

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

ON GREEK TRAGEDY

Greek tragedy is still acted in the original and in translations; it has inspired such modern drama as *The Family Reunion* and *La Machine Infernale*; in Norway and France Sophocles' *Antigone* helped to give hope to the resistance. Greek tragedy was produced originally at a religious festival by a poet who was poet, musician, producer, and sometimes actor too. The plays were meant to be seen; they had staging and costumes, dancing, and dramatic technique. They were meant to be remembered; they had language, style, and thoughts which the poet desired to communicate at that particular time. The poet himself knew well the leading artists, thinkers, and politicians of the small society in which he lived. Production, metre, technique, style, and thought are the chief elements which the scholar must study if he would make these ancient plays as intelligible as possible to modern readers.

My purpose here is to draw attention to certain important new documents and to enlarge a little on certain works of scholarship which either mark ground firmly won or point a way for further development. Detailed bibliography with admirable criticism is provided by Professor

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Albin Lesky in articles appearing in the *Anzeiger für die Altertumswissenschaft* since 1948. Thus I shall not notice the numerous new texts and editions which have appeared in many countries except to note E. D. M. Fraenkel's edition of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.¹ This great work (the commentary amounts to more than eight hundred pages) not only gives the views of a very sound scholar on a great play, which has survived in an abominably corrupt text, but also records very fully the views of his predecessors so that the whole process of argument through the centuries can be observed. Such a labour could only be justified for a few major works; the result is a slice of the history of scholarship, an elucidation of many problems of Greek literature, and a complete (though not final) edition of the *Agamemnon*.

New information about Greek tragedy is due to the papyrologists and archaeologists; the former produce new texts and the latter new illustrations. The twentieth volume of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*² contains a number of fragments of Aeschylus, which still need evaluation. A fragment of commentary shows that the scene was changed four times (Aetna, Xuthia, Aetna, Leontini, Syracuse) in the *Aetnaean Women*, a fine disregard for the unity of place. A lyric fragment has been attributed to the *Egyptians* by M. L. Cunningham (in a forthcoming *Rheinisches Museum*) and shows, if the attribution is right, that the Argive king was killed and that the main chorus was formed, as in the surviving *Supplikes*, by the Danaids. It is still more startling to find evidence that the trilogy of which the *Supplikes* was the first play was not performed before 466 B.C.; at least twenty years later than the date usually assumed. The notice is fragmentary, and in one line the writer has certainly made a mistake, but it seems unlikely that this notice refers either to another trilogy or to a later production after Aeschylus' death. The evidence that *Supplikes* and *Egyptians* were produced with *Danaides* and the satyr play *Amymone* (the two plays whose names have survived in the notice) is good, and all the production dates given in our manuscripts refers to first productions.

It may be possible to find some other explanation of the papyrus, but for the moment it looks as if we must accept the new date, although it goes against the normal opinion that the *Supplikes* is the earliest surviving play of Aeschylus and was probably written soon after 500 B.C. The reasons for the early dating are importance of the chorus, absence of prologue,

¹Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.

²London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1952.

absence of true dialogue, extreme stiffness of language: criteria which have been used with suitable adaptations to date the undated plays of Sophocles. It has been assumed that the earliest tragedy was something like oratorio and that the surviving plays can be arranged on a line which leads from oratorio to the realistic melodrama of late Euripides. We have accepted a biological scheme from Aristotle's *Poetics* and have applied it to Aeschylus; as one scholar phrased it, '*Stetigkeit der Entwicklung ist ein Grundgesetz hellenischer Art und Kunst*'.

