seen a thing, I do not know a thing, I have not heard a word from anyone. I cannot give information nor can I win the reward. Do I look like a man of brawn, a cattle rustler? That is not my line; I am interested rather in other things: sleep, milk from my mother's breast, baby blankets about my shoulders and warm baths. Do not let anyone find out how this dispute came about. It would indeed be a source of great amazement among the immortals that a newborn child should bring cattle of the field right through the front door of his house. What you say is pretty unlikely. I was born yesterday, my feet are tender and the ground is rough beneath them. If you wish, I shall swear a great oath by the head of my father; I pledge a vow that I am not guilty myself and that I have not seen anyone else who might be the one who stole your cows—whatever cows are, for I have only heard about them now for the first time."

Thus Hermes spoke, his eyes twinkling and his brows raised as he looked all about, and gave a long whistle to show how fruitless he considered Apollo's quest. But far-shooting Apollo laughed softly and spoke to him: "Oh splendid, you sly-hearted cheat; from the way that you talk I am sure that many a time you have broken into the better homes during the night and reduced more than one poor fellow to extremities by grabbing everything in the house without a sound. And you will distress many a shepherd in the mountain glens, when greedy after meat you come upon their herds of cattle and their woolly sheep. But come on now, if you do not want to sleep your last and longest sleep, get down out of your cradle, you comrade of black night. For this then you will have as your prerogative hereafter among the gods: you will be called forevermore the prince of thieves."

Thus Phoebus Apollo spoke and took hold of the child to carry him away. At that very moment the mighty slayer of Argus had an idea; as he was being lifted in Apollo's hands he let go an omen, a bold and servile messenger from his belly, a hearty blast, and right after it he gave a violent sneeze. And when Apollo heard, he dropped glorious Hermes out of his hands to the ground and sat in front of him; even though he was eager to be on his way he spoke with taunting words: "Rest assured, son of Zeus and Maia, in your swaddling clothes, with these omens I shall find my sturdy head of cattle by and by, and furthermore you will lead the way." Thus he spoke.

HERMES AND APOLLO BRING THEIR CASE BEFORE ZEUS

And Cyllenian Hermes gave a start and jumped up pushing the blanket away from both his ears with his hands, and clutching it around his shoulders he cried out: "Where are you taking me, O far-shooter, most vehement of all the gods? Is it because of the cows that you are so angry and assault me? Oh, oh, how I wish the whole breed of cattle might perish! For I did not steal your cows and I have not seen anyone else who has—whatever cows are, for I have only heard about them now for the first time. Let us have the case decided before Zeus, the son of Cronus."

Thus as they quarreled over each and every point, Hermes, the shepherd, and the splendid son of Leto remained divided. The latter spoke the truth and not without justice seized upon glorious Hermes because of the cattle; on the other hand, the Cyllenian wished to deceive the god of the silver bow by tricks

and by arguments. But when he in his ingenuity found his opponent equally resourceful, he hastened to walk over the sandy plain in front with the son of Zeus and Leto behind. Quickly these two very beautiful children of Zeus came to their father, the son of Cronus, on the top of fragrant Olympus. For there the scales of justice lay ready for them both.

A happy throng occupied snow-capped Olympus, for the deathless gods had assembled with the coming of golden-throned Dawn. Hermes and Apollo of the silver bow stood before the knees of Zeus, and he who thunders from on high spoke to his glorious son with the question: "Phoebus, where did you capture this delightful booty, a child newly born who has the appearance of a herald? This is a serious business that has come before the assembly of the gods."

Then lord Apollo, the archer, replied: "O father, you, who scoff at me for being the only one who is fond of booty, are now going to hear a tale that is irrefutable. After journeying for a long time in the mountains of Cyllene I found a child, this out-and-out robber here; as sharp a rogue I have not seen either among gods or mortals who cheat their fellows on earth. He stole my cows from the meadow in the evening and proceeded to drive them along the shore of the loud-sounding sea making directly for Pylos. The tracks were of two kinds, strange and marvelous, the work of a clever spirit. The black dust retained the prints of the cattle and showed them leading into the asphodel meadow. But this rogue I have here, an inexplicable wonder, did not cross the sandy ground on his feet or on his hands; but by some other means he smeared the marks of his amazing course as though someone had walked on oak saplings. As long as he followed the cattle across the sandy ground, the tracks stood out very clearly in the dust. But when he had covered the great stretch of sand, his own course and that of the cows quickly became imperceptible on the hard ground. But a mortal man noticed him driving the herd of cattle straight for Pylos. When he had quietly penned up the cows and slyly confused his homeward trail by zigzagging this way and that, he nestled down in his cradle, obscure as the black night, within the darkness of the gloomy cave, and not even the keen eye of an eagle would have spied him. He kept rubbing his eyes with his hands as he devised his subtle wiles, and he himself immediately maintained without a qualm: 'I have not seen a thing, I do not know a thing and I have not heard a word from anyone. I cannot give information nor can I win the reward.' " Thus Phoebus Apollo spoke and then sat down.

And Hermes in answer told his side of the story, directing his words pointedly to Zeus, the ruler of all the gods. "Father Zeus, I shall indeed tell you the truth. For I am honest and I do not know how to lie. He came to our house today as the sun was just rising, in search of his shambling cattle. He brought none of the blessed gods as witnesses or observers and with great violence ordered me to confess; he made many threats of hurling me down into wide Tartarus, since he is in the full bloom of his glorious prime, while I was born only yesterday (as he too well knows himself) and do not look at all like a cattle rustler or a man of brawn. Believe me (for you claim to be my own dear father too) that I did not drive his cows home nor even cross the threshold—so may I prosper, what I tell you is the truth. I deeply revere Helius and the other gods; I love you and I am in dread of this fellow here. You know yourself that I am not guilty—

I shall swear a great oath besides—no, by these beautifully ornate portals of the gods. Somehow, someday, I will pay him back, even though he is mighty, for his ruthless behavior. Be on the side of a defenseless baby." Thus the Cyllenian slayer of Argus spoke, blinking in innocence, and he held his baby blanket on his shoulder and would not let it go.

Zeus gave a great laugh as he saw the devious child knowingly and cleverly make his denials about the cattle. He ordered the two of them to act in accord and make a search; Hermes, in his role of guide, was to lead without any malicious intent and point out the spot where he had hidden away the mighty herd of cattle. The son of Cronus nodded his head and splendid Hermes obeyed, for the will of aegis-bearing Zeus easily persuaded him.

THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN HERMES AND APOLLO

The two very beautiful sons of Zeus hastened together to sandy Pylos, crossed the river Alpheus, and came to the lofty cave where the animals were sheltered in the nighttime. Then, while Hermes went into the rocky cavern and drove the mighty head of cattle out into the light, the son of Leto looked away and noticed the cowhides on the steep rock and immediately asked glorious Hermes: "O sly rogue, how were you, a newborn infant, able to skin two cows? I do indeed wonder at the strength that will be yours in the future; there is no need to wait for you to grow up, O Cyllenian, son of Maia."

Thus he spoke and fashioned with his hands strong bonds out of willow.[7] But they grew up in that very spot on the ground under their feet; and twisting and twining together, they readily covered over all the cattle of the field at the will of the trickster Hermes, while Apollo watched in wonder. Then the mighty slayer of Argus looked away to the ground, fire flashing from his eyes, in his desire to get out of his predicament. But it was very easy for him, just as he wished, to soften the far-shooting son of Leto, even though he was strong; he took up the lyre in his left hand and tried it by striking successive notes. The instrument resounded in startling fashion and Phoebus Apollo laughed with delight as the lovely strains of the heavenly music pierced his being, and sweet yearning took hold of his heart while he listened.

The son of Maia, growing bold as he played so beautifully, took his stand on the left side of Phoebus Apollo and began to sing a song—and lovely was the ensuing sound of his voice—fashioned on the theme of the immortal gods and the dark earth and how in the beginning they came into being and how each was allotted his due. Of the gods he honored first of all Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses, for she honored him, the son of Maia, as one of her own. The splendid son of Zeus paid tribute to each of the other immortal gods according to age and birth, mentioning all in the proper order, as he played the lyre on his arm.

But an irresistible desire took hold of Apollo, heart and soul, and he spoke up, interrupting with winged words: "Cattle slayer, contriver, busy worker, good companion at a feast, this skill of yours is worth fifty cows—I think that we soon will be peacefully reconciled. Come now, tell me, ingenious son of Maia, was this wonderful achievement yours from birth or did one of the gods or mortal humans give you this noble gift and teach you inspired song? For this newly

uttered sound I hear is wonderful, and I tell you that no one, either mortal or god who dwells on Olympus, has ever before known it, except you, you trickster, son of Zeus and Maia. What skill! What Muse's art! What salve for sorrow and despair! It gives the choice of three blessings together all at once: joy and love and sweet sleep. I follow the Olympian Muses who delight in dancing, the swelling beat of music, and the lovely tune of flutes, yet never have I been as thrilled by such clever delights as these at young men's feasts. I marvel, O son of Zeus, at your charming playing. Since you know such a glorious skill, even though you are little, sit down, my boy, and listen to what I intend. For you yourself and your mother will have renown among the immortal gods. And I shall vow this to you truly: By this spear of cornel wood, I shall make you a renowned and prosperous guide among the immortal gods, and I shall give you splendid gifts and to the end I shall not deceive you."

Hermes answered him with clever words: "Archer-god, your questions are well considered; I do not begrudge your taking up my art. You will know it this very day. I want us to be friends, alike in what we think and what we say. You know all things in your heart, for you, son of Zeus, sit in the first place among the immortals, brave and strong. Zeus in his wisdom loves you as he rightly should and has granted you splendid gifts. And they say that you have acquired from the mouth of Zeus honors and, O archer-god, from him too every kind of divine oracular power. I know then that you are very rich in these gifts and you have only to make the choice of whatever you desire to learn. So, since your heart is set on playing the lyre, sing and play and be merry; accept this gift from me; and you, my dear friend, bestow glory upon me. With this clear-voiced companion in your hands,[8] sing beautifully and well, knowing the art of proper presentation. Then with confidence take it to a luxurious feast and lovely dance and splendid revel, a thing of joy both night and day. Whoever makes demands of it after acquiring skill and knowledge is informed with sounds of every sort to delight the mind, for it is played by gentle familiarity and refuses to respond to toilsome drudgery. And whoever through lack of skill is from the first vehement in his demands is answered in return with wild and empty notes that clang upon the air. But you have only to make the choice of learning whatever you desire. To you I give this gift, splendid son of Zeus, and we both shall feed the cattle of the field on the pastures in the mountain and the plain where horses also graze. Even you, shrewd bargainer that you are, ought not to be violently angry."

With these words he held out the lyre, and Phoebus Apollo accepted it. And he entrusted to Hermes the shining whip that he had and put him in charge of cattle herds. The son of Maia accepted this with joy. The far-shooting lord Apollo, the glorious son of Leto, took the lyre in his left hand and tried it by striking successive notes. It sounded in startling fashion at his touch and the god sang a beautiful song in accompaniment.

Afterward the two of them turned the cows out into the sacred meadow and they, the very beautiful sons of Zeus, hastened back to snow-capped Olympus, all the while taking delight in the lyre. Zeus in his wisdom was pleased and united them both in friendship; Hermes has loved the son of Leto steadfastly, and he still does even now, as is evident from the pledges made when Hermes entrusted his lovely lyre to the archer-god and Apollo took it on his

arm and learned how to play. But Hermes himself fashioned another instrument and learned another art, producing the sound of pipes that are heard from afar.[9]

Then the son of Leto said to Hermes, "I fear, cunning guide, that you may steal my lyre and my curved bow; for you have from Zeus the prerogative of establishing the business of barter among people on the nourishing earth. Yet if, for my sake, you would deign to swear the great oath of the gods, either by a nod of your head or by the mighty waters of the river Styx, you would do everything that would satisfy my heart's desire." Then the son of Maia nodded and promised that he would never steal a thing from all that the far-shooter possessed and that he would never come near his mighty house. In turn Apollo, the son of Leto, nodded in loving friendship that no one else among mortals would be more dear, neither god nor mortal sprung from Zeus, and said, "I shall pledge that this bond between us will be trusted and honored both in my heart and that of all the gods. Besides, I will give you in addition a very beautiful golden staff of prosperity and wealth, three-branched and protective; it will keep you safe while, in the name of all the gods, you accomplish by word and by deed the good things which I declare that I learn from the divine voice of Zeus.

"As for this gift of prophecy which you mention, O best of Zeus' sons, it is not allowed by god that you or any other of the immortals learn what the mind of Zeus knows; but I have pledged, vowed, and sworn a mighty oath that no other one of the eternal gods (apart from me) should know the infinite wisdom of Zeus. You, my brother, with your rod of gold, do not bid me reveal any of the divine plans which far-seeing Zeus is devising. I shall hurt some and help others, as I cause great perplexity for the masses of unhappy human beings. The person will profit from my utterance who comes under the guidance of the flight and the cry of my birds of true omen. This is the one who will profit from my utterance and whom I will not deceive; but the one who trusts the birds of meaningless chatter will seek to find out my prophecies and to know more than the eternal gods, quite against my will. I declare that for this one the journey will be in vain but I would take his gifts anyway.

"I shall tell you another thing, son of illustrious Maia and aegis-bearing Zeus, O divine luck-bringer of the gods: indeed, certain holy sisters have been born, three virgins, glorying in their swift wings and having on their heads a sprinkling of white barley, and they live under a ridge of Mt. Parnassus;[10] set apart, they are masters of divination, an art I practiced while still a lad tending cattle and my father did not mind. Then from their home they fly from one place to another and feed from every honeycomb until it is empty. When they have eaten the yellow honey, they become inspired and willingly desire to speak the truth; but if they are deprived of the sweet food of the gods, they gather in a swarm and tell lies. These sisters I give to you; enquire of them carefully and take pleasure in your heart. If then you inform mortal persons, they will listen to what you say often, if they are fortunate. Have these things, son of Maia, and care for the horned oxen of the field, the toiling mules and the horses."

Thus he spoke, and from heaven father Zeus himself added a final pledge to his words: he ordered that glorious Hermes be the lord of all birds of good omen, fierce-eyed lions, boars with gleaming tusks, dogs, and every flock and herd that the wide earth nourishes; and that he alone would be the ordained

messenger to Hades, who, although he accepts no gifts, will grant this, by no means the least of honors.

So lord Apollo loved the son of Maia in an all-encompassing friendship; and Zeus, the son of Cronus, bestowed on him a beguiling charm. He associates with mortals and immortals. On occasion he gives profit or help to a few, but for the most part he continually deceives human beings by the horde in the blackness of night.

So hail to you, son of Zeus and Maia; yet I shall remember both you and another song too.

This artful hymn to Hermes has been much admired; the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) himself was one of its translators. The glib and playful treatment of both Hermes and Apollo is often labeled typically Greek.[11] It is typically Greek only if we mean by typical *one* of the many brilliant facets of Hellenic genius and a suggestion of the wide variety and scope in the conception of deity. Sincere profundity in religion and philosophy are as typically Greek as wit and facetious sophistication.

The Nature of Hermes and His Worship

Many of Hermes' characteristics and powers are evident from the poem. The Greek admiration for cleverness is readily apparent; it is this same admiration that condones the more dubious traits of the hero Odysseus. Anthropomorphism and liberalism are both pushed to their extreme in the depiction of the god Hermes as a thief and in the implication that thieves too must have their patron deity. Divine Hermes, like Prometheus, represents another (albeit extreme) example of the archetypal trickster. Yet in delightful, archetypal variations, the major quest of this charming young rogue is extremely dubious—a robbery—and, moreover, is accomplished when he is only a little baby!

The similarities between Hermes and Apollo are equally apparent. They share pastoral and musical characteristics and the origins of both were probably rooted in the same pastoral society of shepherds with their interest in flocks, music, and fertility. The Sicilian shepherd Daphnis was the son of Hermes and a nymph and became the inventor of pastoral music and a leading character in the pastoral poetry of Theocritus. Hermes and Apollo are alike in appearance, splendid examples of vigorous and handsome masculinity. But Hermes is the younger and more boyish, the idealization and patron of youths in their late teens; his statue belonged in every gymnasium. Hermes is perhaps best known as the divine messenger, often delivering the dictates of Zeus himself; as such he wears a traveler's hat (*petasus*) and sandals (*talaria*) and carries a herald's wand (*caduceus*), which sometimes bears two snakes entwined.[12] Wings may be depicted on his hat, his sandals, and even his wand. Thus he is also the god of travelers and roads. As the guide of souls (*psychopompos*) to the realm of Hades under the earth, he provides another important function, which reminds us once again of his fertility connections.

Mercury, by Giovanni Bologna (known as Giambologna, 1529–1608). Bronze, 1576; height 25 in. Giambologna has taken the classical attributes of Hermes—the petasus, caduceus, and winged sandals—and combined them with the nude figure of a running man to create a masterpiece of Late Renaissance Mannerism. *(Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. Courtesy of Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)*

Statues of Hermes, called *herms* (singular, *herm*), were common in the ancient world and symbols of fertility. They were intended to bring prosperity and luck. In the classical period, a herm might be found outside any house; and these herms could be taken very seriously. In appearance, they were square pillars equipped with male genitals; on top of each was the head of Hermes. These phallic statues probably marked areas regarded as sacred or designated, at least originally, the bounds of one's home or property.

To sum up, many of the functions of Hermes can be characterized by his role as a creator and crosser of boundaries and an intermediary between two

THE MUTILATION OF THE HERMS

Some ancient Greeks did believe in their gods. A historical incident concerning herms warns us to be wary of facile generalizations about Greek religious attitudes. In 415 B.C., on the eve of the great Athenian expedition against Sicily, the herms in the city of Athens were mutilated during the night. The religious scandal that ensued became a political football; the general Alcibiades was charged and the consequences were serious—quite a fuss over phallic statues of a god in a period fraught with sophistic skepticism, agnosticism, and atheism. Alcibiades was also charged with the parody and desecration of the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter in a private home; he called himself Hierophant and wore a robe like that of the high priest when he shows the holy secrets to the initiates (Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 22. 3; see also Thucydides 6. 27–29).

different worlds. His *herms* served to mark the boundaries between one's property and that of another and what has to be bridged. As a messenger of the gods, Hermes joins the human with the divine realm of the Olympians; as *psychopompos* he brings mortals across the barriers of the Underworld. As a god of young men, Hermes stands as an exemplar of the critical rite of passage between youth and

Hermes. Attic red-figure cup by the Euaion painter, ca. 460 B.C. Hermes stands with his attributes of petasus, caduceus, and winged boots. He wears the traveler's cloak and is bearded. Compare Giambologna's bronze, page 268. *(Paris, Louvre.)*

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS

Hermes came to be equated with the Egyptian god Thoth and thus began to acquire some of his attributes as a god of magic, knowledgeable in things mystic and occult. The epithet Trismegistus comes from the Egyptian and means thrice great (an appellation denoting a superlative, "great, great, great"). Hermes Trismegistus (supposedly the grandson of Hermes the god and not the god himself) is said to have composed many books on various aspects of Egyptian religion. The extant corpus of works attributed to him is referred to as the Hermetica (*Discourses of Hermes*) or Hermetic writings. Topics deal with philosophy, astrology, and alchemy and despite some Egyptian influence are essentially Greek in character. These texts belong to the Hellenistic period (in the fourth century) after the time of Plato, whose influence is evident.

adulthood. Finally, in relation to Hermes and the crossing of established boundaries, consider the story of Hermaphroditus, a figure who unites the attributes of both sexes but transgresses the limitations of gender.

Hermaphroditus and Salmacis

Among the adventures and affairs of Hermes, his union with Aphrodite is important because of their offspring, Hermaphroditus, whose story is told by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 4. 285–388):

Let me tell you how the fountain Salmacis got its bad reputation and why it weakens and softens limbs touched by its enervating waters.[13] This power of the fountain is very well known; the reason for it lies hidden. A son was born to Mercury and Venus, and Naiads brought him up in the cave of Mt. Ida. You could recognize his mother and father in his beauty and his name also came from them. As soon as he reached the age of fifteen, he left the hills of his homeland. When he had departed from Ida, the mountain that had nurtured him, he took delight in wandering over unknown lands and in seeing unknown rivers; his zeal made the hardships easy.

Then he came to the cities of the Lycians and their neighbors the Carians. There he saw a pool of water that was clear to the very bottom with no marsh reeds, barren sedge, or sharp-pointed rushes to be seen. The water was transparent in its clarity, and the edge of the pool was surrounded by fresh turf and grass that was always green.

A nymph lived here; but one who was not inclined to hunt and not in the habit of bending the bow or contending in the chase. She alone of the Naiads was unknown to swift Diana. It is told that her sisters often said to her: "Salmacis, take up a javelin or a lovely painted quiver; vary the routine of your idleness with the strenuous exercise of the hunt." She did not take up the javelin or the lovely painted quiver and did not vary the routine of her idleness with the stren-

uous exercise of the hunt. Instead she would only bathe her beautiful limbs in her fountain and often comb out her hair with a comb of boxwood and look into the water to see what suited her best; and then she would clothe her body in a transparent garment and recline on the soft leaves or the soft grass. Often she picked flowers.

Salmacis was picking flowers as it happened when she saw the boy Hermaphroditus. As soon as she saw him she desired to have him. Although she was anxious to hasten to him, she did not approach until she had composed herself, arranged her garment, and assumed a beautiful countenance. When she looked as attractive as she ought, she began to speak as follows: "Lovely boy, most worthy to be believed a god; if you are a god, you could be Cupid; if a mortal, blessed are your parents, and happy your brother and fortunate indeed your sister, if you have one, and the nurse who gave you her breast. But by far the most blessed of all is your betrothed, if she exists, whom you will consider worthy of marriage. If you have such a beloved, let my passion be satisfied in secret but if you do not, let me be the one and let us go together to our marriage bed." With this the nymph was silent.

A blush flared up in the boy's face, for he did not know what love was. But the flush of red was becoming; his was the color of apples hanging in a sunny orchard or of tinted marble or of the moon, a reddish glow suffusing its whiteness. . . . To the nymph, as she demanded without end at least the kisses of a sister and brought her hand to touch his ivory neck, he exclaimed: "Are you going to stop or am I to flee and leave you and your abode?" Salmacis was frightened and replied: "I give over to you free access to this place, my guest and friend." She turned her step away and pretended to depart, though still with a glance back. She concealed herself in a hidden grove of bushes, dropping on bended knees. But he moved on the deserted grass from one spot to another, confident that he was not being watched and gradually dipped his feet as far as the ankles in the playful waves.

Taken by the feel of the captivating waters, with no delay he threw off the soft clothes from his body. Then, to be sure, Salmacis was transfixed, enflamed with desire for his naked form. Her eyes too were ablaze just as if the radiant orb of the glowing sun were reflected in their mirror. With difficulty she endured the agony of waiting, with difficulty she held off the attainment of her joy. Now she longed to embrace him, now in her frenzy she could hardly contain herself. He swiftly struck his hollow palms against his sides and plunged into the pool, and as he moved one arm and then the other he glistened in the limpid water like an ivory statue or a lily that one has encased within clear glass. The nymph cried out: "I have won, he is mine!" And she flung off all her clothes and threw herself into the middle of the waves. She held him as he fought and snatched kisses as he struggled; she grasped him with her hands and touched his chest and now from this side and now from that enveloped the youth.

Finally she encircled him as he strove against her in his desire to escape, like a serpent which the king of birds has seized and carried aloft, and which as it hangs binds the eagle's head and feet and with its tail enfolds the spreading wings, even as ivy is wont to weave around tall trunks of trees or as the octopus grabs and holds fast its enemy in the deep with tentacles let loose on every side. Her-

maphroditus, the descendant of Atlas, endured and denied the nymph the joys that she had hoped for. She continued her efforts, and her whole body clung to him as though they were glued together. She cried: "You may fight, cruel villain, but you will not escape. May the gods so ordain and may we never be separated in future time, you from me or me from you." The gods accepted her prayer.

For their two bodies were joined together as they entwined, and in appearance they were made one, just as when one grafts branches on a tree and sees them unite in their growth and become mature together; thus, when their limbs united in their close embrace, they were no longer two but a single form that could not be called girl or boy and appeared at the same time neither one, but both. And so, when he saw that the limpid waters into which he had gone as a man had made him half a man and in them his limbs had become enfeebled, Hermaphroditus stretched out his hands and prayed in a voice that was no longer masculine: "Father and mother, grant this gift to your son who bears both your names. Let whatever man who enters this pool come out half a man and let him suddenly become soft when touched by its waves." Both parents were moved and granted the wish of their child, who was now of a double nature, and they tainted the waters with this foul power.

Statues of Hermaphroditus and hermaphrodites became common in the fourth century and in the following Hellenistic period, when Greek masters strove to vary their repertoires with fascinating and brilliantly executed studies in the realistic, erotic, and unusual.

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NOTES

1. The live tortoise was believed to be a taboo against harm and sorcery.
2. This is probably the well-known Pieria near Mt. Olympus in northern Thessaly. On his journey from Pieria, Hermes passes through Onchestus, situated between Thebes and Orchomenus, and brings the cattle to the river Alpheus, which flows near Olympia in the western Peloponnesus.

3. As he walks along, Hermes makes the cattle walk backward. Thus the hoofprints of the cattle will seem to be going toward the meadow and not out of it. Hermes' own tracks will be obscured by his sandals.
4. As we have seen, according to Hesiod (*Theogony* 387) Selene is the daughter of Hyperion and Theia; Pallas (*Theogony* 375, 377, 409) was the son of the Titan Crius; and his brother Perses was the father of Hecate. Megamedes is not found elsewhere.
5. The text is corrupt at this point; apparently Hermes used the laurel branch to rub against a piece of wood grasped in the palm of his hand, thus creating the friction to produce fire.
6. Hermes offers a portion to each of the twelve gods. According to sacrificial ritual, he (as one of them) must not eat his portion or those of the other gods but merely savor the aroma.
7. Presumably Apollo intends to bind either Hermes or the cows.
8. The lyre is mentioned as a beloved companion, that is, a girlfriend, and in the next few lines Hermes sustains the metaphor, which reads naturally in Greek but is difficult to render in English. Thus she will accompany Apollo to the feast and the dance and she will behave and respond as a beloved should, if only she is treated in the right way.
9. These are shepherds' pipes of reed, also called panpipes since they are often said to be the invention of the god Pan. Hermes sometimes is named as the father of Pan, whom he resembles in certain respects.
10. These are identified as the Thriae; their name means "pebbles"; thus they are the eponymous nymphs of divining pebbles, i.e., pebbles used for divination. They appear to be women with wings; probably their hair is literally powdered with white flour; some suggest that they are meant to be white-haired and old or that the image intended is that of bees covered with pollen.
11. In tone and mood this story is not unlike that of Aphrodite, Ares, and Hephaestus in Homer (*Odyssey* 8. 266–366, translated in Chapter 5, pp. 120–122).
12. The entwined snakes maybe be a symbol for Hermes as a fertility god. The staff of Hermes became confused with the staff of the physician Asclepius, for whom serpents represented new life, since they could slough their old skins.
13. In context, Alcithoë is telling the story to her sisters. The spring Salmacis was located at Halicarnassus.

CHAPTER

13

DIONYSUS, PAN, ECHO, AND NARCISSUS

THE BIRTH, CHILDHOOD, AND ORIGINS OF DIONYSUS

The traditional account of the birth of Dionysus (Bacchus)[1] runs as follows. Disguised as a mortal, Zeus was having an affair with Semele, a daughter of Cadmus. When Hera found out, her jealousy led her to get even. She appeared to Semele disguised as an old woman and convinced her rival that she should ask her lover to appear in the full magnificence of his divinity (see Color Plate 17). Semele first persuaded Zeus to swear that he would grant whatever she might ask of him, and then revealed her demand. Zeus was unwilling but was obliged to comply, and Semele was burned to a cinder by the splendor of his person and the fire of his lightning flash. The unborn child, being divine, was not destroyed in the conflagration; Zeus saved his son from the ashes of his mother and sewed him up in his own thigh, from which he was born again at the proper time.[2]

Various nurses are associated with the infant Dionysus, in particular certain nymphs of Nysa, a mountain of legendary fame located in various parts of the ancient world. Hermes, who had rescued Dionysus from Semele's ashes, carried the baby to the nymphs of Nysa. Ino, Semele's sister, is traditionally singled out as one who cared for the god when he was a baby.[3] When Dionysus reached manhood, he carried the message of his worship far and wide, bringing happiness and prosperity to those who would listen and madness and death to those who dared oppose. The tradition of his arrival in Greece makes clear that he is a latecomer to the Olympian pantheon. His origins lie in Thrace and ultimately Phrygia.[4]

THE *BACCHAE* OF EURIPIDES

Dionysus is basically a god of vegetation in general, and in particular of the vine, the grape, and the making and drinking of wine. But his person and his teaching eventually embrace very much more. The best source for the profound meaning of his worship and its most universal implications is found in Euripides' *Bacchae* (*The Bacchic Women*). Whatever one makes of the playwright's depiction

The Death of Semele. By Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640); oil on panel, 1636, $10^1/_2 \times 15^1/_2$ in. Both Semele and Zeus are shown under extreme emotion—she, as death approaches, and he, rising from her couch with pity and horror, knowing her coming agony. He holds the thunderbolt back in his left hand, and his eagle grips it in its beak. *(Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts.)*

of the rites in a literal sense, the sublimity and terror of the spiritual message are inescapable and timeless.

The play opens with Dionysus himself, who has come in anger to Thebes; his mother's integrity has been questioned by her own relatives, and the magnitude and power of his very godhead have been challenged and repudiated; the sisters of Semele claim (and Pentheus agrees) that she became pregnant because she slept with a mortal and that Cadmus was responsible for the story

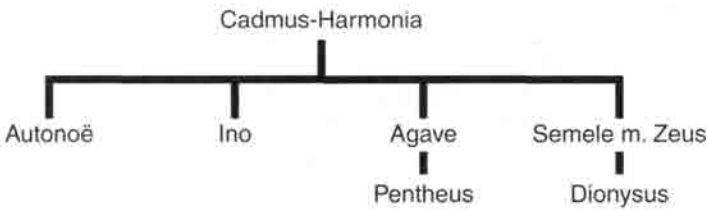

Figure 13.1. The Children of Cadmus. A fuller genealogy for the House of Cadmus is given in Figure 17.3.

The Indian Triumph of Dionysus. Roman marble sarcophagus, mid-second century A.D.; width (without lid) 92 in., height 39 in., lid, width 93 in., height 12½ in. Dionysus rides on a chariot drawn by panthers. He is preceded by satyrs, maenads, sileni, and animals, among which elephants and lions are prominent. He has come from India, bringing happiness and fertility to the Greek world. On the lid are reliefs of the death of Semele, the birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus, and his nurture by the nymphs of Nysa. Hermes appears in each of the three scenes on the lid—rescuing the infant from the dying Semele in the left panel; taking him to the nymphs in the center panel after his birth from the thigh of Zeus, and pointing toward the scene of his nurture by the nymphs in the right panel. The sarcophagus is one of seven found in the tomb of the family of the Calpurnii Pisones in Rome. *(Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.)*

that Zeus was the father of her child; as a result Zeus killed her with a blast of lightning (1–63):

DIONYSUS: I, Dionysus, the son of Zeus, have come to this land of the Thebans; my mother Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, gave birth to me, delivered by a fiery blast of lightning. I am here by the stream of Dirce and the waters of the Ismenus, not as a god but in disguise as a man. I see here near the palace the shrine that commemorates my mother, who was struck dead by the lightning blast, and the ruins of her home, smoldering yet from the flame of Zeus' fire that still lives—the everlasting evidence of Hera's outrage against my mother. I am pleased with Cadmus for setting this area off as a holy sanctuary dedicated to his daughter, and I have enclosed it round about with the fresh greenery of the clustering vine.

I left the fertile plains of gold in Lydia and Phrygia and made my way across the sunny plateaus of Persia, the walled towns of Bactria, the grim land of the

Medes, rich Arabia, and the entire coast of Asia Minor, where Hellenes and non-Hellenes live together in teeming cities with beautiful towers. After having led my Bacchic dance and established my mysteries in these places, I have come to this city of the Hellenes first.

I have raised the Bacchic cry and clothed my followers in the fawnskin and put into their hands the thyrsus—my ivy-covered shaft—here in Thebes first of all Greece, because my mother's sisters claim (as least of all they should) that I, Dionysus, was not begotten of Zeus but that Semele became pregnant by some mortal man and through the clever instigations of Cadmus laid the blame on Zeus; they gloatingly proclaim that Zeus because of her deception struck her dead.

And so these same sisters I have stung with madness, driving them from their homes, and they inhabit Mt. Cithaeron, bereft of sense; I have compelled them to take up the symbols of my rituals, and all the women of Thebes—the entire female population—I have driven from their homes in frenzy. Together with the daughters of Cadmus they sit out in the open air on rocks under the evergreens. For although it does not wish to, this city must learn full well that it is still not completely schooled in my Bacchic mysteries and I must defend the reputation of my mother Semele by showing myself to mortals as the god whom she bore to Zeus.

Cadmus has handed over the prerogatives of his royal power to his daughter's son, Pentheus, who fights against my godhead, thrusting me aside in sacrifices and never mentioning my name in prayers. Therefore I shall show myself as a god to him and all the Thebans. And when I have settled matters here, I shall move on to another place and reveal myself. If the city of Thebes in anger tries by force to drive the Bacchae down from the mountains, I shall join them in their madness as their war commander. This then is why I have assumed a mortal form and changed myself into the likeness of a man.

O you women whom I have taken as companions of my journey from foreign lands, leaving the Lydian mountain Tmolus far behind, come raise the tambourines, invented by the great mother Rhea, and by me, and native to the land of Phrygia. Come and surround the royal palace of Pentheus and beat out your din so that the city of Cadmus may see. I will go to my Bacchae on the slopes of Cithaeron, where they are, and join with them in their dances.

The chorus of women that follows reveals the exultant spirit and mystic aura surrounding the celebration of their god's mysteries (64–167):

CHORUS: Leaving Asia and holy Mt. Tmolus, we run in sweet pain and lovely weariness with ecstatic Bacchic cries in the wake of the roaring god Dionysus. Let everyone, indoors or out, keep their respectful distance and hold their tongue in sacred silence as we sing the appointed hymn to Bacchus.

Happy is the one who, blessed with the knowledge of the divine mysteries, leads a life of ritual purity and joins the holy group of revelers, heart and soul, as they honor their god Bacchus in the mountains with holy ceremonies of purification. He participates in mysteries ordained by the great mother, Cybele herself, as he follows his god, Dionysus, brandishing a thyrsus.

Run, run, Bacchae, bringing the roaring god, Dionysus, son of a god, out of the Phrygian mountains to the spacious streets of Hellas.

Once when his mother carried him in her womb, the lightning bolt flew from the hand of Zeus and she brought the child forth prematurely with the pains of a labor forced on her too soon, and she gave up her life in the fiery blast. Immediately Zeus, the son of Cronus, took up the child and enclosed him in the secret recess of his thigh with fastenings of gold, and hid him from Hera thus in a second womb. When the Fates had so decreed, Zeus bore the bull-horned god and wreathed his head with a crown of serpents, and so the Maenads hunt and catch wild snakes and twine them in their hair.

O Thebes, crown yourself with ivy, burst forth luxuriant in verdant leaves and lovely berries; join the Bacchic frenzy with branches torn from trees of oak or fir and consecrate your cloak of dappled fawnskin with white tufts of purest wool. Be reverent with the violent powers of the thyrsus. Straightway the whole land will dance its way (whoever leads the sacred group represents the roaring god himself) to the mountain, to the mountain where the crowd of women waits, driven from their labors at the loom by the maddening sting of Dionysus.

O secret chamber on Crete, holy cavern where Zeus was born, attended by the Curetes![5] Here the Corybantes with their three-crested helmets invented this drum of hide stretched tight for us and their ecstatic revels mingled its tense beat with the sweet alluring breath of the Phrygian flutes, and they put it into the hand of mother Rhea, so that she might beat an accompaniment to the cries of her Bacchic women. The satyrs in their frenzy took up the drum from the mother-goddess and added it to the music of their dances during the festivities in which Dionysus delights.

How sweet it is in the mountains when, out of the rushing throng, the priest of the roaring god falls to the ground in his quest for blood and with a joyful cry devours the raw flesh of the slaughtered goat. The plain flows with milk and wine and the nectar of bees; but the Bacchic celebrant runs on, brandishing his pine torch, and the flame streams behind with smoke as sweet as Syrian frankincense. He urges on the wandering band with shouts and renews their frenzied dancing, as his delicate locks toss in the breeze.

Amid the frantic shouts is heard his thunderous cry: "Run, run, Bacchae, you the pride of Tmolus with its streams of gold. Celebrate the god Dionysus on your thundering drums, honoring this deity of joy with Phrygian cries and shouts of ecstasy, while the melodious and holy flute sounds its sacred accompaniment as you throng, to the mountain, to the mountain."

Every Bacchanal runs and leaps in joy, just like a foal that frisks beside her mother in the pasture.

The scene that follows (215–313) is fraught with tragic humor and bitter irony. Cadmus (retired king) and Tiresias (priest of the traditional religion) welcome the new god with motives that are startling in their blatant pragmatism. In their joyous rejuvenation, these two old men, experienced realists, present just the right foil for the introduction of the doomed Pentheus, who, in his mortal blindness, dares to challenge the god, his cousin, Dionysus.

TIRESIAS: Who attends at the gate? Summon Cadmus from the house, the son of Agenor, who came from Sidonia and fortified the city of the Thebans. Let someone go and announce that Tiresias wants to see him. He already knows for what reason I have come. I made an agreement with him, even though I am old and he is even older, to make myself a thyrsus, wear a fawnskin, and crown my head with shoots of ivy.

CADMUS: My dearest friend, I knew your voice from inside the palace, and recognized the wise words of a wise man. I have come ready with the paraphernalia of the god. For since Dionysus, who has revealed himself to mortals as a god, is the son of my daughter, I must do everything in my power to magnify his greatness. Where should we go to join the others in the dance, shaking our gray heads in ecstasy? Tell me, an old man, Tiresias, for you are old too and wise. I shall never grow tired by night or by day as I strike the ground with my thyrsus. It will be a sweet pleasure to forget that we are old.

TIRESIAS: You experience the same sensations as I do, for I feel young again and I shall attempt the dance.

CADMUS: Shall we not proceed to the mountain by chariot?

TIRESIAS: No, the god would not have as appropriate an honor.

CADMUS: I will lead the way for you, two old men together.

TIRESIAS: The god will lead the two of us there without any difficulty.

CADMUS: Are we to be the only men of the city to dance in honor of Bacchus?

TIRESIAS: We are the only ones who think the way one should; the others are wrong and perverse.

CADMUS: We delay too long; give me your hand.

TIRESIAS: Here it is, take hold and join our hands together.

CADMUS: Being a mere mortal, I am not scornful of the gods.

TIRESIAS: About the gods we have no new wise speculations. The ancestral beliefs that we hold are as old as time, and they cannot be destroyed by any argument or clever subtlety invented by profound minds. How could I help being ashamed, one will ask, as I am about to join in the dance, at my age, with an ivy wreath on my head? The god does not discriminate whether young or old must dance in his honor, but he desires to be esteemed by all alike and wishes his glory to be magnified, making no distinctions whatsoever.

CADMUS: Since you are blind, Tiresias, I shall be a prophet for you, and tell you what I see. Pentheus, the son of Echion, to whom I have given my royal power in Thebes, comes in haste to this palace. How excited he is; what news has he to tell us?

PENTHEUS: Although I happened to have been away from Thebes, I have heard of the new evils that beset the city; the women have abandoned our homes on the pretense of Bacchic rites, and gad about on the dark mountainside honoring by their dances the new god, Dionysus, whoever he is. Bowls full of wine stand in the midst of each group, and they sneak away one by one to solitary places where they satisfy the lust of males. Their pretext is that they are Maenad priestesses, but they put Aphrodite ahead of Bacchus. All those I have caught are kept safe with their hands tied by guards in the state prison. The others, who still roam on the mountain, I shall hunt out, including my own mother, Agave,

and her sisters, Ino and Autonoë, the mother of Actaeon. And when I have bound them fast in iron chains, I shall soon put an end to this evil Bacchism.

They say too that a stranger has come here from Lydia, some wizard and sorcerer, with scented hair and golden curls, who has the wine-dark charms of Aphrodite in his eyes. He spends both night and day in the company of young girls, enticing them with his Bacchic mysteries. If I catch him here in my palace, I'll cut off his head and put a stop to his thyrsus-pounding and head-tossing. That fellow is the one who claims that Dionysus is a god, who was once sewn up in the thigh of Zeus, when he was in fact destroyed by the fiery blast of lightning along with his mother, because she lied and said that Zeus had been her husband. Whoever this stranger may be, does he not deserve to hang for such hubris?

But here is another miracle—I see the prophet Tiresias in a dappled fawn-skin, and my mother's father, a very funny sight, playing the Bacchant with a wand of fennel reed. I refuse, sir, to stand by and see you behave so senselessly in your old age. You are my grandfather; won't you toss away your garland of ivy and rid your hand of the thyrsus?

You persuaded him, Tiresias. Why? By introducing this new divinity among people do you hope that he will afford you an additional source of income from your omens and your sacrifices? If it were not for your gray hairs, you would not escape being bound and imprisoned along with the Bacchae for initiating evil rites. As far as women are concerned, I maintain that whenever the gleam of wine is in their feasts, there can be nothing further that is wholesome in their ceremonies.

CHORUS: What sacrilege, sir! Do you not have respect for the gods and Cadmus, who sowed the seeds from which the earthborn men arose; are you the son of Echion, who was one of them, bringing shame on your own family?

TIRESIAS: Whenever a wise man takes a good theme for his argument, it is no great task to speak well. You seem to be a man of intelligence from the glibness of your tongue, but there is no good sense in your words. A headstrong man who is powerful and eloquent proves to be a bad citizen because he is wanting in intelligence. This new divinity whom you laugh at—I could not begin to tell you how great he will become throughout Hellas. . . .[6]

Pentheus, believe me; do not be overly confident that force is all-powerful in human affairs, and do not think that you are wise when the attitude that you hold is sick. Receive the god into the city, pour him libations, crown your head, and celebrate his worship.

Tiresias goes on to argue that self-control is a question of one's own nature and character. Dionysus is not immoral; he cannot corrupt a chaste woman or restrain a promiscuous one. Besides, the god (just like Pentheus himself) is happy to receive the homage of his people.

Cadmus reinforces Tiresias' appeal for reason and control. Pentheus must be sick to defy the god; and even if he were right and Dionysus were an impostor, he should be willing to compromise and lie in order to save the honor of Semele and the whole family. But Pentheus is young and adamant; he accuses

his peers of folly and madness and directs one of his henchmen to smash Tiresias' place of augury (after all, has he not himself desecrated his own priestly office?) and to hunt down the effeminate foreigner who has corrupted the women of Thebes.

A guard brings in the exotic stranger who has come with his new religion (in reality he is Dionysus himself), and Euripides presents the first of three interviews between the god and the man which turn upon the ironic reversal of their positions. Pentheus, believing himself triumphant, is gradually but inevitably caught in the net prepared for him by Dionysus. The calm and sure strength of the god plays beautifully upon the neurotic impulsiveness of the mortal (433–518):

GUARD: Pentheus, here we are, having hunted the quarry you sent us after, and our efforts have not been unsuccessful. But we found this wild beast tame—he did not attempt to flee, but gave me his hands willingly; he did not even turn pale, but kept the flush of wine in his cheeks. With a smile he bade me tie him up and lead him away and waited for me, thus making my task easy. I was taken aback and said: "O stranger, I do not arrest you of my own free will but at the orders of Pentheus who has sent me."

About the Bacchae whom you seized and bound and imprisoned—they are freed and have gone and dance about the glens calling on their god, Bacchus. The bonds fell from their feet of their own accord, and the locks on the door gave way untouched by mortal hands. This man who has come to our city of Thebes is full of many miraculous wonders—and what else will happen is your concern, not mine.

PENTHEUS: Untie his hands. Now that he is in my trap, he is not nimble enough to escape me. Well, stranger, you are not unattractive physically—at least to women—and, after all, your purpose in Thebes is to lure them. Your flowing locks that ripple down your cheeks so seductively prove that you are no wrestler. Your fair complexion too is cultivated by avoiding the rays of the sun and by keeping in the shade so that you may ensnare Aphrodite with your beauty. But first tell me where you come from.

DIONYSUS: I can answer your question easily and simply. I am sure you have heard of the mountain of Tmolus with its flowers.

PENTHEUS: I have; its range encircles the city of Sardis.

DIONYSUS: I am from there; Lydia is my fatherland.

PENTHEUS: How is it that you bring these mysteries of yours to Hellas?

DIONYSUS: Dionysus, the son of Zeus, has directed me.

PENTHEUS: Is there a Zeus in Lydia who begets new gods?

DIONYSUS: No, he is the same Zeus who wedded Semele here in Thebes.

PENTHEUS: Did he bend you to his service, an apparition in the night, or did you really see him with your own eyes?

DIONYSUS: We saw each other face to face and he gave me his secrets.

PENTHEUS: What is the nature of these secrets of yours?

DIONYSUS: It is not lawful for the uninitiated to know them.

PENTHEUS: What advantage is there for those who do participate?

DIONYSUS: It is not right for you to learn this, but the knowledge is worth much.
PENTHEUS: Your answer is clever, designed to make me want to hear more.
DIONYSUS: An impious man is abhorred by the god and his mysteries.
PENTHEUS: You say that you saw the god clearly; well then, what did he look like?
DIONYSUS: He looked as he wished; I had no control over his appearance.
PENTHEUS: Once again you have sidetracked me cleverly with an answer that says nothing.
DIONYSUS: The words of the wise seem foolish to the ignorant.
PENTHEUS: Have you come here first of all to introduce your god?
DIONYSUS: Every foreigner already dances his rituals.
PENTHEUS: Yes, of course, for they are far inferior to Hellenes.
DIONYSUS: Customs differ, but in these rituals the foreigners are superior.
PENTHEUS: Do you perform your holy rites by night or by day?
DIONYSUS: By night for the most part; darkness adds to the solemnity.
PENTHEUS: For women it is treacherous and corrupt.
DIONYSUS: One may find, if one looks for it, shameful behavior by daylight too.
PENTHEUS: You must be punished for your evil sophistries.
DIONYSUS: And you for your ignorance and blasphemy against the god.
PENTHEUS: How bold our Bacchant is and how facile his retorts.
DIONYSUS: What punishment must I suffer? What terrible thing will you do to me?
PENTHEUS: First I shall cut your pretty locks.
DIONYSUS: My hair is sacred; it belongs to the god.
PENTHEUS: Hand over your thyrsus then.
DIONYSUS: Take it away from me yourself. I carry it for Dionysus; it really belongs to him.
PENTHEUS: I shall close you up in a prison.
DIONYSUS: The god himself will free me, whenever I wish.
PENTHEUS: As you call on him when you take your stand amid your Bacchic women, I suppose.
DIONYSUS: Even now he is near at hand and sees what I endure.
PENTHEUS: Where is he? My eyes cannot see him.
DIONYSUS: Here with me. But you in your blasphemy cannot perceive him for yourself.
PENTHEUS: Guards, seize him; he is making a fool of me and of all Thebes.
DIONYSUS: I tell you not to bind me—I am the sane one, not you.
PENTHEUS: My orders are to bind you, and I have the upper hand.
DIONYSUS: You do not know what life you live, what you do, or who you are.
PENTHEUS: I am Pentheus, the son of Agave; my father is Echion.
DIONYSUS: Your name, Pentheus, which means sorrow, is appropriate for the doom that will be yours.
PENTHEUS: Get out of here—Guards, imprison him in the neighboring stables where he may find his secret darkness—do your mystic dances there. And the women you have brought with you as accomplices in your evil I shall either keep as slaves myself to work the loom or sell them to others—this will stop their hands from beating out their din on tambourines.

DIONYSUS: I will go, since what is not destined to be, I am not destined to suffer. But Dionysus, who you say does not exist, will exact vengeance for your insolence. For as you do me wrong and imprison me, you do the same to him.

Pentheus confidently follows Dionysus into the prison. But the god miraculously frees himself amid fire, earthquake, and the destruction of the entire palace. He explains to the chorus how he has escaped from Pentheus' evil clutches, maintaining throughout the fiction of his role as the god's disciple. Quite typically Dionysus is associated with or transformed into an animal (616–636):

DIONYSUS: I have made a fool of Pentheus—he thought that he was tying me up, yet he did not so much as lay a finger on me but fed on empty hopes. In the chamber where he led me a prisoner, he found a bull. It was the knees and hoofs of this animal that he tried to bind, fuming and raging, biting his lips, and dripping with sweat, while I sat calmly close by his side and watched. In this crisis Bacchus arrived and made the building shake and raised a flame up from the tomb of his mother. When Pentheus saw it, he thought that the palace was on fire and rushed this way and that, calling on the servants to bring water. The entire household joined in the work but their toil was for nothing. Pentheus, thinking that I had got away, abandoned his efforts and seized a dark sword and rushed inside the palace in pursuit.

Then Dionysus created an illusion in the courtyard (I am telling you what I believe happened) and Pentheus made a dash for it, jabbing and stabbing at the sunny air, imagining he was butchering me. Bacchus had even greater humiliation for him than this. He razed the whole palace to the ground; all lies shattered for him as he beholds the most bitter results of my imprisonment. Worn out and exhausted, he has dropped his sword; a mere mortal, he dared to go to battle against a god.

As Dionysus coolly finishes his account, Pentheus appears, bewildered, angry, and, despite his experience, still relentlessly aggressive. A brief exchange between the two is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger, who reports what he and others have seen of the Bacchic women and their worship in the mountains; at first a calm, peaceful scene full of miracles, then madness and bloodshed when the interlopers are detected—a grim foreshadowing of what is in store for Pentheus (678–774):

MESSENGER: I had just reached the hill country with my pasturing herds by the time that the sun had risen and was warming the earth with its rays. And I saw the women, who had arranged themselves in three groups; Autonoë led one, your mother, Agave, the second, and Ino, the third. All were stretched out asleep, some reclined on beds of fir, others rested their heads on oak leaves, having flung themselves down at random but with modesty; and they were not, as you said they would be, intoxicated with wine and the music of the flute, bent on satisfying their lust in solitary places.

When your mother heard the sounds of our horned cattle, she stood up in the midst of the Bacchae, and cried out to rouse them from their sleep, and they

threw off the heavy slumber from their eyes and jumped up—amazing in their orderliness, young and old (many still unwed). The first thing they did was to loosen their hair to their shoulders and tie up their fawnskins if any of the fastenings had come loose; and they made a belt for the dappled fur with snakes that licked their cheeks. Some held in their arms the young of the wild, a gazelle or wolf cubs, and those who had left their newborn babes at home gave them white milk from breasts that were still full.

And they put on crowns of ivy, oak, and flowering vine. One took her thyrsus and struck it against a rock, and from it a gush of dewy water welled up; another hit the solid earth with her wand, and from the spot the god sent forth a spring of wine. Those who thirsted for milk scraped the earth with their fingertips and produced white streams; and from each thyrsus, wreathed in ivy, dripped sweet drops of honey. And so, if you had been there to see these things, you would have invoked with prayers the god whom you now blame.

We herdsmen and shepherds gathered together to discuss and argue about the strange and wondrous actions. One of the group, who always goes into town and has a way with words, spoke to us all: "You who inhabit the sacred mountain heights, how would you like to hunt down Agave, the mother of Pentheus, in her revels and do the king a favor?" What he said seemed good to us, so we hid ourselves in a leafy thicket and waited in ambush. At the appointed time they began their Bacchic revels, shaking their thyrsus and calling on the god, the son of Zeus, with one voice "Iacchus, Bromius!" The whole mountain and animals joined in their ecstasy and there was nothing that remained unmoved by the dance.

It happened that Agave, as she leaped and ran, came close to me, and I leaped out of the ambush where I had hidden myself, bent on seizing her. But she cried aloud: "O my swift-running hounds, we are being hunted by these men; so follow me, follow, armed with your thyrsus in your hands."

And so we fled and escaped being torn into pieces by the Bacchae, but with their bare hands they attacked our cattle grazing on the grass. You could see one of them wrenching apart a bellowing cow, its udders full. Others ripped apart the calves, and you could see ribs and cloven hoofs being scattered high and low, and from the pines the pieces hung dripping with blood. Bulls, arrogant before as they raged with their horns, were laid low, dragged bodily to the ground by the countless hands of girls; and their flesh was stripped from their bodies more quickly than you, O king, could wink your eyes.

Like birds propelled aloft by the speed of their course, the Bacchae ranged across the stretch of plain along the stream of the Asopus, which affords the Thebans a rich harvest. Like a hostile army they descended upon the villages of Hysiae and Erythrae, nestled low on the slopes of Cithaeron, and devastated them. They snatched children from their homes, and all the booty (including bronze and iron) that they carried off on their shoulders did not fall onto the dark earth, although it was not fastened. They bore fire on their hair and it did not burn. The villagers, enraged by the plundering of the Bacchae, rushed to arms.

Then, my king, there was a terrifying sight to behold. The weapons that the villagers threw did not draw any blood, but when the Bacchae hurled the thyr-

sus from their hands they inflicted wounds on many. Women routed men—a feat not to be accomplished without the power of some god. Back they came to where they sallied forth, to the very streams which the god made gush for them. They washed their hands of blood, and snakes licked the stains from their cheeks.

And so, my lord, receive into the city this god, whoever he is. He is great in many respects but especially in his reputed gift to mortals, about which I have heard, the grape, our remedy for pain and sorrow. With no more wine, there could be no more love and no other pleasure for humankind besides.

Pentheus refuses to listen to the pleas of the messenger. He is determined to rush to arms for an assault on the Bacchae. But the stranger, Dionysus, finds a way to restrain him by appealing to Pentheus' basic nature and psychology—in general, the complex neurosis that stems from his repressions, in particular, his prurient preoccupation with sex and his desire to see the orgies that he insists are taking place (811–861):

DIONYSUS: Would you like to see the women banded together in the mountains?
PENTHEUS: Yes, indeed. I would give a ton of gold for that.
DIONYSUS: Why are you driven by such a great desire to see them?
PENTHEUS: Actually, it would pain me to see them drunk.
DIONYSUS: Nevertheless you would be pleased to see what is painful to you?
PENTHEUS: To be sure, if I watched in silence crouched beneath the firs.
DIONYSUS: But they will track you down, even if you go in secret.
PENTHEUS: Then I shall go openly; what you say is right.
DIONYSUS: You will undergo the journey then? Let me lead you.
PENTHEUS: Come, as quickly as possible; I begrudge you this delay.
DIONYSUS: Then dress up in a fine linen robe.
PENTHEUS: What is this? Am I to change from a man to a woman?
DIONYSUS: If you are seen there as a man, they will kill you.
PENTHEUS: Again, what you say is right. You are like some sage of long ago.
DIONYSUS: Dionysus gives me this inspiration.
PENTHEUS: In the garb of a woman? But shame holds me back!
DIONYSUS: You are no longer interested in watching the Maenads?
PENTHEUS: What dress did you say that you would put on me?
DIONYSUS: I shall set on your head a long flowing wig.
PENTHEUS: And what is the next feature of my outfit?
DIONYSUS: A robe that falls to your feet and a band around your head.
PENTHEUS: What else will you give me?
DIONYSUS: A thyrsus in your hand and a dappled fawnskin cloak.
PENTHEUS: I cannot bring myself to put on the costume of a woman.
DIONYSUS: But if you attack the Bacchae in battle, you will shed blood.
PENTHEUS: This is true; I must first go as a spy.
DIONYSUS: To be sure, it is wiser than to hunt out evil by evil.
PENTHEUS: How shall I get out of the city without being seen?
DIONYSUS: We shall take a deserted route, and I shall lead the way.
PENTHEUS: Anything, rather than have the Bacchae laugh at me. I shall go into the house and make preparations that are for the best.

DIONYSUS: So be it, and I am at your side ready for everything.
PENTHEUS: I am going inside; I shall either proceed with arms or follow your instructions.
DIONYSUS: Women, this man is ready to be caught in the net. He will go to the Bacchae, and he will pay the penalty with his life. Dionysus, now do your work; for you are not far away. We shall exact our retribution. First we shall inflict upon him delirious madness and drive him out of his wits; in his right mind, he would not want to dress up in the costume of a woman; but once driven from reason he will put it on. My desire is to make him the laughingstock of the Thebans as they see him led in a woman's garb through the city in return for the terrible threats that he uttered before. I go now to deck out Pentheus in the dress with which he will go down to the realm of Hades, slaughtered by the hands of his mother. He will know Dionysus as the son of Zeus and a deity of his own right, among humankind most dread and most gentle.

The dressing of Pentheus in the garb of the Bacchae suggests the ceremonial decking out of the sacrificial victim. By the ritual of donning his costume, Pentheus falls under the spell and the power of the god, eventually to be offered up to him. The chorus sings of the joys of their worship and the justice of their triumph over impiety; and at the end of their song, Dionysus exerts final and complete mastery over Pentheus, who is delirious (912–970):

DIONYSUS: Pentheus, I call on you, the one who desires to see what he should not see and hastens upon what he should not do. Come forward out of the house, let me behold you dressed in the garb of a woman, a Bacchic Maenad, about to go as a spy on your mother and her group.
PENTHEUS: I think that I see two suns, and the image of Thebes with its seven gates appears double. You look like a bull as you lead me forward, with horns growing out of your head. Were you then an animal? Now, indeed, you have become a bull.
DIONYSUS: The god walks with us; he is on our side although he was not kindly disposed before. Now you see what you should see.
PENTHEUS: Tell me how I look. Do I not have the bearing of Ino or my mother, Agave?
DIONYSUS: Looking at you I seem to see those very two. But this lock here that I had fixed under your hairband has fallen out of place.
PENTHEUS: I shook it loose indoors while I was tossing my head back and forth like a Bacchic reveler.
DIONYSUS: Well we, whose concern is to serve you, shall put it back in place. Bend your head.
PENTHEUS: Fine, you deck me out properly, for I am now dedicated to you.
DIONYSUS: Your belt is loose and the folds of your dress do not hang straight to your ankles.
PENTHEUS: They are not straight at the right foot but here on the left the dress hangs well at the heel.
DIONYSUS: You will, I am sure, consider me the best of your friends, when contrary to your expectation you witness the temperance of the Bacchae.

PENTHEUS: Shall I be more like one of the Bacchae if I hold my thyrsus in my right or my left hand?
DIONYSUS: You should hold it in your right hand, and raise it and your right foot at the same time.
PENTHEUS: Will I be able to lift up on my shoulders Mt. Cithaeron with its glens full of Bacchae?
DIONYSUS: You will, if you wish; before your mind was not sound, but now it is as it ought to be.
PENTHEUS: Let us take crowbars, or shall I thrust my shoulder or my arm under the peaks and crush them with my hands?
DIONYSUS: Do not destroy the haunts of the nymphs and the places where Pan does his piping.
PENTHEUS: Your words are right; women must not be overcome by force; I will hide myself among the firs.
DIONYSUS: You will find the hiding place that you should, coming upon the Maenads as a crafty spy.
PENTHEUS: Indeed I can see them now in the bushes like birds held fast in the enticing coils of love.
DIONYSUS: Yes, of course, you go on a mission to guard against this very thing. Maybe you will catch them, if you yourself are not caught first.
PENTHEUS: Take me through the middle of Thebes, for I am the only man among them who dares this deed.
DIONYSUS: You alone bear the burden of toil for this city—you alone. And so the struggle which must be awaits you. Follow me, I shall lead you there in safety, but another will lead you back.
PENTHEUS: My mother.
DIONYSUS: A spectacle for all.
PENTHEUS: It is for this I am going.
DIONYSUS: You will be carried home.
PENTHEUS: What luxury you are suggesting.
DIONYSUS: In the hands of your mother.
PENTHEUS: You insist upon pampering me.
DIONYSUS: Pampering of sorts.
PENTHEUS: Worthy of such rewards, I follow you.

Pentheus imagines he will return in a splendid carriage, with his mother by his side. This terrifying scene is built on more than this one irony and is laden with a multiplicity of ambiguities. Pentheus the transvestite imagines, like a child, loving care at the hands of his mother. How bitter now appear the earlier taunts of Pentheus against Cadmus and Tiresias! In his delirium, does Pentheus really see the god in his true and basic character—a beast? Or does his vision spring from his own warped interpretation of the bestial nature of the worship?

A messenger arrives to tell of Pentheus' horrifying death (1043–1152):

MESSENGER: When we had left the town of Thebes behind and crossed the stream of the Asopus, we made our way up the slopes of Cithaeron, Pentheus and I (for I followed with my master) and the stranger who led us to the scene.

First we took a position in a grassy glen, with silent footsteps and not a word, so that we might see and not be seen. It was a valley surrounded by cliffs, watered by streams, and shaded by pines; here Maenads sat, their hands occupied in their joyous tasks. Some were restoring a crown of ivy on a thyrsus that had lost its foliage; others, happy as fillies let loose from their painted yokes, were singing Bacchic hymns in answering refrains.

But poor Pentheus, who could not see this crowd of women, said: "My friend, from where I stand I am too far away to see these counterfeit Maenads clearly, but if I climbed up a towering pine on the hillside, I could properly behold the orgies of the Maenads." Then and there I saw the stranger do wondrous things. He took hold of the very top branch of a pine that reached up to the sky and pulled it down, down, down to the black earth. And it was bent like a bow or the curving line of the circle of a wheel. Thus the stranger grabbed the mountain pine with his hands and bent it to the ground, a feat no mortal could accomplish.

He sat Pentheus on the topmost branches and let the tree go, sliding it through his hands until it was upright again, slowly and carefully so that he might not dislodge him. It towered straight to towering heaven, with our king perched on top. He could be seen more clearly by the Maenads than he could see them. He was just becoming visible, seated aloft, when the stranger was no longer to be seen, and from heaven a voice (I imagine that of Dionysus) cried aloud: "O women, I bring the man who made a mockery of you and me and our mysteries; now take vengeance on him."

As the voice spoke these words, a blaze of holy fire flashed between heaven and earth. The air grew still, every leaf in the wooded glen stood silent, and no sound of a beast was to be heard. The women had not made out the voice clearly, and they stood up straight and looked around. He called again, and when the daughters of Cadmus understood the clear command of Bacchus, they rushed forth as swift as doves in their relentless course, his mother, Agave, her sisters, and all the Bacchae. With a madness inspired by the breath of the god, they darted over the glen with its streams and rocks. When they saw the king seated in the pine tree, they first climbed on the rock cliff that towered opposite and hurled stones at him with all their might and pelted him with branches of pines. Others hurled the thyrsus through the air at Pentheus, a pitiable target.

But they were unsuccessful, for the poor wretch sat trapped and helpless, too high for even their fanaticism. Finally, with a lightning force they ripped off oak branches and tried to use them as levers to uproot the tree. But when these efforts too were all in vain, Agave exclaimed: "Come, O Maenads, stand around the tree in a circle and grab hold of it, so that we may catch the climbing beast and prevent him from revealing the secret revels of the god." And they applied a thousand hands and tore up the tree out of the earth. And from his lofty seat, Pentheus fell hurtling to the ground with endless cries; for he knew what evil fate was near.

His mother as priestess was the first to begin the slaughter. She fell on him and he ripped off the band from his hair so that poor Agave might recognize him and not kill him, and he cried out as he touched her cheek: "Mother, it is your son, Pentheus, whom you bore in the home of Echion. Have pity on me for my sins and do not kill me, your son."

But Agave was not in her right senses; her mouth foamed and her eyes rolled madly as the god Bacchus held her in his power. And Pentheus could not reach her. She seized his left arm below the elbow and placing her foot against the ribs of her ill-fated son, wrenched his arm out of his shoulder. It was not done through her own strength, but the god made it easy for her hands. From the other side, Ino clawed and tore at his flesh, and Autonoë and the whole pack converged on him. All shouted together, he moaning with what breath remained, they screaming in triumph. One carried an arm, another a foot with the boot still on; his ribs were stripped clean and they all with blood-drenched hands tossed the flesh of Pentheus among them like a ball. His body lies scattered, some pieces under hard rocks, others in the shady depths of the woods—not easy to find.

His mother has taken his poor head and affixed it on the point of her thyrsus; she carries it like that of a mountain lion through the depths of Cithaeron, leaving her sisters and their Maenad bands. She comes within these walls, exulting in her ill-fated prey and calling on Bacchus, her partner in the hunt, her comrade in the chase, her champion of victory, who gave her tears as her reward. And so I am leaving now, before Agave reaches the palace, to get away from this misfortune. Temperance and reverence for the gods are best, the wisest possessions, I believe, that exist for mortals who will use them.

Agave returns and in a terrifying scene with her father Cadmus, she awakens from her madness to recognize the horror of her deed; it is the head of her son Pentheus, not that of a mountain lion that she holds in her hands. The conclusion of the play affirms the divine power of Dionysus. He appears now as god, the deus ex machina, to mete out his harsh justice against those who have denied his godhead and blasphemed his religion.

Pentheus has already died for his crimes; the other principal sinners must go into exile. Cadmus and Harmonia will experience much war and suffering in their wanderings and will be turned into serpents; but eventually they will be saved by Ares (the father of Harmonia) and transported to the Islands of the Blessed. Agave and her sisters must leave Thebes immediately. In her anguished farewell to her father, she utters this provocative commentary on her bitter and tragic experience with the religion of Dionysus.

May I reach a place where Cithaeron, that mountain polluted by blood, may never see me or I lay eyes upon it, where any record of the thyrsus is unknown. Let Cithaeron and the thyrsus be the concern of other Bacchic women, not me.

There are serious textual problems in the last section of the play; and a medieval work, the *Christus Patiens*, that drew upon Euripides, is of some help—an interesting fact that rivets our attention to the parallels between Dionysus and Christ.

The pathos and horror of the butchering of Pentheus have led some to advance a sympathetic view of the rash king as an ascetic martyr, killed in his crusade against the irrational tide of religious fanaticism. But too much in the makeup of this young man suggests the myopic psychopath who is unable to

HARRY PARTCH'S AMERICAN BACCHAE

Harry Partch, the American composer, offers enlightening insights into element of Dionysiac worship in his elucidation of his musical and theatrical Americanization of Euripides' tragedy, *Revelation in the Courthouse Park:*

> *I first decided that I would bodily transfer Euripides'* The Bacchae *to an American setting. But in the end the better solution seemed to be to alternate scenes between an American courthouse park and the area before the palace of the city of Thebes. . . . I was determined to make this an American here-and-now drama, which, tragically, it truly is. . . . Many years ago I was struck by a strong and strange similarity between the basic situation in the Euripides play and at least two phenomena of present-day America. Religious rituals with a strong sexual element are not unknown to our culture, nor are sex rituals with a strong religious element. (I assume that the mobbing of young male singers by semihysterical women is recognizable as a sex ritual for a godhead.) And these separate phenomena, after years of observing them, have become synthesized as a single kind of ritual with religion and sex in equal parts, and with deep roots in an earlier period of evolution. . . .*[7]

The equation of the idolization of Elvis Presley with the worship of Dionysus has turned out to be more apt than Partch might even suspect. For the devout, Elvis either has never really died, or has been resurrected, and he is still very much with us. Pilgramages to his temple in Graceland are legion. The Dionysiac experience in relation to singers of popular music and rock has spanned more than one generation. It can be recognized in the bobby-soxers who swooned at the feet of Frank Sinatra and in the androgynous cults of Michael Jackson and Boy George, and it afflicts both sexes with equal passion. The furor aroused by the female singer Madonna or the rock group The Beatles devastates both men and women equally, sometimes enhanced by the Dionysiac use of intoxicating drugs (see also pp. 724–725).

accept human nature as it is and foolishly tries to suppress it. The basic impulses toward both the bestial and the sublime are terrifyingly and wondrously interrelated; Dionysus is after all the god of mob fury and religious ecstasy and anything in between. Was the celebration of his worship a cry for release from the restraints of civilized society and a return to the mystic purity and abounding freedom of nature, or was it merely a deceptive excuse for self-indulgence in an orgy of undisciplined passion?

Other Opponents of Dionysus

In Argos, the daughters of Proetus, king of Tiryns, refused to accept the god and were driven mad; but the famous seer Melampus knew of certain therapeutic dances (or herbs) to cure them.[8]

In Orchomenus, a city of Boeotia, the daughters of Minyas refused to participate in Bacchic worship but remained at home to weave. Dionysus, in the guise of a girl, warned them of their folly to no avail, and they were driven mad; one of them, Leucippe, bore a son named Hippasus, who (like Pentheus) was torn to pieces. The women eventually were turned into bats.

Lycurgus of Thrace pursued the nurses of Dionysus with an ox goad, and Dionysus himself in terror jumped into the sea and was rescued and comforted by Thetis. The gods became angry with Lycurgus, and Zeus struck him with blindness and he died soon afterwards. (See Color Plate 4.)

The Nature of Dionysus, His Retinue, and His Religion

The *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (1)[9] gives some variant information about Dionysus' birth, derives his name from Zeus (Dios) and the mountain Nysa (which is here placed in Egypt), and establishes the universal power of his worship.

O divinely born god, sewn in Zeus' thigh,[10] some say it was on Dracanum, some in windy Icarus, some at the deep flowing Alpheus,[11] where Semele, made pregnant by Zeus who delights in the lightning, gave birth to you. Others say, O lord, that you were born in Thebes. They are all wrong; the father of both gods and men gave you birth, away from people and hidden from white-armed Hera.

There is a certain mountain, Nysa, very high and with verdant forests, far from Phoenicia, near the streams of Egypt.[12]

". . . and they will set up many statues in temples; and as things are three, mortals always, everywhere, will sacrifice perfect hecatombs to you in triennial festivals."[13] The son of Cronus spoke and nodded with his dark brows; and the divine hair of our lord flowed down around his immortal head and he made great Olympus shake. Thus speaking, wise Zeus nodded confirmation with his head.

Be kind, you, sewn in Zeus' thigh, who drive women mad. We bards sing of you as we begin and end our song. It is utterly impossible for anyone who is forgetful of you to remember how to sing his holy song.

So hail to you, Dionysus, sewn in Zeus' thigh, along with your mother, Semele, whom indeed they call Thyone.

Another *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (26) tells us more about the god:

I begin to sing about ivy-crowned, loud-crying Dionysus, glorious son of Zeus and renowned Semele. The nymphs with beautiful hair took him to their bosoms from the lord his father and nurtured him tenderly in the vales of Mt. Nysa. By the grace of his father, he grew up in a fragrant cave, to be counted among the immortals. But when the goddesses had brought up this much-hymned god, then indeed he used to wander, heavily wreathed in ivy and laurel, among the woodland haunts of the forest. The nymphs followed along, with him as leader, and the sound of their cries filled the vast forest.

So hail to you, Dionysus, rich in grape clusters; grant that we may in our joy go through these seasons again and again for many years.

Maenad. Interior of an Attic kylix by the Brygos painter, ca. 480 B.C.; diameter 11¼ in. This lively white-ground painting (the cup is signed by the potter Brygos) shows a maenad in violent motion, holding a thyrsus in her right hand and a small leopard in her left. A leopardskin is fastened over her dress and a wreath of serpents encircles her head. *(Antikensammlungen, Munich. Photograph courtesy of Hirmer Verlag, München.)*

The essential characteristics of Dionysiac religion are an ecstatic spiritual release through music and dance,[14] the possession by the god of his followers, the rending apart of the sacrificial animal, and the eating of the raw flesh (*omophagy*, a kind of ritual communion, since the god was believed to be present in the victim). The religious congregation (the holy *thiasus*) was divided into groups, often with a male leader for each, who played the role of the god. The Bacchae,

or maenads, are the female devotees, mortal women who become possessed. In mythology they are more than human, nymphs rather than mere mortals.

Their mythological male counterparts are satyrs, who are, like them, spirits of nature; they, however, are not completely human but part man and part animal, possessing various attributes of a horse or a goat—a horse's tail and ears, a goat's beard and horns—although in the later periods they are often depicted as considerably more humanized. Satyrs dance and sing and love music; they make wine and drink it, and they are perpetually in a state of sexual excitement. One of their favorite sports is to chase maenads through the woods. Animal skins and garlands are traditional attributes of Bacchic revelers (although satyrs are usually nude); maenads, in particular, carry the thyrsus, a pole wreathed with ivy or vine leaves, pointed at the top to receive a pine cone. As we have seen, it is a magic wand that evokes miracles; but if necessary it can be converted into a deadly weapon.

Sileni also attend Dionysus; they often cannot be distinguished from satyrs, although some of them are older (*papposileni*) and even more lecherous. Yet others are old and wise, like Silenus himself, the tutor of Dionysus. A story tells how once one of them was made drunk by adding wine to the water of a spring; when he was brought to King Midas, this Silenus philosophized that the best fate for human beings was not to be born at all, the next best to die as soon as possible after birth, a typical example of Greek pessimism and wisdom reminiscent of Solon and Herodotus.[15] Dionysus and his retinue are favorite subjects in Greek art.

