions and frictions. Tragic poets used Dionysiac rituals in particu-

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2See Rudhardt 1958: 149–58 and Bilinski 1979. Both dance and agonistic contest fit the structural model Rudhardt proposes for sacrifice (see Chapter 1). For the correspondence between the cult of athletes and the cult of heroes, especially those of Heracles, see Fontenrose 1968 and Crotty 1982: Chap. 4.

The term agôn is, of course, a complex one, meaning not only a labor or contest of many kinds but also a struggle, battle, trial, assembly, speech, and so on. All these meanings ultimately come into play here as Heracles’ struggles turn from physical to mental and verbal.

3See Crotty 1982, esp. chap. 2, on the epinician poet’s mediating role between victor and community.

4See Meuli 1941 and Gernet 1955: 9–18.

5For a more detailed discussion of festival in Greek city life, see Chapter 5.
lar to symbolize the dangers inherent in this festal context. Here the boundaries between god, man, and nature dissolve; but the resulting collective ecstasy may suddenly erupt into bestial revenge and kin murder. Greek drama, too, essentially entailed Dionysiac ritual performed in a civic context. Comedy celebrated the festal state with outrageous license and satire, but with a view to restoring social justice and fertility. Tragedy presented and interpreted the myths of a Panhellenic past for a democratic society in Athens; but the plays control and in fact ritualize their movement to violence, social inversion, and disorder. In both genres a new form of praise and hence of communal solidarity emerges from festal inversion or tragic disaster.

Why does Euripides make the central moment of the *Heracles* a ritual crisis of spectacular proportions? And how can an exploration of this question help interpret a play that has deeply puzzled critics for its radical shifts and disjunctions in the action, in the views adopted of the gods, and in the character of the hero himself?

The *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the *Phoenissae* involved sacrificial actions in which ritual offered a “cure” for a social crisis, as well as creating a bridge between odes and action, that is, between myth and tradition and the corrupt politics of Greece or Thebes. In the *Heracles* and the *Bacchae* the use of the sacrificial motif is more complex: first, a perversion of ritual results in unintentional kin murder; second, the sacrificial crisis is absorbed into a larger ritual crisis, which itself includes a perversion of *ágôn*, of festal *molpê*, and of the poetic tradition itself. In the *Heracles* the choral odes no longer serve largely to create a counterpoint with the action. Instead, the events of the suppliant action and then of the peripety directly jeopardize the stance adopted by the chorus toward Heracles and the gods. The meanings of sacrificial ritual, of Heracles’ labors, and of the encomiastic songs of the chorus stand and fall together. The chorus (and to a lesser extent the characters) evokes a pretragic hymnic and epinician tradition; throughout the suppliant action it struggles to praise and find hope in the absent

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6See esp. Detienne 1979a: chaps. 3 and 4 and Segal 1978a for the fundamentally anticultural nature of such Dionysiac festival.
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Heracles. The peripety silences this poetry of praise, for if the gods are irrational and unjust and the hero cannot be celebrated, choral poetry loses its function. It is left to Theseus and Heracles to find the environment and the terms on which the hero can survive and continue to win honor and praise.

The *Heracles* also raises with particular directness social and artistic questions central to all Greek tragedy. First, how can the heroic *aretē* of a Heracles be celebrated in an Athenian context? The crazed Heracles of the peripety can be said to represent a whole class of epic heroes whose violent achievement of *kleos* (fame) comes ultimately at the cost of their family’s or community’s survival. What place can such firebrands command in a fifth-century democracy, in which ideally the exploits of the individual contribute to the glory and survival of the group? What relation have the sufferings and disasters of such titanic creatures to those of ordinary mortals? In the *Heracles* Euripides systematically confronts almost the entire earlier tradition on Heracles and the contradictions it poses for a Thebes that finds no place for the hero. Yet finally only Athens and tragedy, with its emphasis on sacrifice, violence, and suffering, can rescue Heracles from the “death” and anachronism with which he is threatened in the earlier scenes and create an untraditional spiritualized hero equal to the mutability of human life and valuable for the Athenian *polis*.

At *Poetics* 1448b–1449b Aristotle implies that tragedy descends from or logically succeeds encomium. Poets were originally of two kinds: the serious poets who represented the deeds of noble men and who wrote hymns and *engkōmía* (praise poems), and those who preferred *psogoi* (blame poems) and the representation of the deeds of inferior men. Epic and tragedy were successors to or descended from the first group, and iambic satire, the *Margites*, and comedy from the second group. The connection between encomium and tragedy is not immediately obvious. Yet, as we shall see, it does begin to explain why the peripety of the *Heracles* should

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7My argument is, though from an entirely different point of view, comparable to that of Wilamowitz 1895, who interpreted the play as questioning the tradition about Heracles. He, however, originally saw Euripides as attacking Heracles’ “Dorian” heroism.

8On the limits of this formulation see Nagy 1979: 253–64.
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entail the perversion of the encomiastic poetry of the suppliant action, and why the final scenes make a point of instituting honors for the humiliated hero in a new social context.

Our discussion of the Heracles will examine in succession the ritual and poetic crises of the play and the social, artistic, and psychological implications of each.

In the peripety Hera interrupts Heracles’ pollution sacrifice, denies purification and hence justice to the hero, and stains him instead with a new miasma (pollution). In the concluding scenes, however, Theseus ignores the pollution that Heracles has acquired in the “sacrifice” of his wife and sons, offers to purify the hero, and promises to honor him perpetually with the sacrifices of hero cult. Ritual performance continues, but apparently without recourse to an Olympian superstructure. Heracles accepts his full dependence on other men rather than on himself and the divine; the slaughter of the children in place of animal victims ultimately allows the substitution of Theseus and the Athenian community as Heracles’ heirs.

In the peripety Heracles’ civilizing agônes also become destructive to those whom they were meant to protect. The hero’s first reactions upon awakening from his madness are to reject the labors and contemplate suicide. Again, Theseus finds a new context for Heracles’ glorious agônes and his heroic powers in Athens. In coming to terms with his weapons and his painful past, Heracles provides suitable closure for a mode of civilizing violence, his labors, for which a world now tamed has no further use.

Finally, poetic kleos itself enters the cycle by falling, like Heracles, victim to itself. By momentarily denying in the peripety its own capacity to praise any version of Heracles offered by the poetic tradition, Euripides’ poetry ultimately amplifies its capacity to memorialize in an Athenian context a now transformed heroism. Paradoxically the ritual crisis itself becomes a cure for an anarchy that sets man against man and man against god. Sacrifice, agôn, poetry, and the whole festal context reconstitute themselves by the end of the play and harness violence on all levels. The mysteries of ritual become by association the mysteries of poetry, so that the profound cultural values violated in the peripety can regenerate themselves. The Heracles (like the Bacchae) thus contains an implicit
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recognition that tragedy derives from and serves ritual; tragic resolutions are achieved through ritual, and tragic heroes are made through sacrifice.

The Ritual Crisis

At the beginning of the play Heracles is reported to be in the underworld performing his final labor, the abduction of the dog Cerberus from Hades. Euripides here apparently changes the traditional order of the myth, putting the murder of the children after, not before, the labors.⁹ In his absence the tyrant Lycus has usurped the government of a faction-ridden Thebes and has decided to confirm his rule by eliminating the family of Heracles. Heracles’ family, his father, wife, and three male children, have taken refuge at the altar of the temple of Zeus Soter (48). The situation for the family seems hopeless. Megara, Heracles’ wife, eventually persuades his father, Amphitryon, to abandon hope and accept death nobly. The family leaves the altar; Megara dresses the children in the garments of death (329) and addresses them as sacrifices (ta thumata) about to be made to Hades (453). At this moment Heracles returns from the underworld as a savior whom Megara describes as not inferior to Zeus (521–22). He removes the chaplets of death from the children’s heads (562) and bids farewell to his labors (575). He kills Lycus, apparently bringing the rescue plot to a happy conclusion.

Heracles then undertakes to purify himself and the house of the slaughter he has just performed (922).¹⁰ The hiera katharsia (purification sacrifices 922–23) are prepared; the basket is carried

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⁹It is important to remember that in this play Heracles’ labors are essentially over. For previous treatments of the Heracles myth and Euripides’ probable innovations, see esp. Hendrickson 1929, Arrowsmith 1954: app. B, Wilamowitz 1959 (1895): II, 1–107, and, more generally, Galinsky 1972. Bond 1981: xxvii–xxx notes in disagreement with Wilamowitz that the evidence concerning the timing of the murder of the children in the tradition before Euripides is late and slim. Nevertheless, I strongly suspect that Wilamowitz is right.

¹⁰Bond 1981: 311–12 also assumes that both the house and Heracles would have been polluted by Lycus’ corpse. He doubts that miasma would have resulted from such a lawful killing.
around in propitious silence. Heracles is about to carry the torch in his right hand and dip it into the lustral waters (928–29). At this moment he abruptly begins to go mad (see also 1144–45 for emphasis on the ritual moment at which the madness took Heracles).11 The mad hero asks that the waters be poured out and the

11Bond 1981: 308, 310 (see also 318 on line 995) and Moulinier 1952: 88 share my assumption that Heracles’ purification ritual is a full sacrificial procedure with animal victims, rather than a purification with fire and water like that performed by Odysseus when he purifies his house in the Odyssey. Wilamowitz 1959 (1895): III, 207 apparently interpreted these preliminaries as the whole purification ceremony. As Rudhardt 1958: 270 points out, evidence on the procedures in purification sacrifice comes almost exclusively from literature and art, and is thus difficult to evaluate. (See also Moulinier: 87–94.) In Greek tragedy the other important purifications of an individual and place polluted by murder involve the use of blood, or blood in addition to fire. Apollo in the Eumenides purifies Orestes with pig’s blood (282–83), as does Zeus a murderer in an Aeschylean instance cited by Eustathius (ad ll. 118), 18; see also Medea’s purification of Jason in Apollonius Rhodius 4. 705–7). But these two tragic rites are performed by deities. In Euripides’ IT Iphigenia plans to purify the strangers and the temple with both lambs (1223–24) and fire (1224, 1331–32); thus the only close tragic parallel is one in which animal sacrifice is part of the procedure (phonōi phonon / musaron ekniposé, 1223–24). In the Heracles the term hiera . . . kathar sia (922–23) could be interpreted to include animal victims (see IT 1224–25, where, after the lambs are mentioned, Iphigenia brings the kathar sia in addition to the fire of torches). Philostratus 2.23 describes a painting derived from the scene in the Heracles, showing baskets, basins, grain, firewood, and a sacrificial bull, as well as an altar heaped with dead children. The preliminary steps taken here are identical to those preceding animal sacrifices (see, for example, Aristophanes Peace 956–1017), and they are most easily understood as a shorthand way of indicating that an animal sacrifice is about to take place (especially given the presence of the basket, which would have no role in a rite confined to fire and water). In addition, the symmetrical shift from an animal to a human victim is the rule in tragic sacrifices (see Agamemnon and Euripides’ Electra, IT, IA—in reverse—and Andromache). Rituals of purification in Greek literature involving fire or fire and sulphur only—for example, Odyssey 22.481–94 (fire and sulphur), Helen 865–72 (fire and sulphur), and IT 1216 (fire)—generally refer to the purification of a place rather than of a person. If this were the case in the Heracles, it would make no difference to my later argument about the failure of the sacrifice, which becomes a human “sacrifice” that pollutes Heracles, not his house (note Heracles’ later fear of his own miasma before Theseus), but it would suggest that Heracles himself (rather than his house) is not polluted by the murder of Lycus. The text, however, provides insufficient detail.

Although Greek propitiatory rituals frequently involved sacrifices or offerings to non-Olympian deities (as in Sophocles’ OC 466–92), a fact emphasized by many religious historians (see Stengel 1920, esp. 120ff., or Rohde 1925: 214 n. 168), the major tragedy passages dealing with ritual purification of an individual for murder involve Olympian deities (Apollo, Artemis, Zeus). Here the sacrifice is
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baskets thrown away (941). The recent killing of Lycus seems to suggest the killing of another tyrant deserving of revenge, Eurystheus, the man for whom Heracles was forced to commit his violent labors (936–40). Thinking he is killing the children of Eurystheus, Heracles proceeds to “sacrifice” the sons whom he has just preserved from the same fate; he kills the second son as the child departs the altar to supplicate his father. Finally (994–95):

dεύτερον δὲ παιδ’ ἐλών,
χωρεῖ τρίτον θυμ’ ὀς ἐπισφάξων δυοίν.

His second son taken, he rushed to add a third sacrificial victim to the other two.

The killing of the children is described not only as a sacrifice but as a final terrible ἀгоν (1229: “Theseus, have you seen the ἀγόν of my children?” See also the ironic τεκνὸν . . . εκπόνησο θανατόν at 580–81). Heracles the καλλινίκος (victorious) destroys the victorious crown of his life, his children (τὸν καλλιπαίδα στέφανον, 839; compare 355–56, στέφανομα μοθθόν, of Heracles’ labors). The mad Heracles shakes his head like a racer at the starting gates (867). He mounts an imaginary chariot in an attack on Mycenae (943–49) and celebrates a victory feast in his own honor at Megara (955–57). Thinking he is at the Isthmus, he then wrestles with no one and declares himself victor (961–62). Heracles must become one of the beasts he has fought for so long (869–70). Lyssa’s maddening of the hero is also described as an athletic contest and an ἀγόν. She runs races against him (863). More ironic still, the term ἀγόν is later applied to Hera’s action against Heracles (1191 and 1311–12).

Finally, Heracles’ murder of the children is described as a per-

made on the raised Olympian altar of Zeus, under which one of Heracles’ sons cowers like a bird (see βόμος at 927 and 974, βόμια at 984, and ἐσχαρα at 922; on ἐσχαρα see Rudhardt: 270). Fictional purification sacrifices may well have borne little precise relation to actual practices, and we must interpret them accordingly. For example, there is no evidence, except in one vase painting probably influenced by Aeschylus’ Eumenides, that purification with pig’s blood was actually practiced at Delphi in the classical period. On this point see Moulinier 1952: 88–89 and Dyer 1969.