We must ask what has gone wrong because we have used such schemes as the only means of dating undated pottery, painting, sculpture, poetry, prose, and thought. We want to date because, though some works are so great that their date does not matter, most works are more easily understood in their context, and dating establishes their context. The stages of using this method seem to me to be these: First, we make a general assumption of the direction in which the series is going; these general assumptions are normally correct—tragedy does change from oratorio to drama, sculpture does become more realistic. Secondly, we use every external aid we can find to date individual members of the series. Thirdly, we examine these dated members of the series and decide what characteristics in them show the direction that we have assumed and are therefore valid criteria for dating the undated members of the series (e.g., resolutions in the iambic trimeter are thus shown to be significant for Euripides but not for Sophocles). Here we ought to stop and ask whether the works of the tragedians form a series at all: for Sophocles, four dated plays spaced over about 38 years; for Euripides, eight dated plays spaced over about 31 years—these may be regarded as series; but the dated plays of Aeschylus are only spaced over 14 years when he was between the ages of 53 and 67; still it may perhaps be reasonable to regard *Persae* (472 B.C.) and *Septem* (467 B.C.) as middle-aged Aeschylus and *Oresteia* (458 B.C.) as old Aeschylus. Fourthly, we arrange dated and undated works in order by the increase or decrease of the characteristics which we have decided are significant. Fifthly, we decide that this order is the chronological order of their creation.

In taking this last step we have made a further assumption. We have assumed that the creator creates in an absolutely regular way, that each work is an advance on its predecessor in the direction given by a comparison of early and late dated works. No allowance is made for special circumstances, brilliant work, repetitive work, or careless work. It is of course probable that the public—the audience and judges of the play or

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the purchaser of the vase or statue—act as a stabiliser; they do not like anything very old-fashioned or outrageously modern, but they only set outside limits beyond which the creator must not go. The creator is a human being at a particular moment of his existence; he may be at the top of his form or he may not (clearly these variations are more important when survival is due to chance as with the alphabetical plays of Euripides or vases from a rubbish heap); he may be excited about one particular side of his work but retain old forms or old ideas in the rest; or he may have chosen a subject which demands a particular kind of treatment. This last, I suspect, is the case with the *Supplikes*: the daughters of Danaos must be the heroines and they can only be the chorus; therefore the chorus must take the chief part in the play even if this is old fashioned.

It seems to me therefore that we must be very careful how we take the fifth step. The fourth step gives us a logical order; but this cannot be converted automatically into a chronological order. And in fact two of the sounder stylistic series—the plays of Euripides and the dialogues of Plato—have been shown not to produce chronological series but only groups of early, middle, and late. Suppose that we have arrived at a logical series A–Z of which D, M N, T, are dated respectively 500, 470, 468, and 450 B.C. We must not say that B is earlier than D or that U is later than T; still less must we say that H is about 485 B.C. or that Q is about 459 B.C., and there is no justification at all for reconstructing unknown prehistory on the basis of A. We may say that A–H are probably early, I–P are probably middle, and Q–Z are probably late, if we remember that early overlaps middle and middle overlaps late. But we shall be safest if we only say that B is more like D than M N or that V is more like T than M N.

I have enlarged on this theme because it seems to me of great importance to be clear how far stylistic dating may be trusted. A rather similar problem arises with a curious fragment of a tragedy about the Gyges story, which is related in the first book of Herodotus. In the fragment Kandaules' wife tells how she had seen Gyges in the royal bedchamber and in the morning had summoned him after she had sent Kandaules about his business. This tragedy on a story of palace intrigue was dated by its first editor, E. Lobel,³ in the first half, and by Professor D. L. Page⁴ in the first quarter of the fifth century, but by Professor K. Latte⁵ in the third century. Was it by a contemporary of Aeschylus or was it Hellenistic? Both parties

³ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxxv, 1.

⁴ *A new Chapter in the History of Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge: University Press, 1951.

⁵ *Eranos*, xlviii, 131.

invoke technical arguments from metre. These certainly prove that it could not have been written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides. The phenomena on which most stress is laid occur in Ionian writers of the seventh and sixth century (therefore the fragment is early) and in Hellenistic tragedy (therefore the fragment is late). The tragic fragments of the fifth-century Ion of Chios show them in a much higher degree than the three Attic tragedians. At most the metrical argument shows that the new fragment is either non-Attic (early or late) or Hellenistic. We do not know enough to construct a metrical series. We can, however, say that the only three tragedies with historical subjects known from the early fifth century present major events of urgent importance for Athens; there is, on the other hand, some evidence for historical drama in the Hellenistic age, when such themes as Themistocles, Marathon, and Amastris had only a romantic interest, and it is here that the Gyges play probably belongs.