As the male god of vegetation, Dionysus was, as we should expect, associated with a fertility goddess; his mother, Semele, was a full-fledged earth deity in her own right before she became Hellenized. The story of Zeus' birth on Crete, with the attendants who drowned out his infant cries by their frenzied music, suggests contamination with Dionysiac ritual. Certainly Euripides associates Bacchic mysticism with the ritual worship of both Rhea and Cybele. Dionysus' "marriage" with Ariadne, saving her after she was deserted by Theseus on the island of Naxos (see pp. 558–563), not only provides an example of the union of the male and female powers of vegetation but also illustrates allegorically his powers of redemption. Dionysus represents the sap of life, the coursing of the blood through the veins, the throbbing excitement and mystery of sex and of nature; thus he is a god of ecstasy and mysticism.

Another myth told about his birth even more clearly established him in this role as a god of the mysteries. Zeus mated with his daughter Persephone, who bore a son, Zagreus, which is another name for Dionysus. In her jealousy, Hera then aroused the Titans to attack the child. These monstrous beings, their faces whitened with chalk, attacked the infant as he was looking in a mirror (in another version, they beguiled him with toys and cut him to pieces with knives). After the murder, the Titans devoured the dismembered corpse.[16] But the heart of the infant god was saved and brought to Zeus by Athena, and Dionysus was born again—swallowed by Zeus and begotten on Semele. Zeus was angry with

the Titans and destroyed them with his thunder and lightning; but from their ashes humankind was born.

Surely this is one of the most significant myths in terms of the philosophy and religious dogma that it provides. By it human beings are endowed with a dual nature—a body gross and evil (since we are sprung from the Titans) and a soul that is pure and divine (for after all the Titans had devoured the god). Thus basic religious concepts (which lie at the root of all mystery religions) are accounted for: sin, immortality, resurrection, life after death, reward, and punishment. It is no accident that Dionysus is linked with Orpheus and Demeter and the message that they preached. He is in his person a resurrection-god; the story is told that he went down into the realm of the dead and brought back his mother, who in this account is usually given the name Thyone.

The essence and spirit of Greek drama are to be found in the emotional environment of Dionysiac ecstasy. Theories concerning the origins of this genre in its relationship to Dionysus are legion. But it is a fact that tragedy and comedy were performed at Athens in a festival in his honor. It is difficult to agree with those who feel that this connection was purely accidental. Certainly Aristotle's treatise dealing with the nature of tragedy in terms of a catharsis of pity and fear takes for granted emotions and excitement that are essentially Bacchic.[17]

Dionysus and Icarius and Erigone

Dionysus, however, can be received amid peace and joy. In Attica, in the days of King Pandion, a man named Icarius was most hospitable to the god, and as a reward he was given the gift of wine. But when the people first felt the effects of this blessing, they thought they had been poisoned, and they turned upon Icarius and killed him. Erigone, his devoted daughter, accompanied by her dog Maira, searched everywhere for her father. When she found him, she hanged herself in grief. Suffering and plague ensued for the people until, upon Apollo's advice, they initiated a festival in honor of Icarius and Erigone.

Dionysus' Gift to Midas of the Golden Touch

We have learned how the philosophical Silenus was captured and brought to King Midas.[18] Midas recognized the satyr at once as a follower of Dionysus and returned him to Dionysus. The god was so delighted that he gave the king the right to choose any gift he would like for himself. Midas foolishly asked that whatever he should touch might be turned into gold. At first Midas was delighted with his new power, when he saw that he could transform everything into gleaming riches by the mere touch of his hand. But the blessing quickly became a curse, for he could no longer eat or drink; any morsel or drop that he brought to his lips became a solid mass of gold. Midas' greed turned to loathing; in some accounts, even his beloved daughter was transformed. He begged the

Dionysus with Satyrs and Maenads. Athenian black-figure amphora, sixth century B.C.; height 18¾ in. Dionysus, wreathed with ivy, holds a horn-shaped wine cup in his left hand and looks back at the satyr on the left carrying off a maenad, who is playing a double-flute. A second satyr on the right carries off a maenad with castanets, who raises her arms and looks back at the god. Vine leaves and bunches of grapes trail in the background and frame Dionysus. *(British Museum, London. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees.)*

god's forgiveness for his sin and release from his accursed power. Dionysus took pity and ordered the king to cleanse himself of the remaining traces of his guilt in the source of the river Pactolus, near Sardis. Midas obeyed, and the power of transforming things into gold passed from his person into the stream, whose sands forevermore were sands of gold.

Dionysus and the Pirates

In the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (7) the god is abducted by pirates who mistake him for a mortal. (See Color Plate 2.) The ensuing events aboard ship offer a splendid picture of Dionysus' power and majesty and remind us of funda-

mental elements in the nature of his character and worship: miracles, bestial transformation, violence to enemies, and pity and salvation for those who understand.[19]

I shall sing of how Dionysus, the son of renowned Semele, appeared as a man in the first bloom of youth on a projecting stretch of shore by the sea that bears no harvest. His hair, beautiful and dark, flowed thickly about his head, and he wore on his strong shoulders a purple cloak. Before long, foreign pirates, led on by evil fate, appeared swiftly over the sea, dark as wine, in a ship with fine benches of oars. As soon as they saw him, they nodded one to the other and, quickly jumping out, seized him at once and put him on board ship, delighted in their hearts. For they thought that he was the son of kings, who are cherished by Zeus, and wanted to bind him in harsh bonds. But the bonds fell far from his hands and feet and did not hold him as he sat with a smile in his dark eyes.

When the helmsman saw this he called aloud to his comrades: "Madmen, who is this mighty god whom you have seized and attempt to bind? Not even our strong ship can carry him, for this is either Zeus or Apollo of the silver bow or Poseidon, since he is not like mortal men but like the gods who have their homes on Olympus. But come, let us immediately set him free on the dark shore; do not lay hands on him for fear that he become angered in some way and rouse up violent winds and a great storm."

So he spoke, but the commander of the ship rebuked him scornfully: "Madman, check the wind, and while you are at it seize the tackle and hoist the sail. I expect that he will come with us to Egypt or Cyprus or the northern Hyperboreans or farther. But at his destination he will eventually tell us about his friends and all his possessions and his brothers, since a divine power has put him in our hands." When he had spoken, the mast and sail were hoisted on the ship; the wind breathed into the midst of the sail and the men made the ropes tight all around.

But soon deeds full of wonder appeared in their midst. First of all a sweet and fragrant wine flowed through the black ship, and a divine ambrosial odor arose. Amazement took hold of all the sailors as they looked, and immediately a vine spread in all directions up along the very top of the sail, with many clusters hanging down; dark ivy, luxuriant with flowers, entwined about the mast, and lovely fruit burst forth, and all the oarpins bore garlands. When they saw this, they ordered the helmsman to bring the ship to land. But then the god became a terrifying lion in the upper part of the ship and roared loudly, and in the middle of the ship he created a shaggy-necked bear, thus manifesting his divine credentials. The bear stood up raging, while on the upper deck the lion glared and scowled.

The sailors fled into the stern and stood in panic around the helmsman, who had shown his right sense. The lion sprang up suddenly and seized the commander of the ship, but the sailors when they saw this escaped an evil fate and leaped all together into the shining sea and became dolphins.

The god took pity on the helmsman and saved him and made him happy and fortunate in every way, saying: "Be of good courage, you who have become dear to my heart. I am loud-crying Dionysus, whom my mother, Semele, daughter of Cadmus, bore after uniting in love with Zeus."

Hail, son of Semele of the beautiful countenance; it is not at all possible to forget you and compose sweet song.

THE *DIONYSIACA* OF NONNUS

Nonnus, a poet from Panopolis in Egypt, composed in the fifth century A.D. a Greek epic poem in forty-eight books upon the theme of Dionysus and his exploits. In the "Mythical Introduction" to the Loeb text in three volumes, H. J. Rose begins with this arresting statement: "The mythology of the *Dionysiaca* is interesting as being the longest and most elaborate example we have of Greek myths in their final stage of degeneracy."[20] Crammed full of learned information, this work does have its moments (often more academic than poetic) that justify proclaiming Nonnus "the last great epic poet of antiquity."

Book 1 begins with the carrying off of Europa by Zeus, and Book 48 concludes with Dionysus' final return to Olympus, where he places the crown of his beloved Ariadne. Nonnus, in his varied and crammed tapestry of countless events, gives us information that is to be found nowhere else, for example, the fight between Dionysus and Perseus and the myth of Beroë, a child of Aphrodite, invented to afford Berytus, the site of a great Roman school of law, its very own foundation-myth. One should single out as well his wealth of knowledge of astronomy, astrology, and religious doctrine, especially that of the Orphics. The amorous exploits of Dionysus seem endless, and a whole group of his lovers are all metamorphosized into various plants. Most interesting and bizarre of all Nonnus' excesses is the lengthy account of Dionysus as world conqueror, whose military conquests are obviously inspired by the legendary career of Alexander the Great. This same author Nonnus is credited with a poetic paraphrase of the gospel of John.

PAN

The god Pan has much in common with the satyrs and sileni of Dionysus.[21] He is not completely human in form but part man and part goat—he has the horns, ears, and legs of a goat; he will join in Bacchic revels, and he is full of spirit, impulsive, and amorous. His parents are variously named: his mother is usually some nymph or other; his father is very often Hermes or Apollo. Like them, he is a god of shepherds and a musician.

Pan is credited with the invention of his own instrument, the panpipe (or in Greek, *syrinx*); Ovid tells the story with brevity and charm (*Metamorphoses* 1. 689–712). Syrinx was once a lovely nymph, devoted to Artemis, who rejected the advances of predatory satyrs and woodland spirits. Pan caught sight of her, and as he pursued her she was transformed into a bed of marsh reeds. The wind blowing through them produced a sad and beautiful sound, and Pan was inspired to cut two of the reeds, fasten them together with wax, and thus fashion a pipe on which he could play.

Pan's haunts are the hills and the mountains, particularly those of his homeland, Arcadia, and he came to be especially honored in Athens.[22]

Pan Pursuing a Goatherd. By the Pan painter, Attic red-figure krater, ca. 460 B.C.; height 142 in. Pan pursues a herdsman, possibly Daphnis, son of Hermes. Pan's intentions are clear, and his lust is wittily echoed by the herm (or, more likely, figure of Priapus) in the rocky background. This is reverse of the vase illustrated in Chapter 10 on page 205. The impunity of divine lust contrasts with the tragic consequences of divine anger for human error. *(Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.)*

Pan had other loves besides Syrinx.[23] His passion for the nymph Echo also ended tragically. She fled from his advances, and Pan spread such madness and "panic" among a group of shepherds (a particular feat to which he was prone) that they tore her to pieces. All that remained was her voice.

The *Homeric Hymn to Pan* (19) presents a memorable account of his birth and his revels; in this case his father is Hermes and his mother Dryope, the daughter of Dryops.

Tell me, O Muse, about the dear son of Hermes—Pan, goat-footed, two-horned, lover of musical clangor—who wanders through wooded meadows together with a chorus of nymphs dancing along the heights of sheer rock. They call upon Pan, the splendid shaggy-haired god of shepherds, who has for his domain every snowy ridge, and mountaintops and rocky summits. He roams this place and that through dense thickets; sometimes he is tempted by soft streams, and then again he passes among sheer rocks and climbs up to the highest peak that overlooks the flocks. Often he moves across gleaming high mountains; often, among the slopes, he presses on and, sharply on the outlook, kills animals.

Then, in the evening only, returning from the chase, he plays a lovely tune upon his pipe of reeds. Not even the nightingale, the bird who pours forth her sad lament in honeyed song amidst the petals of flower-laden spring, could surpass him in melody. With him then the clear-voiced mountain nymphs, moving on nimble feet, sing by a dark-watered spring; and Echo's wails reverberate around the mountaintop. The god Pan dances readily here and there among the chorus and then slips easily into their midst. He wears a spotted pelt of a lynx on his back, and his heart is delighted by his piercing tunes in a soft meadow where the crocus and fragrant hyacinth blooming at random mingle in the grass.

They sing hymns about the blessed gods and high Olympus, and, above the rest, they single out Hermes, the bringer of luck. They sing how he is the swift messenger for all the gods and how he came into Arcadia, full of springs and mother of flocks, the place where his sacred precinct is located. There, even though he was a god, he tended the shaggy-fleeced sheep, in the service of a mortal. For a melting longing seized Hermes, and his passion to make love to the daughter of Dryops,[24] the nymph with the beautiful hair, intensified; and he brought to its fulfillment a fruitful marriage.

Dryope bore to Hermes in their house a dear son, a marvel to behold right from his birth, a goat-footed, two-horned baby who loved music and laughter. But his mother was startled and fled, and she abandoned the child, for she was frightened when she saw his coarse features and full beard. Hermes, the luck-bringer, took him at once and clasped him in his arms; and the god felt extremely happy. Quickly he covered the child in the thick skin of a mountain hare and went to the homes of the immortals and sat him down beside Zeus and the other gods and showed them the boy. All the immortals were delighted in their hearts, and especially Bacchic Dionysus; and they called him Pan because he delighted the hearts of them all.[25]

So hail to you, lord. I pray to you with my song, and I shall remember both you and another song too.

Echo and Narcissus

We know that because she rejected him Pan caused Echo to be torn to pieces so that only her voice remained. A more famous story about Echo concerns her love for Narcissus. Ovid's version is as follows (*Metamorphoses* 3. 342–510):

Echo and Narcissus. by Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665); oil on canvas, ca. 1630, $29\frac{1}{4} \times 39\frac{1}{2}$ in. Narcissus lies along the edge of the pool with his flowers growing near his head, while Echo, waiflike, fades away in the background. The Cupid's burning torch is more fitting for a funeral than for the celebration of love. *(Paris, Louvre.)*

The river-god Cephisus once embraced the nymph Liriope in his winding stream and, enveloping her in his waves, took her by force. When her time had come, the beautiful Liriope bore a child with whom even as a baby the nymphs might have fallen in love. And she called him Narcissus. She consulted the seer Tiresias, asking whether her son would live a long time to a ripe old age; his answer was: "Yes, if he will not have come to know himself." For a long time this response seemed to be an empty prophecy, but as things turned out, its truth was proven by the unusual nature of the boy's madness and death.

The son of Cephisus had reached his sixteenth year and could be looked upon as both a boy and a young man. Many youths and many maidens desired him, but such a firm pride was coupled with his soft beauty that no one (either boy or girl) dared to touch him. He was seen once as he was driving the timid deer into his nets by the talkative nymph, who had learned neither to be silent when another is speaking nor to be the first to speak herself, namely the mimic Echo.

At that time Echo was a person and not only a voice; but just as now, she was garrulous and was able to use her voice in her customary way of repeating from a flood of words only the very last. Juno brought this about because, when

she might have been able to catch the nymphs lying on the mountain with her Jove, Echo knowingly detained the goddess by talking at length until the nymphs could run away. When Juno realized the truth, she exclaimed: "The power of that tongue of yours, by which I have been tricked, will be limited; and most brief will be the use of your voice." She made good her threats; Echo only gives back the words she has heard and repeats the final phrases of utterances.

And so she saw Narcissus wandering through the secluded countryside and burned with passion; she followed his footsteps furtively, and the closer she pursued him, the nearer was the fire that consumed her, just like the tops of torches, smeared with sulphur, that catch fire and blaze up when a flame is brought near. O how often she wanted to approach him with blandishments and tender appeals! Her very nature made this impossible, for she was not allowed to speak first. But she was prepared to wait for his utterances and to echo them with her own words—this she could do.

By chance the boy became separated from his faithful band of companions and he cried out: "Is there anyone there?" Echo replied "There!" He was dumbfounded and glanced about in all directions; then he shouted at full voice: "Come!" She called back to him with the same word. He looked around but saw no one approaching; "Why do you run away from me?" he asked. She echoed his words just as he spoke them. He was persistent, beguiled by the reflection of the other's voice, and exclaimed: "Come here and let us get together!" Echo replied, "Let us get together," and never would she answer any other sound more willingly. She emerged from the woods, making good her very words and rushed to throw her arms about the neck of her beloved. But he fled and in his flight exclaimed, "Take your hands off me; I would die before I let you possess me." She replied with only the last words "Possess me."

Thus spurned, Echo hid herself in the woods where the trees hid her blushes; and from that time on she has lived in solitary caves. Nevertheless, her love clung fast and grew with the pain of rejection. Wakeful cares wasted away her wretched body, her skin became emaciated, and the bloom and vigor of her whole being slipped away on the air. Her voice and her bones were all that was left. Then only her voice remained; her bones, they say, were turned into stone. From that time on, she has remained hidden in the woods; she is never seen on the mountains, but she is heard by everyone. The sound of her echo is all of her that still lives.

Narcissus had played with her so, just as he had previously rejected other nymphs sprung from the waves or the mountains, and as well males who had approached him. Thereupon one of those scorned raised up his hands to the heavens and cried: "So may he himself fall in love, so may he not be able to possess his beloved!" The prayer was a just one, and Nemesis heard it.

There was a spring, its clear waters glistening like silver, untouched by shepherds, mountain goats, and other animals, and undisturbed by birds, wild beasts, and falling tree branches. Grass grew round about, nourished by the water nearby, and the woods protected the spot from the heat of the sun. Here the boy lay down, tired out by the heat and his quest for game and attracted by the pool and the beauty of the place. While he was trying to quench his thirst, it kept coming back again and again, and as he continued to drink, he was captivated by the reflection of the beauty that he saw.

He fell in love with a hope insubstantial, believing what was only an image to be real and corporeal. He gazed in wonder at himself, clinging transfixed and emotionless to what he saw, just like a statue formed from Parian marble. From his position on the ground he looked at his eyes, twin stars, and his hair, worthy of both Bacchus and Apollo, and his smooth cheeks, his ivory neck, and the beauty of his face, a flush of red amid snowy whiteness. He marveled at all the things that others had marveled at in him. Unwise and unheeding, he desired his very self, one and the same person approving and being approved, seeking and being sought, inflaming and being inflamed. How many times he bestowed vain kisses on the deceptive pool! How many times he plunged his arms into the midst of the waters to grasp the neck that he saw! But he could not catch hold of himself in their embrace. He did not understand what he was looking at, but was inflamed by what he saw, and the same illusion that deceived his eyes aroused his passion.

Poor deluded boy, why do you grasp at your fleeting reflection to no avail? What you seek is not real; just turn away and you will lose what you love. What you perceive is but the reflection of your own image; it has no substance of its own. With you it comes and stays, and with you it will go, if you can bear to go. No concern for food or rest could drag him away from his post, but stretched out on the shady grass he looks at this deceptive beauty with insatiable gaze and destroys himself through his own eyes. He raised himself up a little and stretching out his arms to the surrounding woods exclaimed:

"Has there ever been anyone smitten by more cruel a love? Tell me, O trees, for you know since you have provided opportune haunts for countless lovers. In the length of your years, in the many ages you have lived, can you remember anyone who has wasted away like me? I behold my beloved, but what I see and love I cannot have; such is the frustration of my unrequited passion. And I am all the more wretched because it is not a vast sea or lengthy road or impregnable fortress that separates us. Only a little water keeps us from each other. My beloved desires to be held, for each time that I bend down to kiss the limpid waters, he in return strains upward with his eager lips. You would think that he could be touched; it is such a little thing that prevents the consummation of our love. Whoever you are, come out to me here. Why, incomparable boy, do you deceive me? When I pursue you, where do you go? Certainly you do not flee from my youthful beauty, for nymphs loved me too. You promise me some kind of hope by your sympathetic looks of friendship. When I stretch forth my arms to you, you do the same in return. When I laugh, you laugh back, and I have often noted your tears in response to my weeping. And as well you return my every gesture and nod; and, as far as I can surmise from movements of your lovely mouth, you answer me with words that never reach my ears. I am you! I realize it; my reflection does not deceive me; I burn with love for myself, I am the one who fans the flame and bears the torture. What am I to do? Should I be the one to be asked or to ask? What then shall I ask for? What I desire is with me; all that I have makes me poor. O how I wish that I could escape from my body! A strange prayer for one in love, to wish away what he loves! And now grief consumes my strength; the time remaining for me is short, and my life will be snuffed out in its prime. Death does not weigh heavily upon me, for death

will bring an end to my misery. I only wish that he whom I cherish could live a longer time. As it is, we two who are one in life shall die together!"

He finished speaking and, sick with longing, turned back again to his own reflection. His tears disturbed the waters and caused the image in the pool to grow less distinct. When he saw it disappearing he screamed: "Where are you going? Stay here, do not desert me, your lover. I cannot touch you—let me look at you, give me this nourishment at least in my misery and madness." As he grieved, he tore his garment in its upper part and beat his bare chest with his marble-white hands. And his chest when struck took on a rosy tinge, as apples usually have their whiteness streaked with red, or grapes in various clusters when not yet ripe are stained with purple. As soon as he beheld himself thus in the water that was once again calm, he could endure it no further; but, as yellow wax is wont to melt under the touch of fire and the gentle frost under the warmth of the sun, so he was weakened and destroyed by love, gradually being consumed in its hidden flame. His beautiful complexion, white touched with red, no longer remained nor his youthful strength, nor all that he had formerly looked upon with such pleasure. Not even his body, which Echo had once loved, was left.

When Echo saw what he had become, she felt sorry, even though she had been angry and resentful. Each time that the poor boy exclaimed "Alas," she repeated in return an echoing "Alas." And as he struck his shoulders with his hands, she gave back too the same sounds of his grief. This was his last cry as he gazed into the familiar waters: "Alas for the boy I cherished in vain!" The place repeated these very same words. And when he said "Farewell," Echo repeated "Farewell" too. He relaxed his weary head on the green grass; night closed those eyes that had so admired the beauty of their owner. Then too, after he had been received in the home of the dead below, he gazed at himself in the waters of the Styx. His sister Naiads wept and cut off their hair and offered it to their brother; the Dryads wept, and Echo sounded their laments. Now the pyre and streaming torches and the bier were being prepared, but the corpse was nowhere to be seen. They found instead a yellow flower with a circle of white petals in its center.

Narcissism

This tragic story of self-love and self-destruction has cast a particularly potent spell upon subsequent literature and thought, not least of all because of Ovid's perceptive and moving tale. How typical of classical poetry is Ovid's insight: the fact that a male lover's prayer for just retribution is answered defines the homoerotic nature of Narcissus' self-love and self-destruction.[26] We do believe that Ovid intends us to understand that a male lover (*aliquis*) was rejected, because then Narcissus' affliction becomes so ironic and so just: "Let the punishment fit the crime." The ominous words of Tiresias predict the tragedy in a fascinating variation of the most Greek of themes, "Know thyself," preached by Apollo and learned by Oedipus and Socrates. "When his mother inquired if Narcissus would live to a ripe old age, the seer Tiresias answered, "Yes, if he

will not have come to know himself." We should not be surprised that Ovid is so profound.

Narcissism and narcissistic have been technical psychological terms and part of our everyday vocabulary since 1914, the year of Freud's paper "On Narcissism: An Introduction."[27]

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NOTES

1. Bacchus, the name for the god preferred by the Romans, is often used by the Greeks as well.
2. The word *dithyrambos,* an epithet of Dionysus and the name of a type of choral poetry that included hymns sung in the god's honor, was in ancient times believed to refer etymologically to his double birth.
3. The career of Ino is extremely confusing because of the multiple versions of her story. She was the second wife of Athamas (whom we shall meet again in the Argonautic saga), and they had two sons, Learchus and Melicertes. Angry with Ino because of her care for Dionysus, Hera drove both Ino and her husband mad. Athamas killed his son Learchus and pursued Ino, who escaped with Melicertes in her arms. She leaped from a cliff into the sea and was transformed into the sea-goddess Leucothea; Melicertes also became deified under the new name of Palaemon.
4. Note the Dionysiac aspects of Orpheus' missionary zeal in Thrace. The date for the introduction of the worship of the god into Hellas is difficult to establish; it probably belongs to the obscure period of transition after the fall of Mycenae (ca. 1100). But it is foolhardy to be dogmatic, especially if the decipherment of a Linear B tablet is correct and the name Dionysus (whether that of the god or not) can be identified as belonging to the Mycenaean Age.
5. The Curetes, as we have seen, are the attendants of Rhea, who hid the cries of the infant Zeus from his father Cronus. In this passage, Euripides associates them with the Corybantes, the ministers of Cybele.
6. We have translated only the beginning and end of Tiresias' lengthy and learned sermon on the great power of Dionysus.
7. Harry Partch, *Bitter Music, Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos,* ed. Thomas McGeary (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 244–246. Reprinted from his *Genesis of Music.* 2d ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974 [1949]).
8. See pp. 606–607.
9. The initial nine lines, quoted by Diodorus Siculus (3. 66. 3), are probably not a separate hymn but should in some way be joined to the fragmentary last section of this first hymn, which is found in manuscript.

10. The epithet *eiraphiotes* is of uncertain derivation. It may mean "insewn," but it may instead refer to Dionysus' connection with the ivy plant or the goat or the bull.
11. Dracanum is a cape on the island of Cos; Icarus and Naxos are islands, and the Alpheus is a river in Elis.
12. There must be a lacuna after these lines from Diodorus and before the next section from the manuscript text.
13. The reference to three things is unclear; it may refer to the ritual of dismemberment.
14. E. R. Dodds' helpful edition of the Greek text of the *Bacchae*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), includes an enlightening introduction; he notes that Dionysiac religion shares a belief, found universally, that musical rhythms and ritual dances lead to the most satisfying and highest religious experiences. See also Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965 [1933]); M. Detienne, *Dionysos at Large* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989 [1986]); Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life.* Translated from the German by Ralph Manheim. Bollingen Series LXV.2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); and Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, eds., *Masks of Dionysus.* Myth and Poetics Series (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), a collection of essays about various aspects of Dionysus and his worship.
15. A famous adaptation of this legend was made by Vergil in his sixth *Eclogue*, in which the utterance of the silenus is cosmogonical and mythological.
16. Variations in the story are obviously etiological attempts to account for elements of Bacchic ritual. Later ceremonies enacted the passion, death, and resurrection of the god in all their details.
17. Friedrich Nietzsche has provided the most imaginative and influential modern analysis of the Dionysiac experience, particularly in enunciating its antithetical relationship to the Apollonian. See M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), a study of Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy.*
18. Ovid's version of Midas' story (*Metamorphoses* 11. 85–145) is well known. This is the same Midas whose ears were turned into those of an ass as a result of his preference for the music of Pan over that of Apollo; see p. 243.
19. The same story is told by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 3. 597–691), who provides an interesting comparison in artistic method and purpose.
20. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca.* Translated by W. H. D. Rouse (New York: Harvard University Press, 1934), Vol. 1, p. x.
21. See Philippe Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) for a study of changing representations of Pan. Also Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).
22. According to Herodotus (6. 106), Pan was encountered by the runner Phidippides, who had been sent to Sparta by the Athenians to ask for help when they were about to fight the Persians at Marathon in 490. Phidippides claimed that Pan called him by name and asked why the Athenians ignored him although he was a deity friendly to them. The Athenians believed Phidippides and later built a shrine to Pan and honored him with annual sacrifices and torch races.
23. Another nymph he pursued was turned into a tree that bore her name, Pitys (the Greek word for "pine").

24. This is Dryope; Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 9. 325 ff.) has a different version.
25. The Greek word *pan* means "all."
26. See Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century* (Lund, Sweden: Gleerups, 1967); also Gerasimos Santas, *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988): Freud believed (and of course many disagree) that an individual's sexual development as an infant may determine his or her choices as an adult concerning the object and nature of love; thus the theory of narcissism had a great impact on his conviction that, for some, relationships in love may stem not from their primal attachment to their mothers but from infantile self-love.
27. See *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strockey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 69–129. Of great interest is a biography of the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut by Charles B. Strozier, *Heinz Kohut: The Making of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001). Kohut made himself famous by his profound exploration of narcissism in papers such as "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism" (1966) and "The Analysis of the Self" (1971).

CHAPTER

14

DEMETER AND THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

THE MYTH OF DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE

There are two *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*. Number 13 is a very short prelude.

> I begin to sing about the holy goddess Demeter of the beautiful hair, about her and her very lovely daughter Persephone. Hail, goddess; preserve this city and lead my song.

The lengthy and powerful *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (2), by contrast, is of the utmost importance; it begins with Hades' abduction of Persephone at the will of Zeus:

> I begin to sing about the holy goddess, Demeter of the beautiful hair, about her and her daughter, Persephone of the lovely ankles, whom Hades snatched away; loud-thundering Zeus, who sees all, gave her to him.
>
> Alone, away from Demeter of the golden scepter and goodly crops, Persephone was playing with the deep-bosomed daughters of Oceanus and picking flowers along a soft meadow: beautiful roses, crocuses, violets, irises, and hyacinths; and Earth at the will of Zeus to please Hades, the host of many, produced as a snare for the fair maiden a wonderful and radiant narcissus, an awesome sight to all, both immortal gods and mortal humans. From its stem a hundred blossoms sprouted forth, and their odor was most sweet. All wide heaven above, the whole earth below, and the swell of the salt sea laughed. The girl was astounded and reached out with both her hands together to pluck the beautiful delight. And the wide-pathed Earth yawned in the Nysaean plain, and the lord and host of many, who goes by many names, the son of Cronus, rushed at her with his immortal horses. And he snatched her up in his golden chariot and carried her away in tears.
>
> She shouted with shrill cries and called on father Zeus, the son of Cronus, the highest and the best, but no one of the immortals or of mortals—not even the olive trees laden with their fruit—heard her voice except for the daughter of Persaeus [Perses], Hecate, her hair brightly adorned, who listened from her cave as she thought kindly thoughts, and lord Helius, the splendid son of Hyperion. These two heard the maid call on the son of Cronus, father Zeus; but he sat apart, away from the gods, in his temple with its many suppliants, receiving beautiful holy offerings from mortals. By the counsel of Zeus, his brother

Demeter. Marble, second half of the fourth century B.C.; height 58 in.This is the cult-statue from the sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidus in Asia Minor. She is shown seated and heavily draped. Her solemn gaze and matronly clothing are consistent with the Demeter of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter. (British Museum, London. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees.)*

and her uncle Hades, the son of Cronus, who bears many names, the lord and host of many, led her off with his immortal horses against her will.

As long as the goddess could behold the earth, starry heaven, the deep flowing sea full of fish, the rays of the sun, and still hoped to see her dear mother and the race of everlasting gods, hope soothed her great heart, although she was

distressed. But the peaks of the mountains and the depths of the sea echoed with her immortal voice, and her lady mother heard her.

DEMETER'S GRIEF, ANGER, AND RETALIATION

Sharp pain seized Demeter's heart, and she tore the headdress about her ambrosial hair with her own dear hands and threw off the dark covering from both her shoulders; and she rushed in pursuit, just like a bird, over land and water. But no one—either of gods or mortals—wished to tell what had really happened—not even a bird came to her as a messenger of truth. For nine days, then, lady Demeter roamed over the earth holding burning torches in her hands and in her grief did not eat any ambrosia or drink sweet nectar, nor did she bathe her body. But when dawn brought on the light of the tenth day, Hecate, a torch in hand, met her and gave her some news as she exclaimed: "Lady Demeter, bringer of goodly gifts in season, who of the heavenly gods or mortals carried off Persephone and troubled your dear heart? For I heard her voice but did not see with my eyes who it was. I am telling you the whole truth quickly."

The Abduction of Persephone. By Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640); oil on canvas, 1639, 71 × 106¼ in. Rubens follows the narrative of Book 2 of the epic poem *De Raptu Proserpinae,* of Claudian (late fourth century A.D.). Hades emerges from the Underworld in a chariot drawn by black horses and accompanied by two Cupids. He seizes Persephone, who has been gathering flowers in the basket that has fallen to the ground. To the left Artemis (distinguished by the small crescent on her forehead) and Athena (wearing her helmet) try to restrain Hades, while Aphrodite, who in Claudian's narrative had conspired with Zeus to arrange the abduction and had persuaded Persephone to go into the meadow to pick flowers, is caught in the middle. *Madrid, Prado.*

Thus Hecate spoke, and the daughter of Rhea of the beautiful hair did not answer but swiftly rushed away with her, holding burning torches in her hands. They came to Helius, the lookout for both gods and human beings, and stood before his horses, and the goddess of goddesses spoke: "Helius, do at least have respect for me, a goddess, if I have ever by word or by deed gladdened your heart and your spirits. Through the barren air I heard the piercing cry of the girl whom I bore, a sweet daughter, illustrious in her beauty, as though she were being violated; yet I saw nothing with my eyes. But since you look down from the divine aether with your rays on all the earth and sea, tell me truthfully if you have seen my dear child at all and who, either of gods or mortals, has seized her alone, away from me, by force against her will and made away."

Thus she spoke. And the son of Hyperion answered her: "Demeter, regal daughter of Rhea of the beautiful hair, you will know the truth. For indeed I revere you greatly and I pity you in your grief for your daughter of the lovely ankles. No other of the immortals is to blame except the cloud-gatherer Zeus, who gave her to his own brother Hades to be called his lovely wife. And he seized her and with his horses carried her away to the gloomy depths below as she cried aloud. But, O goddess, desist from your great lament; you should not thus bear an unrelenting anger to no avail. Indeed Hades, the ruler over many, is not an unseemly husband for your daughter; he is your own brother and born from the same blood; and as for honor, when at the first power was divided three ways, his lot was to be made lord of all those with whom he dwelt."

Thus he spoke and called out to his horses. And at his cry they nimbly bore the swift chariot, just like long-winged birds. But a more dread and terrible grief possessed Demeter's heart, and thereafter she was angry with the son of Cronus, Zeus, enwrapped in clouds; she kept away from the gatherings of the gods and high Olympus; and for a long time she went among the cities and rich fields of human beings, disguising her beautiful form.

DEMETER COMES TO ELEUSIS AND THE PALACE OF CELEUS

No one of men or deep-bosomed women who saw her recognized her until she came to the home of wise Celeus, who at that time was ruler of fragrant Eleusis. Grieving in her dear heart, she sat near the road by the Maiden Well, from which the people drew their water; she was in the shade, for an olive tree grew overhead. Her appearance resembled that of a very old woman long past her days for childbearing and the gifts of garland-loving Aphrodite; she was like the nurses for the children of law-pronouncing kings or the housekeepers in their echoing halls.

The daughters of Celeus, of the family of Eleusis, saw her there as they came after the easily drawn water so that they might bring it in their bronze pitchers to the dear home of their father. There were four of them, just like goddesses in their youthful bloom, Callidice and Cleisidice and lovely Demo and Callithoë who was the oldest of them all. They did not know Demeter, for it is difficult for mortals to recognize the gods; and standing near they spoke winged words: "Who are you, old woman, of those born long ago? Where are you from? Why have you come away from the city and not approached the houses there, in whose shadowy halls dwell women just like you and younger, who would welcome you in word as well as in deed?"

Thus they spoke. And she, the queenly goddess, answered with these words: "Dear children, whoever you are of women, I bid you greeting, and I shall tell you my tale. To be sure it is not inappropriate to relate the truth to you who have asked. My name is Doso, for my lady mother gave it to me. Now then, I have come from Crete over the broad back of the sea—not willingly but against my wishes, for by force pirates carried me away. Then they put in at Thoricus, where the women and the men together disembarked; they were busy with their meal beside the cables of the ship, but my heart had no desire for the delicious food. I hastened away over the black land and escaped from my overbearing masters so that they might not sell me, whom they had not bought, and reap a profit from me. And so I have come here after my wanderings, and I have no idea at all what land this is or who inhabit it. But may all those who dwell in homes on Olympus grant that you have husbands and bear children just as parents desire. But you maidens pity me now and show concern until, dear children, I come to the home of a man and woman to perform for them zealously the tasks appropriate for an elderly woman like me; I could hold a newborn child in my arms and care for him well, make my master's bed in the recess of his well-built chambers, and teach the women their tasks."

Thus spoke the goddess, and at once the virgin maiden Callidice, the most beautiful of the daughters of Celeus, answered: "Good woman, we mortals, even though we suffer, must bear what the gods bestow, for indeed they are much the stronger. I shall help you with the following advice, and I shall tell you the names of the men who have great honor and power here and who are foremost among the people and guard the battlements of our city by their counsels and firm judgments. There is clever Triptolemus and Dioclus and Polyxeinus and noble Eumolpus and Dolichus and our own brave father. All of these have wives who take care of their homes, and no one of them at the very first sight of your person would dishonor you or turn you out of his house, but they will welcome you, for to be sure you are like one of the gods. But if you wish, stay here, so that we may go to our father's house and tell our mother, the deep-bosomed Metaneira, the whole story in the hope that she will bid you come to our place and not search for the homes of the others. She cherishes in our well-built house an only son, born late, a darling long prayed for. If you were to bring him up and he attained the measure of his youth, you would easily be the envy of any woman who saw you. Such are the great rewards that would be yours for your care."

Thus she spoke, and Demeter nodded her head in agreement. And the girls filled their shining pitchers with water and carried them away happy. Quickly they came to the great house of their father and told their mother at once what they had seen and heard. She enjoined them to go with all speed and to hire the woman at any price. Just as deer or heifers bound along the meadow when in the springtime they have had their fill of pasture, thus they hurried along the hollow wagon path, holding up the folds of their lovely garments, and their hair, which was like the flower of the crocus, danced about their shoulders. And they found the illustrious goddess where they had left her earlier and thereupon led her to the dear house of their father; she followed behind with her head veiled, distressed at heart, and the dark robe grazed the slender feet of the goddess.

Soon they arrived at the house of Celeus, a man cherished by Zeus, and passed through the vestibule to where their lady mother sat by the pillar that supported the sturdy roof, holding her son, just a baby, in her lap. Her daughters ran to her, but the goddess stood at the threshold; her head reached up to the beams and she filled the doorway with a divine radiance. Then awe and reverence and fear seized Metaneira, and she sprang up from her couch and bade her guest be seated, but Demeter, the giver of goodly gifts in season, did not wish to sit on the splendid couch but waited in silence with her beautiful eyes downcast, until [the servant] Iambe in her wisdom set out for her a chair, artfully made, and threw a silvery fleece over it; then Demeter sat down, holding her veil over her face with her hands.

For a long time she remained seated without a sound, grieving; she did not by word or action acknowledge anyone; but without a smile, not touching food or drink, she sat wasted with longing for her deep-bosomed daughter, until Iambe in her wisdom resorted to many jests and jokes and brought the holy lady around to smile and laugh and bear a happy heart (thereafter too Iambe was to cheer her in her anguish). And Metaneira filled a cup with wine as sweet as honey and offered it, but she refused saying that it was not right for her to drink red wine. But she ordered them to mix meal and water with tender mint and give it to her to drink. Metaneira mixed the potion and gave it to the goddess as she had ordered. And the great lady Demeter took it for the sake of the holy rite.[1]

DEMETER NURSES DEMOPHOÖN

Beautifully robed Metaneira was the first to speak among them: "Greetings, O lady, I expect that you are not born of base parents but of noble ones. Majesty and grace shine clearly in your eyes as though from the eyes of royalty who mete out justice. But we mortals, even though we suffer, must bear what the gods bestow, for the yoke lies on our necks. Yet now since you have come here, as much as I have will be yours. Nurse this child, whom the immortals gave me late in life, fulfilling my desperate hopes and endless prayers. If you were to bring him up and he attained the measure of his youth, you would easily be the envy of any woman who saw you. Such are the great rewards that would be yours for your care." Then Demeter of the beautiful crown replied to her: "Sincere greetings to you, also, O lady, and may the gods afford you only good. I shall take the boy gladly, as you bid, and tend to him, and I have good hopes that he will not be harmed or destroyed by any evil charms, for I know much more potent remedies and effective antidotes for harmful spells."

Thus she spoke, and with her immortal hands she took the child to her fragrant bosom. And his mother rejoiced in her heart. Thus she nursed in the house the splendid son of wise Celeus, Demophoön, whom beautifully robed Metaneira bore. And he grew like a god, not nourished on mortal food but anointed by Demeter with ambrosia, just as though sprung from the gods, and she breathed sweetness upon him as she held him to her bosom. At night she would hide him in the might of the fire, like a brand, without the knowledge of his dear parents. It was a source of great wonder to them that he grew and flour-

ished before his time, for he was like the gods to look upon. And she would have made him immortal and never to grow old if beautifully robed Metaneira in her foolishness had not seen what was happening, as she watched in the night from her fragrant chamber. Great was her dismay, and she gave a shriek and struck both her thighs, terrified for her child. Amid her groans she uttered winged words: "Demophoön, my child, this stranger buries you within the blazing fire to my anguish and grievous pain."

Thus she spoke in agony, and the goddess of goddesses, Demeter of the beautiful crown, grew angry as she listened; with her immortal hands she snatched from the fire the dear son whom Metaneira had borne in her house, blessing beyond hope, and threw him down on the floor. Demeter was dreadfully angry in her heart as she spoke to beautifully robed Metaneira: "Mortals are ignorant and stupid who cannot foresee the fate both good and bad that is in store. Thus you in your foolishness have done a thing that cannot be remedied. I call to witness by the relentless waters of the river Styx, the oath of the gods, that I would have made your dear child immortal and never to grow old all his days, and I would have granted him imperishable honor; but now, as it is, he will not be able to escape death and the Fates. Yet imperishable honor will always be his because he has lain on my knees and slept in my arms. But when the years go by and he has reached his prime, the new generation of Eleusinians will continually engage in dread wars and battles all their days. I am Demeter, esteemed and honored as the greatest benefit and joy to mortals and immortals. Now then, let all the people build to me a great temple and an altar with it, below the town and its steep wall, on the rising hill above the well, Kallichoron. And I myself shall teach my rites, so that performing them with reverence you may propitiate my heart."

Thus the goddess spoke and cast aside her old age, transforming her size and appearance. Beauty breathed around and about her, and a delicious odor was wafted from her fragrant garments. The radiance from the immortal person of the goddess shone far and wide, and her golden hair flowed down on her shoulders. The sturdy house was filled with her brilliance as though with a lightning flash. She disappeared from the room, and at once Metaneira's knees gave way; for a long time she was speechless and did not even remember at all to pick up her late-born son from the floor. But his sisters heard his pitiful cries and sprang down from their beds, spread well with covers; one of them then picked up the child in her arms and took him to her bosom, another stirred the fire, and a third hastened on her delicate feet to rouse their mother from her fragrant chamber. They gathered around the frantic child and bathed him with loving care. But his spirits were not soothed, for the nurses who tended him now were indeed inferior.

The whole night long, trembling with fear, they made their supplication to the illustrious goddess, and as soon as dawn appeared they told the truth to Celeus, whose power was great, just as Demeter the goddess of the beautiful crown had commanded. Then Celeus called the many people to an assembly and bade them build a splendid temple to Demeter of the lovely hair and an altar on the rising hill. They listened to him as he spoke and immediately complied and did as they were told. And the child flourished by divine destiny.

HADES AND PERSEPHONE AND HER EATING OF THE POMEGRANATE

When they had finished and ceased from their labor, each made his way homeward. But golden Demeter remained sitting there quite apart from all the blessed gods, wasted with longing for her deep-bosomed daughter. And she caused human beings a most terrible and devastating year on the fruitful land. The earth would not send up a single sprout, for Demeter of the lovely crown kept the seed covered. In vain the oxen dragged the many curved ploughs through the fields, and much white barley was sown in the earth to no avail. Now she would have destroyed the entire human race by cruel famine and deprived those who have their homes on Olympus of their glorious prestige from their gifts and sacrifices, if Zeus had not noticed and taken thought in his heart. First he roused golden-winged Iris to summon Demeter of the lovely hair, desirable in her beauty.

Thus he ordered. And Iris obeyed Zeus, the dark-clouded son of Cronus, and on swift feet traversed the interval between. She came to the citadel of fragrant Eleusis and found dark-robed Demeter in her temple. She spoke to her, uttering winged words: "Demeter, father Zeus, whose knowledge is imperishable, commands you to join the company of the eternal gods. Come now, let not the word I bring from Zeus be unaccomplished."

Thus she spoke in supplication, but Demeter's heart was unswayed. Thereupon father Zeus sent down to her all the blessed gods who exist forever; and they came one by one, calling out her name and offering her many very beautiful gifts and whatever honors she would like to choose for herself among the immortals. But no one was able to sway her mind and her heart from her anger, and she stubbornly rejected all appeals. She maintained that she would never set foot on fragrant Olympus or allow fruit to sprout from the earth until she saw with her own eyes her lovely daughter.

Then loud-thundering Zeus, who sees all, sent the slayer of Argus, Hermes, with his golden wand to Erebus to appeal to Hades with gentle words and bring chaste Persephone up from the murky depths to the light, so that her mother might desist from anger when she saw her daughter with her own eyes. Hermes did not disobey, and straightway he left the realms of Olympus and swiftly rushed down to the depths of the earth. He encountered the lord Hades within his house, sitting on a couch with his modest wife, who was very reluctant because of her longing for her mother. And Demeter, far away, brooded over her designs to thwart the actions of the blessed gods.

The mighty slayer of Argus stood near and said: "Hades of the dark hair, ruler of the dead, father Zeus has ordered me to bring to him from Erebus august Persephone, so that her mother may see her with her own eyes and desist from her wrath and dread anger against the immortals. For she is devising a great scheme to destroy the feeble tribes of earthborn men by keeping the seed hidden under earth and ruining the honors that are bestowed on the immortals. She clings to her dire wrath and does not associate with the gods but remains on the rocky citadel of Eleusis sitting apart within her fragrant temple."

Thus he spoke. And Hades, the lord of those below, smiled with furrowed brows and did not disobey the commands of Zeus the king; and he hastily ordered wise Persephone: "Go, Persephone, to the side of your dark-robed mother,

with a gentle and loving heart in your breast. Be not distraught. I among the immortals shall not be an unworthy husband for you, since I am the full brother of your father, Zeus. While you are here with me you will rule over all that lives and moves and you will hold the greatest honors among the immortals. Those who wrong you and do not propitiate your power by performing holy rites and sacrifices and offering appropriate gifts will find eternal retribution."

Hades and Persephone. Terra-cotta plaque, ca. 460 B.C.; height $10^1/_4$ in. This is one of a series of small votive reliefs from the sanctuary of Persephone at Locri (in southern Italy). The divinities of the Underworld sit enthroned holding emblems connected with their worship—grain, parsley, a cock, a bowl. In front stands a lamp with a tiny cock on it, and another cock stands beneath Persephone's throne. *(Museo Nazionale, Reggio. Photograph courtesy of Hirmer Verlag; München.)*

Thus he spoke. And wise Persephone was delighted and jumped up quickly in her joy. But her husband secretly gave her the honey-sweet fruit of the pomegranate to eat, taking thought for himself that she should not remain all her days above with august, dark-robed Demeter. Hades, host of many, then yoked his immortal horses to the front of his golden chariot, which Persephone mounted; the mighty slayer of Argus, Hermes, took the reins and whip in his hands and drove them up and away from the palace; the pair of horses readily sped along and easily covered their long journey. Neither the sea nor streams of rivers nor grassy glens nor mountaintops impeded the onrush of the immortal horses as they cut through the deep air above them in their course. The charioteer brought them to a halt in front of the fragrant temple where Demeter of the lovely crown waited.

DEMETER'S ECSTATIC REUNION WITH PERSEPHONE

At the sight of her daughter, she rushed out like a maenad down a mountain thick with woods. When Persephone on the other side saw the beautiful eyes of her mother, she leaped down from the chariot with its horses and ran, throwing her arms about her neck in an embrace. But while Demeter still had her dear child in her arms, suddenly her heart sensed some treachery; trembling with dread she let go her loving embrace and asked quickly: "My child, have you eaten any food while you were below? Speak up, do not hide anything so that we both may know. If you have not, even though you have been in the company of loathsome Hades, you will live with me and your father, Zeus the cloud-gatherer, son of Cronus, in honor among all the immortals. But if you have eaten anything, you will return again beneath the depths of the earth and live there a third part of each year; the other two-thirds of the time you will spend with me and the other immortals. When the spring blooms with all sorts of sweet-smelling flowers, then again you will rise from the gloomy region below, a great wonder for gods and mortals. But tell me, too, by what trick the strong host of many deceived you?"

The very beautiful Persephone then said in answer: "To be sure, mother, I shall tell you the whole truth. When Hermes, the bringer of luck and swift messenger, came from my father, the son of Cronus, and the other gods of the sky, saying that I was to come up from Erebus in order that you might see me with your own eyes and desist from your wrath and dread anger against the immortals, I immediately jumped up in my joy. But Hades swiftly put in my mouth the fruit of the pomegranate, a honey-sweet morsel, and compelled me to eat it by force against my will. I shall tell you too how he came and carried me down to the depths of the earth through the shrewd plan of my father, the son of Cronus, going through it all as you ask.

"We were all playing in a lovely meadow: Leucippe, Phaeno, Electra, Ianthe, Melite, Iache, Rhodeia, Callirhoë, Melobosis, Tyche, Ocyrhoë beautiful as a flower, Chryseïs, Ianeira, Acaste, Admete, Rhodope, Pluto, lovely Calypso, Styx and Urania, charming Galaxaura,[2] and Pallas the battle-rouser and Artemis delighting in arrows.

"We were playing and gathering lovely flowers in our hands, a mixed array of soft crocuses, irises, hyacinths, roses in full bloom, and lilies, wonderful to behold, and a narcissus, which the wide earth produced, in color yellow of a crocus. I plucked it joyously, but the earth beneath opened wide and thereupon

the mighty lord, the host of many, leaped up and carried me away in his golden chariot beneath the earth despite my violent protests—my cries were loud and shrill. I tell you the whole truth, although the story gives me pain."

Thus they then in mutual love and tender embraces greatly cheered each other's heart and soul the whole long day. Their grief was assuaged as they exchanged their joys. Hecate, her hair brilliantly arrayed, approached them and frequently embraced the holy daughter of Demeter. From that time on, regal Hecate became the lady and attendant of Persephone.

DEMETER RESTORES FERTILITY AND ESTABLISHES THE MYSTERIES

Loud-thundering Zeus, who sees far and wide, sent as a messenger to them Rhea of the lovely hair to lead dark-robed Demeter among the company of the gods, and he promised to grant her the honors that she would choose among the immortal gods, and he consented that her daughter live a third part of the revolving year in the gloomy depths below and the other two-thirds by the side of her mother and the other immortals. Thus he ordered, and the goddess Rhea did not disobey the message of Zeus. She quickly rushed down from the heights of Olympus and came to the Rharian plain, previously very fertile, but now not fertile at all, standing leafless and barren. The white seed was hidden through the machinations of Demeter of the lovely ankles. But soon thereafter, with the burgeoning of spring, long ears of grain would be luxuriant and the rich furrows too along the ground would be laden with grain, some already bound in sheaves.

Rhea came from the barren air to this place first of all, and the goddesses beheld each other gladly and rejoiced in their hearts. Rhea, her hair brilliantly arrayed, spoke to Demeter thus: "Come here, my daughter; loud-thundering Zeus, who sees far and wide, summons you to join the company of the gods, and he has promised to grant you whatever honors you would like among the immortals, and he has consented that your daughter live a third part of the revolving year in the gloomy depths below and the other two-thirds with you and the other gods. Thus he said it would be accomplished and nodded his head in assent. But come, my child, and be obedient; do not persist in your relentless anger against Zeus, the dark-clouded son of Cronus. But quickly make grow for human beings the life-bringing fruit in abundance."

Thus she spoke, and Demeter of the lovely crown obeyed. Quickly she caused fruit to spring up from the fertile plains, and the whole wide land was laden with leaves and flowers. She went to the kings who minister justice (Triptolemus, Diocles, the rider of horses, the mighty Eumolpus, and Celeus, the leader of the people) and showed them the performance of her holy rites and taught her mysteries to them all, Triptolemus and Polyxeinus and Diocles besides—holy mysteries that one may not by any means violate or question or express. For the great reverence due to the gods restrains one's voice.

Happy is the one of mortals on earth who has seen these things. But those who are uninitiated into the holy rites and have no part never are destined to a similar joy when they are dead in the gloomy realm below.

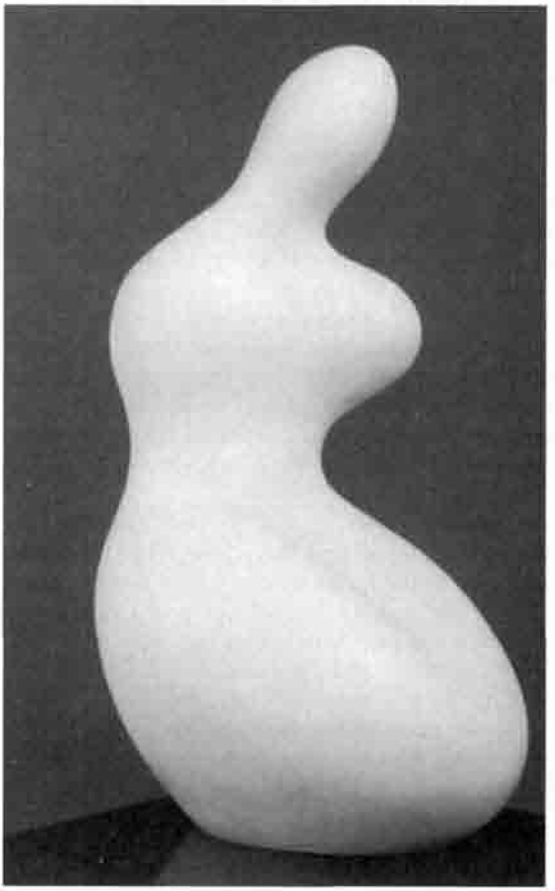
But when the goddess of goddesses had ordained all these things, they made their way to Olympus among the company of the other gods. There they dwell

beside Zeus, who delights in the thunder, august and holy goddesses. Greatly happy is the one of mortals on earth whom they dearly love; straightway they send, as a guest to his great house, Plutus, who gives wealth to human beings.

Come now you who hold power over the land of fragrant Eleusis, sea-girt Paros, and rocky Antron, lady and queen Demeter, the giver of good things in season, both yourself and your daughter, very beautiful Persephone, kindly grant me a pleasing substance in reward for my song. Yet I shall remember both you and another song too.

Interpretations of the Hymn

The myth of Demeter and Persephone represents another variation of a fundamental and recurring theme—the death and rebirth of vegetation as a metaphor or allegory for spiritual resurrection. In the New Testament (John 12:24), this archetype is expressed in this way: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and



Demeter, by Jean Arp (1887–1966). Marble, 1960; 26 × 11 in. At the age of seventy-three Arp returned to the ancient and abstract form of the earth-mother, whose swelling curves and strong thighs presage the fertility of nature that is described at the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. *(New York, Art Resource, © 1994 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.)*

dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit." In this Greek hymn, the allegory is rendered in terms of the touching emotions of mother and daughter; more often the symbols and metaphors involve the relationship between a fertility goddess and her male partner, either lover or son (e.g., Aphrodite and Adonis, Cybele and Attis, Semele and Dionysus). Demeter is often imagined as the goddess of the ripe grain; Persephone then is the deity of the budding tender shoots. They are invoked together as the "two goddesses." Persephone (who is often called merely *Kore*, a name meaning "girl") is the daughter of Demeter and Zeus, who enact once again the sacred marriage between earth-goddess and sky-god.

This is a hymn permeated by religious and emotional allegories about death and rebirth, resurrection, and salvation. The parable of the infant Demophoön is particularly revealing. Nursed and cherished by Demeter, he flourished like a god and would have become immortal, his impure mortality cleansed away in the fire, if only the unfortunate Metaneira, who did not understand the rituals, had not interfered. If we are nourished like this child by Demeter's truth and become initiated into her mysteries, we too shall find redemption, immortality, and joy through the same love and devotion of this holy mother, lavished not only upon Demophoön but also her lovely daughter.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* also illustrates the grim character of Hades in his method of obtaining a wife and provides the mythological reasons for Hecate's prominence as a goddess of the Underworld. Hades' basic character as a fertility god is evident from the location of his realm, the violence of his nature, and his link with horses. He is thus a god of agricultural wealth (compare his names, Pluto or Dis, among the Romans); but he should not be confused with Plutus (Wealth) mentioned in the last lines of the hymn, another deity of agricultural plenty and prosperity (and thus wealth in general), the offspring of Demeter and Iasion.

Triptolemus

Triptolemus, who also appears in the concluding lines of the hymn, is generally depicted as the messenger of Demeter when she restored fertility to the ground. He is the one who taught and spread her arts of agriculture to new lands at that time and later, often traveling in a magical car drawn by winged dragons, a gift of Demeter. He is sometimes either merged in identity with the infant Demophoön (variant spelling is Demophon) of the hymn or said to be his brother; in Plato, Triptolemus is a judge of the dead.

The Eleusinian Mysteries

This hymn to Demeter is of major importance because it provides the most significant evidence that we have for the nature of the worship of Demeter at Eleusis. The town of Eleusis is about fourteen miles west of Athens; the religion and

The Departure of Triptolemus. Attic red-figure cup by Makron, ca. 480 B.C.; height $8^1/_4$ in. Triptolemus holds stalks of grain in his left hand and in his right hand a dish (*phiale*), into which Persephone pours liquid from the jug in her right hand: she holds a torch in her left hand. The libation is a necessary ritual before departure on a journey. To the left stands Demeter, holding a torch and grain-stalks, and the personification of Eleusis stands behind Persephone. Triptolemus sits in a throne-like wheeled vehicle, whose wings symbolize the speed and extent of his travels, while the serpent indicates his association with the grain-bearing earth. *(London, British Museum.)*

ceremony that developed in honor of Demeter and her daughter had its center here, but the city of Athens too was intimately involved. This religion was of a special kind, not the general prerogative of everyone but open only to those who wished to become initiates; these devotees were sworn to absolute secrecy and faced dire punishments if they revealed the secret rites.[3] This does not imply that initiation was confined to a select few. In early times, membership was inevitably limited to the people of Eleusis and Athens; but soon participants came from all areas of the Hellenic world, and eventually from the Roman Empire as well.

This religion was not restricted to men; women, children, and even slaves could participate. Appropriately, the religious celebration that evolved was given the name of the Eleusinian mysteries. Demeter, then, along with other

Hellenic deities, is the inspiration for a kind of worship that is generally designated as the mystery religions (compare elements in the worship of Dionysus and aspects of the devotion to Aphrodite and Adonis or Cybele and Attis). Orpheus is credited with originating the mysteries, and the nature of Orphism and kindred mystery religions will be considered in Chapter 16. Although there must have been differences among the various mystery religions (some of them probably quite marked) obvious to the ancient world, we have difficulty today in distinguishing precisely among them. It seems fairly certain that the major common denominator is a belief in the immortality of the soul and a future life.

The mysteries at Eleusis were kept secret so successfully that scholars are by no means agreed about what can be said with any certainty, particularly about the highest and most profound elements of the worship. The sanctuary at Eleusis has been excavated,[4] and buildings connected with the ceremonies have been found, most important among them being the temple of Demeter, where the final revelation of the mysteries was celebrated.[5] But no evidence has been unearthed that might dispel the secrecy with absolute certainty once and for all. The priests in charge of the rites presumably transmitted orally what Demeter was said to have taught.

It is impossible to know just how much of the ritual is revealed in the *Hymn to Demeter.* It would be presumptuous to imagine that the most profound secrets are here for all to read, and we cannot be sure how much may be inferred from what is directly stated. That elements of the ceremonies are indicated cannot be denied, but presumably these are only the elements that were witnessed or revealed to all, not only to the initiated. Thus we have prescribed by the text such details as an interval of nine days, fasting, the carrying of torches, the exchange of jests, the partaking of the drink *Kykeon,* the wearing of a special dress (e.g., the veil of Demeter); even precise geographical indications (e.g., the Maiden Well and the site of the temple) are designated.

The emotional tone of the poem, too, might hold the key for a mystic performance in connection with the celebrations. The anguish of Demeter, her frantic wanderings and search, the traumatic episode with Demophoön, the miraculous transformation of the goddess, the thrilling reunion between mother and daughter, the blessed return of vegetation to a barren earth—these are some of the obvious emotional and dramatic highlights.

On the basis of our inadequate evidence, the following tentative outline of basic procedures in the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries may be presented; ultimate revelation and meaning are matters of more tenuous conjecture. Two major compulsory stages had to be undertaken: (1) participation in the Lesser Mysteries, involving preliminary steps in initiation; (2) advancement to the Greater Mysteries, which entailed full initiation into the cult. A third stage, not required but possible, entailed participation in the highest rites.[6] It is immediately apparent that these mysteries are basically different from the festivals celebrated in the Panhellenic sanctuaries at Olympia and Delphi, which were open

to all, without secrecy or initiation or a fundamental mystic philosophy, however religious the tone that oracular response and devotion to a god might set.

Two major priestly families were connected with Eleusis.[7] Among the many important priesthoods and assistant officials, the highest was that of the Hierophant; this priest alone could reveal to the worshipers the ultimate mysteries that entailed the showing of the *Hiera*, the sacred objects—his title means "he who reveals the *Hiera*." Prominent too was the priestess of Demeter, who lived in a sacred house. Many of the priests received a fixed sum of money from each initiate as a fee for their services. The initiate was sponsored and directed by a patron.[8]

The Lesser Mysteries were held in Athens, usually once a year in early spring. Precise details are unknown, but the general purpose was certainly the preliminary preparation of the initiates for subsequent advancement to higher things. Ceremonies probably focused upon ritual purification, involving sacrifices, prayer, fasting, and cleansing by water.

The Greater Mysteries were held annually during the months of September and October. A holy truce was declared for a period of fifty-five days, and heralds were sent to issue invitations to states. Both Athens and Eleusis were involved in the festivities. Preliminary to the festival proper was the day on which the *Hiera* were taken out of the temple of Demeter in Eleusis and brought to Athens amid great pomp and ceremony. The splendid procession, headed by the priests and priestesses who carried the *Hiera* in sacred caskets bound by ribbons, was met officially in Athens and escorted in state to the sanctuary of Demeter in the city (the Eleusinion). The next day began the formal celebration of the Greater Mysteries, which continued through eight days, the ceremonies culminating in Eleusis, with a return to Athens on the ninth. The first day saw the people summoned to an assembly in the Athenian agora; those who were pure and knew Greek were invited by proclamation to participate in the mysteries. On the second day all participants were ordered to cleanse themselves in the sea. The third day was devoted to sacrifices and prayers. The fourth day was spent honoring the god of healing, Asclepius, who according to tradition had in previous times arrived late for initiation. So on this day other latecomers could enroll.

The festivities in Athens culminated on the fifth day in a brilliant procession back to Eleusis. Priests and laymen wended their prescribed way, crowned with myrtle and carrying mystic branches of myrtle tied with wool strands.[9] Heading the procession was a wooden statue of Iacchus (very likely another name for the god Dionysus) escorted in a carriage. At some stages of the journey, abuse, jest, insults, and scurrilous language were exchanged, perhaps in part to instill humility in the throng. Prayers were chanted and hymns sung; torches were carried and lit as night fell, and the sacred procession reached the sanctuary of Demeter in Eleusis.

The sixth and seventh days brought the initiates to the secret core of the mysteries, and it seems safe to assume that much of the ritual was performed

in remembrance of the episodes described in the *Hymn to Demeter.* Thus there was a fast (certain foods, such as pomegranates and beans, were prohibited) and a vigil; the fast was probably ended by the drinking of the prescribed drink, the *Kykeon,* whatever its significance.

The heart of the ceremonies, which were celebrated in Demeter's temple, apparently involved three stages: a dramatic enactment, the revelation of sacred objects, and the uttering of certain words. What were the themes of the dramatic pageant? Probably it focused upon incidents from the story of Demeter and her wanderings and other episodes recorded in the hymn, all designed to elicit a religious catharsis. Some have suggested scenes of an Orphic character involving a simulated trip to the Underworld, with fabricated apparitions of terror and sublimity as the action moved from Hell (Tartarus) to Paradise (Elysium). That no underground chambers have been found in the excavations does not necessarily invalidate this theory. We do not know whether the initiates merely witnessed the drama or actually participated in it. Eventually the culmination was the awesome exhibition by the Hierophant himself of the holy objects, bathed in a radiant light as he delivered his mystic utterances. The highest stage of all, which was not required for full initiation, entailed further revelation of some sort. The eighth day concluded the ceremonies; the ninth brought the return to Athens, this time with no organized procession. The following day the Athenian council heard a full report on the conduct of the ceremonies.

Conjectures about the exact nature of the highest mysteries have been legion. Comments by the fathers of the Christian church have been brought to witness, but their testimony has been rightly viewed with grave suspicion because it was probably rooted in prejudice, stemming from ignorance and hostility. No one of them had ever been initiated into the mysteries, and surprisingly enough, those Christian converts who had been initiated seem to have continued to take their pledges of secrecy very seriously. It has been claimed that the ultimate revelation was connected with the transformation of the Eleusinian plain into a field of golden grain (as in the hymn); the heart of the mysteries consisted of no more than showing an ear of grain to the worshipers. Thus we actually *do* know the secrets; or, if you like, they are really not worth knowing at all in terms of serious religious thought. Yet this ear of grain may, after all, realistically and allegorically represent the enigma of the mystery itself. Others insist upon an enactment of the holy marriage in connection with the ceremonies, imagining not a spiritual but a literal sexual union between the Hierophant and the Priestess of Demeter. The *Hiera* too might be the female pudenda and, since Dionysus may be linked with Demeter and Kore, the male phallus as well. These holy objects were witnessed, or even manipulated, by the initiates in the course of the ritual. But there is no good evidence to argue with any certainty for such orgiastic procedures. The *Hiera,* as has been conjectured, could have been merely sacred and antique relics handed down from the Mycenaean Age.

It is difficult to agree with those who assert that Dionysus was completely excluded from the worship of Demeter at Eleusis. Iacchus has good claims to be Dionysus. And the myth of Zagreus-Dionysus, which provides the authority for Orphism (see pp. 362–363), makes Persephone his mother. Any spiritual message in the cult at Eleusis must have, in common with Dionysiac cults, a belief in the immortality of the soul and in redemption. If a doctrine similar to that of Orphism is also involved, it need not spring directly from Orphism. The confusion arises because all the mystery religions (whatever their precise interrelation)[10] did in fact preach certain things in common.

The death and rebirth of vegetation as deified in Demeter and Kore surely suggest a belief in the afterlife. After all, this is the promise of the hymn: "But the one who is not initiated into the holy rites and has no part never is destined to a similar joy when he is dead in the gloomy realm below." If at some future time, only obscure evidence remained for the ritual of the Christian mass, scholars might imagine all sorts of things and miss completely the religious and spiritual doctrine upon which it rests. The words uttered by the Hierophant could have ordained spiritual direction and hope. But there was no church body as such for the followers of Demeter, in the sense that they were required to return each year; we know of no sacred writings like those, say, of Orphism. George Mylonas' conclusions affirm the universal power of the matriarchal cult of Demeter in the Graeco-Roman world:

> *Whatever the substance and meaning of the Mysteries was, the fact remains that the cult of Eleusis satisfied the most sincere yearnings and the deepest longings of the human heart. The initiates returned from their pilgrimage to Eleusis full of joy and happiness, with the fear of death diminished and the strengthened hope of a better life in the world of shadows: "Thrice happy are those of mortals, who having seen those rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have true life there; to the rest all there is evil," Sophocles cries out exultantly. And to this Pindar with equal exultation answers: "Happy is he who, having seen these rites goes below the hollow earth; for he knows the end of life and he knows its god-sent beginning." When we read these and other similar statements written by the great or nearly great of the ancient world, by the dramatists and the thinkers, when we picture the magnificent buildings and monuments constructed at Eleusis by great political figures like Peisistratos, Kimon, Perikles, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius and others, we cannot help but believe that the Mysteries of Eleusis were not an empty, childish affair devised by shrewd priests to fool the peasant and the ignorant, but a philosophy of life that possessed substance and meaning and imparted a modicum of truth to the yearning human soul. That belief is strengthened when we read in Cicero that Athens has given nothing to the world more excellent or divine than the Eleusinian Mysteries. Let us recall again that the rites of Eleusis were held for some two thousand years; that for two thousand years civilized humanity was sustained and ennobled by those rites. Then we shall be able to appreciate the meaning and importance of Eleusis and of the cult of Demeter in the pre-Christian era. When Christianity conquered the Mediterranean world, the rites of Demeter, having perhaps fulfilled their mission to humanity, came to an end. The "bubbling spring" of hope and*

THE FESTIVAL OF THE THESMOPHORIA

Women generally played a dominant role in the religion of the ancient world. In the celebration of some of these rites only women were permitted to participate and men were completely excluded. One of the most famous of these women's festivals was the Thesmophoria, common to all Greece. The rites as performed in Athens became the subject of Aristophanes' comedy *Thesmophoriazusae,* about the doings of the feminine participants and the dire consequences for any male who dared to intrude. The festival, lasting for five days, took place in the fall and its purpose was to ensure fertility, especially of the crops to be sowed. Important in the ceremonies was the throwing of piglets into subterranean pits; after three days their remains were recovered and mixed with the seed to be planted in hopes of a good harvest. Etiology for this practice was provided by the myth of Eubouleus, a swineherd, who was swallowed up with his swine by the earth at the very time when Persephone was taken by Pluto. Celebrations also included sexual abstinence, a procession, sacrifices, fasting and feasting, and even ribald jests.

inspiration that once existed by the Kallichoron well became dry and the world turned to other living sources for sustenance. The cult that inspired the world for so long was gradually forgotten, and its secrets were buried with its last Hierophant.[11]

Finally, a word of caution about the usual generalizations put forth concerning the dichotomy between the mystery religions and the state religions of antiquity. The argument runs something like this. The formal state religions were sterile or very soon became so; people's hope and faith lay only in the vivid experience offered by the mysteries. Whatever the general truth of this view, it must be noted that for classical Greece, at any rate, the lines are not so distinct. Ceremonies connected with Demeter at Eleusis are tied securely to the policies of the Athenian state. The *archon basileus* (an Athenian official in charge of religious matters in general) directed the celebrations for Demeter in Athens. The Athenian council as a political body was very much concerned about the festival. The pomp and procession involved are startlingly similar to the pageant connected with the Panathenaic festival in honor of Athena, a civic function, whatever its spiritual import. The "church" at Eleusis and the Athenian state were, to all intents and purposes, one.[12]

The Triumph of Matriarchy

Again and again there appear in mythology variations on the theme of the dominant earth-goddess and her subordinate male lover, who dies and is reborn to ensure the resurrection of the crops and of the souls of mortals. Demeter's name may mean "earth-mother," but her myth and that of Persephone introduce a startling

and drastic variation of this eternal and universal archetype. The myth's sexual blatancy is replaced by a more refined and purer concept of motherhood and the love between a mother and daughter. In this guise, with nobility and humanity, the mother-goddess and matriarchy sustained their dominance in the ancient world.

Details of the myth continually challenge the patriarchal power of Zeus. The abduction of Persephone ordained by the supreme god so that Hades may have a wife and the Underworld may have a queen is depicted not as a divine right but a brutal rape, seen from the point of view of Demeter, who will not accept the status quo and is mighty enough to modify it. Through compromise, both the will of Zeus and the will of Demeter are fulfilled. Demeter shares the love and the person of her daughter with Hades; Hades has his wife; and Persephone attains honor as queen of the Underworld: the mystic cycle of death and rebirth is explained by a myth accommodating a specific matriarchal religious ritual, promising joy in this life and the next.

As we have seen, the Eleusinian mysteries were an inspiring spiritual force and became the one universal mystery religion of the ancient world before Christianity. Indeed, matriarchy was very much alive and well in the patriarchal world of the Greeks and the Romans.

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NOTES

1. That is, "to initiate and observe the holy rite or sacrament." There appears to be a lacuna after this sentence. The words translated "for the sake of the holy rite" are difficult, and their precise meaning is disputed. The reference must be to an important

part of the ceremony of the Eleusinian mysteries, namely the partaking of a drink called the *Kykeon.* But the nature and significance of the ritual are unknown: was this in any real sense the sharing of a sacrament, an act of communion fraught with mystic significance, or was it merely a token remembrance of these hallowed actions of the goddess?