12On the potential irony here, see Bond 1981 ad loc. On the use of the term ἀγόν in the play, see Bond on line 1189.
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verted song and dance (871) and as a corrupt Bacchic ritual (891–95, 899, 1085). Lyssa institutes a dance without kettledrums or thyrsus (891–92) in order to kill the beautiful chorus (choros de kallimorphos, 925) of Heracles’ children. Heracles becomes a Bacchus of Hades (1119). He pants and bellows like a bull (869–70), the animal most associated with Dionysus. The sacrificial libations of wine become the outpourings of bloody pollution (894–95). Hera is finally left to dance alone (1312–4, although the text is difficult), while the chorus laments and then falls silent.

The Perverted Sacrifice

After his slaughter of the suitors in the Odyssey, Odysseus purifies his house with fire and sulphur.13 The gods stand behind his ritual. In the final book Athena steps in to protect Odysseus from the consequences of his justified revenge. Peace is made with the families of the suitors. The gods honor those who honor them. At the close of the supplicant action of the Heracles the chorus expects a similar outcome for the hero.14 A perfectly sane Heracles has ex-
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acted a justified revenge from the murderous usurper Lycus and possibly also from a number of the guilty Thebans; he acts decisively yet remains attentive to Amphitryon’s advice (585–86). The chorus reacts with a song celebrating renewed confidence in a just universe (734–814). The gods do care for men. Heracles is the son of Zeus.

Like Odysseus, Heracles initiates a correct ritual appeal to the gods to purify himself and his house. As a form of justice, pollution sacrifice serves to remove the stain acquired in the shedding of human blood and to reincorporate the murderer into his community. Taking advantage of the moment of ritual communication, the goddess here offers in place of justice and purification a long-meditated revenge. (Note the ironic contrast between Heracles’ labors as a form of purification at 255 and his new pollution at 1283–84.)

An Oxyrhynchus papyrus says that for showing Heracles going mad in a play at the Dionysia Euripides was prosecuted (by Cleon) for impiety. Although the story is almost certainly apocryphal, it apparently records ancient dissatisfaction with the treatment of Heracles in this play. The moment is indeed shocking. Sacrifice establishes the division between god and man, delineates a man’s relation to his community, and, in a pollution sacrifice, makes god in part responsible for human violence. In the sacrificial crisis of the Heracles all these functions of sacrifice come into play, raising multiple questions about the ritual itself and about the relations among god, man, and community established through the rite. Euripides typically provides several possible answers to those questions, and none remains certain.

unconventional nature of the suppliant action here and to the play’s reliance on a human savior; the unusual suppliant action corresponds with the unusual relation between men and gods developed throughout the drama. Yet we should recall, in relation to Burnett’s tenuous argument that Heracles’ family is justly punished for its lack of faith in the gods here, that the human intermediary is always the decisive factor in suppliant actions, and that the chorus, at least temporarily, continues to find in Heracles’ successful return and vengeance evidence of divine support (see Zeitlin 1970a: 360).

15On the question of Heracles’ revenge on Thebans other than Lycus, see Bond 1981 on 604ff. The text is unclear.
16See note 11 above.
Iris, in offering justification for Hera’s maddening of Heracles, implies that Heracles has overstepped the limits that separate the divine from the human. He has made the gods nothing (theoi men oudamou, 841). In other words, he threatens the gods’ timē from men (honor expressed through prayer and sacrifice). Surprisingly, even the gods themselves need the powers of the hero, for Heracles has fought on the side of the gods against the giants and shared in their victory celebrations (178–80, 1192–97), thus becoming part of the community of gods as well as the community of men. He is the product of a divine/human relation offensive to Hera (826, 1309). In the suppliant action the chorus and characters treat Heracles as such a near divinity. Parallels between the staging of Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound and the Heracles may further hint at the hero’s unintentional threat to divine power. Both heroes are shown onstage bound to a pillar, and the roles of Iris and Lyssa may echo those of Aeschylus’ Kratos and Bia. By sacrificial logic, then, Heracles’ ritual fails and he is punished by Hera because in his case the ritual no longer functions to divide the divine from the human.

Iris’ position is perfectly understandable. Hera’s hatred of Heracles was well known. In literary tradition Heracles quite often transgressed human limits, even going so far as to fight against the gods rather than with them (Pindar, Olympian 9). He became an Olympian after death. But Euripides has Lyssa contest Iris’ argument (846–54). Heracles, she argues, has been a model of piety, a great benefactor whose reputation is well deserved. He alone has preserved the timai of the gods (852–53). She advises Iris to reconsider (847–48). Lyssa’s defense is thoroughly borne out by the

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18See Chapter 1 on sacrifice as timē. Bond 1981: xxvi in his discussion of line 841 quotes M. J. Cropp’s argument that the lines mean “if Heracles escapes unpunished, the interests of mortals will be preferred to the interests of the gods (i.e. Hera).” Euripides, Bond argues, may also have had in mind the notion that nothing great comes to men ektos atas (without tragic disaster, Soph. Ant. 614).

19See Mullens 1939.

20Vernant 1980: 120 argues that pollution results from a failure to maintain the proper distinction between separate, especially divine and human, realms.

21Bond 1981: xxiv–xxv and 206–7 stresses that Hera’s revenge on Heracles would have appeared well motivated to the audience, since it was familiar in the literary tradition. This point is perfectly correct, but in the circumstances of this play her action is nevertheless made to seem unjust and shocking, as is emphasized by offensive references to Zeus and Hera throughout the play (see esp. 1127).
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Heracles we have seen onstage up to this point as he honors the gods, rescues his family and city from an unjust regime, and justly chastises Thebes for its betrayal of his interests.

Fearing the nobility of Heracles’ children and their legitimate claim to the throne of Thebes (168–69), Lycus has determined to kill them to ensure his own authority (245–46). He does not respect the altar of the gods (240–46, 722–25), and he rules a Thebes dominated by stasis and indifferent to the claims and past benefits of Heracles (217–28). Hera makes the mad Heracles perform the crimes intended by Lycus. Threatened at the altar by Lycus, Megara has addressed the children as thumata (sacrificial victims, 453); Hera makes Heracles treat the children as sacrificial victims. Indeed, as Zeitlin has argued, the sacrifice of the children in this sense comes as no surprise: the combination of a suppliant plot and sacrificial imagery must be seen as proleptic of a later plot development also involving ritual (see also the Helen and the Andromache); sacrifice and suppliancy share the presence of the altar and the threat of imminent death.22 Echoing Thebes’ neglect of the hero’s benefits, Hera ignores Heracles’ past honors to the gods. Reenacting Lycus’ fears for his regime, she apparently wishes to take revenge on Heracles because Zeus’ adultery threatens her legitimacy as wife and because he has made the gods nothing (841). Whereas Lycus was prepared to violate the sanctity of the altar, Hera ignores Heracles’ claims to justice and violates his correct ritual appeal to the gods. Although the parallels are not in every respect exact, Hera in essence offers to Heracles in an even more despicable form the (in)justice of Lycus and Thebes. By equating the justice of Hera and Thebes, Euripides hints at a Girardian identity of divine and communal violence. In this play neither the divine nor the human realm offers justice. In response to a just revenge, Heracles receives only revenge. The failure of Heracles’ pollution ritual seems to reflect precisely the hostile divine and human reality in which he is trapped.

Sacrifice draws the boundary between god and man and defines the relation between the sacrificer and his community. The failure of a ritual of purification could symbolize the inability of a com-

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The Heracles

community indifferent to the hero and ridden by *stasis* and loss of hierarchy to reintegrate the hero. Yet critics of the play, taking their cue from Iris’ blame of the hero, have struggled to find in the hero’s own person an explanation for his disaster. Even Girard, who usually finds the explanation for sacrificial crisis and the ensuing explosion in the community, argues in the case of this play that Heracles’ extraordinary capacity for violence undermines the sacrificial mechanism, in that his return to Thebes overloads the ability of ritual to control this violence. According to Girard, Heracles acts like a soldier who returns from war only to act violently against those whom he fought to protect. Douglas’s cross-cultural analysis in *Purity and Danger* similarly emphasizes the danger of social explosion and the locus of impurities that can be found in transitional states or in acts, objects, and beings that lie between normal social categories. Both views help to illuminate the ambivalent effects of *nostos* (return home) common throughout Greek myth. Yet Girard’s observation more aptly describes Sophocles’ explosive hero in the *Trachiniae*, who has already explicitly committed two of the three sins that Dumézil associates with Heracles’ myth: disobedience to Eurystheus, for which he was punished with madness and the labors; the killing of Iphitus, for which he was punished with sickness (or in the *Trachiniae*, with slavery to Omphale in Lydia); and the sack of a city to capture Iole, which led to Deianeira’s gift of the poisoned robe. In Sophocles’ play Deianeira cannot tolerate Heracles’ challenge to her role as wife; Iole’s

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23 Although the Thebes of this play is in a state of “sacrificial crisis,” which might logically result in the mass lynching of a scapegoat figure, Girard 1977 himself emphasizes instead in his interpretation of the play the problem of Heracles’ own pollution for the sacrificial system. Girard seems correct in stressing the ritual setting for the action, but the text does not directly attribute excessive violence and impurity to the hero.

24 See Girard 1977: 39–41 and Douglas 1966, esp. 116, who stresses the use of ritual generally to control the passage of an individual from his old to his new status.

25 Dumézil 1969 identifies Heracles’ madness as typical of the Indo-European warrior. Yet in fact Euripides’ Heracles has at the point of his entrance apparently committed none of the three sins Dumézil identifies in his myth. Burkert 1979: 93–96, attributing to shamanistic origins Heracles’ role in bringing animals back to civilization and his intimate connection with sacrifice, finds a relation between shamanistic ecstasy and Heracles’ madness at the sacrifice.
presence in the household will make a mockery of her marriage. The robe mortally wounds the hero while he is offering a sacrifice to celebrate his violent return to civilized life. In the final scenes the hero himself comes to see the logic of this particular punishment. He insists on completing his own sacrifice and responds to his disastrous surrender to eros by insisting on the marriage of Iole and his son Hyllus. Agamemnon’s return in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon also results in a fatal sacrifice, this time of himself by his wife. But Agamemnon has already been tainted by his past crimes, his ritual slaughter of Iphigenia, and his violation of the gods’ shrines at Troy.

Wilamowitz and others have insisted, without Girard’s perceptive emphasis on the sacrificial setting for the disaster, that Euripides’ Heracles represents a similar case. For Wilamowitz, Heracles’ Dorian heroism explodes in an excessive revenge on Thebes; the hero showed signs of incipient madness before committing his crime. Because Wilamowitz’s specific arguments have been thoroughly discredited, later critics have based their similar views on the madness scene itself. The mad Heracles does indeed imagine the killing of his children as an act of long-suppressed revenge against Eurystheus and his children. The murders suggestively come as a climax rather than as a preliminary to the labors, and Iris notes that Hera waited until this point to attack Heracles (827–29). Should we then follow Kamerbeek in viewing Heracles’ psychotic break as an understandable reaction to the strain of his overburdened life?

Euripides seems to insist, however, that his Heracles is not the unstable and violence-prone hero well known in previous tradi-

26 For an excellent refutation of the views of Wilamowitz 1895, see Kroeker 1938, esp. 114–24. In this he is followed by Bond 1981: xix, 206–7, and 285, who emphasizes Heracles’ lack of hubris and the reasonableness of Heracles’ revenge. Pohlenz 1954 attributes Heracles’ madness to the shock of finding his family in danger; Blaiklock 1952: 122–40 explains the madness as an epileptic fit. Pachet 1972 more convincingly argues that the madness has a certain compelling dream logic despite its implausibility in the context of this play. Although Greek ideas of madness are difficult to evaluate, the notion of a strictly external cause for insanity seems in no way foreign to Greek thought. For recent general discussions, see Simon 1978: 89–154 and Vasquez 1972.

27 Kamerbeek 1966, esp. 14. His views are a variation on those of Wilamowitz 1895 and similar to those of Verrall 1895, Murray 1913, and Pohlenz 1954.
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tion. Everyone in the play repeatedly assumes that Hera is responsible for the madness (1127, 1180, 1253, 1263–64, 1310, 1311–12, 1393). Amphitryon speculates briefly on whether the blood of the slain could have made Heracles mad (965–67), as happens in the case of Orestes in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*. But Heracles has not at this point killed his own kin.28 In the *Bacchae* Euripides makes Pentheus’ madness psychologically understandable. Even the madness of Sophocles’ Ajax seems a logical extension of his hubristic overconfidence and his obsession with honor and revenge; in the Ajax the hero goes mad while contemplating violent action, and the gods substitute animals for the intended human victims. But in the *Heracles* Euripides creates a sane and modest hero without an explicit record, like that of Sophocles’ Heracles or Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, of illegitimate violence.

If Heracles had indeed transgressed the limits between god and man or had in fact been the volatile and violent hero of tradition that he becomes in his state of madness, sacrificial logic could easily explain his disaster. The ritual setting can speak with an implicit language as precise as that of the explicit language of the text. Yet in this play the sacrificial explosion seems more logically to derive from the community of Thebes and from the goddess who enacts the plans of its tyrant. The failure of Heracles’ ritual thus implicitly poses the same questions posed in the play as a whole; but it raises them without offering answers, drawing attention to the disjunction between the logic of ritual and the actual situation of the hero. What place can be found for Heracles in a world that has no place for his heroism? Not, certainly, in an unjust and indifferent Thebes, nor in a universe peopled by similarly unjust deities. Not for the violent individualist of existing literary tradition. Instead Euripides provides an untraditional Heracles, a model of paternal concern, piety, and justice. In descending into madness he seems to be pushed arbitrarily into his own literary reputation for violence and instability, and into a sacrificial scenario that belongs more appropriately to heroes such as Sophocles’ Heracles or Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. At the height of Heracles’ disaster Lyssa’s defense opens a moment of hope and pos-

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28 On this point, see Bond 1981 ad loc.
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sibility. A just community could surely find a place for the Heracles of Euripides’ play.

