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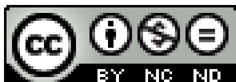

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A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE ORTHODOXY OF EURIPIDES

BY

VINCENT C. HORRIGAN, S.J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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VITA

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

The problem we have proposed to ourselves in this thesis is the problem of Euripides' religious attitude. We do not wish to investigate the content of his religious beliefs, nor the influence for good or for ill that his plays had on the religion of his countrymen. Our interest lies in determining as precisely as we can the nature of his attitude towards the traditional religion of Athens, the religion of the majority of his audience. It is obvious that the interpretation of the dramas of Euripides will be a function of the answer that one gives to this question.

One definite answer has been given and ably supported by a group of modern scholars. Their influence on Euripidean criticism has been so great that it will be necessary for us constantly to consider their position. As an aid in evaluating their findings, we shall review briefly in this first chapter their opinions and theories.

Since Euripides more so than other ancient writers seems to divide his critics into two opposing camps, one of praise and one of censure, it is difficult to write about him without being challenged to adopt one side or the other. Some appear to see in him a reflection of their own spirit, and consequently defend him with an earnestness that men

usually reserve for self-defense. Others find in him a rebel against sacred canons of art, drama, and poetry, and in fine indignation exert themselves to condemn him.

We would like, therefore, to make clear from the start that we belong to no particular School, have no prejudice to vocabularize, and no intention of condemning or praising Euripides. It is not that we feel a value judgment on Euripides is uninteresting or insignificant: far from it. It is simply that we feel that the whole problem of Euripidean appreciation has been unnecessarily confused and side-tracked by a serious lack of understanding and an over-emphasis on one particular feature of his art.

Before we can hope to arrive at an objectively fair and really sound estimation of Euripides, it will be nedessary, of course, to clear up this confusion. This study, then, is directed and restricted to a determined feature of Euripides' dramas in the hppe of setting forth carefully its actual lineaments without any concern with the further question of whether our solution will make Euripides compare more favorably with Aeschylus and Sophocles, will make him seem a greater world dramatist or poet, or will lend support to one camp or the other.

That Euripides really does present many problems no one will deny. Professor Murray was merely expressing the common opinion when he wrote:

> We possess eighteen plays from the hand of Euripides, as against seven each from the other two tragedians; and we have more material for knowledge about him than about any other Greek poet, yet he remains, perhaps, the most problematic figure in ancient Greek literature.[1]

One is immediately struck by the contrast between Euripides and Sophocles with whom he was contemporary, and to a lesser extent also Aeschylus whom he followed on the stage. Gone are the sublime heights, the massive almost bombastic language, the gigantic figures, the cold statuesque characters of Aeschylus. Gone, too, are the niceties, the symmetry, the calmness, the sharpness and sureness of execution, the impersonality of the works of Sophocles. Instead we find "striking scenes, clever reasoning, splendid oratory, harrowing situations, brilliant musical effects."[2] Most of the characters are from mythology but they act and think and feel like fifth-century Athenians. Ideas on politics, the place of women, religion, slavery, war and peace, are scattered broadcast without much attempt to synthesize. Undoubtedly, this great change in spirit and technique has been a contributing factor in the various estimates of modern critics on Euripides. As Lewis Campbell remarks:

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[1] Gilbert Murray, A History of Ancient Greek Literature. D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1897, 250.

[2] Edward Capps, From Homer to Theocritus: A Manual of Greek Literature. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1901, 238.

> The judgments of modern critics on Euripides have been strangely various. . . . The just appreciation of Aeschylus and Sophocles impresses on the mind a standard of dramatic art to which their great successor did not, and could not, conform. The secret of his influence is not their secret. His aim is different from theirs, perhaps less elevated, but his success as an original poet is notwithstanding very real and wide.[3]

His plays show an almost incredible versatility, radical changes in spirit and manner of treatment, and inconsistencies in what seem, at least, to be the opinions of the dramatist. Mr. Lucas, one of those who will praise Euripides at any cost, admits quite freely his inconsistency but glories in it.

> On political and social questions Euripides shows the same fearless freedom of thought; and if here too he seems to take now one position, now another, it is not only because he is a dramatist, but because he recognizes that truth is greater than consistency and that 'the Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule.'[4]

In religious ideas, as well as in others, Euripides is by no means entirely clear and consistent. What he has to say of gods and oracles, his criticisms of legendary morals, the

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[3] Lewis Campbell, A Guide to Greek Tragedy for English Readers. Percival and Co., London, 1891, 240.

[4] F.L.Lucas, Euripides and His Influence. Marshall Jones Co., Boston, 1923, 35.

sometimes abrupt entrance into the plot of divine characters have all given rise to much speculation, and have created the problem this paper considers. It will be well to give here some of the difficulties in interpretation that face one courageous enough to try to force the views of our dramatist into one unified scheme.

An obvious problem is the reconciliation of the Bacchae, a play of supreme religious power and fervor, an attack on rationalism and sophism, a vindication of piety against cynicism, with many of the other plays which seem to criticise and rationalize religious legends. In the Bacchae we have numerous passages like:

> 'Tis not for us to reason touching Gods.
> Traditions of our fathers, old as time,
> We hold: no reasoning shall cast them down,--
> No, though of subtlest wit our wisdom spring.[5]

And yet the heroine in the Iphigeneia in Tauris, with whom we are naturally borne to sympathize, does not hesitate to scrutinize the "traditions of our fathers" with some bitterness.

> Out on this Goddess's false subtleties,
> Who, if one stain his hands with blood of men,
> Or touch a wife new-travailed, or a corpse,

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5 Bacchae 200-203. Translation from Arthur S. Way, Euripides with an English Translation. 4 vols. William Heinemann, London, 1930. Other translations of the plays of Euripides in the thesis, unless otherwise stated, will be taken from the same source.

> Bars him her altars, holding him defiled,
> Yet joys herself in human sacrifice!
> It cannot be that Zeus' bride Leto bare
> Such folly. Nay, I hold unworthy credence
> The banquet given of Tantalus to the Gods,--
> As though the Gods could savour a
> child's flesh!
> Even so, this folk, themselves man-
> murderers
> Charge on their Goddess their own sin,
> I ween;
> For I believe that none of the Gods is vile.[6]

Again, in the Bacchae the chorus constantly repeats that whatever is sent from heaven is truest and best and will bring man to bliss. For example, we have:

> We may not, in the heart's thought
> or the act,
> Set us above the law of use and wont.
> Little does it cost, faith's precious
> heritage,
> To trust that whatsoe'er from Heaven
> is sent
> Hath sovereign sway; whate'er through
> age on age
> Hath gathered sanction by our nature's
> bent.[7]

And yet a good part of the Orestes is devoted to criticism of the oracle of Apollo which lead Orestes to slay his mother. Electra says plainly:

> Wrongful was he who uttered that
> wrongful rede
> When Loxias, throned on the tripod,
> decreed
> The death of my mother, a foul un-
> natural deed![8]

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6 Iphigeneia in Tauris 378-391.
7 Bacchae 892-897.
8 Orestes 162-164.

. . .
Phoebus for victims hath sealed us twain,
Who decreed that we spill a mother's
blood
For a father's--a deed without a name![9]

And many other passages from the Bacchae could be placed in like contrast with sentiments from the other plays.

Moreover, not only between the spirit of the Bacchae and some of the other plays is there reconciliation needed, but even in individual plays themselves. As we noted, the Orestes contains many bitter strictures against Apollo; yet at the end the whole situation is reversed and Apollo receives the praise of all. The chorus insists

Yet God overruleth the issue still,
To mete unto men what issue he will;
Great is his power![10]

Orestes seems to be completely won over to Apollo and exclaims:

Hail, Prophet Loxias, to thine oracles!
No lying prophet wert thou then, but true.[11]

And Apollo blesses them all with the words:

Pass on your way; and to Peace, of
the Gods most fair,
Render your praise.[12]

Yet the whole reversal is so sudden that it cannot satisfy us.

After the Bacchae, the Ion is thought by some to be the most difficult play of Euripides to interpret correctly. The

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9 Ibid., 191-113.
10 Ibid., 1545-1547.
11 Ibid., 1666-1667.
12 Ibid., 1684.

boy Ion is made to rebuke Apollo severely for ravishing the maid Creusa and to cast doubt on all such stories about the gods.

> Yet must I plead with Phoebus--
> What ails him? He ravisheth
> Maids, and forsakes; begetteth babes by stealth,
> And heeds not, though they die. Do thou not so:
> Being strong, be righteous. For what man soe'er
> Transgresseth, the Gods visit this on him.
> How were it just then that ye should enact
> For men laws, and yourselves work lawlessness?
> For if--it could not be, yet put it so--
> Ye should pay mulct to men for lawless lust,
> Thou, the Sea-king, and Zeus the Lord of Heaven,
> Paying for wrongs should make your temples void.
> For, following pleasure past all wisdom's bounds,
> Ye work unrighteousness. Unjust it were
> To call men vile, if we but imitate
> What Gods deem good:--they are vile who teadh us this.[13]

The almost irresistible inclination is to take this passage as expressing the true mind of the dramatist and not that of the supposedly pious Ion; the only difficulty is that if the story of Apollo's fatherhood is not true, the whole dramatic action is simply absurd.

Nor is Apollo the only divine being to be haled before the tribunal of Euripides to be judged and condemned. The queen

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13 Ion 436-451.

of heaven, Hera herself, is violently repudiated by Henacles:

> To such a goddess
> Who shall pray now?--who, for a
> woman's sake
> Jealous of Zeus, from Hellas hath
> cut off
> Her benefactors, guiltless though
> they were![14]

In the same play, Zeus is challenged by Amphitryon in no uncertain terms:

> Zeus, for my couch-mate gained I
> thee in vain,
> Named thee in vain co-father of my son.
> Less than thou seemedst art thou friend
> to me!
> Mortal, in worth thy godhead I outdo;
> Hercules' sons have I abandoned not.
> Cunning wast thou to steal unto my couch,--
> To filch another's right none tendered
> thee,--
> Yet know'st not how to save thy dear
> ones now!
> Thine is unwisdom, or injustice thine.[15]

In strange contrast to plays like this, we have others, e.g., the Suppliants, in which with great earnestness and conviction the whole safety and success of Athens is placed on the proper reverence and service of the gods, their temples, and oracles. Theseus, the Athenian king and hero, whom again we feel almost of necessity to be speaking the true mind of the Athenian patriot, Euripides, rebukes Adrastus for neglecting the warnings of the seers.

> Thou leddest forth the Argives all to war,

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14 Madness of Heracles 1307-1310.
15 Ibid., 339-347.

Though seers spake heaven's warning,
setting at naught
These, flouting Gods, didst ruin so
thy state,
By young men led astray, which love
the praise
Of men.[16] . . .
And for invisible things, or dimly seen,
Soothsayers watch the flame, the
liver's folds,
Or from the birds divine the things to be.[17]

On the other side, again, we have passages where the poet seems to go deliberately out of his way to castigate "the whole seer tribe as one ambitious curse."[18] In the Helen the messenger steps out of character and presents a short discussion on the question of soothsaying:

This will I do, king. But the lore
of seers,
How vain it is I see, how full of lies.
Utterly naught then were the altar-
flames,
The voices of winged things! Sheer
folly this
Even to dream that birds may help
mankind. . . .
Why seek we then to seers? With
sacrifice
To Gods, ask blessings: let sooth-
sayings be.
They were but as a bait for greed
devised:
No sluggard getteth wealth through
divination.
Sound wit with prudence, is the seer
of seers.[19]

Aristophanes attacked Euripides with great energy, ac-

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16 Suppliants 229-233.
17 Ibid., 211-213.
18 Iphigeneia at Aulis 520.
19 Helen 747-757.

cusing him of all sorts of crimes, and especially with persuading the people that there are no gods.[20] If we take this view seriously, though, we must yet explain why play after play ends with at least apparent vindication of the gods and their oracles, and the troubles of the characters are attributed to their lack of faith and patience.

Another problem which has considerable bearing on the question of Euripides' religious views is the fact of his immense and continuing popularity even in the face of what certainly appear to be grave defects and blemishes in his work. The structure of some of the plays cannot help but strike the modern reader as being decidedly weak. And even in the best plays, such as the _Medea_, there are features that almost spoil for us the force of the drama. Even Aristotle states as simply inexcusable the entrance of Aegeus in the _Medea_,[21] and many moderns would have preferred that the flying chariot had been omitted at the end. In more than one play the structural unity appears to us to be severely jarred by episodes which are in themselves not badly done, but which have little or nothing to do with the action in hand. More than once the appearance of the _deus ex machina_ fails to make a great deal of sense. But despite these and many other criticisms that can with justice be made, the fact still stands

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20 Aristophanes, _Thesmophoriazusae_ 451.
21 Poetics 1461b.20.

that Euripides has survived and retained his popularity not only with the masses who might be thought to be less discriminating, but also and perhaps even more so with some of the greatest poets, dramatists, and critics of the Western tradition.[22]

In an effort to explain the discrepancy between the undeniable popularity of Euripides and the dramatic blemishes that evoked the scorn of Schlegel, Swinburne, and other modern critics, certain scholars, especially in England, towards the end of the nineteenth century, introduced a revolutionary change in the direction of Euripidean criticism.[23] Their leaders seemed determined to show that Euripides was very nearly the perfect dramatist. It is possible that they were inclined to take this view because Euripides appeared to them to personify the ideals and spirit of their own century. Considering, apparently, that excellence of dramatic structure is coterminus with excellence of drama, they set out to show that Euripides was indeed a master poet by attempting to save

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22 Among his most ardent admirers may be listed Aristotle, Philemon, Alexander the Great, Petrach, Milton, Corneille, Racine, Goethe, Coleridge, the Brownings, Macaulay, Cardinal Newman, and many others. Haigh, op. cit., 318, states: "No poet ever exercised a more powerful influence on subsequent literature."

23 Dr. Verrall, the leading exponent of the new interpretation, explains his motive in the first sentence of the introduction to his Euripides the Rationalist: A Study in the History of Art and Religion. Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1895: "The purpose of this book is to explain and account for, ... the great and surprising difference of opinion between ancient readers and moderns respecting the position and merits

at any cost the dramaturgy of his plays.

In 1889 appeared a translation of the Ion by H.B.L., to which was joined a new interpretation of the play.[24] According to his theory, the play is not at all to be taken as meaning what it says. Creusa was not really ravished by Apollo but by some youth with yellow hair whom she fancied to be the god. To avoid the scandal that would diminish the honor of the royal family, the Athenian priests transferred the baby to Delphi. Later, however, when the union with Xuthus was unfruitful and it seemed likely that a foreign prince would gain the throne, they plotted with Delphi to bring back the illegitimate child of Creusa as the heir to the crown. All the wonderful happenings in the play--the action of the doves, the theophany, the birth-tokens--were merely tricks. Thus there remains a clever and subtile piece of dramatic writing.

This "rationalization" of the plot of the Ion caught favor at once, and from this time on we find commentator after commentator accepting in whole or in part this view of the play, and extending the novel interpretation to the other plays as well. A.W.Verrall, especially, took up the theory with no little skill and enthusiasm and pushed it to the limit. In the very next year he made public a similar "rationalistic" inter-

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of Euripides.

24 The information about the translation by H.B.L. is taken from A.S.Owen, Euripides Ion. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1939, Introduction xxxii.

pretation of the story in a translation and commentary prepared for a performance of the Ion at Cambridge.[25] Ion, he explained, was really the son of the Maenad with whom Xuthus admits his relations at the festival in Delphi. In fact, this Maenad very probably became a priestess and is the Pythia of the play. The Delphian priests wish to place Ion in a position of influence as the son of the Athenian rulers, and consequently arrange the meeting with Xuthus as he leaves the shrine. When Creusa reacts so violently that she is in danger of being put to death in the very temple, the priests hastily invent certain clues to convince her that Ion is in reality her long dead illegitimate son by some ruffian. Creusa is overjoyed and accepts the allegation with little questioning. Thus all ends well, and the play is shown to be finely constructed and brilliantly conceived.

When this commentary was later, 1895, published in book form, three other essays were joined with it. In accordance with the same theory, they treat at length the Alcestis, the Iphigeneia in Tauris, and the Phoenissae. Dr. Verrall's point of view is best presented in his essay on the Phoenissae:

> On the one hand we have the fact
> that prima facie his plays, like
> those of his two great rivals, seem
> to be illustrations of sacred legends,

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25 This interpretation is to be found in his later book, Euripides the Rationalist, pp. 138 ff.

> in which the gods and miracles of anthropomorphic religion are assumed, at least for artistic purposes, as truth, forming the machinery of the story, giving the conclusion to which it points, and controlling the sentiment which it raises. On the other hand we have the equally visible fact that the plays are full of incidents and language pointing directly to the opposite conclusion, stimulating an adverse sentiment, consistent only with disbelief in the traditional religion and rejection of the anthropomorphic gods. The result is a confusion, a want of unity, which, if accepted as the final base for a judgment of the author, degrades him at once to a level of thought and feeling altogether below that of his alleged compeers, and indeed below that of the ordinary practitioner in literary fiction, thus causing us, if we consider the matter clearly, to wonder how his contemporaries, and still more the generations which immediately followed his death, can have entered, as they certainly did, into the delusion that this was an artist worthy of the very highest rank. The answer which we have offered is, briefly, that of the two conflicting elements, one is real and one pretence.[26]

We have quoted this statement exactly because it has had tremendous influence on later commentators, and sums up one solution to the problem we wish to treat. In 1905 Verrall strengthened his influence by publishing a second book of essays interpreting in a rationalistic vein four more plays of Euripides, the Andromache, Helen, Heracles, and Orestes.[27]

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26 Ibid., 246.