2. Sixteen of these names are listed among the daughters of Oceanus and Tethys by Hesiod, *Theogony,* 346–361; and Melite is a Nereid (246). The poet adds Leucippe, Phaeno, Iache, and Rhodope.
3. The charges against Alcibiades mentioned in the Box on p. 269 are indicative of the seriousness of the consequences if the sacred ceremonies were divulged or desecrated in any way.
4. See in particular George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); this provides the best general survey of all the evidence and the inherent archaeological, historical, religious, and philosophical problems.
5. As a place for the celebration of the mysteries (the Greek word is *teletai*), the temple of Demeter is called a *telesterion.*
6. Known as the *Epopteia.*
7. The Eumolpids (whose ancestor Eumolpus, according to the hymn, received the mysteries from Demeter herself) and the Kerykes.
8. The initiate was the *mystes* and his patron the *mystagogos.*
9. Aristophanes' *Frogs,* 340 ff., gives us some idea of this procession.
10. Herodotus (8.65) tells a tale about a mysterious cloud (arising from Eleusis amidst the strains of the mystic hymn to Iacchus) that provided a true omen of future events; in the context, the worship of the mother and the maiden is mentioned. This miracle sets the right tone for elements common to the worship and myths of both Demeter and Dionysus. It is not impossible that the passion of this resurrection-god played some role in the mysteries; Dionysus too is close to drama, and drama lies at the essence of the emotional aspects of Eleusinian ritual.
11. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries,* pp. 284–285; footnotes are omitted.
12. For a survey of festivals, including the important *Thesmophoria,* in honor of Demeter, see H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); also, Erika Simon, *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). For Ovid's treatment of the rape of Persephone in the *Metamorphoses* 5 and *Fasti* 4, see Stephen Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

CHAPTER

15

VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE: THE REALM OF HADES

HOMER'S BOOK OF THE DEAD

The earliest surviving account of the realm of Hades appears in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. Homer's geographical and spiritual depiction is fundamental to subsequent elaborations and thus deserves to be excerpted at some length. Odysseus is telling the Phaeacians and their king Alcinoüs of his visit to the Underworld, where he must consult the seer Tiresias about how to reach Ithaca, his homeland (12–99):

Our ship came to the farthest realm of deep-flowing Oceanus, where the country of the Cimmerians lies shrouded in cloud and mist. Bright Helius never looks down on them with his rays, either when he ascends to starry heaven or returns to earth; but dire night covers these poor mortals. Here we beached our ship, and after putting the animals ashore, we went along the stream of Oceanus until we came to the place that Circe had indicated. Here two of my men, Perimedes and Eurylochus, held the sacrificial victims, and I drew my sharp sword from my side and dug a pit about eighteen inches square. Around it I poured a libation to all the dead, first with a mixture of honey and milk, then with sweet wine, and a third time with water; over this I sprinkled white barley. I then supplicated the many strengthless spirits of the dead, promising that once I had come to Ithaca I should sacrifice, in my own halls, a barren heifer, the very best I had, and heap the sacrificial pyre with the finest things and offer separately to Tiresias alone a jet-black sheep that was outstanding among my flocks.[1]

When I had finished entreating the host of the dead with prayers and supplications, I seized the victims and cut their throats, and their dark blood flowed into the pit. Then the souls of the dead who had departed swarmed up from Erebus:[2] young brides, unmarried boys, old men having suffered much, tender maidens whose hearts were new to sorrow, and many men wounded by bronze-tipped spears and wearing armor stained with blood. From one side and another they gathered about the pit in a multitude with frightening cries. Pale fear took hold of me, and then I urgently ordered my companions to flay the animals which lay slaughtered by the pitiless bronze and burn them and pray to the gods, to mighty Hades and dread Persephone. But I myself drew my sword from my side and took my post and did not allow the strengthless spirits of the dead to come near the blood before I had questioned Tiresias.

But first the soul of my comrade Elpenor came up, for he had not yet been buried in the wide earth.[3] We had left his body in Circe's palace, unwept and unburied, since other toil had oppressed us. I wept at seeing him and pitied him and calling out addressed him with winged words: "Elpenor, how have you come in this gloomy realm? You arrived on foot sooner than I in my black ship."

Thus I spoke; and he replied with a groan: "Royal son of Laërtes, clever Odysseus, a divine and evil destiny and too much wine were my undoing. When I went to sleep in Circe's palace, I forgot to climb down the long ladder and fell headlong from the roof; my neck was severed from my spine and my soul came down to the realm of Hades.[4] Since I know that when you leave this house of Hades you will stop with your fine ship at Circe's island of Aeaea, I beseech you by those whom you left behind far away, by your wife and father who took care of you as a child, and by Telemachus, your only son whom you left at home in your palace, do not turn away and go back leaving me unwept and unburied for future time, or I may become the cause of wrathful vengeance from the gods upon you. But burn my body with all the armor that I have and pile up a mound for me on the shore of the gray sea, the grave of an unfortunate man, so that posterity too may know. Do these things for me and plant on the mound the oar with which I rowed alongside my companions while I was alive."

Thus he spoke. And I addressed him in answer: "My poor friend, I shall accomplish to the full all your wishes." So we two faced each other in sad conversation, I holding my sword over the blood and on the other side the shade of my companion recounting many things. The soul of my dead mother came up next, daughter of great-hearted Autolycus, she who was alive when I went to sacred Ilium. I cried when I saw her and pitied her in my heart. Still, even though I was deeply moved I did not allow her to come near the blood before I had questioned Tiresias.

Then the soul of Theban Tiresias came up, bearing a golden scepter. He knew me and spoke: "Royal son of Laërtes, clever Odysseus, why, why, my poor fellow, have you left the light of the sun and come to see the dead and their joyless land? But step back from the pit, and hold aside your sharp sword so that I may drink the blood and speak the truth to you." So he spoke; and I drew back my silver-studded sword and thrust it into its sheath. After he had drunk the dark blood, then the noble seer spoke to me.[5]

Tiresias then tells Odysseus what destiny has in store for him; after the seer has prophesied, Odysseus asks how he can enable his mother, Anticlea, to recognize him (141–159):

"I see there the soul of my dead mother, and she stays near the blood in silence and has not dared to look at her own son face to face nor speak to him. Tell me, O prince, how may she recognize that I am her son?" Thus I spoke. And he addressed me at once with the answer: "I shall tell you simple directions which you must follow. Any one of the dead you allow to come near the blood will speak to you clearly, but anyone you refuse will go back away from you." With these words the soul of Prince Tiresias went into the home of Hades, after he had uttered his prophecies.

But I remained steadfast where I was until my mother came up and drank the dark blood. Immediately then she knew me and in her sorrow spoke winged words: "My son, how have you come, while still alive, below to this gloomy realm which is difficult for the living to behold? For great rivers and terrible waters lie between, first Oceanus which, if one does not have a sturdy ship, he cannot in any way cross on foot."

Anticlea and Odysseus continue their conversation, questioning each other. Finally she reveals to her son that it was heartache and longing for him that brought her life to an end. At this Odysseus cannot restrain himself (204–234):

Troubled in spirit I wished to embrace the soul of my dead mother; three times I made the attempt, as desire compelled me, three times she slipped through my hands like a shadow or a dream. Sharp pain welled up from the depths of my heart, and speaking I addressed her with winged words: "O my mother, why do you not stay for me so eager to embrace you, so that we both may throw our arms about each other, even in Hades' realm, and take comfort in chill lamentation? Or has august Persephone conjured up this phantom for me so that I may groan still more in my grief?"

Thus I spoke, and she, my lady mother, answered at once: "O my poor child, ill-fated beyond all men; Persephone, daughter of Zeus, does not trick you at all; but this is the doom of mortals when they die, for no longer do sinews hold bones and flesh together, but the mighty power of blazing fire consumes all, as soon as the life breath leaves our white bones and the soul like a dream flutters and flies away. But as quickly as possible make your way back to the light, but understand all these things so that you may in the future tell them to your wife." Thus we two exchanged words; then women came up (for august Persephone compelled them), all of whom were the wives or daughters of noble men. And they gathered all together about the dark blood. But I deliberated how I might speak to each one individually, and upon reflection this seemed to me the best plan. I drew my sharp sword from my sturdy side and did not allow them to drink the dark blood all at the same time. And they came up one by one and each explained her lineage and I questioned them all.

The parade of beautiful women that follows is packed with mythological and genealogical information that has little meaning for us in this context. At the end, Persephone drives away the souls of these illustrious ladies. A lengthy interview follows between Odysseus and Agamemnon, who tells bitterly of his murder at the hands of his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, and remains suspicious and hostile toward all women. Then the souls of Achilles and Patroclus and the greater Ajax appear. The soul of Achilles addresses Odysseus next (Patroclus does not speak). We must excerpt two portions of their conversation to establish more completely the tone and humanity of Homer's conception. The first reveals Achilles' despair (473–491):

"Royal son of Laërtes, clever and indomitable Odysseus, what still greater exploit have you ingeniously devised? How have you dared to come down to

Hades' realm where spirits without body or sense dwell, shadows of mortals worn out by life?" Thus he spoke, and I addressed him in answer, "O Achilles, son of Peleus, by far the mightiest of the Achaeans, I came down to Hades' realm to ask the seer Tiresias if he might tell me some way by which I might return to rocky Ithaca. For I have not yet come near Achaea nor yet reached my homeland, but I always have misfortunes. But no man either before or after is more fortunate than you, Achilles. Previously while you lived, we Argives heaped honors on you equal to those of the gods, and now being in this place you have great power among these shades. So, Achilles, do not be at all distressed, even though you are dead."

Thus I spoke, and he at once addressed me in answer: "Do not speak to me soothingly about death, glorious Odysseus; I should prefer as a slave to serve another man, even if he had no property and little to live on, than to rule over all these dead who have done with life."

Achilles goes on to inquire about his son, Neoptolemus; and when Odysseus has given details of how the boy has proven himself a man worthy of his father, Achilles in his pride feels a surge of joy illumine his gloomy existence (538–544):

The soul of swift-footed Achilles [Odysseus goes on to relate] made its way in great strides over the plain full of asphodel, rejoicing because I said that his son was a renowned hero. Other souls of the dead stood grieving, and each recounted his sorrows. Only the soul of Ajax, son of Telamon, stood apart.

Ajax, who committed suicide because Odysseus was awarded the armor of Achilles rather than he, will not respond to Odysseus' appeals (563–600):

Instead he followed the dead spirits into Erebus, where perhaps he might have spoken to me or I to him. But desire in my breast wished to see the souls of the other dead.

There I saw Minos, the splendid son of Zeus, sitting with a gold scepter in his hand and pronouncing judgments for the dead, and they sitting and standing asked the king for his decisions within the wide gates of Hades' house. And I saw next the giant hunter Orion, driving together on the plain of asphodel the wild beasts which he himself had killed on the lonely mountains, having in his hand a bronze club that was always unbreakable. And I saw Tityus, son of revered Earth, lying on the ground covering a vast area. Two vultures sitting on either side of him tore into his body and ate at his liver, and his hands could not keep them off. For he had assaulted Leto, the renowned consort of Zeus, as she was going through Panopeus, a city of beautiful dancing places, to Pytho.[6]

And also I saw Tantalus enduring harsh sufferings as he stood in a pool that splashed to his chin. He strained to quench his thirst but was not able; for every time the old man leaned eagerly to take a drink, the water was swallowed up and gone and about his feet the black earth showed, dried up by some divine power. Tall and leafy trees dangled fruit above his head: pears, pomegranates, apples, sweet figs, and olives, growing in luxuriant profusion. But whenever he reached out to grasp them in his hands, the wind snatched them away to the shadowy clouds.[7]

The Underworld, Apulian red-figure krater by the Underworld painter, ca. 320 B.C.; dimensions not given. This large vase represents many of the myths of the Underworld. In the center, Hades sits enthroned facing Persephone in a small temple. She is crowned and holds a staff; chariot wheels hang from the ceiling, probably the wheels of the chariot in which Hades abducted Persephone. To the left Orpheus plays his lyre, and behind him may be Megara and the children of Heracles. To the right a Fury stands next to a seated judge of the Underworld, before whom is the soul of an old man. In the bottom register Heracles drags off Cerberus, while Hermes points the way. To the left a Fury lashes Sisyphus, and to the right Tantalus, wearing a Phrygian cap, reaches up towards an overhanging cliff. In the upper register appear to be scenes of initiation, and on the neck are the chariots of Helius and Selene, beneath which fishes symbolize the Ocean in which their daily (or nightly) journeys begin and end. *(Munich Antikensammlung, no. 3297.)*

> And also I saw Sisyphus enduring hard sufferings as he pushed a huge stone; exerting all his weight with both his hands and feet he kept shoving it up to the top of the hill. But just when he was about to thrust it over the crest then its own weight forced it back, and once again the pitiless stone rolled down to the plain. Yet again he put forth his strength and pushed it up; sweat poured from his limbs and dust rose up high about his head.[8]

Odysseus next sees the phantom of Heracles—the real Heracles is with his wife, Hebe, among the immortal gods. Heracles tells how he too was ill-fated while he lived, performing labors for an inferior master.

Homer's Book of the Dead ends when hordes of the shrieking dead swarm up and Odysseus in fright makes for his ship to resume his journey.

Countless difficulties beset any interpretation of the Homeric view of the afterlife, many of them linked to the nature of the composition of the *Odyssey* as a whole and of this book in particular. Discrepancies are apparent, and explanations must finally hinge upon one's views on the much wider problems of the Homeric question. Does the Book of the Dead reflect different attitudes and concepts put together by one man or by several, at one time or over a period of years—even centuries? Basic to the account, perhaps, is a cult of the dead—seen in the sacrificial ceremonies performed at the trench and in the serious note of moral compulsion to provide burial for one who has died. But as the description proceeds, there is much that is puzzling. Odysseus apparently remains at his post while the souls come up; if so, how does he witness the torments of the sinners and the activities of the heroes described? Are they visions from the pit of blood, or is this episode an awkward addition from a different treatment that had Odysseus actually tour the realm of Hades? Certainly the section listing the women who come up in a group conveys strongly the feelings of an insertion, written in the style of the Boeotian epic of Hesiod. As the book begins, the stream of Oceanus seems to be the only barrier, but later Anticlea speaks of other rivers to be crossed.

Thus the geography of the Homeric Underworld is vague, and similarly the classification of those who inhabit it is obscurely defined, particularly in terms of the precision that is evident in subsequent literature. Elpenor, among those who first swarm up, may belong to a special group in a special area, but we cannot be sure. Heroes like Agamemnon and Achilles are together, but they do not clearly occupy a separate paradise; the meadow of asphodel they inhabit seems to refer to the whole realm, not to an Elysium such as we find described by Vergil. One senses, rather, that all mortals end up together pretty much in the same place, without distinction. Since Odysseus thinks that Achilles has power among the shades as great as that which he had among the living, perhaps some prerogatives are assigned or taken for granted. A special hell for sinners may be implied (at least they are listed in a group), but it is noteworthy that these sinners are extraordinary indeed, great figures of mythological antiquity who dared great crimes against the gods. Apparently ordinary mortals do not suffer so for their sins. Homer does not seem to present an afterlife of judgment and reward

and punishment, and Minos presumably acts as a judge among the dead, settling their disputes there very much as he did in real life.

The tone and mood of the Homeric afterlife are generally more consistent. Vague and fluttering spirits, with all the pursuits, passions, and prejudices they had while alive, drift aimlessly and joylessly in the gloom; the light and hope and vigor of the upper world are gone. Philosophical and religious thought, shot through with moral earnestness and righteous indignation, will soon bring about sublime and terrifying variations in this picture.

Plato's Myth of Er

Plato concludes the last book of his great dialogue, *The Republic,* with the myth of Er. This vision of the afterlife is steeped in religious and philosophical concepts; and although figures from mythology are incorporated, the symbolic and spiritual world depicted is far removed from that of Homer. Addressing Glaucon, Socrates makes this clear as he begins (614B–616B):

I shall not tell a tale like that of Odysseus to Alcinoüs, but instead my story is of a brave man, Er, the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian, who at one time died in war; after ten days, when the bodies—by now decayed—were taken up, his alone was uncorrupted. He was brought home, and on the twelfth day after his death placed on a funeral pyre in preparation for burial. But he came back to life and told what he had seen in the other world. He said that, after his soul had departed, it traveled with many and came to a divine place, in which there were two openings in the earth next to each other, and opposite were two others in the upper region of the sky.

In the space between these four openings sat judges who passed sentence: the just they ordered to go to the right through one of the openings upward in the sky, after they had affixed their judgments in front of them; the unjust they sent to the left through one of the downward openings, bearing on their backs indications of all that they had done; to Er, when he approached, they said that he must be a messenger to human beings about the afterlife and commanded him to listen and watch everything in this place.

To be sure he saw there the souls, after they had been judged, going away through the opening either in the heaven or in the earth, but from the remaining two openings he saw some souls coming up out of the earth, covered with dust and dirt, and others descending from the second opening in the sky, pure and shining. And they kept arriving and appeared as if they were happy indeed to return after a long journey to the plain that lay between. Here they encamped as though for a festival, and mutual acquaintances exchanged greetings; those who had come from the earth and those from the sky questioned one another. The first group recounted their experiences, weeping and wailing as they recalled all the various things they had suffered and seen in their journey under the earth, which had lasted one thousand years; the others from the sky told in turn of the happiness they had felt and sights of indescribable beauty.

O Glaucon, it would take a long time to relate everything. But he did say that the essential significance was this: everyone had to suffer an appropriate

penalty for each and every sin ten times over, in retribution for the number of times and the number of persons he had wronged; that is, he must make one full payment once every hundred years (since this is considered the span of human life) so that he might pay in full for all his wrongs, tenfold in one thousand years. For example, if any were responsible for the deaths of many or betrayed and enslaved cities or armies or were guilty of any other crime, they would suffer torments ten times over for all these sins individually; but on the other hand, if they had done good deeds and were just and holy, in the same proportion they were given a worthy reward. About those who died immediately after birth and those who had lived a short time he said other things not worth mentioning.

He described still greater retribution for honor or dishonor toward gods and parents and for murder. He told how he was near one spirit who asked another where Ardiaeus the Great was. This Ardiaeus had been tyrant in a city of Pamphylia a thousand years before this time, and he was said to have killed his aged parents and older brother and to have committed many other unholy deeds. The reply was that he had not and would not come back to the plain. For to be sure this was one of the terrifying sights that we witnessed.

When we were near the mouth and about to come up, after experiencing everything else, we suddenly saw Ardiaeus and others, most of whom were tyrants, but there were also some ordinary persons who had committed great wrongs. They all thought that they would at last ascend upward, but the mouth would not let them; instead it gave forth a roar, whenever any who were so incurable in their wickedness or had not paid sufficient penalty attempted to come up. Then indeed wild men, fiery of aspect, who stood by and understood the roar, seized some of them and led them away, but they bound Ardiaeus and the others, head, hand, and foot, threw them down, and flayed them; they dragged them along the road outside the mouth combing their flesh like wool with thorns, making clear to others as they passed the reason for the punishment and that they were being led away to be hurled down to Tartarus.

Of all the many and varied terrors that happened to them there, by far the greatest for each was that he might hear the roar as he came up, and when there was silence each ascended with the utmost joy. The judgments then were such as these: punishments for some and again rewards for others in due proportion.

The souls who have completed their cycle of one thousand years spend seven days on the plain and then proceed on another journey, accompanied by Er. Four days later they arrive at a place from which they behold a beam of light that extends like a pillar through all of heaven and earth. After another day's journey, they can see that this light provides as it were a bond or chain to hold the universe together; from this chain of light extends the spindle of Necessity (*Ananke*) by which all the revolving spheres are turned. The next section of the myth presents a difficult, cosmological explanation of the universe, with its circles of fixed stars and revolving planets, the earth being at the center.[9]

Then Plato's account of Er, as Socrates relates it, continues with a description of the harmony of the spheres (617B–621D):

The spindle turned on the knees of Necessity. A Siren was perched aloft each of the circles and borne along with it, uttering a single sound on one musical

note; from all eight came a unified harmony. Round about at equal distances sat three others, each on a throne, the Fates (Moirai), daughters of Necessity, in white robes with garlands on their heads, Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, singing to the music of the Sirens: Lachesis of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of the future. Clotho touches with her right hand the outside circle of the spindle and helps turn it; with her left Atropos moves the inner circles in the same way, and Lachesis touches and moves both, alternating with each hand.

Immediately after the souls arrived, they had to approach Lachesis. First of all a prophet arranged them in order; and then, after taking from the knees of Lachesis lots and examples of lives, he mounted a lofty platform and spoke: "Hear the word of Lachesis, maiden daughter of Necessity. Ephemeral souls, this is the beginning of another cycle of mortal life fraught with death. A divinity will not allot himself to you, but you will choose your divinity.[10] Let one who has drawn the first lot choose a life, which will be his by necessity. Virtue is without master; each man has a greater or lesser share, insofar as he honors or dishonors her. The blame belongs to the one who makes the choice; god is blameless."

With these words, he cast the lots among them all, and each picked up the one that fell near him. Only Er was not allowed to participate. It was clear to each when he had picked up his lot what number he had drawn. Next he placed the examples of lives on the ground in front of them, many more than those present and of every kind; lives of all living creatures and all human beings. Among them lives of tyrants, some complete, others cut short and ending in poverty, exile, and destitution. There were lives of illustrious men, renowned for form and beauty or strength and physical achievement, others for family and the virtues of their ancestors; in the same way were lives of unknown or disreputable men; and so it was for women. But the disposition of the soul was not included, because with its choice of another life it too of necessity became different, but the other qualities were mixed with one another, wealth and poverty, sickness and health, and intermediate states.

Herein to be sure, as it seems, my dear Glaucon, lies all the risk; therefore each one of us must seek to find and understand this crucial knowledge; he must search if he can hear of and discover one who will make him capable of knowing; he must distinguish the good life from the wicked and choose always in every situation from the possibilities the better course, taking into account all that has now been said. He must know how these qualities, individually or combined, affect virtue in a life; what beauty mixed with poverty or wealth achieves in terms of good and evil, along with the kind of state of soul that it inspires; and what high and low birth, private status, public office, strength, weakness, intelligence, stupidity, and all such qualities, inherent or acquired, achieve in combination with one another, so that after deliberation he may be able to choose from all of these between the worse and better life, looking only to the effect upon the nature of his soul.

By the worse life I mean that leading the soul to become more unjust, by the better, that leading it to become more just. All other considerations he will ignore. For we have seen that this is the most crucial choice for a human being living or dead. Indeed one must cling to this conviction even when he comes to the realm of Hades, so that here, just as in the other world, he may not be over-

whelmed by wealth and similar evils and succumb to acts like those of a tyrant, committing many incurable evils, and besides suffering still greater ones himself, and so that he may know how to choose a life that follows the mean in such circumstances, and to avoid the excess in either direction, both in this life and in every future life, as far as he is able. For in this way a person becomes most fortunate and blessed.

Then indeed Er, the messenger from the afterlife, reported that the prophet spoke as follows: "Even for the one who comes last, there lies a life that is desirable and not evil, if he chooses intelligently and lives it unflinchingly. Let not the one who chooses first be careless, nor the last discouraged." After he had spoken, the one who had drawn the first lot immediately went up and chose the most extreme tyranny, and he made his choice out of senselessness and greed and did not look closely at everything, and he did not notice that his life entailed the fate of eating his own children and other evils. And when he examined his choice at leisure, he beat his breast and lamented that he had not abided by the warnings of the prophet. For he did not accept the responsibility for these evils, but he blamed fate and the gods and everything rather than himself. He was one of those who had come down from the sky and had lived his previous life in a city with an orderly political constitution and adopted virtue through habit rather than wisdom.

Generally speaking, the number of those who came down from the sky and were caught in this kind of predicament was not small, since they were untrained in suffering. But many of those from earth, since they had themselves suffered and seen others suffer, did not make their choice on impulse. Because of this and because of the chance of the lot, for many souls there occurred a change from an evil to a good fate or the reverse. For if one always pursues wisdom with all his strength each time he takes a life in the world, and if the lot of choosing does not fall to him among the last, it is likely, from all that has been reported, that not only will he be happy in life but also his journey after death from the plain and back will not be under the earth and hard, but easy and upward to the sky.

Er said that to watch each soul as he chose his life was a worthwhile sight, piteous, laughable, and wondrous. For the most part, they made their choices on the basis of their experiences in their previous lives. He saw the soul that had been that of Orpheus choose the life of a swan through hatred of the female sex because of his death at their hands, not wishing to be born again of woman. And he saw the soul of Thamyras select the life of a nightingale, and a swan decide to change to the life of a human, and other musical creatures make similar decisions. The soul that drew the twentieth lot chose the life of a lion; this was the soul of Ajax, son of Telamon, avoiding a human life because he remembered the judgment concerning Achilles' armor. After him came the soul of Agamemnon; he too through hatred of the human race because of his sufferings changed to the life of an eagle. The choice of the soul of Atalanta fell in the middle of the proceedings; she saw great honors attached to the life of a male athlete and took it, not being able to pass it by. He saw after her the soul of Epeus, the son of Panopeus, assuming the nature of a craftswoman, and far away among the last the soul of the ridiculous Thersites taking the form of an ape.

In his fated turn, the soul of Odysseus, who had drawn the last lot, went to choose; remembering his former toils he sought to be free from ambition; he looked a long time and with difficulty found the quiet life of an ordinary man lying somewhere disregarded by the others and, when he saw it, he made his choice gladly and said that he would have done the same thing even if the first lot had fallen to him. In the same way, souls of wild animals exchanged forms or entered human beings, the unjust changing to savage beasts, the just to tame ones; and all kinds of combinations occurred.

When all the souls had chosen lives, they proceeded in order according to their lots to Lachesis. She gave to each the divinity (*daimon*) he had chosen to accompany him as a guardian for his life and to fulfill his choices. This divinity first led the soul to Clotho, under her hand as it turned the revolving spindle, to ratify the fate each had chosen after drawing his lot. He touched her and then led the soul to the spinning of Atropos, thus making the events on the thread of destiny unalterable. From here without turning back they went under the throne of Necessity and passed beyond it. When all the souls and their guardian divinities had done this, they proceeded together to the plain of the river of forgetfulness (Lethe) through a terrible and stifling heat. For it was devoid of trees and all that the earth grows.

Now that it was evening, they encamped by the river of forgetfulness, whose water no container can hold. It is necessary for all to drink a fixed amount of the water, but some do not have the wisdom to keep from drinking more than this amount. As one drinks one becomes forgetful of everything. In the middle of the night when they were asleep there was thunder and an earthquake, and then suddenly just like shooting stars they were borne upward, each in a different direction to his birth. Er himself was prevented from drinking the water. He does not know where and how he returned to his body, but suddenly opening his eyes he saw that he was lying on the funeral pyre at dawn.

Thus, O Glaucon, the myth has been preserved and has not perished. We should be saved if we heed it, and we shall cross the river of forgetfulness well and not contaminate our souls. But if we all agree in believing the soul is immortal and capable of enduring all evils and all good, we shall always cling to the upward path and in every way pursue justice with wisdom, so that we may be in loving reconciliation with ourselves and the gods, and so that when we carry off the prizes of justice, just like victors in the games collecting their rewards, both while we are here and in the thousand-year journey we have described, we may fare well.

This vision of an afterlife, written in the fourth century B.C., comes from various sources about which we can only conjecture. We must also allow for the inventive genius of Plato himself in terms of his own philosophy. The numeric intervals (e.g., the journey of a thousand years) are reminiscent of Pythagoras and the belief in the transmigration of the soul; reward and punishment, with ultimate purification, is usually identified as Orphic. Since this myth of revelation concludes *The Republic* with proof of divine immortality, problems abound in connection with its precise interpretation. How much was intended to be ac-

cepted literally? Is Er's story an allegory filled with profound symbols hiding the universal truths it wishes to disclose?

In his *Phaedo*, Plato provides another vision of the afterlife in which he explains (114B–C) how true philosophers eventually are released from the cycle of reincarnation; those who have lived a life of exceptional holiness and purify themselves sufficiently through their pursuit of philosophy live entirely as souls in the hereafter in beautiful dwellings, which are not easy to describe.

For the purposes of our sketch of the development of the Greek and Roman concept of the afterlife, it is important to stress that a heaven and a hell are clearly depicted for the soul of every mortal; and in addition to the upward and downward paths that must be traversed, special tormentors exist, as does a special place of torment (Tartarus) in which the greatest sinners are placed forever.[11] In such a conception lies the mythical and biblical basis for the mystery religions of antiquity, whether their god be Demeter or Dionysus and their prophet Orpheus or Plato.[12] Ties with Christian sentiments are not hard to see, despite the obvious differences. More specific links are provided by the early Christian identification of Er as an ancestor of St. Joseph and by the fact that these early Christians, in their championship of free will, seized upon the admonition of Lachesis: "This blame belongs to him who makes the choice; god is blameless."

Vergil's Book of the Dead

In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Vergil paints his sad and prophetic picture of the Underworld in shadowy halftones fraught with tears and pathos. His sources are eclectic, but his poetic vision is personal and unique. Despite the centuries of oral and written tradition and the Roman chauvinism of his depiction, Homeric and Platonic elements are often still distinctly evident. At Cumae, in Italy, the Sibyl, prophetess of Apollo, tells Aeneas what the requirements are to visit his father in the realm of Hades. He must get a golden bough, sacred to Proserpine (i.e., Persephone), and bury his comrade, Misenus. It is easy to descend to the Underworld; the task is to retrace one's steps to the upper air; only a special few have managed this. While his men are preparing a funeral pyre for Misenus, Aeneas goes in search of the bough (186–204):

As Aeneas gazed at the vast woods, it happened that he uttered a prayer: "If only the golden bough would show itself to me in so immense a forest. For the priestess told all that was true—alas, too true—about your need for burial, Misenus." At that moment, as it happened, twin doves came flying from the sky under his very eyes and settled on the green ground. Then the great hero recognized his mother's birds and in his joy prayed: "Be leaders, if there is some way, and direct your course to the grove where the branch rich in gold shades the fertile earth; O goddess mother do not fail me in this crisis."

Thus he spoke and stopped in his tracks, watching what sign they gave and what course they took. They would stop to feed and then fly ahead, always per-

mitting Aeneas to keep them in sight as he followed. When they approached the foul odor coming up from Lake Avernus, they quickly flew higher; and gliding through the liquid air the doves settled down together on the longed-for tree, where the tawny gleam of gold flickered through the branches.

Aeneas eagerly breaks off the golden bough; after the funeral rites for Misenus have been completed, he takes it to the Sibyl (237–322):

There was a deep and rocky cave with a huge yawning mouth sheltered by the black lake and the darkness of the forest; no birds at all were able to wing their way overhead, so great and foul an exhalation poured up to the vault of heaven from the lake. Its name, Avernus, deriving from the Greek, means "birdless." Here first of all the priestess set four black bullocks and poured wine over their heads; between their horns she cut the tips of bristles and placed them on the sacred fire as first libations, calling aloud on Hecate, who holds power both in the sky above and in the depths of Erebus. Attendants applied their knives and caught the warm blood in bowls. Aeneas himself slaughtered with his sword a black-fleeced lamb for Night, the mother of the Eumenides, and her great sister, Earth; and for you, Proserpine, a barren cow; then he built an altar in the night for the Stygian king and placed on the flames the whole carcasses of bulls, pouring rich oil over their entrails. Lo, at the first rays of the rising sun, the ground rumbled and the wooded ridges began to move and she-dogs appeared howling through the gloom as the goddess approached from the Underworld.

The Sibyl cried: "Keep back, keep back, you who are unhallowed; withdraw completely from this grove. But you, Aeneas, enter the path and seize your sword from its sheath. Now there is need for courage and a stout heart." This much she spoke and threw herself furiously into the cave. Aeneas, without fear, matched the steps of his leader as she went.

You gods who rule over spirits, silent shades, depths of Chaos, Phlegethon, and vast realms of night and silence, let it be right for me to speak what I have heard; by your divine will let me reveal things buried deep in earth and blackness.

They went, dim figures in the shadows of the lonely night, through the empty homes and vacant realms of Dis, as though along a road in woods by the dim and treacherous light of the moon, when Jupiter has clouded the sky in darkness, and black night has robbed objects of their color. At the entrance itself, in the very jaws of Orcus, Grief and avenging Cares have placed their beds; here dwell pale Diseases, sad Old Age, Fear, evil-counseling Hunger, foul Need, forms terrible to behold, and Death and Toil; then Sleep, the brother of Death, and Joys evil even to think about, and opposite on the threshold, death-dealing War, the iron chambers of the Eumenides, and insane Discord, her hair entwined with snakes and wreaths of blood.

In the middle, a huge and shady elm spreads its boughs, aged arms in which empty Dreams are said to throng and cling beneath all the leaves. There were also many different forms of beasts and monsters: Centaurs had their haunt in the doorway, Scyllas with twofold form, hundred-handed Briareus, the creature of Lerna hissing dreadfully, the Chimaera armed with flames, Gorgons, Harpies, and the shade of triple-bodied Geryon. Suddenly Aeneas, startled by fear,

snatched his sword and threatened them with his drawn blade as they approached. If his wise companion had not warned that these insubstantial lives without body flitted about with but the empty shadow of a form, he would have rushed in and smitten the shades with his weapon for nothing.

From here is a path that leads to the waters of Acheron, a river of Tartarus, whose seething flood boils turbid with mud in vast eddies and pours all its sand into the stream of Cocytus.[13] A ferryman guards these waters, Charon, horrifying in his terrible squalor; a mass of white beard lies unkempt on his chin, his eyes glow with a steady flame, and a dirty cloak hangs from his shoulders by a knot. He pushes his boat himself by a pole, tends to the sails, and conveys the bodies across in his rusty craft; he is now older, but for a god old age is vigorous and green. Here a whole crowd poured forth and rushed down to the bank: mothers and men, the bodies of great-souled heroes finished with life, boys and unmarried girls, young men placed on the pyres before the eyes of their parents, as many as the leaves that drop and fall in the forest at the first cold of autumn or as the birds that flock to land from the stormy deep, when winter puts them to flight across the sea and sends them to sunny lands. They stood pleading to be the first to cross and stretched out their hands in longing for the farther shore. The grim boatman accepted now these and now those, but he drove others back and kept them at a distance from the sandy shore.

Aeneas, who was moved by the tumult, asked in wonder: "Tell me, O virgin Sibyl, the meaning of this gathering at the river. What do these souls seek? By what distinction do some retire from the bank, while others are taken across the murky stream?" The aged priestess answered him briefly as follows: "Son of Anchises, and most certainly a descendant of the gods, you see the deep pools of Cocytus and the marshes of the Styx, the river by which the gods fear to swear falsely. This one group here consists of those who are poor and unburied.[14] The ferryman is Charon. The others whom he takes across are those who have been buried. Charon is not allowed to transport them over the hoarse-sounding waters to the dread shore if their bones have not found rest in proper burial; but a hundred years they wander and flit about this bank before they come back at last to the longed-for waters to be admitted to the boat." The son of Anchises stopped in his tracks and stood thinking many thoughts, pitying in his heart the inequity of the fate of human beings.

Among those who have not received burial, Aeneas sees his helmsman Palinurus, who had fallen overboard on their voyage from Africa; he managed to reach the coast of Italy, but once he came ashore tribesmen killed him. The interview is reminiscent of the exchange between Odysseus and Elpenor in human emotion and religious sentiment. The Sibyl comforts Palinurus with the prediction that he will be buried by a neighboring tribe. The book continues (384–449):

Aeneas and the Sibyl proceed on their way and approach the river. When the ferryman spied them from his post by the river Styx, coming through the silent grove and turning their steps toward the bank, he challenged them first with unprovoked abuse: "Whoever you are who approach our river in arms, explain

why you have come but answer from there, do not take another step. This is the place of the shades, of sleep and drowsy night; it is forbidden to carry living bodies in my Stygian boat. To be sure, I was not happy to accept Heracles and Theseus and Pirithoüs when they came to these waters, although they were of divine descent and invincible strength. Heracles by his own hand sought and bound in chains the guardian dog of Tartarus and dragged it away trembling from the throne of the king himself. The other two attempted to abduct the queen from the chamber of Dis."

The priestess of Apollo answered briefly: "No such plots this time; be not dismayed; our weapons bear no violence; let the huge doorkeeper howl forever and strike terror into the bloodless shades; let Proserpine remain safe and pure within the house of Pluto, her uncle. Trojan Aeneas, outstanding in goodness and valor, descends to the shades below to his father. If the sight of such great virtue and devotion does not move you, at least recognize this bough."

She revealed the bough that lay hidden in her robe, and at this his heart that was swollen with anger subsided. Not a word more was uttered. He marveled at the hallowed gift of the fateful branch, which he had not seen for a long time, and turned his dark-colored boat around to approach the shore. Then he drove away the souls that were sitting on the long benches, cleared the gangway, and at the same time took the mighty Aeneas aboard; the leaky seams groaned under his weight and let in much of the swampy water. At last Charon disembarked the seer and the hero safe and sound on the further shore amid shapeless mud and slimy sedge.

Huge Cerberus, sprawling in a cave facing them, made these regions echo with the howling from his three throats. When the prophetess saw his necks bristling with serpents she threw him a cake of meal and honey drugged to make him sleep. He opened wide his three throats in ravenous hunger and snatched the sop; his immense bulk went limp and spread out on the ground, filling the whole of the vast cavern. With the guard now buried in sleep, Aeneas made his way quickly over the bank of the river of no return.

Immediately, on the very threshold, voices were heard and a great wailing and the souls of infants weeping who did not have a full share of sweet life but a black day snatched them from the breast and plunged them into bitter death. Next to them were those who had been condemned to die by a false accusation. To be sure their abode has not been assigned without an allotted jury, and a judge, Minos, is the magistrate; he shakes the urn and draws lots for the jury, summons the silent court, and reviews the lives and the charges. Right next is an area occupied by an unhappy group who were guiltless but sought death by their own hand and hating the light abandoned their lives. How they wished now even for poverty and hard labor in the air above! But fate stands in the way and the hateful marsh binds them with its gloomy waters, and the Styx flowing round nine times imprisons them.

Not far from here spread out in all directions were the fields of Mourning, as they are named. Here those whom relentless and cruel love had wasted and consumed hide themselves in secret paths in the woods of myrtle; even in death itself their anguish does not leave them. In this place he saw Phaedra, Procris, and unhappy Eriphyle displaying the wounds inflicted by a cruel son, and

Evadne, Pasiphaë, and with them Laodamia and Caeneus, who had been changed into a boy and now once again was a woman.

Here Aeneas meets Dido, queen of Carthage, who has recently committed suicide because of her love for Aeneas and his betrayal. He addresses her in sad, piteous, and uncomprehending tones; but she refuses to answer and turns away to join the shade of her former husband, Sychaeus.

From here Aeneas and his guide move on to the last group and farthest fields, reserved for those renowned in war, who had been doomed to die in battle and were much lamented by those on earth. Tydeus, Parthenopaeus, Adrastus, and many, many others come to meet Aeneas. Trojan heroes crowd around him, but the Greek warriors from Troy flee in terror. Aeneas converses with Deïphobus, the son of Priam who married Helen after the death of Paris. Deïphobus tells the story of his death at the hands of Menelaus and Odysseus through the treachery of Helen. Their talk is interrupted by the Sibyl, who complains that they are wasting what brief time they have; it is now already past midday on earth and night is coming on (540–543):

This is the place where the road divides and leads in two directions: our way is to the right and extends under the ramparts of Dis to Elysium, but the left path leads to the evil realms of Tartarus, where penalties for sin are exacted.

We must look at Vergil's comprehensive and profound conception of Hell, Tartarus, and Paradise, Elysium or the Elysian Fields (548–579):

Suddenly Aeneas looked back to the left and saw under a cliff lofty fortifications enclosed by a triple wall around which flowed Phlegethon, the swift stream of Tartarus, seething with flames and rolling clashing rocks in its torrent. He saw in front of him a huge door, with columns of solid adamant that no human force nor even the gods who dwell in the sky would have the power to attack and break through. Its tower of iron stood high against the winds; and one of the Furies, Tisiphone, clothed in a bloody robe, sat guarding the entrance, sleepless day and night. From within he heard groans and the sound of savage lashes, then the grating of iron and the dragging of chains. Aeneas stood in terror, absorbed by the din. "Tell me, virgin prophetess, what is the nature of their crimes? What penalties are imposed? What is this great wail rising upward on the air?"

Then she began to speak: "Renowned leader of the Trojans, it is not permitted for anyone who is pure to cross the threshold of the wicked. But when Hecate put me in charge of the groves of Avernus, she herself taught me the penalties exacted by the gods and went through them all. Cretan Rhadamanthus presides over this pitiless kingdom; he punishes crimes and recognizes treachery, forcing each to confess the sins committed in the world above, atonement for which each had postponed too long, happy in his futile stealth, until death. At once the avenging fury, Tisiphone, armed with a whip, leaps on the guilty and drives them with blows; as she threatens with her fierce serpents in her left hand, she summons the phalanx, her savage sisters. Then at last the

Aeneas and the Sibyl in the Underworld. By Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625); oil on canvas, 1600, $10\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$ in. Aeneas strides along holding his sword (useless against the powers of the Underworld) and the golden bough, which he will offer to Persephone before he can enter the Elysian Fields. Behind are the lurid fires of Tartarus, and on either side are monsters and sinners enduring or awaiting punishment. *(Budapest, Szépmüsévesti Museum.)*

sacred gates open wide, turning with strident horror on their creaking hinges. Do you see what kind of sentry sits at the entrance? What forms are watching in the threshold? The monstrous Hydra, more fierce than the Furies with its fifty black and gaping throats, has its home within. Then Tartarus itself yawns deep under the shades, extending straight down twice as far as the view upward to the sky and celestial Olympus."

In Tartarus Vergil places the Homeric sinners Tityus, Sisyphus, and possibly Tantalus; but there is difficulty in the text and its interpretation. Tityus is the only one of the three named directly. Other criminals identified by Vergil are the Titans, who were hurled to the very bottom of Tartarus by the thunderbolts of Jupiter; the sons of Aloeus, Otus and Ephialtes,[15] who tried to storm heaven and seize Jupiter himself; Salmoneus, who was foolish enough to play the role of Jupiter and claim divine honors; Theseus and Pirithoüs; Phlegyas;[16] and Ixion. Ixion is one of the more famous sinners condemned to Tartarus; he is punished by being bound to a wheel that eternally revolves.[17]

Vergil's Tartarus is not a hell just for heroic sinners of mythological antiquity; in it all who are guilty suffer punishment. It is important to realize fully the ethical standards he applies. The nature of sin is clearly summed up by the Sibyl as she continues; just as clear is the moral conviction that assigns happiness to the good in the paradise of Elysium (608–751):

"Here are imprisoned and await punishment those who hated their brothers while they were alive or struck a parent and devised guile against a dependent or who hovered over their acquired wealth all alone and did not share it with their relatives (these misers were the greatest throng), and those who were killed for adultery or took up arms in an impious cause and were not afraid to betray the pledges made to their masters. Do not seek to learn the nature of the crime and fate of each and every sinner and the punishment in which he is submerged. Some roll a huge rock, others hang stretched on the spokes of a wheel; Theseus sits in his misery and will remain sitting forever; wretched Phlegyas admonishes all as he bears testimony in a loud voice among the shades: 'Be warned! Learn justice and not to despise the gods.' This one sold his country for gold, set up a tyrannical despot, made laws and revoked them for a price. This one invaded the bedroom of his daughter in forbidden incestuous marriage.

"All dared enormous crime and were successful in the attainment of their daring. I should not be able to recount all the forms of wickedness or enumerate all the names of the punishments if I had a hundred tongues and a hundred mouths."

After the aged priestess of Phoebus had uttered these words, she continued: "But come now, proceed on your way and accomplish the task you have undertaken. Let us hurry. I see opposite fortifications of Pluto's palace erected by the forges of the Cyclopes and the vaulted arch of its door where we have been ordered to lay down this gift!" She had spoken, and making their way together through the gloom of the path they hurried over the space between and approached the gates. Aeneas reached the entrance, sprinkled himself with fresh water, and placed the bough on the threshold.

When this had been done and the gift had been given to the goddess, then at last they came to the happy places, the pleasant green glades of the Woods of the Fortunate, the home of the blessed. Here air that is more pure and abundant clothes the plains in soft-colored light and they have their own sun and their own stars. Some exercise their limbs on the grassy wrestling grounds, vie in sport, and grapple on the yellow sand. Others dance in a chorus and sing songs; and the Thracian priest, Orpheus, in his long robe, accompanies their measures on the seven strings of his lyre, plucking them now with his fingers, now with an ivory quill. Here is the ancient Trojan line of King Teucer, a most beautiful race, great-souled heroes born in better years, and Ilus, Assaracus, and Dardanus, the founder of Troy.

Aeneas marvels at the unreal arms of the heroes and their chariots nearby. The spears stand fixed in the ground, and horses browse freely everywhere on the plain. The same pleasure that they had in their chariots and arms and in tending their sleek horses follows them after they have been laid in the earth. Behold he sees others feasting to the right and to the left on the grass and singing a happy paean in a chorus amidst a fragrant grove of laurel, from which the full stream of the Eridanus River rolls through the woods in the upper world.[18]

Here in a group were those who suffered wounds while fighting for their country, and the priests who remained pure while they lived, and the poets who were devout in their art and whose words were worthy of their god, Phoebus Apollo, or those who made life better by their discoveries in the arts and the sciences and who through merit made others remember them. All of these wore around their temples a snowy white garland; the Sibyl spoke to them as they surrounded her, singling out Musaeus especially: "Tell me, happy souls and you, O illustrious poet, what region, what place does Anchises inhabit? We crossed the great rivers of Erebus and have come on his account." Musaeus replied in these few words: "No one has a fixed abode; we inhabit shady groves, living in meadows fresh with streams along whose banks we recline. But if the desire in your heart so impels you, cross over this ridge; I shall show you an easy path." He spoke and walked ahead of them pointing out the shining fields below; then they made their way down from the height.

Father Anchises was eagerly contemplating and surveying souls that were secluded in the depths of a green valley and about to enter upon the light of the upper air. It happened that he was reviewing the whole number of his own dear descendants; the fate, fortune, character, and exploits of Roman heroes. When he saw Aeneas coming toward him over the grass, he quickly extended both his hands and a cry escaped his lips as the tears poured down his cheeks: "At last you have come, and your long-awaited devotion to your father has overcome the hard journey. Is it granted to me to see your face, to hear your voice, to speak to you as of old? I have been pondering your visit, thinking about when it would be, counting out the time, and my anxiety has not gone unrewarded. I receive you here after your travels over so many lands and so many seas, harried by so many dangers! How much I feared that Dido in her African kingdom might do you some harm!"

Aeneas replied: "The vision of you in your sadness appearing to me again and again compelled me to pursue my way to this realm. My ships are moored

on the Italian shore. Give me, give me your right hand, father, do not shrink from my embrace." As he was speaking, his face was moist with many tears. Three times he attempted to put his arms around his father's neck, three times he reached in vain as the phantom escaped his hands as light as a breeze, like a fleeting vision of the night.[19] Meanwhile, Aeneas saw in this valley set apart, a secluded grove and the rustling thickets of a wood and the stream of Lethe, which flowed by the serene abodes. Around the river countless tribes and peoples were flitting, just as when bees settle on different flowers in a meadow in the calm heat of summer and swarm about the white lilies; the whole plain was filled with a murmuring sound.

Aeneas, who did not understand, gave a sudden shudder at the sight; and seeking reasons for it all, he asked what the river was in the distance and what crowd of men filled its banks. Then father Anchises replied: "The souls to which bodies are owed by Fate at the stream of the river Lethe drink waters that release them from previous cares and bring everlasting forgetfulness. Indeed I have desired for a long time to tell you about these souls, to show them before your very eyes, and to list the number of my descendants; now all the more may you rejoice with me that you have found Italy." "O father, am I to think that some souls go from here to the upper air and enter sluggish bodies again? What is this dread desire of these poor souls for light?" "To be sure I shall tell you and not hold you in suspense." Thus Anchises replied and proceeded step by step to reveal the details in order.

"In the first place, a spirit within sustains the sky, the earth, the waters, the shining globe of the moon, and the Titan sun and stars; this spirit moves the whole mass of the universe, a mind, as it were, infusing its limbs and mingled with its huge body. From this arises all life, the race of mortals, animals, and birds, and the monsters that the sea bears under its marble surface. The seeds of this mind and spirit have a fiery power and celestial origin, insofar as the limbs and joints of the body, which is of earth, harmful, and subject to death, do not make them dull and slow them down. Thus the souls, shut up in the gloomy darkness of the prison of their bodies, experience fear, desire, joy, and sorrow, and do not see clearly the essence of their celestial nature.

"Moreover, when the last glimmer of life has gone, all the evils and all the diseases of the body do not yet completely depart from these poor souls; and it is inevitable that many ills, for a long time encrusted, become deeply ingrained in an amazing way. Therefore they are plied with punishments, and they pay the penalties of their former wickedness. Some spirits are hung suspended to the winds; for others the infection of crime is washed by a vast whirlpool or burned out by fire. Each of us suffers his own shade.[20]

"Then we are sent to Elysium, and we few occupy these happy fields, until a long period of the circle of time has been completed and has removed the ingrown corruption and has left a pure ethereal spirit and the fire of the original essence. When they have completed the cycle of one thousand years, the god calls all these in a great throng to the river Lethe, where, of course, they are made to forget so that they might begin to wish to return to bodies and see again the vault of heaven."

Anchises then leads Aeneas and the Sibyl to a mound from which they can view the souls as they come up, and he points out to them, with affection and pride, a long array of great and illustrious Romans who are to be born. The book ends with Aeneas and his guide leaving by the gate of ivory; why Vergil has it so, no one knows for sure (893–899):

"There are twin gates of Sleep; one is said to be of horn, through which easy exit is given to the true shades. The other is gleamingly wrought in shining ivory, but through it the spirits send false dreams up to the sky." After he had spoken, Anchises escorted his son and the Sibyl and sent them out by the gate of ivory. Aeneas made his way to his ships and rejoined his companions.

Vergil wrote in the second half of the first century B.C., and variations and additions are apparent when his depiction is compared to the earlier ones of Homer and Plato. There are, of course, many other sources for the Greek and Roman conception of the afterlife, but none are more complete or more profound than the representative visions of these authors, and a comparison of them gives the best possible insight into the general nature and development of the ancient conception both spiritually and physically.

Vergil's geography of Hades is quite precise. First of all a neutral zone contains those who met an untimely death (infants, suicides, and persons condemned unjustly); next the Fields of Mourning are inhabited by victims of unrequited love and warriors who fell in battle. The logic of these allocations is not entirely clear. Is a full term of life necessary for complete admission to the Underworld? Then appear the crossroads to Tartarus and the Fields of Elysium. The criteria for judgment are interesting; like many another religious philosopher and poet, Vergil must decide who will merit the tortures of his hell or the rewards of his heaven on the basis both of tradition and of personal conviction. Other writers vary the list.[21] Some have observed that the tortures inflicted are often imaginative and ingenious, involving vain and frustrating effort of mind and body, and therefore characteristically Greek in their sly inventiveness. Perhaps so, but depicted as well is sheer physical agony through scourging and fire. Attempts made to find a logic in the meting out of a punishment to fit the crime are only sometimes successful.[22]

Vergil's Paradise is very much an idealization of the life led by Greek and Roman gentlemen; and the values illustrated in the assignment of its inhabitants are typical of ancient ethics: devotion to humankind, to country, to family, and to the gods. In Elysium, too, details supplement the religious philosophy of Plato, which has been labeled Orphic and Pythagorean in particular and mystic in general. The human body is of earth—evil and mortal; the soul is of the divine upper aether—pure and immortal. It must be cleansed from contamination and sin. Once again we are reminded of the myth of Dionysus, which explains the dual nature of human beings in terms of their birth from the ashes of the wicked Titans (the children of Earth) who had devoured the heavenly god Dionysus.

Presumably in the cycle of rebirth and reincarnation, the weary chain is ultimately broken; and we are no longer reborn into this world, but join the oneness of divinity in the pure spirit of the upper air.

Traditional Elements of Hades' Realm

Some identification and clarification of the various names and terminology linked with the Underworld are in order. The realm as a whole may be called Tartarus or Erebus, although these are also the names given solely to the region of torment, as opposed to Elysium or the Elysian Fields. Sometimes the realm of Paradise is located elsewhere in some remote place of the upper world, such as the Islands of the Blessed.

There are usually three judges of the Underworld: Minos, Rhadamanthys (or Rhadamanthus), and Aeacus, whose duties are variously assigned. Aeacus is sometimes relegated to more menial tasks; in comedy he appears as the gatekeeper. The rivers are generally five in number, with appropriate names: Styx (the river of hate); Acheron (of woe); Lethe (of forgetfulness); Cocytus (of wailing); Pyriphlegethon or Phlegethon (of fire). For philosophical and religious conceptions of the afterlife and the belief in the transmigration of souls and rebirth, the River of Forgetfulness (Lethe) assumes great importance. It was a custom to bury the dead with a coin in the mouth to provide the ferryman Charon with his fare.[23] Hermes Psychopompus often plays the role of guide for the souls from this world to the next. The ferocious dog, Cerberus, usually depicted with three heads, guards the entrance to the realm of the dead.

Hades, king of the Underworld, is also called Pluto or (in Latin) Dis, which means "the wealthy one," referring to him either as a god of earth and fertility or as a deity rich in the numbers of those who are with him. The Romans called him and his realm Orcus, which probably means "the one or the place that constrains or confines." Sometimes Hades (this word may mean "the unseen one") is given no name at all or is addressed by some complimentary epithet, as is the custom with all dreadful deities or spirits—including the devil. Hades and his realm and its inhabitants are in general called *chthonian*, that is, of the earth, as opposed to the bright world of the Olympian gods of the upper air; and Hades himself may even be addressed as Chthonian Zeus. His queen is Persephone.

In Hades' realm, we may find either our heaven (Elysium) or our hell (Tartarus). Tradition developed a canon of mythological sinners who suffer there forever: Tityus, with vultures tearing at his liver; Ixion, bound to a revolving wheel; the Danaids, vainly trying to carry water in sievelike containers; Sisyphus, continually rolling a rock up a hill; and Tantalus, tantalized by food and drink.[24]

The Furies (Erinyes) usually have their home in the realm of Hades; so does Hecate, who sometimes resembles them in appearance and in character. Hesiod, as we have seen, tells how the Furies were born from the blood that fell onto the

earth after the castration of Uranus; according to others, they are the offspring of Night. Both versions are appropriate in terms of their sphere and their powers. They vary in number, but they may be reduced to three with specific names: Allecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone. In literature and art they are depicted as formidable, bearing serpents in their hands or hair and carrying torches and scourges. They are the pitiless and just avengers of crime, especially murder; blood guilt within the family is their particular concern, and they may relentlessly pursue anyone who has killed a parent or close relative. It has been conjectured that originally they were thought of as the ghosts of the murdered seeking vengeance on the murderer or as the embodiment of curses called down upon the guilty.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF GREEK AND ROMAN CONCEPTS

A consideration of how different societies and peoples at various times have viewed the afterlife cannot help but be fascinating. We all must die, and what will happen after death is a question that each of us has pondered deeply. Whatever our beliefs, the Graeco-Roman view must stand as one of the most philosophically profound and religiously archetypal, with themes that find parallels not only with religions of the West (such as Judaism and Christianity) but also with those of the East (Buddhism and Platonism share basic concepts).[28] For those who dismiss any certain knowledge of death's aftermath as futile, the artistic bequest of the ancient world can offer its own rewards.

The profundity and intensity of the Greek and Roman visions of an afterlife have been all-pervasive in the art and literature of Western civilization. The most explicit literary description is that of Vergil, and this has been the most potent inspiration for postclassical artists and writers. The great Italian poet Dante (1265–1321) was steeped in its radiance, which he suffused with Christian imagination and dogma. Dante takes Vergil as his guide through the *Inferno*, in which many of the classical features of Hades are to be found. In Canto 1 Dante, terrified and lost in a wilderness, encounters Vergil, who becomes his guide through Christian Hell; lines 82–87 express Dante's intense devotion to the Roman poet, inherent in the poem.

> O, honor and light of all the other poets,
> May the long study and great love
> which made me pore over your tome
> help me now.
> You are my master and my authority,
> You are the only one from whom
> I drew and cultivated the noble style
> which has brought me honor.

Many excerpts from Dante could be offered to show the myriad debts to the *Aeneid*. The depiction of Cerberus in Canto 6 is a particularly famous example.

The Furies very definitely represent the old moral order of justice within the framework of primitive society, where the code of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is meted out by the personal vendetta of the family or the clan. This is Aeschylus' conception of them in his dramatic trilogy, the *Oresteia.* The Furies persecute Orestes after he murders his mother (who has murdered his father), but eventually their role is taken over by a new regime of right: the Areopagus, the court of Athens, decides Orestes' case through the due process of law; and it is significant that Apollo and Athena (the new generation of progressive deities) join forces with the justice of advanced civilization. The last play in the trilogy is called the *Eumenides,* which means the "kindly ones"; this is the name for the Furies as they were worshiped in Athens, after having finally been appeased and put to rest once and for all.[25]

The Christian concept of Satan should not be confused with the ancient portrayal of Hades, who is not fighting with his brother Zeus for our immortal souls. We all end up in his realm, where we may or may not find our heaven or our hell. The only exceptions are those who (like Heracles) are specifically made divinities and therefore allowed to join the gods in heaven or on Olympus. Hades, to be sure, is terrible and inexorable in his severity, but he is not in himself evil or our tormentor; we may fear him as we fear death and its possible consequences, which we cannot avoid. But he does have assistants, such as the Furies, who persecute with devilish and fiendish torments.[26] Hades' wife and queen of his realm, Persephone, is considered in the previous chapter.

It would be misleading, however, to conclude our survey of the Underworld with the impression that all Greek and Roman literature treats the realm of Hades and the afterlife so seriously. One thinks immediately of Aristophanes' play the *Frogs,* in which the god Dionysus rows across the Styx to the accompaniment of a chorus croaking *brekekekex koax koax;* his tour of the Underworld is quite different from Aeneas' and is at times hilarious.[27]

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NOTES

1. Tiresias is the famous seer of the Theban cycle, who holds special prerogatives in the world of the dead; his wits are intact, and to him alone in death Persephone has left a mind for reasoning; all others are mere shadows (*Odyssey* 10. 492–495).
2. Another name for Hades' realm or part of it.
3. Elpenor can address Odysseus first without drinking the blood because his corpse has not yet been cremated.
4. As we learn in Book 10 (551–560), Elpenor got drunk and, wanting fresh air, left his companions in Circe's palace. He fell asleep on the roof; in the morning he was awakened suddenly and forgot where he was.
5. Tiresias does not have to drink the blood before he can speak, but he needs to drink it in order to express his prophetic powers to the full. He may also be drinking it as a mortal would drink wine, for refreshment, and thus he establishes ties of hospitality and friendship with Odysseus.
6. An early name of Delphi.
7. Tantalus' crime is variously described by later writers; whatever its specific nature, it is a crime against the gods, often identified as some abuse of their trust or hospitality. The verb *tantalize* comes from his name and his punishment. For Pindar's version, see pp. 404–405.
8. Sisyphus' crimes are recounted on pp. 612–613.
9. Plato's image is of a spindle with its shaft at one end and a fly or whorl at the other. We may liken this to an open umbrella held upside down and filled with eight concentric circular rings, which revolve and carry with them the stars and the planets.
10. This divinity (*daimon*) is the destiny that accompanies each soul through its life on earth, its good or bad *genius.*
11. In Hesiod (*Theogony* 713–814) Tartarus is a dark place in the depths of the earth into which Zeus hurled the Titans after he defeated them. It is surrounded by a fortification of bronze, and inside dwell Night and her children Sleep and Death. The house of Hades and Persephone is guarded by a terrifying hound. The river of Tartarus is the Styx, by whose water the gods swear dread oaths; if they break these oaths, they must suffer terrible penalties for a full nine years.
12. In graves in southern Italy and Crete have been found thin plates of gold inscribed with religious verses that were presumably intended to help the mystic believer in the afterlife; some of the sentiments reflect the eschatology found in Plato, especially concerning the drinking of the waters of Lethe.
13. Vergil's conception of the rivers of the Underworld is far from clear. Charon seems to ferry the souls across Acheron, although Cocytus is mentioned in the immediate context; the Styx is identified by Vergil later. Tradition often has Charon cross the river Styx.
14. By poor, Vergil probably means that they do not have the fare to pay Charon. A coin was traditionally placed between the lips of the dead for passage to the Underworld.
15. The mother of the Aloadae was Iphimedeia, who said that their real father was Poseidon, according to the Greek version. These twins grew to be giants, and their attack on Zeus was made by piling Mt. Ossa upon Olympus and then Mt. Pelion upon Ossa. For this presumption, they were both while still young killed by Apollo.
16. In some accounts Phlegyas is the father of Ixion; he burned the temple of Apollo at Delphi because of Apollo's affair with his daughter Coronis.

17. Sometimes the wheel is on fire. For Ixion's crime, see pp. 602–603.
18. Near its source, the Po River flowed for some distance underground, and the legendary river of the Underworld, Eridanus, was identified with it.
19. Vergil echoes Homer's lines about Odysseus trying to embrace the shade of his mother.
20. That is, each of us has a soul that must bear the consequences of its life on earth.
21. The Danaids, the forty-nine daughters of Danaüs who killed their husbands on their wedding night, are frequently added to the group in Tartarus; their punishment is that they must attempt in vain to carry water in containers that have no real bottoms.
22. Thus, for example, Tityus has his liver devoured because he attempted to violate Leto, since the liver was believed to be the seat of the passions.
23. For Charon in the Western tradition, see R. H. Terpening, *Charon and the Crossing: Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Transformations of a Myth* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1985).
24. Tantalus' misery is vividly described in Seneca's play *Thyestes* (152–175).
25. The Furies also may be called the Eumenides in an attempt to ward off their hostility by a euphemistic appellation, as in the case of Hades.
26. Zeus and the gods may destroy human beings and punish evil in this life, at times in opposition to one another. And the justice of the moral order of the Olympian gods and the Fates is the same as that of the realm of Hades. It is Prometheus who champions the human race as a whole against the antagonism of Zeus, but this is a quite different story.
27. The brilliant, satiric *Dialogues of the Dead* (e.g., nos. 18 and 22) by Lucian also illustrate the varied moods of the Greek and Roman portrayal of the Underworld.
28. For the development of concepts of reward and punishment, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), and, by the same author, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). See also Alice K. Turner, *History of Hell* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1993). Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), reveals how Christianity in developing its own particular views chose between the two options offered by the Graeco-Roman and Judaic conceptions: all the dead live on with no distinction made between the good and the wicked, or the good are rewarded and the wicked punished. His discussion of "Christ's Descent into Hades" is relevant for its theme of the Harrowing of Hell or The Conquest of Death by both resurrection-god and hero, an archetype with which we have already become *very* familiar.

CHAPTER

16

ORPHEUS AND ORPHISM: MYSTERY RELIGIONS IN ROMAN TIMES

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Ovid tells the story of how Orpheus lost his new bride Eurydice (*Metamorphoses* 10. 1–85; 11. 1–66):

Hymen, god of marriage, wrapped in his saffron-colored cloak, left the wedding of Iphis and Ianthe and made his way through the vast tracts of air to the shores of the Thracian Cicones; he came at the call of Orpheus, but in vain, for although he was to be sure present at the marriage of Orpheus to Eurydice, he did not smile or bless the pair or give good omens. Even the torch he held kept sputtering with smoke that drew tears and would not burn despite vigorous shaking. The outcome was even more serious than this ominous beginning. For while the new bride was wandering through the grass accompanied by a band of Naiads, she was bitten on the ankle by a serpent and collapsed in death.

After Orpheus, the bard of the Thracian mountains, had wept his fill to the breezes of the upper world, he dared to descend to the Styx by the entrance near Taenarus so that he might rouse even the shades.[1] Past the tenuous multitudes of ghosts beyond the grave, he approached Persephone and her lord, who rule this unlovely realm of shadows, and sang his song as he plucked the strings of his lyre: "O deities of the world below the earth, into which all of us who are mortal return, if it is right and you allow me to utter the truth, laying aside evasion and falsehood, I did not come down to see the realms of Tartarus or to bind the triple neck, bristling with serpents, of the monstrous hound descended from Medusa; the cause of my journey is my wife; she stepped on a snake, and its venom coursing through her veins stole from her the bloom of her years. I wanted to be able to endure, and I admit that I have tried; but Love has conquered. He is a god who is well known in the world above; I suspect that he is famous even here as well (although I do not know for sure); if the story of the abduction of long ago is not a lie, Love also brought you two together.

"By these places full of fear, by this yawning Chaos, and by the silent vastness of this kingdom, reweave I pray the thread of Eurydice's destiny cut off too soon! We pay everything to you, and after tarrying but a little while, we hasten more slowly or more quickly to this one abode. All of us direct our course here, this is our very last home, and you hold the longest sway over the human race. Eurydice too, when she in her ripe age has gone through the just allotment

Spring: Orpheus and Eurydice. By Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863); oil on canvas, 1836, 78 × 65¼ in. Eurydice falls as a companion holds her and looks in horror at the snake gliding into the undergrowth at the bottom right corner. Orpheus with his lyre approaches from the left, and another nymph looks on in fear on the right, kneeling like the figure of Eurydice in Poussin's painting of the same subject. This painting, left unfinished at the artist's death, is one of a series of the Four Seasons with mythological subjects (*Summer: Diana and Actaeon; Autumn: Bacchus and Ariadne; Winter: Juno and Aeolus*). *(São Paulo, Museu de Arte de São Paulo.)*

of her years, will fall under your power; I ask as a gift her return to me. If the Fates refuse this reprieve for my wife, it is sure that I do not wish to return either. Take joy in the death of us both!"

As he made this plea and sang his words to the tune of his lyre, the bloodless spirits wept; Tantalus stopped reaching for the receding waters, the wheel of Ixion stopped in wonder, the vultures ceased tearing at the liver of Tityus, the Danaid descendants of Belus left their urns empty, and you, O Sisyphus, sat on your stone. Then for the first time, the story has it, the cheeks of the Eumenides were moist with tears as they were overcome by his song, and the king who rules these lower regions and his regal wife could not endure his pleas or their refusal. They called Eurydice; she was among the more recent shades and she approached, her step slow because of her wound. Thracian Orpheus took her and with her the command that he not turn back his gaze until he had left the groves of Avernus, or the gift would be revoked.

Through the mute silence, they wrest their steep way, arduous, dark, and thick with black vapors. They were not far from the border of the world above; here frightened that she might not be well and yearning to see her with his own eyes, through love he turned and looked, and with his gaze she slipped away and down. He stretched out his arms, struggling to embrace and be embraced, but unlucky and unhappy he grasped nothing but the limp and yielding breezes. Now as Eurydice was dying for a second time, she did not reproach her husband; for what complaint should she have except that she was loved? She uttered for the very last time a farewell that barely reached his ears and fell back once more to the same place.

At the second death of his wife, Orpheus was stunned. . . . The ferryman kept Orpheus back as he begged in vain, wishing to cross over once again; yet he remained seated on the bank for seven days, unkempt and without food, the gift of Ceres; anxiety, deep grief, and tears were his nourishment as he bewailed the cruelty of the gods of Erebus. He then withdrew to the mountains of Thrace, Rhodope, and windswept Haemus. Three times the Titan sun had rounded out the year with the sign of watery Pisces, and Orpheus the while had fled from love with all women, either because of his previous woe or because he had made a pledge. Many women were seized with passion for union with the bard, and many in anguish were repulsed. He was the originator for the Thracian peoples of turning to the love of young men and of enjoying the brief spring of their youth and plucking its first flowers. . . .

While the Thracian bard was inducing the woods, the rocks, and the hearts of the wild beasts to follow him, Ciconian women, their frenzied breasts clad in animal skins, spied Orpheus from the top of a hill as he was singing to his lyre. One of them, her hair tossing in the light breeze, exclaimed: "Ah look, here is the one who despises us." And she hurled her weapon, wreathed with foliage, straight at the face of Apollo's son as he sang, and it made its mark but did not wound. The weapon of another was a stone, which as it hurtled was overcome in midair by the harmony of voice and lyre and fell prone at his feet like a suppliant apologizing for so furious an assault. But their hostility grew more bold, and restraint was abandoned until the Fury of madness held absolute sway. All weapons would have been softened by his song, but the great clamor, the

Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes. Marble relief, Roman copy of a Greek original of the fifth century B.C.; height 46½ in. This panel was originally part of a parapet placed around the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Agora at Athens. It shows the moment when Orpheus has looked back at Eurydice and they part forever. Hermes Psychopompos has his hand on Eurydice's wrist, ready to lead her back to the Underworld—a poignant contrast with the tender placement of Eurydice's left hand on her husband's shoulder. The names of the figures appear above them, Orpheus' being written right to left. *(Museo Nazionale, Naples. Photograph Corbis-Bettmann.)*

Phrygian flutes with their curved pipes, the drums, the pounding, and the Bacchic shrieks drowned out the sound of his lyre.

Then at the last the stones that could not hear grew red with the blood of the poet. But first the maenads seized the hordes of birds still spellbound by the singer's voice, the serpents, and the throng of beasts, all testimonies to the triumph of his song. And then they turned with bloody hands on Orpheus himself, like birds that throng together if at any time they see the owl of night abroad by day. They made for the bard, just as the stag about to die is prey for the dogs in the morning sand of the amphitheater, and they flung the verdant leafy thyrsus, not made for such deadly purpose. Some hurled clods of earth, others branches ripped from trees, still others stones.

So that weapons might not be wanting for their fury, it happened that oxen were working the earth, yoked to the ploughshare; and nearby sturdy farmers were digging the hard fields with much sweat preparing for the harvest. When they saw the throng, they fled leaving behind the tools with which they worked. Hoes, heavy mattocks, and long rakes lay scattered through the empty fields. The madwomen snatched them up; and after they had torn apart the oxen that threatened with their horns, they rushed back again to mete out the poet's fate. In their sacrilege they destroyed him as he stretched out his hands and spoke then for the first time in vain with a voice that touched no one. And through that mouth, which was heard, god knows, by stones and understood by bestial senses, his soul breathed forth receding on the winds.

For you, O Orpheus, for you the trees let fall their leaves and shorn of foliage made lament. They say too that rivers swelled with their own tears, and the Naiads and Dryads changed their robes to black and wore their hair disheveled. His limbs lie scattered in various places; his head and lyre you got, O river Hebrus; and—O wonder—while they floated in midstream, the lyre made some plaintive lamentation, I know not what; the lifeless tongue murmured laments too, and the banks lamented in reply. And then they left his native Thracian river and were carried out to sea, until they reached Methymna on the island of Lesbos. Here they were washed ashore on foreign sands, and a savage snake made for the mouth and hair soaked with the dripping foam. At last Phoebus Apollo appeared and stopped the serpent as it prepared to make its bite and froze hard its open mouth and gaping jaws, just as they were, in stone.

The shade of Orpheus went down below the earth and recognized all the places he had seen before; he looked amid the fields of the pious and found Eurydice, and clasped her in his eager arms. Here now they walk together side by side, sometimes he follows her as she precedes, sometimes he goes ahead and safely now looks back at his Eurydice.

As Ovid continues the story, we learn that Bacchus was distressed at the loss of the poet who sang his mysteries; he punished the Thracian women by turning them into trees and then abandoned Thrace all together.

The other major classical version of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is Vergil's.[2] Most, but not all, of the details are similar, although the poetic timbre is different. According to Vergil, Eurydice stepped on the snake while running away from the unwelcome advances of Aristaeus, son of Apollo and Cyrene.[3]

Orpheus and Eurydice, by Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988). Scenic model, 1948. In this model for a scene from the ballet *Orpheus,* with choreography by Balanchine and music by Stravinsky, Orpheus charms all the Underworld by his music, so that, according to Noguchi, "glowing rocks, like astral bodies, levitate." *(Photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt. Courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Inc.)*

Thus Ovid and Vergil represent the tradition for the tragic love story of Orpheus and Eurydice: a paean to the devotion of lover and beloved, husband and wife. Their eternal myth has been re-created again and again with imagination, beauty, and profundity, whether it be in an opera by Gluck or a movie by Cocteau. Orpheus has become the archetype of the poet and musician, and of the great and universal power of art.

Life of Orpheus, Religious Poet and Musician

There is another very important side to Orpheus' character, of which we can only catch glimpses today because of the inadequacy of our evidence. He was considered the founder of a religion, a prophet, who with his priests and disciples committed to writing holy words that provided a bible for dogma, ritual,

and behavior. Variations and inconsistencies in the tradition make it difficult to know this Orpheus and his religion precisely, but the general nature of their character and development can be discerned, despite the frustrating contradictions and obscurities.[4] Some of the significant "facts" that can be isolated from the diverse accounts are as follows.

Orpheus' home was in Thrace; his mother was one of the Muses, usually said to be Calliope; his father was either Oeagrus, a Thracian river-god, or the great god Apollo, whom he followed. He wooed and won Eurydice, a Dryad, by the charm of his music. When she died, he went to Hades to fetch her but failed. Orpheus was one of the members of Jason's Argonautic expedition.[5] He had a son or a pupil, Musaeus, who assumed many of the characteristics of Orpheus himself. Among the versions of his death, several prove interesting in the quest for the historical religious teacher. He is said to have been struck down by the thunderbolt of Zeus because in his mysteries he taught things unknown before; he also is said to have died through a conspiracy of his countrymen, who would not accept his teachings.