Marathon would seem to be the subject of the *Persians* depicted on the well-known Apulian vase in Naples. I quote this for various reasons: in the first place, an old theory that it is a picture of Phrynichus' *Persians* (a doubtful title anyway) has recently been revived. We are asked to believe that an Apulian painter somehow copied an Athenian painting celebrating Phrynichus' victory some hundred and fifty years before. There is no trace of the style or composition of the supposed original and nothing to contradict the much easier assumption that the painter was inspired by a historical tragedy of about 330 B.C., nor does the Apulian painter try to be accurate in matters of detail; he must not be pressed too far. In the last thirty years we have learned a great deal about Greek vase-painting: the main fabrics and within them the chief painters can be dated with some accuracy. We know also how the vase-painter works, that he may give us anything from picture of a performance to picture inspired by tragedy, and that he is not consistent even within the limits of a single picture. The philologist, who expects to find on a vase a photograph of a first night, is apt either to over-interpret the vase scene or to reject it as useless. But if he is treated sympathetically, the vase-painter can tell us what plays were being acted in different places at different times, and something about stage buildings and costumes. A sketch (necessarily fragmentary because of the fortuitous nature of the evidence) of the history of the production of Attic tragedy and satyr plays in Athens and South Italy could now be written on the basis of the vase material.⁶

⁶For tragedy the latest collection is L. Séchan, *Etudes sur la tragédie Grecque*, Paris: Champion, 1926; for the satyr play, F. Brommer, *Satyrspiele*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1944.

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Much of the vase evidence for buildings and costumes is illustrated and discussed in two recent books by the late Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*⁷ and *Athenian dramatic festivals*,⁸ although more can still be done by sympathetic interpretation of the illustrative evidence to trace theatre practice in different places down to Roman times. But these two books mark the stage now reached by scholarship on theatre architecture, scenery, costume, acting, actors' guilds, and organisation of the dramatic festivals; the evidence is clearly presented in a manageable form, and sane and sober conclusions are drawn. It is impossible for us to be certain how much of a Greek production was realistic in the modern sense. Nineteen reconstructions of the scenery of ancient plays are given in *Szenenbilder*⁹ by H. Bulle and H. Wirsing; these are ingenious and interesting but seem to imply a major change of scene for each play. Pickard-Cambridge reckons that the average time for scene-changing between plays must have been about half an hour; the change therefore, in Euripides' trilogy of 431 B.C., from Medea's palace in Corinth to Philoctetes' cave in Lemnos and then to Dictys' palace in Seriphos cannot have involved major structural alterations: I do not suggest that the Greek dramatist did not make full use of the resources at his disposal (K. Reinhardt has recently interpreted Aeschylus' practice in *Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologe*¹⁰), but that his resources were limited and his conventions different from ours. The words of the text are not a safe guide; they may either underline or replace scenery or action. The latter point is well brought out by A. Spitzbarth in *Spieltechnik der griechischen Tragödie*;¹¹ she examines the texts for evidence of gesture, action, mute persons, properties, and representation of emotions; the gestures were presumably made (and it would be interesting to try to equate them with gestures on vases), but smiles, laughter, frowns, and tears were precluded by masks; yet both are described equally fully, and it is perhaps not unreasonable to suppose that the Greek tragic poet wrote for readers as well as spectators.

If the Greek tragic poet wrote for readers as well as spectators, are we justified in supposing that he was more interested in the effect of the single scene than of the play as a whole? Sophocles was interpreted on these lines by Tycho von Wilamowitz at the time of the first war, and insistence on

⁷ Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946.

⁸ Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

⁹ Berlin: Mann, 1950.

¹⁰ Bern: Franke, 1949.