27 A.W.Verrall, Essays on Four Plays of Euripides: Andromache

We can see the influence of Verrall in the statement of J.T.Sheppard in his <u>Greek Tragedy</u>:

> When a story is to be expounded in order to be self-exposed, or to be presented in any new and startlingly unorthodox shape, it is necessary, if we are to catch the meaning of the author, to have clearly in our minds the version of the tale with which he starts.[28]

And shortly afterwards he admits clearly his dependence on the theory of Verrall:

> The technique of Euripides' drama is thus almost inevitably associated with his general point of view. With regard to both it must be apparent that the present writer accepts with gratitude the teaching of Dr. Verrall.[29]

Gilbert Norwood, one of the best and most influential of English-language commentators, accepts pretty thoroughly the position of Verrall:

> Convinced that his contemporaries held false beliefs about the gods and that the myths were largely responsible for this, hypnotizing thought by their beauty and paralyzing logic by their authority, he sets himself to show, not only that they are untrue, but also how, though untrue, they ever won credence.[30]

And about the <u>Ion</u> itself he remarks unequivocally:

> The <u>Ion</u> is the one play in which

<u>Helen</u>, <u>Heracles</u>, <u>Orestes</u>. University Press, Cambridge, 1905.

28 J.T.Sheppard, <u>Greek Tragedy</u>. University Press, Cambridge, 1911, 132-133.

29 <u>Ibid.</u>, 137.

30 Gilbert Norwood, <u>Greek Tragedy</u>. J.W.Luce, Boston, 1920,315.

> Euripides attacks the Olympian theology beyond all conceivable doubt. It is certain . . . that his method of attack is by innuendo and implication. Verrall's theory of the poet's method is here on absolutely unassailable ground.[31]

Lucas repudiates the emphasis of Verrall, but accepts the theory in general:

> The orthodox religion disgusted him; it is fantastic to believe with Verrall that its destruction was the main object with which he wrote his tragedies; but the inexorable fact, veiled so long by the glamour of beautiful legend,--that if the gods behaved as the stories said, they were fiend and fool in one,--he drags to light, in play after play.[32]

Gilbert Murray sympathizes with the position of Verrall, considers Euripides a man "notorious for his bold religious speculation, a reputed atheist," but admits the difficulties of the theory.[33] He says of the Ion:

> What can one make of the Ion? . . . In this point, as in others, the overcomprehensiveness of Euripides' mind led him into artistic sins, and made much of his work a great and fascinating failure.[34]

Finally, one of the most recent works on Euripides to appear, The Plays of Euripides by Hadas and McLean, has this to say on the question:

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31 Ibid., 239.
32 Lucas, 30.
33 Murray, Ancient Greek Tragedy, 268.
34 Ibid., 270.

> He would lead his people in the paths of purity and truth, and his only means of instruction were (only too often) scabrous tales of lust and lying. In the first place he might dissimulate. He might present the old myths as if they were true. He might invest them with all the circumstances of reality, all the embroidery of orthodoxy. But from the start his plan would be *to tell the stories badly*, tolay the emphasis in all the wrong places, to tell them in a way that would bring out and underline all that was morally revolting and intellectually absurd in them. Euripides did take that line. He did more than spoil many a good old story; he ruined them beyond the repair of reasonable men.[35]

We have had, then, in the last fifty years a theory of Euripidean criticism which represents a definite break with the traditional interpretation. It has gained a large measure of popularity. According to it, Euripides cannot be understood or appreciated unless one understands the inner significance of his technique. And the key to this esoteric understanding is his rationalism, atheism, criticism of orthodoxy in a *prima facie* religious medium. Without this key the plays are nonsense and the stories are spoiled beyond repair.

We cannot take space here to show that one of the presuppositions of this theory--namely, that all the great poets and ancients admired him as a first-class dramatist--needs

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35 Moses Hadas and John Harvey McLean, *The Plays of Euripides*. The Dial Press, New York, 1936, xiii.

qualification.[36] Critics and poets from Aristotle to Cardinal Newman have, indeed, praised Euripides, and have ranked as even supreme certain features of his work; but at the same time they have been almost unanimous in finding fault with the structure and execution of his plots. There seems to be, therefore, no great cause for alarm when modern critics attack the same faults. It does not follow that they must misunderstand the true nature of the plays. All that would seem to follow is that those who condemn Euripides so heartily often have their attention directed to a feature of his art which was not that on which critics of former times perhaps centered their attention. Whether these modern judges are justified or not in their views is not at the moment the question. The fact remains that the very faults in construction that annoy the modern reader seemed to have annoyed the ancient and less modern reader as well. There is no necessity to adopt a violent twisting of the entire drama in order to explain our lack of approval.

But the question still remains concerning his religious convictions. Are the plays deliberately composed to destroy belief in the very story they portray? Was Euripides really an atheist who took every occasion to attack the religion of the masses? Did he treat his material with disbelief, dislike, and thinly veiled contempt? Or did he always write from within

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36 For a brief review of Euripidean criticism, confer Lucas, *op. cit., passim.*

the framework of the traditional Greek religion, criticising at times, perhaps, the legends that were the material of his art, but accepting them, nonetheless, with the broad tolerance of the average Athenian? Briefly, then, we attempt to answer the question: was Euripides orthodox in the public expression of his opinions?

CHAPTER II

THE GREEK CONCEPT OF ORTHODOXY

An integral part of our problem is the nature of the concept of orthodoxy among the Greeks. In our effort to discover the Athenian populace's reaction to and estimate of the religious sentiments of Euripides, it will be altogether necessary to investigate their notion of what was orthodox in their religion. Confusion and misapprehension on this point has been largely responsible for the erroneous judgments of critics on the position of Euripides in his religious *milieu*.

The point which must be emphasized at the outset of any discussion of the Greek concept of orthodoxy is the sharp contrast between the Greek religion on the one hand and the religions of the Jews, Christians, Indians, and others on the other hand. This difference lies in the fact that in all the latter religions there were definite sacred writings, given by or inspired by God himself as a rule of life for his devotees. The authority of such scriptures was beyond question; their norm was the norm of orthodoxy. But the Greeks had no such writings. Religious concepts and customs probably deriving from the Minoan and Mycenean cultures were scattered and absorbed in Greece before the time of Homer.[1] He collected

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[1] Cf. Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*. (Translated from the Swedish by F.J.Fielden.) Clarendon Press,

and reduced to some sort of order much of the legendary material, but there is little attempt even in Homer to make anything approaching a scientific theology. Homer, indeed, came long afterward to be regarded as almost unimpeachable, but he still remained a poet with no particular claims to divine help.[2] His was a purely human testimony about the gods, and could be and was criticised without compunction.[3]

The multifarious nature of Greek religion was due in large part to this absence of an accepted "revelation."[4] The typical Greek love of independence and localism manifested itself to the full. Each city had its own ideas of worship and its distinct conception of the gods. Even divinities of identical names were not necessarily the same in different parts of Greece, and were not infrequently quite independent one of

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Oxford, 1925, 9-37: "Minoan-Mycenean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion."

2 Cf. Walter Woodburn Hyde, Greek Religion and Its Survivals. Marshall Jones Co., Boston, 1923, 5: "But even if in this sense [i.e., fixing legends] Homer and Hesiod to some extent represented orthodoxy, their poems never formed a Bible and were never regarded as the word of the gods. The Homeric poems . . . were secular and not religious . . . were never binding on men's beliefs. The Greeks never felt any limit to their religious imagination and curiosity."

3 The attitude towards Homer of the other "founder" of Greek religion, Hesiod, is instructive. He is conscious of his opposition to Homer. The Muses, he says, can sing many lies which resemble the truth; but they can also sing of the truth if they wish. And Hesiod claims for himself the role of the prophet of the truthful Muses.

4 The Greeks did, of course, believe that the gods revealed certain information to those who sought their oracles. The point is that such revelation was confined entirely to practical matters.

the other.[5] So also local shrines were thought of as complete unities, entire in themselves. The same persons might worship at more than one shrine but the shrine itself its own manner of worshipping and its own beliefs.[6]

There was no central authority in Greek religion, whether in respect of beliefs or in respect of ritual. There were no dogmas, no body of fixed beliefs that demanded an act of credence as a test of orthodoxy, since there was no authority to determine or formulate such beliefs. If a worshipper performed properly the rubrics of sacrifice customary at a given shrine, it made not the slightest difference what he himself really believed. And even the mode or ritual was a matter for the local shrine to decide upon; there was no central authority to interfere. The priests themselves were of scarcely any real influence as a class.[7] Any adult male could perform the functions of a priest, could sacrifice in his home, while in the army, or at the banquet table. Professional soothsayers were called in usually only at special times,

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5 Cf. Arthur Fairbanks, A Handbook of Greek Religion. American Book Co., New York, 1910, 22: "At the hundreds of points where Athena was worshipped in Greece, the goddess was never twice conceived in exactly the same manner. Even where the epithet attached to her name is the same, we have no assurance that it is really the same goddess."

6 "The local nature of Greek religion meant that there were as many religions as there were cities, or rather as many as there were individual shrines all over Greece." Ibid., 22.

7 Cf. Nilsson, 247-248.

especially to take omens in affairs of the state.

It has been truly said that there was not one religion but three religions in Greece.[8] The first was that of the poets and story-tellers. It was almost exclusively narrative and may in general be identified with the mythology of Greece. It is important for the purpose of this paper to note that mythology was not the same as religion. It represented a point of view quite distinct from that of religion. The imagination was free from any restrictions imposed by religion, or dogma, or morality. It included many beings such as nymphs, centaurs, satyrs, and heroes who seldom if ever received any worship from the people; and on the other hand, had no place for many of the gods who had been receiving for many decades formal and important cult worship. A god with the same name was not considered to be the same person in mythology and in religion. The god of the myth was pretty much the same over the whole Greek world. The god of religion was specifically and usually only the god of a particular place and shrine who might be thought of as radically different from the god of a shrine even in the same city. And finally, myths were confined to the realm of belief; religion, to the realm of practice.[9]

The second religion may be described as the religion of

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8 We follow here the division given by Professor William Charles Korfmacher, St. Louis University, in his unpublished notes on Greek religion, lecture 1.

9 For a more complete treatment, see Fairbanks, 16-19.

the philosophers. It began with the physical inquiries and speculations of the early Ionian philosophers in the sixth century, and from the beginning or at least very early began to be looked upon as a definite way of life. This religion was dogmatic, and each of the schools,--the Pythagoreans, Academicians, Peripatetics, Stoics, Epicureans, and the rest,--tried to establish a unified set of principles and doctrine. Yet a man was free to choose from among them and which one he eventually selected made little difference. If he chose wrongly he might find inner dissatisfaction and uneasiness, but no evil would befall him and he would be just as "orthodox" and as close to the divinity as anyone else.

The third kind of religion was the State religion, the religion of the Polis and its gods. Far back in the history of Greece when the family was the unit of society, the care of worship of the gods was in the hands of the Paterfamilias, and family unity and loyalty was founded on and expressed by the unified family worship. With the growth of the cities, a conflict arose between the new power of the state and the self-sufficiency of the family structure. The city too had to be united and held in loyalty by the bonds of religion. The unification of Attica was accomplished only by convincing the people concerned that it was the command of the gods.[10] But

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[10] Nilsson, 242-247.

if the State was to be one, its religion and its religious exercises must be one. Hence the State strove to wrest away from the families their personal worship and make it public State worship in the name of the whole body of citizens.[11] In this it succeeded. In fifth-century Athens, all public religion was in the hands of the State. The great festivals were State festivals, and were in reality more a worship of the State than of the gods.[12]

Consequently the State religion had no interest in the private beliefs of the individual.[13] So long as he took part in the State ceremonies, performing the outward acts and ritual, so long as he remained outwardly loyal to the personification of the body politic--the particular deity or deities of the Polis,--then that man was highly "religious" and pious. The appeal of the citizen's religion was not to uprightness of life,

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11 Ibid., 240-241.

12 For a thought-provoking commentary on the real position of the State in the minds of fifth-century Athenians, confer the funeral speech of Pericles. (Thucydides, 2.35.) There is absolutely no mention of a future life, or of the gods. Virtue is equated with service to the State, and is rewarded only by the State. The highest destiny of a citizen is to contemplate, love, serve, and die for Athens.

13 Cf. Hyde, 4: "We shall find that it [Greek religion] differed essentially from most of the religions which dominated the ancient world or those which demand the reverence of mankind in our day. . . . While these generally emphasize certain dogmas, the religion of the Greeks was primarily not a matter of belief at all, but only of practice. It had no dogmas, no creeds, no <u>summa theologica</u>. It had no sacred books to prove an obstacle to intellectual progress." (sic)

and in fact had nothing to do with it. It was not concerned with private ethics, but with State unity and patriotism. There were no doctrines, no intellectually developed theological system; the State religion was a religion exclusively of feeling, emotional exhilaration, and politics.

Religious orthodoxy, therefore, in fifth-century Athens, about which the commentators on Euripides speak so frequently, meant something altogether different from orthodoxy in the modern sense. Burnet expresses it well when he says:

> We have now to ask why Sokrates was charged with irreligion, and why he was put to death. We must at once put aside the idea that it was for not believing the stories about the gods. It is not likely that any educated man believed these, and uneducated people probably knew very little about them. There was no church and no priesthood, and therefore the conception of religious orthodoxy did not exist. So far as mythology was concerned, you might take any liberty.[14]

And a little farther on he adds:

> The truth is that belief in narratives of any kind formed no part of ancient religion; anyone might reject or accept such things as he pleased. Mythology was looked upon as a creation of the poets, and "poets tell many falsehoods." No one could be prosecuted for what we call religious opinions.[15]

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14 John Burnet, Greek Philosophy Part I Thales to Plato. Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1924, 182-183.

15 Ibid., 183.

What was dangerous, though, and what could be prosecuted was "impiety" towards the State, or what we would rather call disloyalty or treason. That such was the real charge against Socrates is highly probable. We cannot here enter deeply into a question that is still being discussed, but the trial of Socrates represents to so many minds the very opposite of what we are trying to establish that it will be advisable to indicate certain reasons for thinking that the real offense of Socrates was his political attitude.[16]

Socrates' connection with the Thirty was well known, and his criticism of Athenian democracy open and severe. Plato seems to go out of his way in two of his dialogues to indicate the real reason for the trial and death of his master. In the _Gorgias_,[17] Socrates is represented as finding serious fault with the democracy and even its best-known leaders. Kallicles, the democratic Sophist, warns him most explicitly that he had better be careful or he would find himself haled before the court. Again in the _Meno_,[18] the accuser himself, Anytus, enters into the dialogue without particular reason, and in a rage threatens Socrates with punishment if he continues to abuse the heroes of the democracy. But we never hear of anyone in Plato

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16 Hyde, 10: "But even here religious intolerance had little to do with the crime; it was rather his supposed oligarchical views and the immediate circumstances of his trial which were responsible for the strange verdict."

17 _Gorgias_ 521c.

18 _Meno_ 94e.

warning Socrates that he had better be careful what he says about the gods. Although the true piety and belief in the divine on the part of Socrates is well known, we yet find him in the *Phaedrus*[19] entirely indifferent whether the stories about the gods are true or false.

The other cases of trials for impiety seem also to be founded not on opinions about the gods but on utterances dangerous to the State.[20] It is very instructive to notice, for example, that Aeschylus could write his *Prometheus* which, apparently at least, is a direct and unqualified blasphemy against Zeus, the father of all the gods, without arousing any excitement or concern. Yet because he inadvertently mentioned in one of his plays a secret of the Eleusinian mysteries a great furor arose and he was tried for impiety.[21]

Again the famous atheist,Diagoras,was allowed to say what he pleased about the gods, their origins, and morals, but

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19 *Phaedrus* 229.

20 *Cf. Fairbanks*, 328: "So long as philosophy neglected religion, it had aroused little or no opposition; when its followers arrayed themselves against religion, they met the penalty of arraying themselves against the State."

21 In memory of his valor at Marathon, he was acquitted before the Council of the Areopagus. So Heracleides Pontius, quoted by Eustratius, a late Christian writer. Given in *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* 1.260, with the apparent approval of A.Sidgwick. Haigh also accepts it: "Such is the earliest version of the story, and there seems to be no sufficient reason to doubt its authenticity." (*Tragic Drama*, 50.) Aristotle seems to refer to the trial:". . . or that he did not know that they were forbidden as Aeschylus did in the case of the mysteries." (*Ethic. Nicom.* 3.2.)

when he began to speak against the temples and the festivals he was quickly prosecuted for impiety.[22]

Much is made of the fact that Anaxagoras was exiled for saying that the sun was not a god, apparently reserving that name for the Nous only. However, we know nothing else about the nature or the truth of the charge. It is quite likely that there was something else behind it. Xenophanes had denied just as much without any harm. The attack on Anaxagoras may well have been one more way of attacking his patron and friend, Pericles.

We are told that Critias had actually written a play in which he describes the tales about the gods as inventions of statecraft to make the people obey the laws of the State.[23] Yet there is no record of his being troubled on this account.[24]

Greek religion, then, left plenty of room for picking and choosing one's beliefs, and did not abhor a critical scrutiny of traditional mythology. Very probably these examinations of myths were rather popular than the opposite among the Greeks who were notoriously ever looking for something new and never

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[22] Cf. speech against Andocides preserved among works of Lysias, 6.17.

[23] Frank Byron Jevons, A History of Greek Literature from the Earliest Period to the Death of Demosthenes. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1897, 233.

[24] Another case in point is the famous incident of the mutilation of the Hermes. It was made so much of because the mutilation was thought to be bound up with the profanation of the mysteries and directed towards the overthrow of the democracy.

tired of asking questions. Even the most orthodox of Greek writers never hesitated to express bluntly their disbelief in certain legends. It was only natural, of course, that the citizens in the State worship should begin to picture the gods as they were described in legend, but they believed that all the descriptions and details about the gods had been given to them by Hesiod and Homer,[25] and consequently considered them ever open to improvement.

The early Ionian philosophers no doubt considered themselves quite orthodox in their questioning. They marked no sudden and complete break with tradition, but were merely carrying on in the typical Greek way. As Hack says of Thales:

> It is quite true that Thales was a philosopher and a scientist; it is equally true that he was a theologian. Under the influence of modern prepossessions, we habitually regard these three vocations as distinct and to a considerable extent mutually exclusive; but they were combined in Thales as well as in most of his successors, and unless we realise that fact the subsequent development of Greek thought tends to become unintelligible.[26]

Xenophanes of Colophon, so far as we know, was never prosecuted for impiety; but he is certainly severe on the re-

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25 They were in error, however, according to Nilsson, 43 *et passim*.