The common tradition (which both Ovid and Vergil reflect) makes the women of Thrace responsible for his death. But the reasons for their hostility vary: they were angry because he neglected them after the death of Eurydice, or refused to initiate them into his mysteries, or enticed their husbands away from them. Sometimes the women are followers of Dionysus, expressly directed against Orpheus by their god, for Dionysus in his attempts to convert Thrace to his religion met the opposition of Orpheus, a devoted follower of Apollo the sun-god, and sent his maenads to tear the bard to pieces. According to some, the fragments of his body were buried by his mother and sister Muses in Thrace or in the region of Mt. Olympus. His head and lyre were claimed by Lesbos (as already explained by Ovid), where a shrine was erected in his honor. The head became an oracular source, but its prophecies were suppressed by Apollo. A temple of Bacchus was built over the spot where the head was buried.[6]

In these conflicting speculations, a fundamental and puzzling duality is evident. Orpheus is linked in one way or another to both Apollo and Dionysus. Was there a *real* Orpheus, a missionary in Thrace who met his death violently? Did he champion Apollo against Dionysus or Dionysus against Apollo? Did he compromise and adapt the religion of the Oriental Dionysus to that of Hellenic Apollo, taking from both and preaching a message that was new and convincing, at least to some?

However one would like to interpret the evidence, this duality cannot be ignored. The music, magic, and prophecy suggest Apollo, as does the championship of civilization, but Orpheus' sermon of gentleness and peace has none of the violence of the archer-god. On the other hand, Orpheus' music is the antithesis of the clashing din of Bacchus; and the tales of his misogyny could imply a religion that at some period was confined to men, in contrast to the worship of Dionysus with its appeal to women. At the same time, Orphic initiation

and mysteries are by their very nature Dionysiac. Other elements in the legends of both Orpheus and Dionysus are strikingly parallel: Orpheus is torn to pieces like Dionysus himself (at the hands of the Titans), or like Pentheus, who also opposed the god and met destruction at the hands of his maenads. Like Orpheus, Dionysus descended to the Underworld, in his case to fetch his mother, Semele; indeed, a less common variant has Orpheus successful (like Dionysus) in his pursuit of Eurydice.[7]

There is nevertheless a well-established tradition that the historic Orpheus was not a god but a hero who lived, suffered, and died; his tomb was sacred, and he had a cult. He was in this view a prophet, a priest, or, if you like, a saint, whose god was Apollo or Dionysus or both. Such a belief is ultimately subjective; but by the fifth century B.C. he *was* accepted as a human religious teacher,

ORPHEUS—THE IMMORTAL ARTIST

Orpheus exemplifies the universal power of the artist and in particular music and poetry. Art eases care, makes life meaningful and beautiful, and can instruct. Orpheus is also the archetypal religious teacher, illustrating the omnipotence of the word in music. Orpheus suffers and dies the martyr's death of a prophet and a savior. Just as potent are the eternal elements in the romance of Orpheus and Eurydice. Theirs is a moving and tragic love story that, in its endless metamorphoses, never fails to touch the hearts and minds of human beings of all times.

There is a wondrous duality of religion and music in the archetype that illuminates the uplifting and informing spiritual power of his gift. "Indeed, what then is music? Music is a sacred art, which brings together all who have spirit, like cherubim around a radiant throne, and that is why it is the holiest among the arts, sacred music."[8]

The following simple but sublime verses from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, Act 3, scene 3, which also sum up the spiritual power of Orpheus, have often been set to music. A beautiful version is that of William Schuman:

Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountains that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing.
To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung, as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.

Every thing that heard him,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart.
Fall asleep, or hearing, die.

whose doctrine was communicated in sacred writings attributed to him and believed to be much earlier in time. Tablets were said to be found in the mountains of Thrace inscribed with his writing, prescribing potent charms, incantations, and spells. In the fourth century, Plato quotes hexameter lines of Orpheus and tells of priests who preached his message of salvation. Later, Orpheus is credited with songs about the gods and the origin of all things. The hymns that have come down to us under Orpheus' name were given their present form in the early centuries of our era;[9] in fact this corpus of *Orphic Hymns* may have been composed (rather than compiled) in the second or third century A.D. It is of little help for reconstructing early Orphic doctrine.[10]

In music, art, and poetry Orpheus has been a source of inspiration for thousands of works. His myths address several of the most profound of human concerns: the power of music over animals and inanimate nature, over human discord, and over death itself; the pain of bereavement and the hope of reunion after the loss of one's beloved.

The Orphic Bible

Dominant in the pantheon of Orphism was Dionysus, very often under the name of Zagreus. Although we hear about initiation into mysteries and a ritual life of purity demanded by the Orphics, we do not know their details. The shedding of blood and the eating of flesh seem to have been important prohibitions inspired by a fundamental belief in the transmigration of the soul and the sanctity of all life. It is possible to reconstruct the basic themes of the Orphic theogony, with its myth of Dionysus crucial to the doctrine. Although parallels to the *Theogony* of Hesiod are apparent, there are meaningful differences and variations. The major stages in the Orphic theogony run as follows, although divergent statements in the tradition are many.

The first principle was Chronus (Time), sometimes described as a monstrous serpent having the heads of a bull and a lion with a god's face between; Chronus was accompanied by brooding Adrasteia (Necessity), and from Chronus came Aether, Chaos, and Erebus. In Aether, Chronus fashioned an egg that split in two; and from this appeared the firstborn of all the gods, Phanes, the creator of everything, called by many names, among them Eros.[11] He was a bisexual deity, with gleaming golden wings and four eyes, described as possessing the appearance of various animals. Phanes bore a daughter, Night, who became his partner in creation and eventually his successor in power. Night then bore Gaea (Earth) and Uranus (Heaven), and they produced the Titans. Next Cronus succeeded to the rule of Night and subsequently (as in the Hesiodic account) Zeus wrested power from his father, Cronus.

Then Zeus swallowed Phanes, and with him all previous creation (including a special race of human beings of a golden age); Zeus now created everything anew, with the help of Night. As second creator, Zeus became the begin-

ning and middle and end of all things. Eventually Zeus mated with Kore (Persephone), and Dionysus was born. This myth of the birth of Dionysus is most potent for the dogma it provides, and we have related it in connection with Dionysus himself (pp. 293–294). Its essential features are that the infant god was dismembered and devoured by the monstrous Titans, who were then struck down in punishment by the thunderbolt of Zeus. From the ashes of the Titans came mortals; thus humans are partly evil and mortal but also partly pure and divine, since the wicked Titans had consumed the god, although not completely. The heart of Dionysus was saved and he was born again.

In this way, the Orphic bible provided the divine authority for belief in an immortal soul; the necessity for keeping this soul pure despite the contamination and degradation of the body; the concept of a kind of original sin; the transmigration of the soul to an afterlife of reward or punishment; and finally, after various stages of purification, an apotheosis, a union with the divine spirit in the realms of the upper aether. The seeds of everything came from Phanes or Zeus; out of the One, all things come to be and into the One they are once again resolved.

Plato's myth of Er and Vergil's vision of the afterlife are, as far as we can tell, strongly influenced by Orphic concepts; a reading of both, translated in Chapter 15, conveys most simply and directly a feeling for the basic tenets of Orphism. The ritual purification and catharsis of the great god Apollo are mingled with the Dionysiac belief in the ultimate immortality of the human soul to provide a discipline and control of the ecstatic passion of his Bacchic mysteries.

Mystery religions have been a persistent theme; their spiritual ethos has been associated with Eros, Rhea, Cybele and Attis, Aphrodite and Adonis, Dionysus, Demeter, and Orpheus. We cannot distinguish with clear precision among the many different mystery religions and philosophies of the ancient world. It is possible, for example, to argue that the mysteries of Demeter, with their emphasis on participation in certain dramatic rites, lacked the spiritual depth of Orphism, with its insistence on the good life as well as mere initiation and ritual. In any comparison or contrast for the greater glory or detriment of one god or goddess and one religion as opposed to another, it must be remembered that we know practically nothing about the Greek and Roman mysteries. In contrast, our knowledge, say, of Christianity, particularly in its full development, is infinitely greater.

The correspondences between Christianity and the other mystery religions of antiquity are perhaps more startling than the differences. Orpheus and Christ share attributes in the early centuries of our era;[12] and of all the ancient deities, Dionysus has most in common with the figure of Christ.

Mystery Religions in Roman Times

Indeed, the association of Christ with the vine frequently led to the use of the myths and attributes of Dionysus in early Christian iconography. We discuss in a later chapter (p. 694) the third-century A.D. wall mosaic in the cemetery be-

neath St. Peter's basilica in the Vatican and the fourth-century vault mosaics in the church of Santa Costanza in Rome. (See Color Plate 3.) In both cases, the vine of Dionysus, the symbol of new life after release from the old life, is associated with the Christian resurrection and the words of Jesus in John 15:1, "I am the true vine." In the same cemetery there is a tomb containing both pagan and Christian burials, one of which is a third-century sarcophagus decorated with a relief showing Dionysus finding Ariadne (see p. 502). Whether the occupant of the sarcophagus was Christian or not, the finding of Ariadne as she wakes from sleep, by the god of life renewed, is an allegory of the soul waking from death equally applicable to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection or to pagan beliefs in an afterlife. The mysteries of Dionysus were widely practiced, and the similarities between them and the Christian *mythoi* made the process of *syncretism* inevitable. This term literally means "growing together," and in the context of religion and mythology it describes the harmonizing of different cults and their myths into some sort of unity. You can clearly see this process in our discussion of the worship of Isis later in this chapter.

Mystery religions were widely practiced in the Roman Empire during the first four centuries of the Christian era.[13] Like Christianity, they gave the individual worshiper hope for a better life in an uncertain world and frequently the expectation of a new life after death. Since mystery religions involved initiation into secret knowledge, our information about them is at best partial and generally inadequate. We can say with certainty that the mysteries involved a sense of belonging to a group and that initiation preceded some sort of revelation, which resulted in a sense of release and joy, with hope for a better future in this life and in the life after death. Often the initiate submitted to the discipline of a rule of life, so that morality and religion were closely associated.

The mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis (discussed at length in Chapter 14) attracted initiates from all classes all over the empire and continued to be practiced down into late antiquity. The sanctuary was destroyed by the Huns in A.D. 395, and the Christians saw to it that it was never rebuilt.

Other Greek mystery cults continued to flourish in the Roman Empire. The mysteries of Cybele and Attis continued to be important throughout the Roman world, but their violent elements, especially the self-mutilation of the Galli (i.e., priests), made the cult less attractive than other cults with central resurrection myths (see pp. 643–644). Shedding the blood of a bull came to be a spectacular feature of the rite of initiation into these mysteries. It was called the *taurobolium*, and the initiate stood in a pit under the bull, so that its blood poured down upon him.[14] This baptism symbolized purification, the washing away of the old life, and resurrection to a new one; and the rebirth was further symbolized by the drinking of milk, the drink of a newborn child, while the ancient musical instruments of Cybele's worship became part of a kind of communion: "I have eaten from the tambourine, I have drunk from the cymbal, I have become a mys-

tic of Attis," are the words of one hymn. Like the Eleusinian mysteries, the mysteries of Cybele ceased to be practiced after the fourth century.

The oldest of the Greek mysteries after those of Demeter were those of the Cabiri, whose cult center was associated with the island of Samothrace and the city of Pergamum. The Cabiri themselves were usually referred to as *theoi megaloi*, the "great gods." Sometimes they were identified with the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, and thus offered protection from the dangers of seafaring. The Argonauts were said to have been initiated, and there are innumerable records of actual initiations in the Greek and Roman world right down until the end of the fourth century.[15]

Three Eastern mystery religions widely practiced in the Roman Empire were sometimes assimilated to Greek and Roman mythology. From Persia came the mysteries of Mithras (or Mithra), the god of light and truth and righteous champion of good against evil. His myth included a miraculous birth from a rock and the slaying of a bull, from whose blood sprang the fertility of the earth. Mithraism was practiced in underground chapels or *Mithraea*. More than four hundred of these have been found all over the Roman world, wherever Roman soldiers and merchants traveled. Basic to the iconography of a Mithraeum was a *tauroctony*, a scene depicting Mithras, amidst other figures, killing a bull, presumably a ritualistic sacrifice by which the god assured beneficence and rebirth for his initiates.[16] The cult appealed especially to officers, soldiers, and sailors; and only men could be initiated. We do not know the details of the initiation rituals, but we do know that there were seven grades of initiation and that the cult demanded a high level of self-discipline from its initiates. Its ceremonies also involved a communal meal. Mithraism was a major rival to Christianity; and, like the other mystery religions we have mentioned, it continued to be practiced widely until the end of the fourth century.

The second Eastern religion, which was not strictly a mystery religion with the usual elements of secrecy and revelation, was the worship of Atargatis, known to the Romans simply as *Dea Syria*, the Syrian goddess. She was originally an earth-mother, like Cybele and Demeter, whose cult was spread through the Roman world, especially by soldiers. Shrines have been found at Rome itself and as far away as Hadrian's Wall, which the Romans built in northern England. Her consort was variously called Tammuz or Dushara, but her sacred marriage to the Semitic god of the thunder, Hadad, led to her association with the other sky-gods, the Syrian Baal, the Greek Zeus, and the Roman Jupiter. She was worshiped in wild rituals with self-flagellation by ecstatic priests.[17] Amongst Romans her consort was usually called Jupiter Dolichenus, who was portrayed holding an axe and a thunderbolt and standing upon the back of a bull.[18]

The third Eastern mystery religion is the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis, and we have a full account of an initiate's conversion. Like Demeter and Cybele, Isis was a goddess of fertility, bringer of new life and hope. Her myth involved a search, in this case for her husband and brother, Osiris (dismembered by the evil power, Seth),[19] and for a child, Horus (also known as Harpocrates).

Her attributes included a musical instrument (the *sistrum,* a kind of rattle), a breast-shaped container (the *situla*) for milk, and a jug for the holy water of the Nile. Her cult was associated with the god Serapis, whose origin is quite obscure; temples to Isis and Serapis are found all over the Roman world. Isis herself, however, as mother and nurturer, appealed to multitudes of men and women, who found in her a less terrible presence than that of Cybele or the Syrian goddess. Lucius, the hero of Apuleius' novel *Metamorphoses* (or *The Golden Ass*), appealed to her for help in becoming a human being again and shedding his form as a donkey. She appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to take the garland of roses from the hand of a priest, who would be taking part in the procession in her honor the next day. When Lucius did this, he resumed his human form, and the miracle was greeted with the praise of the crowd (*Metamorphoses* 11.16):

> The august divinity of the all-powerful goddess today has restored this man to human form. Fortunate indeed and thrice blessed is he who has deserved such glorious protection from heaven because of the innocence of his earlier life and faith.

When Isis first appeared to Lucius in answer to his prayer, she described herself in terms that perfectly illustrate the meaning of syncretism, expressed with a power and enthusiasm that even translation cannot totally obliterate (*Metamorphoses* 11. 5):

> Behold, Lucius, I have come, moved by your prayers. I am the mother of things in nature, the mistress of all the elements, the firstborn of the ages, the sum of the divine powers, queen of the souls of the dead, first of the heavenly powers, the single form of the gods and goddesses, who by my nod control the bright heights of heaven, the health-bringing winds of the sea, the grievous silence of the gods of the Underworld. My name, one with many forms, varied rituals, and many names, is revered by the whole world. Thus the firstborn Phrygians call me Pessinuntia, the Mother of the Gods; the autochthonous people of Attica call me Cecropian Minerva; the Cyprians, tossed by the waves, call me Paphian Venus; the archer Cretans call me Dictynna Diana; the Sicilians of three languages call me Stygian Proserpina; the Eleusinians the ancient goddess Ceres; some call me Juno, others Bellona, some Hecate, others Rhamnusia [i.e., Nemesis]; the . . . Ethiopians . . . and the . . . Egyptians, who worship me with proper ceremonies, call me by my true name, Queen Isis.

Cybele, Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, Demeter, Persephone, Hera—the ancient Queens of Heaven and Earth—are here, through the process of syncretism, included in the great Egyptian goddess, Isis. Apuleius, whose evidence is almost certainly reliable, shows us how in the second century (he was born about A.D. 120) the figures of Greek and Roman mythology had given way to the idea of a single divine power. Her devotees experienced a sense of liberation, of hope and joy. Lucius (through whom Apuleius is evidently describing his own expe-

rience) was initiated three times into the mysteries of Isis and Serapis; his life was consecrated to Isis. In this experience we can see how the mythology of the gods of the Greek city-state became incorporated in the mysteries that brought hope of salvation to the individual worshiper. The power of that experience is revealed in Lucius' description, with which we end our survey of the mystery religions (*Metamorphoses* 11. 23):

> Perhaps you may ask, studious reader, what then was said, what was done. I would tell you, if it were lawful to speak; and you would know, if it were lawful to hear. . . . I do not wish to torture you . . . with the pain of long suspense. Therefore hear, but believe, because these things are true. I approached the boundaries of death; I trod the entrance of Proserpina and, carried through all the elements, I returned. At midnight I saw the sun shining with brilliant light, I came into the presence of the gods below and the gods above, and close by I worshiped them. Behold, I have told you that about which, although you have heard, you must remain ignorant.

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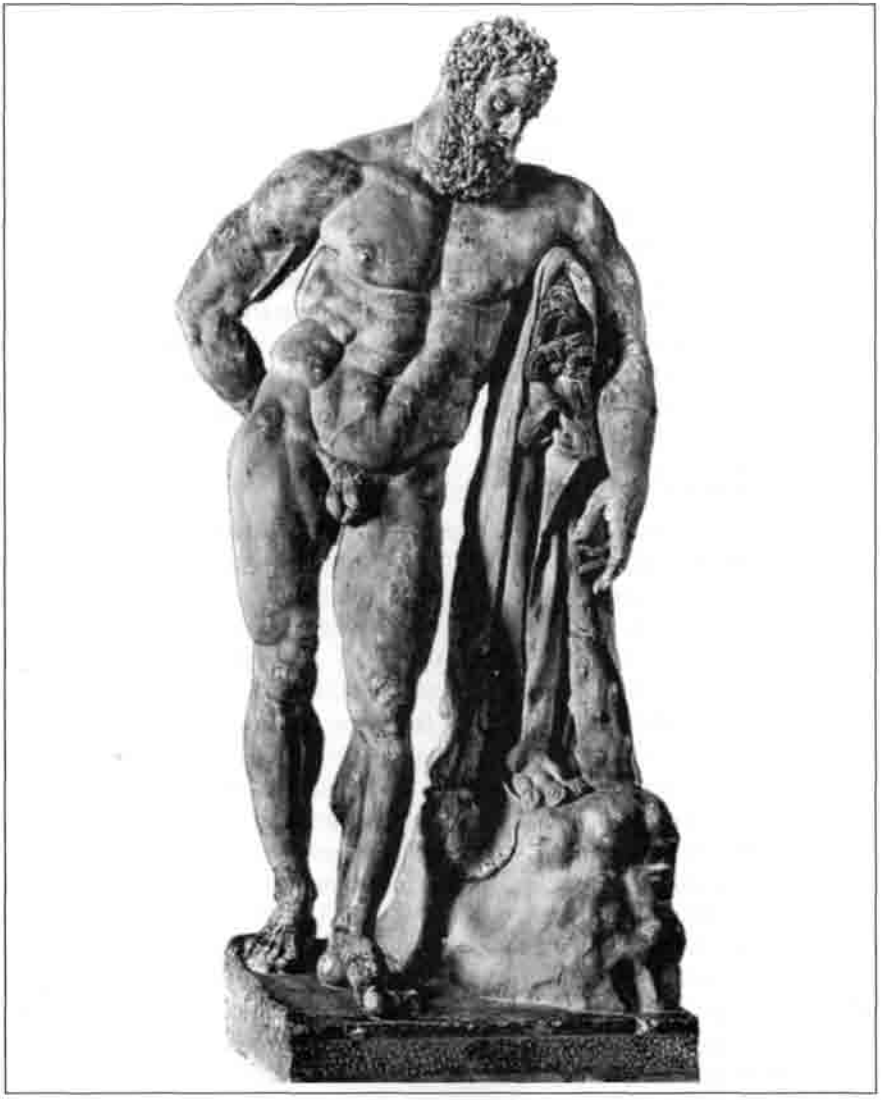
NOTES

1. One of the many places identified as an entrance to the Underworld was a cave near Taenarus, a town in Laconia.
2. *Georgics* 4. 452–526.
3. Aristaeus, the son of Apollo and Cyrene, is the traditional hero or deity of rustic pursuits, especially beekeeping. When Eurydice died, her sister Dryads in their grief and anger caused all the bees of Aristaeus to die. Perplexed at this, he eventually consulted the wise old man of the sea, Proteus. Aristaeus appeased the nymphs and a new swarm of bees was created. Through the role of Aristaeus, Vergil artfully introduces the touching account of Orpheus and Eurydice in the last book of his didactic poem on farming.
4. An important survey offers the general reader a scholarly examination of the whole question: W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (New York: Norton, 1966).
5. He does not seem really to belong, but the gentle bard was placed among the brawny heroes because of his prestige and the magical powers of his song, which saved them all in more than one crisis; Orpheus appropriately was the leader in religious matters. The chronology also seems wrong for our historical Orpheus, if we must put him back in the heroic age in the generation before the Trojan War.
6. The chronological tradition for Orpheus is equally muddled. Those who connect his dates with Homer's deserve the most credibility. Thus either he was the inventor of writing and his works immediately preceded the Homeric epics, or Homer was the first poet and Orpheus followed shortly after.
7. This link with Dionysus may mean that Orpheus is yet another god (however faded) of the death and rebirth of vegetation; Eurydice, too, has some of the chthonian characteristics of Semele and Persephone. These parallels could likewise have been added to the legend that grew up about a historical prophet. Some of the themes also look

like motifs common to folktale: conjugal devotion, the journey to Hades' realm, the taboo of looking back.

8. The words of the Composer, yet another Orpheus (*Musik ist eine heilige Kunst . . .*), in the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos,* by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, which epitomizes the profundity of Orpheus' art in one of the most beautiful of all musical motifs.
9. The date and authorship of these hymns are not securely established; perhaps at least some of them are earlier. See Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns,* text, translation, and notes (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977); Athanassakis (pp. viii–ix) inclines to accept the theories of Otto Kern that the hymns belong to the city of Pergamum for use in the celebration of the mysteries of Dionysus, third century A.D.
10. An attractive thesis claims that the religion attributed to the legendary musician was formulated in large part by philosophers in southern Italy and Sicily (although not necessarily confined to this region) in the sixth century B.C. Thus we can explain the elements identified as Orphic in the philosophy of Empedocles and in the religious sect of Pythagoras and thereby account for the Orphic–Pythagorean thought transmitted by Plato.
11. See Aristophanes' parody translated on p. 53.
12. For the archetypal Orpheus and subsequent motifs, including that of the Good Shepherd, see John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).
13. The Roman emperor Augustus himself was initiated, while Nero, according to his biographer Suetonius, did not dare to become a candidate because of his guilty conscience. In the third century, Gallienus (253–268) commemorated his initiation by issuing a coin with his name and title in the feminine gender (*Galliena Augusta*) in honor of the goddess.
14. The *taurobolium* is described in detail by the fourth-century Christian poet Prudentius in the tenth of his hymns about martyrs, *Peri Stephanon* (*On Crowns*). The most vivid details are translated in John Ferguson, *Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 104–105. The *taurobolium,* which is recorded in many inscriptions, the first being in A.D. 105, was practiced by initiates of Mithraism and even of Demeter; for a description by Frazer in connection with the worship of Attis, see p. 180.
15. See Susan Cole, *Theoi Megaloi: The Cult of the Great Gods of Samothrace* (Leiden: Brill, 1984).
16. This interpretation, advocated by Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (New York: Dover, 1956 [1903]), has been challenged; David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), follows those scholars who believe the tauroctony represents a series of stars and constellations, and in this kind of star map, the figure of Mithras is to be equated with the Greek and Roman Perseus.
17. Vividly described by Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 8. 27–29.
18. To this Jupiter the Romans assimilated the dedications of the great temples of Baal at Baalbek (in modern Lebanon), usually referred to as the temple of Jupiter, and of Bel at Palmyra.
19. See R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Greek and Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). For Io, who came to be worshiped as Isis, see pp. 91–93 and 516–517.



PART TWO

The Greek Sagas

GREEK LOCAL LEGENDS

Universal themes are persistent in the myths of Greek gods, who present archetypal images of fundamental human traits—the passions, psychology, and mores of mortal men and women writ large—and basic familial relationships, social ties, and political aspirations. Variations of these recurring themes are equally prominent in saga (or legend) and folktale. These classes of myth have been discussed in the Chapter 1 (pp. 3–15), and saga will be the principal focus of the chapters in this part. Although saga has a relationship (however tenuous) to history, it often includes elements of folktale that are common to other legends, and its heroes are descended from gods and often associate with divine beings. A defining feature of saga is the focus upon the deeds of one or more heroes.

The Hero and Heroine in Saga and Folktale

We have seen (pp. 13–14) how the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp has shown how one particular kind of folktale (the Quest) has a universal structure, in which the elements always appear in the same sequence. In Greek saga, as in folktales, we find many recurring motifs, though not always as predictably as in Propp's structural theory. Ten motifs frequently appear: (1) The hero usually has elements of the extraordinary linked to his birth and his childhood. (2) He inevitably faces opposition of one sort or another from the beginning, and as a result he must prove his inherent worth by surmounting challenges of every kind. (3) His enemy or enemies usually instigate his achievement, and (4) he is helped by at least one ally, divine or human. (5) He faces apparently insuperable obstacles, often labors that must be accomplished or a quest that must be completed. (6) Adventurous conflicts with divine, human, or monstrous opponents present him with physical, sexual, and spiritual challenges. (7) He may also have to observe taboos—he must not, for example, look back, eat of a forbidden fruit, or be too inquisitive. (8) Death itself is the ultimate conquest, usually achieved by going to and returning from the Underworld. (9) The hero's success may be rewarded with marriage, political security, or wealth and power. (10) But knowledge through suffering and more lasting spiritual enlightenment (literal or symbolic)—entailing purification, rebirth, redemption, and even deification—are also part of a hero's attainment. These and other motifs recur with seemingly infinite variation, and they will continue to do so as long as human nature remains the same. Refined by artistic experience, they delight and inform, while they touch the very depths of the human spirit.

Propp's analysis of structure is very helpful for the scientific mythographer interested in structural analysis and similarities in the patterns of comparative mythology. It can be very misleading, however, for those whose delight is in the study of the subtle differences in the manipulation of motifs and the diverse

characterization of heroes in all periods of mythological creation. The quests of Perseus, Odysseus, and Aeneas, to name only three, are to some degree alike, but they are all the more fascinating because of their differences. Achilles and Ajax represent two very different personalities in their response to the thematic code of heroic *arete* ("excellence"). Hector and Paris are not simple reflections of the pattern of brotherly opposites; instead, emotionally and psychologically they are worlds apart, and their feelings about war, life and death, and love and marriage may be most intricately juxtaposed. The rich and illuminating examples of complexity and profundity in heroic portraits make up the substance of our text.

Some heroes do not always act as heroes and reveal their feet of clay, and all heroes, to be sure, do not live happily ever after; a few of them are even undone by the heroines with whom they are associated. Witness the life and humiliating demise of Jason and the death of Heracles, both excruciating and glorious at one and the same time; Theseus too suffers a miserable end as a dishonored exile.

Heroines also provide motifs that are just as intriguing and varied as those of the heroes. They usually are of royal or divine stature, are possessed of extraordinary beauty, wield great power, and become the mothers of heroes. Like Propp in his analysis of the hero, Burkert (as we have seen, pp. 14–15) reduces the diverse lives of heroines into a clear sequence of five functions: (1) The girl leaves home. (2) The girl is secluded (beside a river, in a tower, in a forest, etc.). (3) She is made pregnant by a god. (4) She suffers punishment or rejection or a similar unpleasant consequence. (5) She is rescued, and her son is born. Yet, just as in the case of heroes, the lives of heroines reveal astonishing variety and complexity, which are not easy to summarize.

As the lover or the wife of a hero, a heroine can perform great feats because of passionate devotion. Ariadne helps Theseus kill the Minotaur, and without Medea, Jason never could have won the golden fleece. When heroines are abandoned or betrayed, they can be driven by despair and hatred to wreak a terrifying revenge or, like Ariadne, find salvation. Heroes can be destroyed by heroines through cleverness or guile, for example, the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra or the ruin of Jason by Medea.

Helen of Troy, alluring in her multifaceted nature, has become an archetypal image. Antigone, devoted daughter and loving sister, by contrast presents for all time brave and righteous defiance against tyranny. Penelope as wife and mother offers us a paradigm of intelligence, integrity, and loyalty, her *arete* a match and a foil for that of her husband Odysseus. Then there are the Amazons, every bit like men in their *arete*, heroes and not heroines with respect to their prowess and courage in war.

The Mycenaean World and Greek Saga

The cycles of Greek saga are for the most part connected with cities and areas that were important in the later Bronze Age—that is, from about 1600 to 1100 B.C.

The richest of these cities, Mycenae, gave its name to the period, and it was the king of Mycenae who led the Greeks on the greatest of their expeditions, the war against Troy. There are three major geographical groups in the cycles of saga: first, cities of the Peloponnese—Mycenae, Tiryns, Argos, and Sparta and the rural area of Arcadia; second, cities of the rest of the Greek mainland and their surrounding areas—Athens in Attica, Thebes and Orchomenus in Boeotia, and Iolcus in Thessaly; third, Troy in Asia Minor, whose relations with the Mycenaean cities may have been extensive. Beyond these groups are legends connected with Crete, whose Minoan civilization preceded Mycenae as the dominant power in the Aegean world, before its collapse at the end of the fifteenth century B.C. Finally, the story of Odysseus, although based in the Mycenaean world, extends far beyond it and incorporates many folktales.

There is a historical dimension to Greek saga that archaeological discoveries have confirmed. It is important therefore to keep in mind our review of the historical background given in Chapter 2 (pp. 39–50). Many Minoan and Mycenaean sites that can be linked to the legends of the Greek and Roman heroes and heroines have been and are being excavated: Cnossus, Troy, Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos, Thebes, and Athens, to name some of the more important. How to distinguish historical fact from romantic fiction affords endless and exciting debate.

The sequence of these chapters from Greek saga is quite deliberate. We begin with Thebes and Oedipus because the treatment by Sophocles is so uniquely religious that it should follow closely upon a study of the gods. The spiritual intensity of *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, provides concrete and sublime evidence for how the Greeks could actually use their myths for moral edification, and Sophocles makes us understand more clearly how they might have actually believed them, whether as reality or metaphor. Following this premise, Mycenaean legend comes next, which leads directly into the events of the Trojan War. We know that a different order, along legendary, chronological lines, may seem more logical. The chapters, however, are designed so that they can be read with profit in any order that one wishes.

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CHAPTER

17

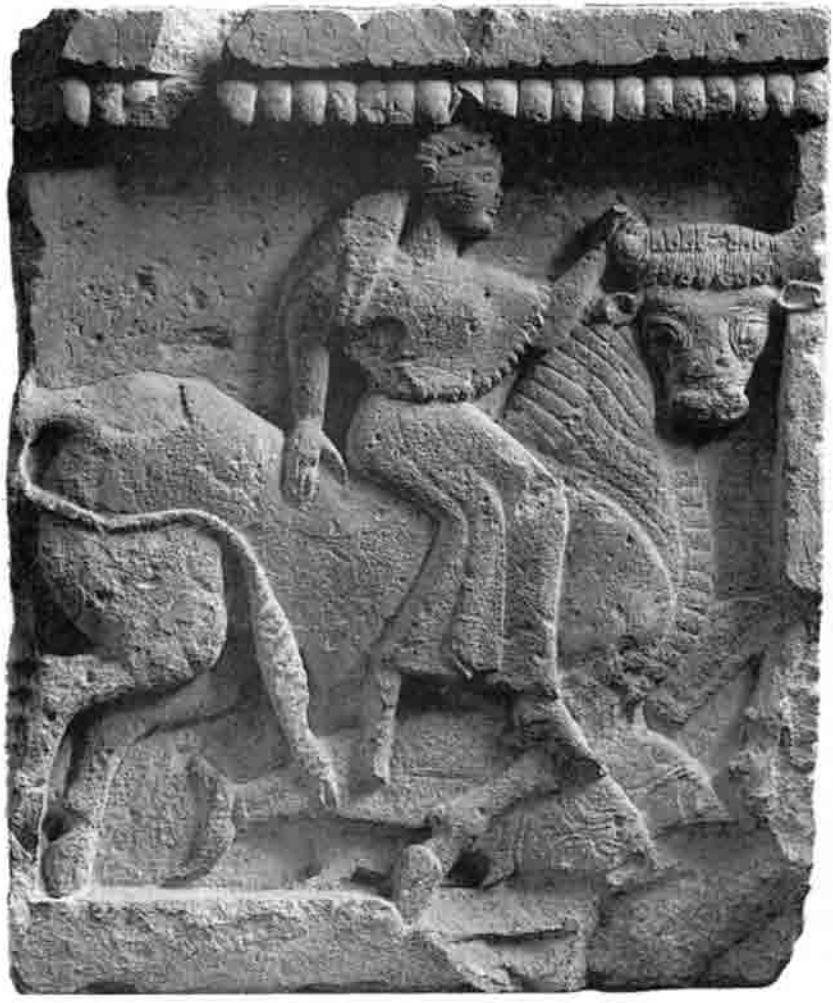
THE THEBAN SAGA

THE FOUNDING OF THEBES

The historical Thebes was the leading city of Boeotia, the plainland area of central Greece, ringed by the mountain ranges of Parnes, Cithaeron, Helicon, and Parnassus and bounded on the east by the Straits of Euboea. Thebes was situated on the low ridge that separates the two chief plains of Boeotia; its citadel was called the Cadmeia, preserving the name of Cadmus, legendary founder of the city. Cadmus was son of Agenor, king of Tyre, and brother of Europa. Agenor sent him to find Europa, whose abduction from Tyre is one of several myths in which a woman was taken against her will from Asia to Europe or vice versa. Herodotus narrates these legends at the beginning of his *History* in order to underline the difference between mythology and history. In these myths the opposition of the Greek and Asiatic worlds, which came to a historical climax in the Persian Wars of 494–479 B.C., began when Phoenician traders kidnapped the Argive princess Io and took her to Egypt. The Greeks (whom Herodotus calls "Cretans") in return seized the Phoenician princess Europa and took her to Crete. The pattern was then reversed: the Greeks took Medea from Colchis and in return the Trojan Alexander (Paris) took Helen from Sparta. Herodotus explained that the Persians, reasoning from these myths, believed that Europe and Asia were permanently divided and hostile. As a historian he was skeptical about these tales, for he could not vouch for their truth, whereas he could report things of which he had knowledge: "About these things I am not going to come and say that they happened in this way or in another, but the man who I myself know was the beginner of unjust works against the Greeks, this man I will point out and advance with my story . . ." (1.5). So for the Greek historian of the Persian Wars the distinction between myth and history was evident.

EUROPA

The story of Europa is the first in which the Asiatic figure makes her way to the Greek world. In the usual version of the myth (which is different from the skeptical account of Herodotus) Zeus, disguised as a bull, took her to Crete. Here is



The Rape of Europa. Limestone metope from Selinus, ca. 540 B.C.; height 58 in. Europa rides over the sea, represented by the dolphins, upon the bull, which looks frontally at the viewer. The formality and restraint of the relief contrast with the swirling motion of Titian's painting. *(Museo Nazionale, Palermo. Photograph courtesy of Hirmer Verlag, München.)*

Ovid's description of the abduction (*Metamorphoses* 2. 846–3. 2), which should be compared with the nearby illustrations.

Majesty and love are not well joined, nor do they sit well together. Abandoning the dignity of his royal office, the father and ruler of the gods took on the appearance of a bull, and as a beautiful animal shambled over the tender grass.

Agenor's daughter [Europa] wondered at the bull's beauty, amazed that he did not threaten to attack, yet, gentle as he seemed, she at first was afraid to touch him. After a while she came up close and offered flowers to his white face. The young princess even dared to sit upon the bull's back. Then the god little by little began to take his deceptive steps further from the dry land into the sea, then he went further and carried his prey across the central waters of the sea. At length he laid aside the disguise of the deceiving bull and revealed who he was and reached the shores of Crete.

In Crete Europa became the mother of Minos by Zeus.

The Rape of Europa, by Titian (ca. 1488–1576). Oil on canvas, 1559–1562; 73 × 81 in. Titian relies upon Ovid's narratives (*Fasti* 5. 605–614 and *Metamorphoses* 2. 843–875). As in the Selinus metope, dolphins swim near the bull (one in the right foreground and one supporting a cupid), and Europa grasps the bull's horn. Her windblown drapery and desperate gestures, and the cupids flying through the air, impart an air of agitated movement in keeping with the mixed emotions, fear and anticipation, of the principal figures. In the distant background Europa's companions vainly call her back to the shore. *(Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. Reproduced by permission.)*

Cadmus, Founder of Thebes

Meanwhile Cadmus, Europa's brother, set out to find her and came to Delphi, where he asked the oracle for advice. Apollo told him not to worry about Europa any more but to follow a certain cow until she lay down out of weariness and there to found a city. Cadmus found the cow in Phocis (the district of Greece in which Delphi is situated), and she led him to Boeotia, where he founded his city, Cadmeia, later called Thebes. As for the divinely sent cow, it was Cadmus' duty to sacrifice her; to perform the ceremony, he needed water, which he sent his companions to draw from the nearby spring sacred to Ares. A serpent, a child of Ares, guarded the spring; it killed most of Cadmus' men, and in return was itself killed by Cadmus. Ovid relates that Cadmus then heard a voice saying: "Why, son of Agenor, do you look at the dead serpent? You too will be looked at as a serpent." Thus the final episode in the life of Cadmus was prophesied.

Athena, to whom Cadmus had been sacrificing the cow, now advised Cadmus to take the serpent's teeth and sow them; from the ground sprang up armed men, who fought and killed each other until only five were left. From these five survivors, who were called Spartoi (i.e., "sown men"), descended the noble families of Thebes.

Euripides recounts Cadmus' achievement as follows (*Phoenissae* [*The Phoenician Women*] 639–675):

> Tyrian Cadmus came to this land where the cow fell down on all fours, providing irrevocable fulfillment of the oracle by which god had ordained that he was to make his home amid the fertile plains—here where the beautiful stream of Dirce waters the rich and green fields. In this place the bloodthirsty serpent of Ares kept his savage guard over the freshly flowing waters, looking far and wide with his swiftly darting glances. Cadmus came for sacrificial water and destroyed him, wielding a stone by the might of his arm and showering deadly blows upon the monster's head. At the bidding of Pallas Athena he sowed its teeth in the bountiful ground; and in their place Earth sent up onto its surface the spectacle of armored men. Iron-willed Slaughter sent them back to Mother Earth; and she who had presented them to the bright breezes of the upper air was steeped in their blood.

Now Cadmus had to appease Ares for the death of the serpent; he therefore became his slave for a year (which was the equivalent of eight of our years). At the end of this time he was freed and given Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite, as his wife. The marriage was celebrated on the Cadmeia, and all the gods came as guests. Among the gifts for the bride were a robe and a necklace from her husband; the necklace was made by Hephaestus and given by him to Cadmus; it came to play an important part in the Theban saga. Cadmus and Harmonia had four daughters—Ino, Semele, Autonoë, and Agave—whose stories, with those of their husbands and sons, are told in Chapters 10 and 13.

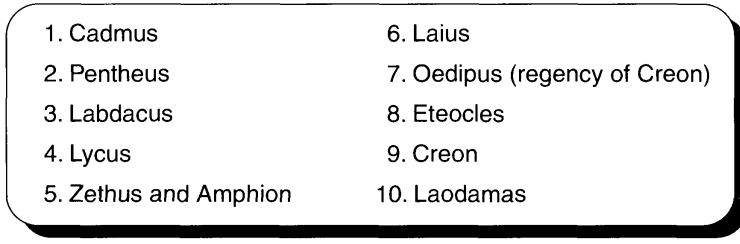


Figure 17.1. The Kings of Thebes

Despite the misfortunes of their daughters, Cadmus and Harmonia reigned a long time, civilizing their people and introducing knowledge of writing. Eventually they went away to northwest Greece, where Cadmus became king of the Illyrians; at the end of their lives, they both were turned into great harmless serpents (according to Euripides and Ovid; Apollodorus says that Zeus sent them to Elysium). They were worshiped by their descendants, and their departure from Cadmeia was not the outcome of any misdeed or grief, but a symbol of their change from mortal to heroic or divine status.

The Families of Labdacus and Lycus

Lycus and Antiope

Cadmus' successor as king was his grandson Pentheus, son of Agave, whose misfortunes are dealt with in Chapter 13. After his death, a new dynasty was founded by Labdacus, possibly a grandson of Cadmus. He is said to have perished while pursuing the same policy as Pentheus, leaving as his successor an infant son, Laius. Lycus, a great-great-uncle of Laius, first assumed the regency and then made himself king, reigning for twenty years. He was the son of Chthonius, one of the five Spartoi, and his family has an important legend. His brother's daughter Antiope was loved by Zeus; while she was pregnant, she fled to Sicyon (a city in the northern Peloponnese) to escape from the anger of her father, Nycteus. In despair Nycteus killed himself, and his brother (Lycus) then attacked Sicyon and recovered Antiope.

Somewhere in Boeotia, Antiope gave birth to twin sons, who were left to die. A shepherd found them and named them Amphion and Zethus. Zethus became a skilled herdsman, Amphion a musician, playing on a lyre given him by the god Hermes. Many years later, Amphion and Zethus met and recognized their mother, who had escaped from the imprisonment in which she was kept by Lycus and his wife, Dirce. They avenged Antiope by killing Lycus and tying Dirce to the horns of a bull that dragged her to her death. From her blood sprang the fountain at Thebes that is called by her name.

Amphion and Zethus now became rulers of Cadmeia and drove Laius into

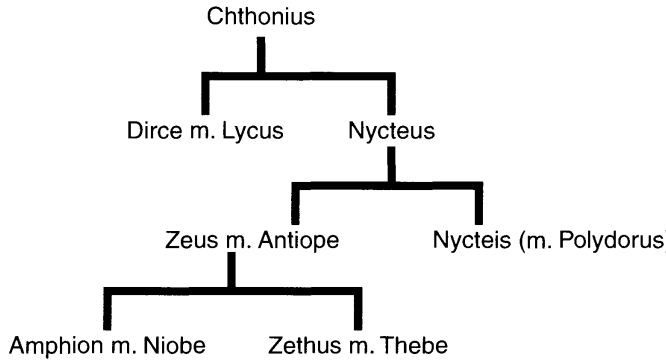


Figure 17.2. The Descendants of Chthonius

exile. They built walls for the city, whose stones were moved into place by the music of Amphion's lyre. Amphion married Niobe (whose story is told on p. 203), and Zethus married Thebe, in whose honor the newly walled city was renamed Thebes.

The story of the family of Lycus repeats motifs from the story of Cadmus. The walling of Cadmeia and its renaming is a doublet of the founding of the city by Cadmus, and just as Cadmus and Harmonia civilized their people, so Amphion's music demonstrated the power of harmony and beauty over the disunited and inanimate stones.

Laius

After a reign of many years Amphion and Zethus died, and Laius returned from exile and resumed the kingship of which he had been deprived as an infant. In exile, he had been hospitably received by Pelops, king of Elis. The ties of guest and host were among the most sacred of human relationships, and Laius brought upon himself and his descendants a curse by abducting Chrysippus, the son of Pelops, with whom he had fallen in love. Apollo foretold the working out of the curse in the first generation when Laius (now king of Thebes) consulted the Delphic oracle about the children who should be born to him and his wife, Jocasta. This is the reply of the oracle (Sophocles, Argument to *Oedipus Tyrannus*):

> I will give you a son, but you are destined to die at his hands. This is the decision of Zeus, in answer to the bitter curses of Pelops, whose son you abducted; all this did Pelops call down upon you.

Oedipus, Son of Laius and Jocasta

When a son was born, Laius attempted to avoid the fate foretold by the oracle by ordering the infant to be exposed upon Mt. Cithaeron, with a spike driven

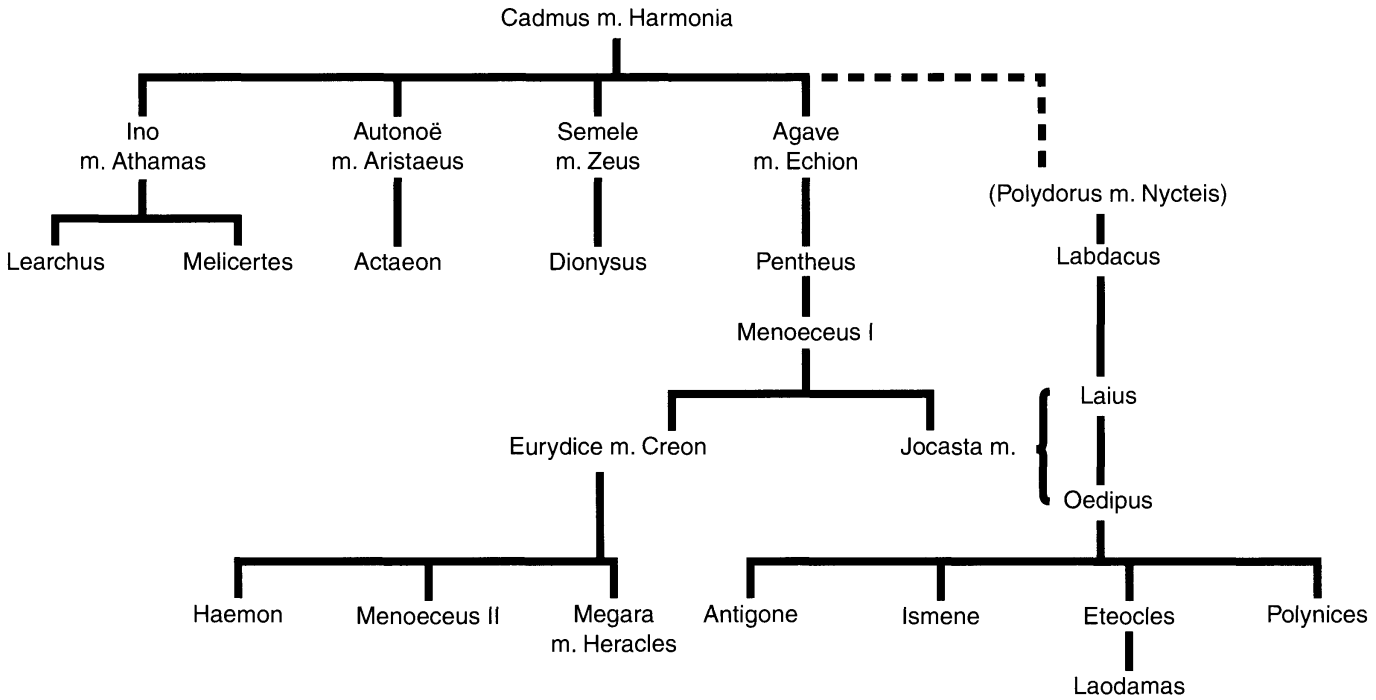


Figure 17.3. The Dynasties of Thebes

through his ankles. The servant entrusted with the task pitied the baby, and instead gave him to a Corinthian shepherd (for the Theban and Corinthian summer pastures were adjacent on Cithaeron). The shepherd in turn brought the infant to his master, Polybus, king of Corinth. The child was brought up as the son of Polybus and his queen, Merope, and was called Oedipus (which means "swellfoot") from the injury to his ankles.

Years later, a drunken companion jeered at Oedipus during a feast at Corinth and said that he was not Polybus' natural son. In alarm and shame at the taunt (which soon spread through the city), Oedipus left Corinth to ask the oracle at Delphi who his parents were. The oracle warned him in reply to avoid his homeland, since he must murder his father and marry his mother. So he determined not to return to Corinth and took the road from Delphi that led to Thebes. What happened then, Oedipus himself relates to Jocasta (Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 800–813):

> As I came on my journey to this junction of three roads, a herald and a man (like him whom you described) riding in a horse-drawn chariot blocked my way; they violently drove me off the road. In anger I struck the driver, who was pushing me aside; and when the old man saw me passing by him, he took aim at the

Oedipus and the Sphinx. Interior of Attic red-figure cup by the Oedipus painter, ca. 470 B.C. Oedipus, dressed as a traveler, ponders the riddle of the Sphinx, who sits on an Ionic column. The Sphinx is winged, with a woman's head and a lion's body and tail. *(Vatican Museums.)*

middle of my head and struck me with the two-pronged goad. But he paid for this with interest; struck promptly by the staff in this hand of mine, he quickly tumbled out of the chariot. I killed them all.[1]

The old man, whom Oedipus did not recognize, was Laius. The curse of Pelops was being fulfilled.

Oedipus and the Sphinx

So Oedipus came to Thebes, a city in distress; not only was the king dead, but also the city was plagued by a monster sent by Hera, called Sphinx (which means "strangler"). This creature had the face of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird. It had learned a riddle from the Muses, which it asked the Thebans. Those who could not answer the riddle, it ate; and it was prophesied that Thebes would be free of the Sphinx only when the riddle was answered. The riddle was: "What is it that has one name that is four-footed, two-footed, and three-footed?"[2] No Theban had been able to find the answer; and in despair, the regent Creon (son of Menoeceus and brother of Jocasta) offered both the throne and his sister as wife to anyone who could do so. Oedipus succeeded. "Man," said he, "is the answer: for as an infant he goes upon four feet; in his prime upon two; and in old age he takes a stick as a third foot." And so the Sphinx threw itself off the Theban acropolis; Oedipus became king of Thebes and husband of the widowed queen, his mother.

The Recognition of Oedipus

Thus the prophecy of Apollo was fulfilled; what remained was for the truth to be discovered. There are three versions, two Homeric and one Sophoclean, of Oedipus' fate. According to Homer, Epicasta (Homer's name for Jocasta) married her own son "and the gods speedily made it known to mortals. Unhappily he reigned on at Thebes, but she went down to the house of Hades, fastening a noose to the roof of the lofty hall" (*Odyssey* 11. 271). In the *Iliad*, Oedipus is spoken of as having fallen in battle. In this version, another wife is the mother of the children of Oedipus.

The most widely accepted story, however, is the later version, that of Sophocles. Oedipus and Jocasta lived happily together, and she bore him two sons, Polynices and Eteocles, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. After many years, a plague afflicted Thebes, and the oracle of Apollo advised the Thebans that it was the result of a pollution on their state, for the murderer of Laius was in their midst. At this point, Polybus died, and the messenger who brought the news also brought the invitation to Oedipus from the people of Corinth to become their king. Oedipus, still thinking that Merope was his mother, refused to return to Corinth; but the messenger—who was the same shepherd to whom the infant exposed on Cithaeron had been given—tried to reassure him by telling him that he was not in fact the son of Merope and Polybus. Oedipus then sent

for the servant to whom Laius had given his infant son to be exposed on Mt. Cithaeron. This man was also the sole survivor of the incident in which Laius died. Now the truth came out. This is how Sophocles describes the moment of Oedipus' discovery. He is questioning the servant (who already knows the truth) in the presence of the messenger (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 1164–1185):

OEDIPUS: Which of these citizens [gave you the baby] and from what house [did it come]?
SERVANT: Do not, I beg you by the gods, master, do not question me any more.
OEDIPUS: You will be killed if I have to ask you this question again.
SERVANT: Well, it was one of the children of Laius.
OEDIPUS: A slave? Or one of his own children?
SERVANT: Alas! I am on the point of revealing a terrible secret!
OEDIPUS: And I of hearing it. Yet hear it I must.
SERVANT: Well, it was called the son of Laius. The woman inside the palace best would tell—your wife—the facts.
OEDIPUS: So she it was who gave you the baby?
SERVANT: Yes, my lord.
OEDIPUS: For what purpose?
SERVANT: That I might kill him.
OEDIPUS: Was she his mother, unhappy woman?
SERVANT: Yes, and she was afraid of the harm that had been foretold by the oracle.
OEDIPUS: And what was that?
SERVANT: The prophecy was that he would kill his parents.
OEDIPUS: How then did you give him up to this old man, how did *you?*
SERVANT: I was sorry for him, master, and I thought this man would carry him to another country, from which he came himself. But he saved him for evils much worse. For if *you* are the person this man says you are, then, I tell you, you were born to a wretched destiny.
OEDIPUS: Alas! Alas! All is revealed! O light, may this be the last time I look upon you, I who have been shown to be born from those from whom I should not have been born, to be living with those with whom I should not live, and to have killed those whom I should not have killed!

Oedipus and the Sphinx. By Gustave Moreau (1826–1898); oil on canvas, 1864, $81\frac{1}{4} \times 41\frac{1}{4}$ in. The sphinx clutches Oedipus, ready to tear him in pieces (like his predecessors whose remains lie in the foreground), while Oedipus gazes at her intensely. Like Ingres (*Oedipus and the Sphinx,* 1808), Moreau sets the scene in the mountains outside Thebes (faintly seen in the background of both paintings), but he paints the whole of the monster's body and includes a column with a serpent, topped by an ancient vase with griffins' heads, copied from an engraving by Piranesi. The close physical contact of man and monster heightens the intensity of Oedipus' encounter. This was Moreau's best-known work, and it drew the attention of critics (favorable and unfavorable) and cartoonists (Daumier's caption read in part: "A bare-shouldered cat with the head of a woman, so that's called a sphinx?"). *(New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.)*

The horror of Oedipus' predicament is powerfully expressed in the stark dialogue, and it is no wonder that Sophocles' version of the myth has swept aside all other versions.[3] While Oedipus was questioning the servant, Jocasta, who already knew the truth, had gone into the palace and hanged herself. Oedipus rushed into the palace and, when he saw her corpse, blinded himself with the brooches from her robe. Creon became regent again, and Oedipus was banished, in accordance with a curse he himself earlier pronounced on the (as yet unknown) killer of Laius and in obedience to an oracle of Apollo.

The End of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Modern readers and viewers of Sophocles' tragedy are likely to find the 234 lines (15 percent of the whole) that are spoken after the entry of the blind Oedipus an anti-climax after the discovery of his identity. This would be a mistake. Oedipus establishes the true measure of his heroic stature in his lament and dialogue with the Chorus and with Creon. The central themes of the tragedy are the relationship of the human to the divine and, as a consequence, the way in which human beings react to or control events brought about by the divine will. The audience knows the end result of Oedipus' search for the killer before he begins the process of discovery. Part of the suspense lies in our not knowing how he will react to the discovery. His self-blinding cannot be the end of the story: Sophocles shows how this act begins the next part of the hero's life, in which he proves his worth as a human being, accepting the will of the gods while still asserting his own dignity and independence. Thus he cries out to the Chorus (1329–1335):

> Apollo it was, Apollo, who brought to fruition these my evil sufferings. No one struck [my eyes] but I in my misery. Why should I need to see, when there is nothing sweet for me to see?

Oedipus recognizes the power of the god and the impossibility of avoiding the divine will. Yet he also recognizes his own responsibility—he is the one who committed the crimes against the divine law, and he is the one who blinded himself. He is also the one who now, even in his miserable state, gives instructions to Creon (1446: "These are my orders to you . . .") for the burial of Jocasta, for his own exile from Thebes (where, he commands, he is not to be buried), and for the reunion with his daughters, Antigone and Ismene, who in the last lines of the play are taken from him as he is led back into the palace.

How noble the interpretation of Sophocles is can be seen if we look back to the lines in the tragedy where Jocasta dismisses the prophecies of Apollo, thinking that the details of the killing of Laius, as told by Oedipus, have proved that the oracle was false (857–858):

> I would not in the future look for prophecies on this side or on that.

The Chorus, speaking for ordinary citizens of Thebes (or of any Greek city that honored the gods), is appalled. They (so they affirm) will not resist what is fated, for its laws have been established by Zeus and never die, while human beings grow old and die. The human being who dismisses the laws of Zeus commits *hubris* (pride, leading to insolent violence) and becomes a tyrant, his world one in which the proper order of things human and divine is thrown into disorder. Such insolence, so the Chorus sings, they never will display. In famous lines they conclude (893–896):

> What man who lives his life like this [i.e., disregarding the divine law] can protect his soul from the shafts [of Zeus]? If deeds such as his are honored, why should I dance in the Chorus?

In the lines that follow these words they pray to Zeus to assert his power, for if the prophecies of Apollo are disregarded, then religion (and with it, the power of the gods) no longer has any meaning.

Immediately after this chorus, in a brilliant dramatic stroke, Sophocles brings on Jocasta, the very person who had declared that the prophecies of Apollo were useless. She has kept faith in the god but not in the prophecies she believes were delivered by his false prophets. Jocasta sacrifices at the altar of Apollo but to no avail. In bitter irony, her prayer is answered at once by the arrival of the Corinthian messenger, who sets in motion events leading to her own death. The inexorable progress of Oedipus' discovery continues to its fated climax.

Returning now to the last scene of the tragedy, we see that the power of Zeus is confirmed, but with it comes the potential for the hero to assert his dignity in the face of the worst that the will of Zeus can do to him. In the final lines of the drama, the Chorus, in lines that appear repeatedly in Sophocles (and in Herodotus' story of Croesus, as told in Chapter 6), sing (1528–1530):

> Call no man happy until he reaches the end of his life without suffering.

The will of Zeus, as foretold by Apollo at Delphi, has triumphed, but so also has Oedipus, who has asserted his greatness as a human being and has not given in to despair.

SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*

Sophocles died in 406–405 B.C. at about the age of ninety, and his final drama, *Oedipus at Colonus*, was produced at Athens by his grandson in 401.[4] It is the longest of Sophocles' tragedies, and it is a profound meditation upon the wisdom that old age brings after a lifetime of experience—success and failure, suffering and happiness. It develops the themes of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, produced in about 428, bringing the hero to his mysterious yet glorious end near the village of Colonus, the birthplace of Sophocles himself.

The drama begins with Oedipus, after years of wandering as an exile and beggar, coming to Colonus accompanied by Antigone. A citizen of Colonus tells him that he is on holy ground, sacred to the Eumenides, daughters of Earth and Darkness, ground possessed also by Poseidon and Prometheus. The citizen leaves to find the king of Athens, Theseus, and Oedipus prays to the Eumenides that they will bring an end both to his wandering and to his life, as prophesied by Apollo and hinted at in the dialogue with Creon at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Thus in this imposing opening scene Sophocles sets out the essential plot of the drama, the climax of which is to be the end of the hero's life on earth.

A Chorus of old men, citizens of Colonus, enters and learns the identity of this stranger. Naturally, they think he is a pollution on their land, and in the subsequent scenes Oedipus looks back on his crimes from the perspective of the end of a long life. Thus he says (265–274):

> Neither [the condition of] my body nor my deeds were mine. Know that I was the sufferer in my deeds, not the agent, if I *must* tell you of what happened with my mother and my father. This is why you are afraid of me, I know well. Yet how was I evil in nature if I reacted to what I suffered, so that, if I did what I did with full awareness, I would not have been an evil-doer? Yet, as it is, I have come where I have come not knowing what I did. I suffered and was destroyed by those who knew [i.e., the gods].

So in this play Sophocles discusses the intractable question of Oedipus' guilt or innocence more fully than in the earlier tragedy. By establishing the innocence of Oedipus he prepares for his transformation to heroic status (in the religious sense) at the end of his life, while he in no way diminishes the horror that we (represented by the citizens of Colonus) feel at his crimes of parricide and incest. The role of the Eumenides in the drama makes Sophocles' solution yet more powerful, for they had been the Erinyes, the terrible goddesses who pursued and punished those who committed crimes against members of their own families.[5] It is in their sacred *temenos* (enclosure) that the action takes place, and it is to them that Oedipus first prays before the entry of the Chorus, and again following the instructions of the Chorus (486–487):

> Since we call them *Eumenides* you should pray that they should be the suppliant's saviors, acting with kindly hearts.

The action of the drama is therefore intertwined with the resolution of Oedipus' crimes, so that at the end he is justified and can control the final scene of his life, as he proceeds to his miraculous disappearance from the earth.

Creon, king of Thebes, appears with an armed escort and tries by persuasion and by force to get Oedipus to return to Thebes, even kidnapping Antigone and Ismene in his efforts to overpower him. But Oedipus is secure in the protection of Theseus, which the Athenian king has promised him before the appearance of Creon. Theseus appears just as the young women have been led off, and he sends soldiers to recover them. Meanwhile Creon attempts to justify him-

self before Theseus, the Chorus, and Oedipus, whose great speech in response is the most detailed defense of his actions. We translate most of it here (962–1002):

Murder, marriage, misfortune—you have hurled these charges from your mouth. These things I suffered unwillingly, for they were the will of the gods, who perhaps have been angry with our family for generations past. As for myself alone, you never could reproach me for a crime in doing the deeds I did against myself and members of my family. Then show me this: if you came upon an oracle prophesying that [my] father must be killed by his children, how could you justly call me guilty? My mother had not then been filled with my father's seed, and I had not been conceived. Again, if I, appearing as the victim of an evil fate (as I did appear)—if I fought with my father and killed him, knowing nothing of what I was doing and to whom I was doing it, how could you reasonably find fault with an unwilling deed?

Then, you wretch, you are not ashamed to force me to speak of my mother's marriage, your own sister! I will speak, I will not be silent. . . . For she bore me—yes, she gave me birth, unhappy man that I am. She did not know, and I, her child, knew not. She gave birth to me and then to her shame bore children to me. One thing I know, that you slander her and me in saying that I did these things willingly. Unwillingly did I marry her, and unwillingly do I say these things now. Not even in this marriage can you find me guilty, nor in the murder of my father (which you constantly bring up with your bitter charges). Answer me this one question: if someone came up to you—you righteous man—to kill you, would you ask if your killer were your father? Or would you pay him back immediately? I think, if you love life, you would pay back the criminal and you would not look round for justification.

Well, these were the evils that I walked into, led by the gods. I do not think even my father's soul, if he were alive again, would disagree. But you, you are not just: you think it good to say anything, things that can be spoken and things that should remain unspoken, and you make these charges in the presence of these men.

Oedipus ends by calling on the Eumenides to support him and his protector, Theseus (1010–1013):

I call upon these goddesses, I beg them with my prayers, to come as my helpers and defenders, so that you [Creon] may know what sort of men are guardians of this city [Athens].

Creon leaves, and Theseus' soldiers return with Antigone and Ismene. But now another threat to Oedipus appears as Polynices, his elder son, comes from Argos to ask his father's blessing and presence as he marches with six heroic allies to claim the throne of Thebes. Before Polynices appears, Theseus promises Oedipus that he will not allow him to leave under compulsion, and we know therefore that Polynices will fail. The scene between Polynices and Oedipus is powerful. Though Oedipus is blind and a wandering beggar, he is still the father who has the authority to bless or curse his son.

Polynices makes a self-serving speech, in which he describes the expedition that he is making against his own city.[6] He knows that the army that has Oedipus with it will be victorious, and he promises to restore Oedipus to Thebes. Oedipus' reply is a masterpiece of reproach and chastisement. He shows who in fact has been guilty of transgressing the unwritten laws of the family, the very charge that he himself had answered in his speech to Creon. He says (1354–1364):

> When you held the power and ruled at Thebes, as now your brother does, yourself you banished your own father; you made me a man without a city and made me wear these rags, which now make you weep to see. Now you suffer the same troubles as I and suffer the same evils. They do not call for tears, but I must endure them all my life, as I remember that you were my destroyer. You made me live with suffering, you thrust me out; you made me a wanderer who must beg his daily life from others.

Oedipus disowns his sons, contrasting them with Antigone and Ismene, who have truly been loyal to him. He foretells the failure of the expedition against Thebes, reminding Polynices that he had cursed him long ago. He curses him once more (1383–1396):

> Go! I spit you out, you are no son of mine. You are the worst of evil men. Take with you these curses which I call down on you—never may you rule your own land by force, and never may you return to the vale of Argos. May you die by your brother's hand and may you kill the man [your brother] who drove you out! These are my curses. I call on the hateful, dark abyss of Tartarus, where my ancestors lie, to keep you from your city. I call on these goddesses [the Eumenides]; I call on Ares, who thrust this terrible hatred into your hearts. Hear this and go! Tell all the Thebans and tell your loyal allies that Oedipus has bequeathed this legacy to his children.

Before he goes Polynices refuses to listen to Antigone's request that he give up his expedition. In Antigone's moving words Sophocles foreshadows her fate, to die upholding the unwritten laws of Zeus that compel her to break the laws of man in burying her brother. This is the plot of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone.*

The End of the Life of Oedipus

The drama of *Oedipus at Colonus* has looked back at the crimes of Oedipus and has proved him innocent of deliberate intention in his crimes against his family. It has looked forward to the self-destructive hatred of the sons of Oedipus for each other, and it has foreshadowed the tragic self-sacrifice of Antigone. It has brought Oedipus to Colonus, where he is protected by the earthly power of king Theseus and the divine power of the Eumenides. One thing remains, the final moments of the hero's life on earth. As Polynices leaves thunder is heard, and Oedipus knows that this is the sign for the ending of his life. Theseus reappears, and the blind Oedipus, with the authority of one who fully knows who

he is, and at peace with himself, leads him and the young women toward the place where his life will end. He blesses Theseus and Athens, asking only that Theseus never reveal the place of his disappearance.

What happened next is related in the speech of the messenger who was an eyewitness. We give the passage in full here, since it clearly tells us how Sophocles viewed the relationship of Oedipus the man to Oedipus the hero. The poet carefully describes the place, for a hero is associated with a particular locality. He connects Oedipus' passing with the powers beneath the earth (Zeus is called by his title Chthonius, that is, "Zeus of the Earth"); yet Theseus rightly worships the powers of both earth and heaven after the miracle, for the hero is part of the array of Greek divinities, those of heaven as well as the chthonic powers. And Oedipus' passing is miraculous and without grief, in this symbolizing his benign influence upon the place where he passed from mortal sight and his power as a hero to perform miracles for those who worship him. Here then is Sophocles' description (*Oedipus at Colonus* 1587–1665):

You know how he left this place without any of his friends to guide him, himself the leader of us all. When he came to the edge of the ravine, which is rooted in the earth by the brazen stairs, he stood in one of the paths which meet there—the place is by the hollow basin where the pact of Theseus and Pirithoüs was forever made. Around him were the rock of Thoricus, the hollow wild pear tree, and the stone tomb. Here he sat and loosened his dust-stained garments. Then he called his daughters and bade them bring him water from the running stream to wash with and make libations. So they went to the hill of Demeter, bringer of green freshness, which overlooks the place, and soon returned bringing what their father had asked for. Thus they washed and clothed him as custom demands. When he was satisfied with all that they were doing and none of his commands had gone unfulfilled, then Zeus of the Earth thundered, and the girls shuddered as they heard. They clasped their father's knees and wept; continuously they beat their breasts and wailed. But he immediately answered their unhappy cry, clasped his arms around them, and said: "My children, today your father ceases to be. All that is mine has come to an end; no more need you labor to support me. Hard was that task, I know, my daughters; yet one word alone relieves all that toil—for of *Love* you never will have more from any man than me. And now you will pass your lives bereft of me."

In this way they all sobbed and wept, embracing each other. When they came to an end of weeping and were silent, a sudden voice called him and all were afraid and their hair stood on end. It was God who called him repeatedly. "Oedipus, Oedipus," he called, "why wait we to go? Too long have you delayed." Then Oedipus, knowing that God was calling him, called King Theseus to him, and when he drew near said: "Dear friend, give your hand to my children as a solemn pledge, and you, my children, give yours to him. And do you, Theseus, swear never knowingly to betray these girls and always to act for their good." And Theseus, without complaint, swore on his oath that he would do as his friend asked, for he was a man of generous nature.

When this was done, Oedipus straightway felt his children with unseeing hands and said: "My daughters, you must resolutely leave this place; you may

not ask to see what is not right for you to see, nor hear words that you should not hear. Go then; let only King Theseus stay and behold what will be done."

All of us heard his words, and with groans and tears went with the girls. As we began to leave, we turned and saw Oedipus no longer there; the king we saw, shielding his eyes with his hand, as if some dread sight had appeared which he could not bear to look upon. Yet soon after we saw him worship Earth and Olympus, the gods' home above, with the same words.

How Oedipus died no man can tell except Theseus. No fiery thunderbolt from God consumed him, no whirlwind from the sea. Some divine messenger came for him, or the deep foundations of the earth parted to receive him, kindly and without pain. Without grief he passed from us, without the agony of sickness; his going was more than mortal, a miracle.

So Oedipus became a hero, bringing good to the country in which he lay, and thus Sophocles honors Attica and his own deme of Colonus in this version of the end of Oedipus' life.

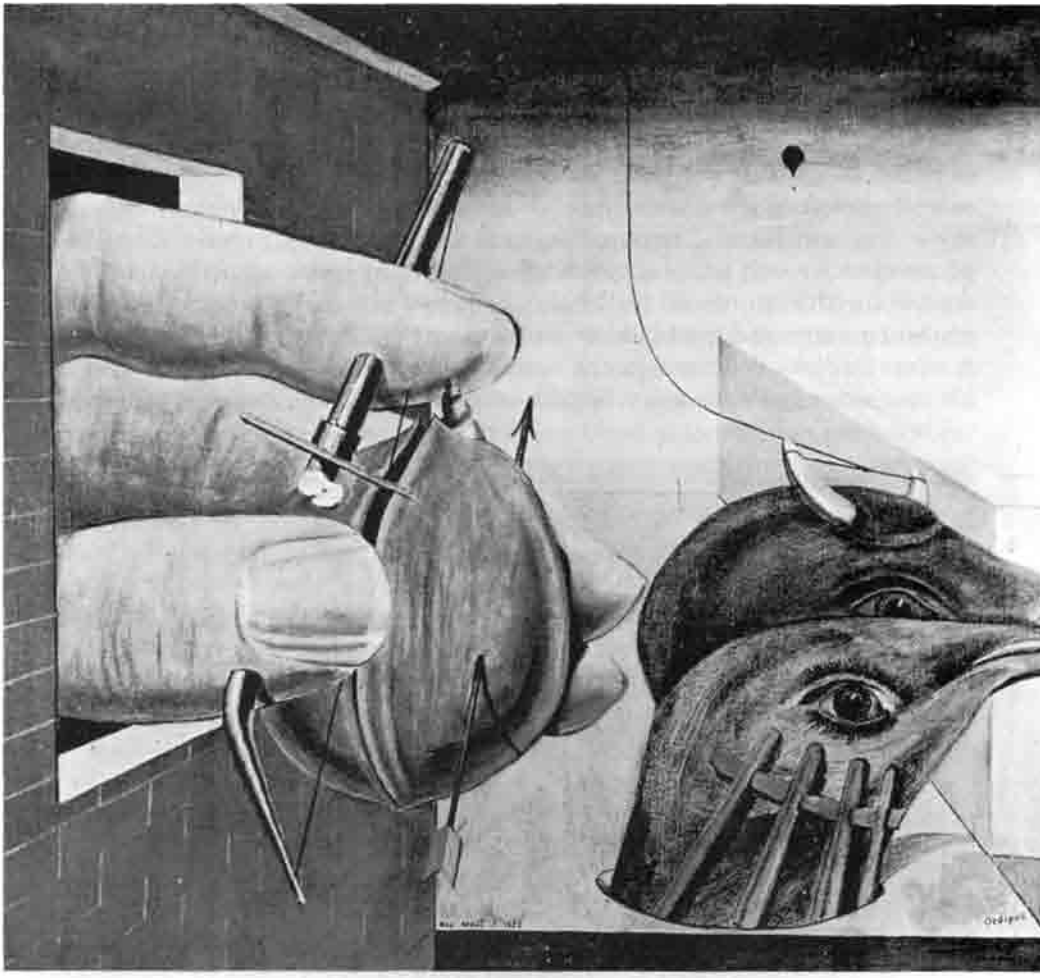
Other Versions of the Myth of Oedipus

There were, however, other versions. We have seen (p. 383) that in Homer Jocasta is not the mother of his children and that he apparently dies in battle. In the *Oedipus* of Euripides (of which a few lines survive) the servants of Laius boast that they blinded Oedipus. At the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* he is led into the palace, whereas he had earlier indicated (1446–1454) that he was to be thrust out of the city to wander and die on Mt. Cithaeron, where he had been exposed as a baby. In the *Phoenissae* of Euripides (produced about a decade before the *Oedipus at Colonus*), Oedipus is still in the palace at the time of the expedition of the Seven against Thebes and Jocasta is still living. After his sons have killed each other and Jocasta has killed herself over their corpses, he emerges for the first time and is sent into exile by Creon. At the end of the play he leaves Thebes accompanied by Antigone and foretells that he will come to Colonus: in this respect the version of Euripides harmonizes with that of Sophocles. His final speech in the *Phoenissae* looks back over his tragic life (1758–1763):

O citizens of my glorious homeland, look! Here am I, Oedipus, I, who knew the hard riddles; I, once the greatest of men. I alone ended the violence of the murderous Sphinx. Now I, the same man, I am being driven out of my land, a pitiful figure, deprived of my rights. Yet why bewail these things and weep in vain? A mortal must endure what the gods compel him to suffer.