The Restoration of Sacrifice

Heracles’ disaster seems irrevocable. He cannot live in Thebes, for his pollution has been redoubled rather than removed. Trapped between an unjust god and an unjust city, he cannot live with his madness and its results.

Theseus, a just man from an apparently just city, resolves Heracles’ problems on a social level. He will purify the hero himself and restore Heracles to society in Athens. Euripides’ characters frequently choose to minimize miasma (see Hipp. 1448–51 or Orestes 75–76), but we cannot tell whether Theseus’ indifference to Heracles’ pollution represented a larger trend in Athenian society.²⁹ In Athens murderers returning from exile obtained ritual purification before they took up a normal position in civic life (Demosthenes 23.72), a formality that Theseus apparently will accomplish for Heracles. Theseus emphasizes his willingness to take responsibility for Heracles’ pollution and insists on Heracles’ innocence; the hero has now no need to rely on the justice of the gods. Although Euripides rarely expresses social optimism about cities, he consistently presents Athens as a place that can cope, ritually and artistically, with the violence represented by the terrible heroes of myth. If Athens can accept Medea after she deliberately “sacrificed” her children, why not Heracles? The Medea passage about Athens (824–65) seems to hint, however, that this special capacity of Athens is associated with the greatness of her artistic traditions; wisdom dwells where Harmony gave birth to the nine Muses. The

²⁹For discussions of purity and pollution in ancient society, see, among others, Adkins 1960: 86–115; Dodds 1951: chap. 2; MacDowell 1963, esp. 110–29; Moulinier 1952, criticized by Vernant 1980: 110–29; Rudhardt 1958: 21–52; and Gagarin 1981. Gagarin’s de-emphasis of the role of pollution in Athenian homicide law is not convincing. Homicide trials were held in the open air, Solon’s amnesty law excludes homicides; all such details seem to reflect legal concern with pollution. See also Bond 1981 on lines 1232–34.
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*Heracles*, as we shall see, makes the hero’s killing of his children a tragic sacrifice to the Muses.

Theseus establishes for the hero a relation with a community that despite his disaster values his heroism and specifically his past benefits to mankind. By arguing that both men and gods are subject to *tuchai* (misfortunes, 1314), Theseus makes Heracles’ sufferings part of a universal burden of sorrow. Heracles responds with a determination to depend on other human beings for survival (1403, 1425; compare also 1337–38) rather than on Zeus or a paternal universe. Amphitryon will become his sole father (1263–65) and Theseus his “son” (1401).30 His status in society will be defined by Theseus’ friendship and his gifts. Deprived of his family, Heracles’ powers will serve Athens alone. Whereas Iris earlier argued that Heracles threatened to transgress human limits, the hero here takes his place firmly on the side of man.

Heracles’ final view of the gods also expresses a determination to depend on man rather than on the gods for identity and justice. Redefining man’s relation to the gods, he implies that Theseus should not project man’s own violence and other illegitimate human desires onto the gods (1341–46):

> I do not think the gods desire illegitimate love or to fasten chains on each other’s hands. I do not think it worthy nor will I be persuaded that one god is master of another. For god needs, if he is truly god, nothing. These are the wretched *logoi* [stories] of poets.

Human beings may commit adultery, make wives jealous, create hierarchies of power, and punish each other. Gods do not or should not. This controversial passage insists that Hera could not be jealous of Heracles’ birth, for Zeus could not have adulterously fathered Heracles; it denies or censors the version of events presented in the peripety.31 Heracles’ assertion is consistent with his

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30 For the importance of the theme of the two fathers in the play, see most recently Gregory 1977.
decision to treat Amphitryon as his true father. As long as he thinks of the gods as human beings, his fate, like that of Ajax, seems a divine mockery too unbearable for a man who has rationalized his entire life as a series of labors performed for his father, Zeus. Heracles cannot pray to such a repellent Hera (1307–8). Suicide becomes the only alternative (1146–52, 1247). The decision to understand the force that destroyed him as *tuche* or the *tuche* of Hera (1393) does preserve for Heracles a relation to the divine. (I define *tuche* here as a sign of gods at work, and as “chance” only insofar as this divine activity is incomprehensible and arbitrary from the human perspective). But he will depend on the divine in one respect only, to rationalize his disaster: This divine *tuche* is still responsible for Heracles’ madness, and thus he can escape from an intolerable mental imprisonment in his own nature and choose to survive and accept a relation to a new community.

Hera’s *tuche*, then, does not so much reassert the old anthropomorphism as capture the inscrutability of man’s relation to godhead (be it *tuche* or Olympians). Euripides’ contemporaries, after all, had no expectation that divination through sacrifice would put the divine force under their control nor always even reveal with which divinity they might be communicating or should communicate. They expected favorable omens only when their plans accorded with divine necessity, which Greek authors frequently characterized as inherently arbitrary and indifferent to men’s aspirations, values, and standards of justice. In this respect ritual practice implied the recognition about divinity that Heracles reaches here. Gods who give or enforce justice must be anthropomorphic and violent. Heracles’ slavery to divine *tuche*, in contrast, seems to

avoid the challenging implications of this passage by insisting that Heracles’ words are *only* a reply to Theseus (see Bond 1981: xxii and ad loc.). Stinton, in arguing that Heracles is not denying the existence of arbitrary divinities but finds them unacceptable and prefers the new ideal he presents here, adduces many parallel passages such as Pindar *Olympian* 9.28ff. and Eur. *Hippolytus* 120 and *Bacchae* 1348. One might add *Ion* 440–51, where Ion speculates on the consequences for mortals of divine injustice and irresponsibility. Lines such as 1243–45 do not indicate that Heracles is making a complete break with divinity as such.
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imply a continued relation to divinity but no confidence in a divine justice.

Heracles’ decision marks an interesting moment in the development of tragedy. The *Heracles*, like the *Oresteia*, makes etiology the telos (concluding moment) of tragedy, and Athenian society the reward for mankind’s transformation of suffering into knowledge. In both cases the gods as violence personified enter directly into the tragic *agôn* (Erinyes/Lyssa) but give way before strengthened mechanisms of social control. In Aeschylus, however, piety prevails only through an immeasurably larger portion of divine concern (Athena) and concession (the Eumenides), whereas Euripides’ men can fall back only on *philia* (friendship), ritual, and imagination: Theseus’ capacity to purify Heracles at Athens derives from his command of that city, and Heracles’ restored sanity rests on his adroit denial that he has experienced what the audience has in fact seen—the vindictive human gods of the peripety. Remasking those gods in incomprehensibility, Heracles may now understand himself as the victim of an order that neither resembles man nor invites his judgments. And this too is a familiar figure: the Sophoclean hero walking through a tragic foundation myth, but with powers of redemptive self-delusion that are purely Euripidean.

In the final scenes Theseus offers Heracles both land (*temenē*, 1329) and a cult (1331–33) in Athens.32 His new community will restore to him the honor apparently destroyed by the gods (1333), and it will accept glory in compensation for receiving the hero (1334–35). The sacrifices (*thusiai*, 1332) that he will receive suggest either a combination of divine and heroic rites or, more probably, heroic rites. In his cult at Athens, a cult that Theseus is apparently preparing to establish, Heracles was one of the few Greek heroes to receive both Olympian and chthonic sacrifice, and Athens claimed to have been the first to worship the hero in both forms.33 Yet

32Tarkow 1977, in discussing the role of Athens in the play, thinks Heracles turns to the intellectual world of Athens as he becomes a spiritual rather than a physical hero in the final scenes. Theseus serves as an intellectual sounding board for the hero in his painful transition.

33See Woodford 1971 for the most up-to-date treatment of Heracles’ cults in Attica and the ancient references to his double nature. On the cults of Theseus see
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there are several reasons for interpreting Theseus’ offer as one of a hero cult. Theseus offers to a very humanized hero, after he has gone to Hades (1331), sacrifices and raised stone monuments (laĩn-oĩî t’ exōngkōmasin, 1332; see exongkoun used of raising a tomb for Clytemnestra in Orestes 402); and Theseus, who received exclusively heroic honors in Athens, offers to share his own temenē (a term often used for a divine precinct) with Heracles.

Though dead, a hero could still receive honor and offer assistance to his worshipers from the world below. Yet Heracles’ claim to this special daemonic status now rests on Theseus and Athens, not on the paternity of Zeus. Indeed, Theseus’ offer of a cult that is neither initiated nor supported by divine authority is as striking as his comparable offer to perform pollution rites for a hero whose appeal to the gods for purification has been rejected.34

Leaving aside numerous other aetiologies of hero cults, we have only to compare the similar situation in Sophocles’ Oedipus at Colonus. Here Oedipus acquires cult status in a traditional manner, as Theseus and the chorus accept the prophecies about his death offered to the hero by the oracles from Delphi. Through the city’s experience of Heracles’ imagination, courage, and suffering, we see that Athens will receive the advantage of the hero’s divine energies in a form more human and predictable than that embodied in the forces variously called Zeus, Hera, or tuchē. The hero offers the city divinity with a human face, a power that can mediate positively between the city and an external reality now visualized as totally nonhuman.

Athens wins a crown for adopting Heracles (1334) and transforms a Theban and Panhellenic hero into a local Athenian deity (hero cults were always local).35 Here the community creates its

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Nock 1944: 144. The term thusiai could continue to suggest both divine and chthonic honors for the audience, if not for Heracles. For the use of thuô to refer to a combination of divine and chthonic honors (although the term enagizein is more common), see Casabona 1966: 83–85.

34 Hero cults were generally accorded by gods and imposed on communities; see esp. Crotty 1982: xi and chap. 4, and Rohde 1925: 129–31.

35 Nagy 1979 argues that epic texts suppress the mention of hero cults precisely because this poetry aims at being Panhellenic rather than tied to a specific location. Regional poets, in contrast, celebrate hero cults precisely because they are local. Euripides’ play transforms a Panhellenic hero into an Athenian one. Just as the
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own divinity and ritualizes its relation to the hero through sacrifice. Heracles will remain in Athens, but his powers will be limited by his humanity and his mortality. The gods exist simply to rationalize his disaster and to declare his innocence. For the first time in known poetic tradition Heracles finds a permanent place within a *polis*. (Sophocles’ play, in contrast, returns the hero to a sacrifice on the margins of civilization where he lived his life.) This resolution of Heracles’ sacrificial crisis restores the relations among hero, god, and community shattered in the peripety. Ritual remains necessary for the ordering of human experience, but the superstructure by which it is rationalized is transformed. In this sense the *Heracles* reflects a trend in late fifth- and fourth-century religious thinking; as the Olympian gods become less anthropomorphic, heroes and *daimones* serve to mediate between gods and men and open the way for mortals to achieve a divine status.\(^{36}\)

The Restoration of Heracles’ Perverted Labors (*Agônes*)

**Amphitryon** finds three factors responsible for Heracles’ crime: Heracles, the bow, and a god (1135). When Heracles first contemplates the terrible *agôn* in which he slew his family, he wishes to reject his past glory and painful labors and associates his famous weapons exclusively with the murder of his children (1270–78 and 1377–81). Indeed, although the chorus and characters find consolation and meaning in the labors, Heracles from his first entrance has been only too willing to abandon the labors and his glorious past for the sake of defending his family. Finally, Heracles, as he accepts responsibility for the murders precipitated by Hera, also reluctantly adopts the *koinôniai* (companionship, 1377) of the weap-

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\(^{36}\)On this point, see Vernant 1980: 107–8. See Nock 1944: 165 on the greater closeness of heroes than Olympians to the ordinary man.
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ons as murderers of his children. As the weapons say to Heracles (1380–81):

Through us you murdered your wife and children. Wearing us you wear the murderers of your children.

Heracles thus attributes the blame for his crime to the tuchē of Hera and to the weapons as paidoktonous (child murderers, 1381).37 The Greeks sometimes considered weapons to be responsible for a crime and hence polluted.38 For example, the sacrificial knife at the Attic Bouphonia was condemned for the murder of a bull and banished.39 Just as Theseus ignores Heracles’ miasma, Heracles, with a magnificent gesture of self-mastery as he takes up the hated weapons, now ritualizes his relation to his weapons and hence to his own past violence. Heracles determines to keep his weapons only for self-defense, for standing up against (hupostēnai, 1350) and enduring possible aggression. Just as Heracles has resolved to be a slave to tuchē, he will now keep his weapons wretchedly (athliōs de sóisteon, 1385), as, clinging to his side like the children he destroyed (see 1379),40 they endlessly remind him of his crimes. By accepting dependency on Theseus and by confining his powers within new limits (he will act only defensively; his labors are over), Heracles becomes a hero who will act within a polis rather than, as before, on the margins of civilization.

Theseus, in accepting Heracles into Athens, chooses to ignore, in addition to Heracles’ miasma, the apparent perversion of the hero’s labors. He insists that Heracles can offer Athens a crown of glory by coming to the city (1334–35). By establishing a cult he gives Heracles an opportunity to benefit the city with his powers. Theseus also attempts to use the hero’s past glory, celebrated at length in the suppliant action, to persuade him to survive (1248 and 1250, 1410, 1414; in the apparent lacuna at 1313 he may have

37 On this point, see Pucci 1980: 185.
38 See Bond 1981 on line 1381.
39 See esp. Pausanias 1.24.4 and 1.28.10 and Porphyry De abst. 2.29–30 on the Bouphonia.
40 On the ironic similarity between weapons and children here, see Bond 1981 on line 1379. See also lines 79 and 986. Heracles kills the children with the very weapons, club and bow, that he had promised them.
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expanded on this motif in reply to Heracles’ despair). The final scenes, then, establish a new context for the labors that were earlier denigrated by Lycus, ignored by Thebes, and perverted by the mad hero.