26 Roy K. Hack, God in Greek Philosophy: *To the Time of Socrates*. *Princeton University Press (For the University of Cincinnati)*, Princeton, 1931, 39.

presentations of the gods by Homer and Hesiod. Fragment 1 in the edition of Edmonds reads:

> And I praise the man who, when he hath drunken showeth that he hath a good memory, and hath striven well in pursuit of virtue; he marshals not battle of Titans, nor of Giants, nor yet of Centaurs, fables of them of old, nay nor of vehement discords; these things are of no worth; what is good is ever to have respect unto the gods.[27]

Similarly Heraclitus, perhaps the greatest of the Ionian philosophers, never hesitated to assail popular ideas about the gods and their anthropomorphism.

The credulous and religious-minded Herodotus shows extraordinary signs of what moderns would call "rationalism"[28] in dealing with legends. The Vale of Tempe, he says, is not the work of Poseidon; it is the work of an earthquake.[29] His ex-

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27 J.M.Edmonds, Elegy and Iambus, 2 vols. William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1931, vol. 1, 193.

28 Most moderns who are styled "rationalists" represent an "attitude of negative criticism that has no positive content and confines itself to criticising and questioning any doctrine or theory which transcends the limits of everyday experience." True rationalism or intellectualism, by which the genuine Western culture is distinguished from ancient Orientalism and modern Western heresies is a quite different thing. "It may be defined as a belief in the supremacy of reason; the conviction that the human mind is capable of understanding the world and consequently that reality is itself intelligible and in a manner rational. This positive rationalism had its origin in ancient Greece and was, in fact, the peculiar creation of the Greek genius. . . ." Christopher Dawson, Enquiries into Religion and Culture. Sheed and Ward, New York, 1933, 141.

29 Herodotus, vii, 129.

planation of the tale about the doves with human voices at the oracle of Dodona is more sceptical and rationalistic than anything in Euripides.[30] And he scouts as incredible the stories of Heracles in Egypt.[31]

Even more surprising to one who thinks in terms of modern religious ideas is the criticism of Pindar of whom Adam justly remarks:

> With the exception, perhaps, of Sophocles, it may be doubted whether there is any other Greek poet, the spirit of whose writings is more essentially religious. In part, no doubt, this distinctive peculiarity of Pindar's odes is due to the occasion which they celebrate.[32]

Yet this very Pindar writes thus of the feast of Tantalus:

> In truth it is seemly for man to say of the gods nothing ignoble; for so he giveth less cause for blame. Son of Tantalus! I will tell of thee a tale far other than that of earlier bards. . . . and when thou wast seen no more, and, in spite of many a quest, men brought thee not to thy mother, anon some envious neighbours secretely devised the story that with a knife they clave thy limbs asunder, and plunged them into water which fire had caused to boil, and at the tables, during the latest course, divided the morsels of thy flesh and feasted.
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> Far be it from me to call any

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30 Ibid., ii, 55-57.
31 Ibid., ii, 45.
32 James Adam, The Religious Teachers of Greece, Being Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Aberdeen. T. and T. Clark, Edinburg, 1923, 115.

> one of the blessed gods a cannibal! I stand aloof.[33]

It is interesting to compare this with the supposedly shocking passage from the Iphigeneia in Tauris in which Euripides criticizes the same legend.[34]

Nor is the passage quoted the only attack of Pindar on popular stories about the gods. We read also:

> For many a tale hath been told in many a way. . . . Thus, even in days of old, there was malignant misrepresentation, walking in the ways of crafty language, imagining deceit, mischief-making calumny.[35]

And in the same vein:

> Wonders are rife indeed; and as for the tale that is told among mortals, transgressing the language of truth, it may haply be that stories deftly decked with glittering lies lead them astray. But the Grace of song, that maketh for man all things that soothe him, by adding her spell, full often causeth even what is past belief to be indeed believed.[36]

But it may be objected that such criticisms and doubts were not paraded before the people at a religious festival as were the tragedies of Euripides. Let us see, therefore, what attitude Aeschylus and Sophocles took towards the gods of the legends.

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33 Olympian Odes I, 35-55. (Translation from Sir John Sandys, The Odes of Pindar. William Heinemann, London, 1927.)
34 Cf. supra p. 6.
35 Nemean Odes VIII, 20, 32-33.
36 Olympian Odes I, 28-29.

The religious position of Aeschylus is itself something of a problem, but there are a number of passages which cause one to wonder if he was truly the great theologian of the popular religion as he is sometimes said to have been. In fact Gilbert Murray thinks him unorthodox and obnoxious to the orthodox party, the "precursor of the sophistic movement, as Euripides is the outcome of it."

> Not to speak of the Prometheus, which is certainly subversive, though in detail hard to interpret, the man who speaks of the cry of the robbed birds being heard by "some Apollo, some Pan or Zeus" (Ag. 55); who prays to "Zeus, whoe'er he be" (160); who avows "there is no power I can find, though I sink my plummet through all being, except only Zeus, if I would in very truth cast off this aimless burden of my heart"--is a long way from Pindaric polytheism.[37]

Even the conventional and religious Sophocles has left a number of critical observations about the gods that are seldom given the attention they deserve. Philoctetes becomes pretty cynical about the gods, and the young hero Neoptolemus does not contradict him.

> No evil thing has been known to perish; no, the gods take tender care of such, and have a strange joy in turning back from Hades all things villianous and knavish, while they are ever sending the just and the good out of life.

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[37] Murray, Ancient Greek Literature, 223-224. Euripides is, indeed, in good company if he is as 'unorthodox' as Aeschylus!

> How am I to deem of these things,
> or wherein shall I praise them, when,
> praising the ways of the gods, I
> find that the gods are evil?[38]

When the audience of the _Trachiniae_ have been thoroughly moved at the terrible sufferings of Heracles, the play comes to an end with the bitter words of Hyllus ringing in their ears:

> Lift him, followers! And grant me full
> forgiveness for this! but mark the
> great cruelty of the gods in the deeds
> that are being done. They beget
> children, they are hailed as fathers,
> and yet they can look upon such
> sufferings.
> No man foresees the future; but
> the present is fraught with mourn-
> ing for us, and with shame for the
> powers above, and verily with an-
> guish beyond compare for him who
> endures this doom.[39]

What is our conclusion from this necessarily brief survey of pertinent texts in the writings of Greek philosophers, historians, poets, and dramatists who represent for us traditional Greek attitudes toward religion, or what we generally call Greek "orthodoxy"? We may conclude, first, that we are correct in saying that our modern notion of orthodoxy is not the same as that of the Greeks. Secondly, we conclude that it would be indeed disingenuous to condemn Euripides, on the strength of occasional expressions in his plays of doubt in the

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[38] Sophocles, _Philoctetes_ 446-452. (Translation from R.C.Jebb, _Sophocles_: _The Plays and Fragments_. 2nd edition. University Press, Cambridge, 1898.)

[39] _Trachiniae_ 1264-1274.

providence of god, or criticism or disbelief in the dramatic legends, as a rebel against tradition and an opponent of the religion of his fellow-citizens. His audience had heard from the most orthodox of Greek writers frank disapproval of elements in their religion; they would not, then, have been scandalized and have raised the cry of "unorthoxy" when they heard similar expressions from Euripides.

One last pitfall of considerable danger the critic must be warned against when approaching the gods of Euripides. There is always danger in questions of this kind that we read into ancient times our own ideas of the divine. For people today, even for those who think that they have cast off the influence of Christianity, the very concept of polytheism seems absurd. We tend to think that no educated man of the time of Euripides could have believed that there actually were such gods as Apollo, Athena, Hermes, and therest, even prescinding from the obviously false myths dealing with them. And a scholar of Gilbert Murray's reputation has lent support to this prepossession by teaching in his well-known _Five Stages in Greek Religion_ that the best of the Greeks did arrive at monotheism. If this is true, it follows that we ought to assume from the beginning that Euripides, too, had abandoned polytheism, and consequently was clearly an enemy of the State religion. However, we have good reason to doubt that this was actually the case.

An educated man like Herodotus, for example, givés repeated indications in his History of a belief in the existence of a plurality of divine beings, called as they were by various names. Xenophon, too, appears to have had a simple faith in many of the gods traditionally worshipped by the State. Though, as we have seen, Socrates was quite indifferent about mythology, he did advise Xenophon to consult the Delphic oracle on the wisdom of going on the expedition with Cyrus. Plato with all his sublimity never reached the Christian concept of the Divinity, and appears to have believed that even the sun was a god of some sort. Futher, he takes Apollo as the patron of his city. In the Timaeus he perhaps rises to his highest conception of god; yet even the god of the Timaeus has rivals in the intelligible world of the ideas and does not differ essentially from the divine stars, the divine world he makes, and the whole complexus of Platonic gods.

But Aristotle at least surely shook off the traditional polytheism. What indeed could be closer to the monotheism of St. Thomas than his famous description of the "thought of thought," the "unmoved mover," and the rest?[40]

Before we answer too readily in the affirmative, it will be wise to glance at a text from the Metaphysics. He first reviews briefly wha t he has said before in the Physics:

It is clear, then, from what has

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[40] Physics viii, 6.

> been said, that there is a substance which is eternal and immovable, and separate from sensible things. It has been shown also that this substance cannot have any magnitude . . . it is impassive and unalterable. . . .

Then at once adds, and this sentence cannot be overlooked:

> We must not ignore the question whether we have to suppose one such substance or more than one, and, if the latter, how many?[41]

And he then carefully calculates whether there should be forty-nine or even fifty-five other movers, all separate, impassive, and eternal,--in other words, all gods. As Roland-Gosselin remarks, ". . . in spite of the supremacy of the first Thought, the mind of the Philosopher is still profoundly impregnated with polytheism."[42]

Even more surprising, we have evidence that Aristotle left instructions in his will that an image of his mother should be consecrated to Demeter, and that further, in order to fulfill a vow that he had made to the gods, a marble statue should be erected at Stagira to Zeus Soter, and another one to Athena Soteira.[43] A man who does not believe in the gods is not likely to leave instructions in his will to honor them.

In criticism of Professor Murray's tenet of monotheism,

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41 Metaphysics xii, 7-8.
42 M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, Aristote. Paris, 1928, 97.
43 Cf. Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1936, 45.

it will suffice perhaps to quote the answer given by the eminent authority, Etienne Gilson: "As to the supposed monotheism of the Greeks. . . we may say shortly that it never existed."[44] And he sums up the evidence on the subject thus:

> It is clear from the evidence that first comes to hand that if the Greek poets and thinkers waged a successful warfare against anthropomorphism in natural theology, they never succeeded in eliminating, and hardly even dreamt of eliminating, polytheism. Xenophon teaches the existence of a great god, but that merely means a supreme god among gods and men. Neither Empedocles nor Philolaus went any further, and as for Plutarch, it is well known that the plurality of gods was one of his dogmas. Never, it seems, did Greek thought rise higher than this; for it failed to do so even in the natural theologies of Plato and Aristotle.[45]

When we approach, therefore, the gods of Euripides, we have no right to presuppose that the poet himself did not believe in them; and we shall attempt to show in succeeding chapters that neither from external nor internal testimony of his work do we have any real evidence to the contrary. The more logical conclusion, in fact, seems to be that he did believe in the traditional gods of the State. This does not mean, of course, that Euripides necessarily believed in the historical truth of the story he tells, for example, in the *Ion*. As

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44 *Ibid.*, 430.
45 *Ibid.*, 43-44.

we shall see, it is more probable that he invented the story, and thus, obviously, could not take it for fact. But it seems that he did believe in what we may call the artistic truth of his material; that is, he intended to tell a story in which the gods were to be real persons and were to be accepted as such in the story, in which there would be nothing intrinsically repugnant, which was not in conflict with facts but would suggest a possible explanation for certain facts, which was justified by a vague and confused tradition, and which would in any case help the Ionians to appreciate their unity and the Athenians their glory. Perhaps we could compare his attitude to that of a modern who writes semi-historical novels. The modern author does not vouch for the veracity of the incidents reported, and is primarily interested in writing a good novel. But the story is told with a background of history both to make it more interesting and as a means of making more vivid the times about which it deals. So, as we shall try to demonstrate later, Euripides does in the Ion.[46]

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[47] We refer here particularly to the Ion because it is the play we shall devote most of our attention to.

CHAPTER III

TESTIMONY OF EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

The question of an author's orthodoxy must be answered ultimately--in so far as it can be answered at all--by a careful investigation of his writings. They are his own expression of what he thought and felt. Yet experience has shown how various are the definitions of a writer's personal views that can be deduced from his works. When the author is a dramatist who never speaks in his own person, a conclusive interpretation becomes much more difficult. A critic is accordingly forced to look for evidence outside the plays that may afford him a directive norm for his interpretation.

In our attempt, therefore, to answer the question that we have proposed to ourselves, we must first examine the external evidence that bears on the religious attitude of Euripides. We feel that a careful examination of this kind is the more necessary because it appears that critics not infrequently have been misled by false impressions as to the nature of this evidence. Confusion and mystification have been the consequence. Professor Murray, for example, on the basis of certain assumptions, finds himself at a loss in interpreting certain features of Euripides' dramas:

> When it [peripeteia] is done by a
> man notorious for his bold religious

> speculation, a reputed atheist, and no seeker after popularity, then it becomes a problem. Let any one who does not feel the difficulty, read the Orestes.[1]

Dr. Verrall, also, found the same difficulty, and attempted his amazing solution that has had a most regrettable influence on subsequent scholars. Assuming that Euripides was in fact notorious for his religious views and a reputed atheist with no interest in popularity, we must agree that there is a real and perhaps insoluble problem. We hope, however, to show that the assumptions are not true to fact, or are at least but doubtful.

The external evidence in our case may be divided into two kinds: the reputation of Euripides as revealed by contemporary writers, and his relations with significant phases of the life about him.

We shall consider first the testimony of a contemporary which has apparently molded much of Euripidean criticism,--the testimony of the comic poet, Aristophanes. It is to him that most of the unfavorable legends can be traced; it was from his plays that most of the dislike of scholars of the early nineteenth century was drawn.[2]

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[1] Gilbert Murray, A History of Ancient Greek Tragedy. D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1897, 268.

[2] Cf. Gilbert Murray, Euripides and His Age. Williams and Norgate, London, no date, 25: "And we find, oddly enough, that most of the anecdotes about Euripides in Satyrus are simply the jokes of comedy treated as historical fact."

Also Reginald B. Appleton, Euripides the Idealist. J.M.

One critic of the time put it in this fashion:

> When he began to study tragedy, he shut himself up in a cave, wild and horrid, and sequestered from the world, in the island of Salamis: he is charged with having a professed antipathy to women, and every feature both of nature and education, as now described, is discoverable in his writings: his statements breathe the air of the schools, his images are frequently vulgar, and his female characters of an unfavorable cast: he is carping, sour, and disputatious: and though he carried away only five prizes out of seventy-five plays, he is still indignant, proud, and self-assuming: his life was full of contention and his death of horror, for he was set upon by mastiffs and killed.[3]

More recent scholarship has modified greatly this view; but Aristophanes and the early biographers who followed his lead remain the chief witnesses to Euripides' atheism, unpopularity, and unsocialness. We submit that the testimony of the comic poet is of no real value in our discussion.

In the first place, Aristophanes was a poet and a dramatist, and, further, a comedian of a peculiarly free and riotous

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Dent and Sons Ltd., London, 1927, 27: "I think there is no disputing the fact that the comparative unpopularity of Euripides, until recent years, has been due, to a degree greater than is usually recognized, to some such unconscious bias occasioned by the ridicule of Aristophanes."

3 From Cumberland's Observer, quoted by J.R.Major, A Guide to the Reading of the Greek Tragedians; Being a Series of Articles on the Greek Drama, Greek Metres, and Canons of Criticism. Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844, 51.

style; hence, we should scarcely expect him to be reliable as an historian, biographer, or literary critic. And this *a priori* judgment is confirmed by the studies of a well-known scholar, who says:

> Aristophanes is a poet of ideas, not of psychology. There is little character-drawing throughout his work: his invented people are ordinary, though they move in fantastic surroundings. What of his 'historical characters'--his presentation of distinguished real persons--Cleon, Socrates, Lamachus, Euripides? We know from other sources something about all these, and conclude that the poet is wildly burlesquing them.[4]

As an example of the comedian's recklessness with facts may be cited his taunts about Euripides' family and marriages. Critics today are in agreement that the very opposite is true. Similarly, the ridicule poured upon the language of Euripides in the *Frogs* for its commonplaceness cannot be taken too literally as representing the opinion of the ancients. On the contrary, Aristotle praises Euripides for the fineness of his language:

> The same iambic, for instance, is found in Aeschylus and Euripides, and as it stands in the former, it is a poor line; whereas Euripides, by the change of a single word, the substitution of

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[4] Gilbert Norwood, *The Writers of Greece*. Oxford University Press, London, 1925, 82.

> a strange for what is by usuage the ordinary word, has made it seem a fine one.[5]

Secondly, we know from the surviving plays themselves that Aristophanes was not adhering strictly to facts when he repeatedly accused Euripides of being a hater of women.

> They called him a hater of women; and Aristophanes makes the women of Athens conspire for revenge against him. Of course he was really the reverse. He loved and studied and expressed the women whom Socrates ignored and Pericles advised to stay in their rooms.[6]
>
> Consider, for instance, the Medea, the wonderful proof that a Greek could sympathize with a woman, a bad woman, and--strangest of all--a barbarian.[7]

Finally we have what would seem to be a clinching argument in the close parallel between Aristophanes' attack on Socrates in the Clouds and his attack on Euripides. No one today receives seriously the portrait of Socrates in the play named, simply because Socrates was fortunate enough to have had vindicators of the genius of Plato and Xenophon. Euripides was not thus fortunate. It is a strange fact indeed that Euripides is considered an atheist on the strength of the lines in the Frogs:

> Di. (to Eur.) Now put on incense, you.

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5 Aristole, Poetics, 1458b.20. Translation from W.D.Ross (editor), The Works of Aristotle Translated into English. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1924.