¹¹ Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1946.

the dramatic effect of each scene marks a recent book by A. J. A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist*.¹² For Euripides the same line has been taken by W. Zürcher in *Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides*.¹³ Briefly, the author's conclusions are that the minor figures of Euripides are often coloured entirely by the situation in which they appear, and that for the major figures 'Euripides reveals and describes causes and results, expressions and intensities of particular feelings and emotions, but not the secret structure of the soul from which they come nor its inner relations and coherence as a personality'. These particular feelings he sees as part of human nature in general, not of the character of the individual. One feels that Aristotle would have enjoyed this book; the general outlook is so near to his treatment of *dianoia* and *ethos*, and to his conception of tragedy as a piece of rhetoric designed to awake pity and fear. It is true, of course, that we must not ask, as an English scholar recently said in discussing Shakespeare from a rather similar point of view, how many children had Lady Macbeth. The dramatist has given us all the answers that he wants us to have; we must be careful how we fill in gaps and we must refuse to ask what happened before the play began or what will happen after it ends. It is true also that a conception of a drama in which every utterance should be significant and realistic is entirely foreign to Euripides. Medea speaks in high tragic language and appears in scenes composed according to certain rules of which the most important was that they should have the maximum effect on the spectator. But with all these reservations Medea is a great individual whose actions are consistent with her greatness. The spectator (and presumably the reader) had, however, an affection for certain types of scenes, among others scenes of appeal and persuasion and debates. These have been examined by J. Duchemin in *L'Agon dans la tragédie grecque*,¹⁴ the authoress classifies all such scenes in tragedy and arrives at the very just conclusion that Sophocles never uses this form unless a profound necessity in the situation demands it, whereas Euripides, finding it already in existence as a type of scene, introduces it into every piece. The development of the debate scene in comedy is a parallel phenomenon, and in both kinds of drama the cross influence of the law courts and the sophists can be detected.

Of the poet as musician we know little beyond what the metres of the

¹² Cambridge: University Press, 1951.

¹³ Basel: Reinhardt, 1947.

¹⁴ Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1945.

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choruses tell us. A. M. Dale in *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama*¹⁵ has discussed such information as there is about the performance of Greek lyric verse and has introduced a great deal of clarity into metrical questions. This book puts the scansion of choruses on a much sounder basis than before and is laudably sceptical of attempts to reduce different metres to a common denominator or to see metre as directly reflecting the emotions of the words. The vocabulary of choruses and dialogue have been the subject of several recent studies. G. Björck has discussed in *Das Alpha impurum*¹⁶ the use of alpha when according to the normal Attic phonetic system eta would be regular; in the choruses the use of alpha instead of eta is due to the fact that the Attic tragedians, writing in the tradition of Dorian choral lyric, stylise their diction accordingly. In the dialogue this impure alpha occurs in certain words which are borrowed from other dialects, partly because the poets want to avoid Homeric words or colloquialisms, etc. Besides solving this specific problem and giving an immense amount of information about this particular class of words, Björck has a very interesting discussion of poetic language and its relation to colloquial language, which is also affective, and gives a number of hints as to the kind of categories which may be used in a study of style, such as variations of form which make no difference to sense, lack of determination in meaning, creation of new words, influence of context, ex-poetic words, etc. It is to be hoped that Björck will go further and write a history of tragic language in these terms. These categories would have to be used in conjunction with the more traditional classification of words by their forms; a very clean and careful work of this latter kind has been done by J. C. F. Nuchelmans in *Nomina des Sophokleischen Wortschatzes*.¹⁷ Suggestions for a study of tragic language and some hint of the dangers involved are given in Nuchelmans' interesting lecture in *De Antieke Tragedie*.¹⁸ F. R. Earp in his *Style of Aeschylus*¹⁹ operates with the very simple categories, compound words, rare and epic words, and metaphors. He gives statistics, and although the numbers involved are too small to be significant, they nevertheless give the evidence for a fine and sensitive appreciation of Aeschylus' style, which brings out very well the peculiarities of the *Supplikes*; it is in language the most mannered and strained play of Aeschylus, but this need

¹⁵ Cambridge: University Press, 1948.

¹⁶ Uppsala: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1950.

¹⁷ Utrecht: Beyers, 1949.