Heracles keeps his weapons for his own defense and, by implication, for the benefit of his new city. The decision is crucial, given the lengthy debate on weaponry in the earlier part of the play. There the tyrant Lycus tries to establish the irrelevance of Heracles’ labors and of his bow in contemporary warfare. Lycus attacks the truth of Heracles’ parentage and relegates his beast labors to the precivilized past; Heracles’ choice of weapons, bare arms and a bow, offers no proof of courage in a world in which the noblest military figure is the hoplite. For Lycus, the hoplite shows superior courage as he stands in the ranks of his fellow spearmen enduring blows directly, instead of at a distance like the bowman (157–64). Lycus’ attack clearly reflects a general decline in the popularity of portrayals of Heracles’ beast labors and of Heracles as bowman in the art and literature of the classical period. Amphi­tryon, countering with a defense of the bowman, asserts that the hoplite, a slave to his weapons, can have no heroism apart from his fellow soldiers, whereas the bowman can defend his friends without taking foolish risks (190–203).

Scholars have related the debate over weaponry to the bow’s prominent role in Athens’ battles with the Persians and Spartans (the success of the archers at Sphacteria in 425 or the failure to employ archers in the hoplite defeat at Delium in 424). Yet the text’s characterization of the bowman has far more to do with

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41 Recent work on the Athenian hoplite stresses the association between the hoplite and the development of democracy. Athens was in essence a nation of equal men in arms. See Detienne 1968 and Vidal-Naquet 1968b.

42 See Bond 1981 on line 158.

43 Recent battles may have influenced the reaction of the audience to this passage, yet only literary *topoi* can explain the passage. Bond 1981: xxxii and on line 161 mentions *Iliad* 2.385, Soph. *Ajax* 1120, and the later Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.9.2 and Dio Chrysostom 58.1. We might add Archilochus frag. 3 W, which also contrasts the bowman’s mode of warfare with that of the swordsman and spearsman. Bond argues that the central issue in this debate is the contrast between two kinds of bravery. Heracles wielded the spear in other earlier poetry (cf. the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield* poem), so that Euripides’ decision to make Heracles exclusively a bowman is deliberate.
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literary tradition and the tricky, adaptable descendants of Paris, Odysseus, and Teucer than with fifth-century battlefields. Euripides’ Heracles puts to the test the heroism of the Bowman as it is represented in the literary tradition. After seeing an unfavorable omen Heracles enters Thebes secretly (596–98) and agrees to ambush Lycus rather than attack the city directly in his old style (566–606). The Bowman Odysseus makes a similar secret return home in the Odyssey and sets a comparable trap for the unjust suitors. Heracles acts alone, and his primary goal is to use his weapons for the defense of his family, to ensure the survival of the group; so too Odysseus in the Odyssey, though with some help from his friends. For all Heracles’ success in destroying Lycus with his bow, the peripety leaves unresolved this debate on weaponry inasmuch as Heracles’ powers have turned against those whom they were meant to protect. The strategy of leaving the defense of a group in the hands of a single human being, vulnerable to tuche, remains questionable.

This debate over the heroism of the Bowman can best be understood through a more detailed examination of its prominent role in the Homeric poems. In Iliad 11.369–95, the Bowman Paris, hiding behind a column on the gravemound of Ilus, shoots Diomedes in the foot. Diomedes laughs at the wound and the weapon. Those who feel the spearsman Diomedes’ blows know instant death. Although this passage denigrates the heroism of the Bowman relative to that of the spearsman, and perhaps, by setting the episode near a gravemound, associates Paris’ weapon with the past and the dead, we also know that the invincible spearsman Achilles met his fate from an arrow in the foot and that the war could not be won without Philoctetes, who brought the bow of Heracles to Troy (Iliad 2.724–25). In short, although even in the Iliad Heracles is the hero of a previous generation and his style of heroism is no longer the predominant one, the epic tradition as a whole (the Odyssey, the Little Iliad of Lesches) recognized that both the direct violence of the spearsman and the strategy of the Bowman were necessary to success in warfare.

44Galinsky 1972: 10–14 has a complementary interpretation of these Odyssey passages. I have confined discussion of Heracles’ heroism and weapons (a large topic in the tradition) to the issues raised directly by the play.
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In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus becomes a hero of the bow who was inferior even at Troy, as he says, to Philoctetes alone (*Od*. 8.219). Odysseus leaves his best bow at home for the ultimate task of protecting his own family and for surviving that defense by trickery and skill. Achilles, the spearsman, regrets his choice of glory over survival (*Od*. 11.488–91). The *Odyssey*, then, offers an implicit defense of the heroism of the bowman; yet even here the potential instability or antisocial quality of the bowman is recognized and established through comparisons and confrontations between Odysseus and Heracles. Shunning the example of Heracles and Eurytus of Oechalia, Odysseus declines to use his prowess with the bow to compete with the immortals (*Od*. 8.215–25). *Odyssey* 21 recounts the history of Odysseus’ bow: the youthful Odysseus received it from Iphitus, who had in turn received it from his father, Eurytus. Odysseus and Iphitus never had the opportunity to enjoy their newly established guest friendship because Heracles, ignoring the wrath of the gods, violated the rules of hospitality by killing his host Iphitus. In each case Heracles acts as a foil for Odysseus, both by his positive example of glorious bowmanship and by the negative example of his misuse of that strength. The Odysseus of the *Iliad* is primarily a spearsman, not a bowman. In the *Odyssey*, although he still adroitly wields the spear in fighting the suitors, he is primarily a bowman. Yet Odysseus, unlike Heracles, willingly holds his heroism within human limits and seeks collaboration with the gods rather than rivalry. Most important of all, he exacts retribution for violations of hospitality rather than abusing it like Heracles. Odysseus retains the glory of the earlier generation of heroes but adapts his heroism to a more modern and ethically bound environment.

Elsewhere in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus meets his heroic predecessors Achilles and Heracles in the underworld. Achilles, despite his glory, would rather be a laborer on earth than a king of the dead. Odysseus meets Heracles’ image in the underworld (11.601–27) while Heracles himself is on Olympus. The terrifying ghost of the hero, who appears about to shoot his bow at any moment, wears a belt recording his mighty deeds. The image suggests isolation and volatility. Yet in addressing Odysseus he weeps, lamenting his life of hard labors and his enslavement to a man far worse than himself. Heracles, unlike Achilles, is a figure both dead and immortal.
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Yet in playing degrading social roles as a slave to his labors and to Eurytus he has suffered no loss of stature. Like Heracles, Odysseus goes on to play the role of a beggar in the interest of his family’s and his own survival, but without the loss of kleos that would have met Achilles had he chosen to go home to his father in Phthia. Yet Odysseus’ judicious planning and his final actions as part of a group allow him to escape Heracles’ lonely instability. In the Odyssey the older form of heroism, that of the bowman, once it is subjected to new physical and ethical limits, rivals and almost surpasses that of the spearsman. Sophocles’ Ajax provides another complementary relation between spearsman and bowman. Teucer the bowman, though denigrated by Menelaus, speaks bravely to defend the reputation of the dead spearsman Ajax and to protect his family. Yet in both the Ajax and the Odyssey the bow continues to serve best off the battlefield, where defense outweighs aggression and glory for its own sake.

The poetic tradition, then, sufficiently explains the issues raised in the debate on weaponry in the Heracles without recourse to recent military history. In both Homer and Euripides the bowman is associated with self-defense and survival, with the seemingly less heroic mode of waging war in disguise or at a distance, from a place where the victims cannot locate in advance the origin of the death that comes upon them. Heracles, by coming to Athens as the future recipient of a hero cult and dependent on Theseus and Athens for a place to survive, resolves the earlier debate between Lycus and Amphitryon on the heroism of the bowman. In the Odyssey the image of the bowman was transformed and adapted to new conditions. The heroic style of an earlier generation was found to be essential to the survival of the individual and the group and in the final scenes became a necessary complement to the heroic and direct aggression of the Iliadic spearsman. In the supplicant action of the Heracles Megara, using formulae traditional to an appeal to a dead hero, calls on the absent Heracles to aid his friends in the world above (490–96).45 The living Heracles answers her call, ambushes Lycus, but then destroys the family he has just rescued. Theseus recreates this protective role for Heracles in the context of

45See Bond 1981: 191.
an Athenian hero cult. The image of the bowman surviving and sending his unending supply of arrows from an unseen source within the city suits that of a dead hero defending his city from the world below. (See 196 on the bowman’s endless supply of arrows, and 200 on his hidden position.) In *Iliad* 2.369–95, Paris’ hidden position behind the tomb of his ancestor Ilus implicitly associates the bowman with the powers of the dead. Similarly, in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers* the ghost of the hero’s father and other underworld spirits can send an avenging *belos* (almost certainly an arrow) from the world below (see 286–87 and, more metaphorically, 380–81; see also 161–63, 694, and 1032–33); the dead Heracles of *Odyssey* 11, too, stalks through Hades ever ready to shoot his bow (608). In Euripides’ play, Heracles’ new dependence on Athens, his slavery to *tuchē* (1357), and his willingness to stand up against death directly (1350; 1349; 1351, if the text is correct) recall the characteristics of the hoplite established earlier in the play by Lycus: the hoplite’s direct confrontation of death, his slavery to his weapons, and his dependence on and subservience to a community (163–64; see also 190–91). The heroism of the individualistic bowman no longer stands in contradiction to that of the hoplite but supports and merges with it. Here Euripides implicitly exploits the alternative tradition of Heracles as hoplite rather than bowman that had existed from epic onward and was prominent in late fifth-century vase paintings, especially in representations of Heracles’ pyre on Mount Oeta. Athens thus purifies Heracles of both his *miasma* and the potential instability associated with the isolated and sometimes deceptive or antisocial heroism of the past. The play does not deny that Heracles’ heroism is in some sense anachronistic in the world of the hoplite, as Lycus has argued, but finds an appropriate place for it in a new context. The *agōnes* of Heracles are complete, yet they remain relevant in

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46 Many argue that the text should read *engkarterēsō bioton*. See Bond 1981 ad loc. Wilamowitz 1895 ad loc., if he was correct in thinking that *paraspizont’* in 1099 was a metaphor drawn from hoplites fighting in a phalanx, offers further strength to my argument. Fragmenta tragica adespota 374 N characterizes Heracles as a slave to his *aretē*.

47 See Beazley 1947: 103ff. on representations of Heracles’ pyre with greaves, shield, and corselet. See note 43 above.
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the context of the polis, where agônes are performed in accordance with the rules of civic life and for the defense and glory of the city as well as the individual (see 1334–35).

The resolution of the conflict between spearsman and bowman has important implications for the audience and for fifth-century Athenian democracy. Hoplite warfare, as Lycus shows, entails collective action in place of the self-assertion characteristic of the archaic hero, egalitarianism in place of personal kleos. In the story of Aristodamus, Herodotus (9.71) associates that soldier’s drive for individual excellence with the kind of madness that attacks Hercules in Euripides’ play (he is described as mad, lussonta, a word derived from the same root as Lyssa). Yet Athens was also a supremely agonistic society, in which both the training for warfare, hunting, and athletics, and the popularity of the archaic hero in myth and cult stood in contradiction to the strictly communal ethic of political and military life. The hunter and the ephebe, whose sphere of action was outside the central spaces of the city, favored trickery, survival, and the traditional Greek drive toward individual excellence and success. The bow was, of course, originally a hunter’s weapon. Megara’s speech of lament for her sons emphasizes the child-loving Hercules’ training of his children, who were to inherit their father’s weapons and to rule Greece in a Panhellenic dynasty (462–79). In Attic cult, too, Heracles served as a model for youths, who, for example, drank with Heracles and dedicated their hair to the hero in their initiation to the phratry at the Apatouria. Indeed, as Farnell emphasizes, Heracles’ “higher social function” in Greek cult “does not range beyond his protection of the Epheboi and his care for their physical development. He

48For a general discussion of the contradictions and tensions posed by the agonistic nature of Greek society, see Gouldner 1965. Vidal-Naquet 1968a and 1981b and Lonis 1979: 25–40 call attention to the particular contradiction between the ethics of hoplite warfare and those of athletics and hunting. Lonis suggests that the view presented in the Laches may have been more widespread than other critics have thought, and he stresses the ritualized nature of Greek warfare, which incorporates in a carefully controlled form agonistic elements from other spheres of activity. Alternatively, it could be argued that Greek society has deliberately structured spheres in which the drive for individual glory can be spent, thus allowing citizens to commit themselves more fully to collective effort in areas such as warfare and politics, where the communal effort must take first place.

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is not concerned with the higher political life."

His cults in Attica are to be found not on the acropolis but in suburbs and remote demes such as Marathon, where the Athenians apparently received the hero’s protection in the famous battle against the Persians (Herodotus 6.108 and 116; the Athenians camped in his precinct). At Laches 181e–182d Socrates argues that the ethics of single combat and hoplite warfare can be compatible. Similarly, the Heracles implicitly demonstrates that the ideal of the archaic hero and his individualistic heroism need not conflict with Athenian political ideals, provided that the hero submits to the city, retains self-control, and remains marginal to its higher political life.

The Poetic Crisis

The Heracles questions not only the relations among god, man, and community, as expressed in sacrificial ritual, or the status of Heracles’ mythical labors and the form of heroism that they represent, but also the entire past poetic tradition about Heracles. The earlier scenes of the play, up through the central crisis, present in succession three different views of the hero: the epinician Heracles, the domestic Heracles, and the violent and criminal Heracles. (On the structure of the Heracles, see the appendix to this chapter.) Epinician poets favor Heracles, the Panhellenic hero par excellence, as a model for their aristocratic athletes and emphasize his role as superhuman culture hero. Following Indo-European tradition, all serious Greek poets make it their mission to praise what they view as socially valuable and to blame what should be rejected (for example, Pindar Nemean 7.61–63 or 8.39). In the supplicant scene of the Heracles, however, the chorus adopts in its praise of

49Farnell 1921: 154. See also Woodford 1971 on the connections between Heracles and youth in Attic cult.

50Farnell 1921: 108. The ghost of Theseus also reportedly emerged from the underworld to fight with the Athenians at Marathon (Pausanias 1.15.3). Theseus’ own heroic exploits were modeled on those of Heracles, yet as a whole the later hero was explicitly associated in Attic myth and cult with the democracy (Farnell 1921: 340).