Eu. Excuse me, no;
My vows are paid to other gods than these.
Di. What, a new coinage of your own?
Eu. Precisely.
Di. Pray then to them, those private gods of yours.
Eu. Ether, my pasture, volubly-rolling tongue, Intelligent wit and critic nostrils keen, O well and neatly may I trounce his plays![8]

But Socrates we do not consideredan atheist although the lines in the Clouds are a remarkably close parallel:

St. Name your own price, by all the gods I'll pay it.
So. The Gods! why you must know the Gods with us Dont pass for current coin. . . .
Come, would you like to learn celestial matters. How their truth stands?
St. Yes, if there's any truth. . . .
So. Old man sit you still, and attend to my will, and hearken in peace to my prayer,
O Master and King, holding earth in your swing, O measureless infinite Air;
And thou glowing Ether, and Clouds who enwreathe her with thunder and lightning, and storms,
Arise ye and shine, bring Ladies Divine, to your student in bodily forms.[9]

By the end of the play, Strepdiades has learned his les-

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6 Murray, Ancient Greek Tragedy, 262-263.

7 J.T.Sheppard, Greek Tragedy. University Press, Cambridge, 1911, 146.

8 Aristophanes, Frogs 888-894. (Translation from Benjamin Bickley Rogers, Aristophanes with an English Translation. 3 vols. William Heinemann, London, 1938.

9 Clouds 245-266.

son well:

> Pa. You 'scape me not, by Mighty Zeus, and all the Gods!
> St. I wonderfully like the Gods; An oath by Zeus is sport to knowing ones.[10]

And finally, to conclude our reasons for refusing to take seriously the defamation of Euripides by Aristophanes, we quote here the very convincing remarks of Mr. R.B.Appleton on the point:

> In order to appreciate this, contrast what we now think of Socrates with what we might have thought had Plato never written. What an unedifying picture we should have formed!--a man actually put to death by the Athenians for impiety, the corrupter of Athenian youth, a frequenter of brothels,[11] casuist,[12] bigamist,[13] cynic,[14] Sodomite,[15] of violent sexual passions and general temper[16]--could a less engaging picture possibly be imagined? Certainly we should not recognise the Socrates whom we know from Plato, and should have good grounds for believing that Aristophanes was justified in his attack. Yet such is the perversity of human nature that we regard this attack, supported as it is by other evidence, as absolutely unfounded, but give credence to the same Aristophanes when he similarly

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10 Ibid., 1239-1241.
11 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* iii, 2.
12 Aristophanes, *Clouds* 245-266.
13 Diog. Laert., II.v.10.
14 Lucian, *Vera Historia* ii. 19.
15 Ibid., II.v.16.
16 Mueller, *Frag. Hist. Graec.*, ii, 280.

> attacks a poet whom we know from other evidence to have been held in almost universal honour by the whole of antiquity.[17]

Whatever the reason for Aristophanes' vicious attacks on Euripides--it may have been keen rivalry and jealousy aroused by the success of the tragedian at the Laenea festival and his encroachment on the field of comedy--we feel ourselves justified in refusing to be influenced by it in deciding whether or not the religious views of Euripides were orthodox.

The second major source of information conderning Euripides is the ancient "lives." These are strangely various and in certain points certainly false; yet they are called upon to support the theory that the plays of the dramatist must be considered _a priori_ as the work of a philosophic, unpopular atheist. These ancient biographies, when used as authorities for the characters of the Greek dramatic poets, are , by common consent, of very uncertain reliability. A scholar who was particularly able to judge of their veracity spoke of them thus: "Biographi Graeci veteres mendacissimum hominum."[18] It need hardly be added that anything they state must be examined very critically.

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17 Appleton, 33.

18 Dindorf, as quoted in an article by L.C.St.A.Lewis in J.U. Powell and E.A.Barber, _New Chapters in the History of Greek Poetry and Prose of the Fourth and Following Centuries B.C._ Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1921, 144.

The next step is to seek Euripides' opinions on traditional religion in the light of his circumstances. Here it is important to keep in mind that Greek tragedy, utterly unlike drama in modern times, was a distinctly religious thing.[19] It was an act of worship of the State religion. The actors were looked upon as ministers of the gods. Even when the old religion had lost much of its vigor, the "holy art"[20] retained its unique position. The Athenian actors' guild was granted the unusual privilege of exemption from military service, and its members were declared by an inter-state convention free from capture in war.[21] Even the spectators shared in the sacredness of the ceremonies.[22]

Now if Euripides was a notorious atheist and deliberately intended to destroy the State religion, it seems incredible that the Commissioners of that State should have given him a chorus and permitted him to produce his dramas. Dr. Verrall and those who think with him explain this difficulty away by saying that his method of attack was always by innuendo and implication,[23] by sham prologues and epilogues,[24] by misplaced emphasis,[25] or simply by bungling the mythological

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19 See Roy Caston Flickinger, The Greek Theater and Its Drama. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 4th edition, 1936, 119 ff.: "Influence of Religious Origin."

20 Plato, Gorgias 502b.1.

21 Demosthenes gives details. See Flickinger, 130.

22 Ibid., 128.

23 Gilbert Norwood, Greek Tragedy. John W.Luce and Co., Boston, 1920, 239.

24 A.W.Verrall, Essays on Four Plays of Euripides, 260.

stories.[26] But how were the people to grasp the point of such unusual treatment? They--or at least the more intelligent among them--would know beforehand what to expect from a notorious free-thinker and hence would be on the watch for the hidden meanings.[27]

This explanation is far from satisfactory. If the dramatist's intentions were known beforehand, though only by the more-enlightened, the difficulty remains of explaining why he was granted a chorus. For it cannot be supposed that all the more intelligent citizens would be in sympathy with an attempt to destroy the State gods. Xenophon was a young and surely keen-witted Athenian of the time. He was a constant and fervent worshipper of the gods.[28] There is no evidence to show that he was an exception to the general rule. Plato, too, and it is to be supposed, those who were influenced by him, seems sincerely and seriously to have supported the State religion.[29] Nor can it be urged that Plato's interests lay in a field so distant from tragedy that he did not comprehend the peculiar

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25 Moses Hades and John Harvey McLean, The Plays of Euripides: The Dial Press, New York, 1936, xiii.

26 Ibid., xiv.

27 A.W.Verrall, Euripedes the Rationalist: A Study in the History of Art and Religion. University Press, Cambridge, 1913, 85 et passim.

28 The whole spirit of the Anabasis shows this clearly. In the Cyropaedeia (I.vi.44-46) he insists that the chief of all things is the fear of the gods.

disposition of Euripides. The fact is that he shows a deep knowledge of the drama and a wide acquaintance with the tragedians, and with Euripides especially whom he quotes more frequently than he does either Aeschylus or Sophocles. Surely men such as Plato would have been intelligent enough to grasp Euripides' intentions and interested enough to have seen that the State officials knew of them.

Supposing, however, that permission were granted to produce the plays, would the Athenian people have allowed them? The "great pack of the orthodox and the vulgar,"[30] which is referred to with disdain by the critics, is sometimes not so obtuse as is supposed. The Athenian "pack" displayed remarkable powers. S.H. Butcher says:

> But a fine and trained instinct for
> language was the very condition which
> made it possible for the average Athenian,
> unversed in books, to become
> a capable critic even of the higher

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[29] In our opinion, the tenth book of the Laws removes all doubt on the score. Cf. also J.P.Mahaffy, Social Life in Greece from Homer to Meander. Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1925, p. 355: "The important point . . . is this, that all through Greek history scepticism never made way among the majority even of educated people, but was merely the privilege or pastime of small circles of philosophers and their followers. The Sophists indeed attempted to transfuse this mental attitude, by means of education, into the public mind, but the soberer portion of the nation vehemently and successfully resisted them."

[30] Murray, as quoted by Arthur S. Way, Euripides with an English Translation. G.P.Putnam's Sons, 1930, vol. I, Introduction.

> poetry. Add to this a marvelous alertness of mind, a power of catching a point or seeing an allusion, which is vouched for by the most various testimony, and which justified Demosthenes in declaring: 'No people is so quick at taking a speaker's meaning.'[31]

The extremely subtile and varied satire of Aristophenes, calling as it did for a broad knowledge and appreciation of the tragedies, and a great quickness of perception, was immensely popular with the ordinary people. It seems, therefore, highly improbable that this same people would not have discovered the hidden meanings of Euripides--if there were any.

It is possible, as has been suggested, that Euripides wrote some at least of his plays to be read, not staged. In that case it would have been absurd for him to take pains to disguise his real meaning.

It may be well to consider here the testimony of the two most reliable authorities of the times. Plato and Aristotle were neither comedians nor story-tellers, but earnest thinkers. Their testimony, it is true, is chiefly negative but is not without value for our purpose.

Both writers speak of Euripides repeatedly, but there is never the slightest hint that they looked upon him as radically different in spirit and purpose from the other tragedians, or as an atheist. If Euripides was a reformer and prophet who

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[31] S.H.Butcher, Harvard Lectures on the Originality of Greece. Macmillan Co., London, 1920, 187.

"would lead his people in the paths of purity and truth,"[32] there is no reason to think so from Plato. He assumes without question that tragedy in his day was concerned with delighting the people and with little or nothing else.[33] There is no evidence to show that Plato recognized in Euripides, as moderns have,[34] a fellow reformer and purifier of the State religion.

Aristotle studied and greatly admired Euripides.[35] He gives no indication that he admired him for his innuendoes and implications, or for his reforming zeal. Strangely enough, Aristotle seems to have had no difficulty in appreciating the plays without recourse to a complicated theory of religious criticism, though Dr. Verrall states unequivocally that the plays taken at their face value "exhibit the same crying incongruity between promise and execution, the same inexplicable carelessness of development, the same futility in the termination, in short the same marks of 'the botcher.'"[36] Professor Murray is aghast at Euripides' not seeing "that his *deus* makes the whole grand tragedy [Orestes] into nonsense."[37] Aristotle's

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32 Hadas and McLean, xiii.
33 Plato, *Gorgias* 502c.1-4.
34 T.R.Glover, *Greek Byways*. University Press, Cambridge, 1932, 125.
35 In the *Rhetorica*, Aristotle quotes: *Andromeda*, *Orestes*, *Medea*, *Sthenelus*, *Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Hippolytus*, *Thyestes*, *Telephus*, *Iph. Taur.*, *Iph. Aul.*, *Oenues.*
36 Verrall, *Euripides the Rationalist*, 129.
37 Murray, *Ancient Greek Tragedy*, 268.

judgement is that his execution is often faulty, but that when actually presented on the stage, he is the "most tragic certainly of the dramatists."[38] Shortly afterwards, he even holds him up as a model in the treatment of legendary data.[39]

It is interesting to note, too, that Aristotle gives Xenophanes and Critias as exemples of atheists and critics of religion and does not mention the 'notorious atheist,' Euripides; and that when Hygiaenon, in his law suit against the poet, wanted to convict him of impiety, his argument was the absurd charge that the line in the Hippolytus, "My tongue hath sworn: no oath is on my soul," encouraged perjury.[40] A weak charge, indeed, to bring against a man who was a notorious atheist. Sophocles has lines more compromising than this in the Oedipus Coloneus.

Aristotle quotes this example to explain what course to take when one's adversary in court brings up a point that has been already decided. We infer that Euripides had been tried for impiety and acquitted. The inference is confirmed by Satyrus.[41] The fact of the trial proves nothing. For it was Cleon who prosecuted him and, as Lewis remarks, this "is not so incredible as it seems at first sight, considering the levity with which such charges were made."[42] Aeschylus, whose

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38 Aristotle, Poetics 1453a.24.
39 Ibid., 1456a.17.
40 Aristotle, Rhetorica 1416a.30.
41 According to Lewis, 150.
42 Loc. cit.

orthodoxy is not generally questioned, was tried for impiety;[43] Socrates, who believed in the gods, was actually condemned for impiety. That Euripides was vindicated by a jury of the Athenian "orthodox pack" shows that he was not thought an atheist by them and that he was probably not very unpopular with them.

Just what were Euripides' relations with the common people of Athens? Was he really unpopular? Aristophanes and some of the later traditions have led many critics to think so, and to regard the fact as a proof of his heterodoxy.

Certain facts that appear quite certain lead us to believe that Euripides was very popular with the people during his lifetime. Plutarch bears witness to the astounding love and admiration of the Syracusans for the poet.[44] The time referred to was the year 411, six years before the death of Euripides. Is it reasonable to suppose that a poet who was despised in Athens, the 'arbiter elegantiae' of the intellectual world, would have won such an enormous following in far distant Sicily? We know, too, that from his death to the fall of Rome, Euripides was universally admired.[45] Why should the

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43 A.E.Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1925, 52.

44 Plutarch, Nicias 29.

45 Cf. above, chapter I. If his unpopularity during his lifetime was caused by his expression of unorthodox opinions, what caused such a radical change of sentiment upon his death? Had the people so completely relaxed their orthodoxy in a space of four or five years? Mahaffy, op. cit.,

taste of the Athenians have undergone so abrupt a change at his death? It is far more likely that he was popular throughout his lifetime, and his favor with the masses is conceded even by Aristophanes.[46]

What then of his life of seclusion, his withdrawal from public life, his hatred of women, and his final despairing departure from Athens? Mr. Lucas seems to have followed a distorted and exaggerated tradition when he wrote:

> Always he maintained an aloofness, eccentric in Athenian eyes, from public life--an unsociable hermit, lurking now in his library, the first ever formed in Athens, now in his study, a sea-cave on the isle of Salamis.[47]

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argues that "after the fever of the Peloponnesian war was over, when the novelty of the sophists had gone by, when the hard and selfish generation of Pericles had passed away, there may have been a reaction towards positive belief, and towards old-fashioned views." (p. 371) "Take Demosthenes, or the orator Lycurgus, or Hypereides, or even any obscure contemporaries who works have been preserved. Do they preach or suggest sceptical views? Nothing of the sort. All of them address throughout an orthodox and even religious public . . . admitting and enforcing a faith in Divine Providence, and looking to the gods for help and pardon in national dangers and transgressions." (pp. 367-368)

Yet the "destructive and sceptical" Euripides was quite approved of by these orators. Aeschines, for example, calls him "a poet as wise as any"; Lycurgus was the author of the law ordering an official text of the plays of the three great dramatists precisely in order that they could not be changed in the regular revivals--in which, incidentally, Euripides was easily the best received and most often played.

46 Frogs 99. Cf. also Edward Capps, From Homer to Theocritus: A Manual of Greek Literature. Charles Scribners Sons, 1901, 237.

47 Lucas, 6.

It is hard to conceive how a man who personally directed and trained choruses for eighty-four or more tragedies could have led a secluded and lonely life. This task in addition to the labor of composing the poetry and music for the same dramas would appear to be sufficient explanation for his withdrawal from public life.

> The statement has been made that Euripides 'lived in a cave' at Salamis, implying that he was an unsociable eccentric who became a troglodyte. Aulus Gellius's absurd adjectives (xv.20) seem to imply the same thing: 'Philochorus refert in insula Salaminia speluncam esse taetram et horridam, quam nos vidimus, in qua Euripides tragoedias scriptitarit.' This rests on a misconception. Satyrus's words . . . (Fr.39, col.ix), and the words in the Bios (Schwartz, Eurip. Schol. genos, s.5.). . . simply mean that he 'fitted up' a cave as a study by the seaside, like a summer bungalow.[48]

In addition, we have the information from Aristotle that Euripides did not entirely cut himself off from public life or office. He was sent on an embassy to the Syracusans to negotiate peace;[49] and there may have been other public functions of which we have no record.

His reputed adversion to women has no bearing on his popularity because, as we have pointed out above, it has no

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48 Lewis, "Satyrus's Life of Euripides," in New Chapters in Greek Literature, 149.

49 Aristotle, Rhetorica 1384b.15; the scholiast confirms the identification of the Euripides mentioned with the tragedian. Cf. Ross, op. cit.

foundation in fact.

That Euripides passed his last few years away from Athens in Macedon and died there seems clear, though the details of his death as given by the early biographies are now generally discounted.[50] There is no justification for making a martyr of him, picturing him as worn out by the ill-will and hatred of his fellow-citizens, and leaving the city in defeat. Aeschylus retired to Sicily shortly before his death, and an early biographer, now held suspect, assigns practically the same reasons.[51] If religious differences were responsible for Euripides' departure, must we not assign the same reason, in lieu of any evidence to the contrary, for the presence in Macedon of Agathon, Timotheus, Zeuxis, and perhaps Thucydides?[52] Satyrus gives the quite unromantic reason that his retirement was due to his irritation with the poets Acestor, Dorilaus, Morsimus, and Melanthius.[53]

But what of the more important point of his ill-success in the contests? Was that due, as many think, to the people's resentment of his heterodoxy? In the first place, Euripides was not nearly so unsuccessful as he is generally made out to have been. Granted that he secured only five first prizes

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50 Paul Decharme, _Euripides and the Spirit of His Dramas._ (Translated by James Loeb.) Macmillan Co., 1906, 11.
51 Haigh, _The Tragic Drama of the Greeks_, 51-52.
52 Murray, _Euripides and His Age_, 170.
53 Satyrus's _Life of Euripides._ See Lewis, _op. cit._, 150.

at the city Dionysia, he yet took nine firsts at the Laenea festival. In all he won fourteen first places as compared with twenty-four for Sophocles and twenty-nine for Aeschylus.[54] That record is not bad in view of the fact that Euripides entered the contests rather late in life and entered only eighty-four plays as compared with considerably more than a hundred by the other two. Besides, as Haigh points out, a second prize or even indeed the granting of a chorus to a playwright were in the time of Euripides no mean honors. It must not be overlooked that his competitors were numerous and of real ability. There was always the great master, Sophocles, and a younger poet, Agathon, was well received.[55] And there were a host of others, many of whose names we still have.[56]

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54 Capps, 237-238: "Euripides was only moderately successful in the competitions, his victories at both festivals amounting to fifteen, as against the twenty-eight of Aeschylus and the twenty-four of Sophocles."

This is a very interesting and illuminating bit of information, not noticed by other authors we have consulted. We know that towards the end of the fifth century, tragic contests at the Leneae had come to rival those in the "city." If Euripides made it a practice of producing many of his tragedies there, it would help to explain the tragi-comic nature of some of the plays, and the frequency of the parodies of his plays by the comedians. (Cf. A.E.Haigh, The Attic Theatre. 2nd edition. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1898, 36-43.)

Unfortunately, in the passage cited, the author does not refer to his sources, but we may accept his testimony with considerable assurance. Professor Capps had a particularly valid right to speak with authority on this subject. Among his greatest scholarly achievements were the reconstruction of the Catalogue of Victors (see The Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago. First Series, vol. vi, 1904.), and intensive research in the history of the Great Dionysia and Leneae festivals.