The Myth of Oedipus and Psychoanalytic Theory

The story of Oedipus is among the best-known classical legends, largely because of the use made of it by psychologists ever since Sigmund Freud's identification of the "Oedipus complex" in 1910; Freud's interpretation of the myth, excerpted in Chapter 1 (pp. 7–8) provides the basis for any psychoanalytical approach. Sophocles was aware of the Oedipus complex, in part, at any rate: "Many men,"



Oedipus Rex by Max Ernst (1891–1976); oil on canvas, 1922, 37 × 41 in. In this surrealist painting, Freudian imagery is combined with elements in the myth of Oedipus. A hand stretches out from the house (or palace?), with a handsaw that splits a womblike walnut shell, itself pierced by an arrow. To the right a bird's head with tethered horns projects from a hole in a plank, while a balloon rises into the sky. The painting clearly alludes to Oedipal themes, including father-son rivalry, the mother's womb, piercing, freedom and confinement, flight from home, and being drawn inexorably back. *(Private collection.)*

says Jocasta (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 981), "have in dreams lain with their mothers," and we have already noted how Greek myths of creation are permeated with the concepts of the mother-son relationship and of conflict between father and son. Sophocles and his predecessors were concerned with the historical, theological and other aspects of the myth, and we should be skeptical of attempts to

interpret the legend purely and solely in psychological terms. Nevertheless, psychoanalytical criticism reveals many rewarding insights.

On the face of it, the plot of the play appears most incredible. Oedipus, brought up as a prince, when told by god that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother tries to avoid his fate; when he does kill a king old enough to be his father and soon after marry a queen old enough to be his mother and recently bereft of a murdered husband, we may at first be dubious enough to ask a very superficial question: Why is it that a man so reputed for his intelligence cannot reach some obvious, albeit terrifying, conclusions? As we try to answer, mythic, universal truths about human nature, revealed by Sophocles' art, will emerge and gradually overwhelm us with their credibility. Young and ruthless Oedipus believes what he wants and needs to believe in order to achieve his ambitious goals for glory, wealth, and power. An unshakable fixation that

OEDIPUS THE HERO

Oedipus is basically an archetypal Greek hero whose legend is consistent with the criteria given at the beginning of this chapter or with Propp's formulation (see Chapter 1, pp. 14–15). The *Odyssey* version of the story focuses on the kingship of Oedipus—he kills his father, king of Thebes; succeeds him; and inherits his wife. After she commits suicide he continues to rule and dies, as a king often does, in battle (as may be implied in the *Iliad*'s reference to his death). Kingship, rather than incest, is the focus of Oedipus' myth (as opposed to that of Epicasta/Jocasta) in its early stages. Sophocles seems to have brought the theme of incest into the foreground, and in so doing to have taken the myth beyond the traditional ending of the hero's quest, that is, the winning of a bride. And from Sophocles' great tragedy have descended the psychoanalytical theories discussed here and in Chapter 1.

Other than kingship and family relations, the myth also focuses on the hero's wisdom and his effect on society. Gustave Moreau (see photo on page 384) commented in preparing his painting that Oedipus was "a man of mature age wrestling with the enigma of life," and for him this was the principal focus of the myth, not parricide and incest. For Lévi-Strauss and the structuralists, the myth mediates between extremes in family relationships that would be intolerable otherwise. Others have adopted the structuralist approach of including all variants of a myth in their context. Jan Bremmer, for example, accepts the Freudian notion of father-son rivalry and sees the Greek myth as a "warning to the younger generation" to respect their fathers, whom they will succeed. Modern fascination with the Freudian interpretation—powerful and satisfying as it may be—should not obscure the origins of the myth in the role of kingship in preclassical Greek society, nor should they ignore the fact that the myth as we have it is made up of many elements from different Greek (and non-Greek) societies.

Polybus and Merope of Corinth are his parents must reassure him that the murder of a fatherly figure who gets in his way cannot be his father so that he need not pursue pressing questions about Laius' death. The mutual attraction of filial husband and motherly wife becomes a deep-rooted love, compelling and strangely consoling. Sublimation and repression free him from any guilty suspicions. His gradual perception of truth, when forced by irrefutable reality to make conscious what lies suppressed and hidden in his subconscious, is portrayed with shattering beauty by the master psychoanalyst, Sophocles.

The strength and perseverance to face the past and the present, to learn the truth about oneself, to recognize honestly one's real identity and face it—these are the cornerstones for healing in psychoanalysis. Oedipus then is a paradigm for everyone in his struggle and his victory. Through suffering he has come to know himself and win personal and spiritual salvation. Jocasta cannot face the consequences of self-knowledge and thus must seek solace for her guilt and her misery in death.[7]

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE PRELIMINARIES TO THE EXPEDITION

In his speech cursing Polynices in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus refers to an earlier curse that he had laid upon his sons, Eteocles and Polynices (1375). According to early epics, now lost, they had disobeyed Oedipus by using a golden cup and a silver table belonging to Laius in serving a meal to him while he was shut up in the palace, and he cursed them. Later they served him a less honorable portion of meat than was his due as a king, and he cursed them again. The curses were that they should divide the kingdom of Thebes, that there should "always be war and battle between them," and that they should kill each other.[8] Thus the curse uttered in the *Oedipus at Colonus* is the third one.

The curses were fulfilled after the death of Oedipus or (in the version of the *Phoenissae* of Euripides) while he was still alive. Eteocles and Polynices quarreled over the kingship at Thebes. They agreed that each should rule in alternate years, while the other went into exile. Eteocles ruled for the first year, while Polynices went to Argos, taking with him the necklace and robe of Harmonia. At Argos Polynices and another exile, Tydeus of Arcadia, married the daughters of the king, Adrastus, who promised to restore them to their lands, and decided to attack Thebes first. This war and its consequences are the subject of the saga of the Seven against Thebes, which is the title of one of the tragedies of Aeschylus.

Several other dramas deal with the saga, including two with the title *Phoenician Women*, one by Euripides and the other by the Roman author Seneca. The consequences of the war are the subject of *The Suppliant Women* by Euripides and of *Antigone* by Sophocles. The saga is most fully narrated by the Roman poet

Statius, whose epic, *Thebaid*, written in about A.D. 90, was widely read in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.

The Argive army had seven leaders: besides Adrastus, Polynices, and Tydeus, there were Capaneus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, and Amphiaraüs. Amphiaraüs, who had the gift of prophecy, knew that except for Adrastus all seven would be killed, and therefore opposed the expedition. But Polynices bribed Amphiaraüs' wife, Eriphyle, with the necklace of Harmonia, to persuade her husband to change his mind. As he set out, he ordered his sons to avenge his death on their mother, and themselves to make an expedition against Thebes when that of the Seven had failed.

Incidents on the Journey from Argos to Thebes

Before the army reached Thebes, two episodes intervened. At Nemea (not far from the Isthmus of Corinth) they were led to a spring of water by Hypsipyle, nurse of Opheltes, the infant son of the local king. She left the baby lying on the ground while she showed the way, and he was killed by a serpent. The Seven killed the serpent and celebrated in honor of the dead child the athletic contests that became the Nemean Games. His name was changed by Amphiaraüs from Opheltes (Snake Child) to Archemorus (Beginner of Death), as an omen of what was yet to come.

In the second episode Tydeus was sent to Thebes as an ambassador to demand the abdication of Eteocles in accordance with his agreement with Polynices. While at Thebes, he took part in an athletic contest and by winning humiliated the Thebans, who ambushed him as he returned to the army. He killed all fifty of his attackers, except for one man who took the news to Thebes.

The Failure of the Attack on Thebes

When the army reached Thebes each leader attacked one of the city's seven gates. The central part of Aeschylus' tragedy *Seven against Thebes* consists of matched speeches in which the herald describes each of the Seven and is answered by Eteocles, who stations a Theban hero at each gate of the city. The herald's speeches give a vivid idea of the qualities of each of the Argive heroes (selections from Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes* 375–685):[9]

> Tydeus raging . . . shouts out with midday cries like a dragon. . . . Upon his shield he has this proud sign embossed, the heaven blazing beneath the stars. The bright full moon, the oldest of the stars, the eye of night, shines brightly in the middle of the shield. . . .
>
> Capaneus . . . is another giant, greater than the one already named. . . . He threatens to sack the city, whether the god is willing or not. . . . His device is a naked man carrying fire, and the torch with which his hand is equipped blazes, and in golden letters he says, "I will burn the city."

> Hippomedon with a war-cry stands before the gates of Athena. . . . It was no mean craftsman who placed this work upon his shield, Typhon, belching fiery smoke through his mouth, and the encircling hollow of the shield is covered with wreathed serpents. . . .
>
> [Parthenopaeus the Arcadian] swears . . . that he will violently sack the city of Cadmeia. . . . Upon his bronze shield he wields the flesh-eating Sphinx, the reproach of the city. . . .
>
> The sixth I would say is the most virtuous man, the prophet best in might, strong Amphiaraüs. . . . Upon his shield was no sign, for he did not wish to seem, but to be, the best. . . . Against him I advise setting wise and virtuous defenders, for terrible are those whom the gods revere.

Finally the herald describes Polynices, whose threats against his brother are the most terrible of all. Upon his shield is a double device, a woman leading an armed man:

> She says she is Justice, as the inscription says: "I will bring this man back, and he shall possess his father's city and go about its houses."

In these descriptions, Aeschylus has given an impressive picture of the heroic stature of the Seven, whose individual characters are delineated through the devices on their shields. Eteocles refuses to be intimidated and arms himself for battle, denying that Justice is on Polynices' side. He knows that he must kill his brother, and he knows that in so doing he will be the instrument fulfilling the curse of Oedipus. When the Chorus asks him if he wishes to kill his own brother, he replies, "When the gods give evil, you cannot escape their gift."

These were the final words of Eteocles before the Seven attacked the city, and they express the inevitability of the curse on the sons of Oedipus. The failure of the Seven was foretold by the Theban prophet Tiresias, who prophesied that if one of the Spartoi sacrificed himself, the city would have atoned fully for the blood-guilt incurred by the killing of Ares' sacred serpent and so be saved. Here is part of the prophecy of Tiresias, as given by Euripides (*Phoenissae* 931–941):

> This man [i.e., Menoeceus] must be killed at the lair of the earthborn serpent, the guardian of Dirce's fountain, and he must pay the earth with his blood for the water drawn by Cadmus. This is the result of the ancient anger of Ares, who will avenge the death of the earthborn serpent. If you [i.e., Creon and the Thebans] do this, you will have Ares as your ally. If the earth takes your fruit for hers, and for her blood the blood of mortals, she will favor you—she who once put forth the gold-helmeted crop of Sown Men [*Spartoi*]. Of their descendants, one must die, one who is descended from the serpent.

Menoeceus, son of Creon and a descendant of the Spartoi, willingly died for the city: "Dying for the city," says the messenger in Euripides' play (*Phoenissae* 1090–1092), "he plunged the black-bound sword through his throat to save this land, upon the top of the city-walls," and so he fell into the serpent's lair. In the ensuing fight, only Capaneus succeeded in scaling the wall. As he reached the

top, he boasted that not even Zeus could keep him out, and for his blasphemy "Zeus," says Sophocles (*Antigone* 131–137), "hurled him with brandished fire as he stood upon the parapet eager to raise the victory cry. Down he fell to the hard earth, hurled through the air, as he breathed out rage and madness in his frenzied assault."

Eteocles and Polynices killed each other in single combat, which Statius describes at great length in Book 11 of his epic, *Thebaid*. Even after death their enmity continued. Statius imagines Antigone, after the battle, trying to burn the corpse of Polynices on the very place where Eteocles had been cremated. She cries out in horror as the flames split in two with divided tongues, symbols of the brothers' eternal hatred.

Of the other heroes, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, and Tydeus fell in battle. (Tydeus, indeed, could have been made immortal by Athena, whose favorite he was, but she revoked her gift when she saw him eating the brains of the man who had fatally wounded him.)

Amphiaraüs

Only Amphiaraüs and Adrastus escaped; Adrastus was saved by the speed of his divine horse Arion and returned to Argos; Amphiaraüs was swallowed up in the earth, with his chariot and driver, as he fled along the banks of the river Ismenus, one of the rivers of Thebes. The scene is vividly described by Statius (*Thebaid* 7. 816–820):

> The earth parted with a deep, steep-sided chasm, and the stars above and the dead below were both struck with fear. The huge abyss swallowed Amphiaraüs and enveloped the horses as they began to cross. He did not relax his hold on his arms or the reins: just as he was, he drove the chariot straight into Tartarus.

Amphiaraüs became an important hero, and chthonic cults (i.e., cults whose ritual was directed toward the earth and the Underworld) were established in his honor in several places. He was worshiped at the place beside the river Ismenus where he was said to have descended into the earth. His most famous cult was at Oropus (a city in northeastern Attica near the border with Boeotia), where an elaborate shrine, the Amphiaraüm, was developed in the fifth century B.C. He exemplifies the hero who is associated with the place (or places) where his life was said to have ended. Like Oedipus at Colonus, he experienced a mysterious death and made the place where he disappeared holy.

Antigone

The deaths of Eteocles and Polynices posed difficult religious and political dilemmas, which are presented in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*. The four children of Oedipus and Jocasta were Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, and Polynices. Creon, Antigone's uncle, became king of Thebes again on the death of Eteocles. He gave orders that Polynices was not to be buried, on the grounds that he was a traitor

who had attacked his own city. To leave the dead unburied was an offense against the gods, for it was the religious duty of the relatives of the dead to give them a pious burial. Antigone, as the sister of both Eteocles and Polynices, owed such a burial to both brothers, even though she would be breaking Creon's edict by burying Polynices. Alone (for Ismene refused to join in her defiance) she gave him a symbolic burial by throwing three handfuls of dust over his corpse. For this Creon condemned her to be buried alive. Antigone expresses her defiance of Creon in words of unforgettable power (Sophocles, *Antigone* 441–455):

CREON: Do you admit that you did this or deny it?
ANTIGONE: I admit it and I do not deny it.
CREON: Did you know that this was forbidden by my decree?
ANTIGONE: I knew it for it was clear to all.
CREON: And yet you dared to break these laws?
ANTIGONE: Yes, for it was not Zeus who gave me this decree, nor did Justice, the companion of the gods below, define such laws for human beings. Nor did I think that your decrees were so strong that you, a mortal man, could overrule the unwritten and unshaken laws of the gods.

Antigone was right. Creon's order defied the law of the gods, and he was soon punished. His son Haemon attempted to save Antigone (to whom he was engaged to be married) and, finding she had hanged herself in her tomb, killed himself with his sword. Creon's wife, Eurydice, killed herself when she heard the news of her son's death. Warned by Tiresias, Creon himself relented too late.

The *Antigone* of Sophocles, like his *Oedipus Tyrannus*, shows how human beings cannot ignore the demands of the gods. Antigone is a heroine who is willing to incur a lonely death rather than dishonor the gods by obeying the king's command.[10]

The Burial of the Seven against Thebes

According to Euripides (in his tragedy *The Suppliant Women*) Adrastus and the mothers of the Seven went to Eleusis (in Attica) as suppliants. Helped by Aethra, mother of Theseus, they persuaded Theseus to attack Thebes and obtain an honorable burial for the dead Argives. Theseus returned victorious with the corpses of the heroes (other than Polynices, Amphiaraüs, and Adrastus himself), and conducted their funeral rites. Capaneus was granted a separate pyre, and his widow, Evadne, threw herself into its flames.

The Epigoni, Sons of the Seven against Thebes

Alcmaeon, Son of Amphiaraüs

Amphiaraüs had ordered his sons to attack Thebes and to punish their mother, Eriphyle, for her treachery in accepting the necklace of Harmonia from Poly-

nices as a bribe. Alcmaeon, one of his sons, carried out these commands ten years later. He and the sons of the Seven (they are known as the Epigoni, "the later generation") made a successful expedition against Thebes and destroyed the city, which the Thebans had abandoned on the advice of Tiresias. At this point saga touches on history, for the war of the Epigoni took place, it was said, not long before the Trojan War. In the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*, which is certainly historical, only Hypothebae (Lower Thebes) is mentioned, implying that the ancient town and its citadel had been abandoned.

Alcmaeon, Eriphyle, and the Necklace of Harmonia

Alcmaeon, encouraged by an oracle of Apollo, avenged his father by killing Eriphyle. The Furies pursued him as a matricide until he found temporary shelter in Arcadia, where he married the daughter of King Phegeus, giving her the necklace of Harmonia. But the land was soon afflicted with famine, the result of the pollution caused by the presence of the matricide Alcmaeon. Obedient to another oracle, he searched for a land on which the sun had not shone when he killed his mother. In western Greece he found land at the mouth of the river Acheloüs recently formed by the river's silt. Settling here, he was purified of his guilt by the river-god, whose daughter Callirhoë he married. But he soon was killed by the sons of Phegeus for the crime of stealing the necklace of Harmonia in order to give it to Callirhoë. The necklace eventually was dedicated by the sons of Callirhoë and Alcmaeon at Delphi. Alcmaeon's sons became the founders of Acarnania, a district of western Greece.

Tiresias

A recurring figure in the Theban saga is the blind prophet Tiresias. Descended from one of the Spartoi, he was the son of a nymph, Chariclo, a follower of Athena, and a Theban nobleman, Eueres. He appears in the *Bacchae* of Euripides as a companion of Cadmus in the worship of Dionysus (see Chapter 13). Pindar (*Nemean Odes* 1. 60–69) describes him as "the outstanding prophet of Zeus" and tells how Amphitryon summoned him to interpret the miracle of the strangling of the snakes by the infant Heracles (we translate this passage in Chapter 22, pp. 521–522). On this occasion he foretold the labors of Heracles and part in the defeat of the giants by the Olympians (see Chapter 4, note 4). Tiresias, then, was distinguished for his longevity; he lived for seven generations, says Hesiod, and continued to have the gift of prophecy after his death, for in the Underworld, where the souls of the dead are insubstantial and futile, he alone retained his full mental faculties. Accordingly Homer makes him Odysseus' informant when he consults with the dead, and he foretells the end of Odysseus' wanderings and the manner of his death.

There are different stories about his blindness, an affliction shared by many prophets and poets in Greek literature. Ovid tells the story in full (*Metamorphoses* 3. 318–338):

They say that Jupiter once had driven away his serious worries with nectar and was joking with Juno, saying, "You women have more pleasure than men, I am sure." She disagreed, and they decided to ask the experienced Tiresias for his opinion, since he had known the act of love both as man and as woman. For once he had struck with his staff the bodies of two large serpents copulating in the green forest, and he miraculously passed seven autumn seasons turned from man into woman. In the eighth, he saw the same serpents and said, "If striking you has the power to change the striker to the other sex, then I will strike you again now." He struck the serpents, and his former body returned with his native physique. So, being made the judge of the lighthearted quarrel, he agreed with Jupiter. Juno, they say, was more angry than was just and condemned the arbiter [Tiresias] to eternal blindness. But the all-powerful father [Jupiter] granted him in return for the loss of his sight knowledge of the future.

The sight of two large snakes entwined in the act of copulation is mysterious and impressive (it is symbolized in the entwined snakes of the staff of Asclepius, still a modern medical symbol), and a person who violates the snakes can readily be thought to have offended against a divine power. The idea of the violation of the divine is explicit in the second legend of the blinding of Tiresias, which is similar in this respect to the legend of Actaeon (see Chapter 10, pp. 203–206), also a Theban hero. In this version (narrated by the third-century B.C. Alexandrian poet, Callimachus), Tiresias came upon Athena and Chariclo as they were bathing in the waters of the fountain Hippocrene, on the slopes of Mount Helicon. Athena caused him to lose his sight, a punishment for having seen what mortal eyes should not have seen, but gave him the power of prophecy (Callimachus, *Hymn* 5. 121–30):

[Athena speaks to Chariclo:] Do not lament, my companion. For your sake I shall give him many other honors. I will make him a prophet, to be honored in song by future generations, a far greater prophet than any other. He will have knowledge of birds, those that are of good omen as they fly, and those that are ill-omened. He will give many oracles to the Boeotians and to Cadmus, and, last of all, to the family of Labdacus. I will give him, too, a great staff, to guide his feet where he must go, and I will give him a limit to his life after many generations. And he alone when he dies will walk among the dead having intelligence, and he will be honored by the great Gatherer of the People [i.e., Hades].

In the story of Oedipus, Tiresias revealed the truth before Oedipus or the Thebans were ready to understand it (Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 350–367):

TIRESIAS: I bid you obey your own decree, and on this day speak neither to these men here nor to me, for you are the unholy pollution on this land.
OEDIPUS: Tell me again, that I may better learn.
TIRESIAS: I say that you are the murderer of Laius. Unwittingly you live most shamefully with those who are dearest to you, and you do not see how far gone you are in evil.

Oedipus still cannot believe Tiresias and goads him into telling him the truth even more terribly (412–419):

TIRESIAS: These are my words, since you have reproached me with being blind: you see, and you do not see the evil in which you are, nor where you live, nor with whom you dwell. Do you know from whom you are sprung? You do not know that you are hateful to your family below and above upon the earth, and that the double curse from your mother and your father will track you down and drive you from this land, now seeing clear, but then in darkness.

The words of Tiresias powerfully express the horror of Oedipus' crimes. Through the images of seeing and blindness, they bring before us the inevitability of the justice of the gods.

Tiresias, in Sophocles' *Antigone,* also warned Creon of the disastrous mistakes he was making, only to be understood too late. Finally, before the attack of the Epigoni, he advised the Thebans to abandon the city and migrate to found the city of Hestiaea. Tiresias never reached the new city; on the way he drank from the spring called Telphusa and died on the spot.

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NOTES

1. One of Laius' retainers escaped: in Sophocles' play he is the very servant who originally failed to expose Oedipus, and his story brings about the final discovery of Oedipus' identity.

2. There are several variants of the riddle and its answer. The shortest (Apollodorus 3. 53–54) is given here.
3. Cf. Lowell Edmunds, *Oedipus: The Ancient Legend and Its Later Analogues* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), a survey of the many versions of the myth. Two modern novels are of merit: *Oedipus on the Road* (1990), originally in French by Henry Bauchau, recounting the journey of Oedipus, blind and bleeding, from Thebes, with his daughter Antigone and a shepherd-bandit named Clius, though an imaginative, geographical and spiritual landscape; and *Emmeline* (1980) by Judith Rossner, a powerful retelling of the Oedipus legend, set in the eastern United States in the mid-nineteenth century.
4. In the intervening four years Athens had surrendered to Sparta and her allies at the end of the Peloponnesian War; the "long walls" between the city and its port had been pulled down. The democracy had been replaced by an oligarchy led by a committee of thirty, itself soon replaced by the restored democracy.
5. The transformation of the Erinyes ("Furies") into Eumenides ("Kindly Ones") is the climactic theme of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (see Chapter 18); Aeschylus brings the goddesses to Athens where they take up their new home.
6. In lines 1284–1345 of his speech, Polynices names the Seven against Thebes. We translate a similar passage from Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* on pp. 396–397. Another catalog is given by Euripides in the *Phoenissae* (1090–1199), where a messenger reports the failure of the attack on Thebes.
7. For a psychoanalytic interpretation, a good place to begin is with *Oedipus: Myth and Complex, A Review of Psychoanalytic Theory*, by Patrick Mullahy (see the Bibliography for Myth and Psychology on pp. 32–33 and 402). Mullahy discusses Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, C. G. Jung, Otto Rank, Karen Horney, Eric Fromm, and Harry Stack Sullivan. Of related interest is a study of the use of myth (with emphasis upon psychoanalytic interpretation) in the works of William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden: Lillian Feder, *Ancient Myth and Modern Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
8. The legends contained in the lost epics (with the titles of *Oedipodea* and *Thebais*) are discussed by G. A. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), chap. 3.
9. The herald's description of Eteoclus (son of Iphis), whom Aeschylus names as the third hero in place of Adrastus, is omitted. For other catalogues of the Seven in Euripides and Sophocles see note 6 in this chapter.
10. Antigone, as the symbol of individual conscience against the unjust laws of the state, has inspired many literary and musical works. See George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

CHAPTER

18

THE MYCENAEAN SAGA

The legends of Mycenae are particularly concerned with the House of Atreus and the greatest of its princes, Agamemnon, leader of the Achaeans against Troy. We consider the Trojan War later; in the present chapter we discuss the fortunes of the house as they developed in Greece itself.

PELOPS AND TANTALUS

The ancestor of the family of Atreus was Pelops, son of Tantalus, who came from Asia Minor as a suitor for the hand of Hippodamia, daughter of Oenomaüs, king of Pisa, whose territory included Olympia. This fact accounts for the importance of Pelops in the religious cults at Olympia. From the end of the Mycenaean Age, Pisa and Olympia were for most of the time controlled by Elis.

In the time of Tantalus and Pelops there was easy intercourse between gods and mortals, and in some way Tantalus abused the privilege of eating with the gods. In the best-known version of the myth, he invited the gods to dine with him and cut up his son Pelops, boiled the parts in a cauldron, and served them at the feast. Pindar is reluctant to believe the story, but he told it nevertheless (Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 1. 46–58):

> One of the envious neighbors secretly told the tale that they cut your limbs up with a knife and [put them] into the water boiling over the fire, and at the second course of the meat at the tables they divided you and ate. I cannot say that any of the blessed gods was gluttonous—I stand aside. . . . But if the guardians of Olympus honored a mortal man, that man was this Tantalus. Yet he could not digest great fortune, and in his fullness he brought on himself great madness. Thus the Father [Zeus] balanced above him a mighty rock, and longing always to throw it away from his head, he is an exile from good cheer.

The usual punishment of Tantalus is that he was condemned to suffer everlasting thirst and hunger in the Underworld. We have given Homer's account (*Odyssey* 11. 582–592) in Chapter 15. There are two other Greek myths that involve cannibalism, both from places connected with Elis. The one is the story of Lycaon, king of Arcadia, told by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 1. 211–243, see pp. 93–94), and the other is the banquet of Thyestes, which we discuss later in this chapter.

The existence of these myths is evidence enough that in the distant past some form of cannibalism once underlay the sacrificial rituals.[1]

In the usual version of the myth, the gods recognized the deception of Tantalus, and all, except for Demeter, refused to eat. She, it was said, ate the flesh from Pelops' shoulder, so that when he was restored to life and wholeness by the gods, an ivory shoulder had to be substituted. Pindar gives a different explanation of the temporary disappearance of Pelops, saying that Poseidon fell in love with him and took him up to Olympus, as Zeus had done with Ganymede. In any case, says Pindar, "the immortal gods sent back the son [of Tantalus] to be among the short-lived race of mortals." It was after this that Pelops traveled to Greece as the suitor of Hippodamia.

Pelops became an important hero with a cult at Olympia, where his shrine, the Pelopion, was next to the temple of Zeus. Pindar says (*Olympian Ode* 1. 90–93):

> Now he lies by the crossing of the Alpheus and is present at the blood-drenched festival. He has a busy tomb, close by the altar [of Zeus] visited by multitudes.

Indeed, sacrifices to Zeus and Pelops were central to the ritual of the Olympic festival, and Pelops received a sacrifice (usually a black ram) before each sacrifice to Zeus. Not only did he give his name to the southern part of the Greek mainland, the Peloponnese (Pelops' Island), but he received honors at the center of the greatest of the Panhellenic festivals. When the great temple of Zeus was built around 460 B.C. to house Pheidias' gold and ivory statue of Zeus seated upon his throne, the sculptures of the west pediment showed the moment before the start of the race between Pelops and Oenomaüs (we have described the temple in Chapter 5).

This race was the origin of the curse on the descendants of Pelops. To win Hippodamia, a suitor had first to win a chariot race against Oenomaüs from Pisa to the Isthmus of Corinth. He would have a short start and take Hippodamia in his chariot with him; Oenomaüs would follow, and if he caught up, he would kill the suitor. Thirteen suitors had failed before Pelops came, and their heads decorated Oenomaüs' palace.

According to Pindar, Pelops prayed to his lover, Poseidon, before the race. His words give a sense of the heroic stature of Pelops (*Olympian Ode* 1. 75–89):

> [Pelops said] "If the dear gifts of Love, Poseidon, can be turned to good, shackle the brazen spear of Oenomaüs and bring me upon the swiftest chariot to Elis and set me near to power. For he has killed thirteen suitors and puts off his daughter's marriage. Great danger, however, does not take hold of the coward. Among those who must die, why should a man sitting in darkness pursue old age without glory, to no purpose? Before me, however, lies this contest. May you give me the action dear to me." Thus he spoke, and his words were not without success. Honoring him, the god gave him a golden chariot and tireless winged horses. He overcame the violence of Oenomaüs and took the girl as wife. And she bore him six princes, sons eager in virtue.

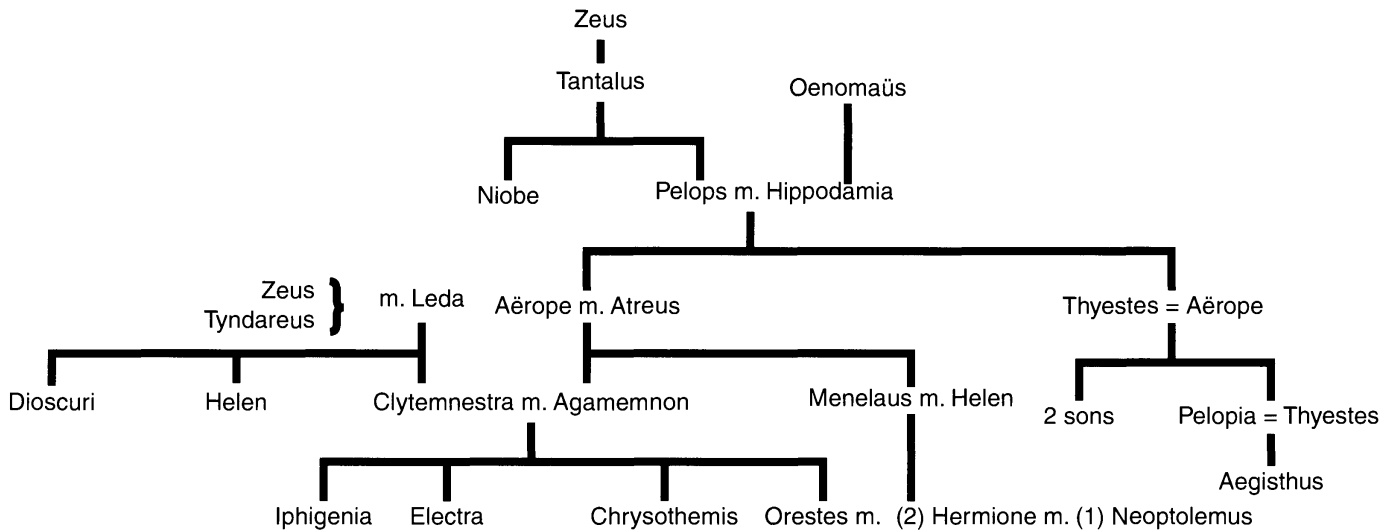

Figure 18.1. The House of Atreus

This version is simpler and probably older than the better-known one, according to which Pelops bribed Oenomaüs' charioteer, Myrtilus (son of the god Hermes), to remove the linchpins from Oenomaüs' chariot so that it crashed during the pursuit, killing Oenomaüs.

So Pelops won Hippodamia and drove away with her, accompanied by Myrtilus. Now Myrtilus expected that Pelops would reward him by allowing him to enjoy Hippodamia on the first night. At a resting place on the journey, he attempted to violate her, and when Pelops discovered this, he threw Myrtilus from a cliff into the sea. As Myrtilus fell, he cursed Pelops and his descendants. This curse, and the blood-guilt of the murder of Myrtilus, led to the misfortunes of the House of Atreus. Seneca, however, whose tragedy *Thyestes* is the only classical drama on this theme to survive, connects the murder with the crime of Tantalus (*Thyestes* 138–148):

> Neither right nor shared crimes have prevailed. Betrayed, the master [Oenomaüs] of Myrtilus has perished, and he, meeting with the same loyalty [from Pelops] as he had shown [to Oenomaüs] has given his name to the noble sea [the Myrtoan Sea]. . . . The child Pelops, running to kiss his father, was met with the impious sword and fell, a young victim at the hearth. He was cut up by your hand, Tantalus, so that you might make a feast for your guests, the gods.

Atreus and Thyestes

Pelops returned to Pisa and became king in place of Oenomaüs. His children, Thyestes and Atreus, quarreled over the kingdom of Mycenae, which had been offered to "a son of Pelops" in obedience to an oracle. It was agreed that the possessor of a golden-fleeced ram should become king. According to Euripides (*Electra* 698–725), Pan brought the golden-fleeced ram to Atreus, and the people of Mycenae were celebrating his succession to the throne:

> The golden censers were set out, and throughout the city the altar-fires blazed. The flute, the Muses' servant, sounded its music, most beautiful. The lovely dances spread, honoring the golden ram—of Thyestes. For he had persuaded Atreus' own wife [Aërope] with secret love and took the talisman to his house. Then he came to the assembly-place and cried out that he had the horned sheep in his house, the golden-fleeced one.

Euripides further says that Zeus, in anger at Thyestes' deception, caused the sun to travel in the opposite direction. So Thyestes for a time enjoyed the reward of his adultery, and Atreus was banished. Later, Atreus returned and became king, exiling Thyestes in his turn, only to recall him and avenge himself for Aërope's seduction. He pretended to be reconciled with Thyestes and invited him to a banquet to celebrate the reconciliation. He killed Thyestes' sons and gave them to him to eat (the banquet is described in the fifth act of Seneca's *Thyestes* in a scene of overpowering horror). Too late, Thyestes realized what he had eaten. As the heavens darkened and the sun hid from sight of the crime, Thyestes cursed Atreus and went into exile.

OTHER VERSIONS OF THE MYTH OF THYESTES

Adrastus and Thyestes at Sicyon. Apulian red-figure krater by the Darius painter, ca. 325 B.C.; height 25¼ in. A scene from Sophocles' (lost) tragedy *Thyestes at Sicyon.* Adrastus, king of Sicyon, central figure in the lower register, commands Thyestes (wearing a cap) to give up the baby Aegisthus to the huntsman (extreme lower left) for exposure. On the lower right, the baby's mother, Pelopia, is comforted by the queen of Sicyon, Amphithea. In the top register, Apollo (with a swan and a panther) sits in the middle looking toward a Fury (right center): Apollo had commanded the incest of Thyestes, and the Fury foreshadows the further working out of the curse on the house of Atreus if Aegisthus survives. On the right is the figure of Sicyon, representing the city bearing his name, and on the left Artemis (protectress of the young) orders Pan to see that Aegisthus is saved, perhaps (like Zeus on Crete) through being suckled by a goat. The vase shows that other traditions of the myths of Thyestes and Adrastus existed as well as those known from Aeschylus. Here Adrastus is ruler at Sicyon, having fled from Argos, and Aegisthus is born at Sicyon, where Pelopia had been sent for safety after the "banquet of Thyestes" at Argos. *(Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.)*

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, AND AEGISTHUS

Thus the curse of Myrtilus affected the first generation of Pelops' descendants. The quarrel of Thyestes and Atreus was continued by their sons. In his second exile, Thyestes lay with his daughter Pelopia, as he had been advised to do by an oracle, and became the father of Aegisthus, who continued the vendetta in

the next generation. The son of Atreus, Agamemnon, succeeded his father as king of Mycenae. He married Clytemnestra and their children were Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes; a third daughter, Chrysothemis, is important only as a foil for Electra in Sophocles' play (see the Additional Reading at the end of this chapter).

Agamemnon in his turn committed an unspeakable crime against one of his children. He sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia at the start of the Trojan expedition in order to appease Artemis and gain favorable winds to sail from Greece. This is one of the most powerful and pervasive of all Greek myths and was frequently represented in literature and art. It is the central myth with which Aeschylus sets forth the background to the action of his tragedy *Agamemnon* (184–249), and it is the theme of Euripides' final tragedy, *Iphigenia in Aulis*. It was narrated by the Roman poet Lucretius in a moving passage that we translate on page 453.

Agamemnon's crime earned the implacable hatred of his wife, Clytemnestra. During his absence at Troy she committed adultery with Aegisthus, who had his own reasons to join her in plotting vengeance against Agamemnon. On his return from Troy with his prisoner, the Trojan princess Cassandra, Agamemnon was enticed into the palace and murdered by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. This is the central event (although it takes place off stage) of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. After the murder, Clytemnestra justifies the deed in a speech we translate later in this chapter (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1372–1398). Aegisthus also took full responsibility for the deed, which he welcomed as a just vengeance upon the son of Atreus, the enemy of his father, Thyestes.

In the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon's ghost tells Odysseus how he and Cassandra were murdered (Homer, *Odyssey* 11. 408–426):

It was not brigands who murdered me on land, but Aegisthus, with my cursed wife, who killed me, arranging my death and fate, having called me into the house and given me a feast—killing me like an ox at the manger. Thus I died a most pitiable death, and around me my other companions were being ruthlessly killed, like tusked boars. . . . You have in the past experienced the death of many men, but if you had seen those deaths you would have most of all been grieved to see us lying in the hall amid the wine-bowls and tables full with food, and the whole floor flowing with blood. Most pitiable was the voice of the daughter of Priam that I heard, of Cassandra, whom treacherous Clytemnestra killed with me. But I, lifting my hands [in supplication] let them fall to the earth as I died by the sword, and my shameless wife turned away, nor did she dare, even though I was going down to the House of Hades, to close my eyes or mouth with her hands.

In this version Agamemnon was killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra at the banquet celebrating his homecoming. The more widely accepted version is that of Aeschylus, in which Clytemnestra kills him in his bath, trapping him in a robe while she stabs him. Aeschylus has Cassandra foresee the murder and her own death in a dramatic prophecy before she enters the palace. She links

The Death of Agamemnon. Attic red-figure krater, possibly by the Dokimasia painter, ca. 470 B.C., height 20½ in. Aegisthus holds Agamemnon by his hair, having already thrust his sword into him. Agamemnon, enmeshed in a net, slips to the ground as Clytemnestra (holding an axe) runs in from the left and a woman (perhaps Electra) tries to protect Agamemnon. Cassandra tries to escape to the right. On the other side of this vase, the death of Aegisthus is painted. *(William Francis Warden Fund, Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)*

Agamemnon's murder to the banquet of Thyestes, which she describes as if it were before her eyes (*Agamemnon* 1095–1125):

> Yes, I am persuaded by the evidence I see, as I weep for these children murdered, for the cooked flesh eaten by their father. . . . What now is this new sorrow? Great is the evil being plotted in this palace, intolerable to its friends, hard

to atone for, and one where defense is far away. . . . Oh, wretched woman, is this your purpose? As you wash your husband, who shares your bed, . . . how shall I describe the end? . . . What is this I see? Some net, the net of Hades? But the net is she who shares the guilt for the murder. . . . Ah! Ah! Keep the bull from the cow! She takes him in the robes and strikes him with the black-horned weapon.[2] He falls in the bath full of water. It is the fate brought by the bath, contriver of treacherous murder, that I describe to you.

The prophetic cries of the inspired victim describe, as vividly as any objective report, the death of Agamemnon, which she shortly is to share. With the corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra at her feet, Clytemnestra defends the justice of her actions. Her speech ends with the terrifying image of Clytemnestra as the earth-mother being renewed by the rain of the sky-god—in this case the blood of her murdered husband. The archetypal Sacred Marriage has never been used with greater poetic effect (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1372–1398):

I have said many things previously to serve my purpose, all of which I shall now contradict, without any shame. For how else could anyone fulfill hatred for an enemy who pretends to be a friend and string up nets of woe too high for him to overleap? For me this contest in this ancient quarrel has come after long planning—in the fullness of time, I say. I stand here where I struck him, over my deeds. Thus did I act, I shall not deny it, so that he could not escape or ward off his doom. I entrapped him in the fatal richness of the robe, encircling him with the huge net, like fishes. I struck him twice, and with two cries he let his limbs go slack; a third blow did I add as a thank-offering to Zeus below the earth, keeper of the dead. Thus fallen he gasped out his life, and at his dying breath he spattered me with rapid spurts, a dark-red rain of blood, and I rejoiced no less than the sown Earth rejoices in the glory of the rain that Zeus sends for the birth of the swelling buds. Thus my case rests, elders of Argos assembled, and may you too rejoice, if you would like to rejoice. As for me, I exult in my imprecations. If I had poured a libation for the corpse as would be fitting, it would have been of wine and curses—with justice, yes, with more than justice. So great were the accursed evils with which he filled our cup in the house, and now by his homecoming he drinks it to the dregs.

It is notable that of the sons of Atreus only Agamemnon was affected by the curse of Myrtilus. Menelaüs had his own sorrows in the adultery and flight of his wife, Helen, the cause of the Trojan War. Euripides portrays him in a contemptible light in his tragedy *Orestes*, the action of which takes place soon after Orestes has murdered Clytemnestra. He is hardly any more attractive in the *Andromache* (whose action we describe later in this chapter) or in the *Trojan Women*, whose action takes place immediately after the sack of Troy. All the literary versions of the myth portray the working out of the curse on the House of Atreus exclusively in the family of Agamemnon, whose son, Orestes, inherits its consequences.

Orestes and Electra

According to Aeschylus, Orestes was away from Mycenae at the time of Agamemnon's murder. While Clytemnestra and Aegisthus usurped the throne, he grew to manhood in exile at the court of Strophius, king of Phocis. It was now his duty to avenge the murder of his father, even though one of the murderers happened to be his own mother; and Apollo commanded him to carry out his duty. He returned to Mycenae, and with the encouragement of his sister Electra, murdered Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In the *Odyssey*, Homer makes Zeus praise Orestes for his piety toward his dead father; and Sophocles, of the three Athenian tragedians (each of whom wrote a tragedy on the murder of Clytemnestra), is the most neutral. In both Aeschylus and Euripides, however, the feeling of revulsion at the matricide predominates. In this tradition Orestes was pursued by the Erinyes, the Furies, the ancient divinities who avenge the victims of murder. At the end of Euripides' *Electra*, the Dioscuri prophesy that Orestes must go into exile, pursued by the Furies. Eventually, they promise, he will appeal to Athena and be acquitted of the charge of matricide by the court of the Areopagus at Athens.

These events are the subject of the *Eumenides*, the third drama in Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia*. The play begins at Delphi, where Orestes has come pursued by the Furies. There Apollo orders him to go to Athens, promising to protect him. At Athens he pleads his case before the court of the Areopagus, whose members, citizens of Athens, are the jury.[3] Apollo defends him, and Athena presides, while the Erinyes claim the justice of their punishment. The jury's votes are tied, and Athena gives her casting vote in favor of Orestes' acquittal, on the grounds that the killing of a mother does not outweigh the murder of a husband and father and that the son's duty toward a father outweighs all other relationships. Thus the curse on the House of Atreus comes to an end; the Erinyes are appeased and given a new name, the Eumenides (Kindly Ones), and worshiped thereafter at Athens.

This version of the myth focuses on the development of law as the vehicle for justice, as against the ancient system (represented by the Erinyes) of blood-guilt and vengeance. But the arguments of Athena are hardly persuasive, and we are left in some doubt as to whether Aeschylus himself believed in their validity. Nor is this as important as the fact that it was the will of Zeus that had already determined that Orestes would be acquitted.[4] Indeed, to Aeschylus, as

Orestes at Delphi. Apulian krater, ca. 370 B.C.; height 35½ in. Orestes clings to the omphalos in the temple of Apollo, while Apollo wards off a Fury who flies in from the upper left. The Pythia runs off in horror from her tripod (seen between the legs of Apollo), and Artemis, on the right, with her hunting hounds, scans the heavens for more flying Furies. Various other details reinforce the setting in the temple—the three Ionic columns, the second tripod (to the left), the Pythia's key to the temple, which she is dropping, and the dedications (chariot wheels and helmets) at the top center. *(Naples, Museo Nazionale.)*

to many authors, playwrights, and poets since his time (including Eugene O'Neill and T. S. Eliot in the twentieth century), the legend of Orestes is important because of the moral and religious principles that it introduces. In its original form, the story of the House of Atreus is one of blood-guilt descending from one generation to another. The murder of Agamemnon is an act of vengeance, which is more fundamental to the myth than the tragic pride (*hubris*) that precedes the fall of Agamemnon, or the jealousy of Clytemnestra against Cassandra. Similarly Orestes acted with piety in avenging his father's death; his "guilt" is a later—if more humane—interpretation. Indeed, it is illogical, for it ignores the fact that Apollo had ordered him to murder Clytemnestra. It was the genius of Aeschylus that transformed the primitive legend and, in place of the ancient doctrine of blood-guilt and vengeance, substituted the rule of reason and law.

Aeschylus presents his monumental tragic version in his trilogy *Oresteia*, consisting of *Agamemnon, Libation Bearers* (*Choephori*), and *Eumenides.* We are fortunate to have dramas of all three tragedians—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—that deal with the events of the saga that concern Electra, the return of Orestes, and the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. These are the subjects of the second play (*Libation Bearers*) in Aeschylus' trilogy and of the *Electra* of Sophocles and the *Electra* of Euripides. Thus we are in the unique position of being able to compare the three great dramatists in their manipulation of the same plot. Each has produced a masterpiece, stamped with an individual conception of motivation, character, and religion. These three plays on an identical theme could not be more different in their personal statements and universal implications.

Electra is the focal point of Sophocles' play. Even while Orestes is killing their mother, it is Electra whom we see outside the palace with her cry, "Strike her again!" And it is Electra who, with exquisite Sophoclean irony, taunts and lures Aegisthus to his death at the hands of Orestes. Sophocles accepts the fact that Orestes has acted justly in his obedience to Apollo's command, and he presents us with a compelling portrait of Electra, passionate in her devotion to her murdered father, consumed by hatred for her mother, Clytemnestra, and her mother's lover, Aegisthus, and kept alive by the hope that Orestes will return to mete out retribution and justice. Among the glories of Sophocles' version are a dramatic confrontation between mother and daughter and a recognition scene between brother and sister of great emotional intensity. Sophocles shows us what anger, frustration, and longing can do to the psyche of a young woman.

Even more brutal, Euripides' portrayal of Electra affords its own kind of pity and fear, tinged as it is by the sordid, realistic, and mundane. Electra and Orestes act at times as little more than neurotic thugs: Electra's revenge, in particular, is motivated as much by sexual jealousy as by any sublime sense of absolute justice. Her monologue to the head of Aegisthus is a study in horror, and brother and sister join side by side in butchering their mother. Castor, the deus ex

machina, with typically Euripidean philosophical ambiguity, tells us that Apollo is wise but that his orders to Orestes were not wise.

For a more lengthy analysis of Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides with pertinent excerpts from the texts, see the Additional Reading at the end of this chapter.

It is not surprising that there are other versions of Orestes' story, which allow him to be purified from the blood-guilt either by some ritual or by performing an expiatory deed, without undergoing trial and acquittal. In Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Tauris* not all the Erinyes have accepted the judgment of Athena, and some still pursue Orestes. Once again he comes to Delphi, where he is told by Apollo to go to the land of the Tauri (the modern Crimea) and fetch a wooden statue of Artemis. It was the custom of the Tauri to sacrifice strangers to Artemis in her temple, and Orestes and his companion Pylades (now the husband of Electra) are handed over to the priestess of Artemis, none other than Orestes' sister Iphigenia. She questions the Greek strangers about events at Argos and Mycenae and then reveals to Orestes who she is and how she has been miraculously saved at Aulis by Artemis and transported to the land of the Tauri. Once she recognizes Orestes, they deceive Thoas, king of the Tauri, into letting them take the statue of Artemis to the sea, to be cleansed of the pollution caused by Orestes, the matricide. They board Orestes' ship and set sail, but adverse wind and waves drive them back toward the land. Before Thoas can seize them, Athena appears and instructs him to let them go. So Orestes and Iphigenia return to Greece. They dedicate the statue of Taurian Artemis at Halae in Attica. Orestes returns to Mycenae, while Iphigenia stays in Attica as the priestess of Artemis at Brauron for the rest of her life.

Thus Orestes recovered his sanity and reigned at Mycenae. Later, he is said to have married his cousin Hermione (daughter of Helen and Menelaüs), and by her to have been the father of Tisamenus. Before his madness, he was betrothed to her, but she married Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, and accompanied him to the land of the Molossi in Epirus. According to Euripides, however, in his tragedy *Andromache*, Neoptolemus lived in Phthia (the home of his grandfather Peleus) with Hermione and Andromache, widow of the Trojan hero, Hector, and now given to Neoptolemus as the spoils of war. Hermione, who is barren (while Andromache bears a child), plots to escape with Orestes, who has unexpectedly appeared while journeying to the oracle of Zeus at Dodona. This all takes place while Neoptolemus is away at Delphi on a mission to appease Apollo for his anger with him after the death of his father, Achilles, at Troy. Orestes himself goes to Delphi, and there Neoptolemus is brutally murdered by the Delphians in the sanctuary of Apollo. Orestes organizes the attack, but it is not clear if he actually takes part in the murder. Neoptolemus is buried in the sanctuary of Apollo, thus gaining the status of a hero with a cult. Pindar twice

TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE LEGEND

The legend of the Oresteia has inspired many works of literature. Especially memorable in the twentieth century were Eugene O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), a saga set in nineteenth-century New England, and T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1939), where the setting is the house of an English family. John Barton has written a monumental cycle of ten plays entitled *Tantalus: An Ancient Myth for a New Millenium* (2000, an extension of an earlier work *The Greeks*), which embraces the sagas of Mycenae and of the Trojan War. In French there is, for example, Jean Giraudoux's *Electra* (1937), and Jean-Paul Sartre in his play *The Flies* transforms Orestes into a paradigm of existentialism. *The Prodigal* (1960), by the American playwright Jack Richardson, might also be mentioned.

In the ingenious novel *Angel of Light*, by the American Joyce Carol Oates, Orestes and Electra have become students in Washington, D.C., descendants of the abolitionist martyr John Brown, who are convinced that their father, a director in the Ministry of Justice, has been murdered by their mother.

tells the story of his death, each time without mentioning the name of Orestes (*Nemean Ode* 7. 33–47: cf. *Paean* 6. 98–120):

> Neoptolemus came as a defender to the great navel of the broad-bosomed earth, when he had sacked the city of Priam, where the Danaäns had labored. He sailed from Troy past Scyros, and wandering they came to Ephyra [Corinth]. And for a short time he ruled over Molossia, and his descendants always have this honor. But he went to the god [Apollo], bringing the first fruits of the spoils from Troy. And there a man killed him with a dagger fighting over the [sacrificial] meat.

As for Orestes, he married Hermione and came to rule over Argos and Sparta, as well as Mycenae.[5] After his death (from a snake bite) he was buried at Tegea, which in historical times was the rival of Sparta. According to Herodotus, the Spartans got possession of his bones, on the advice of the Delphic oracle, and afterwards always were victorious over the Tegeans. Tisamenus was the Achaean leader against the Heraclidae, at whose hands he perished. Electra, as has already been mentioned, married Orestes' constant friend and companion, Pylades, son of Strophius, and by him bore two sons, Strophius and Medon. Thereafter she disappears from the legend.

ADDITIONAL READING

ORESTES AND THE THREE ELECTRAS

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was first produced in 458 B.C. The second play of this trilogy, *Libation Bearers* (*Choephori*), tells of the return of Orestes, his reunion with

his sister Electra, and the murder of their mother Clytemnestra and her lover and husband Aegisthus. As has been noted in this chapter, Sophocles and Euripides also wrote plays on this same theme. Thus a unique opportunity is afforded us to compare and contrast the methods and the purposes of these three great dramatists. Following are some interpretative observations with translations of pertinent excerpts from each of the three plays.

AESCHYLUS, *LIBATION BEARERS* (*CHOEPHORI*)

The play opens with Orestes, accompanied by his companion Pylades, having returned to Argos. Orestes, with a prayer to Hermes, places two locks of his hair upon the tomb of his father Agamemnon. As Electra enters accompanied by a chorus of women bringing offerings to the grave, the two young men withdraw. After libations have been offered, during which Electra reveals her plight, she discovers Orestes' locks of hair and immediately recognizes them because, in texture, they are like her own. Similarly she is convinced Orestes has returned because the footprints that he has left match hers exactly. These signs of recognition strike the contemporary reader as dubious and extremely curious, but apparently they were used by primitive people.[6]

At this point Orestes reveals his identity by showing a woven design on his clothing of wild animals that his sister remembers. Their recognition scene is short, swift, and joyous. To Electra, her brother brings the light and the hope of her salvation; in him alone four lost loves are restored: that of her father, her mother, her sacrificed sister, and her beloved Orestes himself. A lengthy threnody follows in which Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus elaborate upon the theme of their just retribution and call upon Agamemnon, with prayers to Zeus and Apollo as well. Orestes, very much in command, reveals his plans for the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and gives Electra directions for her limited role in his plot. Orestes will be received into the palace and convey to Clytemnestra the false news that Orestes is dead (supposedly learned from Strophius, to whom the child Orestes had been sent).

Orestes has already disclosed the devastating power of Apollo's oracle with its dire predictions. If he does not kill to avenge Agamemnon's murder, his life will become a horror. Pursued relentlessly by the terrifying Furies of his father and covered by boils and a kind of leprosy, he will wander endlessly, an exile and pariah until he dies in misery. Orestes, then, is motivated by fear of these punishments and also by compassion for his father, by desire to win the inheritance that is his due, and by dismay that heroes who returned from Troy with his father are now subjected to the rule of two women, Clytemnestra and the weakling Aegisthus.

Orestes and Pylades are received by Clytemnestra into the palace. She accepts the report of her son's death with intense and mixed emotions. The servant Cilissa is called upon to bring the news to Aegisthus, who is away, and we

learn that it was this Cilissa who nursed and cared for Orestes when he was a baby and saw to it that he got safely away after the murder of Agamemnon.

Aegisthus returns to confirm the good news and upon entering the palace meets his death at Orestes' hands. Clytemnestra will soon be next. She had sent the women with libations to the tomb of Agamemnon because, in a terrifying dream, she gave birth to a snake and nestled it to sleep in coverlets. She gave the little monster her breast to suck and cried aloud in fright and pain as it fed and tore at her nipple, drawing blood that stained the milk. Now Orestes the serpent has come to fulfill her nightmare.

A servant cries out that Aegisthus has been murdered and rouses Clytemnestra with warnings that she will be next; Clytemnestra realizes that Orestes is not dead but alive and ready to kill her (885–930):

CLYTEMNESTRA: What is the matter? What is this shouting within the palace?

SERVANT: I tell you that the dead one is alive and come to strike the living dead.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah! I understand the meaning of your riddle. We die by treachery, just as we killed by treachery. Someone, quickly, give me an axe to kill a man. Let us see whether we win or lose. Now I have reached the critical moment in these terrible events.

Orestes is revealed with Pylades at his side and the murdered Aegisthus at his feet.

ORESTES: It is you I am looking for. I have dealt well enough with this one here.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Alas, strong Aegisthus, dearest, are you dead?

ORESTES: You love the man, do you? Fine, for you will lie in the same grave. Never will you be unfaithful to him now that he is dead.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Stop, my son, have reverence for this, your mother's breast, my child, from which so many times with toothless gums you drowsily sucked the milk that nourished you.

ORESTES: Pylades, what shall I do? Shouldn't I be in dread of killing my own mother?

PYLADES: What about the future and the sanctity of Apollo's oracles delivered by his holy priestess? What about binding pledges sworn in good faith? Make enemies of mortals rather than the gods.

ORESTES: You overcome my fears; your advice is good. Come, mother, I want to slaughter you right next to Aegisthus here. For, when he was alive, you thought him better than my father; now sleep with him in death, since you love him and hate the man you should have loved.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I gave life to you and I want to grow old with you.

ORESTES: You killed my father and you want to live with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA: My son, Fate had a part in all that has happened.

ORESTES: Then Fate has determined what is about to happen now.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Aren't you afraid of the curses of a mother, my son?

ORESTES: A mother? You bore me and then threw me out to misery.
CLYTEMNESTRA: I did not throw you out but sent you away to friends.
ORESTES: I, free born, was shamefully sold out, my person and my patrimony betrayed.
CLYTEMNESTRA: Where, then, is the price that I received for giving you up?
ORESTES: I blush to enumerate what you got in return, much to your shame.
CLYTEMNESTRA: You should count the sins of your father, not only mine.
ORESTES: Don't malign him, who suffered much, while you stayed safe at home.
CLYTEMNESTRA: It is grief for women to be without a husband, my son.
ORESTES: Yet the hardships of the husband insure the safety of the wife at home.
CLYTEMNESTRA: My son, you are going to kill your mother.
ORESTES: It is you who kill yourself, not I.
CLYTEMNESTRA: Watch out, beware the Furies, hounds of a mother's curse.
ORESTES: How can I escape the curse of my father, if I do not act?
CLYTEMNESTRA: I plead for my life as though to a dead man entombed, all in vain.
ORESTES: The fate of my father brings this fate down upon you.
CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah, this is the snake that I gave birth to and nourished.
ORESTES: The terror of your dreams prophesied the truth. You should not have committed murder. Suffer your own murder in retaliation.

A chorus comments upon the terrifying events and reiterates the themes of vengeance, justice, and the will of god. Then Orestes appears with the corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra at his feet to claim that he has acted with justice. The scene parallels the one in the *Agamemnon* (with its rich and profound imagery of ensnarement, entanglement, and the net), where Clytemnestra after the murders of Cassandra and Agamemnon appears with her victims to claim that her actions have been just (p. 411). Orestes holds in his hands the very robe in which Agamemnon was entangled and butchered (973–1006):

ORESTES: Behold the two of them, tyrants of this land, murderers of my father and despoilers of his estate. Haughtily they once sat on their august thrones, lovers then and even now, as you may infer from what has befallen them. They have remained true to their pledges: together they vowed death for my poor father and swore to die together. All these things that they swore are truly accomplished.

As you listen to my litany of their wicked deeds, look at this robe, an entanglement which they devised for my poor father as a fetter for his hands and a shackle for his feet. Spread it out, stand in a circle around it, point out this trap to ensnare her husband for father to see these unholy deeds of my mother, not my father but Helius, the Sun, the one who watches over everything so that he may bear witness for me when the time for judgment comes that I, with justice, was responsible for the fate of my mother. Aegisthus' death I need not mention, for he has received the just deserts of an adulterer according to the law. But she who devised this monstrous crime against her husband became preg-

nant by him; the children that she bore him she loved once but now, as it is all too clear, they have become her dire enemy. I'll tell you what she is like. If she had been born a serpent or a viper, she would have been able to infect by touch alone, no need of fangs to bite, because of an inherent, venomous audacity.

This robe, what am I to call it? Could I find the proper words? A trap for a wild beast, a snare for a corpse, or a covering for after the bath. One might call it a net to catch fish or one for animals or fabric to entangle the feet. The sort of thing a thief might own in order to make his living by ensnaring wayfarers and robbing them. With such a treacherous device, he could kill many, steal much, and warm his heart in comfort.

May I never get this kind of woman for a wife. By the will of the gods, may I die first, childless.

In the finale of the play Orestes is driven out by the Furies, frightening, with faces like Gorgons and serpents entwined in their hair. He will find salvation in the third play, the *Eumenides* (as we have seen) through the agency of Apollo and Athena and a civil court of law. The righteous will of Zeus is eventually accomplished.

SOPHOCLES' *ELECTRA*

In Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, Orestes maintains center stage, determining the course of the action. True, a stirring and compelling portrait of Electra emerges, delineating characteristics with great potential for further development. Yet she exits from the play before Orestes and Pylades enter the palace, and her presence, therefore, does not dilute the power of a vengeance delivered by Orestes himself at the dictates of Apollo. All is as it should be for the central play of a trilogy entitled *Oresteia*.

How different are the two *Electras* that follow! We do not know for sure whether Sophocles wrote his version before or after that of Euripides; the date for Sophocles' play is unknown, and 416 B.C. for Euripides' is only a conjecture. Because of the nature of the development in motives and characterizations and the drastic shift in religious and philosophical sentiment, Euripides' play is best considered last.

Sophocles' *Electra* begins with the return of Orestes to Mycenae, accompanied by both his tutor and his friend Pylades, ready to set in motion his plans to exact vengeance from Aegisthus and Clytemnestra for their murder of his father Agamemnon. In Sophocles, both are the murderers, not as in Aeschylus, where Clytemnestra did the actual deed herself. Orestes clearly and succinctly emphasizes the justice of his mission, ordained by god (32–37):

ORESTES: When I went to the Pythian oracle to find out how I should win justice from the murderers of my father, Phoebus Apollo uttered this response, which I will tell you now: I alone, without men in arms, am to steal by treachery their righteous slaughter by my own hand.

The moans of a grieving Electra are heard from within the palace, and at the tutor's urging the three leave to carry out the orders of Apollo. Thus the recognition scene between brother and sister is postponed to achieve its full effect later in the play.

In her lengthy exchange with the chorus of sympathetic women, Electra reveals her misery; she cannot ever forget that her mother and her mother's bed partner split the skull of her father with an axe, as one would cut down a mighty and regal oak. Her laments for her beloved father are endless, her hatred for his murderers relentless, and she lives only in her hope for the return of her brother and vengeance. Unmarried and alone, without children, she has become a slave and a beggar in her father's house. In her helpless isolation, she awaits the return of her brother, her savior and her salvation. She reveals her soul and her psyche in the following summation (254–309):

ELECTRA: I am ashamed, women, if it seems to you that I am too excessive in my suffering and my many complaints. Forgive me, but I am forced to act this way. How could a woman of noble integrity help but behave as I do, if she sees what I see—calamitous evils in my father's house, never ceasing causes of pain, continually fresh and renewed. First of all, my relationship with the mother who bore me has come to be most hateful. Then, in my own house I live with the murderers of my own father; I am ruled by them, I am dependent on them for what they give and what they take away alike. Furthermore, what kind of day do you think that I spend when I see Aegisthus sitting on the throne of my father and I behold him wearing the same clothes as he did, pouring libations at the very hearth where he killed him, and I witness the ultimate hubris, the murderer in the bed of my father, with my abominable mother—if I should call the woman who sleeps with him my mother. She is so brazen that she lives with the guilty wretch, unafraid of any retribution from any of the Furies. Instead, as though laughing exultantly at her wicked deeds, she has fixed the date on which she killed my father through treachery—and on this day of each month she has established choruses and sacrifices, a holy celebration for the gods who keep her safe.

I, however, ill fated, seeing in these halls this evil ceremonial in the name of my father, I, all alone lament, myself to myself, and weep and pine away; but I cannot indulge my grief as much as would fill my heart with joy because this queen of lies shouts wicked renunciations such as these: "Damned and hateful creature, are you the only one for whom a father has died? No other person in the world has ever been in mourning? May you go to hell and may the gods below never release you from your agonies."

Thus she wantonly rages, except when she hears some rumor that Orestes has returned. Then, mad with rage, she stands close beside me and yells: "Aren't you the one responsible? Isn't all this your doing, you, the one who stole Orestes safely out of my arms? I want you to know that you will pay the just reward that you deserve." Such are the words she screams at me; and present by her side, he urges her on with the same reproaches, this renowned bridegroom of hers, completely impotent, an utter disaster, whose battles are only fought behind the skirts of a woman.

I, poor wretch, waste away, waiting for Orestes to put an end to these miseries, for living in the constant expectation that he is about to accomplish this great feat, I have lost all possible hope that he will ever return. So, dear women, in such circumstances, I cannot behave with pious self-control but in the midst of these evils, necessity compels me to pursue an evil course.

Sophocles purposefully changes Aeschylus, who has the servant Cilissa nurse the infant Orestes and whisk him away after the murder, in order to depict Electra as mother-figure to her brother.

A scene follows in which Electra encounters her sister Chrysothemis, who, as we learn, has been willing to obey Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and as a result lives freely and normally with them in the palace. Such compromise is incomprehensible and disgusting to Electra. Chrysothemis warns Electra that if she does not change her ways, she is to be sentenced upon Aegisthus' return to spend the rest of her life imprisoned in a dungeon. We learn also that Chrysothemis has been sent to the grave of Agamemnon with libations from Clytemnestra, who has been tormented by an ambiguous dream that could foretell Orestes' vengeance: she saw Agamemnon come to life again. He took back his royal scepter, now held by Aegisthus, and planted it in his own ground; there it burst into luxuriant leaf and quite overshadowed the whole of Mycenae.

Chrysothemis' only importance lies in her role in Sophocles, where she is created as a dramatic foil for Electra, in much the same way as this playwright uses Ismene to illuminate by contrast the character of Antigone. Central to Sophocles' play is a bitter and revealing confrontation between mother and daughter (516–609); there is no such scene in Aeschylus. Clytemnestra argues that Agamemnon should not have sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia. Instead, a child of Menelaüs and Helen should have been the victim at Aulis, since the Greek expedition against Troy was on behalf of Menelaüs, whose wife Helen had been abducted by the Trojan prince Paris. Electra responds with a vehement defense of her father:

CLYTEMNESTRA: It is obvious that you feel free to leave the palace and without any restraint disgrace your family and friends, since Aegisthus is not here to prevent you as he always does. But now since he is away you show me no respect. Over and over again for many to hear you have spoken out that I rule brazenly and unjustly, treating you and all that you hold dear outrageously. But I am not guilty of hubris. I revile you only because you revile me so often.

Your father is always your excuse, and nothing else—that he died by my hand. By my hand, I am well aware of that and cannot deny the charge. But Justice killed him, not I alone, and you would be on the side of Justice if you had any sense at all. Why? Because this father of yours, whom you are always bemoaning, was the only one of the Greeks to have the effrontery to sacrifice his daughter to the gods, Iphigenia, your sister. Of course it was easy enough for him to beget her, with none of the pain that I suffered when I gave her birth. So be it! Yet explain this to me. Why and for whom did he sacrifice her? Will your

answer be, for the Greeks? But they had no right to kill a daughter of mine. If he killed her on behalf of his brother Menelaüs, didn't he still owe me just retribution for killing what was mine? Menelaüs had two children of his own; since the expedition against Troy was for the sake of their mother and father, wasn't it only right that they should die, instead of my daughter? Did Hades have some sort of longing for the death of a child of mine rather that one of Helen's? Did your accursed father love the children of Menelaüs and feel nothing for those that I bore to him? Isn't this the behavior of an evil, foolish father with no scruples? I think so, even if you do not. Iphigenia who is dead would agree with me, if she could speak. I am not sorry for what I have done. If you think that I am evil for feeling as I do, you had better have justice on your side before you blame others.

ELECTRA: This time you cannot claim that I started this painful confrontation and that you were only responding to my reproaches. Yet if you will allow me, I would like to make a righteous defense on behalf of both my dead father and my sister.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes, I allow you. If you always began your speeches so politely, you would not be such a pain to listen to.

ELECTRA: Then I will speak to you. You say that you killed my father. What further admission could be more disgraceful, whether you acted justly or not? I tell you that you killed him not in justice but because you were enticed by the allurement of the evil man with whom you live. Ask the huntress Artemis what ransom she demanded for the release of the many winds which she held fast at Aulis. Since we cannot find out the answer from her, I will tell you what I have been told. Once when my father was hunting in a sacred grove of the goddess, at the sound of his footsteps a dappled stag with antlers started up. He killed it and happened to make some boast or other; at this the daughter of Leto was enraged and detained the Achaeans until the time he would sacrifice his own daughter in compensation for the animal. Thus it was that Iphigenia was sacrificed; there was nothing else he could do so that the army could sail either homeward or to Troy. It was for this and not for Menelaüs that he sacrificed her, with great reluctance and much against his will. Suppose that he did perform the sacrifice out of a desire to help Menelaüs, as you argue. Did he have to die at your hands because of this? According to what kind of law? Be careful that you do not regret imposing such a law for human beings since you bring punishment down upon yourself. For if we are to commit murder in retaliation for murder, you should be the first to die, in order to satisfy the justice you deserve. But watch out that you are not making an insubstantial excuse to justify your actions. Tell me, if you like, for what reason you are doing the most shameful thing of all, you who sleep with the murderer with whom you once killed my father, and you who have begotten a child by him but have cast out your legitimate children born in holy wedlock.[7] How could I sanction such behavior? Or will you say that these actions too are done in recompense for your daughter? If you do argue so, it is to your shame. For it is not right to marry the enemy, Aegisthus, for the sake of your daughter. Yet it is impossible to give good advice to you, the one who continually berates us with the charge that we speak ill of our mother, and I consider you more a tyrant than a mother towards us, I who live

a life of misery, suffering many torments at the hands of you and your bedmate. Your other child far away, poor Orestes, having barely escaped your violence, wastes away his ill-starred life. Many times you have accused me of nurturing him to be your avenger. Know full well that I would have done so, if I had the power. For these reasons then denounce me to everyone, whether you proclaim me as evil or loud-mouthed or full of shamelessness. Indeed, if I am so accomplished in such behavior, it only shows that I do not in the least belie a nature and character just like yours.

In this way mother and daughter argue their case. The scene ends with Clytemnestra calling upon Apollo to grant that her dream might turn out well for her and that she might live a long, safe, and happy life. At the conclusion of her prayer, the tutor arrives to announce the false news of Orestes' death and set in motion the action that will end in death for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. With similar dramatic irony, Sophocles in *Oedipus the King* marks the beginning of the end for Jocasta when the messenger from Corinth arrives immediately after her invocation to Apollo for salvation.

Belief that Orestes is dead brings to Clytemnestra a joyous relief but also a painful sadness. Electra is devastated and in a second clash with Chrysothemis reveals that she is ready, all alone, to kill Aegisthus herself. Sophocles' Electra does not even contemplate the murder of her mother.

When Orestes and Pylades arrive bringing an urn that supposedly contains the ashes of the dead Orestes, Electra receives it into her hands and utters these heartbreaking words (1126–1170):

ELECTRA: This urn is a memorial of the life of Orestes, to me the most beloved of men. Here is all that is left of him. With what high hopes I sent you away, dear brother, and how far they have fallen now that I have gotten you back. Now I fondle you in my hands but you are no more. You were gloriously alive when I rescued you out of the palace.

How I wish that I had died before I stole you away with these same hands and delivered you into a foreign land to save you from being murdered; if I had not done so, you could then on that day have died here, and shared death and a grave with your father. But now as it is, you have died miserably, far from home, an exile in a foreign land, separated from your sister. I, wretched me, did not bathe your corpse with loving hands or remove your remains from the blazing pyre as I should have; instead, poor brother, your funeral was in the hands of foreigners and you have come back to me as a handful of ashes in a tiny urn. Alas, unhappy me, all for nothing was the care which long ago I lavished upon you—a sweet burden; you never loved your mother more than you did me, and I was your nurse, not anyone else in the household; in addition to mother and nurse, you could call me your sister. But now with your death, all is over in one day. You have gone and have taken everything away with you, like a whirlwind. Father is gone, you yourself are gone and your death has killed me. Our enemies laugh and our mother is insane with joy, she no mother at all, against whom you were to appear as an avenger, as you so often promised in secret

messages. But your unfortunate fate and mine have taken everything away and have sent you back to me thus—ashes, an ineffectual shade instead of the living form of my dear, dear brother. Woe is me, O pitiable corpse, alas! You have been sent on a most dread journey. Welcome me to this home of yours, me your sister, whom you have destroyed—nothingness into nothingness—so that I may live with you below for the rest of time. Since I shared equally with you when I was in the upper world, now too in death I long to be given a place with you in your tomb. For I envision an end of suffering for those who are dead.

In the recognition scene that follows, Electra, with an overwhelming joy, rushes into the arms of her brother. It is a signet-seal of his father that Orestes shows as final proof of his identity—proof more realistic, if not irrefutable, than that in Aeschylus! Orestes, her surrogate father and mother, now becomes in a sense her surrogate lover and most certainly her very real savior.