¹⁸ Leiden: Batteljee en Terpstra, 1947.

¹⁹ Cambridge: University Press, 1948.

not necessarily be explained as a sign of early date. Earp's discussion of metaphors is chiefly concerned with their use in the different plays, their sources, and the knowledge that Aeschylus has of the world from which he draws them. O. Hiltenbrunner in *Wiederholungs- und Motivtechnik bei Aischylos*²⁰ examines among other stylistic phenomena the use of imagery to carry an important theme which runs right through a play or even a trilogy. This technique is particularly highly developed in Aeschylus, who thinks in pictures, and it is right to press it. It is not so certain whether it is justifiable to see conscious repetition of imagery in Euripides, and I am inclined to think that R. P. Winnington-Ingram, who in earlier articles has shown his sensitiveness to this element in Aeschylus' style, presses it too far in his otherwise admirable book on *Euripides and Dionysus*,²¹ but this is a personal view and may be unfair both to the modern and to the ancient author. The *Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone* has been studied with great sympathy by R. F. Goheen,²² who employs the technique and (unfortunately) the language of the 'new criticism'. It is concerned chiefly with six main kinds of imagery, military, maritime, imagery of animals and their control, imagery of money and merchandising, imagery of disease and cure, and imagery of marriage. He traces them through the play and shows how they are related to each other and to the characters and at the same time give a frame through which the dramatist intended his work to be seen. The same kind of examination should be extended to other plays. The common factor of all these stylistic studies is the desire to base stylistic judgment on some kind of facts which are communicable instead of expressing them in 'effusive and vague terms of excellence' (Goheen).

A particular section of Euripides' terminology is discussed by B. Meissner in *Mythisches und Rationales in der Psychologie der euripideischen Tragödie*.²³ Meissner examines the psychological terms used by Euripides to discover how far he freed himself from three curiosities of the psychological terminology found in the Homeric poems and much later; the lack of distinction between psychical and physical being (e.g., *phrenes* means both midriff and mind), the absence of a comprehensive word for the soul like *psyche* in Plato, the tendency to speak of the soul as the victim of divine or daemonic powers. In his careful study he distinguishes various levels of

²⁰ Bern: Franke, 1950.

²¹ Cambridge: University Press, 1948.

²² Princeton: University Press, 1951.

²³ Göttingen: Philosophische Fakultät, 1951.

meaning for each word—anatomical, psycho-physical, purely psychic, and occasionally to denote the result of a psychic operation. He decides that Euripides does occasionally use a comprehensive word for the soul, and defines his position in relation both to the still surviving Homeric view that psychic disturbances were due to the gods or the like and to the new fifth-century view that knowledge of what was right would lead to doing it. This is a very valuable semantic study.

The Greek tragedian wrote for a great public religious festival. He was saying something which he believed to be important, and he had practically no historical sense to delude him into thinking that his characters could be other than his contemporaries magnified. These magnified contemporaries stand in some relation to the gods, and the relation between gods and men established by the three great tragedians is a subject to which I shall return. A less important question to which, however, widely differing answers have been given, is the question of the political relevance of Greek tragedy. It is quite clear that in Aeschylus' *Supplikes* the people of Argos behave like a democracy, and the king, who is necessary because of the heroic setting, acts as a constitutional monarch (the implications of this for Greek political history have been shown by V. Ehrenberg²⁴). In the *Oresteia* again it is clear that, as Solmsen says in *Hesiod and Aeschylus*,²⁵ 'Aeschylus sees Athens' contemporary situation *sub specie aeternitatis*', and this is true both of the Argive alliance and of the judicial function of the Areopagus; the Areopagus is given a sanction as a murder court and nothing more, because its other functions had been recently removed by the democracy. Reinhardt²⁶ seems to me to draw the line entirely correctly when he refuses to find any criticism of Hiero of Syracuse in the *Prometheus* but recognises that Okeanos is drawn as a naïve fellow traveller and Zeus as a tyrant. Similarly Ehrenberg²⁷ in a forthcoming book discusses the relation between Sophocles and Pericles on the basis that in a small town where everybody of consequence knew one another Sophocles inevitably coloured Creon in the *Antigone* and Oedipus in the *Tyrannus* with traits derived from Pericles, but that we are not therefore justified in seeing a portrait of Pericles in either Creon or Oedipus. To draw portraits (or caricatures) of public figures was the task of comedy not of tragedy, and for this reason it seems to me unacceptable to find a connexion