55 Cf. Aristotle, Poetics 1451b.21; 1454b.14; 1456a.18,24,30.

Finally, there were many reasons other than religious prejudice why a superior play might not gain the crown. The music, the actors, the generosity of the choregus in furnishing the costumes, and the training of the chorus were sometimes the determining factors in a victory. Nicias boasted that he had never lost a contest as choregus. There is an early statement to the effect that Euripides was sometimes unsuccessful because he was neglectful in the training of his choruses. At any rate, we know that the Oedipus Rex, Aristotle's ideal tragedy, won only second place. In the following century, Menander, who is not considered to have been hindered by religious spite, won the first prize only four times out of a total of one hundred and eight comedies![57] It is quite possible that an audience may like a play very much, and yet be unwilling to award it first place in a dramatic contest. This case seems to hold particularly with Euripides. Porson, no doubt, expressed the feelings of many when he wrote:

> Cautius agendum est, et difficilius descrimen subeundum, si Sophoclem et Euripidem inter se comparare velimus. Uterque enim propriis virtutibus elucet, et si sua vitia Euripides habet, quibus alter caret, magnis ea bonis redimit. . . . Interea non diffiteor, majorem me quidem voluptatem ex Euripidis nativa venustate et inaffectata simplicitate percipere, quam ex magis ela-

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56 See Haigh, Tragic Drama of the Greeks, 405-419.
57 Butcher, 174.

> borata et artificiosa Schoolis sedulitate. Hic fortasse meliores tragoedias scripsit; sed ille dulciora poemata. Hunc magis probare solemus; illum magis amare; hunc laudamus; illum legimus.[58]

All that we have seen thus far is hard to reconcile with the theory that Euripides was an atheist or at any rate a severe critic of the popular beliefs. All the evidence seems to point in precisely the other diredtion. We also have the testimony of the ancient biographies--not very reliable--that the Athenians held the tragedian in great veneration during his lifetime. They bestowed upon him the distinction of dining at the public table in the Prytaneum, a distinction that would hardly have been granted to an unpopular and suspected man. In fact, they even made the 'notorious atheist' a priest of Apollo of Zoster! Immediately after his death, they sent an embassy to Macedon to plead that his body be returned to Athens for burial, and when their request was refused, erected a cenotaph to his memory on the road between Athens and the Peiraeus. A tradition soon grew up that Euripides was held in such favor by the gods that both his tomb and cenotaph had been struck by lightning.[59]

As far, then, as the external evidence is concerned, we must conclude that Euripides, far from being a notorious athe-

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58 "On the Style of Euripides," quoted by Major, op. cit., 4-15.
59 Vita Euripidis and Plutarch, Lycurgus. Cf. Haigh, Tragic Drama of the Greeks, 217; Decharme, 13.

er free-thinker, was in all probability quite orthodox
the public expressions of his views on the State religion.
shall not consider ourselves obliged, therefore, to study
religious element in the surviving plays of Euripides with
a priori assumption that his real meaning can be grasped
by discovering all the subtile implications and innuen-
that lie hidden in the orthodox framework.

CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF THE *ION*

It is apparent that we cannot in the brief span of this essay attempt anything approaching a complete examination of the total work of Euripides. In such circumstances, it is most satisfactory to select one play which by common consent is the critical play, the touchstone, in determining the attitude of the author. If critics generally agree that a given work represents most clearly and certainly the "unorthodoxy" of Euripides, then that is the play to choose for examination. For if our analysis proves that the dramatist's religious attitude in this play would have caused no offense to the susceptibilities of an orthodox audience, it follows that we have a strong *a fortiori* argument that the other plays which are not as anti-religious as the one examined would have caused no scandal.

Fortunately, there is no difficulty in selecting such a play from among the dramas of Euripides. In the fifty years during which scholarly attention has been focused especially on the religion of Euripides, one play--the *Ion*--has been easily most prominent. It was the novel "rationalization" of the *Ion* by H.B.L. that initiated the modern trend.[1] It was the *Ion*

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[1] Cf. *supra* p. 13.

that Dr. Verrall selected for his first endeavor along the same line of interpretation.[2] Mr. Lucas calls the _Ion_ "the most anti-religious" of the plays.[3] Hadas and McLean concur, stating: "Nowhere is Euripides' scepticism of current orthodoxies more apparent than in the _Ion_."[4] And most positive of all is Gilbert Norwood:

> The _Ion_ is the one play in which Euripides attacks the Olympian theology beyond all conceivable doubt. It is certain . . . that his method of attack is by innuendo and implication. Verrall's theory of the poet's method is here on absolutely unassailable ground.[5]

We have, accordingly, selected this as the critical play, and shall devote this chapter to a thorough analysis of its religious elements.

Part 1

A Summary of the Play

Against the imposing background of the Apolline temple at Delphi, Hermes appears on the stage to deliver the customary Euripidean prologue.[6] The play, he says, is about the lovely princess, Creusa, only child of the Athenian hero-king, Erechtheus, and descendant of the earth-born Ericthonius. One

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2 Cf. _supra_ pp. 13-14.
3 _Op. cit._, 6.
4 _Op. cit._, 193.
5 Norwood, _Greek Tragedy_, 239.
6 _Ion_ 1-81.

day as she was gathering flowers near the Long Cliffs, Apollo came upon her and ravished her. In due time she gave birth to a son. In her shame she secretly took the child to the cave where she had lain with the god, and left it there to die. Apollo, however, did not desert his son, but bade Hermes carry the babe to Delphi. There Hermes left it on the steps of the temple to be found and cared for by the priestess of Apollo.

Now it was the will of Apollo that the boy should become the rightful king of Athens and the founder of a great race. So, when the lad had grown to young manhood, the god inspired Creusa and her husband (an alien warrior, Xuthus by name, to whom she had been given in marriage as a reward for his assistance in war) to come to his shrine with the hope of ending their long childlessness. The time had come for the boy to take his place in the royal house of Athens. Ion would be his name, and with that name on his lips, Hermes steps aside to watch the outcome of the divine plan.

Ion himself then enters and in an ode of great beauty sings of his service to the temple and to Phoebus.[7] A chorus of Creusa's handmaids sing their admiration of the sculptures on the walls of the temple.[8] Creusa follows her servants, and at sight of the temple breaks into tears. When Ion courteously inquires of her discomfort, she pretends that she would in-

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7 *Ibid.*, 82-183.
8 *Ibid.*, 184-236.

quire of the oracle for the sake of a "friend" who had been ravished and deserted by Apollo. Xuthus, who has delayed to consult the neighboring oracle of Trophonius, enters the shrine to ask Phoebus for children. Ion, left alone on the stage, expresses dismay at the shocking conduct of the god, and wonder at his strange interest in Erechtheus' daughter.[9]

After a fervent prayer by the chorus to Athena, sister of Phoebus, that the line of Erechtheus may not die out and that Creusa may not be left barren,[10] Ion reenters just as Xuthus emerges from the shrine. Xuthus tries to embrace the boy but is repulsed with increasing temper by Ion. At last Xuthus convinces him that Apollo has declared that the first person he should meet on leaving the oracle would be his son. Although he accepts the story of Xuthus, Ion is very reluctant to leave his happiness at Delphi to go to Athens even as heir to a throne, and he still mourns for his unknown mother. But Xuthus brushes aside objections, and goes to prepare a birth-feast, forbidding the chorus under penalty of death to mention to Creusa what has happened.[11]

In a song of great indignation, disbelief, and rage at the supposed dishonor to Creusa and the true Athenian line, the chorus determines to tell their queen, and prays that the boy will never reach Athens alive.[12] When Creusa and an old

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9 Ibid., 237-451.
10 Ibid., 452-509.
11 Ibid., 510-675.

servant enter and hear the news, they are distraught with grief and anger. In her sorrow Creusa tells the old man for the first time about the rape of Apollo and the desertion of her child. They then plot the death of Ion, and the servant departs for the birth-feast with poison given him by Creusa.[13]

In a short ode the chorus deplores the disgrace and shame of having an alien prince on the throne of Athens and participating in the sacred festivals of Dionysus. They express their hatred for what they consider the treachery and presumption of Xuthus.[14]

At the conclusion of the ode, a servant rushes in and announces the frustration of the plot against Ion. He describes, at the chorus's bidding, the marvelous beauty of the pavilion erected for the feast. He tells how the old servant had busied himself in serving the guests until he had the opportunity of offering Ion a poisoned cup. Just as Ion was about to drink, someone spoke an inauspicious word and the temple-trained boy told all to pour out their wine on the ground. While the cups were being refilled, sacred doves fluttered down and drank of the spilled wine. The one that took the poison from the cup of Ion screamed and died in convulsions. An uproar was made, the old servant seized, forced to

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12 Ibid., 676-724.
13 Ibid., 725-1047.
14 Ibid., 1048-1105.

reveal the truth, and the death penalty was decreed for Creusa.[15]

After the chorus expresses its despair in a brief song,[16] Creusa enters pursued by the Delphians. She takes refuge at the altar of the god and warns Ion, who heads her pursuers, not to touch her. When it seems as though Ion will drag her from the altar anyway, the Pythia stops him. She chides him for his ruthlessness and, inspired by Loxias, gives him the cradle in which she had found him many years before. At sight of the cradle, Creusa cries out and leaves the altar. It is the very one, of course, in which she had abandoned her child, and she is able to identify all its contents. Ion is at length persuaded and happily embraces her. She tells him the truth about his birth, and tries to answer his difficulties. When the boy declares his intention of questioning Phoebus, Athena appears and reassures him, prophesying his future greatness and the glory of his race. Ion and Creusa express their faith and joy, and the company, followed by Athena on high, begins the jubilant journey to Athens.[17]

Part 2

Euripides' Use of the Legend

Here, then, we have one of those "scabrous tales of lust

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15 *Ibid.*, 1106-1228.
16 *Ibid.*, 1229-1249.
17 *Ibid.*, 1250-1622.

and lying" which the unfortunate poet was forced to use. This is the orthodox version to which he must ostensibly conform while secretly making the whole thing its own refutation.

It might be remarked first that the oft-quoted rule that the ancient legends had to be followed to the letter by the Greek tragedians and that many of the apparently incongruous episodes in the plays of Euripides were forced upon him by the necessities of the legend, is a rule that cannot be verified in ancient times. The Electra story, for example, which was treated by all three tragedians, is changed at will according to their own purpose. That remarkable play, the Helen, is contradictory of all that is said in the Andromache, Orestes, and Trojan Women of the famed bride of Paris. Futhermore, as we have noted, we have the explicit statement of Aristotle that it would be nonsense to try to follow the legends exactly, since the people did not know them. And he tells us also that some successful plays had few known names in them, and that Agathon had even written plays with no basis in legend at all.[18]

Now the thesis which holds that Euripides wrote the Ion

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18 "Nevertheless even in Tragedy there are some plays with but one or two names known in them, the rest being inventions; and there are some without a single known name, e.g., Agathon's Antheus, in which both incidents and names are of the poet's invention; and it is no less delightful on that account. So that one must not aim at a rigid adherence to the traditional stories on which tragedies are based. It would be absurd, in fact to do so, as even the known stories are only known to a few, though they are a delight nonetheless to all." Poetics 1451b.20.

in order to destroy the people's belief in the story it tells certainly supposes that the legend was well known and accepted by the orthodox before the play was written. Yet the facts of the case seem to point in the opposite direction,--that the legend as we have it was not known, and that Euripides shaped certain vague ideas about it into a novel and consistent whole.

Rose states in his Handbook of Greek Mythology that he can find no other source of the story other than the play of Euripides.[19] This is a significant fact when we consider the intimate connection of the legend with the glory of Athens and remember the almost innumerable and often little-known stories that are recounted by the Greek authors.

It seems certain that Ion himself does not belong to the earliest period of Greek mythology, but was invented by and named after the Ionian race. Since he has no place in the line of Athenian kings, we deduce that he must have come too late to be included in the rather vague lists.[20] The first definite statement about Ion seems to be that of Herodotus. According to him, however, Ion is the son of Xuthus and there is no hint of any birth from Apollo.[21] Aristotle speaks of him as the

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19 H.J.Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology Including Its Extension to Rome. Methuen and Co., Ltd., London, 2nd edition revised, 1933, 268 and note 46, p. 283.

20 Cf. Owen, ix.

21 ". . . they were named Ionians after Ion the son of Xuthus." Herodotus, 7.94. "The Athenians, while the Pelasgians ruled what is now called Hellas, were Pelasgians, bearing the name of Cranoi, . . . but when Ion son of Xuthus was made leader of their armies they were called after him Ionians." Ibid.,

first polemarch who had been summoned to the help of the Athenians.[22] Hecataeus says that a certain Physcus was the father of Ion;[23] and Pausanias,[24] Apollodorus,[25] and Strabo[26] all name Xuthus as his father without any mention of the story of the birth from Apollo such as we find in the _Ion_ of Euripides.

Not always in the very plays of Euripides himself is Ion always given a divine father. In the _Erechtheus_, for instance, we hear that there was no Creusa to survive her sisters. According to the prologue of the _Melanippe Sapiens_, Xuthus married an unnamed daughter of Erechtheus and became the father of Ion.[27]

Again, the very structure of the play would support the position that the legend which Euripides has to dramatize was not very well known to his audience. In the prologue spoken by Hermes, considerable pains are taken to explain the exact

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8.44. (Translation from A.D.Godley, _Herodotus with an English Translation_. 4 vols. William Heinemann, London, 1924.)

22 _Aristotle, Respublica Ath_. 3.

23 Given in _Carolus Muellerus, Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum_. _Firmin Didot, Paris_, 4 vols., _vol. 1, 26_.

24 Pausanias, 7.1.

25 "Xuthus received Peloponnese and begat Achaeus and Ion by Creusa, daughter of Erechtheus, and from Achaeus and Ion the Achaeans and Ionians derive their names." Apollodorus, 1.7.3. (Translation from Sir James George Frazer, _Apollodorus the Library with an English Translation_. 2 vols., _William Heinemann, London, 1921._)

26 ". . . but later it was called Ionia after the Ionians, just as Attica also was called Ionia after Ion the son of Xuthus." Strabo, 8.7.1. (Translation from Horace Leonard Jones, _The_ Geography of Strabo with an English Translation. 8 vols., William Heinemann, London, 1923.)

27 Cf. Owen, xii.

situation and that Apollo is really the father of Ion. Eight times does Hermes say that the child is of Apollo, and he quotes the god as stating definitely: ". . . for this--that thou mayest know,--Is my son."[28] He emphasizes Creusa's name by repeating it six times, leading us to believe that the name was not familiar to his audience. Hermes makes quite clear that Xuthus and Creusa had no children at the time of their visit to Delphi. The complicated strategem of having Apollo give the child to Xuthus "as his son" looks as though Euripides was trying to explain how the common tradition attributed the fathership of Ion to Xuthus. It is to be noticed, also, that Euripides does not give the same names to the tribes that will descend from Ion as do other writers.[29]

If, then, it seems "fairly conclusive"[30] that Euripides invented the story, it follows that he can hardly have brought it forward to discredit it.[31]

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28 Ion 35.

29 Cf. Herodotus, 5.66.2.

30 So Norwood in a review of Owen's Ion. American Journal of Philology, vol. LXIII, 1, January, 1942, 112.
Dr. Verrall effectively admits it too: ". . . the story which he tells in the prologue contradicts the primitive belief of the Athenians. . . . To gratify Athenian pride Ion was converted from 'son of Xuthus' into 'son of Apollo,' which could of course be easily done without importing into the story any of the horrors engrafted on it by Euripides." Euripides the Rationalist, 170.

31 So argues Owen, xxxiii.

Part 3

The Significance of the Plot

We wish now to investigate the actual working out of the plot, and to approach it without any preconceived axioms "that a god in Euripides can never speak the truth,"[32] or that the orthodox structure must always be disregarded in trying to get at the real meaning of the author. Further, we have shown that the poet was not trying to discredit the story. What, then, can we make of the plot taking it on its face value?

On its face value, the play tells how a god, wishing to found a great race, held intercourse with a noble princess of Athens and begot a son. According to his careful plans, he had the babe carried off to Delphi to be educated at his altars and so become a refined and reverent youth. When the boy had grown old enough to take his rightful position in authority, the god intended to effect the change without scandal or dishonor to the boy. He inspired Creusa and her princely husband to come to his shrine to seek advice. Xuthus, according to the plan, was to be given the boy as his ward to raise and protect as his own son, and in due time to succeed him as king

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32 Verrall, Euripides the Rationalist, 170: ". . . after a time the whole public must have taken the measure of a Euripidean 'god,' and the sort of 'truth' which might be expected from him. . . ." Also, 171: ". . . the prologue and finale are . . . comments on the story by 'gods,' that is to say 'liars.' "

of Athens and leader of the Ionians. His mother was to be informed of the true identity of the boy later, but just how or when we are not informed and need not be.

The plan progresses well until the highly-strung and proud Creusa goes suddenly berserk at the thought of being childless while her husband has a son. She spoils the plan by trying to kill Ion, but Apollo in his providence frustrates her efforts and affords her refuge from the pursuing Ion lest she be killed by her own son. In order to smooth over the estrangement, Apollo, who had farsightedly preserved the cradle and ornaments in which Ion had been left as a babe, inspires the Pythia to reveal them at this time. A beautiful recognition follows, and Athena, the patroness of Athens and the Ionians, appears herself to answer their difficulties and assure them of their and their descendants' greatness. With tears of joy Creusa acknowledges her hastiness and unfairness in mistrusting Apollo, and with happiness and triumph, they set forth for Athens escorted by the divine guardian of the famous city. And the chorus pronounces the final judgment:

> Zeus's and Leto's Son Apollo, hail!
> Let him to powers divine
> Render homage undismayed, who house
> afflictions buffets smite:
> For the good at last shall overcome,
> at last attain their right;
> But the evil, by their nature's law,
> on good shall never light.[33]

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[33] *Ion* 1619-1622.