51Comparative studies in Indo-European poetry and studies of early Greek poet-
Ritual Irony

Heracles a stance most closely analogous to epinician poetry. The Heracles who finally arrives in Thebes, however, is decidedly not the extraordinary epinician hero, but modest, pious, an ideal son and husband, and an emphatically loving father. Finally, this novel domestic Heracles lapses in the peripety into another familiar Heracles, the criminal hero of epic.

Euripides enjamb these three views of the hero, emphasizing the separateness of each and the apparent contradictions among them. For example, the criminal Heracles of the central crisis is represented in the language of the text as a perversion of the hero of encomiastic poetry, and the domestic Heracles has a stature inadequate to his grand mythical tradition. The scenes following the peripety, however, restore the relation among these three apparently contradictory interpretations and recreate a hero who is equal to the mutability of events (see 1245) and appropriate even to contemporary Athens. The Heracles whom Athens will worship in hero cult is the acknowledged if apparently blameless author of terrible deeds, as well as being human, dependent, and suffering. He retains his past glory, yet by his crime and suffering he has been reduced to equality with other men, and in this sense becomes a true participant in a democratic society. Ironically, in destroying the Heracles of earlier Greek literature, the gods confer tragic stature on him and ensure his survival as a hero in Athens. Greek tragedy, of course, often ennobles heroes by portraying their suffering. Yet the Heracles through its radical disjunctions in character and action makes its audience particularly conscious of the process by which a tragic poet creates a new heroism by transforming previous tradition. The Heracles who emerges from Euripides’ tragedy is, unlike Sophocles’ hero in the Trachiniae, a strikingly

ry have made a clear case for the role of the poet as dispenser of praise and blame. See Dumézil 1943 and Ward 1973. For archaic Greek poetry, see Detienne 1967, Nagy 1976 and 1979: 213–75, and Crotty 1982. For praise and blame vociferously exercised in the theater, see Plato Laws 876b. The praise poetry of the choral odes of the Heracles is closest to the epinician tradition in mediating between hero and city, praising the hero and defending him against detractors and traditions that might denigrate him; in its insistence on the contemporary relevance of the hero and his role as heroic model; and in its acknowledgment of human instability and the importance of the gods to human success. See my discussion later in this chapter.
novel figure who resembles in part the philosophical hero of Prodicus and the later Stoics; he determines to survive on the basis of a deliberate decision to control and rationalize his suffering and to view from a radically different perspective both divine reality and his own painful experiences.

Euripides frequently translates the titanic figures of saga into the everyday world, as if to test the mythic tradition with the touchstone of the ordinary. Here his goal seems unusually clear: the creation of an Athenian hero. In an almost programmatic fashion Euripides shows how tragedy can create from the anachronistic and individualistic heroes of the past a hero who remains relevant to a fifth-century Athenian polis. The tradition about Heracles lent itself particularly well to Euripides’ tragic experiment, both because Heracles was a problematic hero even in epic and because he had so rarely been made the central subject of a tragedy. So far as we know, fourteen tragedies treated Heracles and his children, but only Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* and Euripides’ play made Heracles the tragic hero. Indeed, despite Heracles’ enormous popularity in cult and the fine arts, the Heracles of literary tradition was simultaneously too superhuman (as Iris herself complains in this play) and too pervasively anticultural in his behavior to fit readily into a genre that specialized in domestic and civic disasters. Both Sophocles and Euripides avoid direct mention of his untragic transformation into an Olympian deity after death.

Let us now examine the way in which the play presents the three Heracles in succession and then discredits each in turn as too limited to survive in memory with the resilience and range that they acquire in combination.

*The Epinician Hero*

The Athenian audience would have brought to the *Heracles* a poetic vision of Heracles primarily shaped not by tragedy but by the older epic, hymnic, and lyric traditions and by contemporary Old Comedy and satyr play. From the perspective of these earlier traditions, the hero was frequently the subject of admiration and praise. For his victory over the giants and his other labors, Heracles earned praise in the Homeric hymns, Hesiod, Bacchylides,
Pindar, and the visual arts. And so it is in the first stasimon of the *Heracles*, which portrays the hero as a champion of civilization over chaos, lawlessness, and barbarism. The *Heracles* of *Iliad* 5.637–56 and of the pseudo-Hesiodic shield poem avenges violated hospitality. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Heracles continues Zeus’ civilizing work on earth by destroying monsters born of the older generation of Titans. With his voyage to what became the Pillars of Heracles he establishes the limits to human achievement and thereby to poetic *kleos* as well (Pindar *Olympian* 3.44–45, *Nemean* 3.21). Numerous cities besides Thebes and Argos/Mycenae, in whose myths he figures most prominently, staked literary claims to the hero. As Pindar says (*Pythian* 9.87): “That man is mute who does not lend his voice to Heracles.” For Pindar, Heracles is the major Panhellenic model of *aretē* (*Nem*. 1.31–34), the foil for the athletes and kings praised in his poems.

In the first, or suppliant, action of the play, Megara, Amphitryon, and the chorus hold up to the test of events a hero who essentially belongs to a pretragic, encomiastic and epinician, tradition. On a purely formal level, it is worth noting that the chorus sings three odes that all critics agree are traditional praise poems, whether hymnic or epinician.⁵² Megara offers a funeral lament, another speech of praise, for Heracles’ children. Amphitryon praises Heracles to counter Lycus’ blame of the hero. Megara and Amphitryon try to defer the children’s grief through hope in the hero (76–77, 99–100); later Megara summons the courage to die in his image. The chorus tries to find in Heracles the subject for song, dance, and celebration, and hence a way of softening the bitterness of old age. According to these powerless Theban elders, his heroism can unite them in a set of shared values, and praise of him provides potential consolation for suffering and a model for courageously accepting their lot.

Amphitryon’s prologue, as is often the case in Euripides, imme-
The Heracles
diately raises for the audience the problem of contradictory mythi­
cal traditions about the hero. Were the motives for Heracles’ labors
filial, based on a desire to restore Mycenae to his father? Or was
Heracles driven by the goads of Hera or by necessity (17–21)? The
first motive, apparently a novel one in the tradition, prepares for
the later appearance of the surprisingly domesticated Heracles; the
second, for the persecution of Heracles in the peripety; the third,
necessity, anticipates Heracles’ own final view of the forces that
have shaped his fate. Amphitryon-upholds Heracles’ claim to
Thebes on the basis of his good birth and his divine and human
fathers, in contrast to the claims of Lycus, whose ancestry is ob­
scure in the Theban tradition (31–32; see also 663, 810). Megara
then voices regret for the lost glory of Heracles’ family. She defers
the grief of Heracles’ children with stories of past myths: ego de
1 diapherō / logoi mutheousa, “I lead them on telling fables” (76–
77). Amphitryon urges Megara to continue this deception: par­
eukèlei logos / kleptousa muthoi athlious klopas homōs, “charm them
with stories, / cheating them with words, wretched deceivers
though words are” (99–100). He himself, however, finds a source
of optimism only in the cyclical transitions offered by time; the
best man relies on values of the spirit, on hope (101–6). Faced with
extinction from a dictatorship established by violence in a sta­
sis-ridden city and the absence or probable death of Heracles, Am­
phitryon essentially confesses that the glorious myths about Hera­
cles offer only a fragile and deceptive consolation in the present.
The elders enter, emphasizing their friendship for the hero and his
family but lamenting their helpless old age, their lost heroic past,
and the indifference of Thebes to Heracles.

Lycus abruptly intervenes and attacks Heracles’ parentage and
labors, although his fear of the hero’s children to some extent
b elies his words. Lycus, replies Amphitryon, blames (memphēi,
r89) the bow. He, Amphitryon, has nothing but words to counter
Lycus’ amathia (ignorance of correct values, injustice, 171–76), but
he will defend Heracles’ traditional reputation (see 205: tôn kathestō­
tōn peri). His words are enemies to Lycus (204–5). Heracles has

53See Bond 1981 ad lac.
54On amathia in the play, see Bond 1981 on line 347. Note the use of the similar
term skaios at 283 and 299.
shared a victory song with the gods (180); the centaurs are witnesses of his prowess (181–83). If Dirphys, Lycur’s homeland, were asked a comparable question, it would not praise him (ouk an s’epaineseien, 186). Amphitryon reproaches Greece and Thebes for failing to show gratitude to Heracles and hence to defend his children (217–28). Later Amphitryon extends this accusation of amathia (347) and lack of philia (341) to Zeus. The chorus makes a point of praising Amphitryon’s words (236–37), whereas Lycur sneers at the uselessness of words in comparison to action (238–39).

After Lycur’s departure, Megara tries to use Heracles as a model for facing disaster. She bows to the uselessness of words as a weapon against Lycur (298). She evokes her own nobility and the labors that she underwent in bearing children (hamochthesa, 281; for m ochthoi used of Heracles’ labors, see 355–56). She proposes to imitate her husband (emoi te mimēm’ andros ouk apōsteon, 294) by accepting death. The children may be excluded from their ancestral halls, but Heracles’ name at least remains (338). He was literally a model for his three sons, for he resolved to leave his lionskin to one, his club to another—a pseude dosin (pretend gift, 471) to teach his child—and his bow to the third. He planned to establish all three, with suitable marriages from Athens, Thebes, and Sparta arranged by Megara, as kings in Argos, Thebes, and Oechalia. The Panhellenic hero wished to found a Panhellenic dynasty, to create a source of Greek unity that will be lost after the death of the children. The chorus echoes Megara’s lost hopes in the first stasimon (348–441), celebrating Heracles’ Panhellenic heroism and his use of the bow and the club. Yet for Megara Heracles has finally been reduced here to a model for dying, not for living.

The play opens, then, with an implicit poetic crisis. Heracles is “dead,” and the world is dead to Heracles. Lycur and Thebes are indifferent to the values of eugeneia (noble birth), philia, and the poetic tradition about Heracles and threaten to destroy all that he represents. The gods, centaurs, and landscapes evoked by Amphitryon as witnesses of Heracles’ prowess have no voices in the world of the play until the surprising peripety. The absent Heracles has no defense but words, whereas Lycur supports his blame of the hero with actions.
The Heracles

The name Lycus (Luk-os), meaning wolf, has associations with the tradition of poetic invective, or blame poetry. Gernet has established an Indo-European model for the motif of the wolf as outlaw and outsider.55 The root luk–appears in the name Lycambes (Luk-ambês, “having the steps of a wolf”), the figure who elicited invective from Archilochus for humiliating him. The king Lycurgus (Luko-orgos) denigrated the divinity of Dionysus.56 Hence the name Lycus itself evokes a figure ignorant of correct values and an enemy of the praise poet. This amathês enemy of praise poetry questions the authenticity, nobility, or relevance of the hero or poet whom he attacks. The name Lycus, which Euripides is probably introducing into the legend for the first time (see 27–34), evokes three useful sorts of associations. First, it creates another “beast labor” for the hero (at 701 Lycus’ entrance immediately follows the choral description of Heracles as beast killer). Second, it recalls the wolf’s paradoxical associations with both hoplite (egalitarian and communally oriented) warfare and tyranny, demonstrated by Detienne and Svenbro.57 Indeed, Lycus’ namesake Lycaeon (compare Zeus Lukeios) is explicitly associated not only with tyranny but also with human sacrifice and cannibalism.58 Third, it labels the dramatic opponent of praise.

Frequently proponents of ignorant invective such as Lycus deliberately misrepresent the actions and values of the hero. Thersites in Iliad 2, for example, pretends that Achilles could not really have been angry at Agamemnon, since he did not kill him. In Pindar Nemean 8.32–34b, the enemies of Ajax use echthra parphasis, hateful distortion or misrepresentation, to obscure and blacken the reputation of the hero. The praise poet must rescue the hero from such misrepresentation or psogos (blame), identify and praise what is praiseworthy, and bring kleos to a philos (Nem. 7.61–63, 8.21–25 and 39). He addresses an audience of friends who are labeled sunetoi or phroneontes (Olym. 2.85 and Pyth. 5.107; Bacchylides 3.85), wise and experienced men who can understand the true nature of

57 See Detienne and Svenbro 1979. There was another Lycus in Theban tradition, who usurped the throne of Thebes during Laius’ infancy.
58 See Piccaluga 1968 on Lycaon.
human victory and failure, of friendship and divine favor. He mediates the relation between victor and community and unites his audience in festive celebration and a set of shared values; he makes men forget their mortal suffering as they confront the glorious actions of heroes and victors. Negative criticism has little place in a praise poem (Pyth. 2.52–65, Bacchylides 3.67–68), and both Homer and Pindar justify only the blame of an inferior or wicked person (Nem. 8.38–39, Il. 2.211–77). A jealous refusal to praise (phthonos) becomes in essence a form of revolt against the gods, who are in part responsible for mortal achievement. The comic poet Aristophanes explicitly adopts this tradition in his parabases, where he lays claim to constructive praise and blame and appeals to the intelligence of his audience. In a similar fashion, the scenario, vocabulary, and themes traditional to earlier praise and blame poetry recur in the early scenes of the Heracles, where Heracles’ perceptive friends, who seek to praise him fittingly and enduringly, confront the ignorant enemy, who blames, misrepresents, and de­nigrates him. Amphitryon appropriately reserves his scorn for those who neglect the hero, while Lycus establishes his impiety through his ignorant attack on the glorious son of Zeus. The chorus seeks in Heracles a source of consolation and forgetfulness, while Megara and her sons find a model for action.

The epinician poet also makes his audience conscious of his skill in selecting from the mythical tradition. By highlighting or rejecting certain aspects of that tradition, he restores the past to the present and heightens the present through forging links to the glorious past or a larger-than-human reality. He makes the praise of god and hero, and of the contemporary victor and his city, part of a single process (for example, Pindar Olympian 2.2). The poet takes care not to emphasize the possible disjunction between the heroism of the past and the realities of the present; his poetry fits the moment (Pythian 9.76–79). The praise poet and his laudandi (the people praised) enter into a reciprocal relationship: in exchange for the patron’s benevolence and support, poet and community offer immortality to the hero or athlete. Yet their praise

59See Crotty 1980 on the refusal to praise as a form of revolt against the gods.
The *Heracles* has no meaning without an acceptable heroic theme and a receptive context.