²⁴ *Historia*, 1950, pp. 515 *et seq.*

²⁵ Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1949.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*

²⁷ *Sophocles and Pericles*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1954.

between Pericles and Zeus, Prometheus and Protagoras in the *Prometheus*, or between Pericles and Eteocles, Themistocles and Polynices in the *Septem*; to identify Sitalces of Thrace with the hero of the *Rhesus* or the plague at Athens with the sickness of Phaedra in the *Hippolytus* is unjustifiable. The Greek tragedian may consciously or unconsciously have coloured his mythological figures and events with traits taken from contemporaries and events, and the audiences may have seen a political allusion rightly or wrongly; but there is no evidence that he produced political allegory. We can only accept political allusions when they are forced on our notice like the Argive alliance in the *Oresteia* or the plague in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; we must not search them out. It is distressing to have to abandon a clue which would help to date a unique play like the *Rhesus*, but we must sadly admit that if in fact the subject suggests an interest in Thrace, Thrace was as interesting in the fourth century as in the fifth, that the metrical peculiarities tell us nothing if the play is not by Euripides, and that in fact we have no clue except the general feel of the play.

However doubtful we may be about the poet's political allusions, we cannot doubt that he represents a relationship between god and man. Aeschylus' general position is clear, but one particular problem has always been troublesome: how is the Zeus who tortures Prometheus in the *Prometheus Bound* to be reconciled with the just governor of the Universe, whom we apprehend in the hymn in the first chorus of the *Agamemnon*. The solution escapes us, because we only know the barest outline of events in the *Prometheus Unbound*, and we can only guess whether these two plays were preceded or succeeded by another play or not. It is certain that Zeus and Prometheus were reconciled but quite unclear how the whole sequence is compatible with the theology of the *Agamemnon*. Two recent books have included a considerable treatment of this problem, the two books already mentioned by Solmsen and Reinhardt. For Solmsen, who considers in full detail what Aeschylus derived from Hesiod and Solon, 'the Zeus of *Prometheus Bound* is not Aeschylus' Zeus at all but the Zeus whose manifestations he found recorded in the *Theogony*'. The Zeus of Hesiod's *Theogony* is, however, also the father of Justice and of the Graces (*Charites*), besides being the conquerer of the Titans. Solmsen suggests that Aeschylus saw the change from one state of affairs to the other as a development in time and that the emergence of justice took place during the reign of Zeus, not at its beginning. Solmsen has in fact supported with new arguments the view that the reconciliation

with Prometheus is due to a development in the character of Zeus. But it is this development which is so hard to accept: W. Dekker,²⁸ whose position is very near that of Solmsen, makes this clear when he says that the idea of a gradual development is not on the whole a Greek idea, the Greek demands concrete beginnings. Reinhardt looks for a solution in quite a different direction. He says that the peculiarity of the gods is not that they develop but that they show two faces. Then the *Prometheus Bound* shows the cruel face and the *Prometheus Unbound* the gracious face. This conception is found at the end of the Zeus hymn in the *Agamemnon*; the words may be paraphrased, 'there is something which we may call the grace of the gods, although in their majesty they steer human affairs by force'. (And we may recall that the sixth century statue of Apollo at Delos carried a bow in one hand and little statues of the Graces in the other.) Our only guide here is the *Oresteia*, and it provides several points of contact besides the Zeus hymn: the contrast between Apollo's severity to Orestes in the *Choephoroi* and his protection of Orestes in the *Eumenides*, the conflict between the young gods and the old gods (who speak of the young gods in the same terms as Prometheus speaks of Zeus), and the sudden reconciliation of the Furies achieved by Athena's whispered word. Some such sudden change in Prometheus and some such revelation of the other face of Zeus seems more probable than the development of Zeus, but only the discovery of essential fragments of the later play or plays can bring certainty.