Now it would seem that one reading or even better actually seeing the production of the play without previous prejudices would gain the impression of a piece of glorious patriotism. The theme of the story is the glorification of Athens, that "not unknown city"[34] guarded over by Athena herself. From her royal family is to come the founder of the Ionian race and under Athens that race will be united in strength. Even the inhabitants of the Peloponnese have some part with them for they will spring from a half-brother of Ion.[35]

If such an observer were to consider the date of production carefully he would be strengthened in his conviction that the purpose of the author was to give some such impression as this. The Ion was produced late in the fifth century, a time when the increase of her wars had led the citizenry of Athens to new bursts of patriotism. Aeschylus seems to have written only about six tragedies dealing with Athenian history and characters. But Sohocles wrote sixteen; and Euripides, many that deal either exclusively with Attic themes or at least go far out of their way to bring in a notable character from her history or a word of praise for her deeds. The Attic hero and king, Aegeus, for instance, appears momentarily in the Medea as a patriotic gesture and little more. Even Aristotle considers his entrance indefensible from the standpoint of straight

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34 Ibid., 8.
35 Ibid., 1589-1594.

dramatic writing. Similarly, as Haigh points out,[36] the introduction of Theseus in the _Madness of Heracles_ and the final retirement of Heracles to Athens are novelties, plainly inserted for patriotic reasons.

There was also, in addition to simple love of country, the more practical consideration of an emotional uniting of the Ionian cities under the leadership of Athens, and since this was a time of at least nominal peace,[37] it would be good to show reason why the Dorians would violate no historical tradition in joining themselves to the Athenian league.[38] No more typically Greek method of uniting peoples could be invented than that of establishing a god as their common progentor and a hero as their common eponym. And yet the shadowy figure of the legendary Ion was said to be the son of Xuthus, an alien soldier of fortune. What a blow to Athenian pride in their autochthony![38] How could Athens claim supremacy of all the Ionians with such a haphazard beginning of fame!

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36 _Tragic Drama of the Greeks_, 299.

37 We have no cerain evidence for the date of the _Ion_. Rose puts it after the _Iphigeneia in Tauris_ which was composed sometime in the thirties, and before the _Electra_ to which he assigns the date c.413. Norwood puts it at some time notlong before 413. Croiset is satisfied with the period between 424 and 413. The lasest book on the _Ion_, that by Owen, includes a lengthy discussion of the date and concludes convincingly that the most probable date is 418 or 417.

38 It may also be recalled that Athens had concluded an alliance with Argos in 420 B.C. See Jevons, 221.

If the date assigned to the play is correct, we have another reason for not accepting the _Ion_ as an attack on the

It seems quite probable that Euripides set himself to draw up a story in which Ion would have at least an Athenian father. Since that might have been too difficult to handle because too conflicting with general opinion, a god would be the ideal father. Of the gods, Apollo was the obvious choice.[40] We have many references to Apollo as the Patrous of the Ionians.[41] Strabo, further, tells us of the prevalence of the Apolline cult in the tetrapolis of Attica, established by Xuthus himself.[42] Apollo was in a special way the ratifier of new laws and new customs.[43] He must be consulted to establish new religious rites; he was the brother of Athena, the

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Delphic oracle. It is not likely that Euripides who was clearly a lover and advocate of peace would have sought deliberately to disturb the existing peace by arousing in his countrymen the bitter memories and hatreds associated with the role of the Delphic priests in the war.

39 Notice the prominence given the idea in the Ion. Cf. lines 29, 589, 737, and the choral ode 695-724.

40 Cf. Farnell, 63: "It is interesting also to study the social and ethnic value of the cult of Apollo Patrous at Athens, who was revered as the divine "ancestor" of the Attic clans. The son who had been newly presented to the phratores by the father must also be taken to the temple of Apollo Patrous, to communicate there with him."

41 Cf. Owen, xii.

42 Strabo, 8.7.1.

43 ". . . the important point is that in public opinion the laws of Sparta were supported by the authority of Delphi. Draco instituted laws dealing with murder and homicide; that these did not come into existence without the co-operation of Delphi is clear. . . . Again, when Cleisthenes overthrew the old basis of state organization by establishing his ten phylae, the oracle was called upon to choose the ancestral heroes of the new phylae. . . . Plato lays it down as the duty of the legislator, with the oracle's help, to regulate the festivals and determine what sacrifices shall take place. . . ." Martin P. Nilsson, A History of Greek Religion. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1925, 190-191.

protectress of Athens. Possibly there were among the varying accounts of Ion some vague reference to the favor of Apollo that could be built into a more definite statement without seeming to depart from tradition very much.

That the whole play is permeated with a spirit of patriotism seems clear. The name of the city is scarcely ever mentioned without the epithet of glorious, divine, noble, and the like. Great detail is lavished on the sacred customs connected with Erechtheus.[44] The royal line of pure Athenian strain is constantly brought to the attention of the audience.[45] Even Ion is made to exclaim against an alien wedding the princess. The plot itself turns on Creusa's and the old servant's horror at the thought of a stranger some day securing the throne of Athens. The prospect of an alien prince taking part with the initiated in the Bacchic mysteries causes anguish to the chorus of Athenian women.[46] And nothing could have been more inspiring to the audience at the Great Dionysia than the appearance of Athena herself in her glory:

> ". . . no foe am I that ye should flee,
> But, as in Athens, here am gracious-
> willed.
> I come from thy land--land that bears
> my name. . . . [47]

Solemnly she prophesies the bright future of the Athenian

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44 Ion 20-26.
45 *Ibid.*, 489-594, 719-724, 735-737, *etc.*
46 *Ibid.*, 714-724.
47 *Ibid.*, 1553-1555.

tribes, their settlement of both sides of the strait, and the renown the Ionians, named after Creusa's son, shall win. Then in a burst of marching music and with songs of triumph the procession, like the procession at the end of the Eumenides, winds its way off the stage.[48]

Now it does, indeed, seem very difficult to believe that Euripides wrote this play with the deliberate purpose of making the whole thing appear absurd and incredible. Even though we were to grant that he had not invented substantially the whole legend but had followed the version of the orthodox, can we believe that this treatment bespeaks the cynical doubter and rationalist?

If the legend is absurd and patently so, all the fine patriotism of the piece is of course nonsense. Athens is dishonored, Apollo, its Patrous, is made ridiculous if not worse, and Athena who was to the fifth century the very personification of Athens, who represented for her citizens "not only a personal divine character, but the supreme principle of their national existence," is made a dupe and laughing-stock.[49]

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48 Ibid., 1616-1622.

49 Felix M. Wassermann, "Divine Violence and Providence in Euripides' Ion." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, edited by George D. Hadzsits, published by the Association, Philadelphia, vol. LXXI, 1940.
Cf. also L.R.Farnell, The Higher Aspects of Greek Religion. Williams and Norgate, London, 1912, 68-70: "It was not to any hero or mortal ancestor that the momentous cult-titles Polieus or 'Polias' were attached, but only to the highest divinities, Zeus and Athena, pre-eminently political powers; and it is they above all others who inspired

We have explained in some detail in a previous chapter[50] the distinction between the mythology and the religion of the Greeks. We saw that the notion of orthodoxy in what concerned the popular stories about the gods had simply no meaning, that anyone could believe whatever he liked and could say what he pleased. But the attitude of the citizenry towards the State religion was altogether different. Its ritual and worship were the bond and the expression of State unity. Reverence for the State gods was reverence for the State in its highest form. The poets could say what they would about the stories and legends, could criticize and disbelieve the sins of the divinities, but no loyal Athenian, especially at a time when patriotism was at fever-height, would think of showing dishonor or disloyalty to the Polis; and no patriotic citizen of whatever intelligence, party, or belief would ever have permitted him to do so.

The answer, then, to the question: did Euripides try to make Apollo and Athena in this play appear in such a light that people would not believe in them or at least not believe or accept the legend therein proposed?--would seem to be a definite negative. The poet was here treating of the State

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political wisdom, and who alone were worshipped as Boulaioi, deities to whom the members of the council prayed and sacrificed before each meeting. Greek religion, then, is absorbed in politics, especially at Athens. . . ."

50 Cf. chapter II, pp. 21 ff.

gods and of a subject intimately connected with the existence and the glory of Athens. As Fairbanks says:

> As the family or the phratry claimed common blood from one divine ancestor, so the Athenians traced their descent from Ion or from an earth-born king. . . . Nor was this mere poetic fancy; it was regarded as a fact to this extent, that the naturalization of foreigners took the form of a (religious) adoption into the state-family, which was based on ties of common blood and common worship.[51]

Under such circumstances, Euripides, whose patriotism was never attacked, would have been the last to abuse his position to make the story of Ion ridiculous.[52]

And yet, could an educated man and thinker like Euripides have wished people to believe in the existence of such gods as Apollo and the rest? We have attempted to show earlier in this paper[53] that, despite modern prepossessions to the contrary, the probabilities are that Euripides really believed in the traditional polytheism. Nor does an analysis of the *Ion* cause us to reconsider our judgment. It is true that Euripides sometimes does express disbelief in certain of the grosser elements of the myths (we shall discuss these in-

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51 Fairbanks, 315.

52 "The men of that age never felt that the nature and influence of tragedy were purely and simply aesthetic. Its power over them was so vast that they held it responsible for the spirit of the whole state. . . ." Jaeger, 245.

53 Cf. *supra* pp. 37 ff.

stances later), but all his criticism and scepticism is directed at the stories that people tell about the gods, never at the existence of the gods themselves. His criticism was on the moral plane; there seems to be none on the theological plane.

Creusa who utters almost all the reproaches against Apollo gives no indication that the story she tells is not the truth. Even when Ion suggests that she may be concealing her own sin by calling her former lover a god, she emphatically denies it and swears most solemnly by Athena that no mortal was his father but Loxias.[54] In the earlier parts of the play when she accuses the god of abandoning his child, she never considers the possibility of the god being other than he is traditionally represented to be. She says that this deed is unworthy of him, but his action does not affect in the slightest her belief in his existence.[55] When the old servant urges her to burn down the temple of Apollo, even in her rage she believes too firmly in the power of the god to follow out the suggestion. She has suffered enough, she says.[56]

Although Ion is made toreproach Apollo with his deed, he too gives no hint of a real loss of faith in his reality. There has not been a progressive disillusionment on his part

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54 _Ion_ 1528-1531.
55 _Cf. ibid._, 385 ff.
56 _Ibid._, 973-975.

so that the Ion who leaves the stage at the end of the play knows that all has been sham and trickery.[57] The first conversation of Ion with Creusa shows him to be a thoroughly Greek boy who wants to know everything and is equally ready to doubt everything. He finds it hard to believe that Erichthonius was born of the earth as the legend held.[58] He wants to know whether it is true or only "an idle tale"[59] that her sisters were slain by Erechtheus. He cynically remarks that her "friend" who says she has lain with the god is merely trying to cover up her own shame.[60] So also the excited declaration of Xuthus that Phoebus has declared Ion his son, meets with cold incredulity on the part of Ion. "Thou art thine own witness," he says, "Heardest riddles and misreadest."[61] It is only with the greatest reluctance that he at length gives in and admits: " 'Tis the God: I may not doubt him."[62] He is also made to deliver a keen critical estimate of his position in democratic Athens, and shows himself throughout a boy of cool and unhurried judgment.[63]

Neither the revelation of the "shame" of Apollo nor the strange oracle given to Xuthus changes his belief and contentment in the service of Apollo. He rejects the opportunity

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57 Cf. Hadas and McLean, 194.
58 Ion 265.
59 _Ibid._, 275.
60 _Ibid._, 340.
61 _Ibid._, 533, 535.
62 _Ibid._, 556.
63 _Ibid._, 585.

of going to Athens as heir apparent, saying:

> My life was prayer to Gods, con-
> verse with men,
> Ministrant unto joy and not to grief,
> Welcoming coming, speeding parting
> guests,
> A new face smiling still on faces new.
> And that which men, though loth, must
> ask in prayer,
> Uprightness, use and nature bred in me
> For Phoebus' service. Thinking on
> all this,
> Father, I more esteem things here
> than there.[64]

At the end of the play when the final recognition between son and mother takes place, we find no difference in the action of Ion. He forces his mother to identify all the tokens in the cradle; only then does he believe, but with an enthusiasm and joy far different than he displayed in his meeting with Xuthus. He wants to know the truth of his birth, but he shows, for him, unusual excitement and credulity at the news that he was born of Phoebus.

> Say on: glad tidings this and for-
> tune fair![65] . . .
> O happy words, if this thou sayest
> be true![66] . . .
> Sweet, mother, is my treasure-trove
> of thee;
> And this my birth, I find no fault
> therein.[67]

As before, he wants to examine the whole account and be

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64 Ibid., 638-645.
65 Ibid., 1485.
66 Ibid., 1488.
67 Ibid., 1518-1519.

assured of the truth of it. As he did when he first heard the story of the "friend" of Creusa, so now he suggests that Phoebus is named to escape shame. This gives the daughter of Erechtheus the opportunity of reassuring him with, probably, the most solemn oath an Athenian of that day could have used. She swears

> . . .by Athena, Lady of Victory, who
> At Zeus' side chariot-borne with
> Giants fought,
> No mortal man was sire to thee, my son,
> But he which reared thee, Loxias the
> King.[68]

Similarly the boy's desire to know why Apollo gave him to Xuthus as son leads to an explanation of the common opinion that Xuthus was the father of Ion. This was a point that Euripides had to handle when he decided to make Ion the real son of Apollo, and only the supposititious son of the hero. Again and again in the play he prepares the way for his explanation. He makes clear from the beginning that Ion and Xuthus are not at all attracted to one another. When the boy first hears of Xuthus, he refers to him with some contempt as an alien and is surprised that a stranger might wed into the royal family.[69] In sharp contrast with the meeting between mother and boy, Xuthus dismisses him with scarcely a nod: " 'Tis well: now know I all I sought to know."[70] The excitement and

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68 Ibid., 1528-1531.
69 *Ibid.*, 293.
70 *Ibid.*, 417.

haste of Xuthus after he has heard the oracle leads even Ion, who should have been eager to acknowledge his longed-for father, to state flatly that he had simply misinterpreted the god. And the boy forces Xuthus to admit that he had failed to inquire for any more details.[71] That strange question of Ion seems also highly significant, and the equally strange answer of Xuthus:

> Ion: Ay, and what should be his fate?
> Xuthus: My true-begotten son is this.
> Ion: *Born thy son, or given of others?*
> Xuthus: *Given*--and born from me he is.[72]

Notice, too, the immediate reaction of the chorus. Their thought is at once for "Erechtheus' ancient line." And Ion himself shows how little such a begetting meant to him or to any Athenian:

> The glorious earth-born state,
> Athens, men say, hath naught of alien strain.
> I shall thrust in, stained with a twofold taint--
> An outland father, and my bastard self.
> And bearing this reproach, nor strong in friends,
> "Nobody" shall be called--"Nobody's Son."[73]

By such lines Euripides clearly indicates that he does not wish us to believe that Ion is really the son of Xuthus, or tries at least to make us wish that he were not his son.

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71 Ibid., 541.
72 *Ibid.*, 536-537. (Italics ours.)
73 *Ibid.*, 589-594.

As soon as Xuthus and Ion leave the stage, the chorus does not hesitate to accuse Xuthus of treachery, baseness, falseness, and stealing. They feel sure that somehow he has faked the oracle.

> And the oracle stirreth mine heart
> to defying
> Of its tones with the whisper of
> treachery haunted.
> I fear whereunto it will grow,
> This fate thou hast caused us to
> know:
> Too strange for my credence it is.
> Child fathered of fortune and treason!
> Child alien of blood![74]

Once again, when the chorus tells Creusa of what has happened, we find the same play on the word, "given," son.

> Ancient, to him hath Loxias *given* a
> son. . . .[75]
> Already born--nay more, a stripling
> grown
> Doth Loxias *give* him. I was there,
> and heard. . . .[76]
> Whomso thy Lord should first meet
> as he passed
> From the God's fane, the God *gave*
> *him for son*.[77]

Thus we are prepared for the explanation put in the words of Creusa at the end:

> Nay, not begotten: but his *gift* art
> thou,
> Sprung from himself,--as friend to
> friend should *give*
> His own son, that his house might
> have an heir.[78]

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74 Ibid., 685-693.
75 *Ibid.*, 773. (Italics ours as in following.)
76 *Ibid.*, 780-781.
77 *Ibid.*, 786-787.
78 *Ibid.*, 1534-1536.

And she goes on to explain that it was necessary for Ion to be given as son so that he might take his place in the house and receive his due.[79]

Much has been made of the fact that even with this explanation Ion still seems dissatisfied and determines to ask Phoebus himself. It is difficult to see why this act should show that Ion has lost all faith in Apollo and Delphi, and that he intends to prove the god a liar to his face.

First of all, it is surely a not unnatural thing for one in his position to ask the god for information. Anyone who had lived at the shrine as long as he had must have been well acquainted with the ambiguous responses frequently returned, and their too eager interpretations given by the inquirers. Since Xuthus had been so vague about the oracle, what could be more natural than for Ion to seek further details himself?

Secondly, if Ion had lost all faith in the shrine, why would he question its god? If the oracle had been sham and trickery before, there was no reason why it could not continue its trickery. The skilled interpreters of Delphi would have had no difficulty in explaining such a simple misunderstanding as this.[80]

Thirdly, we think it at least probable that Euripides

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79 Ibid., 1562. The explanation of Creusa is corroborated by Athena, 1561, with the same play on words: "He gives to whom he gave, not that they gat thee."

80 Owen, op. cit., note on line 1564, also makes this suggestion.

makes Ion wish to have divine assurance of the truth of his birth precisely in order to give the poet some excuse for introducing his favorite theophany.[81] In another play written at about the same time Euripides employes the same dramatic device. At the end of the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, Orestes and

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81 Owen, note on line 1549, holds this opinion. He also believes the same of the *deus ex machina* at the end of the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*. Norwood, *American Journal of Philology*, III, says in criticism of Owen's view: ". . . possibly the *deus* here and elsewhere, instead of being thrust forward to cut the knot (as some believe) or to provide a *reductio ad absurdum* of traditional theology (as others hold), is introduced precisely and mostly in order to prophesy concerning Athenian tribes, cults, and the like." He then quotes Owen's suggestion to this effect, and concludes: "That makes a notable contribution to the study of Euripides' dramaturgy. I am not at present disposed to believe it, . . . but I recognize that it merits careful attention."