Apollo will grant Electra's prayer for success. She remains center stage while Orestes kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Sophocles reverses the order of the murders with telling effect. Here is the conclusion of his play (1398–1510):

ELECTRA: Dearest women, the men will accomplish their mission at once. Just be silent and wait.
CHORUS: How now? What are they doing?
ELECTRA: She is preparing the urn for burial and the two are standing beside her.
CHORUS: Why have you hastened out of the palace?
ELECTRA: I must watch so that we may know when Aegisthus returns.
CLYTEMNESTRA (from within the palace): Alas, the house is bereft of friends but teeming with killers.
ELECTRA: Someone is crying out from within. Don't you hear, my friends?
CHORUS: I heard a chilling cry that makes me shudder.
CLYTEMNESTRA: Woe is me, O Aegisthus, where can you be?
ELECTRA: Listen, someone is calling out again.
CLYTEMNESTRA: My child, my child, pity your mother who bore you!
ELECTRA: But he received no pity from you and neither did his father who begat him.
CHORUS: O unfortunate city! O unhappy family! The fate that supported you daily now is waning, waning.
CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah, I am struck!
ELECTRA: Strike her again, and more deeply, if you have the strength.
CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah, I am struck again!
ELECTRA: I only wish Aegisthus were there too!
CHORUS: The curses are being fulfilled. Those who lie beneath the earth are alive, for those once dead are draining the blood of the murderers in retribution. Look, they are before us. A hand drips with blood from a sacrifice to Ares, and I cannot find any fault.
ELECTRA: Orestes, how has it turned out?
ORESTES: It has turned out well in the house, if Apollo prophesied well.
ELECTRA: Is the wretched woman dead?

ORESTES: No longer be afraid that your mother's arrogance will ever dishonor you again.
CHORUS: Be quiet, for I see Aegisthus approaching.
ELECTRA: Orestes and Pylades, get back.
ORESTES: Where do you see the man?
ELECTRA: He comes towards us from the outskirts of the city, with a smile on his face.
CHORUS: Get back inside as fast as you can so that you may take care of the situation well, as you have just done previously.
ORESTES: Rest assured, we will do it.
ELECTRA: Now hurry within.
ORESTES: I am gone.
ELECTRA: Let me take care of him out here.
CHORUS: It would be a good idea for him to hear from you a few gentle words of assurance so that he may rush unsuspecting into his hidden ordeal with justice.
AEGISTHUS: Which one of you knows the whereabouts of the strangers from Phocis, who they say have brought the news that Orestes has lost his life in the wreckage of chariot? You, I ask you, yes you, the one always so insolent before, for I believe that his death touches you especially and you especially know about it and can answer.
ELECTRA (her responses to Aegisthus are laden with dramatic irony): I know about it. How could I not know about it and remain uninformed about a calamity touching those dearest to me?
AEGISTHUS: Then where might the strangers be? Tell me.
ELECTRA: Within. They have greeted a loving hostess.
AEGISTHUS: Did they bring the news that he was truly dead—for sure?
ELECTRA: Yes, and not by word alone, but they even offered proof.
AEGISTHUS: Is it possible for us to see this proof clearly?
ELECTRA: We certainly can and it is a very unenviable sight.
AEGISTHUS: You have said much to please me—how unusual!
ELECTRA: May you be pleased, if this happens to give you pleasure.
AEGISTHUS: I order that the doors be opened to display his corpse for all the Mycenaeans and Argives to see, so that if any of them were once elated by vain hopes in this man, now upon beholding him dead they may accept my bridle and learn good sense without my having to chastise them with force.
ELECTRA: Certainly I have learned this lesson; in time I have come to my senses and now acquiesce with those who are stronger.
AEGISTHUS (upon the revelation of the corpse): O Zeus, what I behold is a portent that has befallen not without the ill will of the gods. If it entails a just nemesis, I do not say. Remove the covering over the eyes completely so that my relative may receive proper lamentation from me.
ORESTES: Lift the cloth yourself; it is yours to do not mine—to behold this face and to speak words of affection.
AEGISTHUS: You give good advice and I will follow it. But you, call Clytemnestra, if by any chance she is in the house.
ORESTES: She is close to you; no need to look elsewhere.
AEGISTHUS: Ah, what do I look upon?

ORESTES: Of whom are you afraid? Whom do you not recognize?
AEGISTHUS: Into the trap of what men have I fallen? Poor me!
ORESTES: Haven't you been aware that you who are alive have been conversing face to face with the dead?
AEGISTHUS: I understand your meaning. It cannot be otherwise; this must be Orestes who is speaking to me.
ORESTES: You the best of prophets and yet fooled for so long?
AEGISTHUS: Wretched me, I am done for! Yet let me say a word.
ELECTRA: Don't let him say more, brother; don't prolong all this talk, by the gods. When mortals are enmeshed in evil, what advantage is there in delay for the one who is about die? Kill him as quickly as possible, and when he is dead throw his body to scavengers for the burial he deserves, far from our sight, since for me this would be the only deliverance from evil.
ORESTES: Go inside. Be quick about it. For now the contest is no longer of words but about your life.
AEGISTHUS: Why do you force me into the palace? If your action is good, how come you need the dark and are not ready to kill me out here?
ORESTES: Don't give orders to me. Go inside where you killed my father so that you may die in the same place.
AEGISTHUS: Is it really necessary that this house witness future as well as the present evils that have fallen upon the family of Pelops?
ORESTES: It will witness yours, for sure. I am your unerring prophet in this.
AEGISTHUS: You boast about a skill that you did not inherit from your father.
ORESTES: Your replies are too long and our short journey is delayed. Now go.
AEGISTHUS: Lead on.
ORESTES: You must go first.
AEGISTHUS: So that I may not escape you?
ORESTES: No, so that you may not die where it pleases you. I must see to it that this is bitter for you. This swift justice should be meted out to all who desire to act outside of the laws—death, for then there would not be so much crime.
CHORUS: O family of Atreus, how much you have suffered to reach freedom amid such adversity, freedom crowned by this present act of daring.

Apollo's will has been accomplished and the justice of Zeus has been fulfilled. There are no Furies to pursue a guilty Orestes in this masterpiece that explores so profoundly the heart and the soul of a frightening, pitiable, and tragic Electra.

EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*

By clever manipulation of the plot to create a different emphasis in the interpretation of the characters and their motives, Euripides seriously questions religious and philosophical beliefs about right and wrong action and the nature of justice. The setting for his play is the hut of a peasant, who is the husband of Electra. This peasant provides a prologue that gives the essential background

for the plot with its subtle Euripidean twists, only a few of which can be mentioned in this brief summary. Most important is the fact that Aegisthus has married off Electra to this poor but well-meaning man, in the belief that he would have nothing to fear from such a match. Indeed Electra has remained a virgin, untouched sexually by her husband, whose nature is admirably noble.

Orestes, at the command of Apollo, returns with Pylades and encounters Electra. Eventually their scene of recognition is confirmed most realistically. The servant who once saved the infant Orestes now, as an old man, points out to Electra a scar that proves the identity of her brother. As Electra makes abundantly clear, similarity in locks of hair and footprints or the design of woven fabric are not enough for certainty.

Now Orestes can make plans for his vengeance. He receives a great deal of assistance from the old servant for his scheme against Aegisthus, and it is Electra who takes a particularly vicious delight in laying the plot herself for the death of her mother, Clytemnestra. Euripides, like Aeschylus, places the murder of Clytemnestra last for his own macabre purposes.

The circumstances and the religious setting of the murder of Aegisthus place him in an ingratiating light. The scene is described by a messenger to a gloating Electra. Aegisthus is approached by Orestes and Pylades while he is preparing a sacrifice in honor of the Nymphs, and he welcomes the strangers most hospitably as guests and friends. After he has butchered the sacrificial bull and bends over to examine the severed parts of the animal in fear of bad omens, Aegisthus is brutally stabbed in the back by Orestes, who brings his body and his severed head to his sister. Electra, painfully triumphant, addresses the remains of her most bitter enemy with the following apostrophe (907–1248):

ELECTRA: Alas, first of all in reproaching you with evils where will I begin? What sort of ending will I provide? How shall I list all those in between? To be sure, from early dawn I never ceased rehearsing the things that I wanted to say to you face to face if ever I should become free from those former terrors. Well now we are free and I will repay you with this litany of evils which I wanted to recite to you when you were alive.

You destroyed me and you made me and Orestes here bereft of a dear father, even though you were never wronged. You married my mother shamefully and killed her husband, commander-in-chief of the Hellenic forces against Troy, while you stayed at home. You reached such a pinnacle of folly that you expected that, having wronged my father's bed and married my mother, she would do you no wrong. Whenever anyone has corrupted the wife of another in a clandestine affair and then is compelled to marry her, let him know for sure that he is a sorry fool if he thinks that she who has already betrayed one husband will be a chaste wife for him. You lived a most abominable life, not realizing how evil it was. Yet you knew that you had entered into an unholy marriage and my mother knew that she had taken an impious man as her husband. Both of you base, each partaking of each other's evil fate, she of yours and you of hers. And among all the Argives Clytemnestra never was called the wife of Aegisthus, instead you heard yourself denigrated as the husband of Clytemnestra.

This is a disgrace that the woman and not the man controls the household, and I hate it when in the city children are designated not as the offspring of the male, the father, but of the mother. When a husband has married a conspicuously superior wife, the woman receives all the attention but no account is taken of the man. But this is what deceived you, what you did not understand. You boasted that you were somebody relying upon wealth for your importance. But money is nothing. It is our consort for only a little while. Nature is what remains steadfast, a good character, not money; it stays with us always and lifts away evils. But wealth, dishonest associate of the foolish, flourishes for a short time and then flies out the door.

As for your affairs with women, I remain silent. Since it is not proper for a virgin to speak out about them, I will only offer discreet hints. You behaved outrageously, possessed as you were of a royal palace and endowed with physical beauty. As for me, may I get a husband who does not look like a girl but is manly, whose children would be like Ares. Good looks alone are merely a pretty adornment for devotees of the dance.

Away with you, completely ignorant that you have paid the penalty for your crimes that have in time been found out. Let no one as wicked as you think that, if he has run the first phase of the course well, he is triumphing over Justice, before he approaches the final turn and the end of his life.

CHORUS: He has done terrible things and he has paid a terrible retribution to you and Orestes because of the power of Justice.

ELECTRA: So be it. Servants, you must carry the body inside and hide it in the darkness so that when my mother arrives she may not see the corpse before she is slaughtered.

At this point Clytemnestra arrives upon the scene. She had been summoned with the false announcement that Electra had recently borne a son, just as Electra had planned, and, as it was with Aegisthus, her entrapment appears particularly sordid. The confrontation between mother and daughter raises similar issues that had been argued in Sophocles' version, but Euripides provides crucial additions with disturbing differences in motivation; so much of their conflict is steeped in sexual rivalry and jealousy and psychological perversity. Clytemnestra is even very much aware of the nature of Electra's complex when she observes that it is ingrained in her daughter's nature to love her father more than her mother.

Here is a much weaker Orestes than we have ever seen, who must be goaded and driven by his sister to murder their mother, and Electra herself, obsessed with a passionate hatred, actually participates in the killing.

ORESTES: Hold on now, another decision is thrust upon us.

ELECTRA: What is it? Do I see an armed force coming from Mycenae?

ORESTES: No, but the mother who gave birth to me.

ELECTRA: Good! She is stepping right into the trap. How splendid she looks in her fine chariot and robes.

ORESTES: What are we to do now? Will we murder our mother?

ELECTRA: Are you overcome with pity at the sight of your mother in person?

ORESTES: Ah, how am I to kill her, the one who bore me and nourished me?
ELECTRA: In the same way as she butchered your father and mine.
ORESTES: Oh Phoebus, you prophesied sheer folly. . . .
ELECTRA: Where Apollo is a fool, who are wise?
ORESTES: . . . you, Phoebus, who told me to kill my mother, a crime which I should not commit.
ELECTRA: What possible harm is there since you are avenging your own father?
ORESTES: I am guiltless now, but if I do the deed I will be condemned as the killer of my mother.
ELECTRA: But if you do not avenge your father, you will be impious against god.
ORESTES: The murder of my mother—to whom will I pay the penalty?
ELECTRA: To whom will you pay, if you fail to accomplish vengeance for your father?
ORESTES: Did some demon, disguised as god, order me to do this?
ELECTRA: A demon sitting on the sacred tripod? I really don't think so.
ORESTES: I cannot be convinced that this divine oracle was right.
ELECTRA: Don't become a coward and a weakling.
ORESTES: Am I to devise the same treachery against her?
ELECTRA: Yes, the same that you used when you killed her husband Aegisthus.
ORESTES: I will go in and undertake a terrible task. I will do a terrible thing—if the gods think it is right, so be it. This ordeal is both bitter and sweet for me.
CHORUS: Lady and queen of the land of Argos, daughter of Tyndareus and sister of the noble twins, the sons of Zeus, who live amid the stars in the fiery firmament and are honored by mortals as their saviors in storms at sea. Greetings, I give you honor equal to the gods because of your great wealth and blessed happiness. Now is the right time for your fortunes to be provided for. Hail, O queen!
CLYTEMNESTRA: Out of the chariot, Trojan women, take my hand and help me to get down. The temples of the gods are adorned with Trojan spoils, and for my palace I have taken these chosen women from Troy, a small yet lovely gift, in exchange for the daughter whom I lost.
ELECTRA: Shouldn't I, mother, take hold of your royal and blessed hand, for I also am a slave, cast out of my ancestral home and living in a miserable one?
CLYTEMNESTRA: I have these slaves here; don't trouble yourself on my account.
ELECTRA: Well, am I not just like these women, taken prisoner when my palace was captured, driven out of the house, left bereft of my father?
CLYTEMNESTRA: Such are the results of actions your father devised against those whom he should have loved. I will explain. I know that when a reputation for evil clings to a woman, a bitter sharpness inevitably invests the tone of her argument. So it is with us, and that is not good. But if, upon learning the truth, you have a worthy reason to hate, it is right to hate but if not, why should there be hatred?

Tyndareus gave me to your father and the marriage was not intended to bring death to him or me or the children whom I bore. Yet that man, Agamemnon, through the pretext of marriage with Achilles, took my daughter from home

and brought her to Aulis, where the fleet was kept from sailing. There he placed Iphigenia high upon the sacrificial altar and slit her white throat. If to avert the capture of his city or to benefit his house or to his other children he killed this one girl on behalf of many, it would be forgivable. No, it was for the sake of Helen, a voracious whore, and because Menelaüs, who married her, did not know how to control his adulterous wife. This was the reason why Agamemnon murdered my daughter. And yet for all that, having been wronged, I would not have become a savage and killed my husband. But he came back to me bringing with him the maiden Cassandra, mad, possessed by god, and he brought her to our marriage bed; now there were two wives in the same household! Women really are foolish prey, I do not deny it. This is taken for granted, every time a husband wrongfully rejects his marriage bed for someone else. When his wife at home in her desire to follow his example takes on a lover, then all the blame is blazoned forth upon us women, but the men who are responsible hear not a word of criticism. What if Menelaüs had been secretly abducted from his home? Would it then have been necessary for me to kill Orestes so that I might rescue Menelaüs, the husband of my sister, Helen? How would your father have tolerated that crime? I would have had to suffer death at his hands for killing his son. Should he not have died for killing my daughter? Yes, and so I killed him, turning to his enemies—the only way possible. For any friend of your father would never have conspired with me in his slaughter. Speak your refutation freely, if you like, and explain how your father died unjustly.

CHORUS: You have made a just argument but your justice is tainted with shame. A woman who is right-minded should concede to her husband in everything. Any woman who does not think so is not included in my reckoning.

ELECTRA: Remember, mother, your last words which gave me liberty to speak.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes I do and I stand by them now, my child.

ELECTRA: After you have heard what I have to say, mother, will you treat me badly?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Not at all. I will be sweetly disposed towards you.

ELECTRA: I will speak then and this is how I will begin. I only wish you, O you who gave me birth, were of a better mind and character. You and Helen are sisters, through and through. The physical beauty of you both is worthy of my praise, but the two of you morally are whores, and I do not consider you worthy of your noble brother Castor. Helen was willing in her rape and brought about her own ruin, and you destroyed the best man of Hellas, making up the pretext that you killed your husband because of your daughter. Those who believe you do not know you as well as I do.

Even before the sacrifice of your daughter and when your husband had scarcely left home, you were primping before a mirror as you adorned your blonde tresses. A wife who decks herself out in beauty while her husband is away, I label a wicked woman. For she should not vaunt her fair features out of doors, unless she is looking for evil. I know for a fact that you alone of all the women of Hellas rejoiced when you heard that the Trojans were doing well, but if they were losing, your eyes would look troubled because you did not want Agamemnon to return from Troy. Yet there was every reason for you to behave

properly. You had a husband in no way inferior to Aegisthus, whom Hellas chose as its commander-in-chief. Furthermore, in contrast to Helen, your sister, who did such terrible things, you could have won for yourself great renown for virtue since evil actions present a foil to enhance the good for all to see. If, as you say, my father killed your daughter, in what way have I or my brother done you wrong? After you killed our father why didn't you include us in the ancestral estate? Instead, you gave what was not really yours as a dowry for your lover and bought your marriage with him. Your husband Aegisthus is not banished because of your son Orestes nor has he died on my account, even though he has inflicted a living death upon me, twice as painful as the death of Iphigenia. If slaughter demands slaughter as a just penalty, then I and your son Orestes will kill you to avenge our father. If your actions are just, ours would be too.

CLYTEMNESTRA: My child, it is ingrained in your nature to love your father always. This is the way things are. Some are attached to the fathers, others love their mothers more than their fathers. I will forgive you, for in truth I am not that exultant at all about the things that I have done, my daughter. But you so unwashed and so unkempt in your dress, have you just recently given birth and become a mother? Alas, poor me and my plots! I drove myself into a fury against my husband, more than I should have.

ELECTRA: Too late for bewailing when you have no remedy for your plight. My father is dead, so why don't you recall your son who wanders far from home?

CLYTEMNESTRA: I am afraid to. I must look to my own safety, not his, since they say that he is enraged at the murder of his father.

ELECTRA: Why do you allow your husband Aegisthus to treat me so cruelly?

CLYTEMNESTRA: That's the way he is; and you are inherently stubborn.

ELECTRA: I am suffering, yet I will put an end to my fury.

CLYTEMNESTRA: If so he will persecute you no longer.

ELECTRA: He is arrogant because he lives in my house.

CLYEMNESTRA: You see, you are at it again, kindling a fresh inflammatory quarrel.

ELECTRA: I'll be quiet, for I fear him, how I fear him!

CLYTEMNESTRA: Stop such talk. Why did you summon me here, my child?

ELECTRA: You have heard, I know, about the birth of my child. Make the proper sacrifice for me—I don't know how—as it is ordained for a son after he is born. I have no experience in this because until now I have been childless.

CLYTEMNESTRA: This is not my duty but that of the woman who delivered the child.

ELECTRA: I gave birth alone and delivered the child myself.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Is your home so bereft of friendly neighbors?

ELECTRA: No one wants to have friends who are poor.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I will go and sacrifice to the gods as is appropriate after the child's birth, and when I have done this favor for you, I will go out to the countryside, where my husband is offering sacrifice to the Nymphs. Servants, take the horses out to pasture and when you think that I have finished this sacrifice to the gods, be back here, for I must also oblige my husband.

ELECTRA: Enter my humble house but be careful that the soot inside does not defile your robes, for you will make to the gods the sacrifice that you should. All is made ready, the knife that was sharpened has already slaughtered the bull, next to which you will fall after you have been struck down. Even in the house of Hades you will be joined in matrimony with the one whom you slept with in life. I will grant this favor to you and you will grant to me justice for my father.

CHORUS: Retribution for evils. Changed gales of vengeance blow through the house. Once my king, mine, fell stricken in his bath. The stones and the rooftop shrieked with the cry that he uttered: "O wretched woman, my wife, why will you kill me who have returned to my dear fatherland after ten years?" In retribution this unhappy woman of an adulterous marriage is brought to justice, she who took up an axe with sharpened blade and by her own hand killed her husband who had returned after many years to his home and its Cyclopean walls that reach to the sky. A poor, suffering husband, whatever evil wrong took hold of his unhappy wife. Like a lioness roaming the woods, who pastures in the mountains, she accomplished her deeds.

CLYTEMNESTRA (from inside the house): O my children, by the gods, do not kill your mother.

CHORUS: Do you hear her cry from within?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah, woe is me!

CHORUS: I pity her, overpowered and undone by her children. God metes out justice, sooner or later. You have suffered a terrible fate but you, poor wretch, committed an unholy crime against your husband. But here they come out of the house, defiled with freshly shed blood of their mother, triumphal testimony of how they silenced her cries of anguish. No house is more lamentable than that of the family of Tantalus.

Orestes and Electra appear, the bodies of both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra at their feet. After the horror of murdering their mother, all bravado is gone, and upon full realization of what they have done, they become craven with a remorse that is both sad and repellent. Electra must bear full responsibility for committing the crime along with Orestes; brother and sister have learned to their dismay and regret that the desire for retribution, even when ordained by the command of god, is far different emotionally and psychologically from the real trauma of actually killing their mother.

ORESTES: O Earth and Zeus, you who witness all that mortals do, behold these bloody, abominable murders, two corpses lying on the ground, struck down by my hand in recompense for my sufferings.

ELECTRA: Our tears overflow, my brother, and I am the cause. In fiery rage I, poor wretch, came against this mother of mine, who bore me, her daughter.

CHORUS: Alas for misfortune, your misfortune. You, the mother who bore them, have suffered unforgettable misery and more at the hands of your children and you have paid justly for the murder of their father.

ORESTES: O Phoebus, you prophesied a justice I could not foresee, but all too clear now is the misery that you have wrought. You have bestowed on me the

fate of a murderer driven from this land of Hellas. To what other city will I go? What friend, what god-fearing human being will look upon the face of a man who has killed his mother?

ELECTRA: Alas, woe is me! Where will I go? At what dance will I be accepted? What marriage will be in store for me? What husband will take me to his marriage bed?

CHORUS: Your thoughts have been changed back once again to considerations that are good. Now your thinking is holy, then it was not and you made your brother do a terrible thing, when he did not want to.

ORESTES: Did you see how the poor woman opened her robe to show me her breast as I slaughtered her, alas for me, and I grabbed at her hair as her body that gave me birth sank to the floor?

CHORUS: I know full well the pain that you went through when you heard the piercing cry of your mother who bore you.

ORESTES: This was the cry that she uttered as she touched my cheek with her hand: "My child, I beg you," and then she clung to me so closely that my sword fell from my hand.

CHORUS: Poor woman! How did you dare to see with your own eyes your mother breathing out her life?

ORESTES: I covered my eyes with my cloak as we began the sacrifice, plunging the sword into my mother's flesh.

ELECTRA: I ordered you to do it as we took hold of the sword together.

CHORUS: You have done a most terrible deed.

ORESTES: Come, help me cover the limbs of our mother with her garments and close up her wounds. You gave birth to your own murderers.

ELECTRA: See how we cover you, whom we loved and we hated.

The play ends with the appearance of the Dioscuri, and it is Castor who acts as the deus ex machina. He reaffirms religious and philosophical issues raised by Orestes himself as he hesitates in horror, while his sister is prodding him to join her in murdering their mother. To kill a mother is a terrible crime, with devastating ramifications, whether or not it is decreed by god.

CHORUS: Thus ends great evils for this house. But look! Who are these two who arrive high above the house? Are they divine spirits or gods from the heavens? Mortals do not appear in this way. Why in the world do they come into the clear sight of humans?

DIOSCURI (Castor speaks for the two of them): Listen, son of Agamemnon. We, Castor and Polydeuces, address you, we the twin sons of Zeus, brothers of your mother. We just now calmed a terrible storm at sea and come to Argos in time to witness here the slaughter of our sister and your mother. She received justice, but you did not act justly. And Phoebus, O Phoebus—but since he is my lord, I keep silent. Being wise, he did not prophesy to wise things. Yet all this must be commended and now you have to do what Fate and Zeus have ordained for you.

Castor goes on at some length to predict the future course of events, including the pursuit of Orestes by the Furies and his acquittal by the court of the Areopagus in Athens. Pylades is to marry Electra.

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NOTES

1. These tales are brilliantly discussed by Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 83–109, part of his chapter entitled "Werewolves around the Tripod Kettle."
2. The Greek phrase is obscure. Cassandra refers to the instrument of the murder, either a sword or an axe, one or the other of which appears in different poetic accounts and vase paintings of the murder.
3. The Areopagus was the court at Athens that heard homicide cases; its members were former archons, that is, state officials. The court had been a center of political controversy shortly before Aeschylus produced his play.
4. Apollo's argument that the child's begetter is the father not the mother because the mother is only the nurse of the newly sown seed need not be interpreted as a manifestation of Greek misogyny, as Mary R. Lefkowitz so clearly perceives in *Women in Greek Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 122–123: "[Apollo] is acting as an advocate for a person accused of matricide; had Orestes been accused of killing his father to avenge his mother, Apollo might well have said what Aeschylus has the Erinyes say about the primacy of maternal blood ties. The role of the female in conception, of course, was not clearly understood; opinions varied about whether the female seed present in the menstrual fluid contributed to the appearance and character of the child. . . . But no Athenian audience would have believed that Apollo's argument was conclusive. . . . In fact, the jury in Aeschylus' drama gives Apollo and the Erinyes equal votes, and it is only because Athena, who was born from her father Zeus without a mother, casts her vote for Apollo that Orestes is acquitted."
5. In Euripides' drama *Orestes* (408), Orestes is condemned at Argos for the murder of his mother but saves himself by taking Hermione hostage. Apollo orders Orestes to marry Hermione and foretells his acquittal at Athens. Versions of Orestes' marriage to Hermione, including Euripides' *Andromache* (ca. 430), are discussed earlier in this chapter.
6. For comparative examples, see George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens.* 3d ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), p. 449.
7. The child of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus was Erigone, the theme of a lost play by Sophocles and mentioned by the early cyclic poet Cinaethon.

CHAPTER

19

THE TROJAN SAGA AND THE *ILIAD*

THE CHILDREN OF LEDA

Leda, wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, bore four children to Zeus, who visited her in the shape of a swan; the four were born from two eggs—from the one sprang Polydeuces and Helen, from the other Castor and Clytemnestra.

THE DIOSCURI

The legends of the Dioscuri (Sons of Zeus), Castor and Polydeuces (his Roman name is Pollux), are not part of the saga of the Trojan War. Castor was renowned as a tamer of horses and Polydeuces for his skill in boxing. Polydeuces was the immortal son of Zeus, whereas Castor was the mortal son of Tyndareus, who eventually shared in the immortality of his brother. They were perhaps originally mortal heroes, later worshiped as gods. According to Pindar the Dioscuri quarreled with the two sons of Aphareus, Idas and Lynceus, over the division of some cattle that the four of them had taken in a raid. In the quarrel Lynceus and Castor were killed, and Idas was destroyed by Zeus' thunderbolt. As Castor lay dying, Polydeuces prayed to Zeus that he might die with him. Zeus gave him the choice either of immortality for himself and death for Castor or of living with Castor but spending alternate days on Olympus and in Hades. Polydeuces chose the latter, and so the Dioscuri shared both immortality and death.[1]

As gods Castor and Polydeuces were especially connected with seafarers, to whom they appear as St. Elmo's fire.[2] They were particularly honored at Sparta, and in the early fifth century B.C. their cult spread to Rome.[3] One of the most prominent buildings in the Forum at Rome was the temple of Castor.

In the two *Homeric Hymns to the Dioscuri* they are addressed as the Tyndaridae because their mother, Leda, was the wife of Tyndareus. Hymn 17 is short and focuses on their conception and birth:

> About Castor and Polydeuces sing, clear-voiced Muse, the Tyndaridae, who are sprung from Olympian Zeus. Beneath the peaks of Mt. Taÿgetus lady Leda bore them, after she had been stealthily seduced by the dark-clouded son of Cronus.

Hymn 33 depicts the Dioscuri in their important role as patron deities of sailors and seafarers:

> O bright-eyed Muses, tell about the sons of Zeus, the Tyndaridae, splendid children of lovely-ankled Leda—Castor, the horse-tamer, and faultless Polydeuces. Leda joined in love with Zeus, the dark-clouded son of Cronus, and she gave birth beneath the summit of the great mountain, Taÿgetus, to these children, saviors of people on earth and of swift-moving ships, when wintry winds rage over a savage sea. Those on the ship go to the highest part of the stern and call on great Zeus with promises of white lambs. The strong wind and swell of the sea put the ship under water, but suddenly the two brothers appear, darting on tawny wings through the air. At once they calm the blasts of the harsh winds and quell the waves on the expanse of the white-capped sea. Those who have been freed from pain and toil rejoice, since they have seen these two fair signs of deliverance from distress.
>
> Hail, Tyndaridae, riders of swift horses! Yet I shall remember you and another song too.

HELEN

The daughters of Zeus and Leda were Clytemnestra and Helen. Clytemnestra became the wife of Agamemnon, and we have discussed her part in the Mycenaean saga (Chapter 18). Helen grew up to be the most beautiful of women, and from the many Greek princes (including Theseus and Odysseus) who were her suitors she chose Menelaüs, who became king of Sparta. The rejected suitors swore to respect her choice and help Menelaüs in time of need.

Helen lived for some years at Sparta and bore a daughter, Hermione, to Menelaüs. In time, however, the Trojan prince Paris (also called Alexander), the son of Priam and Hecuba, visited Sparta while Menelaüs was away in Crete. There he seduced Helen and took her back to Troy with him. (See Color Plate 5.) To recover her and vindicate the rights of Menelaüs, the Achaean (Mycenaean Greek) expedition, led by Agamemnon, brother of Menelaüs, was raised against Troy.

Another version of Helen's story was invented by the seventh-century poet Stesichorus, who says in his *Palinode:*

> That story is not true; you did not go in the well-benched ships, nor did you go to the towers of Troy.

In Stesichorus' version Helen got only as far as Egypt, where King Proteus detained her until Menelaüs took her back to Sparta after the Trojan War. It was merely a phantom of Helen that accompanied Paris to Troy, and this was sufficient pretext for the war, which Zeus had determined should occur to reduce the population of the earth.[4]

The Judgment of Paris

The Olympian gods were guests at the wedding feast of Peleus and Thetis. During the feast, Eris, goddess of Discord (who was not a guest), threw onto the table an apple inscribed with the words "For the most beautiful." Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite each claimed it, and Zeus decided that the argument should be settled by Paris.

Now Paris had been exposed as an infant because of a dream that came to his mother Hecuba (the Greek form of her name is Hekabe) before his birth. She dreamed that she had given birth to a firebrand that consumed the whole of Troy, and a soothsayer[5] foretold that her baby would be the destruction of the city. The infant was exposed on Mt. Ida, and suckled by a bear. He was found and brought up by a shepherd. Hermes led the three goddesses to him, and each offered the best gift she could provide in return for his favorable decision. Hera promised him royal power and Athena, victory in war, while Aphrodite promised Helen as his wife. He chose Aphrodite, and so the train of events that led to the Trojan War was set in motion, in which Hera and Athena were hostile to the Trojans.

Lucian (*Dialogues of the Gods* 20) offers a satiric version of the judgment of Paris, in tone not unlike Cranach's painting. The sardonic wit of his portrayal illuminates the bitter rivalry, ruthless ambition, and irresponsible passion of the characters, and in so doing they intensify the horror of the tragic events to follow. How bitterly ironic is Paris' response to Athena: "War and battles serve absolutely no purpose to me. As you see, there is peace throughout Phrygia and Lydia and the entire kingdom of my father." The satire begins as Zeus gives the golden apple to Hermes with directions to take it and the three goddesses to Paris, who is tending his flocks on Mt. Ida. Hermes is to tell Paris that he has been chosen to make the decision because he is so handsome and knowledgeable in matters of love. Zeus disqualifies himself as judge by saying that he loves all three equally and that if he gives the apple to one he will incur the anger of the others. The goddesses agree to Zeus' scheme and fly away to Ida with Hermes as their guide. In the course of the journey, each goddess asks for pertinent information about their judge, Paris. As they approach Mt. Ida, Hermes decides that they had better make a landing and walk up to Paris amiably, rather than frighten him by swooping down from the sky. Hermes explains everything to the bewildered Paris and hands him the golden apple with its inscription:

PARIS: Well then, look at what it says: "Let the beautiful one take me." Now, lord Hermes, I am a mere mortal and from the country; how am I to become the judge of this marvelous spectacle, too great for a herdsman to handle? To make a decision such as this is a job for a city sophisticate. I could probably judge which is the more beautiful in a contest between two she-goats or two cows, but all these goddesses are equally beautiful. Their beauty surrounds and engulfs me completely. My only regret is that I am not Argus, and so I cannot look at them with eyes all over my body. It seems to me that my best judgment would be to give the apple to all three. For, besides everything else, this one happens

The Judgment of Paris, by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553); oil on panel, 1530, $13\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ in. This tiny painting wittily exploits the incongruities of a tale where great goddesses appear naked before a shepherd. Paris is a corpulent Renaissance knight in armor and foppish hat, while Hermes is an aged warrior (barefoot, as befits a god) whose decrepit appearance sets off the sensuality of the goddesses. Aphrodite looks fully at the viewer, while Athena rests her arm on Hermes. In the background the towers and spires of Troy can be seen. Cupid draws his bow above, and to the left the horse seems to add his own view of the contest. *(Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, Germany. Reproduced by permission of Staatliche Kunsthalle.)*

to be the sister and wife of Zeus, and these two are his daughters. Doesn't all this make the decision extremely difficult?

HERMES: I don't know. Yet it is impossible to avoid an order given by Zeus.

PARIS: Just this one request, Hermes. Convince them—I mean the two who

lose—not to hold their defeat against me and to realize that the fault was in my eyes.
HERMES: They agree that they will not blame you; but now the time has come to go through with the contest.
PARIS: I'll try. What else can a man do? Still, first I want to know if it will be enough to look at them as they are, or will it be necessary for them to undress for a proper examination?
HERMES: This would be up to you as the judge. Conduct the proceedings as you desire.
PARIS: As I desire; I'd like to see them naked.
HERMES: You goddesses there, undress! And you, Paris, look them over. I have already turned my back.

The goddesses proceed to undress, and Paris is overwhelmed.

PARIS: O Zeus, god of marvels! What a sight, what beauty, what ecstasy! The virgin Athena is such a vision! How regal and august is the radiance of Hera, truly a wife worthy of Zeus! The gaze of Aphrodite is so sweet and lovely, and she gave me such a seductive smile. Already this rapture is too much, but if it is all right with you, I'd like to see each one separately, since at this moment I am overwhelmed.
APHRODITE: Let's do what he wants.
PARIS: Then the two of you go away, but, Hera, you stay here.
HERA: Here I stay, and after you have looked me over carefully, the time will be right for you to think about whether other considerations are beautiful too—I mean, the gifts that you will get in return for your vote for me. Paris, if you judge me to be the beautiful one, you will be master of all Asia.
PARIS: My vote is not determined by gifts: go on now. Athena, you step forward.
ATHENA: I am right beside you, and if you judge me the beautiful one, Paris, you will never leave a battle in defeat but always victorious. I shall turn you into a warrior and a conquering hero.
PARIS: War and battles serve absolutely no purpose for me. As you see, there is peace throughout Phrygia and Lydia and the entire kingdom of my father. But cheer up! You will not be at a disadvantage, even if my judgment is not to be made on the basis of gifts. Get dressed now and put on your helmet, for I have seen enough. It's time for Aphrodite to step forward.
APHRODITE: No rush! Here I am, right beside you. Look at every detail scrupulously. Take your time over every inch of my body, and as you examine me, my beautiful lad, listen to what I have to say. I noticed the moment I saw you how young and handsome you are—I doubt if there is any other fellow in the whole of Troy who is better looking. I congratulate you on your beauty, but it pains me that you do not leave these stony crags for a life in the city. Instead, you are letting your beauty go to waste amidst this isolation. What fun do you get out of these mountains? What good is your beauty to the cows? By now you should be married, not to some country bumpkin like the women from Mt. Ida but to someone from Greece—from Argos or Corinth—or to a Spartan like Helen, young and beautiful as I am and, above all, amorous. If she only got a look

at you, I know very well that she would leave everything behind, succumb to you completely, follow you home in surrender to live with you as your wife. Of course, you have heard at least something about her?
PARIS: Not a thing, Aphrodite, but it would be my pleasure to hear you tell me everything about her.
APHRODITE: She is actually the daughter of beautiful Leda, whom Zeus seduced after flying down to her in the form of a swan.
PARIS: What does she look like?
APHRODITE: As fair as you would expect the daughter of a swan to be, and soft and delicate, since she was hatched from an eggshell, but yet very athletic too—so sought-after, in fact, that even a war has already been waged over her, because Theseus carried her off when she was still quite young. Furthermore, when she reached the peak of her present perfection, all the best of the Achaeans gathered to seek her hand in marriage. Menelaüs, of the family of Pelops, was the one chosen. If you'd like, I'll arrange her marriage to you.
PARIS: What are you saying? Me with a married woman?
APHRODITE: You are young and naïve, but I know how this kind of thing must be managed.
PARIS: How? I want to know too.
APHRODITE: You will take a trip, ostensibly a tour of Greece, and when you come to Sparta, Helen will see you. From then on, it will be up to me to manage how she will fall in love and follow you home.
PARIS: This is the very thing that seems so incredible to me, that she would want to leave her husband and sail away with a foreigner she doesn't know.
APHRODITE: Don't fret about it, for I have two beautiful children, Desire (*Himeros*) and Love (*Eros*). I shall give them to you as guides for your journey. Love will insinuate himself completely into her very being and compel the woman to love you. Desire will make you desirable and irresistible by suffusing you with the very essence of his being. I'll be there myself, too, and I'll ask the Graces to accompany me. In this way, all of us together will persuade her to submit.
PARIS: It is not in the least clear to me how this will all turn out, Aphrodite. But I am already in love with Helen. I seem to see her now—I'm sailing straight for Greece—I'm visiting Sparta—I'm returning home holding the woman in my arms! I am very upset that I am not doing all this right now.
APHRODITE: Hold on, Paris! Don't fall in love until you have rewarded me with your decision—me, the one who is fixing the marriage and giving away the bride. It would be only fitting that I, your helper, be the winner of the prize, and that we celebrate at the same time both your marriage and my victory. For it is up to you. You can buy everything—love, beauty, marriage—the cost is this apple.
PARIS: I am afraid that you will forget about me after my decision.
APHRODITE: And so you want me to swear an oath?
PARIS: Not at all, only promise me again.
APHRODITE: I promise to give you Helen as your wife and that she herself will follow and come with you to your family in Troy. I shall be at your side myself, and I shall help accomplish everything.
PARIS: And you will bring Love, Desire, and the Graces?

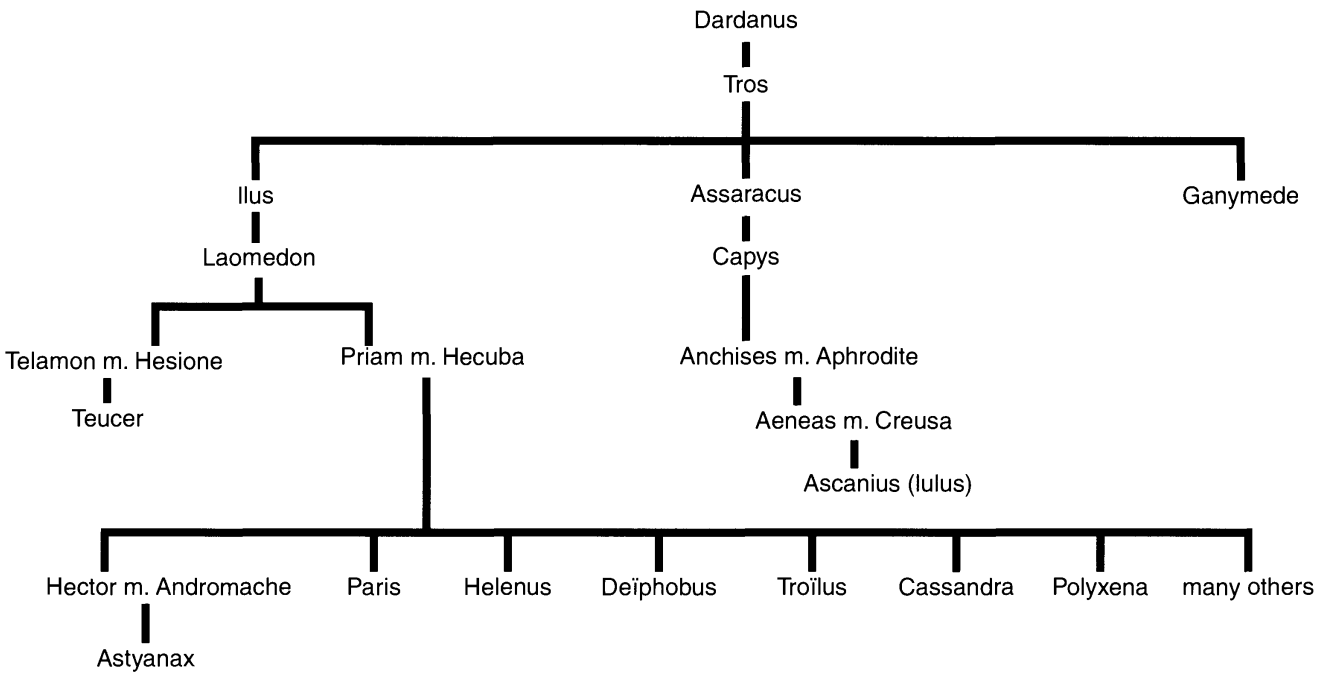


Figure 19.1. The Royal House of Troy

APHRODITE: Never fear, I shall even bring along Passionate Longing and Hymen, the god of Marriage.

Homer never mentions this story; according to him Paris once insulted Hera and Athena when they visited him but praised Aphrodite, who gave him the power to attract women irresistibly. This simpler version is certainly older than the more famous literary account of the judgment, but it is the latter that has dominated the tradition and fascinated an endless line of poets and artists.

Troy and Its Leaders

Laomedon

Apollo and Poseidon (disguised as mortals) built the walls of Troy for its king Laomedon, who then cheated them of their pay.[6] In punishment, Apollo sent a plague and Poseidon a sea monster to harass the Trojans. The oracles advised that the only way to get rid of the monster was to expose Laomedon's daughter Hesione and let it devour her. When Heracles came to Troy (see p. 527) he agreed to kill the monster and save Hesione in return for Laomedon's immortal horses, which were the gift of Zeus.[7] Once again Laomedon cheated his benefactor; Heracles therefore returned with an army, captured Troy, and gave Hesione as wife to his companion, Telamon, by whom she became the mother of Teucer. Heracles killed Laomedon but spared his young son Podarces, who became king of the ruined city, changing his name to Priam.

Priam and Hecuba

King Priam was father of fifty sons and twelve (or fifty) daughters, of whom nineteen were children of his second wife, Hecuba (Arisba, his first wife, is not significant in the legend). In the *Iliad* Hecuba appears as a tragic figure whose sons and husband are doomed; her most famous legend takes place after the fall of Troy (p. 477).

Paris (Alexander)

The most important sons of Priam and Hecuba were Paris and Hector. While Paris was a shepherd on Mt. Ida he fell in love with a nymph, Oenone, who had the gift of healing. He left her for Helen. Years later, when he was wounded by Philoctetes, she refused to heal him, but when he died she killed herself in remorse. As a young man, Paris had returned to the royal palace and had been recognized by Priam as his son. As we have seen, his actions led to the Trojan War, in which he appears as a brave warrior if uxorious. He was the favorite of Aphrodite, who saved him from being killed in combat by Menelaüs. His vanity and sensuality contrasted with the dignity and courage of Hector. Paris shot the arrow that fatally wounded Achilles.

Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax

Hector, brother of Paris, was the champion of the Trojans, brave and honorable, and as a warrior excelled only by Achilles, by whom he was killed in single combat. As long as Achilles took no part in the fighting, Hector carried all before him. When he was killed, the Trojans knew they were doomed. His wife was Andromache, daughter of Eëtion (an ally of the Trojans killed by Achilles), and their child was Astyanax. In the *Iliad* Homer draws unforgettable portraits of Paris and Helen and of Hector and Andromache, as he juxtaposes their characters and their relationships in moving scenes of universal power (pp. 457–459).

Helenus, Deïphobus, and Troïlus

Priam's son Helenus had the gift of prophecy, for when he was a child serpents had licked his ears. In the last year of the war the prophet Calchas (pp. 453 and 473) advised the Greeks to capture him, since he alone could tell what must be done to end the war. He was caught by Odysseus and honorably treated, so that he alone of Priam's sons survived the war. He eventually married Andromache and became a ruler in Epirus. As a prophet he appears for the last time in the *Aeneid*, where he foretells the course of Aeneas' future wanderings (pp. 646–647).

Of Priam's many other sons, Deïphobus married Helen after the death of Paris; his ghost spoke with Aeneas in the Underworld; and Troïlus, who was killed by Achilles, became more significant in later times.[8]

Cassandra and Polyxena

Cassandra and Polyxena are the most important of the daughters of Priam. Cassandra had been loved by Apollo, who gave her the gift of prophecy. When she rejected him, he added to the gift the fate that she should never be believed (p. 235). Thus she foretold the fall of Troy and warned the Trojans against the Trojan horse all in vain. Her fate in the sack of Troy is described later in this chapter (pp. 475–477); as we have seen, she died in Mycenae, murdered by Clytemnestra.

Polyxena was sacrificed on the tomb of Achilles as his share of the spoils after the sack of Troy, as we describe later in this chapter (pp. 471–472).

Aeneas

Of the Trojan leaders outside Priam's immediate family, the most prominent is Aeneas, who belonged to another branch of the royal family. Although he was the son of Anchises and Aphrodite, he was not the equal of Priam in prestige or of Hector as a warrior. In the *Iliad* he fights in single combat with Achilles and is saved from death by Poseidon, who transports him miraculously from the fight. Poseidon prophesies that Aeneas and his descendants, now that Zeus has withdrawn his favor from Priam's family, will be the future rulers of Troy. We consider his later prominence, as depicted by Vergil, in Chapter 26.

ANTENOR

Antenor, brother of Hecuba, was conspicuous among those who did not want the war, and he advised returning Helen to the Greeks. When the Greeks first landed, he saved their ambassadors from being treacherously killed by the Trojans. In the last year of the war, he protested the breaking of a truce by the Trojans and still proposed the voluntary return of Helen. The Greeks spared him at the sack, and he and his wife, Theano, the priestess of Athena, were allowed to sail away. They reached Italy, where they founded the city of Patavium (Padua).

GLAUCUS AND SARPEDON

Of the allies of Troy, the most prominent in the *Iliad* were the Lycians, led by Glaucus and Sarpedon. When Glaucus and Diomedes were about to fight, they discovered that they were hereditary guest-friends (i.e., their ancestors had entertained one another and exchanged gifts). They exchanged armor instead of fighting and parted amicably. Since Glaucus' armor was made of gold and that

The Death of Sarpedon. Athenian red-figure krater by Euphronios, ca. 510 B.C.; height 18 in. The winged gods, Sleep (Hypnos, *left*) and Death (Thanatos, *right*), carry the body from the battlefield under the guidance of Hermes as two Greek warriors look on. The gods wear armor (note the chain mail of Thanatos), but the corpse of Sarpedon has been stripped. The vase is one of the masterpieces of Athenian vase-painting. *(New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Gift of Darins Ogden Mills, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, and Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, by exchange, 1972.)*

of Diomedes of bronze, Diomedes had the better of the exchange, as Homer says (*Iliad* 6. 234–236):

> Zeus took away Glaucus' wits, for he exchanged golden armor with Diomedes for bronze, armor worth a hundred oxen for that worth nine.

Glaucus eventually was killed by Ajax (son of Telamon) in the fight over the corpse of Achilles.

Sarpedon was the son of Zeus and the Lycian princess Laodamia, daughter of Bellerophon. Zeus foresaw Sarpedon's death but could not change his destiny (*moira*) without upsetting the established order. He therefore had to be content with raining drops of blood on the earth to honor his son before the catastrophe and saving his body after it. Here is Homer's description of the scene (*Iliad* 16. 676–683) after Sarpedon has been killed by Patroclus and Zeus has instructed Apollo to save his body:

> Thus [Zeus] spoke, and Apollo did not disobey his father. He went down from the peaks of Ida into the terrible din of battle and straightway lifted godlike Sarpedon out of the way of the missiles and carried him far off. He washed him in the flowing waters of the river and anointed him with ambrosia and clothed him with immortal garments. And he sent him to be carried by two swift escorts, the twins Sleep and Death, who quickly set him down in the fertile land of broad Lycia.

After Hector, Sarpedon is the most noble of the heroes on the Trojan side. In Book 12 of the *Iliad*, when the Trojans are attacking the wall of the Greek camp, he addresses Glaucus in words expressing heroic *arete* ("excellence") and nobility as memorable as those of Achilles in Book 9 (translated on pp. 459–460). Unlike Achilles, he speaks as the leader of a community (*Iliad* 12. 310–328):

> Glaucus, why are we specially honored in Lycia with seats of honor, with meat and more cups of wine, and all people look upon us like gods, and we have been allotted a great domain beside the banks of the Xanthus, fine for the planting of vineyards and for grain-bearing tillage? Therefore now must we stand in the front rank of the Lycians and face the raging battle, so that one of the well-armored Lycians may say: "Indeed not without glory do our kings rule over Lycia and eat the fat lambs and drink choice honey-sweet wine. Noble also is their strength, since they fight among the leaders of the Lycians." My friend, if we were to avoid this war and were to live out our lives ever ageless and deathless, then neither would I myself fight among the leaders nor would I station you in the battle that destroys men. Now, as it is, let us go, for ten thousand death-bringing fates are close upon us.

Rhesus

Other allied contingents who appeared at Troy were those of the Amazons and the Ethiopians (p. 471), and the Thracians led by Rhesus. Their arrival coincided

with a night patrol by Diomedes and Odysseus, during which they caught and killed a Trojan spy, Dolon, who first told them of the Thracians. They went on to kill Rhesus and twelve of his men and to capture his white horses. Rhesus, who was a son of one of the Muses, was worshiped as a hero in Thrace.

The Achaean Leaders

The organization of the Greek army was different from that of the Trojans, for Troy was a great city led by a powerful king and helped in war by independent allies. We have seen that Helen's suitors had sworn to help Menelaüs if he called on them, and they assembled for war under the leadership of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae. While Agamemnon's position as leader was unquestioned, each of the Greek princes led his contingent independently and could at any time withdraw, as Achilles did.

Agamemnon

Agamemnon was the "lord of men," greatest in prestige among the Greeks, although neither the greatest warrior nor the wisest in council. His stature is shown in the scene in Book 3 of the *Iliad* when Helen names the Greek warrior whom Priam points out to her from their viewpoint on the wall (hence the scene is known as the "viewing from the wall," or *teichoskopia*). Priam begins (*Iliad* 3. 166–190):

> "Tell me the name of this mighty man, whoever he is of the Greeks, a man valiant and great." Then Helen answered in words, goddess-like among women: "This is the son of Atreus, Agamemnon, ruler of a broad kingdom, both a noble king and a strong warrior. He was my husband's brother." Thus she spoke, and the old man was filled with wonder and said: "O happy son of Atreus, favored by Destiny, blest by fortune, many sons of the Achaeans are your subjects. Long ago I went to Phrygia rich in vineyards, and there I saw great numbers of Phrygian warriors on their swift horses. But not even they were as great as are the quick-eyed Achaeans."

In Book 11 (36–40) the terror inspired by Agamemnon as a warrior is shown in the devices on his shield and shield-strap, "The grim-looking Gorgon with her terrifying gaze, and around the shield Terror and Fear. And on the strap coiled a dark serpent, and it had three heads turning all ways, growing from one neck." Yet great warrior as Agamemnon was, he was a lesser hero than Achilles.

Menelaüs

We have seen how Menelaüs, king of Sparta, and his wife Helen were involved in the origin of the war. In the war itself he fought Paris in single combat. Aphrodite saved Paris just as Menelaüs was on the point of killing him (p. 456).

Diomedes

Diomedes, king of Argos, was a much greater warrior than Menelaüs. He was the son of Tydeus, and second only to Agamemnon in power and prestige. He was also a wise counselor. He was a favorite of Athena and with her help could oppose even the gods in battle. He wounded both Ares and Aphrodite. He was especially associated with Odysseus, with whom he fetched Achilles from Scyros and later Philoctetes from Lemnos. Odysseus was also his companion in the night patrol where Dolon and Rhesus were killed and in the theft of the Palladium from Troy. This Palladium (the statue of Pallas, which Athena had made and Zeus cast down from heaven into Troy) was worshiped and looked upon as a talisman for the city's survival. When Odysseus and Diomedes stole it, Troy was doomed. Diomedes' meeting with Glaucus has already been described; his adventures after the war are discussed in Chapter 20 (pp. 482–483).

Nestor

Nestor, son of Neleus and king of Pylos, was the oldest and wisest of the Greek leaders. Like Priam, he had become king after Heracles sacked his city. In the sack Neleus and all his sons except Nestor were killed. At Troy, Nestor was a respected counselor, and his speeches, full of reminiscences, contrast with the impetuosity of the younger princes. He himself survived the war, although his son Antilochus was killed by Memnon. There is no tradition of his death.

Ajax the Greater of Salamis, the Son of Telamon

Ajax, son of Telamon, was second only to Achilles as a warrior.[9] He is called the Great (or Greater) to distinguish him from Ajax the Less (or Lesser), son of Oïleus. In the fighting before the Greek ships (Books 13–15) he was the most stalwart defender, always courageous and the last to give ground to the enemy. Again he was the Greek champion in the fight over the body of Patroclus in Book 17, providing cover while Menelaüs and Meriones retreated with the body. At the climax of that battle, he prayed to Zeus to dispel the mist of battle and let him die in the clear sunlight, a striking scene in which the sudden appearance of the sun and clear vision seems especially appropriate for this straightforward warrior. In the *teichoskopia* Priam asks Helen (*Iliad* 3. 226–229):

> "Who is this other Achaean warrior, valiant and great, who stands out from the Achaeans with his head and broad shoulders?" [Helen replies] "This is Ajax, of huge size, the bulwark of the Achaeans."

Ajax is both the foil to and the rival of Odysseus. His gruff and laconic speech in the embassy to Achilles (Book 9), which we discuss later, contrasts with the smooth words of the diplomatic Odysseus. In Book 23 they compete in the footrace in the funeral games, and Ajax's defeat there foreshadows his far more

tragic defeat in the contest with Odysseus for the armor of Achilles, discussed later in this chapter.

Ajax the Less (or Lesser)

Ajax the Less (as Homer calls him), prince of the Locrians and son of Oïleus, is a less attractive character than his namesake. Although he figured prominently in the fighting and was the leader of a large contingent, his sacrilegious violation of Cassandra during the sack of Troy diminished his stature and led to his death on the voyage back to Greece (p. 482).

Idomeneus

Another important fighter with a large contingent was Idomeneus, son of Deucalion and leader of the Cretans. He stood in a different relationship to Agamemnon from most of the other leaders in that he came as a voluntary ally. He had long been a friend of Menelaüs, and Agamemnon showed him great respect. In Book 13 of the *Iliad* he defends the Greek camp bravely and kills a number of leading Trojan warriors. Good as he was, however, as fighter and counselor at Troy, his most important legend is concerned with his return (p. 483).[10]

Odysseus

When Menelaüs and Agamemnon sent heralds throughout Greece and the islands to summon the Greek leaders and their contingents to the war, not all the Greek heroes came willingly; two of the most important, Odysseus and Achilles, attempted to avoid the war by subterfuge.

Odysseus, king of Ithaca, pretended to be mad. When Agamemnon's envoys came, he yoked an ox and an ass and plowed a field, sowing salt in the furrows. One of the envoys, Palamedes, took Odysseus' infant son Telemachus from his mother, Penelope, and put him in the path of the plow. Odysseus was sane enough to avoid him; his pretense was uncovered, and he joined the expedition.[11]

Odysseus was the craftiest and wisest of the Greeks, as well as a brave warrior. He was the best in council, and his powerful speech in Book 2 (284–332) decided the debate in favor of staying before Troy to finish the war. He attacked the unattractive and sardonic Thersites for intervening in the debate, when only princes should speak, and for this he was greatly honored by the Greeks. He was the principal speaker in the embassy to Achilles in Book 9, and he undertook the dangerous night mission with Diomedes as well as other missions mentioned earlier. Above all Odysseus was a skilled speaker, and this is brought out in the *teichoskopia* (*Iliad* 3. 191–224):

> Next the old man [Priam] asked about Odysseus. "Come, tell me also about this man, dear child, who he is. He is shorter by a head than Agamemnon, son of

Atreus, but I see that he is broader in the shoulders and chest. His arms lie on the fruitful earth, and he like a ram is going up and down the ranks of warriors. I liken him to a thick-fleeced ram which goes through the flocks of white-fleeced sheep." Then Helen, daughter of Zeus, answered: "This is crafty Odysseus, son of Laërtes, who was raised in the land of Ithaca, rocky though it is. He knows all kinds of deceit and clever plans."

Then wise Antenor spoke to her and said: "Lady, true indeed are your words. Godlike Odysseus came here once before with Menelaüs, dear to Ares, for news of you. I was their host and welcomed them in my home, and I knew their stature and their wise intelligence. But when they joined in the assembly of the Trojans, Menelaüs was taller when they stood by his [head and] broad shoulders; yet when they both were seated Odysseus was the more noble. But when they began to weave their speeches and proposals before all, then indeed Menelaüs spoke glibly, a few words in a clear voice, since he was not long-winded or irrelevant, and he was younger also. But whenever wise Odysseus rose to speak he would stand and look down and fix his eyes on the ground, and he would not gesture with the sceptre before or behind him, but held it stiffly, like some unskilled man. You would say that he was angry and unintelligent too. But when he sent forth the great voice from his chest and the words that were like falling winter snows, then no other mortal could compete with Odysseus. Indeed then we were not amazed as we looked at the appearance of Odysseus."

The double portrait of the wise orator and the glib young king vividly puts before us two sides of the heroic ethos, and it prepares us for the complexity of Odysseus' character in the saga of his return from Troy.

Achilles and His Son Neoptolemus (Pyrrhus)

The second chieftain who attempted to avoid the war was the mighty Achilles, prince of the Myrmidons (a tribe of Phthia, in central Greece) and the greatest of the Greek warriors, as well as the swiftest and most handsome. He was the son of Peleus and Thetis; Thetis was a sea-goddess, daughter of Nereus, who was avoided by Zeus when the secret was revealed hitherto known only to Prometheus and Themis—that Thetis' son would be greater than his father.[12]

Accordingly, Thetis was married to a mortal, Peleus, king of the Phthians. Peleus took part in the Argonauts' expedition and the Calydonian boar hunt (pp. 576 and 608–612), but as a mere mortal he was hardly a match for Thetis. It was with difficulty that he married her, for she was able to turn herself into various shapes in attempting to escape from him. Although the gods attended their wedding feast, Thetis left Peleus not long after the birth of Achilles. She tried to make Achilles immortal, either by roasting him in the fire by night and anointing him with ambrosia by day[13] or by dipping him in the waters of the Styx. In the latter story, all parts of Achilles' body that had been submerged were invulnerable. Only his heel, by which Thetis held him, remained vulnerable. It was here that he received the fatal arrow wound.

Once Thetis left Peleus, Achilles was sent to the centaur Chiron for his education. From him he learned the art of music and other skills. While Achilles was with Chiron, Thetis learned that Troy could not be taken without Achilles; she also knew that he could live long and die ingloriously or go to Troy and die young and glorious. To circumvent his early death, she tried to prevent his going by disguising him as a girl and taking him to the island of Scyros, where he was brought up with the daughters of Lycomedes, king of the island. One of them was Deïdamia, with whom Achilles fell in love; their child, born after Achilles left Scyros, was Neoptolemus (also called Pyrrhus, which means "redhead"), who took part in the capture of Troy after his father's death. Odysseus and Diomedes exposed Achilles' disguise at Scyros. They took gifts for the daughters of Lycomedes, among them weapons and armor, in which Achilles alone showed any interest. As the women were looking at the gifts, Odysseus arranged for a trumpet to sound; the women all ran away, thinking it was a battle signal, but Achilles took off his disguise and put on the armor. Here is the description of the scene by the Roman poet Statius (*Achilleid* 1. 852–884), after the gifts have been set out by Diomedes:

> The daughters of Lycomedes see the arms and assume that they are a present for their mighty father. But when fierce Achilles saw the shining shield close by, chased with scenes of war and lying next to the spear, he grew violent . . . and Troy filled his heart. . . . When he saw his reflection in the golden shield he shuddered and blushed. Then observant Odysseus stood close to him and whispered: "Why do you hesitate? We know. You are the pupil of the centaur, Chiron, you are the descendant of [the gods of] sky and sea. The Greek fleet is waiting for you, the Greek army is waiting for you before raising its standards, the walls of Troy itself are ready to fall before you. Hurry, no more delaying!" . . . Already Achilles was beginning to take off his woman's dress when Agyrtes sounded a loud blast on the trumpet, as he had been ordered to do [by Odysseus]. The girls began to run away, scattering the gifts. . . . Achilles' clothing of itself fell from his chest, and he quickly seized the shield and short spear and, miraculously, he seemed to be taller by head and shoulders than Odysseus and Diomedes. . . . Stepping like a hero he stood forth.

So Achilles was discovered and joined the expedition. At Troy, he proved to be the mightiest of the champions on either side and a hero of enormous passions.

Phoenix and Patroclus

Two of Achilles' associates, Phoenix and Patroclus, are important. Phoenix, at the instigation of his mother, lay with his father's mistress. His father cursed him with childlessness, and Phoenix sought refuge from his father's wrath with Peleus, who made him the tutor and companion of Achilles both in Phthia and at Troy.

Patroclus was a great warrior. When very young, he had killed a rival in anger over a dice game. Peleus took him in and brought him up to be the companion of Achilles. Achilles and Patroclus become devoted friends and perhaps lovers, and their relationship provides a major theme for the *Iliad*.[14]

The Gathering of the Expedition at Aulis

Menelaüs and Agamemnon sent heralds throughout Greece and the islands to summon the Greek leaders and contingents to the war; the expedition gathered at Aulis (on the coast of Boeotia, opposite Euboea) numbering nearly twelve hundred ships with their crews and fighting men.[15]

The Anger of Achilles, by J-L. David (1748–1825): oil on canvas, 1819, $41\frac{1}{2} \times 57\frac{1}{4}$ in. Iphigenia has been brought to Aulis on the pretext that she is to be the bride of Achilles. David shows the moment when Agamemnon has revealed his true intention to Achilles, who draws his sword in anger to strike Agamemnon. The anger of the men contrasts with the sadness of Iphigenia, who has learned that she will be sacrificed, and of Clytemnestra, who gazes at Achilles as she puts her hand on her daughter's shoulder. The subject is based on Euripides' tragedy, *Iphigenia at Aulis*. *(Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum.)*

The Sacrifice of Iphigenia

There were delays before the fleet could sail; for a long time contrary winds blew, and in despair Agamemnon consulted the prophet Calchas. He knew that Artemis had caused the unfavorable weather because Agamemnon had offended her,[16] and that she could only be appeased by the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia, who therefore was fetched from Mycenae (on the pretext that she was to be married to Achilles) and sacrificed. In another version, however, Artemis saved her at the last moment, substituted a stag as the victim, and took Iphigenia to the land of the Tauri (the modern Crimea) to be her priestess.[17]

Lucretius, the Roman poet (ca. 55 B.C.), tells the story of Iphigenia with bitter pathos in order to show to what lengths men will go in the name of religion (*De Rerum Natura* 1. 84–101):

> Look how the chosen leaders of the Greeks, the foremost of men, foully defiled the altar of virgin Artemis at Aulis with the blood of Iphigenia. As they placed around her maiden's hair the headband which hung down evenly by her cheeks, she suddenly caught sight of her father standing sadly before the altar and at his side his ministers hiding the knife, while the people shed tears at the sight of her. Dumb with fear she fell to the ground on her knees. At such a moment little help to her in her misery was it that she had been his first child, that she had first bestowed upon the king the name of father. The hands of men brought her trembling to the altar, not that she might perform the customary ritual of marriage to the clear-ringing songs of Hymen, but that at the very time for her wedding she might fall a sad and sinless victim, sinfully butchered by her own father, all for the happy and auspicious departure of the fleet. Such are the monstrous evils to which religion could lead.

Calchas' Prophecy

Calchas the prophet was an important figure in the Greek expedition, especially in times of doubt or perplexity. At Troy, as we shall see later, he gave the reason for Apollo's anger and advised the return of Chryseïs to her father. At Aulis he interpreted a famous omen. A snake was seen to climb up a tree and devour eight chicks from a nest high in its branches; it then ate the mother, and was itself turned into stone by Zeus. Calchas correctly interpreted this to mean that the Greeks would fight unsuccessfully at Troy for nine years before capturing the city in the tenth.[18]

The Arrival at Troy

Philoctetes

The expedition finally sailed from Aulis, but did not go straight to Troy. On the way the Greeks were guided by Philoctetes, son of Poeas, to the island of Chryse to sacrifice to its goddess. There Philoctetes was bitten in the foot by a snake;

and as the fleet sailed on, the stench from his wound became so noisome that the Greeks abandoned him on the island of Lemnos, where he remained alone and in agony for nearly ten years. Now Philoctetes' father, Poeas, had lit the funeral pyre of Heracles and had in return been given Heracles' bow and arrows, which Philoctetes later inherited. In the last year of the war, the Greeks captured Priam's son Helenus, who prophesied that only with the aid of Heracles' bow and arrows could Troy be captured. Accordingly, Odysseus and Diomedes fetched Philoctetes from Lemnos. The sons of Asclepius, Podalirius and Machaon, healed his wound, and with the arrows he shot Paris, thus removing the most formidable of the surviving Trojan champions.[19]

Achilles Heals Telephus

On the way to Troy the Greeks landed in Mysia, a district of Asia Minor. In the battle against the Mysians, Achilles wounded the Mysian Telephus, a son of Heracles. When the wound would not heal, Telephus despairingly asked the Delphic oracle for advice. Learning that "he that wounded shall heal," he went to the Greek army disguised as a beggar and asked Achilles to cure his wound. Achilles said he could not, for he was not a doctor, but Odysseus pointed out that it was Achilles' spear that had caused the wound. Scrapings from it were applied, and Telephus was healed.

Protesilaüs and Laodamia

When the Greeks reached Troy the first to leap ashore was Protesilaüs, who was immediately killed by Hector. His wife, Laodamia, could not be comforted in her grief. Pitying her, Hermes brought back her husband from Hades for a few hours, and when he was taken away again, she killed herself. Another person to die in the first skirmish was a Trojan, Cycnus, son of Poseidon, who was turned into a swan. The Greeks successfully established a beachhead, made a permanent camp with their ships drawn up on shore, and settled down to besiege Troy.

The *Iliad*

While the events of the first nine years of the war are obscure (since the epic poems in which they were described survive only in prose summaries), those of the tenth are in part brilliantly illuminated by the *Iliad*. The poem, however, deals only with events from the outbreak of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon to the ransoming and burial of Hector.

Nine years were spent in a fruitless siege of Troy, varied only by abortive diplomatic exchanges and raids against cities allied with Troy. The division of the spoil from these cities led to the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles.

Agamemnon was given in his share Chryseïs, daughter of Chryses, priest of Apollo—but (as we shall see) he had to send her back. Therefore he took Briseïs, who had been given to Achilles and whom Achilles had come to love greatly. The wrath of Achilles, the principal theme of the *Iliad*, is characterized in the poem's opening lines (1. 1–7):

> The wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son, sing, O goddess, a ruinous wrath, which put countless woes upon the Achaeans and hurled many mighty souls of heroes to Hades, and made them a feast for dogs and a banquet for birds, and the will of Zeus was being accomplished, from the time when first Agamemnon and Achilles stood opposed in strife.

The passionate theme of "wrath," the very word with which the poem begins, determines the intensity of emotion and the scope and form of its action. In verses of visual and auditory clarity as deceptively simple as they are profound, the story unfolds through scenes of great dramatic power. With Chryseïs in his possession, Agamemnon refused to allow Chryses to ransom his daughter, and Chryses therefore prayed to Apollo to punish the Greeks. Apollo's answer to the prayer is described in these vivid lines (*Iliad* 1. 43–52):

> So Chryses prayed, and Phoebus Apollo heard him. Angry at heart, he strode down from the peaks of Olympus, having his bow slung from his shoulder and his hollow quiver. The arrows clashed loudly upon his shoulders as he strode in his anger, and like night did he go. Then he sat apart from the ships and shot an arrow; terrible was the twang of his silver bow. First he shot the mules and the swift dogs, and next he shot his sharp arrow at the men. Constantly were the funeral pyres burning in great numbers.

This is the first appearance of a god in the *Iliad*, and it shows how the gods are participants in the saga of Troy, with Apollo constantly favoring the Trojans. Calchas advised that the evil could be ended only by the return, without ransom, of Chryseïs. Accordingly she was sent back, but this left Agamemnon without his share of the spoils, a humiliating situation for the greatest of the Greek kings. He therefore took Briseïs from Achilles, and Achilles repaid the dishonor by withdrawing his contingent, the Myrmidons, from the war.

Achilles is the embodiment of heroic *arete* (excellence). Important in the concept of *arete* is one's standing in the eyes of others, which is gained not only by words and deeds but also by gifts and spoils relative to those of others. Therefore Achilles' honor was slighted when Agamemnon took away Briseïs, and he had good cause to withdraw from the fighting, even though the Greeks suffered terribly as a result. Homer describes the mighty quarrel, during the course of which Athena restrains Achilles from attacking Agamemnon, and he describes the prophecy of Achilles as he withdraws from the war (1. 234–246):[20]

> "By this sceptre, which will never grow leaves or roots, since it was cut in the mountains, and now the sons of the Achaeans bear it in their hands when they

> administer justice, for they defend Justice in the name of Zeus—and this will be a great oath: In time all the sons of the Achaeans will long for Achilles. Then you [Agamemnon] will not be able to do anything, grieved though you be, while many men fall in death before Hector, slayer of men. And you will tear your heart, angry that you did not honor the best of the Achaeans." So spoke the son of Peleus, and he cast the golden-studded sceptre upon the ground, and down he sat.

Angry, hurt, and resentful, Achilles finds comfort and support from his mother, Thetis. Theirs is a sad and touching relationship, tragic in the knowledge that Achilles has chosen to come to Troy to die young and gloriously rather than stay at home to live a long but mundane existence. Thetis agrees to go to Zeus for help, and she obtains from the supreme god an oath that he will honor her son, whom Agamemnon has dishonored, and grant success to the Trojans in his absence, so that the Greeks will come to regret Agamemnon's actions and increase the glory of Achilles.

At the end of Book 1, it is difficult not to condemn Agamemnon as a guilty, arrogant sinner, first against Apollo and his priest and then against Achilles. Achilles' tragic withdrawal, like Apollo's arrows, will cause the deaths of countless of his Greek companions, and he will be condemned for his selfish, cruel, and pitiless behavior. Yet the wrath of Apollo, until properly appeased, has been just as devastating, heartless, and indiscriminate, causing innumerable deaths, in this case, too, because of the arrogance of Agamemnon. Homer juxtaposes the wrath of Achilles and that of Apollo at the beginning of his epic. Are we to judge the actions of the god and those of the mortal demigod by two different standards?

In Book 3 a truce is agreed upon to allow Menelaüs and Paris to fight in individual combat, in order to decide the issues and the fate of Helen. In the duel, Menelaüs gets the better of Paris. He takes hold of Paris by the helmet and swings him around so that he is choked by the neck-strap. When Aphrodite notices that Paris is lost, she quickly snatches up her favorite with the ease of a goddess and transports him to his fragrant bedchamber. She goes to summon Helen, who has already witnessed the humiliation of her husband from a high tower of Troy. Although Aphrodite is disguised as an old woman, Helen recognizes the beautiful breasts and flashing eyes of her mirror image, and with this recognition of herself she rebels.

As the scene proceeds, through the literal depiction of the goddess Aphrodite, the inner soul (the psyche) of Helen is laid bare. Helen wonders where in the world beauty and passion—Aphrodite—will lead her next, and in indignation she demands that the goddess abandon Olympus and go herself to Paris until he makes her his wife or his slave. Helen is too ashamed before the eyes of the Trojan women to return to his bed. At this Aphrodite becomes enraged and threatens to turn against Helen. Helen submissively returns to her bedchamber and to Paris, whom Aphrodite has restored from a bedraggled loser into a beautiful dandy. Yet a disillusioned Helen greets her beloved with these demeaning words (3. 428–436):

"You have come out of battle? You ought to have died there, beaten by a stronger man, who was my former husband. To be sure you boasted before that you were mightier than warlike Menelaüs in the might of your hands and your sword. So then go now and challenge warlike Menelaüs again to face you in battle. No, I bid you hold on and do not fight in combat against blond Menelaüs in your rashness, lest somehow you will quickly be subdued by his spear."