As the supplicant action of the *Heracles* develops, however, Euripides increasingly enlarges the gaps between hero, god, and contemporary world closed by the artistry of epinician poetry and simultaneously stresses the need of the characters to put their hope in heroic *aretē*. The chorus and characters fail to suppress the distinction between past and present. The absence of Heracles and the silence of Zeus in the face of multiple appeals to protect the interests of his son suggest a loss of divine favor. In the face of the hostility of Lycus and the indifference of Thebes, Megara and Amphitryon can use the past only as a source of deceptive consolation for the children; Megara finds in Heracles only a model for accepting death, not for life; the chorus cannot assuage the bitterness of old age in song.

Each of the three choral stasima draws on the conventions of encomiastic poetry. Yet all but the last ode suggest that the praise offered fails to fit the moment or to provide even temporary consolation. The first stasimon, sung in response to the certainty that Heracles is dead and all hope for the family lost, commemorates Heracles’ glorious deeds. In closing, the elders regret the loss of their youth and of Heracles’ former greatness (436–41), as well as the threatening situation at hand. They catalogue Heracles’ labors at length, emphasizing his Panhellenic over his Peloponnesian labors, while suppressing the hero’s more ambivalent exploits and concentrating on those that contributed to civilization.60 Yet after making the widest possible geographic and moral claim for their hero, they add that Heracles’ spoils from his victory over the Amazons remain as museum pieces at Mycenae (416–18). This detail, this need to verify the labors by reminding the audience of a last tangible relic, implicitly confirms Lycus’ argument that Heracles is irrelevant to the world of the play. Heracles and his *aretē* are vulnerable to circumstance. Hence the choral song of praise for the

60On this point, see Bond 1981 ad loc. Barlow 1982 rightly comments on the nonviolent tone of the labors in this ode but mistakes Euripides’ purpose in making them sound so remote and mythical.
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absent hero combines themes appropriate to dirge, hymn, and encomium.\(^{61}\)

Parry, following the lead of Wilamowitz and others, has analyzed the second stasimon as a traditional encomiastic poem, with a mixture of themes from epinician poems, paeans, and hymns.\(^{62}\) The elders of the chorus establish themselves as competent laudatores, worthy to praise the hero through their ability to distinguish good from bad. After a gnomic opening they meditate in traditional fashion on the association of youth and aretē, on old age as a foil for youth, on the alliance of good birth and aretē (including a formal genealogy of the laudandum). They praise Heracles’ beneficence as son of Zeus; he is as worthy of paeans as Apollo (687).\(^{63}\) They celebrate the consolatory powers that song, festival, and tradition have had and will continue to have for the old: mē zōien met’ amousias, “may I not live without the Muses” (676). In their choice of themes they perhaps hint at Heracles’ future conquest of Geras (old age), his marriage to Hebe (youth), and his association in vase paintings with the Muses (see 674). Through song they recapture participation in renown for themselves (677–86) and become one with the singers and celebrators of gods throughout Greece (687–94). Heracles’ miraculous return apparently re-establishes the relations among god, man, hero, and the present necessary for the kind of epinician poem that the chorus can now sing for the first time in the play.

The first antistrophe undercuts in part the festal tone appropriate to the epinician form. Heracles has in fact won a second life by his return from Hades; yet the chorus laments that the gods do not have human wisdom (xunesis / kai sophia kat’ andras, 655–56), nor do they make a practice of rewarding the virtuous with two lives and marking the bad man with one (657–68). Instead of praising

\(^{61}\)See Bond 1981 ad loc. The tone of lament, as might be expected, does not predominate. Bond notes the use of Pindaric phrases here.

\(^{62}\)See note 49 above. Parry 1965 adopts the critical approach to Pindar of Bundy 1962. Bond 1981 accepts and expands upon Parry’s approach. This ode offers (perhaps recalling Agamemnon 121) a to eu (694) to the first stasimon’s ailinon. Wilamowitz 1895 (1895): III, 148 regarded the second stasimon as the equivalent of a parabasis; the present analysis should make the relation between the ode and the rest of the text more clearly integral.

\(^{63}\)Wilamowitz 1895 on 694 treats the whole ode as a paean.
time’s revelation of *aretē* or justice and making the traditional prayer for their patron’s increase of wealth, the elders remark that time brings only a meaningless increase of wealth (671–72). Although recognition of the ephemeral nature of divine favor and of the uncertainty of human existence permeates epinician poetry, the poet generally avoids questioning divine morality or casting doubt on the divine blessing manifest in the moment of success. Even in the chorus’ moment of happiness, there lurks the unresolved problem that had already troubled Pindar: how to rescue human *aretē* and the celebration of human *aretē* from its vulnerability to circumstances.

The final ode before the central crisis and after the death of Lycus reaches a pitch of hysterical optimism. Recovering full confidence as praise poets, the chorus adopts common epinician motifs. Its doubts are at last swept away. Time offers hope through change, the slandered gods are just, and the heirs of these changes are new songs (*metallagai suntuchias / (neas) etekon aoidas*, 766–67; see 737–41, 757–60, 772–80). Heracles’ success confirms the previously questionable myth of the double birth and the paternity of Zeus (798–806; 802–4 may echo Pindar *Nemean* 10.54). Recalling Amphitryon’s earlier appeal to the landscape in his defense of Heracles, the chorus asks the entire landscape of Thebes to join in the song and dance that break out in the city at the tyrant’s death (763–64, 781–97). Lycus’ discordant death cry merges with the tune of the chorus’ victory celebration (751–54). The tone is reminiscent of Alcaeus’ well-known fragment on the death of the tyrant Myrsilus (332 LP).

For the epinician poet, human success derives in part from talent and effort but depends ultimately on divine benevolence. Too much praise violates *kairos* (suitability and proportion, Pindar *Pyth.* 10.4; Bacchylides 13.17; see also *Olym.* 13.48). The poet accepts what god gives and subordinates his art to fortune (*Pyth.* 3.108–15 and 10.10–24). In short, epinician poetry continually faces the problem of ensuring that the praise of human *aretē* does not become excessive and so form a dispraise of god. To be sure, the chorus of the *Heracles* piously envisions Heracles’ defeat of Lycus as a confirmation of divine justice. And in the case of Hera-

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64See Bond 1981 ad loc. As Bond points out, however, the rest of the ode often echoes Pindar in theme and phrasing.
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cles even Pindar himself violates his own insistence on mortality, moderation, and piety (see Nemean 1 and frag. 169 S). Yet by the standards of epinician poetry the eagerness of the chorus to elevate Heracles to what amounts to divine status should make the audience uneasy. The chorus earlier proposed to praise the son of Zeus with the paean special to Apollo (687), and Megara saw in Heracles a savior no worse than Zeus (521–22). The chorus here forgets both the hostility of Thebes to the hero and its own earlier sober appreciation of the uncertainty that informs everything human. Though their optimism is dramatically plausible, the elders implicitly justify Iris’ claim that Heracles, however innocently, threatens the status of the gods.

At the moment before Heracles’ actual return, Megara closes her lament for the children with a final wish that Heracles come back even as a dream (494–96) to challenge the despicable men who are about to murder their children. In Pythian 3, Pindar warns against such desires. Hieron is ill; yet Pindar recognizes the impropriety of wishing for Asclepius’ return from the dead to heal him (1–3). One should not reach for what is far off, unreachable. Instead, Pindar offers Hieron the medicine of song; this charm alone properly gives men immortality. The suppliant plot of the Heracles, which demands for its happy conclusion the return of a “dead” hero, raises the same questions and tensions and offers no solution.

Praise poetry directly and repeatedly confronts the instability of the divine favor necessary to human achievement. Yet the setting for an epinician poem is festal (Pindar Nemean 4.1), and success, not irreversible disaster, is its appropriate theme:

Do not reveal to strangers what misfortune is approaching us. I offer you this advice: we should show openly our portion of good and delightful things; but if some god-given, insufferable calamity falls on men, this it is appropriate to hide in darkness.

(Pindar frag. 42 S)

The poet’s duty is to obscure myths that denigrate gods or heroes (Nem. 5.14–18, Olym. 1.35–53): “that which is not loved by Zeus I

Sheppard 1916: 77–78 argues that the choral praise of Heracles is here dangerously excessive. Bond 1981 argues that the optimism of the chorus is justifiable.
The Heracles

keep utterly silent” (Pindar frag. 81 S). Praise follows the way of justice (Nem. 8.35–39; Bacchylides 13.8–11). In Olympian 9, for example, Pindar deals directly with this issue in relation to Heracles, whose life illustrates the importance of divine favor to human success (28–29). Pindar then refers to Heracles’ battle with Poseidon, Apollo, and Hades at Pylos. Could Heracles have fought against the gods in any way other than kata daimona (in accordance with divinity)? The poet stops himself from pursuing this theme and rejects the opportunity to blame (loidorēsai, 37) the gods or to associate them with a war on men (40–41). Heracles’ myths could pose limitless problems for the praise singer, a fact that Pindar magisterially acknowledges and dismisses in a single gesture. Because at the same time the praise poet feels free to blame the wicked or to let the vicissitudes of others heighten his own hero’s glory, he runs a certain risk of contradiction.

By epinician standards, then, Heracles, stained with crime and the seemingly unjust disfavor of the gods (including a hint of theomachia), becomes in the peripety an altogether inappropriate subject for praise. The fall of the hero is described as the fall of a monument or statue off a pedestal (1306–7). Heracles’ crime puts the function of the chorus, who have identified themselves as a group of Theban praise poets, at issue. Sophocles’ chorus in the Oedipus Rex (895–96), wondering how it can continue to sing if irreligious outrage is not punished, uses the phrase ti dei me choreuein, “how should I dance?” Euripides’ chorus responds to the peripety by lamenting Heracles’ crime and falling silent for the final 338 lines of the play. This silence eloquently expresses an inability to celebrate the criminal Heracles. Amphitryon alone survives to find a limited place in Heracles’ future, and he has been the most skeptical in offering an alternative view of heroism as hope and submission to time (101–6), then dissociating himself from

66 On this point, see Detienne 1967: 60.
67 Bond 1981 accepts Camper’s attribution of lines 1311–12 to the chorus. I do not find this emendation convincing, especially from a dramatic point of view. The chorus’ silence is necessary to make Heracles’ change of mind at 1341–46 even marginally convincing. The situation is comparable to that in the Ajax, which offers a similar choral silence in the final scene. Here the defense of the anachronistic hero, who lost Achilles’ arms to the more modern hero Odysseus, passes to the Bowman Teucer.
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Zeus for proving a far less diligent father than he himself has been (339–47).

The “Human” and Domestic Heracles

Greek poetry prior to Attic tragedy occasionally refers to Heracles’ mortality, pain, and suffering but apparently gives little or no attention to his domestic and filial side. In Iliad 18.115–21 the fate of the mortal Heracles is held up for the contemplation of Achilles at the moment when he is choosing his own fate. The poet here suppresses the alternative tradition, which granted Heracles immortality and divinity after death. The Odyssey passage discussed earlier keeps both versions: Heracles’ shade is in Hades, but he himself is on Olympus. Much of the post-Homeric tradition emphasizes the painful burden of Heracles’ life of continual ponos.

Bacchylides’ fifth ode offers the first example of Heracles as a heroic figure capable of pity, learning, and mature suffering, a figure subsequently made popular by tragedy, the Sophist Prodicus, and the later Stoic tradition. In this poem Bacchylides makes Heracles contemplate the pitiable fate of Meleager, the helplessness of even the most heroic man before tuche, and thereby his own vulnerability to divine wrath. Meleager, like Heracles in the Heracles, did not deliberately murder his kin. Although Heracles’ response to the vision of Meleager’s shade is to suppress the tears he sheds for the first time in his life and to reject the efficacy of lament in favor of action, the poem hints at the hero’s own encroaching entanglement in a comparable fate. Moved by Meleager’s beauty, Heracles will soon marry his fatal bride, Meleager’s sister, Deianeira (see also Bacchylides 16).

Given the rare emphasis in earlier poetic tradition on Heracles’ mortality and vulnerability to ordinary human limits, the Heracles who finally appears onstage in the Heracles must have come as a remarkable surprise. Euripides’ Heracles is pious; he immediately thinks of his duty to the gods (608–9) and emphasizes his willingness to respect human limits. He asserts that he will give up his glorious labors (575) for the private goal of protecting his children.

68 For a comparable interpretation of Bacchylides 5, see Lefkowitz 1969.
The Heracles (578–82).  

This Heracles, unlike any other known Heracles of tradition, is capable of acting as the just ruler of a polis and of establishing with both Theseus and his family the bond of true philia. Tradition, which normally confines the violent Heracles to protecting the civilized world from its margins, would have led the audience to expect an explosive and disruptive entrance. Sophocles’ hero or the larger-than-life rescuer of satyr drama or Euripides’ own Alcestis were far more typical. Instead this Heracles is a Bowman in the style of Odysseus, revising his plans to fit new circumstances and using caution and deception where he would once have been more direct (566–666). He puts down his glorious weapons and stops his children’s tears with the reassurance of strong hands. Unlike Amphitryon, who expresses discontent at being reduced by age to the care of children (45), Heracles will not reject nursery service (therapeuma teknon, 633). Heracles is also, in essence, a democrat. He leaves the stage with a refreshing and modest comparison between himself and his fellow men (633–36):

... All men’s natures are alike. Both noble and obscure men love their children. They differ in wealth. Some have, others have not, but all men love their children.