It is only fair to remark here that Mr. Norwood gives Owen too much credit for the "notable contribution." It had been offered long before. Lucas, 12: ". . . Athena, for instance, in the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, is so far from being dragged in to straighten out the plot, that the plot is specially reknotted to bring her in." And Haigh, *Tragic Drama*, 246: ". . . the object of his appearance is, not to unravel perplexities, but to deliver a sort of epilogue, and to predict the future history and fortunes of the various characters. . . . That this was the real purpose of the 'deus ex machina' is proved very clearly by those plays in which, though the action is practically finished, some new and unnecessary incident is appended, merely to supply the god with an excuse for his intervention."

The past may be known to man by tradition, but only a god can know the future, and for this reason it is necessary for the gods to speak the epilogue, even though their entrance into the play is not well-motivated. (Cf. Decharme, 270-271.) As another instance of this same device, consider the sudden, irrational fury of Theoclymenus towards his sister at the end of the *Helen* (lines 1624 ff.). It seems invented to afford some excuse, however weak, for the Twin-brethern to appear. Certainly there is no question in this play of being forced to follow the details of an orthodox legend which the theophany is intended to "reduce to absurdity."

Iphigeneia are successfully escaping with the statue of Artemis when for absolutely no reason[82] the wind suddenly shifts and they are driven back to shore into the hands of their enemies. This gives an opportunity for the appearance of a god who saves them and predicts at length the legendary lore and ritual that were so dear to the heart of the poet.

In the Ion Athena appears to recount the glory and the future history of the characters of the play and their descendants. It would have satisfied, perhaps, certain critics better if Ion had been allowed to consult the oracle and learn his future from Phoebus. No doubt the chief reason militating against this was the difficulty of staging. Ion would have had to enter into the shrine and an interior scene would have had to be arranged,--always a clumsy affair on the Greek stage. An equally strong reason, likely, was the appropriatness of having Athena herself describe the future of her people. We

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Of the extant plays that end with a deus--Andromache, Supplices, Ion, Electra, Hippolytus, Iphigeneia in Tauris, Orestes, and perhaps Iphigeneia at Aulis, and Bacchae--only the Orestes really needs the theophany to solve the plot. It is noteworthy, also, that the other seven plays which do not have a deus yet end with a prophecy or something similar. No ending seems more undramatic and abrupt to the modern reader. No doubt the preternatural character that Medea assumes at the end of the play of that name in order to prophesy the future has ruined the impression of the play for many a modern. We should not then be scandalized and look for subtle motives in what may seem a similarly disturbing theophany of Athena in the Ion.

82 It seems fairly certain that Euripides invented practically all the details of the plot. Cf. Haigh, Tragic Drama, 306-307. He would not have added the detail of the shift of wind unless he intended to make use of it.

cannot doubt but that the apparition of the patroness of the city must have been extremely popular with the audience, and the final scene in which the triumphal march leaves the stage for Athens with the accompaniment of the goddess must have been a very effective spectacle.[83]

Some effort but not much is made to give a reason for Athena's coming instead of Apollo, but the real reason was probably dramatic. With her own lips the goddess--and be it remembered that in Athens this goddess spoke with an authority that brooked no doubt--declares unequivocally:

> Thee this queen bare, begotten of
> Apollo:
> He gives to whom he gave, not that
> they gat thee,
> But for thy bring home to a princely
> house. . . .[84]

Consider, too, how completely unintelligible the play becomes if we are not to believe that Creusa is the true mother of Ion and that Apollo is his father. Even though we should disregard the insistently repeated statements of Hermes that Apollo is the real father of Ion and that Creusa is his mother (under the hypothesis that no god in Euripides _can_ speak the truth[85]), we still are baffled at the whole psychology of the play. If Creusa is not the mother of Ion, then their first conversation loses all significance. If she is not the mother of Ion, the strong and strange attraction they feel

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83 Cf. Wassermann, 602-604.

84 _Ion_ 1560-1562.

for each other from the start is meaningless. If she is not the mother of Ion, then the heart of the whole drama is destroyed. It is precisely the situation in which mother tries to kill son and son to kill mother,--a situation that Aristotle loved so much[86],--that gives the actions of Ion and Creusa their primary dramatic value. And finally, if Creusa is not the mother of Ion all the irony of line after line in the play is utterly lost. And Euripides dearly loved irony. We mention but a few examples of this.

In their first conversation, after they have revealed their identity and story, Ion exclaims: "Ah me! her heart-strings are attuned to mine!" And Creusa answers: "For thee yearns some sad mother too, I ween."[87] Later, when Ion wonders at his strange interest in Creusa, he is made to remark: "Yet with Erechtheus' daughter what have I to do? She is naught to me."[88] If Creusa is not the mother of Ion, what sense does her reply to him make:

> Ion: Hence!--leave the altar and the
> hallowed seat!
> Creusa: Lesson thy mother, where-
> soe'er she be.[89]

And finally the lines of Ion:

> Nay--not the altar, not Apollo's
> house

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85 Cf. *supra* p. 74.
86 Aristotle, *Poetics* 13.14-19.
87 *Ion* 359-360.
88 *Ibid.*, 433-434.
89 *Ibid.*, 1306-1307.

Shall save thee! Ruth for thee!--
rather for me
And for my mother:--though she be afar
In body, ever her name is in mine heart.[90]

If Apollo is not the father of Ion, the dramatic value and irony of many of the situations islost. The very presence of Ion at Delphi as a servant takes on high significance if he is the son of the god of the shrine. And the words of his first ode are weighted with meaning:

For my father thee, Phoebus, I
praise,
Who hast nutured me all my days:
My begetter, mine help, my defender
This temple's Phoebus shall be.[91]

There is typical Euripidean irony, too, in such lines as these:

Ion: Thou sacred?--who didst poison
the God's child!
Creusa: Thou Loxias' child!--his never
but thy sire's.[92]

If Apollo is not his father, how can we explain the fine recognition scene between Ion and his mother? It seems incredible that the priests of the temple, as some think,[93] hastily faked the clues to prevent scandal at the temple. This would mean that the Pythia was an unscrupulous liar and cheat; yet she is always pictured as a kind and loyal woman with great love for the boy she has raised, and receiving in turn

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90 *Ibid.*, 1275-1278.
91 *Ibid.*, 136-139.
92 *Ibid.*, 186-187.
93 See the elaborate reconstruction of the scene by Dr. Verrall in his *Euripides the Rationalist*, pp. 158 ff.

from him great respect and love. And Creusa does identify accurately the contents of the basket without seeing them.[94] Further it seems that in this, too, the poet has prepared us for the scene by dwelling upon the cradle and its contents in the very first speech of the play. Hermes speaks several times of the "fair-rounded cradle," describes how and why she put the two serpents of gold about the babe, and how she tied to him embroidery from her robe. He says that Phoebus gave him explicit orders to bring with the babe to Delphi the cradle and the swaddling-bands which were about him. All things considered, it does not seem possible that the priests, even if they had desired to do so, would have been able to fake the clues successfully, and that Euripides never intended the audience to get the impression that they did so.

As far, therefore, as the significance of the plot is concerned, it is most probable that the plot was intended to mean precisely what it says. The plot is to be accepted as it is. Euripides intended his gods to be real beings in the play and act and speak in the fashion he has described.

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[94] Owen, 169-170, would appear to have answered once and for all the somewhat disingenuous attack of Dr. Verrall on the credibility of the tokens.

Part 4

Criticism of the Gods

We have yet to consider the charges brought against Apollo and the reproaches heaped upon him. It is very common to see in the Ion a direct attack upon Apollo and the oracle of Delphi, suggested in part at least by the action of the shrine during the Peloponnesian War in favor of Athens' enemies.[95] Before we discuss these criticisms, it will be well to see precisely what is said.

The sight of the temple at Delphi causes Creusa to exclaim:

> Ah, wrongs of woman!--wrongful-reckless deeds of
> Gods! For justice where shall we make suit,
> If 'tis our Lords' injustice crushes us?[96]

And the mention of the cave in the Long Cliffs calls from her the wish never to have seen it.

> Ion: What?--hatest thou the God's haunt well-beloved?
> Creusa: Naught.--I and that cave know a deed a shame.[97]

When she is questioned further about her "friend," she has this to say:

> Ion: And hath she borne no offspring

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95 For our doubts on this view, see above p.77, note 38.
96 Ion 252-254.
97 *Ibid.*, 287-288.

after this?
Creusa: Still the God wrongs her: childless grief is hers.
Ion: What if in secret Phoebus fostereth him?
Creusa: Unjust!--alone to enjoy what he should share.[98]

Ion's advice to her is:

There's none will ask the God of this for thee.
For, in his own halls were he villain proved,
Vengeance on him who brought thee that response
Would Phoebus justly wreak.[99]

And Creusa's answer:

O Phoebus, there and here unjust art thou
Unto the absent one whose plea is here.
Thou shouldst have saved thine own, yet didst not save;
Nor heeds the Seer the mother's questioning,
That, if her babe live not, his tomb may rise,
Or if he live, that she may see his face.[100]

When Xuthus enters the shrine to ask for children, she says:

If Loxias consent
Now at the last to atone for olden wrongs,
Not wholly will he show himself my friend,
Yet, since he is God, whate'er he grants I take.[101]

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98 Ibid., 355-358.
99 Ibid., 369-372.
100 Ibid., 384-389.
101 Ibid., 425-428.

Then the scene ends with the often quoted lines of Ion:

Yet must I plead
With Phoebus--what ails him? He
ravisheth
Maids, and forsakes; begetteth babes
by stealth,
And heeds not, though they die. Do
thou not so;
Being strong, be righteous. For what
man soe'er
Transgresseth, the Gods visit this
on him.
How were it just then that ye should
enact
For men laws, and yourselves work
lawlessness?
For if--it could not be, yet put it
so--
Ye should pay mulct to men for law-
less lust,
Thou, the Sea-king, and Zeus the Lord
of Heaven,
Paying for wrongs should make your
temples void.
For, following pleasure past all
wisdom's bounds,
Ye work unrighteousness. Unjust it
were
To call men vile, if we but imitate
What Gods deem good:--they are vile
who teach us this.[102]

Later in the play, when the chorus tells her that Apollo has given a son to Xuthus, Creusa breaks forth in a monody of grief:

Child of Latona, I cry to the Sun--
I will publish thy shame!
Thou . . . cams't on me . . .
Wroughtest the pleasure of Cypris: no
shame made the god-lover quail.
. . .
Ah, ravisher-bridegroom thou!

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102 *Ibid.*, 436-451.

What ailed thee to give to my spouse--
Requiting no service, I trow!--
A son to be heir to his house?
But my baby and thine, O heartless,
was taken
For a prey of the eagles: long ere now
Were the swaddling-bands of his mother
forsaken.[103]

She then explains her song to the old servant and evokes his reproach against Apollo:

Creusa: Dead is he, ancient,--unto
beasts cast out.
Old Ser.: Dead?--and Apollo, traitor!
helped thee naught? . . .
Poor heart of steel!--O God's
heart harder yet![104]

Finally, under the stress of his desire to avenge himself on Creusa, Ion is made to exclaim:

Out upon this!
Shame, that a God ordained unright-
eous laws
For mortals, statutes not in wisdom
framed!
Never should crime have altar-sanc-
tuary,
But hounding thence.[105]

These, then, are the criticisms of the gods that make this playy the most open attack by Euripides on the Olympian theology. That they do present a difficulty may be frankly admitted. Their forcefulness and pointedness seem to jar the working-out of the plot. They seem too strong for the necessities of the story. And yet they can with some degree of success be explained

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103 Ibid., 887-918.
104 Ibid., 951-952, 960.
105 Ibid., 1312-1316.

away.

The charges made against Apollo may be summed up thus:

1) he ravished Creusa;

2) he left her son to die;

3) he made her childless;

4) and yet he gives a son and heir to Xuthus;

5) he will not tell her even the fate of her child;

6) he has afforded sanctuary to a criminal.

When thus coldly analyzed, it is seen that there is really little substance to the charges.[106] The point that irks most and is repeated again and again--by Creusa, by Ion, and by the old servant--is that Apollo has deserted his son. Yet the audience is told definitely from the very beginning that the god has not left the child to die, but with careful providence is rearing him for a glorious future. But the whole plot demands this strong resentment on the part of Creusa and the servant in order to justify dramatically the violence they undertake. And it is all part of the irony that always delighted Euripides to have them complaining about the very thing that was their greatest honor, almost destroying the whole plan of the god for their and their city's greatness by their impatience and pride. It can hardly be denied that all their complaints make an effective dramatic device and raise to the emotional heights that Euripides was constantly seeking the final anagnorisis of

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106 Cf. Wassermann, *passim*.

mother and son. It is precisely the former pain at losing her son that makes convincing her excited joy, even after fifteen to twenty years of separation, at recovering him.

Likewise the charge that Apollo has left her childless is contradicted, and the audience is fully aware of it, everytime Ion appears on the stage. And as a matter of fact, Athena promises some sons to Creusa and Xuthus in time to come.[107] When Ion tells her that she ought not to consult the oracle, Creusa calls Phoebus unjust. Yet we already know that the god will reveal her son to her and has brought her to his temple in order to unite them again. So too, the bitter monody of Creusa in which she most vigorously defies the god, is provoked by the news that Xuthus has been given a son while she is left in dishonorable barrenness. Euripides, as was his wont, builds up her case to his utmost and squeezes from the scene all the pathos he can. But once more, he has already informed the audience that giving the boy to Xuthus is only a trick to bring Ion into his mother's home without dishonor. Even in the song itself the audience knows that Apollo is vindicated.

The protest of Ion against the right of sanctuary is scarcely a profound criticism of a traditional practice that was on the whole for the good of the community; and Euripides does not seem to intend here to lead the people in the "paths of purity and truth." It might seem to be out of keeping with the

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107 <u>Ion</u> 1589-1594.

simple and unaffected character of Ion; but as we have seen several times in the play, Ion shows considerable maturity, and his ruthlessness in hunting down Creusa to kill her himself leads up logically to his impatience with the taboo that frustrates him. We are inclined to believe that the real purpose of his protest is to afford the audience one more spine-tingle in a thrill-packed show.[108] The relief that came from her safety under the protection of the god is erased by the fear that Ion in his excitement may disregard the protection of the god and kill his mother anyway. It also makes the entrance of the Pythia more effective, and shows her influence on the boy in its best light.

It is noteworthy that any criticism of such practices is refuted by the facts of the drama, always the more significant and emphatic factor. It is precisely the piety of Ion that saves him. It was his scrupulous observance of ritual that caused him to pour out the poisoned wine when some one spoke an inaus-

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108 Euripides is famous for just such devices. Another instance is the breath-taking resolve of Ion not to examine the cradle but to offer it to the god, thus frustrating at the last moment the recognition. (1380-1384) The resolve is completely unmotivated. Throughout the play it has always been his <u>mother</u> whom he has wished to find and for whom he mourns. His reaction to the (false) recognition of Xuthus as his father is to wish more ardently than ever to find his mother. (563-565) His fear of slave-birth is a specious excuse on the part of the dramatist for the action. Ion, it will be remembered, is supposed to be convinced that Xuthus is his father. His mother, according to Xuthus, could have been only an Orgiast, and therefore, of necessity a free-born girl. His mother could not have been a slave, and Ion had explicitly recognized the fact: "So, I 'scape the

picious word.[109] And it was his reverence for the god's protection, however reluctant that reverence was given, that saved him from murdering his mother.

One charge remains to be considered, namely, the rape of Creusa. It is several times referred to as a "deed of shame," and it evokes from Ion the indignant speech that men should not be called wicked if they only imitate the gods. This is the charge that causes Norwood to call Apollo, whatever else he may have done, a "knave"[110] and a "brute."[111] Most modern readers find it hard to admire Apollo or condone his force. What are we to think of this charge in the light of the play?

As we have already had occasion to remark, it is not so much the rape as the desertion of the child that causes pain and indignation. Ion reproaches Phoebus:

> He ravisheth
> Maids, and *forsakes*; begetteth babes by stealth,
> And *heeds not, though they die*. Do thou not so
> Being strong, be righteous.[112]

And when he discovers that the god did not forsake his child, that he himself, in fact, is Apollo's son, there are no more reproaches and he thinks it all quite wonderful.

> Say on: glad tidings this and for-

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taint of serfdom." (556)

109 *Ion* 1186-1194.

110 Norwood, *Greek Tragedy*, 238.

111 Norwood, *Amer. Journal of Philology*, January, 1942, 113.

112 *Ion* 437-440. (Italics ours.)

tune fair![113] . . .
O happy words, if this thou sayest
be true![114] . . .
And this my birth, I find no fault
therein.[115]

So also when Athena with her supreme authority declares that Apollo has done all things well, she makes not the slightest attempt to justify the rape, but speaks only of the child:

Well, hath Apollo all things done: for,
first,
He gave thee health in travail; so
none knew:
And, when thou hadst borne this child,
and cast him out
In swaddling-bands, bade Hermes in
his arms
Snatch him away, and hither waft
thy babe;
And nutured him, nor suffered him
to die.[116]

More significant still is the form that the deliberate and undoubtedly sincere recantation of Creusa takes. It seems clear that in her mind the crime of Apollo was the rape and desertion, and that her intercourse with the god would have been her glory if Apollo had saved her son.

Hear me: Phoebus praise I, whom I
praised not in mine hour of grief,
For that whom he set at naught, his
child, to me he now restores.
Lovely is his oracle, and fair to me
these temple-doors,
Hateful though they were aforetime. Now

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113 Ibid., 1485.
114 Ibid., 1488.
115 Ibid., 1519.
116 Ibid., 1595-1600.

> unto the portal ring,
> As I bid his gates my blithe fare-
> well, with loving hands I cling.[117]

Further, if "Euripides intends to prove the descent of the Athenian tribes, through Ion, from Apollo," as Norwood himself is now ready to concede,[118] it is scarcely credible that Euripides set out to convince his audience of Athenians that their divine progenitor was a "brute" and a "knave." That many of his modern readers are so convinced may, perhaps, be explained in two ways.