Paris responds with characteristic nonchalance, and Aphrodite is victorious once again (3. 438–447):

"My wife, do not rebuke me with harsh words; now Menelaüs has won with the help of Athena. At another time I will beat him, for the gods are on our side too. Come on now, let us go to bed and make love. Never at any time has desire so clouded my senses, not even when we first consummated our love on the island of Cranaë, after I had carried you out of lovely Sparta and we sailed away. This is how I love you now and how sweet desire takes hold of me." He spoke, and led her to bed, and his wife followed along.

In Book 6, Hector, the valiant brother of Paris, seeks out his wife, Andromache, to bid her farewell before returning to the battlefield. On his way he looks in on Paris, who is still dallying with Helen in their home. After his defeat by Menelaüs and his lovemaking with Helen, Paris is sullenly polishing his armor. Hector has obviously interrupted another of their quarrels. Paris tells his brother how Helen has just now been urging him to go out to battle, and he agrees with them both that it is time for him to return. Helen speaks to Hector in words fraught with misery and self-reproach (6. 344–358):

"My brother-in-law, how I wish that I—cold, evil-scheming bitch that I am—had died on the day when first I was born before all this had happened—that a terrible blast of wind had hurled me into the side of a mountain or into a wave of the resounding sea to be swept away. But since the gods have so ordained these evils, I wish that I were the wife of a better man, who felt a sense of guilt and shame before the eyes of society. But his character is not rooted in such values and he will never change, and so I think that he will reap the rewards. Now come here and sit down in this chair, brother-in-law, since the battle toil has crushed you the most, all on account of me, a bitch, and retribution for Paris' guilt. Upon us both has Zeus imposed an evil fate, so that we might become for future generations the subjects for poetic songs."

Hector tells Helen that he must be on his way. He finds that his wife, their son Astyanax, and the boy's nurse are not at home; they have been anxiously watching from the battlements in concern for his fate. In the sad farewell between husband and wife, Andromache implores Hector not to go to battle and leave her a widow and their child an orphan. (See Color Plate 20.) Achilles has already killed her father and seven brothers; he captured their mother, and although he accepted a ransom for her return, she has died too. So Hector is father, mother, and brother to her, as well as dear husband. Hector responds with loving conviction (6. 441–485):

"To be sure, all these things are of deep concern to me too, but I should feel terrible shame before the Trojan women with their long robes if like a coward I were to shrink from battle. Nor would my spirit allow me to, since I have learned to be brave always and to fight amidst the first of the Trojans, winning great glory for myself and for my father. For I know this well in my heart and in my soul. The day will come when Troy will be destroyed and Priam and the people of Priam of the fine ashen spear. The suffering that will follow for the Trojans—for Hecuba herself and king Priam and my many brave brothers who will fall in the dust under the hands of their enemies—is not so much a grief for me as is the pain that you will endure when one of the bronze-clad Achaeans leads you away weeping and takes from you the day of your liberty. In Greece at another's bidding you will work the loom and draw water from a spring in Laconia or Thessaly, much against your will, but heavy necessity will lie upon you. Then someone, seeing you in tears, will say, 'This is the wife of Hector, who was by far the best fighter when the horse-taming Trojans did battle for Ilium.' Thus at some time will someone speak, and your grief will be awakened anew because you are without such a husband to ward off the day of your slavery. But may I die with the earth heaped up over my grave before I hear your cries of anguish as you are dragged away a captive."

Thus radiant Hector spoke and reached out for his son, but the child clung to the bosom of the fair-girdled nurse, screaming in dismay at the sight of his father, startled as he saw the bronze crest of his helmet and the horsehair plume nodding dreadful from its peak. His dear father laughed aloud and his lady mother, and immediately Hector took the helmet from his head and placed it all-shining on the ground. Then he kissed his dear son and fondled him in his arms and spoke in prayer to Zeus and the other gods:

"Zeus and you other gods, grant that this son of mine become outstanding among the Trojans, just as I am, excellent in his might and a strong ruler over Ilium. Some day let someone say that this boy has turned out to be far better than his father, as he comes out of the battle, and when he has killed his enemy may he bring home the gory spoils and may his mother rejoice in her heart." Thus speaking he placed his son in the hands of his dear wife. She took him to her fragrant bosom, laughing amidst her tears.

On two other occasions, Andromache prophesies her fate and that of her son and of the city, each time addressing Hector's corpse. Here is how she takes her farewell of him (24. 725–738):

"My husband, you were young when you were taken from life, and you leave me a widow in the palace. The boy is still just a baby, who is our child, yours and mine, ill-fated that we are. I do not think that he will grow to manhood, for the city will first be utterly sacked now that you, its guardian, are dead, who defended the city, the chaste wives, and the little children. They will soon go away in the hollow ships, and I with them. And you, my child, either will go with me, where you will perform demeaning tasks, laboring for a harsh master; or else one of the Achaeans will take you by the hand and hurl you in anger from the tower—a grim death—because Hector once killed his brother or father or son."

Indeed, Andromache became the slave of Neoptolemus after the fall of Troy, and her infant son Astyanax was thrown from the city walls.

A major development in the theme of Achilles' wrath occurs in the ninth book. Should Achilles have relented when Agamemnon offered to restore Briseïs with many valuable gifts? It is a measure of his sensitive and passionate nature that he refused the offer, presented by three envoys, Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax, son of Telamon.

Odysseus' speech to Achilles echoes for the most part the directions given by Agamemnon, but it begins and ends with more tactful and artful persuasion. In describing the successes of the Trojans, Odysseus emphasizes the danger to Achilles and the opportunity to destroy Hector. The fury of Hector cannot wait to come down to destroy their ships. Then he lists the gifts to be given to Achilles immediately upon his return: seven tripods, ten talents of gold, twenty shining cauldrons, twelve prize-winning horses, seven women from Lesbos, particularly beautiful and skilled (whom Achilles had picked out for himself when he took Lesbos!), and Briseïs, with a solemn oath that Agamemnon had never slept with her. In addition, if the gods were to grant that Priam's city be sacked, Achilles might heap up his ship with gold and bronze and choose twenty Trojan women for himself, the most beautiful after Helen. Beyond this, if they return safely to Greece, Agamemnon promises to make Achilles his son-in-law, with a dowry larger than any ever given before and a kingdom of seven rich cities over which he might rule like a god.

At the conclusion of his speech, Odysseus is careful not to repeat Agamemnon's final instructions: "Let him be subdued—Hades is the most hateful of gods and mortals because he is inexorable and inflexible. Let him submit to me, inasmuch as I am more royal and assert that I am the elder" (9. 158–161). Instead Odysseus, with more tact and wisdom, begs that Achilles, even if his anger and hatred of Agamemnon are too great for forgiveness, should at least have pity on the other Greeks, who are worn out in battle and will upon his return honor him like a god. In conclusion Odysseus tries to win Achilles over by playing upon his jealousy of Hector's arrogant success, implying that now is his chance to achieve his desire for glory through the defeat of Hector, who thinks that no Greek is his match. By questioning some of these values in his reply, Achilles reveals a sensitivity and introspection that make him unique (9. 308–345):

"I must give a direct answer to your speech, telling you honestly what I think and what I will do, so that you ambassadors may not try to wheedle me one after the other. For I hate the man who hides one thing in his heart and says something else as much as I hate Hades and his realm. I will say outright what seems to me best. I do not believe that the son of Atreus, Agamemnon, will persuade me, nor will the other Greeks, since it was no pleasure for me always to fight against the enemy relentlessly. The coward is held in equal honor with the brave man who endures and fights hard, and equal is his fate. The one who does nothing and the one who does much find a similar end in death. It was no advan-

tage to me when I suffered deeply, continually risking my life in battle. As a bird brings food to her unfledged nestlings, after she has won it with much distress, so I used to spend many sleepless nights and endure days of blood in fighting against enemies belligerent in the defense of their wives.

Indeed, I say to you, I plundered twelve populated cities by ship and attacked another eleven by land; from all these I took many splendid treasures and brought them back to give to Agamemnon, the son of Atreus. He who had remained behind by his swift ships took them, distributing a few things but keeping much for himself. All that he gave as prizes to the nobles and kings they keep secure; it was from me alone of the Achaeans that he stole. He has a dear wife, let him sleep with her for his pleasure. Why must the Greeks fight with the Trojans? Why did the son of Atreus gather an army to bring here? Was it not on account of Helen with her beautiful hair? Are the sons of Atreus the only ones among mortals who love their wives? To be sure, any decent and responsible man loves and cares for his own, just as I loved Briseïs from the depths of my heart, even though she was won by my spear. As it is now, since he took my prize out of my hands and deceived me, let him not try me, since I know him too well—he will not persuade me."

Achilles' response continues at some length. He makes it clear that he despises gifts from Agamemnon, however grand they may be, and he has no need or desire to be chosen as his son-in-law. Surely Agamemnon could find someone more royal and worthy of respect! The shameless Agamemnon, "dog that he is, would not dare to look me in the face!" The gifts are excessively generous, but Achilles sees through Agamemnon's façade. This is not reconciliation but bribery. Many critics have said, with some justice, that Achilles by his rejection of these gifts has gone too far in his pride and that he is guilty of the sin of *hubris*. He should understand, they say, that Agamemnon cannot humiliate himself by coming to Achilles with apologies, as if to a god. Is it really too much, however, to ask a good king to admit his error in person? Agamemnon by his royal arrogance may be as guilty as Achilles, if not more so, because he, the commander-in-chief, is ultimately responsible for all the slaughter and suffering that might have been avoided.

So Agamemnon's attempt to win Achilles back has failed. After Achilles' old tutor, Phoenix, also tries to persuade Achilles, the third envoy, the warrior Ajax, son of Telamon, bluntly concludes the embassy (9. 628–638):

"Achilles has put a savage and proud spirit within his breast. Obdurate, he does not care for the love of his friends, with which we honored him above all men beside the ships, unpitying as he is. Yet others have accepted payment for the death of a brother or a son. But the gods have put in your breast a spirit unforgiving and harsh, because of one girl."

Without Achilles, the Greeks were driven back by the Trojans until Hector began to set fire to the ships. All this was done, says Homer, in fulfillment of the will of Zeus (1. 5), for Zeus had agreed to honor Achilles in this way after Thetis had prayed to him to avenge the wrong done by Agamemnon.

When Hector broke through to the Greek ships, Achilles finally allowed his friend and companion, Patroclus, to take his armor and fight Hector and the Trojans. For a while, Patroclus carried all before him, even killing Sarpedon, son of Zeus. But he went too far in his fury. Homer describes (16. 786–867) how Apollo opposed him in the battle and struck him across the back with his hand. Patroclus was dazed by the blow, and the Trojan Euphorbus wounded him with a spear. It was left for Hector to deal the deathblow to the enfeebled and stunned Patroclus.

The death of Patroclus is the turning point of the epic. Achilles is overcome by grief, guilt, and remorse. His anguish is so terrifying that his comrades fear he may take his own life. Yet his mother, Thetis, provides comfort once again as Achilles steadfastly makes the tragic decision to return to battle to avenge Patroclus and so, assuredly, to fix the seal upon his own fate. At the beginning of Book 18, Antilochus, son of Nestor, who brings the tragic news of Patroclus' death, finds Achilles agonized with anxiety and fear that Patroclus has ignored his warning not to fight Hector and is dead. Antilochus in tears addresses Achilles (18–38):

"Ah, son brave Peleus, you must hear my painful message—how I wish this had never happened—Patroclus lies dead and they are fighting over his corpse, which is naked. Hector with the flashing helmet has taken his armor."

Thus he spoke and a black cloud of grief enveloped Achilles. He clutched the black dirt with both his hands and poured it over his head and his handsome face was defiled. The dark filth covered his immortal tunic and he, his mighty self, lay stretched out mightily on the ground and he tore at his hair and befouled it.

And the women whom Achilles and Patroclus had taken as captives, stricken to the heart with grief, cried aloud and ran out to surround great Achilles and they all beat their breasts and the limbs of each of them went limp. Antilochus also by his side, shedding tears and lamenting, restrained the hands of Achilles, whose proud heart was overwhelmed with sorrow, because he feared that he would cut his throat with his sword. Achilles cried out a terrifying scream of woe and his divine mother heard him, as she sat beside her aged father Nereus in the depths of the sea and in turn she answered with a cry. The goddesses gathered around her, all her sister Nereids who were there in the deep sea.

Homer goes on to name all these Nereids in lines that read very much like a catalogue that might have been composed by Hesiod. Homer then continues (50-126):

Together all the Nereids beat their breasts and Thetis began her lament:

"Hear me, my sisters, daughters of Nereus, so that all of you, once you have listened, will know well how many sorrows are in my heart. Ah, poor me, unhappy mother of the best of sons born for an evil fate, since I give birth to a child, both blameless and strong, the best of heroes. He shot up like a young sapling and I nurtured him and he flourished like a tree, growing up strong, the

pride of the orchard. But then I sent him forth with the curved ships to battle against the Trojans on Ilium. He will not return home to the house of Peleus and I will never get him back again. All the while that he lives and looks upon the light of the sun, he suffers in anguish, and when I go to him I am not able to help him at all. Nevertheless, I will go to him in order to see my dear son and I will listen to the sorrow that has come to him as he stays out of the battle."

Thetis lamented thus and left her cavern and her sisters went with her, in tears, and the swell of the sea broke and gave way. When they reached fertile Troy, they all came to shore in an orderly stream, where the cluster of the Myrmidons' ships were anchored close by swift Achilles. His divine mother stood before him, as she heaved a deep sigh, and uttering a sharp cry she clasped the head of her son and grieving spoke winged words: "My son, why are you weeping? What sorrow has touched your heart? Tell me and don't keep it hidden. These things have been brought to fulfillment through Zeus, just as you once wanted, lifting your hands in prayer that all the sons of the Achaeans be pinned against the prows of their ships and suffer terrible atrocities, all because of their need for you."

Achilles, swift of foot, groaning deeply answered: "Mother, Olympian Zeus has accomplished these things for me but what joy is there in them now, since my dear friend has perished, Patroclus, whom I loved more than my other comrades, loved as much as my own life. I have lost him. Hector has killed him and stripped him of my mighty armor, wondrous to behold. The gods gave it to Peleus, a splendid gift, on the day when they brought you to the bed of a mortal man. How I wish you had continued to live among the immortal goddesses of the sea and Peleus had won a mortal wife! But as it is now there must be endless sorrow in your heart for the death of your son, whom you will never welcome back again, as he returns home. For I have no more heart to go on living, unless Hector first is struck down by my spear and loses his life and pays the price for stripping my armor from Patroclus, son of Menoetius."

Thetis then in turn answered him amidst her tears: "My son, your life will soon be over from what you are saying. For right after the death of Hector, your own death is at hand."

Then in great distress Achilles, swift of foot, answered her: " So may I die at once, since it was never destined to save my comrade from death. He has perished very far from his fatherland because he did not have me, with my prowess in war, as protector. Now then alas I will not return to my fatherland and I did not become any light of salvation for Patroclus or my other comrades, so many of whom were struck down by mighty Hector. But I sit by my ships, useless, a burden on the earth, though I am superior in battle like no other of the bronze-armored Achaeans, even if others are better speakers in counsel. I wish strife would disappear from among both gods and human beings and wrath, which has sent even the most sensible into a rage and which, much more sweet than the dripping of honey, wells up in the breasts of men like smoke. Thus the king of men Agamemnon enraged me but we will let this be a thing of the past, and even though I am angry I will overcome the anger in my heart because I have to. For now I will go back into battle so that I may seek out Hector, the slayer of my dear friend. I will accept my own death whenever Zeus wishes to bring it about or the other immortal gods. For not even Heracles in his might escaped

death, he who was most dear to Zeus the king, son of Cronus but fate defeated him and the fierce anger of Hera. So I too, if a like fate has been fashioned for me, will lie down in acceptance when death comes. But now may I win goodly renown and compel some one of the Trojan women or deep-girdled Dardanians to wipe away the tears from her tender cheeks with both her hands in her outburst of grief and may they so realize that I have stayed away from the fighting for too long a time. Do not try to keep me away from the battle, however much you love me because you will not persuade me."

Thetis sadly agrees with the tragic decision made by Achilles to determine his own death by avenging his dear Patroclus, and she tells him that she will go to Hephaestus to have new armor made for him.

Grief over the death of Patroclus drove Achilles to end his quarrel with Agamemnon and to return to the fighting with one goal, to kill Hector. So Briseïs was returned with costly gifts, and upon her return she lamented over the corpse of Patroclus (19. 287–300):

"Patroclus, most dear to my unhappy heart, I left you alive when I was taken from the hut, and now upon my return I find you, leader of the host, dead. Thus for me evil follows upon evil. I saw my husband, to whom my father and lady mother gave me, transfixed by a sharp spear in front of his city, and my dear brothers, all three born to our mother, on that day found their way to ruinous death. You would not let me cry when swift Achilles killed my husband and sacked the city of godlike Mynes, but you said that I would be made the wedded wife of godlike Achilles and that I would be taken back in his ship to Phthia to celebrate our marriage among the Myrmidons. So I lament for you unceasingly, you who were always gentle."

Thetis brought new armor, made by Hephaestus, to her son. Homer describes the shield of Achilles in detail, with its portrayal of the human world of the Mycenaeans—cities at war and at peace, scenes of farming and other peaceful activities (a lawsuit, for example, marriage, dancing, and music).

Meanwhile Hector has spoiled Patroclus' corpse of the armor of Achilles, which he himself put on. As he changes his armor, Zeus watches and foretells his doom (17. 194–208):

He put on the immortal armor of Achilles, son of Peleus, which the gods had given to his father and he in turn in his old age gave to Achilles his son. But the son did not grow old in the armor. And when Zeus the cloud-gatherer saw Hector from afar arming himself with the arms of the godlike son of Peleus, he moved his head and spoke to his own heart: "Ah, wretched man! You do not now think of death that will come close to you. You are putting on the immortal arms of the best of men, before whom others also tremble. That man's friend you have killed, gentle and strong, and you have taken the arms from his head and shoulders, as you should not have done. For now I will give you great strength. In return, Andromache will never take the noble arms of the son of Peleus from you when you return from battle."

Achilles returned to the battle and drove the Trojans back to the city, in his rage fighting even the river-god Scamander and filling the river with Trojan corpses. Eventually the Trojans were driven into the city, and only Hector remained outside the wall. The single combat between Hector and Achilles is the climax of the *Iliad*. Hector is chased by Achilles three times around the walls; "as in a dream the pursuer cannot catch him who is running away, nor can he who runs escape nor the other catch him" (22. 199–200). Finally, Zeus agrees to the death of Hector (*Iliad*, 22. 209–213):

> Then indeed the Father held up the golden scales, and in them he put two lots of grievous death, the one for Achilles, and the other for Hector, tamer of horses, and he held the scales by the middle. And the fatal day of Hector sank down toward the house of Hades. Then Phoebus Apollo left Hector, and Athena, the grey-eyed goddess, came to the son of Peleus.

Athena helps Achilles by leading Hector to his death through treachery. She takes the form of his brother, Deïphobus, in whom Hector, now rendered defenseless, puts his final trust (22. 295–301):

> He called with a great shout to white-shielded Deïphobus and asked for a long spear, but Deïphobus was nowhere near him. And Hector knew the truth in his heart and said, "Alas! Now for sure the gods have summoned me deathward. For I thought that the hero Deïphobus was beside me, but he is inside the walls and Athena has deceived me. Now indeed evil death is not far away but very near, and I have no way out."

Deserted by the gods and deceived by Athena, Hector died at the hands of Achilles, who refused to show any mercy and dragged the corpse back to his hut behind his chariot. Next Achilles celebrated the funeral of Patroclus, on whose pyre he sacrificed twelve Trojan prisoners. He also held athletic games in honor of Patroclus, at which he presided and gave valuable prizes for the winners. Yet his anger against Hector was still unassuaged, and daily for twelve days he dragged Hector's body round the tomb of Patroclus behind his chariot; the mutilated corpse was refreshed and restored by Apollo each day. Only when Thetis brought him the message of Zeus was Achilles ready to relent. Priam himself, with the help of Hermes, came to Achilles' hut and ransomed the corpse of his son. The scene where the old man kneels before the killer of so many of his sons is one of the most moving in all Greek saga (24. 477–484):

> Great Priam entered, unseen by Achilles' companions, and stood near Achilles. With his hands he took hold of Achilles' knees and kissed his hands, hands terrible and man-killing, which had killed many of Priam's sons. Achilles was full of wonder as he looked at godlike Priam, and the others also wondered and they looked at each other.

Hector and Achilles. By Eunice Pinney (1770–1849); watercolor on paper, 1809–1826, 16 × 20 in. Eunice Pinney, a member of a prominent Connecticut family, took up painting when she was thirty-nine years old. Her work has more vigor and originality than that of less mature artists in the early Republic. Here Achilles thrusts his spear into Hector's neck (*Iliad* 22. 326–329), while Athena encourages him from above. In the background are the walls and the people of Troy and, to the left, the springs of the river Scamander "where the wives and daughters of the Trojans used to wash their clothes" (*Iliad* 22. 154–155). Note the elaborate clothing of the warriors, the miniature Gorgon's head on Athena's robe, and the owl that accompanies her. All three of the major figures are left-handed, as sometimes happens with designs for engravings or tapestries, for which the final product would be reversed. In fact this painting was copied from an engraving of the oil sketch by Peter Paul Rubens of "The Death of Hector" for his tapestry series on "The Life of Achilles" (now in Rotterdam). Pinney has dispensed with the herms and putti of the sketch, substituting trees for the former. In the center she has kept the prominent shield of Achilles (the subject of much of Book 18 of the *Iliad*) and on the left, beyond the tree and the Scamander, the white horses and charioteer who will drag the corpse of Hector around the tomb of Patroclus. *(Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, Virginia.)*

When Priam has made his appeal to Achilles and they both have had their fill of lamentation, each remembering his sorrows, Achilles explains the ultimate reason for human misery (24. 524–533):

> "No [human] action is without chilling grief. For thus the gods have spun out for wretched mortals the fate of living in distress, while they live without care. Two jars sit on the doorsill of Zeus, filled with gifts that he bestows, one jar of evils, the other of blessings. When Zeus, who delights in thunder, takes from both and mixes the bad with the good, a human being at one time encounters evil, and at another good. But the one to whom Zeus gives only troubles from the jar of sorrows, this one he makes an object of abuse, to be driven by cruel misery over the divine earth."

Achilles has finally learned through suffering true compassion. His pessimistic view of human existence lies at the core of the Greek tragic view of life. It is a view mirrored with sad beauty by Herodotus, as we have seen in Chapter 6, and echoed again and again by the dramatists, who delight in the splendid fall of those who were once great and blessed. "Never count a person happy until dead."

So Priam ransomed Hector and returned to Troy with the corpse. The *Iliad* ends with the funeral of Hector, over whose body Andromache, Hecuba, and finally Helen had poured out their lamentations. For nine days the people of Troy mourned for Hector, whose death had made inevitable their own fate.

Achilles is not only subject to vehement passions. Alone of the Greek heroes he knows his destiny clearly: to Odysseus' speech in the embassy he replies (9. 410–416):

> My mother, Thetis of the silver feet, has told me that two fates are carrying me to the goal of my death. If I stay here and fight before the city of the Trojans, then I lose my homecoming, but my glory will never fade. But if I return home to my own dear land, then gone is my noble glory, and my life will be long.

The character of Achilles is perfectly expressed in these words. When his horse, Xanthus, prophesies his death (19. 404–417), Achilles replies:

> Well do I know that my destiny is to die here, far from my dear father and mother. Even so, I shall keep on. I shall not stop until I have harried the Trojans enough with my warfare.

The Funeral of Patroclus. Apulian red-figure krater by the Darius painter, ca. 330 B.C.; height 56 in. In the central panel is the pyre with Hector's spoils (originally Achilles' armour worn by Patroclus) on it. To its left Achilles holds a Trojan prisoner by his hair before running him through with his sword: three other bound prisoners to the left await the same fate. To the right of the pyre Agamemnon pours a libation. In the lower panel the charioteer of Achilles, Automedon, prepares to drag the corpse of Hector behind the four-horse chariot around the tomb of Patroclus. In the upper register the old warriors, Nestor (seated) and Phoenix, converse in a tent. *(Naples, Museo Nazionale.)*

Again, when the dying Hector foretells Achilles' death, Achilles resolutely accepts his fate. Nor is Achilles always violent. At the funeral games for Patroclus, he presides with princely dignity and even makes peace between the hot-tempered competitors. We have also seen how he gave up his anger against Hector and treated Priam with dignity and generosity. Achilles is a splendid and complex hero, incomparably the greatest figure in the Trojan saga.

The Olympian Gods in Battle

The gods are all-important participants in the Trojan war. We have seen (in Chapter 5, pp. 118–120) how Hephaestus settles the quarrel between Zeus and Hera at the end of the first book of the *Iliad*, an episode that vividly displays the gulf between mortal and immortal emotions. The first book sets forth the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, which (as the poet says in the second line of the poem) ends in the death of so many people. In contrast, the quarrel between Zeus and Hera ends in laughter and lovemaking. We also have seen (in Chapter 5, pp. 111–113) the sacred marriage of Zeus and Hera in Book 14 of the *Iliad*, the union of sky-god and earth-goddess. Usually the gods are distant observers of human battle, which is nevertheless a direct concern to them. Yet individual gods and goddesses sometimes take part in battle by helping or protecting their mortal favorites.

In two episodes (which are called "theomachies"), however, the gods themselves fight each other on the battlefield. In the first of these Athena descends to the battle in a chariot with Hera. We translate here the description of her arming (*Iliad* 5. 736–747):

> Athena put on a tunic and armed herself for tear-filled battle with the armor of Zeus, the cloud-gatherer. Round her shoulders she put the tasseled aegis, a fearsome sight, ringed all around with Fear. In it is Strife, in it is Might, in it is icy Pursuit, in it is the head of the frightening monster Gorgon—a terrible and grim image, the sign of Zeus the aegis-carrier. On her head she put the double-crested golden helmet with its four metal plates, decorated with images of defenders of a hundred cities. She climbed into the fiery chariot, she grasped the heavy, long spear, with which she lays low the ranks of men with whom she, daughter of a mighty Father, is angry.

She helps Diomedes and herself takes part in the fighting. Even Aphrodite enters the battle and is wounded by Diomedes—a mortal wounding an immortal. Aphrodite returns to Olympus and is comforted by her mother, Dione (*Iliad* 5. 382–384):

> Be patient, my child, and endure, even though you are in pain. For many of us who dwell in the palaces of Olympus have endured suffering caused by men, causing harsh pain to each other.

Dione goes on to name gods who have been wounded by mortals. Finally Zeus, alerted by Athena and Hera, says to Aphrodite (*Iliad* 5. 428–430):

Battle is not your gift, my child. You should busy yourself with the work of desire and love. Leave all this business to swift Ares and Athena.

Diomedes wounds even the god of war himself, Ares, who complains to Zeus and finds little sympathy (see Chapter 5, p. 124).

The second theomachy is in Books 20 and 21. In the Council of the Gods at the beginning of Book 20, Zeus gives permission to the gods to fight on the field of battle, while he remains above it all (*Iliad* 20. 22–25):

I will stay here in a fold of Olympus: I will watch from my seat and delight my mind. You other gods may go to the Trojans and Achaeans and give help to both sides, wherever you decide.

Thus the battle becomes more violent, as the gods inspire the heroes with fighting spirit and themselves take part. Once again the contrast is drawn between the reality of human suffering and the triviality of the gods' injuries. Mortals must fight and die: the wounds of the immortals are soon healed.

Not all the gods who are on the battlefield fight. Poseidon challenges Apollo, who replies (*Iliad* 21. 462–467):

Earth-shaker, you would not say I was prudent if I were to fight you for the sake of wretched mortals. They are like leaves that flourish with fiery colors, for a little while eating the fruits of the earth. Then they fade away and perish, lifeless. Let us, however, stop fighting now, and let mortals fight.

The theomachies help us see the unbridgeable gap between the mortal and the divine. They show that it *is* ridiculous for gods to fight like mortals, yet they also show that human warfare is a concern of the Olympians. The theomachies, by recognizing the triviality of divine pain, serve to illuminate human suffering. Nor should we take them too seriously: we end this discussion with the description of Hera's attack on Artemis (*Iliad* 21. 489–496):

Hera spoke and with her left hand seized Artemis by her wrists. With her right hand she stripped the bow and arrows from her shoulder, and with a smile she boxed her ears and stunned her. Out fell the arrows from the quiver. In tears the goddess [Artemis] fled like a pigeon that flies into a hole in a rock chased by a hawk (for it was not fated that the pigeon should be caught)—even so did Artemis run away in tears and left her bow and arrows there.

The Fall of Troy

The brilliance of the *Iliad* makes the rest of the saga of the Trojan War pale by comparison. Episodes are recorded in summaries of lost epics, in drama, in many vase-paintings, and in Vergil's *Aeneid*, so that we can tell the story of the rest of the war.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE *ILIAD*

Since the *Iliad,* if not before, war has served as one of the greatest themes in all literature, a universal human experience, one that lays bare the extremes of human character and passion and explores with wrenching intensity the heights and depths of human relationships. What age has not known war, despite all condemnation, a universal and persistent plague? What man and woman do not care about how they are seen by others? Who has never let rage control action? Who has not had to face an encounter and quailed before it in fear? Who has never felt controlled by a greater power that cares little for the lot of humans and has never questioned standards of moral behavior or concluded that we are all victims and that injustice too often motivates human action? The archetypal Trojan War has become a mirror through which we see war forever, not only in all its devastating horror and brutality but also in the lofty grandeur of the achievements it can inspire in the face of life and death: we see men and women, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters challenged by the most harrowing ordeals, which put them to the test and define their bravery or cowardice, their love or betrayal, their selfishness or their patriotism. The great heroes and heroines of the *Iliad,* in their diversity and scope, transcend the mores of their time and place to epitomize us all. It is easy to recognize not only the men as prototypes but also the women from the depth and grandeur of individual depictions: Andromache, the deeply devoted wife of Hector and mother of Astyanax; Hecuba, the powerful and aged queen, loving wife and mother, who sees her Hector killed and will eventually lose her husband and all her children and be reduced to utter desolation; Helen, trapped by her own passion, as she herself admits, between two opposing forces, a woman of grand stature, the focal point of the entire struggle. The reinterpretations of Helen's character since the time of Homer to the present day have been legion, with judgments ranging from guilty whore to guiltless victim.[21] Her beauty has inspired countless poems: Christopher Marlowe made her an object of sensual desire in *Dr. Faustus* with the lines beginning, "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / and burn't the topless towers of Ilium?" For Goethe, in *Faust* (Part two, Act three), she symbolized all that is beautiful in classical antiquity.

The universality of the *Iliad* and the devastating truth of Homer's depiction of war and its hero Achilles find powerful and specific confirmation in a brilliant book by Jonathan Shay that illuminates the experiences and sufferings of Vietnam veterans through a study of the *Iliad,* in particular the character and emotions of Achilles.[22] Dr. Shay, a psychiatrist who appreciates Homer's contemporary value, finds parallel themes such as these: betrayal of "what's right" by a commander; the shrinkage of social and moral horizons; intense comradeship reduced to a few friends; and the death of one of these special comrades, followed by feelings of grief and guilt culminating in a berserk rage.

Achilles and Penthesilea

After the funeral of Hector the fighting resumed, and Achilles killed the leaders of two contingents that came from the ends of the earth to help the Trojans. From the north came the Amazons—the legendary warrior women—led by Penthesilea. Achilles killed her; in some versions, just as Achilles was about to deal the fatal thrust, their eyes met and he fell in love with her.[23] Achilles mourned over her death and her beauty and killed Thersites, who taunted him.[24] For this murder Achilles had to withdraw for a time to Lesbos, where he was purified by Odysseus.

Achilles and Memnon

A second foreign contingent was that of the Ethiopians, from the south. They were led by Memnon, son of Eos (Aurora), goddess of the dawn, and of Tithonus (a brother of Priam). After Memnon's death, his followers were turned into birds that fought around his tomb. Achilles did not long survive these victories.

The Death of Achilles

As he pursued the Trojans toward the city, Achilles was fatally wounded in the heel by an arrow shot by Paris with the help of Apollo. After a fierce fight, his corpse was recovered by Ajax, son of Telamon, and buried at Sigeum, the promontory near Troy. Agamemnon's ghost tells the ghost of Achilles about the battle over his corpse and his splendid funeral. The Greeks prepared the corpse for cremation and shaved their heads. Thetis herself came from the sea accompanied by her sea-nymphs, and, with the Muses, they mourned with wailing and dirges, while the Greeks wept (*Odyssey* 24. 63–70):

> For seventeen days and nights, immortal gods and mortal men, we wept for you. On the eighteenth we gave you to burning fire, and we sacrificed flocks of fat sheep. You were burned in the clothing of the gods, anointed with oil and sweet honey. Many of the Achaean heroes paraded in armor around the burning pyre, men on foot and horseback, and a loud roar arose.

Agamemnon describes how Achilles' bones were put in a golden urn by Thetis, mixed with those of Patroclus. Then the great tomb was raised, and Thetis gave funeral games in honor of her dead son. Thus Achilles, the greatest of Greek heroes, was given a funeral and burial that would ensure his fame for posterity.[25]

The ghost of Achilles appeared to the Greeks after the sack of Troy and demanded that Polyxena, the daughter of Priam and Hecuba, be sacrificed at his tomb. The sacrifice of Polyxena is one of the principal themes of Euripides' tragedy *Hecuba*, in which the dignity and virtue of Polyxena are a striking contrast to the violence of the young Greeks and their leaders. Thus

the aftermath of the war involved the sacrifice of a maiden before the Greek army just as it had been preceded by the sacrifice of Iphigenia. In a version especially popular in medieval legend, Polyxena had been loved by Achilles, and it was while he was meeting her that he was ambushed and killed by Paris.

Odysseus and Ajax Compete for the Armor of Achilles

Achilles' armor was claimed by both Odysseus and Ajax, son of Telamon, as the leading warriors surviving on the Greek side. Each made a speech before an assembly of the Greeks, presided over by Athena. Trojan prisoners gave evidence that Odysseus had done them more harm than Ajax, and the arms were awarded to Odysseus. The disgrace of losing sent Ajax mad; he slaughtered a flock of sheep (which he believed were his enemies) and on becoming sane again killed himself for shame by falling on his sword. From his blood sprang a flower (perhaps a type of hyacinth) with the initials of his name (AI-AI) on its petals.[26]

This legend is the subject of Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*, in which the hostility of Athena toward Ajax contrasts with Odysseus' appreciation of the human predicament. Athena asks Odysseus if he knows of a hero who was greater than Ajax, and his reply is a final commentary on the heroic tragedy of the *Iliad* (Sophocles, *Ajax* 121–133):

> ODYSSEUS: I do not know [of a greater hero]. I pity him in his misery, nevertheless, although he is my enemy. Because he is yoked to evil madness (*ate*) I look at this man's troubles no more than at my own. For I see that we who live are nothing more than ghosts and weightless shadows.
> ATHENA: Therefore when you see such things, say nothing yourself against the gods and swear no boastful oath if your hand is heavy [with success] or with deep and enduring wealth. For time lays low and brings back again all human things. The gods love those who are moderate (*sophrones*) and hate those who are evil.

We can hardly find a better expression of the way in which the Greeks used mythology to express their deepest understanding of human life.

The Roman poet Ovid tells the story of Ajax and the armor of Achilles at length. Here is how he describes its end (*Metamorphoses* 13. 382–398):

> The Greek leaders were impressed [i.e., by the speech of Odysseus], and the power of eloquence was made clear in the consequences. The eloquent man took away the armor of the brave warrior. Ajax, who alone so many times had resisted Hector, who had opposed iron missiles and fire and the will of Jupiter, could not resist one thing, anger. Shame conquered the unconquered hero. He seized the sword and thrust the lethal blade into his breast, never before wounded. The ground reddened with his blood and put forth a purple flower from the green grass, the flower which earlier had sprung from the wound of Hyacinthus. The same letters were written on the petals for hero and youth, for the one signifying his name, for the other the mourning cry.

The Deaths of Paris and Priam

After Achilles' death, Odysseus captured Helenus, who told the Greeks of a number of conditions that must be fulfilled before they could capture the city. Among these was the summoning of two absent heroes, Neoptolemus (Pyrrhus) and Philoctetes. As we have mentioned, Philoctetes was brought from Lemnos, cured of his snakebite, and with his indispensable bow and arrows shot Paris. Neoptolemus (his name means "new recruit"), the son of Achilles, proved himself to be a brutal warrior, and his butchering of Priam at the altar during the sack of Troy is one of the most moving scenes in the *Aeneid.* Vergil's description of Priam's remains echoes a familiar theme: the once mighty king now "lies, a great and mutilated body, head torn from the shoulders, a nameless corpse on the seashore" (2. 557–558).

The Wooden Horse

The Greeks finally took the city by deception. One of them, Epeus, built an enormous hollow wooden horse, in which the leading warriors were concealed. The *Iliad* does not mention the Trojan horse, which is repeatedly mentioned in the *Odyssey.* In Book 8 the bard, Demodocus, sings a second song at the request of Odysseus, whose identity has not yet been revealed (*Odyssey* 8. 487–495):

> [Odysseus speaks:] "Demodocus, I honor you above all mortals. A Muse, daughter of Zeus, was your teacher, or Apollo, for well do you sing in proper order of the sorrows of the Greeks—their deeds and sufferings and labors—as if you yourself had been there or had heard them from another. Come now, and change your song: sing of the wooden horse, which Epeus made with the help of Athena. Odysseus brought it as a deception into the acropolis [of Troy], when he had filled it with men who sacked Troy."

Demodocus then tells the story of the horse, in which Odysseus has the most prominent role (*Odyssey* 8. 502–513):

> They [i.e., the Greek heroes] sat around glorious Odysseus in the center of Troy, concealed in the horse, for the Trojans themselves had dragged it up to the acropolis. Thus it stood there, and the Trojans sat and debated around it. They favored three plans: either to drive a sharp bronze [spear] through its hollow belly, or to drag it to the edge of the precipice and throw it down the rocks, or to let it be a great dedication to placate the gods. This was the course which they would choose, for it was fated that they would be destroyed once the city held the great wooden horse, where sat all the noblest of the Argives, bringing slaughter and fate to the Trojans. He sang, too, how the sons of Achaeans sacked the city when they poured out of the horse, leaving their hollow place of ambush.

"This was the bard's song," says Homer, and Odysseus wept when he heard it, even as a woman weeps whose husband has been killed in battle—the very suffering that Odysseus himself had inflicted on the Trojans. The song of

The Building of the Trojan Horse, by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804). Oil on canvas, 1773; 15 × 26 in. This is part of a series of oil sketches on the fall of Troy by the younger Tiepolo (formerly ascribed to his more famous father). The massive horse dwarfs the workmen, while the walls of the doomed city brood in the background. The final painting, nearly six times the size of the sketch, hangs in the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. *(National Gallery, London. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees.)*

Demodocus is the basis for Vergil's detailed account of the sack of Troy in the second book of the *Aeneid* (see later in this chapter). Odysseus himself tells the story of the horse to the ghost of Achilles in the Underworld, narrating how Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, alone had been fearless and eager to fight as he sat waiting in the horse, whereas the other Greek heroes had wept and their knees were weak with fear. Odysseus is shown in both of these accounts to be the leader of the Greeks in the horse.

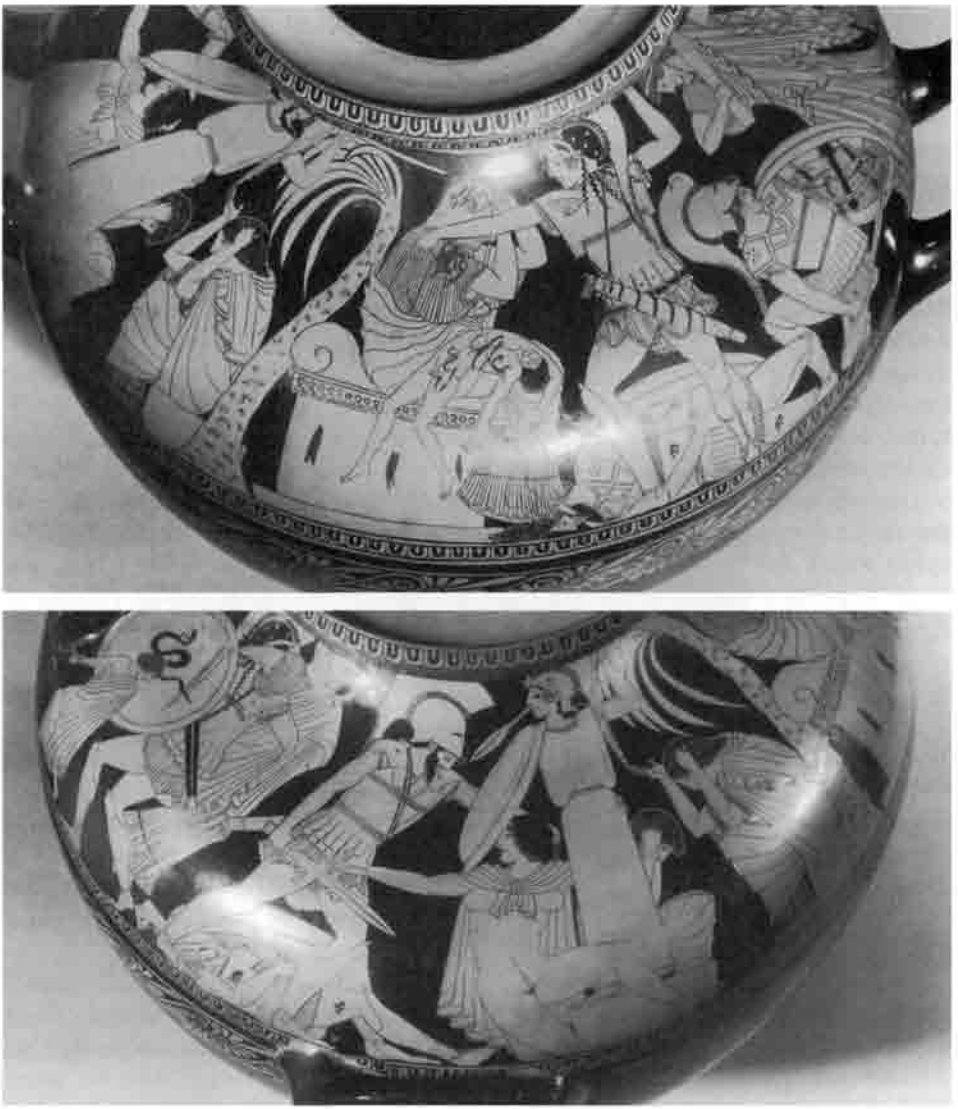
The horse was left outside the city walls, while the other Greeks sailed off to the island of Tenedos, leaving behind one man, Sinon. The Trojans, thinking that their troubles were over, came out of the city and captured Sinon, who pretended to be the bitter enemy of Odysseus and the other Greeks. He told the Trojans that the horse was an offering to Athena, purposely made too big to pass through the city walls; if it were brought inside, the city would never be captured. Not all the Trojans believed him; Cassandra, the prophetic daughter of Priam, foretold the truth, and Laocoön, son of Antenor and priest of Apollo, hurled his spear into the horse's flank and said that it should be destroyed. Yet the Trojans ignored Cassandra and failed to hear the clash of armor as Laocoön's spear struck the horse. Their judgment appeared to be vindicated when two huge serpents swam over the sea from Tenedos as Laocoön was sacrificing to Apollo and throttled him and his two sons.

The Sack of Troy

The Trojans pulled down part of the city walls and dragged the horse in. Helen walked round it calling to the Greek leaders, imitating the voice of each one's wife, but they were restrained from answering by Odysseus.[27] So the horse achieved its purpose; that night, as the Trojans slept after celebrating the end of the war, Sinon opened the horse and released the Greeks. The other Greeks sailed back from Tenedos and entered the city; the Trojans were put to the sword and the city burned.

Antenor was spared, and of the other Trojan leaders only Aeneas escaped, along with his son, Ascanius, and his father, Anchises. Priam and the others were killed; Hector's infant son, Astyanax, was thrown from the walls, and his widow, Andromache, along with Hecuba and the other Trojan women, were made slaves of the Greek leaders. Neoptolemus' share of the spoil included Andromache, but eventually she married Helenus and founded the dynasty of the Molossian kings. In Book 3 of the *Aeneid*, she and Helenus figure prominently. She is the only one of the Trojan women to regain some sort of independent status after the fall of Troy.

During the sack of the city, Cassandra took refuge in the temple of Athena. She was dragged from this asylum by Ajax the Locrian, son of Oïleus, and for this he was killed by the gods on his way home.[28] Cassandra became the slave and concubine of Agamemnon, who took her back to Mycenae, where she was



The Sack of Troy. Attic red-figure hydria by the Kleophrades painter, ca. 480 B.C.; height of vase 16½ in., height of painting 6½ in. In the upper picture Priam sits on the altar with the dead and mutilated Astyanax across his knees, as Neoptolemus rushes forward to kill him. Behind Neoptolemus a Trojan woman attacks with a clublike implement, and behind her, to the right, Aethra is rescued by her grandchildren, Akamas and Demophon (see p. 564 for her being taken to Troy with Helen). In the lower image, Ascanius, on the left, leads the way for Aeneas (helmeted), who carries Anchises on his back (Anchises looks back toward the central scene). In the center Ajax Oïleus brutally drags Cassandra from the statue of Athena, whose threatening stance foreshadows his fate. Between the statue and a palm tree Trojan women grieve for their coming fate. *(Naples, Museo Nazionale.)*

murdered with him by Clytemnestra. In Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon* she foresees her own death in a moving scene (see pp. 475–477); yet her audience, the Chorus in the play, does not believe her. The curse of Apollo remained with her to the end.

As Hecuba sailed back to Greece with Odysseus (to whom she had been given as part of the spoils), she landed in Thrace and there recognized the corpse of her son Polydorus when it was washed up on the seashore. He had been murdered by the local king Polymestor (to whom he had been sent for safety during the war) because of the treasure that had been sent with him. Taking advantage of Polymestor's avarice, Hecuba enticed him and his children into her tent, pretending that she knew the whereabouts in Troy of some hidden treasure, while she appeared to know nothing of the murder of Polydorus. Once they were in the tent, Hecuba's women murdered the children before Polymestor's eyes, then blinded him with their brooches. After this, Hecuba was turned into a bitch; when she died, the place of her burial (in Thrace) was called Cynossema, which means the "dog's tomb."

THE *TROJAN WOMEN* OF EURIPIDES

In Euripides' tragedy the *Trojan Women*, the results of the fall are seen through the eyes of Hecuba, Cassandra, and Andromache. The death of Astyanax is a central part of the tragedy, in which he is torn from his mother's embrace to be hurled from the walls. Later his body is brought back on stage and placed by Hecuba on the shield of Hector, a symbol of the defenselessness of Troy once her champion had been killed. The chorus of Trojan captives recalls the entry of the wooden horse (*Trojan Women* 515–540):

> Now I shall sing of Troy, how I was destroyed by the four-wheeled contrivance of the Greeks and made their prisoner, when they left the horse at the gates, echoing to the skies with the clash of armor and caparisoned with gold. And the Trojan people shouted as it stood on the rock of Troy: "Come, the labor of war is over! Bring in this wooden horse as a holy offering to the daughter of Zeus, guardian of Troy!" Who of the young women did not go, who of the old men stayed at home? Charmed by music, they took hold of the treacherous means of their destruction. All the Phrygian people gathered at the gates, and with ropes of flax they dragged it, like the dark hull of a ship, to the stone temple's floor, bringing death to their city—the temple of the goddess Pallas.

THE SACK OF TROY IN THE *AENEID*

The principal source for the fall of Troy is the second book of the *Aeneid*. Here is how Vergil describes the horror of the end of a city deserted by its divine protectors in Aeneas' vision at the climactic moment of the sack, as his mother Venus allows him a moment of divine insight (*Aeneid* 2. 602–603, 610–625):[29]

Study for "Aeneas' Flight from Troy," by Federico Barocci (ca. 1535–1612). Pen and brown ink, brown wash, opaque watercolor, over black chalk on paper; ca. 1587–1588; 11 × $16\frac{3}{4}$ in. The tightly structured group of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius are separated from Creusa. In the background are the burning buildings of Troy (the circular temple, like a Roman church of Barocci's time, is prominent) and confused forms of Trojans and Greeks are sketched on the right. To the left a dog adds a poignant touch to the departure. With great economy the artist faithfully represents Vergil's narrative. *(Italian. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, L. E. Holden Fund, 60.26.)*

[Aeneas recalls the words of Venus:] "It is the pitiless gods, the gods who are destroying the wealth of Troy and laying the city low from top to bottom. Look—for I will remove the cloud that now dulls your mortal sight. Here, where you see the shattered towers and huge stones torn up, where dust and smoke are billowing, Neptune is convulsing the walls, shaking the foundations with his trident as he uproots the city. Here Juno, most cruel, leads the others in seizing the Scaean gates: raging and clad in iron armor she calls the Greeks from the ships. Look over here—even now Tritonian Pallas has taken up her place upon the height of Troy's citadel: see how she is lit with the lurid storm-cloud and the ferocious Gorgon! The Father of the gods himself renews the courage and violence of the Greeks, himself he urges them on to fight."

I saw the fatal vision and the mighty power of the gods hostile to Troy. Then, indeed, I saw all Ilium collapse into the flames and Troy, built by Neptune, overturned from its foundations.

Aeneas Carrying Anchises. Attic red-figure krater, ca. 460 B.C.; height $17\frac{3}{4}$ in. The economy of the painting contrasts with Barocci's equally dramatic sketch. Ascanius is shown as an adult warrior, looking back at Aeneas, while Anchises looks back toward Creusa (on the left) and the Greek warriors. *(Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.)*

Yet Aeneas escaped, taking with him his father, Anchises (who carried the images of the city's gods in his hands), and his son, Ascanius (also called Iulus). His wife, Creusa, started with him and was lost to Aeneas' sight. Only her ghost appeared to him, foretelling his destiny and encouraging him to travel to a new world. The scene of Aeneas leaving Troy is heavy with symbolism, and it is with hope for the future that Aeneas, burdened with the past, leaves the doomed city (*Aeneid* 2. 707–711, 721–725):

"Then come, dear father, sit on my shoulders; I will carry you, the load will not weigh me down. Whatever chance may fall, we will share a common danger and a common salvation. Let little Iulus walk beside me and let my wife follow.

. . ." With these words I spread my cloak and the skin of a tawny lion across my shoulders and neck and lifted the burden. Little Iulus took my right hand and, hardly able to keep up, walked beside his father.

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NOTES

1. Pindar, *Nemean Ode* 10. In Theocritus, *Idyll* 22, the quarrel begins when the Dioscuri carry off the daughters of Leucippus from their intended husbands, Idas and Lynceus. The "Rape of the Leucippides" was a common subject in ancient art. Another version has one of the divine twins in heaven and the other in Hades on alternate days.
2. Euripides brings them on dramatically at the end of his *Electra,* not only as the protectors of sailors but also as champions of a better morality than that represented by Apollo (see p. 434).
3. Their appearance as horsemen on white steeds at the battle of Lake Regillus in 496 led to a great Roman victory.
4. Aphrodite is said (also by Stesichorus) to have made Helen unfaithful as punishment for Helen's father, Tyndareus, who had once omitted to sacrifice to the goddess. For Helen in Egypt, see Herodotus 2.112–120 and Euripicles, Helen.
5. Hecuba's stepson, Aesacus.
6. For the historical facts about Troy and the Trojan War, see pp. 43–46.
7. Laomedon was a nephew of Ganymede, whom Zeus had snatched up to Olympus to become the cupbearer of the gods (pp. 116–117). In compensation, Zeus gave Tros (father of Ganymede) the divine horses that Laomedon inherited and failed to give to Heracles.
8. The story of Troïlus' love for Cressida (daughter, in this version, of Calchas) is an invention of the Middle Ages; Boccaccio and Chaucer took the story from the *Roman de Troie* of Benôit de Ste. Maure. Shakespeare's play is a further variation.
9. Although the contingents supplied by Odysseus, king of Ithaca, and Ajax, prince of Salamis, were among the smallest (only twelve ships each), their personal prowess gave them preeminence.
10. The comparative importance of the Greek leaders may be gauged from the size of their contingents in the *Catalogue* in Book 2 of the *Iliad:* Agamemnon, one hundred ships; Nestor, ninety; Diomedes and Idomeneus, eighty each; Menelaüs, sixty; Achilles, sixty; Ajax the Less, forty; Ajax, son of Telamon, and Odysseus, twelve each.
11. Palamedes, son of Nauplius, was, after Odysseus, the cleverest of the Greeks; he was credited with a number of inventions. His unmasking of the "madness" earned him the hostility of Odysseus, who eventually contrived his death.
12. For the role of this secret in the story of Prometheus, see pp. 90 and 147; for Thetis' supplication to Zeus on behalf of Achilles, see pp. 119–120.

13. Similar magic was practiced by Demeter at Eleusis on the child Demophoön.
14. Nowhere does Homer mention a physical relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias, probably not speaking in purely spiritual terms, identifies Patroclus as older and less beautiful than Achilles and his lover, contradicting Aeschylus, who (in a play no longer extant) made Achilles the lover rather than the beloved of Patroclus.
15. The figure is given in the *Catalogue* in Book 2 of the *Iliad*. Ancient as this document is and historically of the greatest importance, its numbers are inflated.
16. The most common version of his offense is that he had killed a stag sacred to the goddess. Some say that Artemis caused no winds to blow at all.
17. This version underlies Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Tauris* (see p. 415).
18. After the Trojan War, Calchas challenged the seer Mopsus to a contest by asking him how many unripe figs there were on a nearby tree. When Mopsus gave the correct answer, Calchas died, for he was fated to do so if he met a cleverer prophet than himself.
19. Some versions have Calchas make the prophecy and Neoptolemus accompany Odysseus to Lemnos. Sophocles and Aeschylus both wrote tragedies on Philoctetes; that of Sophocles is extant.
20. Pope's translation of this passage is given on pp. 687–688.
21. Today Helen is often defended as the guiltless victim; for example, see Mihiko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Helen is studied in the depictions by Homer, Vergil, Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*), and Shakespeare (*Troilus and Cressida*), using theories of sacrifice and scapegoating and the conflict between patriarchal attitudes and victimized women.
22. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam* (New York: Atheneum, 1994).
23. Of great interest is *Penthesilea*, by the renowned German playwright Heinrich von Kleist, translated into English by Joel Agee, with pictures by Maurice Sendak (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).
24. This is the same Thersites who spoke out of turn in the assembly of the Greeks in Book 2 of the *Iliad*.
25. In another version Thetis takes the corpse of Achilles to the island of Leuce (in the Black Sea), where she restored it to life. In Book 11 of the *Odyssey* the ghost of Achilles talks with Odysseus and complains bitterly of his fate in the Underworld.
26. Ajax is the Latin form of the Greek Aias. For the metamorphosis of Hyacinthus, see p. 240.
27. Menelaüs narrates this episode in Book 4 of the *Odyssey* to Odysseus' son, Telemachus.
28. His sacrilege had a strange historical consequence; for a thousand years the Locrians annually sent two daughters of noble families to serve as temple servants of Athena at Troy (i.e., the later foundations after the fall of Priam's city) as a penance for Ajax's crime. If any of these girls was caught by the Trojans before she reached the temple, she was put to death. This penance was ended not long before A.D. 100. There is a connection between the name Oïleus and the Greek name for Troy, Ilium.
29. The gods are here called by their Latin names.

CHAPTER

20

THE RETURNS AND THE *ODYSSEY*

The returns of the Greek leaders from Troy were narrated in an epic called *Nostoi* (Returns), of which only a brief prose summary and three lines of verse are extant.[1] It omits the return of Odysseus, which is the subject of Homer's *Odyssey*.

AGAMEMNON, MENELAÜS, AND NESTOR

Agamemnon and Menelaüs quarreled over the departure and so parted company. Agamemnon sailed for Greece with part of the fleet, including the contingent of the Locrians. Near the island of Mykonos, Athena, in her anger at the sacrilege committed at Troy by the Locrian leader Ajax (pp. 475–476), caused a storm to wreck many of the ships. Ajax swam to a nearby rock, where he boasted that not even the gods could prevent his escape from the dangers of the sea. For this Poseidon struck the rock with his trident, and Ajax was hurled into the sea and drowned.

During a second storm, which struck Agamemnon's fleet at Cape Caphareus in Euboea, Nauplius avenged the death of his son Palamedes by luring many ships onto the rocks with a false beacon. Agamemnon finally reached Mycenae, only to be murdered by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

Meanwhile Menelaüs, Nestor, and Diomedes set sail together from Troy. Nestor returned to Pylos safely. In the *Odyssey* he tells Telemachus how Menelaüs lost all his fleet except for five ships in a storm off Crete and eventually reached Egypt. On the advice of the sea-nymph Eidothea, he forced her father, Proteus, to tell him how to appease the gods and secure a safe voyage home. Thus after seven years he and Helen returned to Sparta, where they resumed their rule.[2] At the end of his life he was transported to the Elysian Fields, avoiding the usual fate of going to Hades, because he was the husband of Helen and the son-in-law of Zeus.

DIOMEDES

Diomedes reached Argos quickly, but there he found that his wife, Aegialia (daughter of Adrastus) had been unfaithful. Her adulteries were caused by Aphrodite, angry because Diomedes had wounded her at Troy. Diomedes left Argos and came to Italy, where the Apulian king, Daunus, gave him land.

Diomedes founded several cities in Italy, but he declined to help King Latinus against Aeneas. After his death he was worshiped as a hero in many places in Italy, and in one story Athena made him an immortal god.[3] His followers were turned into birds.[4]

IDOMENEUS

Idomeneus returned to Crete to find that his wife, Meda, had committed adultery with Leucus, who had then murdered her and her daughter and made himself king over ten of the cities of Crete. Idomeneus was driven out by Leucus and came to Calabria in southern Italy, where he was worshiped as a hero after his death.[5]

Servius, the ancient commentator on Vergil, tells a legend which is similar to the biblical story of Jephthah's vow (Judges 11:30–11:40). Idomeneus was caught in a storm during the voyage home and vowed, if he were saved, to sacrifice to Poseidon the first living thing that met him. When he returned home, his son came out first to meet him. After Idomeneus had fulfilled his vow, a pestilence attacked the Cretans, who took it to be a divine punishment for Idomeneus' act and drove him into exile.

PHILOCTETES

Philoctetes returned to Thessaly but was driven out by his people. He came to southern Italy and there he founded a number of cities and after his death was worshiped as a hero.

The stories of Diomedes, Idomeneus, and Philoctetes seem to reflect the founding of Greek colonies in southern Italy from the eighth century onwards. All three were worshiped as heroes after their death.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, warned by Thetis not to return by sea, took the land route back to Greece, accompanied by Helenus and Andromache. With them and his wife, Hermione (daughter of Menelaüs), he left his home in Phthia and came to Molossia in Epirus, where he ruled over the Molossi. He was killed at Delphi and there became a hero with his own cult.

ODYSSEUS

The return of Odysseus forms a saga in itself, to which many folktale elements have accrued. Here is the summary of the *Odyssey* given by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (17):

> The story of the *Odyssey* is not long; a man is away from home for many years; Poseidon constantly is on the watch to destroy him, and he is alone; at home his

property is being wasted by suitors, and his son is the intended victim of a plot. He reaches home, tempest-tossed; he makes himself known, attacks his enemies and destroys them, and is himself saved. This is the heart of the matter: the rest is episodes.

The adventures of Odysseus have been taken as symbolic (e.g., Odysseus conquers death in his visit to the Underworld) or as connected with real places that had become known to the Greeks as their trade and colonization expanded. For the most part, however, they are romantic legends and folktales set in imaginary places and grafted onto the saga of a historical prince's return from a long absence.[6]

During the Trojan War, Odysseus was the wisest of the Greek heroes and a brave warrior. After Achilles' death, Odysseus inherited his divine armor. In the *Odyssey* he experiences many adventures, usually escaping from danger through his intelligence and courage. He meets with many men, women, goddesses, and monsters, and he remains faithful to Penelope, the wife whom he left in Ithaca with his son, Telemachus.[7] Homer, with his customary perception and art, frames just the right introduction to establish our good faith in Odysseus. In Book 5, we first meet our hero, who has been marooned for seven years on the island of Ogygia, captive of the beautiful and divine nymph, Calypso. She comes down to the shore to find her unhappy victim Odysseus, gazing across the sea, pining for home—an indelible tableau of enduring and overriding devotion (151–158):

Calypso found Odysseus sitting on the shore. His eyes were always wet with tears. His sweet life was ebbing away, while he bemoaned the impossibility of his homecoming, since the nymph no longer gave him any pleasure. The nights he was forced to spend lying with her in her grotto; certainly he did not want to, but she did. The days he spent amidst the rocks on the shore, his heart racked by tears and groans and misery, as he looked out across the barren sea, weeping.

Story of the *Odyssey*

At the time the poem begins Odysseus is in the middle of his adventures. Books 1–4 relate the situation in Ithaca, where in Odysseus' absence Penelope is besieged by suitors who want her hand in marriage and with it her kingdom. As we have just seen we first meet Odysseus in Book 5, detained on Ogygia, the island of the divine nymph Calypso. After he has sailed away from this island and his raft has been wrecked, Odysseus relates to his rescuers the events previous to his arrival on Ogygia. The poem then continues with the arrival of Odysseus on Ithaca, his revenge on the suitors for the hand of Penelope, and his eventual recognition by and reunion with Penelope.

The resourceful character of Odysseus dominates the story, but the gods also play a significant part, especially Poseidon, who is hostile to the hero, and Athena, who protects him. Homer introduces Odysseus in the opening lines (1–21) of the *Odyssey:*

Hermes Ordering Calypso to Release Odysseus, by Gerard de Lairesse (1641–1711). Oil on canvas, 1670; 36 × 45 in. Odysseus, loosely garbed in a scarlet robe, and Calypso embrace on a voluptuous bed. Above, Zeus addresses the council of the gods (Apollo is behind him), from which Hermes descends to bring the commands of Zeus. To the left a child plays with the armor of Odysseus, and to the right in the background servants prepare a feast in a columned banqueting hall. At the right is a clothed statue of a woman holding a basket in which is a bird, perhaps Aphrodite and her dove. De Lairesse has changed Calypso's cave into a luxurious palace, and there is no hint of the longing of Odysseus for Ithaca and Penelope in his splendid reinterpretation of Homer's text. *(Dutch. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 92.2.)*

Of the man tell me, O Muse, the man of many ways,[8] who traveled afar after he had sacked the holy city of Troy. He experienced the cities and the thoughts of many men, and his spirit suffered many sorrows on the sea, as he labored for his own life and for the homecoming of his companions. Yet even so he could not protect his companions, much though he wished it, for they perished by their own folly, when thoughtlessly they had eaten the cattle of Helius, Hyperion the sun-god. And the god took away the day of their homecoming. From

Calypso and Ulysses, by Emily Marshall. Watercolor on paper, 1820–1835; 19 × 24 in. Calypso, in the dress of a woman of the early nineteenth century, tries to comfort Odysseus as he looks over the ocean and thinks of Penelope. Her left hand rests on his shoulder and behind is a river landscape with a palm tree to give a suitably exotic air. Nothing is known of the artist, whose deceptively naïve style has caught the pathos of the situation in which the goddess and the hero find themselves. *(Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, Virginia. Reproduced by permission.)*

some point in these things, O goddess, daughter of Zeus, begin to tell me also the tale.

Then all the others, who had escaped sheer destruction, were at home, safe from the sea and the war. But this man alone, longing for his homecoming and his wife, did the nymph, the lady Calypso, keep in her hollow cave, desiring him as her husband. But when, as the years rolled round, that year came in which the gods had destined his return home to Ithaca, not even then did he escape from his labors nor was he with his friends. Yet the gods pitied him, all except Poseidon, and he unrelentingly was hostile to godlike Odysseus, until he returned to his own land.

The Cicones and the Lotus Eaters

It took Odysseus ten years to reach home. When he and his contingent left Troy, they came to the Thracian city of Ismarus, home of the Cicones, which they sacked before being driven off. They had spared Maron, priest of Apollo, in their attack, and he in return gave them twelve jars of fragrant red wine, which was to prove its value later. They were driven southward by a storm to the land of the lotus eaters. Here their reception was friendly but no less dangerous, for whoever ate of the fruit of the lotus forgot everything and wanted only to stay where he was, eating lotus fruit. Odysseus got his men away, even those who had tasted the fruit, and sailed to the land of the Cyclopes.

The Cyclopes

The Cyclopes were one-eyed giants, herdsmen, living each in his own cave. One of them was Polyphemus, son of Poseidon, whose cave Odysseus and twelve picked companions entered. In the cave were sheep and lambs, cheeses, and other provisions, to which they helped themselves while waiting for the return of the cave's owner. When Polyphemus returned with his flocks, he shut the entrance of the cave with a huge stone, and then caught sight of the visitors, two of whom he ate for his supper. He breakfasted on two more the next day and another two when he returned the second evening.

Now Odysseus had with him some of the wine of Maron, and with this he made Polyphemus drunk; he told him his name was Nobody (*Outis*), and the giant, in return for the excellent wine, promised that he would reward Nobody by eating him last. He then fell asleep. Odysseus sharpened a wooden stake and heated it in the fire; then he and his surviving men drove it into the solitary eye of the sleeping giant. As he cried out in agony the other Cyclopes came running to the cave's entrance, only to hear the cry "Nobody is killing me," so that they assumed that not much was wrong and left Polyphemus alone.

Next morning Polyphemus, now blind, removed the stone at the entrance and let his flocks out, feeling each animal as it passed. But Odysseus had tied his men each to the undersides of three sheep, and himself clung to the belly of the biggest ram; so he and his men escaped. As Odysseus sailed away, he shouted his real name to the Cyclops, who hurled the top of a mountain at him and nearly wrecked the ship. Polyphemus had long before been warned of Odysseus, and as he recognized the name he prayed to his father Poseidon (*Odyssey* 9. 530–535):

> Grant that Odysseus may not return home, but if it is fated for him once more to see those he loves and reach his home and country, then let him arrive after many years, in distress, without his companions, upon another's ship, and may he find trouble in his house.
>
> The prayer was heard.

The Blinding of Polyphemus. Proto-Attic vase from Eleusis, mid-seventh century B.C.; height of vase 56 in., of neck 15 in. Odysseus (painted in white) and his companions drive a long pole into the eye of the Cyclops, who holds the cup of wine that has made him drunk. This brutal scene is one of the earliest "free" vase-paintings after the Geometric period. *(Eleusis, Museum. Photograph courtesy of Hirmer Verlag, München.)*

Aeolus and the Laestrygonians

Odysseus, reunited with the rest of his fleet, next reached the floating island of Aeolus, keeper of the winds, who lived with his six sons, who were married to his six daughters. After he had entertained Odysseus, Aeolus gave him as a parting gift a leather bag containing all the winds and showed him which one to release so as to reach home. Thus he sailed back to Ithaca and was within reach of land when he fell asleep. His men, believing that the bag contained gold that

Odysseus was keeping for himself, opened it, and all the winds rushed out and blew the ships back to Aeolus' island. Aeolus refused to help them any more, reasoning that they must be hated by the gods. Odysseus and his men sailed on to the land of the Laestrygonians. They sank all Odysseus' ships except his own and ate up the crews. So Polyphemus' curse was already working, and Odysseus sailed away with his solitary ship.

Circe

He reached the island of Aeaea, the home of the witch Circe, daughter of the Sun. Odysseus divided his men into two groups; he stayed behind with the one while the other, twenty-three men in all, went to visit the ruler of the island.

Circe and Her Lovers in a Landscape, by Dosso Dossi (ca. 1479–1542). Oil on canvas, ca. 1525; $39\frac{1}{2} \times 53\frac{1}{2}$ in. Dossi was court painter to the dukes of Ferrara, where Ariosto composed his poem *Orlando Furioso,* whose Alcina is probably the origin of Dossi's Circe. She points to an inscribed tablet, and on the ground lies an open book of magic, whereas Homer's Circe used a wand and drugs to transform her victims. The exquisite landscape is populated by peaceful animals and birds, far different from Homer's wolves and lions and the swine into which she turned Odysseus' men. *(Samuel H. Kress Collection, © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)*

They found Circe with various animals around her, and they themselves (except for Eurylochus, who brought the news back to Odysseus) became pigs when they ate her food, swine in appearance and sound, but still having human minds.[9] As Odysseus went to rescue his men, he encountered the god Hermes, who told him how to counter Circe's charms and gave him as an antidote the magic herb *moly*, whose "root is black and flower as white as milk." So he ate Circe's food unharmed and threatened her with his sword when she tried to turn him into a pig. She recognized him and instead made love to him. She then set a feast before him, which he would not touch before he had made her change his men back into their human shape. Odysseus lived with Circe for a year and by her begot a son, Telegonus. At the end of a year Odysseus, urged on by his men, asked Circe to send him on his way home. She agreed, but told him that he first had to go to the Underworld and there learn the way home from the prophet Tiresias.

THE *NEKUIA*

Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, which tells of Odysseus' experiences in the Underworld, is generally referred to as the Book of the Dead or the *Nekuia*, the name of the rite by which ghosts were summoned and questioned. Odysseus' visit to the Underworld is a conquest of death, the most formidable struggle a hero has to face. The hero who can return from the house of Hades alive has achieved all that a mortal can achieve. The *Nekuia* of Odysseus is different in one important respect from its most famous imitation: in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas actually descends to the Underworld and himself passes through it (see pp. 339–348), whereas Odysseus goes to the entrance and there performs the ritual sacrifice that summons up the spirits of the dead. Passages that tell of Odysseus' journey from Aeaea to the Underworld, his performance of the rite, and his conversations with a number of the ghosts are translated at length at the beginning of Chapter 15; here we provide a summary of his visit.

Following Circe's directions, Odysseus sailed with his men to the western limit of the world. As he performed the ritual sacrifice at the entrance to the world of the dead, many ghosts came, among them Tiresias, who foretold the disasters that yet awaited Odysseus on his journey. He would reach home, but alone and after many years. At Ithaca he would find the arrogant suitors pressing Penelope hard and wasting his substance. But he would kill them all, and he would have still more travels ahead of him before death came.

From Tiresias, Odysseus also learned that the spirits with whom he wished to speak must be allowed to drink the blood of the sacrificial victim; the others he kept away by threatening them with his sword. Among the ghosts who appeared and spoke were those of Odysseus' mother, Anticlea, and of Agamemnon, Achilles, and Ajax, son of Telamon. Achilles said that "he would rather be

a slave to a poor man on earth than be king over all the souls of the dead." Ajax would not answer Odysseus a word, for he still was grieved by his loss in the contest for Achilles' arms.

Eventually Odysseus left the house of Hades for fear that the Gorgon's head (which turns all whom it beholds to stone) might appear. He rejoined his men and sailed back to Aeaea.

The Sirens, the Planctae, Charybdis, and Scylla

Circe sent him on his way after warning him of the dangers that lay ahead. First were the Sirens (said by Homer to be two in number, but by other authors to be more). To Homer they were human in form, but in popular tradition they were birdlike, with women's heads. From their island meadow they would lure passing sailors onto the rocks; all around them were the whitened bones of their victims. Odysseus sailed by them unharmed, stopping his men's ears with wax,

Odysseus and the Sirens. Athenian red-figure stamnos, ca. 450 B.C.; height $13\frac{3}{4}$ in. Odysseus, lashed to the mast, safely hears the song of the Sirens as his men row by, their ears plugged with wax. Two Sirens (winged creatures with human heads) stand on cliffs, while a third plunges headlong into the sea. The artist, by the dramatic angle of Odysseus' head, expresses the hero's longing to be free of his bonds, and the turned head of the oarsman on the right and the helmsman's gesture add further tension to the scene. *(British Museum, London. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees.)*

while he had himself bound to the ship's mast so that he could not yield to the irresistible beauty of the Sirens' song.

The next danger was the two wandering rocks (Planctae) between which one ship only, the *Argo*, had ever safely passed. Odysseus avoided them by sailing close to two high cliffs; in the lower of these lived Charybdis (she is not described by Homer), who three times a day sucked in the water of the strait and spouted it upward again. To sail near that cliff was certain destruction, and Odysseus chose as the lesser evil the higher cliff where was the cave of Scylla, daughter of the sea deity Phorcys. Originally a sea-nymph, she had been changed through the jealousy of Poseidon's wife Amphitrite into a monster with a girdle of six dogs' heads and with twelve feet, by means of which she would snatch sailors from passing ships. From Odysseus' ship she snatched six men, whom she ate in her cave. Odysseus and the rest of the crew were unharmed.