The Heracles who enters surprises only by his mildness. He manifestly has his wits about him, and right on his side in killing Lycus, whom no other authority will check or punish. This Heracles mixes epic attainment (586–73) with the common touch. Since the killing of the children seems elsewhere to have occurred at the start of the hero’s career, the audience might by now have assumed

69 Bond 1981 comments on the shocking nature of line 575.
70 The Heracles of the Alcestis and satyr play typically adopted the role of rescuer that he plays here.
71 See Arrowsmith 1954: 105 on Heracles’ caution. He sees it as evidence that in the dramatic world of the play Heracles’ old heroism is not false, but no longer applicable to the new reality in which he finds himself. Bond 1981 on line 598 defends Heracles’ secrecy and caution, citing Od. 11.455.
72 I am exaggerating here both to emphasize his deviation from an aristocratic character and to show how this scene prepares for his later role as hero of a democracy. Bond 1981 on 633–36 stresses the democratic tone of Heracles’ views here.
Ritual Irony

it as discarded. Hence it is all the less prepared for his sudden lapse into murderous lunacy.

This adaptable and domestic Heracles is nevertheless curiously disappointing. He can to some degree meet Lycus’ charge of anachronism, although he is still isolated and self-dependent. By the standards of literary tradition, Euripides’ heroic bowman is certainly admirable. But this character cannot fulfill the chorus’ desire to sing of a figure essentially larger than human and equal to the glorious exploits he is reported to have performed. We are not surprised when Amphitryon, almost comically, tries to verify Heracles’ trip to the underworld: “Did you really go to the halls of Hades, son?” (610). A Heracles who is so willing to turn from his public and Panhellenic labors to attend only to the concerns of his own family seems inadequate to the human need for an image to praise and for a hero who belongs only to a larger community, subject to a divinely ordained fate more extraordinary and, perhaps, more terrible than our own.

Euripides was, of course, famous for reducing mythical characters to ordinary human beings. But the arrival of a domestic Heracles in this play is made unusually surprising, both because of the delayed and seemingly miraculous entrance of the hero and because the chorus in the first stasimon has nearly embalmed him in the superhuman glories of his past. The dramatic reality of this very human Heracles does not offer much support to the chorus’ ecstatic return to poetic celebration in the encomiastic tradition. As we know from Achilles’ choice in the Iliad (although the Odyssey contests this view), a private life does not produce kleos. And no human life offers certain happiness. Hence the choral recovery of festivity and song implicitly relies less on the hero than on a radical shift of events, on tuche.

The Violent or Criminal Heracles

Hera’s imposition of madness and the crime of kin murder on Heracles presents the volatile criminal Heracles familiar in the epic tradition. This hero, as was suggested earlier, habitually strains the limits of civilization. Treacherous, lustful, and gluttonous, he frequently turns his powers against his family, guests, his music
The Heracles

teacher Linus, or good centaurs such as Pholus and Cheiron. He is subject to bouts of madness and performs unjustified rapes. This is the hero found in Sophocles’ Trachiniae, where Heracles has sacked an entire city to win Iole for himself and, in a fit of anguish, throws his faithful servant Lichas over a cliff. In comedy and satyr play (or the Alcestis) the hero puts extraordinary pressure on hospitality, taking advantage of all the food and/or sex that he finds available. This Heracles, occupying an unstable position between beast and god, order and disorder, is a figure belonging to one of the earliest generations of Greek myth, extraordinarily prone to violence and never quite part of civilized life. Indeed, he frequently undermines the very culture that it was his function, from its margins, to protect. As Pindar says cryptically in a fragment (169 S), “Custom, king of all, brings on with sovereign hand what is most violent and then makes it just. I infer this from the deeds of Heracles.”73 (See also frag. 81 S and Homeric Hymn to Heracles 6; contrast Pindar’s treatment of Heracles in the epinician odes.) The least domestic of heroes, he is never allowed to rule as king and never fully integrated into the political and social life of a Greek city. Pindar shows in the passage in Olympian 9 discussed earlier that this Heracles never quite submitted to the pious designs of epinician poets; he equally eludes the chorus after the peripety.

Hera’s intervention in the action through Iris and Lyssa perverts and interrupts the poetic themes and connections between themes on which the chorus has based its praise of Heracles. As the supplicant action concludes, the chorus has managed to sing itself into some kind of epinician harmony with god, hero, and community. The triumph of world-encircling praise rests precariously on forgetfulness and the suppression of blame. As near personifications of what has been cast out, Hera’s accomplices invade to reassert the poetry of blame. Iris and, by her actions, Lyssa misrepresent the pious, modest, and human Heracles seen so far onstage and stain him with the kind of psogos and parphasis that Pindar attributes to the uncultured enemies of the praise poet. Iris, contested by Lyssa herself, argues that the hero has made the gods “nothing” (841–42)

73 On the difficulties of interpreting this fragment, see most recently the discussion of Crotty 1982, with further bibliography.
and deserves his new pollution (831–32). Lyssa, or Madness, though she temporarily defends and praises the hero (849–54),\(^\text{74}\) goes on to accomplish everything that Heracles’ amathés enemy and detractor, Lycus, had intended. (See my earlier discussion of the parallels between Hera and Lycus.) The name, *Luk-ia, or “female wolf,” underlines her functional connection with the tyrant.\(^\text{75}\) Her action will separate Heracles from his father, Zeus, and from Thebes; she makes his labors kin murders and turns the chorus’ last song of praise, which putatively unites Thebes in a choral celebration of the hero, into a cacophony. The archaistic quality of her trochaic tetrameters markedly separates the speech from the surrounding drama. The impression remains that the gods wish to blame and destroy the pious Heracles, while Madness alone wishes to praise him. Nevertheless, the disjunction between Heracles the psychopath and Heracles the culture hero remains as marked as that between the obliging family man and the demigod of the preceding praise poetry. Euripides clearly makes no attempt to create a psychologically believable portrait of his hero, but instead deliberately juxtaposes incompatible literary traditions about the hero to create a discontinuous character.

After these two abrupt turnings in the plot, however, we are curiously close to where we began. Blame poetry, after all, shares the assumptions of praise poetry, so that Lyssa and Iris in fact restore Heracles to the world in which the chorus and his family originally located him. He reenters saga, though now as the god’s victim rather than as the favorite. It is the intervening Heracles, the family man, who does not fit. An ordinary Heracles is in some sense no Heracles at all.

The Tragic Resolution

The conjunction of a tragic disaster, the appearance of gods on the machine, and lament is typical of the concluding scenes of a

\(^{74}\) Bond 1981: 287 comments that Lyssa’s language here is typical of the modest style of laudationes. Like Pindar and the chorus of the Heracles she stresses Heracles’ civilizing missions. Iris insists that Lyssa should be true to her name and not be sanc (*sôphronein, 857).

\(^{75}\) See Theocritus 4.11 for another play on the probable etymological connection
The Heracles

Euripidean tragedy. But in this case the gods on the machine cause rather than resolve the disaster, and it is left to Theseus to help save the hero from suicide. The final scenes of the play suggest a new beginning and offer an alternative interpretation of events already completed. The symmetry between the first and last actions is underlined by the unexpected intervention of a second savior, Theseus (unexpected in part because the savior in most suppliant actions is king of the country in which the suppliant action takes place). Heracles leaves the stage following in the wake of Theseus just as his sons followed in his own wake at the conclusion of the suppliant plot (see the repeated image of the boat, used at 631–32 and 1424). The concluding scenes recombine the three Heracles on the basis of an aretē immune to the disaster of the peripety. The play finally recreates heroism through catastrophe, praise through blame, and disrupts ultimately to restore the reciprocity of past and present.

The peripety creates the precise balance needed for an Athenian hero who is somewhere between the human or domestic Heracles and the divine son of Zeus, the hero of the poetry of praise. For in hero cult the city worships a figure both remote and familiar, both dead and alive. The moment of violence eventually restores to Heracles a complex and permanent relation to the divine that prayers for positive aid to a paternal Zeus in the suppliant plot did not. Heracles finally synthesizes the position of Megara, who argues for submission to necessity, with that of Amphitryon, who, defending survival and reliance on human aretē, made the novel argument that the anēr aristos (noblest man) does not abandon hope (105–6). Heracles’ experience of the divine leads him to accept for himself a role as mediator between god and man appropriate for

between lukōs and Lyssa: kā tōs lukōs autika lussēn. For Homeric treatment of Lyssa, see Lincoln 1975. See Duchemin 1967 on the ancestry of Euripides’ Lyssa. Aeschylus’ Lycurgus may have also become maddened by Lyssa during a sacrifice. Bond 1981: 279 and 281 stresses that divine appearances are usually confined to prologues and epilogues. Exceptions are the Dionysus of the Bacchae (present throughout the drama, but making a divine revelation of his power in the palace scene), Euripides’ Rhesus, Aeschylus’ Psychostasia and Xantriae, and possibly Sophocles’ Niobe. Iris’ appearance is like a second prologue. Schmidt 1963: 200–201 comments that in this play Theseus takes the role of the typical Euripidean deus ex machina and offers a mythic way out of the (essentially irresolvable) dilemma created by the plot.
the Athenian cult. His disaster finally ties him irrevocably to the glorious labors that he was about to abandon; dignity requires both that he defend himself and that he bring with him to his new city his heroic capacities.

Heracles’ humanity, even his domesticity and openness to democratic principles, become in the Athenian context no longer incompatible with his heroism but essential to it.\(^{77}\) Heracles, faced now with an internal rather than an external Hades (1297–98), becomes a hero of the spirit as well as of the body. His endurance, dependence, and self-mastery create in him a spiritual unity with the Athenian hoplite, and his adaptability, cunning, and drive for survival make him once more the model for youth that he was for his children and became in Athenian cult. (The resolution also constitutes an implicit defense of Euripides’ habit of populating his tragedies with domesticated characters.)

Heracles’ disaster forces him to turn from a political environment that has rejected his heroism as anachronistic to a new city that accepts his heroism as glorious for itself. The tragedy separates the hero from his family (Theseus is now his son) and from a rejection of his labors in favor of a private life, thereby making him dependent on a new social order. This detachment from private ties and individual glory in favor of a devotion to the needs of the city was a characteristic demanded of the Athenian citizen as well.\(^{78}\) The new relation to the divine, to Athens, and to his labors makes Heracles once more an object of worship and a potential subject for praise. The hero of a cult became a principle of group unity, a model for action, and a defender of his worshipers.\(^{79}\) Now Heracles can, despite his crime, be truly available, even after death, to those who wish to celebrate him. At the same time, by becoming the hero of a cult he is a hero who belongs, not as in earlier

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\(^{77}\) Arrowsmith 1954 and Kitto 1939 are particularly eloquent on Heracles’ humanistic triumph and his shift from physical to mental courage. On the changing concept of aretē in the play, see especially Arrowsmith, Chalk 1962 (with the critical response of Adkins 1966), and Wilamowitz 1895.

\(^{78}\) For a discussion of the role of the Athenian citizen in these respects, see Connor 1971 and Humphreys 1978, esp. chap. 8.

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poetry to all Greece, but to one specific locality. In the Heracles Athens confronts the heroism of this problematic and aristocratic figure of the past and finds for Heracles a permanent and active place within the limits of a democratic polis. As Vernant has remarked:

But it is a surprising paradox that there is no cult of the hero in Homer and Hesiod . . . The cult of the hero is a civic cult, instituted by the City. The City is the frame of reference in which heroes, quite diverse characters or old vegetal spirits are gathered into a simple religious category, assigned to places in their Pantheon. These heroes and heroic legends, while they are relegated to the past, condemned, called into doubt, still do not cease to stimulate certain questions, precisely insofar as they represent mental attitudes, values, patterns of behavior, a religious thought, a human ideal opposed to that of the city.

Thus we have the following situation. The City is calling itself into question through dialogue with heroic characters, which continually produces a confrontation of two systems of values. ⁸⁰

The Heracles simultaneously confronts the difficulties posed by Heracles’ heroism for an Athenian polis and the contradictions posed by Heracles’ tradition for a tragic poet. The play makes it clear how tragedy is a descendant, as Aristotle suggested, of encomium through epic: that is, how tragedy makes heroes through sacrifice and creates a new poetry of praise.

The chorus, in response to the news that Heracles has killed his children, can find no mythological parallel to equal the horror of Heracles’ deed (1016–20). But in offering consolation to Heracles it describes Procne’s terrible murder of her only child as a sacrifice to the Muses (1021–22):

\[ \muονοτέχνου Πρόκυνης φόνον έχω λέξαι \\
θυόμενον Μούσας. \]

I am able to tell of the shedding of blood sacrificed to the Muses by Procne, who had only one child. ⁸¹

⁸⁰Vernant 1970: 283.
⁸¹On problems of text and translation in these lines, see Diggle 1974: 14–15. Wilamowitz 1895 on line 1025 saw in 1025–27 an allusion to the role of the chorus
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Even in Homer, characters rationalize their present sufferings as material for future songs (*Iliad* 6.355–58). Hecuba expresses a similar view at *Troades* 1242–45:

If some god had not destroyed us . . . we would have been unknown. We should not have given songs to the Muses of posterity.

In the *Heracles* passage Procne, too, as she endlessly laments the son she has killed, provides a theme for poetry. The language used here by the chorus ties the sacrificial action of the *Heracles* to the poetic discourse of the play and opens the possibility of interpreting the central crisis as just such a “sacrifice” to the Muses, goddesses with whom Heracles was in fact associated in vase painting and later in cult. In other words, sacrifices to the Muses, like real ones, frame and provide the community with a way of controlling acts of violence, of compensating for or remedying losses, and even of purifying murderers of their crimes. Heracles “sacrifices” to the Muses not a sacrificial animal nor his enemy Eurystheus and his sons (936–40, 982–89), but his own innocent family. Tragic sacrifices are performed offstage and reported by a messenger who surrounds his report of the violent and terrifying act with pity or a promise of poetic immortality. By these means tragedy ritualizes or provides a way of controlling our experience of violence. It achieves catharsis by substituting a fictional victim for ourselves, thereby purifying us of violence and terror. And for the protagonist, as Pucci has shown, the experience of loss immunizes the sufferer against future loss and allows him to gain some measure of control over his pain.