For Sophocles the question which has been recently debated is the relation between gods and men. The texts are not in doubt but the interpretations differ widely. An extreme view was put forward by W. Vollgraff:²⁹ Sophocles is an anthropocentric individualist, his gods are the gods of mythology and play the part which we assign to 'circumstances'. A somewhat similar line is taken by C. H. Whitman in a clever and interesting book.³⁰ He summarises his analysis of the plays in finding four 'levels of moral activity among which the plot creates the tragic tensions'. They are first, the sheer immorality of the clearly bad characters, second, the every-day, maxim-guided chorus and the neutral characters; the third level is the level of the hero himself, whose *arete* 'is human because it is moral but its existence creates a process of becoming divine'; the fourth level is Deity itself; because it is above morality as it is above humanity,

²⁸In *De Antieke Tragedie*. See *supra*, note 18.

²⁹In *De Antieke Tragedie*. See *supra*, note 18.

³⁰*Sophocles*, Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1951.

the relationship is one of keen life-and-death conflict. The whole interpretation is a violent reaction against the traditional view that Sophocles believed in the gods and that his great heroes suffered because of some flaw in their character. Whitman is entirely right in emphasising the greatness of Sophocles' heroes and interprets them admirably, although I am not clear how many of them are great morally besides Antigone, or what the process of becoming divine means except in the obvious instance of Oedipus in the *Coloneus*. It is also perhaps oversubtle to see in Oedipus' suspicion of Teiresias and Creon clear-headedness and shrewdness but to find the same behaviour in Creon in the *Antigone* symptomatic of the tyrant; it is reading rather more into the character of Oedipus than these particular lines warrant. Oedipus is a great, dynamic figure, and Sophocles meant him to be seen as such; but innocence seems to me a difficult word to apply to a man who in anger killed an old man for refusing to get out of his way and who without any foundation suspects his brother-in-law of plotting against him. However, the innocence or guilt of Oedipus have long been argued and will continue to be argued. Whitman is more revolutionary in his view that the Deity is above morality (or, as he phrases it in some passages, the Deity seems to be synonymous with irrational evil) and that the chorus represents the somewhat confused morality of the bourgeoisie. There are two distinct points; first, the Olympians who appear or are mentioned in the plays are conventional symbols of an a-moral Deity, and secondly, the attribution of justice to the gods is a sign of bourgeois morality in the chorus. Whitman has therefore to explain away the tradition that Sophocles was the most pious of the Greeks, that he housed the god Asklepios when his cult was introduced into Athens, and that he received heroic honours after his death, and to disregard the special function of the chorus, inherited from Aeschylus, of being the poet's mouthpiece. J. C. Opstelten in his *Sophocles and Greek Pessimism*³¹ comes near to Whitman's portrayal of Sophocles' heroes when he says that the greatness of the hero, who desires in all circumstances to maintain the *arete* of his personality, makes a contrast full of tragic irony with the mental blindness which surrounds and isolates him, as he proceeds on his way to realise the insignificance of all human existence. Opstelten however accepts the normal view of the utterances of the chorus, and believes that Sophocles feared and honoured the power of the gods without calculating or investigating their behaviour. For Opstelten

³¹ Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1952.

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then Sophocles' gods are real but Sophocles has shifted the emphasis from human guilt to human suffering. The behaviour of these gods has to be accepted piously; the interest lies in the suffering and particularly the delusion of the great and lonely human hero. Opstelten's problem is to decide whether Sophocles can rightly be called a pessimist, and he examines all passages which speak of the suffering of the innocent or the insignificance of human existence, notes their context and their tone of grief, bitterness, or resignation. Whether pessimism is a good word to sum up Sophocles' awareness of the fragility of human greatness, does not greatly matter; Opstelten has grasped the truth that Sophocles' work was also an aesthetic and religious victory over pessimism.