It would seem, first, that it is in points like this that the new romantic, sympathetic, psychological approach of the poet to his material causes his disorder and disharmony of plot. He loses his heart to the woman in Creusa, as Vergil was to do later to the woman in Dido, and almost loses sight of her part in the divine plan. In all his plays Euripides is constantly asking himself how would this person feel and think in such a situation, and he tries to portray these feelings and thoughts, but according to the fifth-century character, even though they sometimes cause inconsistencies and abruptness in the working out of the story he set himself to tell. Creusa is far from being the merely impersonal channel of the seed of Apollo that another poet who represented better the brilliant moderation and cold hardness of the Periclean age would have made her. She is a real

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117 *Ibid.*, 1609-1613.
118 Norwood, *loc. cit.*, 112.

and vividly human woman and exemplifies perfectly the pregnant comment of the chorus:

> Nor in woven web nor in story
> Ever heard I of happiness blent with
> the glory
> Of Gods' seed woman-born.[119]

On the other hand, moderns may approach the question from the point of view of the modern estimate of woman's place in society. Needless to say this is a radically wrong approach. The fact is that women had practically no place in fifth-century Athenian society. The _etairai_ who attented public affairs were merely instruments of pleasure, and the decent women, who were kept in almost oriental seclusion, were looked upon as mothers of children and little else. Real love between man and woman was not frequent in the Greek social life of this period, and a man would scarcely think of making a companion of his wife.[120]

The Greek idea of sexual morality was likewise poles apart from the Christian concept.[121] Promiscuity was a constitutive

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119 _Ion_ 507-509.

120 _Cf._ Farnell, 37: "The spirit of Greek religion is, in fact, entirely in accord with that dictum expressed by Plato in the _Laws_ (774A),--so antagonistic to modern sentiments--namely, that a man in his choice of a wife must be guided by the interests of the State, not by his own pleasure; and Aristotle in his _Politics_ takes the same view. In fact, to the ethical and _religious_ theory of the ancient classical communities romantic sentiment would appear merely egoism, and the religious and philosophic ideal of marriage was wholly altruistic."

121 ". . . the State-theory concerning sexual morality looked only to the preservation of the monogamic marriage and the rearing of healthy children; it could not recognise any abstract value in barren chastity. . . the gulf between an-

part of some religious ceremonies; Xuthus the cavalier and hero is not above reproach but his conduct neither surprises nor shocks the pious Ion. We hear that the most proper Sophocles had a number of illegitimate sons.[122] Moderns are usually shocked at the callousness with which both Plato and Aristotle treat married love, and their prescriptions for exposing infants that are deformed or would raise the population above the theoretical ideal. We must remember, too, that Greek literature had made common the notion of a god holding intercourse with a mortal woman, often with painful results to the woman. And most Greek states were very anxious to trace back their ancestry to a divine person.[123]

Further, Creusa in the play is acutely conscious of her role as the representative and last survivor of the royal line of Erichthonius. And even though Euripides is almost too interested in her as a woman, he never lets his audience forget that her primary importance is as the mother of the eponym of the Ionians. The prayer of the chorus, insistently repeated, is always that the house may not die out, that a stranger may not seize the throne of an autochthonous people. It is fear of this principally that moves the old servant to rage. Athena

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cient and modern morality in this respect is well illustrated by those stories that ascribe to Solon the public organization of courtesans. . . ." Ibid., 79.

122 Cf. Haigh, Tragic Drama, 132.

123 Cf. Cadmus' advice in the Bacchae 333-336.

dismisses Creusa shortly and confines the burden of her message to the son and his descendants,--including those descendants who sat watching the play.

We would say, then, that in all probability, the Athenian audience of the Ion would have understood quite well the action of Apollo, and would not have been especially surprised or scandalized by it.[124] He would not seem a "brute" and "knave" but a god acting very much like a god and with a design that particularly flattered them.[125]

Two other charges, not explicitly mentioned in the play, but preferred by critics,[126] may be considered more briefly. These are that Euripides presents Apollo as a "liar" and a "bungler."

As with the other charges against the god, these too seem to be inconsistent with the purpose of Euripides in writing the play. Nor can they be well supported. It is far too harsh to call Apollo a liar because of the oracle given to Xuthus. That oracle was deliberately made so vague that even Ion doubts it; and both Creusa and Athena explain that the god said he gave Ion to Xuthus as a son, and did not say that Xuthus was his

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124 Herodotus had no difficulty in believing that a god became father of Demaratus, a king of Sparta, by trickery. (vi,69.)

125 Further, if the Ion was intended as an attack on Apollo, it seems doubtful if Euripides would have been made a priest of Apollo. (According to Vita Euripidis, p. 3, Dindorf.)

126 E.g., Verrall, Euripides the Rationalist, 145-146, et passim.

127 Ion 1595.

father. It might be remarked, also, that in such circumstances a "mendacium utilitatis" would have been allowed by most Greek moralists.

The charge that the god was a bungler seems quite unfair. "Well hath Apollo all things done,"[127] says Athena and Euripides probably wanted the audience to think so too. The only part of the plan that was upset was the time of the recognition between son and mother. Because of their own rashness and intemperance they forced the god to allow the recognition at Delphi instead of at Athens. But the god really showed his providence to even better advantage by saving them as he did from their own folly.[128] It was he who sent the doves to reveal the poisoned wine; it was he who inspired the Priestess to bring forth the birth-tokens at the crisis. The rest of the plan was skilfully and naturally accomplished. Hermes had been carefully instructed in his part; the god himself had moved the heart of his Priestess in the first instance not to banish the babe from

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128 The fact that Apollo did not appear to know what was going to happen when he gave Ion to Xuthus as his son, may be explained, we believe, in two ways without reflection on the god.

First, the fore-knowledge of the traditional Greek gods was always very limited. In Homer, for example, Pampetie has to inform all-seeing Helios that the followers of Odysseus have taken his herds. Menelaus and his men hide themselves under seal-skins in order to seize Proteus and force him to reveal to them the future. Yet the omniscient Proteus does not even suspect their presence. Odysseus escapes the notice of his arch-enemy Poseidon until he is far out upon the sea on his way home.

Secondly, Hermes may well be considered as giving the plan Apollo intended to use if there had been no interference.

the temple,[129] and to keep safe, without knowing why, the cradle and its contents for all the intervening years. It was Apollo, too, at the time he had determined upon, who inspired Xuthus and Creusa to come to his shrine to ask for children. The plan whereby Ion was to obtain his rightful place in the royal house and yet be thought a child of Xuthus and receive from him a son's love and protection was very considerate, and was carried through successfully despite the interference of Creusa. Nor does Athena come to the rescue of her brother. There is not reason to believe that Phoebus through his oracle could not have given the same explanation as Athena gave and the same prophecies of the glory of Ion, and that they would not have meet the same credence on the part of Creusa and Ion. Athena's appearance was for dramatic reasons.[130]

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129 Ion 47-48.

130 In the _Iphigeneia in Tauris_, it is not Artemis who appears to save her priestess and establish her own cult in Greece, but Athena. Are we to look upon this as a veiled attack upon Artemis who could not save her worshipper? Cf. Decharme, 269.

Part 5

Conclusions

It is our opinion, therefore, that if one reads the Ion as a Greek drama produced with success before an Athenian audience in or about the year 418 B.C., and keeps out of his head theories of what Greek dramatic structure should be as well as jaundiced judgments of how everything in Euripides must be interpreted, he will find the Ion of Euripides a perfectly simple play which means exactly what it says and contains no insoluble enigmas.[131] The religious figures and ideas in the play are quite within the structure of Greek orthodoxy and would not have caused scandal to the most fervent. The poet handles the religious elements in a way that would glorify the city and its protecting deities, and such was the essence of orthodoxy. He means the story to be taken on its face value. Apollo was the father of Ion; Creusa, his mother. Ion is the divinely ordained eponym of the Athenian tribes. Apollo has arranged in his providence the events of the play as described. Apollo is not a brute, a liar, or a bungler.

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131 Cf. Norwood, Amer. Journal of Phil.,112: "Long study of this play has at last persuaded me that it contains no enigma at all but is perfectly simple; our perplexities, though quite natural, are imposed upon it by our modern ideas about dramatic art, about enlightened and pioneering playwrights, about the Divine Nature as conceived by various kinds of Athenians." This most recent statement of Mr. Norwood suggests that the views we have attributed to him in this thesis may no longer represent his real opinions.

CHAPTER V

CRITICISM OF THE GODS IN THE OTHER PLAYS

We have examined the Ion, and considering it as standing by itself, have given what seems to us the most reasonable interpretation of its purpose and meaning. We now wish to evaluate this interpretation in the light of the other surviving works of Euripides. It is obvious that if the rest of the plays show Euripides an out and out atheist, or at least a man who loses no opportunity to criticize the religion of his countrymen, the interpretation of a single play such as the Ion will have to be reconsidered. The question is: do the other plays reveal an atheist or at least a bitter critic?

In our opinion they definitely do not. It is impossible here, of course, to examine the remaining plays in any detail. We must be satisfied with a brief review of the religious sentiments expressed in the plays. For the sake of convenience and to show the position of the Ion in relation to the other plays, we shall consider them in a chronological order.

If we refuse to accept Verrall's theory of the Alcestis--which even his followers refuse to do[1]--we find nothing in the

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[1] Cf. Norwood, Greek Tragedy, 191.

play that can be taken as an attack on the legend presented. Rather the dramatist appears to encourage the devotion of the common people to the divinized Alcestis:

> But O, let the worship and honour
> that we render to
> Gods rest upon her:
> Unto her let the wayfarer pray.[2]

The Medea and Hippolytus, the succeeding plays, include no attack on ancient lore. But again we find evidence of the poet's interest in explaining religious rites and customs.

> This land of Sisyphus
> Will I constrain with solemn festival
> And rites to atone for this unhal-
> lowed murder.[3]

> And to thee, hapless one, for these
> thy woes
> High honours will I give in Troezen-
> town.
> Ere thy espousals shall all maids
> unwed
> For thee cut off their hair: through
> age on age
> Full harvests shall they reap of
> tears of grieving.[4]

Passing over the Hecuba which certainly represents no rationalistic attack on the legends, we find in the Madness of Heracles the first expression of disbelief in the old stories. Lycus says scornfully:

> Thou, who through Hellas scatteredst
> empty vaunts
> That Zeus was co-begetter of sons

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2 Alcestis 997-999.
3 Medea 1381-1383.
4 Hippolytus 1423-1427.

with thee,
And thou, that thou wast named a
hero's wife! [5]

But Lycus is obviously the villain of the piece and receives a just retribution. The chorus pronounces significantly over his destruction:

> Who was it in lawlessness flouting
> the gods, that mortal wight
> Who in folly blasphemed the Blessed
> in the heaven's height,
> Saying that Gods be void of might? [6]

However, towards the end of the play, Heracles, refusing to be comforted in his grief by the recollection of the sufferings of the gods, exclaims:

> I deem not that the Gods for spousals
> crave
> Unhallowed: tales of God's hands
> manacled
> Ever I scorned, nor ever will believe,
> Nor that one God is born another's
> lord. [7]

Are we to accept this passage as embodying the final sentiments of Euripides? It is difficult to say. We must remember that this speech represents the tragic peak of the drama. The hero, Heracles, at the height of his power and glory, has been brought down to utter and heart-breaking ruin. His mental collapse is more poignant even than his physical suffering. All

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5 *Madness of Heracles* 148-150.
6 *Ibid.*, 757-759.
7 *Ibid.*, 1341-1344.

hope is gone and he feels keenly his apparent abandonment by the gods.[8] He refuses to be comforted by Theseus, and the lines just quoted are his answer to Theseus' argument:

> What wilt thou plead, if, mortal as
> thou art,
> Thou chafe against thy fate, and
> Gods do not? [9]

Secondly, the words, "unhallowed spousals," did not mean to Heracles what they mean to us today. Greek ideas of sexual morality had little in common with ours, and had no place for horror at mere sexual liberty.[10] Heracles clearly refers to the <u>unnatural</u> wedlock of brother and sister, mother and son, of which Theseus speaks.[11] There are no real grounds for concluding that Heracles (or Euripides) meant to deny stories of divine intercourse with mortals such as we have in the story of the <u>Ion</u>. Theseus, who is obviously the personification of Athens and a completely pious man, himself expresses doubt in the very stories he suggests to Heracles. Such expressions do not make Euripides any more unorthodox than Pindar or Herodotus who similarly express themselves.[12]

As if to settle any doubt about his orthodoxy, which was connected almost to the point of identification with patriotism in fifth-century Athens, the very next play, the <u>Suppliants</u>, is

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8 <u>Ibid.</u>, 1243.
9 <u>Ibid.</u>, 1320-1321.
10 <u>Cf. supra</u> pp. 106 ff.
11 <u>Madness of Heracles</u> 1316.
12 <u>Cf. supra</u> pp. 32 ff.

from beginning to end a plea for piety and an encomium of the City.[13] In this play, as in the Ion, the poet was treating of religion in its connection with the State; hence, he would tolerate no rash doubts or denials. The Athenian hero-king tells Adrastus flatly:

> Thou leddest forth the Argives all
> to war
> Though seers spake heaven's warning,
> setting at naught
> These, flouting Gods, didst ruin so
> thy state.[14]

Adrastus recognizes his fault, and speaks these truly remarkable lines:

> Zeus, wherefore do they say that
> wretched man
> Is wise? For lo, we hang upon thy
> skirts,
> And that we do, it is but as thou
> wilt.[15]

The play comes to a close with a last affirmation by Athen's highest authority that the glory of the State is dependent entirely upon reverence for the gods.

> Athena, Queen, thy words will I obey:
> Thou guid'st me ever that I may not err.
> Him will I bind with oaths: only do thou
> Still lead me aright; for gracious
> while thou art
> To Athens, shall we ever safely dwell.[16]

Can we believe that the Athenian people, after having wit-

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13 The Hypothesis to the play explicitly calls it an encomium of Athens.

14 Suppliants 229-231.

15 Ibid., 734-736.

16 Ibid., 1227-1231.

nessed the <u>Suppliants</u>, which by no conceivable effort of the imagination can be made out to be an attack on Athenian orthodoxy, could yet have approached the very next play produced by Euripides with the expectation of hearing a veiled attack on their religious beliefs? Is it reasonable to suppose that a play, following so closely the <u>Suppliants</u> and bound up just as intimately with Athenian pride of race and patriotism, was in fact a complete though hidden denial of everything that had been said in the earlier play? Such a supposition is absurd. And yet we have been asked by some to believe just that about the <u>Ion</u>, the play that (most probably) followed the <u>Suppliants</u>.[17]

In the succeeding play, the <u>Troiades</u>, occur the lines that Decharme selects as expressing the real opinion of the poet and as marking the beginning of the whole rationalistic theory.[18] Hecuba tells Helen:

> And thine own lust was made thy
> Cyprian Queen!
> Ever men's folly is made their Aphrodite.[19]

With all due respect to M. Decharme, we frankly fail to see in the lines the high significance he has discovered there. Hecuba's retort is simply part of a formal debate which moderns find so distasteful and ancients found so delightful. Helen has

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17 For the date, see note 37, p. 77, and Norwood, 234.
18 Decharme, <u>Euripides and the Spirit of His Dramas</u>, 51.
19 <u>Troiades</u> 988-989.

pleaded in self-justification that a "goddess" forced her to go to Troy. Hecuba's answer is, of course, the obvious one. But she definitely does not deny the actual existence of the goddess upon whom Helen has tried to cast her blame. The old queen begins:

> First champion will I be of Goddesses,
> And wilt convict her of a slanderous tongue.[20]

Some time before, she had warned Helen:

> Charge not Goddesses with folly
> To gloze thy sin: thou cozenest not the wise.[21]

These passages show that there was simply no question in her mind about the existence of the goddess; her only thought was to prevent Helen from taking refuge in a sophistical appeal to divine interference.

Passing on to the next play, the popular _Iphigeneia in Tauris_, we see that it contains but one passage that might be considered unorthodox. We have quoted earlier these lines--the lines in which Iphigeneia expresses her disbelief in the banquet of Tantalus.[22] We are quite willing to concede that the passage represents Euripides' opinion as well as that of his heroine; but we deny the conclusion that, therefore, he had lost all belief in traditional mythology and/or religion. As we

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20 _Troiades_ 969-970.
21 _Ibid._, 901-902.
22 _Supra_ pp. 5-6.

have endeavored to show before, Greek orthodoxy left plenty of room for one to choose or reject what he would in the often conflicting mass of legendary material. To realize how little an isolated rebellion against traditional truths really means, we have only to recall that the exemplar of all orthodoxy, Pindar himself, had denied this very story of Tantalus.[23] No, we hardly feel it necessary on the strength of the few lines in the Taurian _Iphigeneia_ to change our interpretation of the religious attitude of the _Ion_.

There is really little need to examine the other plays in detail. All we set out to show in this chapter was that Euripides was not always and everywhere an atheist, a severe critic of the religion of his countrymen, or in fact particularly unusual in his religious sentiments. Our purpose, of course, was thus to demonstrate that our interpretation of the _Ion_ was not forced, that we were justified in approaching the play with an unprejudiced mind. After our present review, brief as it necessarily was, of the plays that preceded and followed immediately after the _Ion_ (and therefore should show best the spirit in which the _Ion_ was written), we think that it is clear that Euripides could and did write plays which are certainly not intended to discredit the orthodox religion or even the legends with which they were concerned. His patriotism is ob-

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23 Cf. _supra_ pp. 33-34.

vious, and, as with all Athenians of his day, his city's greatness was inextricably bound up with the worship of the gods. There is every reason to think, in the light of the other plays we have considered, that the Ion was probably intended to mean what we have suggested it to mean in this thesis.

A Summary

The modern theory that holds that the works of Euripides, and specifically the Ion, were intended by their author as an attack on traditional Greek religion and must be so interpreted to be understood does not seem to be founded on fact. In the first place, the plays of Euripides, not so interpreted, have met with considerable popularity and esteem for two and a half thousand years. Secondly, available evidence points to the conclusion that Euripides was not regarded by his contemporaries as a foe of orthodox religion. Thirdly, an analysis of the Ion would seem to indicate that the natural interpretation is the only one that will account satisfactorily for the lines that the poet has actually written. Finally, the natural interpretation seems to be quite in accord with a proper understanding of the other plays.

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