The sacrifice of Heracles’ family to the Muses is ultimately a

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as singers and dancers. Bond 1981 ad loc. finds the usual interpretation too cynical. Yet all previous uses of this *topos* (that men are sacrificed to be an object of song) refer to disastrous events.

See Bond 1981 on line 674 for Heracles’ association with music in the visual arts beginning in the early fifth century and with the Muses in the Hellenistic period. The Muses appeared on Heracles’ shield in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*. See Daremberg-Saglio: III.2, 2060–61 on cults of the Muses. In later Greek art Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy, is often pictured with the attributes of Heracles, the club and the lionskin (p. 2069).

Pucci 1977. For further discussion of these issues in Euripidean tragedy, see Pucci 1980.
restoration of order through violence even while it initially appears, like the failed pollution sacrifice, to be a perversion of order. Art and ritual both attenuate violence without effacing it and make divinity pertinent to human aspiration. It is ironically correct, then, for Madness to praise Heracles, for her actions in making Heracles sacrifice the children and thus blaming him ultimately lead to the establishment of a hero cult, and with it a permanent place in Athens for this potentially explosive figure of the past. Lyssa’s Dionysiac and hence in essence democratic and tragic poetry, while seemingly perverting the aristocratic epinician poetry of the odes, uncovers common ground between apparent oppositions.

Yet Euripides does not attempt, like earlier Greek poets, to claim that the poetry he creates is a word received directly from the Muses and a reflection of divine truth; instead, it is a sacrifice made by the human imagination to the Muses, who remain outside it and in an uncertain relation to it. Heracles determines to be a slave to tuchē. Euripides, by allowing each part of his plot to be overturned by a chance occurrence (Heracles’ return, Hera’s action, and Theseus’ arrival are all forms of tuchē), confesses that his own art, like Heracles’ future survival, is subservient to fortune, to a changing social reality, and to the human capacity for generosity and mental adaptability.

Tragic praise, then, is fundamentally similar to but more inclusive than that of the traditional praise poet. As in Pindar, the hero is made relevant to the present, and the criminality of the gods is finally denied. Yet Euripides allows Heracles’ denial of the gods’ criminality to bypass the audience’s dramatic experience of Iris and Lyssa. The tragic poet makes the decision to deny a repellant part of the tradition an act not of skillful piety, but of heroic self-delusion. Both versions of the event remain in the audience’s memory; and Heracles himself becomes a greater hero. Pindar, in defending himself and his heroes against detractors, is forced to tread crooked paths, to use against his enemies the stealthy attack of the wolf (Pythian 2.84–85). Like Pindar, Euripides has skillfully devised a song of praise that fits its object, although he has done so by a devious route.84 Euripides’ tragedy creates heroes for Athens

84See Plato Cratylus 408c on the tragic as of the order of pseudos. On the deceptiveness of tragic truth, see Rosenmeyer 1955.
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and establishes praise through illegitimate violence—not through the violence of war, which can be legitimate and external to society, but through an act intolerable to the internal structure of a culture. As a hero of cult the dead Heracles can help and be meaningful to Athens without physically returning to earth. The tragic poet finds a way to control the hero’s violence imaginatively but not, as in most epinician poetry, through purging the hero of his terrible myths and denying reality to the criminality of the hero.

More generally, tragedies such as Euripides’ *Heracles* or Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* follow and surpass Simonides’ famous scolion composed for the Scopadae, preserved mainly by Plato in the *Protagoras* (339b–c, 344c–346e). Here the poet, observing the epinician dictum that success makes a man *agathos* (noble), whereas irresistible disaster (*amēchanoς sumphora*) makes him *kakos*, insists that he will continue to “praise all who do nothing shameful willingly” as long as the offending party is not “excessively resourceless and knows city-supporting justice, a healthy man.” For “not even the gods fight with necessity.” By distinguishing deliberate crime from failure due to accident and necessity, Simonides is often said to have marked a turning point in the evolution of Greek encomiastic poetry, culminating, by way of tragedy, in Aristotle’s insistence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1101b10–1102a4 and 1114a23–29) that praise and blame are appropriate only for voluntary actions. But whereas Simonides modifies and humanizes the heroic ideal offered in encomiastic poetry, tragedy emphasizes the achievement of value for a community through rather than in despite of the taint of violence and suffering.

In sum, then, the hero Heracles begins the play in the underworld, or putatively dead. The central crisis puts him into a social and psychological underworld where, as a sinner like Ixion (1298), he finds no release from pain nor any relation to a human community. He receives not the second life the gods seem to have given him at the end of the suppliant plot, but a second death, and then, through Theseus’ mediation, a second life once more. The final

85See Crotty 1982: 33–40 for discussion of and recent bibliography on this Simonides fragment.

86Ixion shed the first human blood; Pindar *Pythian* 2.31–32.
The scenes put Heracles back into the underworld where he began the play, but retain as well a relation for the hero to the future. While seemingly perverting the premises upon which Greek society controlled internal violence, whether through sacrificial ritual, through ἀγῶν, or through song, the final scenes once more make possible the relations among god, hero, community, and the present shattered in the periphery. Through exposing the fictions upon which ritual is based and establishing the ritualizing function of poetry, the play cleanses Heracles of his violence and retains an important place for ritual in the community; without denying the existence of that violence, the play deflects it sufficiently, as in ritual, from the human actor.87

The Heracles brings its problematic hero into a permanent relation to Athens, yet it does so without denying its own contradictory argument. The remaining contradictions are both structural and psychological. The programmatic nature of the play, its forceful implicit argument for the role of tragedy in integrating seemingly anachronistic myths and poetic traditions into the ideology of the city, offers a rather cold and abstract counterbalance to Heracles’ vivid and terrible suffering. Theseus’ promises and his ability to make an imaginative break from the past that binds Heracles to suicide give Heracles a context in which he can survive death. But only Heracles can treat his own suffering. Theseus’ offers are interludes in or subsidiary to his grief (1340: οἴμοι. παρέργα . . . ταῦτ’ ἐστ’ ἐμὸν κακὸν).88 He must establish his own boundaries for that suffering in a mental act that echoes his earlier boundary-establishing physical labors; now he “wrestles” with Theseus in words (1255).89 When in the future Heracles becomes a dead cult hero and the stone that in his grief he wishes to be (1397; see also 1332 for

87 Girard 1977 argues that tragedy decomposes and demystifies ritual, and then replaces ritual itself. This may in essence be true, but the fact that Euripides’ plays often end with the establishment of a cult seems to suggest that he sees his play as acting in conjunction with ritual and along parallel lines. On this point, see also Whitman 1974: 118–19.

88 It is not clear whether the ταῦτ’ in 1340 refers to Theseus’ offers or to his arguments about the gods.

89 See also 1205–10, where Amphitryon “wrestles” with Heracles while supplicating him. See Gorgias 11.13 DK on the wrestling metaphor used of rhetorical exercises. For other passages in Euripides, see Bond 1981 on line 1255.
Ritual Irony

the stone monument that Heracles will receive as a cult hero), perhaps his suffering will be healed. Heracles’ heroism now depends on his suffering and he leaves the stage in unbearable anguish.

Euripides’ insistence on imposing on his domestic Heracles the violent lunatic of the epic tradition draws attention away from the man to the problems posed by his myth. It frankly suggests that the resolution of this programmatically structured play is fictional and counter to our intuitive sense that madness must be in some sense integral to a character, not simply imposed on it from without. Similarly, Heracles, who did not in his madness consciously experience Iris and Lyssa, determines to survive through a denial or partial denial of the divine intervention that the audience has witnessed onstage. The logoi of the poets attacked by Heracles are Euripides’ own logoi; but the silent chorus, witness to the central crisis, does not intervene to deny Heracles.90 The final moment echoes the close of the suppliant action; the savior Theseus now draws Heracles in his wake as a boat just as Heracles did his sons. The repetition, given the sudden shift of tuche that followed the first action, does not entirely inspire confidence. Indeed, lines 1386–88, in which Heracles requests Theseus’ help with Cerberus, have been interpreted as an expression of the hero’s concern for his own stability, of his fear of another attack of madness or impulse to suicide produced by grief over his children. Yet Heracles’ act of imagination allows the audience to understand precisely the limits of the sacrifice and the irony of the healing poetic deception that Euripides’ tragedy offers to the Muses. As Gorgias said: “Tragedy, by means of legends and emotions, creates a deception in which the deceiver is more honest than the non-deceiver and the deceived is wiser than the non-deceived” (frag. 23 DK).91

Appendix: The Structure of the Heracles

Critics of the Heracles have been universally disturbed and puzzled by the structure of the play. Scholars disagree on how the play is divided (into two or three separate actions) and on its

90 On this point, see Pucci 1980: 178. See also note 67 above.
91 Freeman 1971, trans.
The *Heracles*

unifying principle or principles. Unless one accepts the play as a drama of divine punishment, in which Heracles is destroyed for daring to become more than human,92 or unless one assumes that Heracles enters the stage already potentially unstable or megalomaniac to the point that his sudden madness arises necessarily and probably from his own disturbed internal state,93 one must explain, as even these critics are aware, a dramatic structure in which causal connections between the parts are clearly problematic. I have divided the play into the first, or suppliant, action; the central episode of madness, or the peripety; and the final action, in which Heracles regains sanity, is distracted from suicide, and chooses to live in Athens.

Scholars have searched for thematic connections between the parts or some principle on which to rationalize the deliberate disjunction between these separate actions. Some find structural cohesion in the ethical themes of *aretē* as opposed to *bia* (violence), of *philía* (friendship), wealth, hope, gratitude, *sōtēria* (salvation), pity, *amathía* (ignorant insensitivity and injustice), or *authadia* (self-willed stubbornness). The place of these principles in the universe and the contrast between human and divine responses to them form the central tension of the drama.94 Others find a principle of unity in the theme of self-sacrifice95 or in the double parentage of Heracles.96 Strohm and Schwinge stress the repeated need for a savior to rescue different protagonists from a decision to die.97 Some critics look to the characters, emphasizing the continual presence of Amphitryon onstage or the changing perspective on Heracles and the humanization of the hero.98 In Bond’s view, the play is unified through being a meditation on mistaken human views of the gods.99 The gods first appear unjust, then just; the

93Wilamowitz 1895.
95Strohm 1957.
96Gregory 1977.
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peripety changes the audience's views once more. After Heracles determines on a new view of the gods, the play finally stresses the value of friendship and the hero's decision to endure.

The most recent extensive and ambitious interpretations of the play are those of Rohdich and Arrowsmith. I shall summarize briefly their arguments, since neither work is readily available (Bond mentions neither) and both have influenced my own.

Rohdich sees the central crisis as the introduction of the tragic or mythic world view into the play. For him the unity of the play consists in the tensions, which he finds throughout Euripides' work, between a sophistic and a mythical interpretation of events. The first and last parts of the play stand to each other as thesis and antithesis. The Heracles of the first action is a sophistic hero, an autarchic Bowman who offers a salvation that in essence rejects the rule of supreme beings in favor of a strictly human power to make the world better. The sophistic view cannot accommodate Heracles' madness, the form in which the tragic intervenes in the dramatic action. Only the tragic view can comprehend suffering as part of an ordered world concept. Heracles ends by adopting the sophistic viewpoint, but the tragic contradictions between his attitude and "reality," what he has experienced in the play, remain.

Although Rohdich's interpretation essentially complements my own, I see the issues raised by the crisis of the first action in the context of a broader, presophistic poetic tradition. The sophistic insistence on human self-sufficiency in the final scenes arises from a crisis in the presophistic world view, represented in the traditional praise poetry sung by the chorus, which insists on the instability of man without god and on the dependence of human aretê on the gods. The tragic response developed in the resolution includes, through the mediation of both human imagination and cult, a recognition of both the tragic elements in the Heracles tradition and a place for his earlier heroism.

Arrowsmith explains the relation between the parts of the Heracles with a theory of tragic "conversion." He assumes that there is no necessary or probable causal relation between the first and last

100Rohdich 1968: 71-104 and Arrowsmith 1954.
The Heracles

actions. The first action, traditional and melodramatic, dramatizes the “given” of the myths and legends about Heracles and an outworn theology, “the world as it is said to be” (logos). The second action, with its “sharply anachronized contemporary reality,” presents the world of “things as they are” or “things as they must be” (ergon). The hero’s suffering tests the beliefs and values of the first action and converts them under dramatic pressure to another level of reality. Part one is created to be replaced by part two. The Pindaric hero of physical courage, with the aretē of aristocratic eugeneia, learns through suffering the internalized courage of a moral aristos demanded by fifth-century reality. By the end of the play the characters, motives, and values have been “pushed forward to the very frontiers of reality and morality.” For example, Amphitryon’s ideas about the mutability of human life (though gnomic and trite in part one) and his heroic affirmation of hope prepare for Heracles’ final acceptance of his subservience to tuche in part two; yet hope has become not so much real solace as an acceptance of the human instinct for survival. The play, by allowing such contradictions to survive, makes it clear that “conversion” involves transforming, not simply rejecting, the values and myths of the first action. Finally, the peripety emphasizes the dislocation between the parts and expresses “the furious disorder of experience.” The structure of the play thus mirrors and expresses the tragic idea.

Though rich and complex, this interpretation of the play seems to underestimate the complexity of the first action, with its plot and characters (for example, Lycus) invented, not drawn from the logos of mythical tradition; with its equally anachronistic setting; and with its already very human Heracles. The last action is in many ways more idealized than the first. This theory neglects the

102 Ibid., 10–11 and 42.  
103 Ibid., 42.  
104 Ibid., 46.  
105 Ibid., 66–73.  
106 Ibid., 195.  
107 Ibid., 40.  
108 Ibid., 37 and 68–69.
Ritual Irony

symmetrical and complex relation between part one and the central crisis. Finally, notwithstanding Arrowsmith’s admirable discussion of the magnificence of Heracles’ heroic humanism in the face of the disorder of experience, I see Heracles as moving as much toward the impersonality of a cult and a new logos or myth as toward humanity and “reality” \((\text{ergon})\).