Interpretation of Sophocles' views starts from the certainty that in all his plays a great personality is seen suffering and that this suffering is part of a scheme at least foreseen by the gods. This is a certainty, however much the emphasis on men or gods may vary in different interpretations. Interpreters of Euripides have no such certainty to start from, and his plays leave far more doubt as to whether he was a rationalist or an irrationalist, in what sense he believed in the gods, and whether he was primarily a dramatic poet or a thinker. A. Rivier's *Essai sur le Tragique d'Euripide*,³² which is written with charm and enthusiasm, marks a revolt against the many interpretations of Euripides which have stressed the thinker at the expense of the dramatic poet. The essence of a dramatic poet is his power to organise his stuff so that form and content harmonise perfectly. The correct procedure therefore is literary analysis directed first at those plays in which Euripides has shown himself most successful: *Alceste*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Bacchae* (a list with which all would not agree). As a result of this analysis Rivier formulates Euripides' views about the gods as follows: 'The gods are perhaps cruel, they are terrible to men; but see they act, they exist; one must therefore fear them, worship them, and try to live without provoking their anger', and in another place, 'Euripides does not attack the religion of the myths, he affirms it in its essence and even in its mystery'. If this means in any literal sense, as it seems to do, that Euripides believed in the personal gods of mythology, it is an oversimplification of the evidence.

Quite apart from the various attitudes of characters to the gods—the piety of the unawakened Ion, the criticism, scepticism, and rationalism which is voiced by others—the gods themselves appear on the stage in

³² Lausanne: Rouge, 1944.

different guises, as even a superficial consideration of Artemis and Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, Hermes in the *Ion*, Athena in the *Trojan Women* will show. 'Thus, while Apollo (or Hermes or the Dioscuri, or even Hera) is mainly a figure of mythology and a butt of satire, other gods have both real and mythological aspects, both valid and necessary to the understanding of the plays.' These words are taken from an early chapter of R. P. Winnington-Ingram's study of *Euripides and Dionysus*.³³ This book is a study of the *Bacchae* in the form of a running commentary with introduction and conclusion; the commentary shows great sensitiveness to the language of the play, to the intricate themes which are interwoven in its texture, and to the dramatic effect of each situation both for itself and in its relation to the play. In one way it is something of an experiment, which is my reason for placing it as the conclusion of this summary: 'since I hope that some Greek-less readers may be interested, I have quoted in translation'. This then is a work of very detailed scholarship, which may nevertheless be appreciated by the Greek-less reader; the technique might well be extended to other plays. Here I only wish to say a few words on the general conception of the play and more particularly the view of Dionysus, which the author propounds. The play is not primarily concerned with an ecstatic cult either in Macedonia or in Athens, although recent religious phenomena in Athens may have given it a topical interest. The play is relevant to all emotional religions and, more widely, to the phenomena of group emotion in all social and political life, and finally to the power of emotion over the isolated individual; all these things are the work of Dionysus. The Theban Bacchanals (Agave and her sisters) represent (like the isolated Pentheus) the suppression of emotion; the Asiatic Bacchanals (the chorus) represent the exclusive cult of emotion; both lead to much the same results, which may be either an ecstasy of peace or a fury of violence. All these characters—particularly the Bacchanals, the priest Teiresias, and the puritan Pentheus—claim to have wisdom in regard to Dionysus, and all their wisdoms are variations of misunderstanding. The play as a whole communicates the wisdom of Euripides, the understanding of the beauty and the horror which are interdependently called forth, if individual or group submits to the untrammelled emotion symbolised by Dionysus.

So we end with the interpretation of god as a symbol, and such an interpretation is fully justified in the late fifth century. There are many

³³ Cambridge: University Press, 1948.

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parallels at a time when thinkers are feverishly making new abstract concepts and fixing them by personification or identification with existing divine or heroic figures. The past had made the myth to explain a ritual by which the strength of the god was converted to human purposes. Euripides interpreted it as a story of the effects of emotion, and Dionysus plays his part as the personification of emotion. It was not irreligious to present such a play at the god's own festival because it gave the god a reality which the intellectual Athenian could recognise and we can still appreciate today.