The Cattle of the Sun

Last, Circe told Odysseus of the island of Thrinacia, where Helius (the Sun) pastured his herds of cattle and sheep; she strictly warned Odysseus not to touch a single one of the animals if he and his men wished ever to return to Ithaca. But Odysseus' men could not show such restraint after weeks of being detained by adverse winds, and while he was sleeping they killed some of the cattle for food. Helius complained to Zeus, and as a punishment for the sacrilege of killing the god's cattle Zeus raised a storm when the ship set sail and hurled a thunderbolt at it. The ship sank, and all the men were drowned except for Odysseus, who escaped, floating on the mast and part of the keel.

After the wreck, Odysseus drifted back to Charybdis, where he avoided death by clinging to a tree growing on the cliff until the whirlpool propelled his mast to the surface after sucking it down.

Calypso

Odysseus drifted over the sea to Ogygia, the island home of Calypso, daughter of Atlas, with whom he lived for seven years. Although she loved him and offered to make him immortal, he could not forget Penelope. Finally, after Hermes brought her the express orders of Zeus, Calypso helped Odysseus build a raft and sail away.

The Phaeacians

Even now Odysseus was not free from disaster; Poseidon saw him as he approached Scheria (the island of the Phaeacians) and shattered the raft with a storm. After two days and two nights, helped by the sea-goddess Leucothea (formerly the mortal Ino, daughter of Cadmus) and by Athena, he reached land, naked, exhausted, and alone.

The king of the Phaeacians was Alcinoüs, and his daughter was Nausicaä. The day after Odysseus' landing Nausicaä went to wash clothes near the seashore and came face-to-face with Odysseus. She gave him her protection and brought him back to the palace. Here he was warmly entertained by Alcinoüs and his queen, Arete, and related the story of his adventures to them. The Phaeacians gave him rich gifts, and a day later they brought him back to Ithaca on one of their ships, in a deep sleep. So Odysseus reached Ithaca ten years after the fall of Troy, alone and on another's ship, as Polyphemus had prayed. Yet even now Poseidon did not relax his hostility; as the Phaeacians' ship was entering the harbor of Scheria on its return, he turned the ship and its crew to stone as a punishment upon the Phaeacians for conveying strangers over the seas, especially those who were the objects of Poseidon's hatred.

ITHACA

In Ithaca more than one hundred suitors (young noblemen from Ithaca and the nearby islands) were courting Penelope in the hope of taking Odysseus' place as her husband and as king of Ithaca (for Telemachus, Odysseus' son by Penelope, was considered still too young to succeed). They spent their days feasting at Odysseus' palace, wasting his possessions. Penelope, however, remained faithful to Odysseus, even though he seemed to be dead. She put the suitors off by promising to choose one of them when she should have finished weaving a magnificent cloak to be a burial garment for Odysseus' father, Laertes. For three years she wove the robe by day and undid her work by night, but in the fourth year her deception was uncovered, and a decision was now unavoidable.

At this stage Odysseus returned. Helped by Athena, he gained entrance at the palace disguised as a beggar, after being recognized by his faithful old swineherd, Eumaeus, and by Telemachus. Telemachus had been on a journey to Pylos and Sparta and had learned from Nestor and Menelaüs that his father was still alive. Outside the palace, Odysseus' old hound, Argus, recognized his master after nineteen years' absence, and died.

At the palace Odysseus was insulted by the suitors and by another beggar, Irus, whom he knocked out in a fight. Still in disguise, he gave to Penelope an exact description of Odysseus and of a curious brooch he had worn. As a result, she confided in him her plan to give herself next day to the suitor who succeeded in stringing Odysseus' great bow and shooting an arrow straight through a row of twelve axe heads. Also at this time Odysseus was recognized by his old nurse, Euryclea, who knew him from a scar on his thigh, which he had received when hunting a boar with his grandfather, Autolycus. Thus the scene was set for Odysseus' triumphant return; his son and his faithful retainers knew the truth, and Penelope had fresh encouragement to prepare her for the eventual recognition.

The Return of Odysseus, by Pintoricchio (Bernardo Betti, 1454–1513). Fresco transferred to canvas, 1509, 60 in. × 50 in. To the left sits Penelope at her loom, with Euryclea beside her; above her head are the bow and quiver of Odysseus. Telemachus runs to greet his mother, and behind him are a young suitor (note the falcon on his wrist), the seer Theoclymenus, and Eumaeus. Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, is coming through the door on the right. In the background is the ship of the Phaeacians; to its left is Odysseus' boat being shattered by Poseidon, and, in the wooded landscape beyond, Odysseus meets Circe, while his men root around as pigs. This fresco was originally painted for a wall in a room of the Ducal Palace in Siena. *(London: National Gallery. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees.)*

The Bow and the Killing of the Suitors

The trial of the bow took place next day. When none of the suitors could even so much as string it, Odysseus asked to be allowed to try. Effortlessly he achieved the task and shot the arrow through the axes. Next he shot the leading suitor, Antinoüs, and in the ensuing fight he and Telemachus and their two faithful servants killed all the other suitors. The scene where Odysseus strings the bow and reveals himself to the suitors is one of the most dramatic in all epic poetry (*Odyssey* 21. 404–423; 22. 1–8):

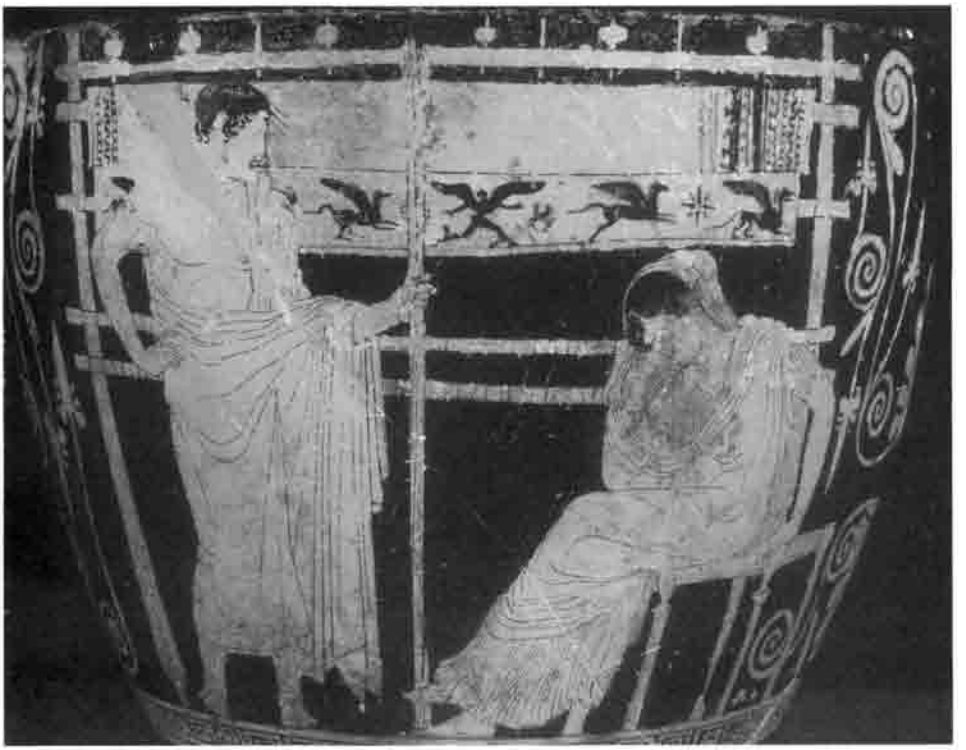
But crafty Odysseus straightway took the great bow in his hands and looked at it on all sides, just as a man who is skilled at the lyre and at song easily stretches a string round a new peg, fitting the well-turned sheep's gut around the peg—

> even so without effort did he string the great bow, did Odysseus. He took it in his right hand and made trial of the string, and it sang sweetly under his hand, in sound like a swallow. Then great sorrow seized the suitors, and in all of them their skin changed color. Zeus, giving a sign, thundered loudly. Then godlike, patient Odysseus rejoiced that the wily son of Cronus had sent him a sign. Then he chose a swift arrow, one that lay on the table beside him uncovered, while the others lay in the hollow quiver—and these the Achaeans would soon feel. This arrow, then, he took, and he drew back the string and the notched arrow, sitting where he was on his stool. And he shot the arrow aiming straight ahead, and of the hafted axes he missed none from the first to the last, and the arrow weighted with bronze sped straight through to the end. . . .
>
> Then wily Odysseus stripped off his rags, and he leaped to the great threshold holding the bow and the quiver full of arrows, and he poured out the arrows in front of his feet. Then he spoke to the suitors: "This my labor inexorable has been completed. Now I shall aim at another target which no man has yet struck, if I can hit it and Apollo grants my prayer." He spoke and shot a death-dealing arrow straight at Antinoüs.

The suitors all were killed, and only the herald, Medon, and the bard, Phemius, were spared. Odysseus called Euryclea to identify the twelve servant-women who had insulted him and had been the lovers of the suitors. They were forced to cleanse the hall, and then they were mercilessly hanged, while the disloyal goatherd, Melanthius, was mutilated and killed. The consequences of the battle in the hall were grisly, a reminder that Odysseus was a warrior who had taken part in the sack of Troy and was merciless to his enemies.

TELEMACHUS

The portrait in the *Odyssey* of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus and Penelope, is a masterful depiction of the hero as a young man. His introduction in Book 1 establishes his character with sure and subtle brevity. Athena has come down from Olympus to inspire courage and action in Telemachus, still a boy at heart. We first meet him in the palace, helplessly witnessing the abusive arrogance of the suitors. He sits sad and despondent, daydreaming that his father had already returned and driven out the suitors and saved them from his insolence and disrespect. Amidst their drunken revels, he is the only one to notice Athena disguised as Mentes waiting at the threshold. He alone is gentleman enough to rise and greet her with a courtesy demanded by the sacred bond of guest-friendship. In a few lines, we know that Telemachus is a worthy son of his heroic father and we are prepared for his gratifying development. By the end of Book 1 he will have stood up to his mother, who is surprised by his manly effort to break loose from her overprotective apron strings. He will go on to have an odyssey of his own (appropriately a mini-odyssey, to be sure, in Books 3 and 4) to Pylos and Sparta to find out news of Odysseus from Nestor and Menelaüs and Helen. When Odysseus does return, it is Telemachus who can almost, but

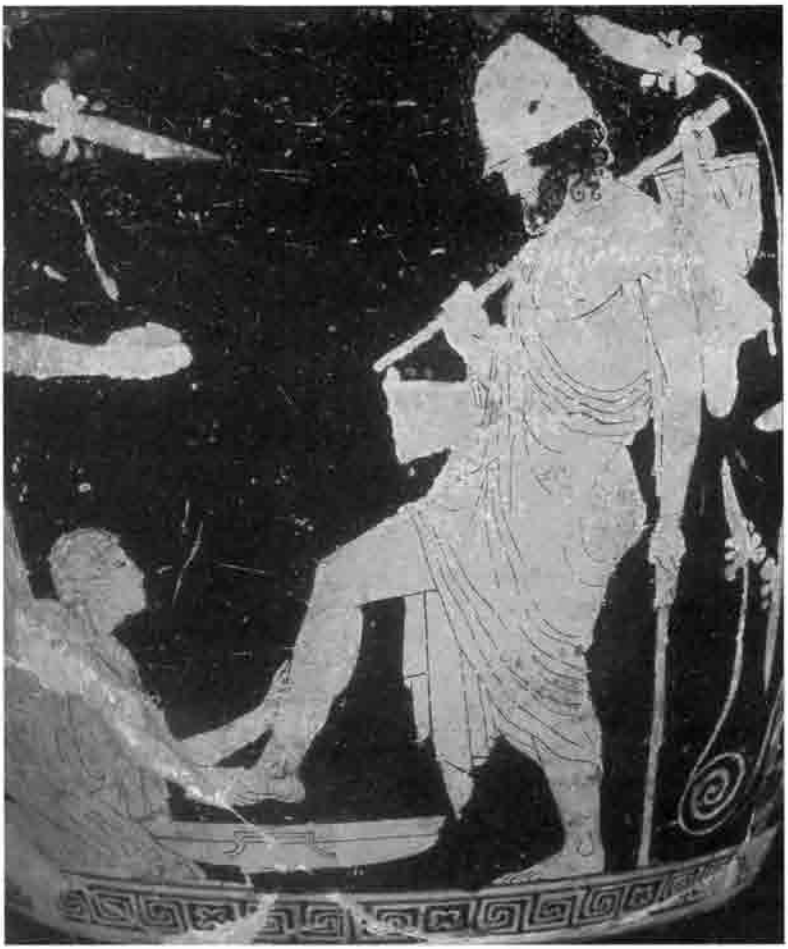


Penelope at Her Loom and *The Washing of Odysseus' Feet.* Attic red-figure cup, ca. 440 B.C.; height 8 in., diameter 62 in. On the first side Penelope sits sadly at her room, while Telemachus talks with her. On the second side (see the opposite page) Euryclea (named Antiphata on the vase) looks up at Odysseus with her mouth open, as she recognizes him from the scar. To the right stands Eumaeus, evidently offering a gift to Odysseus, who wears the traveler's cap and carries the beggar's basket and stick. *(Chiusi: Museo Civico.)*

not quite yet, string his father's bow, although he would have done so if his father had allowed him a fourth try. At the climax of the poem, it is father and son, side by side, who wreak the just slaughter of the sinful suitors.

PENELOPE

We have said earlier that Odysseus "remained faithful to Penelope," and the reunion with his wife is the goal of the epic. Penelope is not a passive figure: she is the equal of Odysseus in intelligence and loyalty, and she is resourceful in fending off the suitors and, equally significant, in choosing her time and method for the recognition of Odysseus. When she finally does recognize him the poet describes her "as fitting his heart" (*thymares*), that is, she is a perfect match for



the man who is the "man of many twists and turns" (*polytropos*, an epithet given him in the first line of the poem), the cleverest of the Greeks.

Penelope's usual epithet is *periphron* ("circumspect"); that is, she is wary and resourceful, able to keep the suitors at bay by her intelligence. In her first meeting with Odysseus (in Book 19) she says "I spin out my stratagems," and she tells him of the weaving and unravelling of the burial-garment for Laertes. She used her sexual power to weaken the suitors. When she appears before them she is repeatedly likened to Aphrodite and Artemis, and "the suitors' knees went slack; she bewitched their spirits with lust, and all longed to lie beside her in bed" (*Odyssey* 18. 212–214). She gets them to give her gifts (observed with joy by Odysseus himself, who is in the hall disguised as a beggar), and, when it ap-

pears inevitable that she must choose one of them, she devises the test of the bow. Finally, she insists that the stranger (i.e., Odysseus, with whom, as we have seen earlier, she had conversed) be allowed to take part in the test. But before Odysseus actually strings the bow she is told by Telemachus (now for the first time asserting himself as his father's heir apparent and head of the household) to go upstairs. Thus she is absent during Odysseus' successful stringing of the bow, the battle in the hall and its cleansing, and the killing of the servants. The stage is set, as it were, for the climactic scene between Penelope and Odysseus, leading to recognition and reunion.

At their first meeting (in Book 19) she had asked the stranger who he was, and he had begun his reply by likening her to a king who rules over a just and prosperous city—in other words, he likens his wife to himself as king of Ithaca. Later (still not revealing how much she knows of his identity) she shares with him a dream in which an eagle kills her flock of twenty geese and he agrees with her that it is an omen of Odysseus' return. Penelope's words are fraught with psychological import. She begins with confidences about how her nights are filled with anxiety. She lies awake, miserable with indecision (525–534):

> Should I stay here by the side of my son and keep all my possessions safe, my property, my slaves, and my grand and lofty palace, respecting the bed of my husband and what people might say or should I go off with the best one of the Achaeans here who court me and offer lavish gifts? As for my son, as long as he was still young and immature, he would not allow me to leave the palace and marry a new husband but now that he is grown up and has reached maturity, he beseeches me to go away, so upset is he about his estate, which these Achaeans are swallowing up.

More Freudian is the insight offered by the dream that Penelope goes on to relate (535–553):

> Now I want you to listen to a dream of mine and interpret it for me. At my home there are twenty geese who come to eat corn from a water-trough and I love watching them. But down from a mountain swoops a huge eagle with hooked beak and he breaks their necks and kills them all. They lie strewn together about the house but he flies aloft into the divine upper air. I weep and wail, although it is only a dream and the Achaean women with lovely hair gather round me as I grieve bitterly because the eagle has killed my geese. He comes back and perched on a beam jutting from the roof speaks in a human voice and restrains my tears. "Take heart, daughter of renowned Icarius. This is not a dream but a reality, a good deed that will be accomplished. The geese are your suitors and I who am the eagle in your dream will come back as your husband, who will bring a sorry fate down upon all your suitors." Thus he spoke and honeyed sleep left me. Looking around, I saw my geese in the courtyard by the trough, pecking at the grain, exactly where they were before.

The stranger in a brief answer assures Penelope that there is only one possible interpretation of her dream. Certain death lies in store for each and every

suitor. We wonder how Odysseus feels about Penelope's avowed affection for her geese and marvel at Homer's finely etched portrait of a complex woman, devoted to her husband but wary about her own future and not unflattered and unmoved by the attention and the gifts of a flock of suitors. Could she knowingly be leading this stranger on?

After the battle in the hall Penelope is wakened by Euryclea and refuses to admit that the stranger is Odysseus (we are not told whether she thinks he is). She comes down, and she and Odysseus sit opposite each other. When Telemachus reproves her for not embracing Odysseus she replies that if the stranger truly is Odysseus then "we will know it from each other even better, for we have signs which we know, hidden from others." Then she orders

NAMING ODYSSEUS

After Euryclea has recognized Odysseus from the scar on his thigh, Homer tells the story of the naming of Odysseus. His grandfather, Autolycus (father of Anticlea, the mother of Odysseus), was asked to name the infant, whom Euryclea had placed on his knees. "I shall call him *Odysseus*," he said, "because I have come being hateful [Greek, *odyssamenos*] to many men and women all over the fruitful earth." The Greek word is in the middle voice, that is, its subject can be either "an agent of rage or hatred but also its sufferer" (B. Knox's phrase). George Dimock suggests "man of pain," implying both the hero's sufferings and the suffering that he caused to others.

The anonymity or naming of Odysseus is an essential element in his story. In the first line of the *Odyssey* he is simply "[the] man": contrast the first line of the *Iliad*, where the hero, Achilles, is named. The conventions of heroic hospitality allowed hosts to ask their guest's name after he had eaten at their table: so Antinoüs asks, "Tell me the name that your mother and father call you by [at home]," and only then does Odysseus reply (*Odyssey* 9. 19), "I am Odysseus, son of Laertes." Odysseus controls the revelation of his name: for example, urged on by Athena, he chooses when to reveal himself to Telemachus in Book 16. Euryclea's discovery caught him by surprise, and his reaction was to threaten to kill her if she revealed it to others. The Cyclops asks his name and is told that it is *Outis* ("Nobody"). Arrived on Ithaca, Odysseus tells Athena that he is a Cretan. Penelope's first question at their first interview (19. 105) is, "Tell me, what people do you come from? Where are your city and your parents?," and Odysseus replies that he is a Cretan named *Aethon* ["shining," an epithet like that of the Cretan queen, *Phaedra*, "bright"]. Only after outwitting him with the test of the bed does Penelope finally achieve the self-revelation of the hero. Odysseus, "man of pain," is indeed both "Nobody" and the universal hero.

[Note: the Latin name for Odysseus is *Ulixes* or *Ulysses*, etymologically the same as the Greek name, with *Od-* shifting to *Ul-*, possibly (it has been suggested) influenced by a local dialect in Sicily or southern Italy.]

Euryclea to move the bed, which Odysseus himself had made, out of the marriage-chamber for him to sleep on outside.

Odysseus is furious that anyone would move his bed, for he had built it using a living olive tree as one of its supports and building the marriage-chamber around it. Thus he revealed the secret, and Penelope knew now that it was he.[10] Then, and only then, did she give way and embrace the husband who had been away for twenty years. The poet again uses a simile for Penelope that identifies her with Odysseus (*Odyssey* 23. 232–240):

He wept as he held the wife who matched his heart (*thymares*). Just as land is a welcome sight to shipwrecked sailors whose well-made ship Poseidon has shattered on the sea, battering it with wind and wave: few escape from the grey sea to reach land, and their skin is caked with brine, but they escape destruction and stand on land with joy—even so with joy did she look upon her husband, and her white arms would not let go of his neck.

In a sense Penelope *is* Odysseus, the sailor wrecked by Poseidon who reaches land. Thus by the similes of the king and the sailor, and by her resourceful patience and deliberate testing of the stranger, she gets him to reveal himself and proves herself to be his match.

The poet describes the end of Odysseus' labors with tact and delicacy. At the same time he allows Odysseus to recall his adventures (*Odyssey* 23. 300–343):

So when they (Odysseus and Penelope) had taken their delight in the joys of love, they took delight in words and spoke to each other. She, goddesslike among women, told of all she had endured in the hall as she watched the unseemly mob of suitors, who to win her slaughtered many oxen and fine sheep and drank many casks of wine. In his turn godlike Odysseus told all, the cares he had brought upon men and the grievous sufferings that he had endured. She delighted in his tale, and sleep did not fall upon her eyes until he had finished his tale.

He told first how he had subdued the Cicones and how he had come to the fertile land of the lotus-eating men. He told of the Cyclops' deeds and how he avenged his valiant companions, whom the Cyclops had pitilessly devoured. He told how he came to Aeolus, who received him kindly and sent him onward, yet it was not yet destined for him to come to his own dear land, for a storm again snatched him and bore him over the fish-full sea, groaning deeply. He told how he came to Telepolus and the Laestrygonians, who destroyed his ships and his well-greaved companions. He told of the deceit and wiles of Circe, and he told how he came to the dank house of Hades to consult the soul of Theban Tiresias, sailing on his well-benched ship. There he saw his companions and his mother, who bore him and nourished him when he was a baby.

He told how he heard the song of the clear-voiced Sirens, and how he came to the wandering rocks of the Planctae, and to terrible Charybdis and Scylla, whom no man before had escaped alive. He told how his companions had slain the cattle of Helius, and how Zeus, who thunders in the high heavens, had struck his swift ship with a smoky thunderbolt and killed all his companions, and only

he escaped evil death. He told how he came to the island Ogygia and the nymph Calypso, who kept him there in her hollow cave, desiring him to be her husband. She fed him and promised to make him immortal and ageless all his days, yet she did not persuade the heart in his breast. He told how, after many sufferings, he reached the Phaeacians, who honored him like a god and sent him with a ship to his own dear homeland with ample gifts of bronze and gold and clothing.

This was the last tale he told, when sweet sleep came upon him, sleep that relaxes the limbs and releases the cares of the spirit.

The End of the Odyssey

The last book of the *Odyssey* begins with Hermes escorting the souls of the dead suitors to the House of Hades, where they converse with the souls of Agamemnon and Achilles. The ghost of Amphimedon (one of the leading suitors) tells Agamemnon's ghost of Penelope's weaving and the test of the bow and the slaughter of the suitors. Agamemnon's ghost replies (*Odyssey* 24. 192–200):

Happy son of Laertes, wily Odysseus! You married a wife of great excellence (*arete*)! How virtuous was the mind of peerless Penelope, daughter of Icarius! How well she kept the memory of Odysseus, her wedded husband! Therefore the fame of her virtue will never fade, and the immortals will fashion a lovely song for mortals to sing in honor of Penelope, the wife who kept her counsel. She did not contrive crimes like the daughter of Tyndareus, who murdered her wedded husband.

Penelope is repeatedly contrasted with Clytemnestra in the *Odyssey*, most eloquently by Agamemnon himself.[11] Meanwhile Odysseus leaves the palace to find his father, Laertes, who is living as a farmer, away from the city. At first he conceals his identity from the old man, but soon he reveals himself. As they are sharing a meal in Laertes' farmhouse, news comes that the relatives of the suitors are approaching to avenge their deaths. Once again Odysseus must fight, helped by Athena, and Laertes, miraculously energized by the goddess, kills Eupeithes, father of Antinoüs. At this point Athena orders the men to stop fighting and Zeus casts a thunderbolt at her feet to confirm her command. She makes peace between Odysseus and the suitors' families, and so the epic ends.

Odysseus and Athena

Odysseus was especially helped by the goddess Athena, whose own attributes of wisdom and courage complement his gifts. The relationship of goddess and hero is brilliantly depicted by the poet in a scene after Odysseus, asleep, has been put ashore on Ithaca by the Phaeacians and wakes up, not knowing where he is. Athena, disguised as a young shepherd, has told him that he is on Ithaca (*Odyssey* 13. 250–255, 287–301):

Thus she spoke, and patient godlike Odysseus was glad, rejoicing in his own fatherland, as Pallas Athena had told him, the daughter of Zeus, bearer of the aegis. And he replied to her with winged words. He did not tell her the truth, but he held it back, always directing his mind in his breast for every advantage. [Odysseus then makes up a story which, however, does not fool the goddess.]

Thus he spoke, and the goddess, grey-eyed Athena, smiled and stroked him with her hand. In form she was like to a beautiful and tall woman, one who is expert in fine handiwork. She addressed him with these winged words:

"Crafty and wily would he be who could surpass you in every trick, even if a god were to compete with you. You rogue, deviser of tricks, never satisfied with deceit, even in your own land you were not going to abandon your deceit and your deceiving words, which are dear to you from your inmost heart. Still, come now, let us no longer talk like this, since we both know how to get the advantage. For you are by far the best of all mortals in counsel and in words, and I am famous among all the gods for wisdom and cunning. Yet you did not recognize Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus, who stands beside you in every labor and protects you."

The End of Odysseus' Life

Homer tells the subsequent history of Odysseus in the words of Tiresias' prophecy (*Odyssey* 11. 119–137):

When you have killed the suitors in your palace, then you must go, carrying a well-made oar, until you come to men who know not the sea nor eat food flavored with salt; nor know they of red-painted ships nor of shapely oars, which are the wings of ships. This shall be a clear sign that you shall not miss: when another traveler meets you and says that you have a winnowing-fan upon your fine shoulder, then plant the well-turned oar in the ground and sacrifice to Poseidon and to all the immortal gods. And death shall come to you easily, from the sea, such as will end your life when you are weary after a comfortable old age, and around you shall be a prosperous people.

Odysseus appeased Poseidon in the manner foretold by Tiresias, founding a shrine to Poseidon where he planted the oar. He returned to Ithaca. Years later, Telegonus, who had grown up on his mother Circe's island, sailed to Ithaca in search of his father. He was plundering the island and killed Odysseus, who was defending his possessions, not knowing who he was.[12]

The Universality of the *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey* is a splendid intermingling of true myth (tales about the gods), legend (stories ultimately reflecting the history of real heroes and heroines), and folktales, fairytales, and the like, which both amuse and edify. It is, perhaps, the finest example of the persistent mythological theme of the legendary Quest. In the case of Odysseus, his personal quest brings him back home, surmounting

all obstacles on his journey to punish the wicked and regain his wife, his son, and his kingdom. In subsequent literature, he has become a kind of Everyman. Certainly, to the Romans Odysseus (Ulysses) was a symbol of virtuous patience, and his endurance of adversity made him an example, especially for the Stoics. Plato, in the myth of Er that ends the *Republic*, shows Odysseus in the Underworld choosing for his next life an inconspicuous existence because of his memory of adversity.

Odysseus, then, perhaps more than any other, is the archetypal hero, just as Penelope is par excellence the archetypal heroine, each beautifully illustrating aspects of an exemplary human and heroic *arete* (excellence). Recently special attention has been given to the character and motives of Penelope. She has been seen as the peer of Odysseus in intelligence and in patience, qualities shown in her resistance to the long siege by the suitors and in her restraint on declaring her recognition of Odysseus. Penelope's reluctance to recognize Odysseus has increasingly been interpreted as a manifestation of her wisdom and self-control, leading attributes of her husband. The final reunion of husband and wife is consummated through the incident concerning their shared knowledge about the solid construction of their immovable marriage bed, with the olive tree forming one leg, a powerful symbol of the strength and persistence of their physical and spiritual love.

Homer's great epic has a unique, universal appeal to both young and old—and to the child and philosopher in us all. It can be read solely as a most entertaining story of travel and adventure, full of exciting episodes of delightful variety, a tale of abiding love that ends happily, with the just triumph of good over evil, or it can reveal to the artist and the sage the most profound insights about men and women, the gods and fate, and the meaning of human existence. The word "odyssey" itself has come into our language as synonymous with a journey and a quest, and never has the word "homecoming" found a more joyous resonance or deeper meaning than in the final books of the poem.[13]

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NOTES

1. The summary is ascribed to the fifth century A.D. scholar Proclus, who names Agias of Troezen as the author of the *Nostoi*. A useful discussion is by G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), Chapter 12.
2. For the story that Helen was in Egypt during the Trojan War, see p. 437.
3. Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 10. 7. Among the many narratives of the legend of Diomedes are those of Vergil (*Aeneid* 11. 243–295) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 14. 460–511).
4. Said by Ovid to be "next in shape to swans." What these birds were can only be guessed.
5. He is also associated with Colophon in Asia Minor.
6. Many attempts have been made to follow the route of Odysseus. See T. Severin, *The Ulysses Voyage: Sea Search for the Odyssey* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). Compare T. Severin, *The Jason Voyage: The Quest for the Golden Fleece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).
7. According to the conventions of Homeric society the liaisons with Calypso and Circe did not make Odysseus unfaithful. Cf. Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 64: "[Penelope] does not demand strict fidelity; neither she nor Helen object to their husbands' liaisons with other women, so long as they are temporary." The same point is made by Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York: Schocken, 1975), pp. 26–27, and by Marilyn Katz, *Penelope's Renown* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 13.
8. The Greek word *polytropos* (of many ways) means a combination of complexity, intelligence, and being widely traveled.
9. A powerful adaptation of this legend is the Circe episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.
10. The living olive tree and the bed are powerful sexual symbols for a psychoanalytical interpretation.
11. The soul of Agamemnon describes his murder in the first Underworld scene (*Odyssey* 11. 405–456). The *Odyssey* focuses on Clytemnestra's deed, not on Agamemnon's killing of his own daughter, Iphigenia, which motivated Clytemnestra's revenge.
12. The adventures of Odysseus subsequent to the *Odyssey* were narrated in the lost epic *Telegonia* by Eugammon of Cyrene. It ends with Telegonus conveying Odysseus' body with Penelope and Telemachus to Circe, who makes them immortal. Telegonus then marries Penelope and Circe marries Telemachus.
13. Of interest is a novel by Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (1997). Homer's *Odyssey* is reset in ninteenth-century America in the South, near the end of the Civil War. Inman, a wounded Confederate veteran, flees from the hospital where he is recovering to return to his home and to his beloved Ida, whom he intends to marry.

CHAPTER

21

PERSEUS AND THE LEGENDS OF ARGOS

HERA AND PHORONEUS

Argos was connected in history and in legend with Corinth and Thebes, and the Argive sagas demonstrate the many contacts of Argos with the eastern Mediterranean, notably the Levant and Egypt. While some of the legendary heroes are associated with a particular city of the Mycenaean Argolid (e.g., Heracles with Tiryns, Diomedes with Argos, and Perseus with Mycenae), it is often hard to distinguish between the separate cities. We shall generally use "Argos" to cover the whole Argolid and its cities.

Argos was the greatest center in Greece for the worship of Hera, and the Heraeum, the hill where Hera's sanctuary stood, was the religious center of the whole area. In the Argive saga, the first of men was Phoroneus, who established the kingdom of Argos and decided in favor of Hera in the contest for the land between Poseidon and Hera. In anger Poseidon dried up the Argive rivers, one of which, Inachus, was the father of Phoroneus. Ever after, the Argive rivers have been short of water.

The richness of Argive saga can be seen from the opening lines of Pindar's tenth *Nemean Ode:*

> Sing, O Graces, of the city of Danaüs and his fifty daughters on their shining thrones, of Argos, dwelling of Hera, a home fit for the gods; bright is the flame of her brave deeds unnumbered in their excellence. Long is the tale of Perseus and the Gorgon, Medusa; many are the cities of Egypt founded by the wisdom of Epaphus; Hypermnestra kept to the path of virtue and alone did not draw the dagger from its sheath. Fair Athena once made Diomedes divine; in Thebes the earth, struck by Zeus' thunderbolts, received the seer Amphiaraüs, the storm cloud of war. Ancient is Argos' excellence in beautiful women; Zeus revealed this truth when he came to Alcmena and to Danaë.

PERSEUS

DANAË AND ACRISIUS

Of the heroes of Argos, first in importance, though not in time, is Perseus. His great-grandfather Abas had twin sons, Proetus and Acrisius, who quarreled even before their birth.[1] Acrisius, who became king of Argos itself while Proetus ruled

Tiryns, had no sons and only one daughter, Danaë; an oracle foretold that her son would kill Acrisius. To keep her from having children, Acrisius shut Danaë up in a brazen underground chamber in his palace, but Zeus loved her and entered the chamber in the form of a shower of gold and lay with her.[2] Their child was Perseus, and Danaë kept him in the chamber for four years, unknown to Acrisius, until he was discovered from the noise he made while playing. Acrisius refused to believe that Zeus was the child's father and put mother and child into a chest which he set afloat on the sea. The chest floated to the island of Seriphos, where the fisherman Dictys (whose name means "net") found it and rescued Danaë and Perseus, giving them shelter in his own home.

Polydectes

Now Polydectes, brother of Dictys, was king of Seriphos, and as Perseus grew to manhood, he fell in love with Danaë, who refused him. He then summoned the leading men of the island to a banquet at which each man had to present him with the gift of a horse. Perseus boasted that he could just as easily give Polydectes the Gorgon's head. Polydectes, eager to get Perseus out of the way, took him at his word and ordered him to perform the task. In despair Perseus wandered to a lonely part of Seriphos, where Hermes and Athena came to his help with advice. That two gods should assist him is remarkable; Hermes belongs more to the Peloponnese than Athena, and it is very likely he was originally the hero's only supernatural helper. Since the Gorgon's head was an attribute of Athena's aegis, she may very early have been associated with the saga, for much of the literary tradition was in the hands of Athenians.[3] Pindar, writing in the first half of the fifth century B.C., makes Athena the sole helper: "Breathing courage, Danaë's son joined the company of blessed men, and Athena was his guide" (*Pythian Odes* 10. 44–46).

The Graeae

Advised by Hermes and Athena, Perseus made his way to the three daughters of Phorcys, sisters of the Gorgons and old women (in Greek, the *Graiai*) from their birth. They alone could tell Perseus the way to some nymphs who possessed certain magic objects he would need for his task, but would part with their information only under duress. Among them they had one eye and one tooth, which they passed to one another in turn. Perseus got hold of these and gave them back only when the Graeae had told him the way to the nymphs. From the nymphs he received three objects: a Cap of Invisibility, a pair of winged sandals, and a wallet or *kibisis*.[4] From Hermes he received a scimitar, the only object given directly by Hermes.[5]

The Gorgons

Perseus now flew to the Gorgons, whose home was somewhere on the edge of the world, usually situated in North Africa.[6] Pindar, who makes Perseus go to

Danaë and the Chest. Attic red-figure lekythos, ca. 470 B.C.: height 16 in. The infant Perseus, already in the chest, reaches up to his reluctant mother. Acrisius gestures impatiently to her to get in. In her left hand Danaë holds a perfume jar. *(Toledo, Ohio, Museum of Art.)*

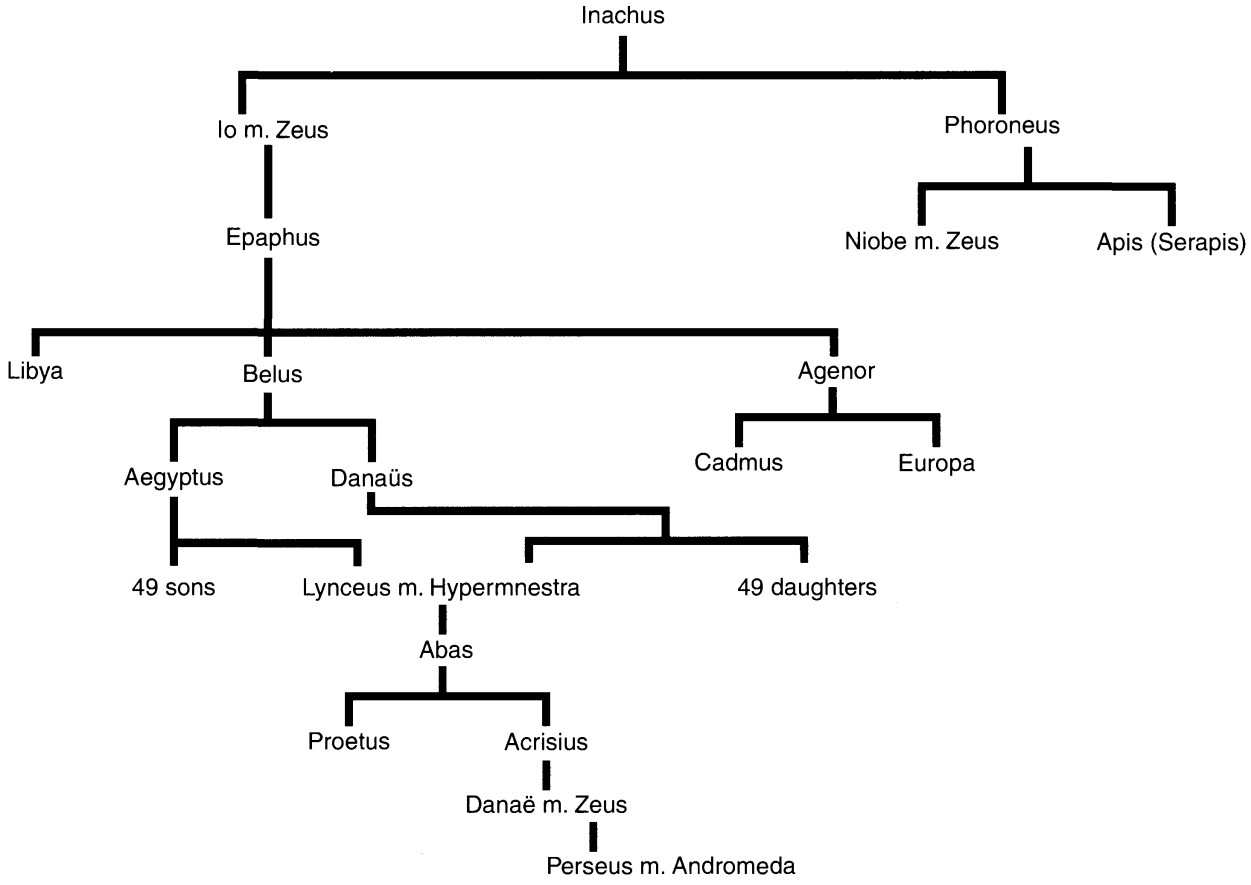

Figure 21.1. The Ancestry of Perseus

the far north, gives a beautiful description of the perfect life lived by the Hyperboreans, and his account is one of the few continuous passages in extant classical Greek literature that deals with the legend of Perseus (*Pythian Odes* 10. 29–48):

> Not with ships nor on foot would you find the marvelous road to the assembly of the Hyperboreans. Once did Prince Perseus feast among them when he entered their palace; he found them solemnly sacrificing one hundred donkeys to their god. In their feasts continually and in their hymns Apollo especially takes delight, and he laughs as he sees the pride of the animals rearing up. The Muse is always with them and is a part of their customs: everywhere are the maidens' dances, the music of lyres and of the deep-sounding flutes. They bind their hair with golden laurel-wreaths, feasting with joy. Neither disease nor wasting old age has any part in their holy nation. Without labor, without battles, they live, escaping the severe justice of Nemesis. Breathing courage, Danaë's son joined the company of blessed men, and Athena was his guide. And he slew the Gorgon and came bearing the head with hair of writhing snakes, for the islanders a stony death.

The three Gorgons, of whom only Medusa was mortal, were of terrifying aspect, and those who looked upon their faces were turned to stone.[7] They were asleep when Perseus came; guided by Athena and looking only at the Gorgon's reflection in his brazen shield he beheaded Medusa and put the head in the *kibisis*. As she was beheaded, Chrysaor (He of the Golden Sword) and Pegasus, the winged horse, sprang from her body. Their father was Poseidon; Chrysaor became father of the monster Geryon, and Pegasus was prominent in the legend of Bellerophon. According to Ovid, his hoof struck Mt. Helicon and caused the fountain Hippocrene (Horse's Fountain) to gush forth, which from then on was loved by the Muses and associated with poetic inspiration.

This is not the only association of the legend of Medusa with music and poetry. Pindar, praising Midas of Akragas, winner in the competition for flute-playing at the Pythian Games, tells how the music of the flute was invented by Athena in imitation of the Gorgons' lament for the death of Medusa (*Pythian Odes* 12. 5–23):

> Receive this garland from Delphi for glorious Midas who is the best in Greece in the art that Pallas Athena wove from the deadly lament of the impetuous Gorgons, which Perseus heard pouring from the snaky heads that could not be approached. Grievously he labored when he killed the third part of the sisters, bringing death to sea-girt Seriphos and its people. Indeed he brought the darkness of death to the Gorgons, god-born children of Phorcys; and grievous did the son of Danaë make the banquet of Polydectes, and the long servitude of his mother and her forced love. His spoil was the head of fair-cheeked Medusa. And he, we say, was born from the shower of gold. But when the virgin Athena had

Perseus Beheads Medusa. Limestone metope from Selinus, ca. 540 B.C.; height 58 in. To the left stands Athena, wearing a *peplos*. The winged horse, Pegasus, springs from the body of Medusa. The frontality of the figures compels the viewer to confront the horror of Medusa's face and the necessity for Perseus of avoiding her gaze. *(Palermo, Museo Nazionale.)*

Medusa, by Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908). Marble, 1854; height 27 in. Hosmer emphasizes the beauty and the pathos of Medusa, whereas most artists, ancient and modern, have preferred to focus on the horror of the Gorgon's head. A visitor to her studio said, "To fulfill the true idea of the old myth, Medusa should be wonderfully beautiful, but I never saw her so represented before." *(© The Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders' Society Purchase, Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund.)*

delivered the hero dear to her from these labors, she made the music of the flutes with its many notes, so that with instruments she might imitate the loud-sounding lamentation that was forced from the hungry jaws of Euryale.[8] This was the goddess' invention, but she gave it to mortals and called it "the music of many heads."

Perseus was able to fly away from Medusa's sisters unharmed, since he was wearing the Cap of Invisibility. In the original version of the saga, he probably returned directly to Seriphos and dealt with Polydectes.

ANDROMEDA

At a very early stage the legend of Andromeda was added to the story of Perseus' return. Andromeda was the daughter of King Cepheus and his queen, Cassiepea. Their kingdom is variously placed in Ethiopia or in the Levant.[9]

Cassiepea boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids. As a punishment, Poseidon flooded Cepheus' kingdom and sent a sea-monster to ravage

Perseus Attacks the Sea-Monster. Etruscan black-figure hydria from Caere (Cerveteri), ca. 530 B.C.; height 15¾ in. Perseus brandishes a rock in his right hand and Hermes' scimitar (*harpe*) in his left. The seal, octopus, and dolphins remind the viewer of marine realities. The absence of Andromeda reflects the artist's narrative priorities, and it has been suggested that the hero is Heracles, rather than Perseus. *(Switzerland, Küsnacht, Hirschmann Collection.)*

Perseus and Andromeda. By Titian (ca. 1477–1576): oil canvas, 1554–1556, $70\frac{1}{2} \times 77\frac{3}{4}$ in. For six centuries the subject of Andromeda has been a favorite vehicle for painters' interpretations of the theme of "Beauty and the Beast." Titian correctly gives Perseus winged sandals and *harpe*. In many versions Perseus is confused with Bellerophon and rides on the winged horse, Pegasus. *(London, Wallace Collection.)*

the land. Cepheus consulted the oracle of Zeus Ammon and learned that the monster could be appeased only if Andromeda were offered to it, chained to a rock. Cepheus obeyed; but at this point, Perseus came on the scene and undertook to kill the monster if he could marry Andromeda. Making use of his sandals and cap, Perseus killed the beast with Hermes' scimitar and released

Andromeda, whom he married, using the Gorgon's head to deal with the opposition of Cepheus' brother Phineus, to whom Andromeda had previously been betrothed. After their son Perses was born, Perseus and Andromeda flew back to Seriphos, leaving Perses behind as heir to Cepheus' kingdom.

The Origin of Libyan Snakes, the Atlas Range, and Coral

A number of other details have been added to the original account of Perseus' flight with the Gorgon's head. The Gorgon's blood is said to have dripped through the *kibisis* as Perseus flew over Libya, and from the drops sprang the infinite number of poisonous snakes that (according to the belief of the ancients) infested the Libyan desert. The giant Atlas, supporter of the heavens, refused to show Perseus any hospitality, and Perseus turned him into stone with the Gorgon's head. His head and body became a mountain range, his hair the forests upon the mountains. As an example of these ingenious additions to the legend, we give Ovid's description of the creation of coral (*Metamorphoses* 4. 740–752):

> Perseus washed his hands, bloody from his victory over the monster, in the sea. So that the hard sand should not damage the snake-bearing head, he made the ground soft with leaves and branches that grow beneath the sea's surface, and on these he placed the head of Medusa, daughter of Phorcys. The branch that a few moments before had been fresh and filled with living pith absorbed the monster's power; and touched by the head, its leaves and stems took on a new hardness. But the sea-nymphs tested the miraculous change on other branches and rejoiced to see the same thing happen. Now coral still retains its same nature: it grows hard in contact with air, and what in the sea was flexible becomes stone out of the water.

Polydectes and Perseus' Return to Argos

When Perseus and Andromeda reached Seriphos, they found that Danaë and Dictys had taken refuge at an altar from the violence of Polydectes. Perseus displayed the Gorgon's head before Polydectes and his assembled followers, who were all turned to stone. Thus Danaë was released and returned to Argos with Perseus and Andromeda. Perseus made Dictys king of Seriphos and returned the magic objects to the gods—the sandals, *kibisis*, and cap to Hermes (who returned them to the nymphs) and the Gorgon's head to Athena, who set it in the middle of her shield (see illustration on p. 165).

The Death of Acrisius

When Acrisius heard that Danaë's son was indeed alive and returning to Argos, he left the city and went to the city of Larissa, in Thessaly, where Perseus followed him. Here Acrisius met his long-foretold death. Competing in the athletic

The Baleful Head. By Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898); oil on canvas, 1887, $60\frac{1}{2} \times 50\frac{3}{4}$ in. This is the final painting in Burne-Jones' Perseus cycle, undertaken for Arthur Balfour in 1875 and based on William Morris' poem "The Doom of Acrisius" in *The Early Paradise.* Ten full-scale watercolor cartoons (now in Southampton, England) and four oil paintings (now in Stuttgart, Germany) were completed. Burne-Jones sets the lovers in an enclosed garden. They look at the reflection of the Gorgon's head, held up by Perseus, in the surface of a marble-sided well. The bright, open eyes of Andromeda provide a dramatic contrast with the reflection of Medusa's closed eyes. The scene is an intense yet peaceful close to the turbulent adventures of Perseus, who still must face the battle with Phineus. *(Stuttgart, Staatsgallerie.)*

games which the king of Larissa was celebrating in honor of his dead father, Perseus threw a discus that accidentally killed Acrisius. He was buried outside Larissa and honored there as a hero. Perseus, having shed kindred blood, returned not to Argos but to Tiryns, whose king Megapenthes, son of Proetus, exchanged kingdoms with him. As king of Tiryns, Perseus founded Mycenae, where in historical times he was honored as a hero. The children of Perseus and Andromeda became kings of Mycenae, and from them descended Heracles and Eurystheus.

Saga and Folktale

An interesting feature of the saga of Perseus is its number of folktale motifs, more than in any other Greek saga. These include the magic conception of the hero by the princess, his mother; the discovery of the hero as a child by the noise of his playing; the villainous king and his good and humble brother; the rash promise of the hero, which he performs with the aid of supernatural helpers and magic objects; the three old women from whom advice must be sought; the Gorgons, imaginary monsters of ferocious ugliness; and, finally, the vindication of the hero and the punishment of the villain.

Other Legends of Argos

The Family of Inachus

Among the earliest legends of Argos are those of the family of Inachus. The daughter of Inachus was Io, much of whose story is told on pages 91–93 in connection with Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound.* Beloved by Zeus, Io was changed into a white cow by jealous Hera and guarded by all-seeing Argus until Hermes, sent by Zeus to rescue her, cut off Argus' head. Next Hera sent a gadfly to madden her; but after wandering the earth, Io came at last to Egypt, where Zeus restored her human form. There she gave birth to a son, Epaphus, destined to be the ancestor of the hero Heracles.

From other sources we learn that the Egyptians identified Epaphus with Apis, the sacred bull. And his birth did not bring an end to Io's wanderings. Hera had Epaphus kidnapped, and Io set out in search of him, eventually finding him in Syria. She now returned to Egypt where she came to be worshiped as Isis.

The story of Io has many confusing elements. An Apis was said to have been a son of Phoroneus and to have given the Peloponnese its ancient name of Apia; after his death he was identified with Serapis, who is the same as the Egyptian bull-god Apis. Io was originally a goddess; she may have been a form of Hera herself. Herodotus, who himself visited Egypt, said that Isis was identified there with Demeter, whose image Io had first brought there, and that Isis was always represented as a woman with cow's horns (in this being similar to the great Phoeni-

cian moon-goddess, Astarte). The versions of Io's legend vary considerably, and Aeschylus gives different reasons for her departure from home and her transformation in his two plays, the *Supplices* and *Prometheus Bound*. She was originally a divine being rather than a human heroine, and through Greek contacts with the East (especially Egypt), she was assimilated into Egyptian mythology.

The Descendants of Io

Through Epaphus, Io was the founder of the royal families of Egypt and Argos, as well as those of Phoenicia, Thebes, and Crete. Epaphus himself was said to have founded many cities in Egypt, including the royal city of Memphis. His daughter was Libya, who gave her name to part of North Africa; he also had twin sons, Agenor and Belus. The former became the Phoenician king, father of Cadmus (founder of Thebes) and Europa (mother of the Cretan king Minos). Belus stayed in Egypt and also became the father of twin sons, Aegyptus and Danaüs, who, like their descendants Proetus and Acrisius, were bitter enemies.

The Daughters of Danaüs

Aegyptus and Danaüs quarreled over the kingdom, so that Danaüs was compelled to leave Egypt. Sailing with his fifty daughters (the Danaïds) via Rhodes, he came to Argos, where he peaceably established himself as king. (His subjects were called after him *Danaï*—the term by which Homer generally refers to the Greeks.) Now Aegyptus had fifty sons, who claimed as next of kin the right to marry their cousins and pursued them to Argos. Danaüs gave his daughters in marriage, but to each he gave a dagger with orders to kill her husband that night. All obeyed, save one only, Hypermnestra, who spared her husband, Lynceus, and hid him. As to the sequel, accounts vary; according to the most popular version, the forty-nine Danaïds who obeyed their father were punished in the Underworld by eternally having to fill water jars, through which the water leaked away. According to Pindar, however, Danaüs gave them as wives to the winners of an athletic contest. After a period of imprisonment by Danaüs, Hypermnestra was reunited with Lynceus and became the mother of Abas, father of Proetus and Acrisius. Thus the line of descent of the Argive kings from Inachus to Heracles remained unbroken.

Amymone

The Danaïd Amymone was sent by her father to search for water and came upon a satyr who attempted to seduce her. She was saved by Poseidon, who then himself lay with her and as a reward caused a spring to burst from a rock with a stroke of his trident. In historical times, the spring Amymone was still shown near Argos.

Other Argive Heroes

Important Argive heroes were the seer Melampus and the heroes who took part in the expedition of the Seven against Thebes. Among these was Tydeus, whose son Diomedes, a leading Greek hero in the Trojan War and the last great mythical prince of Argos, was widely worshiped as a hero after his death. Pindar says that Athena gave him the immortality that she denied Tydeus.[10]

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NOTES

1. For Proetus and Bellerophon see pp. 613–615.
2. The Roman poet Horace (*Odes* 3. 16) changed Danaë's prison to a brazen tower, which has become the traditional version.
3. The Athenian historian Pherecydes (early fifth century B.C.) is an early authority for the saga.
4. The word *kibisis* is not Greek and in antiquity was believed to be Cypriote.
5. Hermes wears the Cap of Darkness in the Gigantomachy and is regularly portrayed with winged sandals. Athena wore the Cap of Invisibility at Troy (*Iliad* 5. 844–845).
6. It is also placed by others in the far north, among the Hyperboreans, or in the far south, among the Ethiopians.
7. For their origin, see pp. 153–154.
8. The Gorgon Euryale is mourning for her dead sister, Medusa.
9. In the first century A.D. the marks of Andromeda's fetters were still being shown on the rocks near the city of Joppa.
10. The legends of these heroes are discussed on pp. 606–607 (Melampus), pp. 395–398 (the Seven), and pp. 482–483 (Diomedes).

CHAPTER

22

HERACLES

Heracles is the most popular of the Greek heroes, and his legends include elements of saga and folktale.[1] His status as man, hero, and god is controversial and continues to be a source of debate. He is particularly associated with the area around Argos and with Thebes, where his birth is traditionally placed. The two areas are connected in the account of his parents' adventures.

AMPHITRYON AND ALCMENA

Electryon, king of Mycenae, and his sons fought at Mycenae against the sons of Pterelaüs, king of the Teleboans (a people of western Greece). Only one son from each family survived.[2] The Teleboans then retreated, taking with them Electryon's cattle. Electryon planned to attack the Teleboans and made Amphitryon (son of his brother, Alcaeus) king in his place, betrothing him to his daughter Alcmena on the condition that Amphitryon leave her a virgin until after his return from the Teleboans. Now Amphitryon had already recovered the stolen cattle, and while he was herding them, he threw his club at one of them and accidentally killed Electryon. For his homicide, he was exiled from Mycenae, while his uncle Sthenelus became king.

Taking Alcmena, Amphitryon went to Thebes, where Creon purified him. Alcmena, nevertheless, refused to lie with Amphitryon until he had avenged the death of her brothers by punishing the Teleboans.[3] Amphitryon's expedition was successful through the treachery of Comaetho, daughter of the Teleboan king Pterelaüs. Out of love for Amphitryon she pulled from Pterelaüs' head the golden hair that guaranteed him immortality and made the Teleboans invincible. Thus Pterelaüs died and Amphitryon was victorious. Amphitryon killed Comaetho and returned to Thebes.

Amphitryon expected to lie with Alcmena, and he did not know that Zeus, disguised as Amphitryon, had visited her the previous night, which he extended to three times its proper length, and had told her the full story of the Teleboan expedition. Alcmena only accepted Amphitryon after Tiresias had revealed the truth. Thus she conceived twins (it was said); the elder by one night was Heracles, son of Zeus, and the younger was Iphicles, son of Amphitryon.

There are several variants of this story. According to Hesiod, Amphitryon

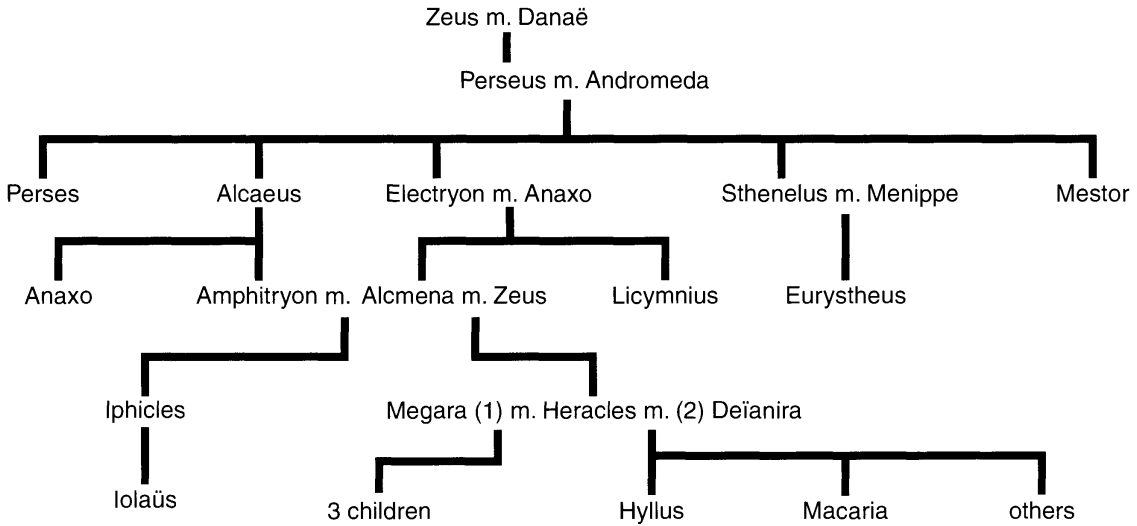


Figure 22.1. The Ancestry of Heracles

killed Electryon in a fit of anger and for this reason left Argos with Alcmena and came to Thebes. There he lived with Alcmena, but he did not consummate their marriage until he had returned victorious over the Teleboans. Meanwhile Zeus had lain with Alcmena that same night; yet Amphitryon was able to lie "all night long with his chaste wife, delighting in the gifts of golden Aphrodite."

Another variant is the plot of the "tragicomedy" (as the playwright himself called it) by Plautus, *Amphitruo.* In this version, Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes) disguise themselves as Amphitryon and Amphitryon's servant Sosia, respectively. Amphitryon returns just after Jupiter has left Alcmena, who is thoroughly confused. She gives birth to twins, one of whom is stronger than the other, and immediately strangles two serpents sent by Juno (Hera) to kill him. Just as Alcmena's servant Bromia is describing the scene, Jupiter himself appears and reveals the truth to Amphitryon. This is the only one of the surviving plays of Plautus whose plot is taken from mythology.

The Birth of Heracles and His Early Exploits

The birth of Heracles introduces a constant feature of his story, the hostility of Hera. Zeus had boasted on Olympus on the day when Heracles was to be born (Homer, *Iliad* 19. 102–105):

> Today Eileithyia, helper in childbirth, will bring to the light a man who shall rule over all that dwell around him; he shall be of the race that is of my blood.

Hera deceived Zeus by hastening the birth of the child of Sthenelus (king of Mycenae), whose wife was seven months pregnant, and sending Eileithyia to delay the birth of Alcmena's sons.[4] Sthenelus was the grandson of Zeus, and so his son rather than Alcmena's fulfilled the terms of Zeus' boast. He was Eurystheus, for whom Heracles performed the Labors.

Pindar tells the story (mentioned earlier in connection with the *Amphitruo* of Plautus) that Hera also sent a pair of snakes to kill the infant Heracles, whose birth she had not been able to prevent. The passage ends with the prophet Tiresias foretelling the hero's part in the battle of the gods against the Giants and his eventual deification (*Nemean Odes* 1. 33–72):

> Willingly do I take hold of Heracles upon the high peaks of Virtue as I retell an ancient tale. When the son of Zeus had escaped from the birth pangs with his twin and had come into the bright light, he was wrapped in the yellow swaddling bands, and Hera of the golden throne saw him. Straightway in hasty anger, the queen of the gods sent snakes, which passed through the open doors into the farthest part of the wide room, eager to coil their quick jaws around the children. But Heracles lifted up his head and for the first time made trial of battle; with his two hands, from which there was no escape, he seized by their necks the two serpents, and his grip squeezed the life out of the huge monsters, strangling them.

> Then fear unbearable struck the women who were helping Alcmena at the birth. Alcmena, too, leaped to her feet from the bedclothes, unclothed as she was, as if to protect her babies from the attack of the beasts. Then the Theban leaders quickly ran and assembled with their bronze weapons, and Amphitryon came, smitten with the bitter pangs of anxiety and brandishing his sword unsheathed. . . . He stood with amazement hard to bear mixed with joy, for he saw the immeasurable spirit and power of his son. The immortals indeed had made the words of the messengers untrue. Then he summoned Tiresias, his neighbor, excellent mouthpiece of Zeus the most high. To Amphitryon and to all his armed men he foretold with what fortunes Heracles would meet, how many lawless wild beasts he would kill on the sea, how many on land. He foretold how Heracles would give to his fate the man who walks with crooked insolence, most hateful of men. For, he foretold, when the gods should do battle with the giants on the plain of Phlegra, beneath the onrush of his missiles, bright hair would be soiled in the dust. But Heracles himself, in peace for all time without end, would win rest as the choice reward for his great labors, and in the palaces of the blessed he would take Hebe to be his youthful bride. Feasting at his wedding beside Zeus, son of Cronus, he would praise the holy customs of the gods.

Thus Heracles survived. In his education he was taught chariot driving by Amphitryon, wrestling by Autolycus, archery by Eurytus, and music by Linus.[5] Heracles killed Linus, who was a son of Apollo, by striking him with his lyre, and for this was sent away to the Theban pastures on Mt. Cithaeron, where he performed a number of exploits. He killed a lion that was preying on the cattle of Amphitryon and of Thespius, king of the Boeotian town of Thespiae. During the hunt for the lion, Heracles was entertained for fifty days by Thespius and lay with one of his fifty daughters each night (or with all fifty in the same night). He also freed the Thebans from paying tribute to the Minyans of Orchomenus, leading the Theban army himself into battle. In gratitude Creon gave him his daughter Megara as wife, and by her he had three children.

The Madness of Heracles

Some time later, Hera brought about a fit of madness in which Heracles killed Megara and her children. When he recovered his sanity, he left Thebes and went first to Thespiae, where Thespius purified him, and then to Delphi, where he sought further advice. Here the priestess of Apollo called him Heracles for the first time (until then he had been known as Alcides) and told him to go to Tiryns and there for twelve years serve Eurystheus, performing the labors that he would impose. If he did them, she said, he would become immortal.

This is the simplest story of the origin of the Labors; there is, however, great confusion over the chronology of Heracles' legends. Euripides in his *Heracles* puts the murder of Megara and her children after the Labors. Sophocles in his *Trachiniae* has Heracles marry his second wife Deïanira before the Labors, whereas Apollodorus places the marriage after them. All are agreed that for a

number of years Heracles served Eurystheus. Heracles' ghost says to Odysseus: "I was a son of Zeus, but infinite was my suffering; for I was slave to a far inferior mortal, and heavy were the labors he laid upon me" (Homer, *Odyssey* 11. 620–633).

The Twelve Labors

The Greek word for labors is *athloi,* which really means contests undertaken for a prize. In Heracles' case the prize was immortality, and at least three of his Labors are really conquests of death.[6] Heracles did not always perform the Labors unaided; sometimes Athena helped him, sometimes his nephew, Iolaüs. The first six Labors all take place in the Peloponnese, the remaining six in different parts of the world. In these Heracles has changed from a local hero into the benefactor of all humankind. The list of the labors varies, but the twelve given are traditional and were represented on the metopes of the temple of Zeus at Olympia (see p. 114).

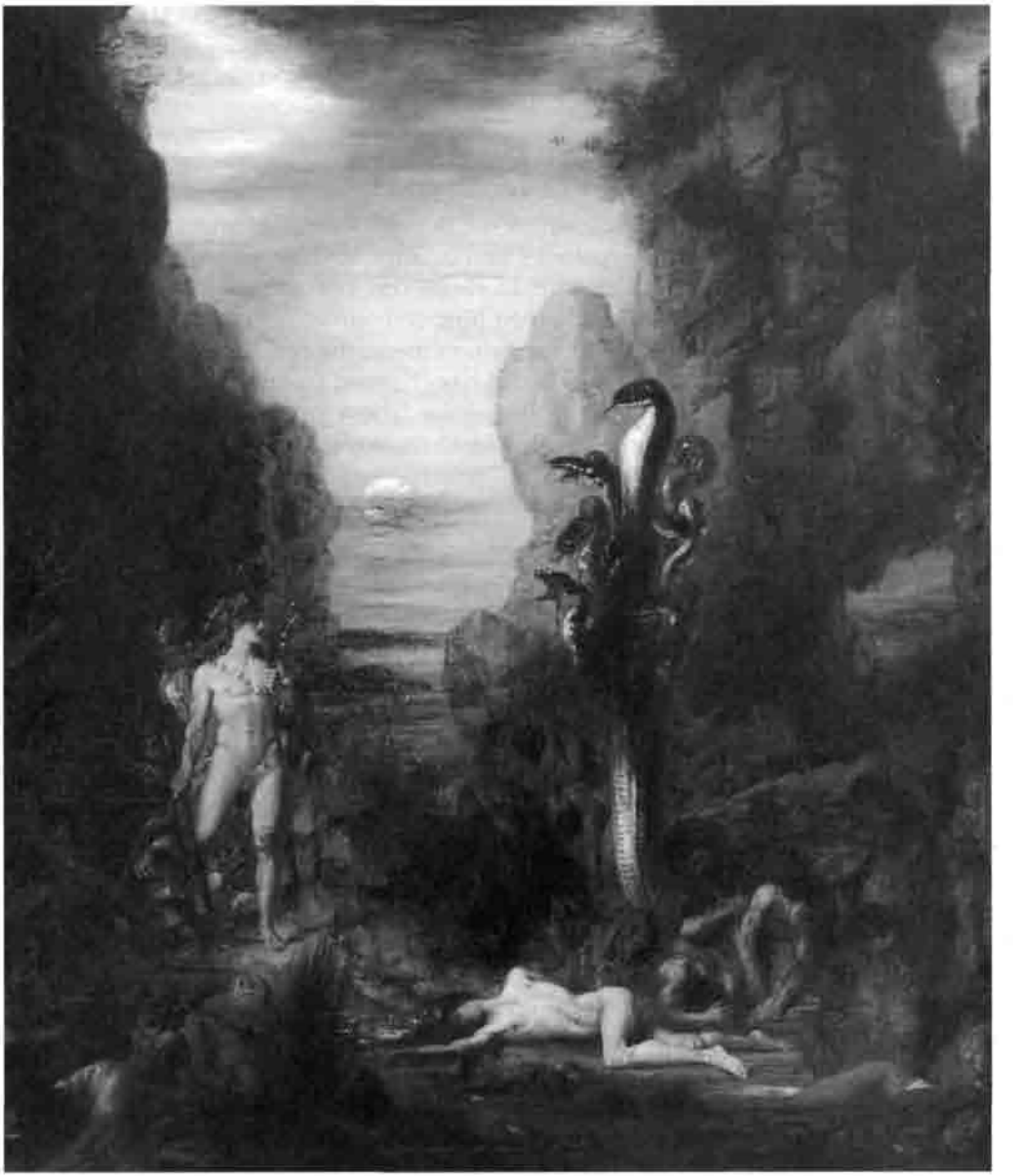
The Peloponnesian Labors

1. The Nemean Lion Heracles was required to bring the skin of this beast to Eurystheus. He killed it with a club that he had himself cut. Theocritus (in his twenty-fifth *Idyll*) makes the lion invulnerable, and Heracles has to strangle it and then flay it by using its own claws to cut its hide. The club and lion-skin henceforth were Heracles' weapon and clothing and are his attributes in art and literature.

2. The Lernaean Hydra This serpent lived in the swamps of Lerna, near Argos. It had nine heads, of which eight were mortal and the ninth immortal. Each time Heracles clubbed a head off, two grew in its place. The labor was made the harder by a huge crab, which Hera sent to aid the Hydra. First Heracles killed this monster, and then killed the Hydra, helped by his nephew, Iolaüs, son of Iphicles. Each time he removed one of the heads, Iolaüs cauterized the stump with a burning brand so that another could not grow. Heracles buried the immortal head under a huge rock. He then dipped his arrows in the Hydra's poison. As for the crab, Hera took it and made it into the constellation Cancer.

3. The Cerynean Hind The hind had golden horns and was sacred to Artemis; it took its name from Mt. Cerynea in Arcadia.[7] It was harmless, nor might it be harmed without incurring Artemis' wrath. After pursuing it for a year Heracles caught it by the river Ladon, and carried it back to Eurystheus. On the way Artemis met him and claimed her sacred animal, but she was appeased when Heracles laid the blame on Eurystheus.

This version of the story is entirely set in the Peloponnese. A different account, however, is given by Pindar in his beautiful third *Olympian Ode.* In it Heracles went to the land of the Hyperboreans in the far north in search of the hind,



Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra. By Gustave Moreau (1826–1898); oil on canvas, 1869–1876, $70\frac{1}{2} \times 60\frac{1}{4}$ in. Moreau, who painted several of Hercules' Labors, devoted enormous effort to this painting. Hercules is young and of normal human size and anatomy. He stands in the attitude (legs reversed) of the *Apollo Belvedere* (p. 229), with his attributes of lionskin, bow (also Apollo's weapon), and club. The seven-headed Hydra towers over the hero, and in front of it lie the remains of its victims. The rocky cliffs heighten the drama, a suitable setting for the fearless hero. The conquest of the Hydra had long been a parable for the triumph of good government over disorder, but Moreau focuses on the moral stature of the hero rather than on political allegory. *(Chicago, Art Institute.)*

on whose golden horns the nymph Taÿgete, a daughter of Atlas, had stamped the name of Artemis.[8] Pindar's narrative allows us to connect this labor with that of the Apples of the Hesperides, for in the latter story Heracles goes to the limits of the world in search of a miraculous golden object, and again Ladon (in the form of a dragon) and Atlas appear.[9] The labor of the Apples of the Hesperides is a conquest of death, and it seems that the story of the Cerynean stag is another version of the same theme.

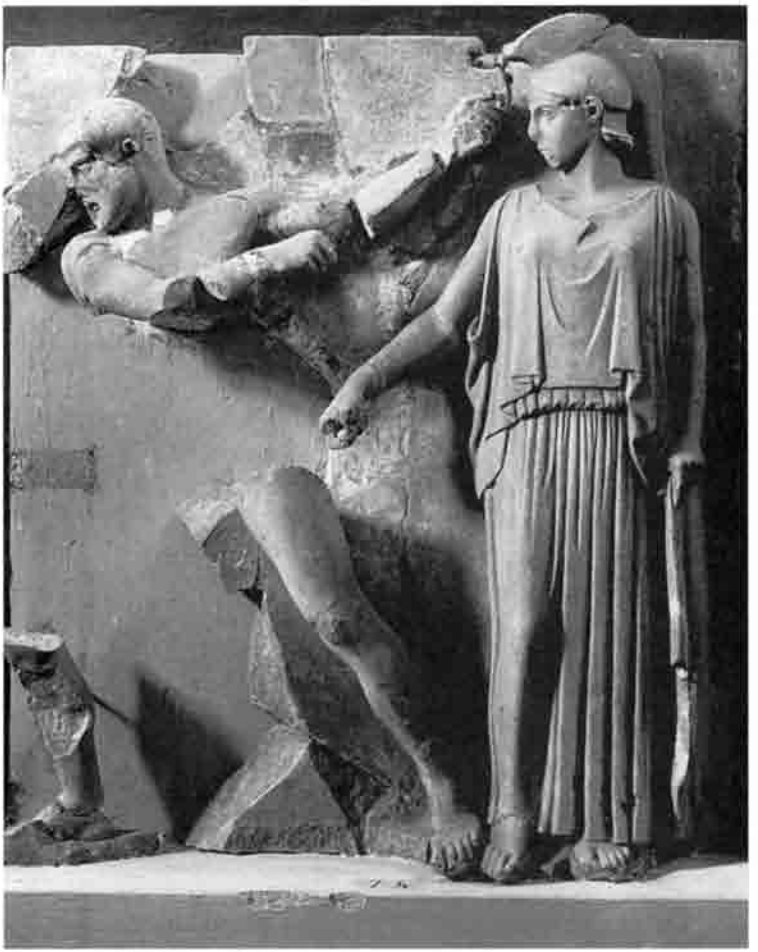
4. The Erymanthian Boar This destructive animal had to be brought back alive from Mt. Erymanthus. Heracles chased the boar into deep snow and there trapped it with nets. He brought it back to Eurystheus, who cowered in terror in a large jar.

This labor resulted in a side adventure (or *parergon*).[10] On his way to the chase, Heracles was entertained by the centaur Pholus, who set before him a jar of wine that belonged to all the centaurs in common. When it was opened, the other centaurs, attracted by its fragrance, attacked Heracles, who repelled and pursued them. Most of them were scattered all over Greece, but Chiron was wounded by one of Heracles' poisoned arrows. Since he was immortal and could not die, he suffered incurable agonies until Prometheus interceded with Zeus and took upon himself the immortality of Chiron. Pholus also met his death when he accidentally dropped a poisoned arrow on his foot.

5. The Augean Stables Augeas, son of Helius (the Sun) and king of Elis, owned vast herds of cattle whose stables had never been cleaned out. Heracles was commanded by Eurystheus to perform the task, and successfully achieved it within one day by diverting the rivers Alpheus and Peneus so that they flowed through the stables. Augeas agreed to give Heracles one-tenth of his herds as a reward, but refused to keep his promise and expelled both Heracles and his own son Phyleus (who had taken Heracles' part in the quarrel). Heracles was received by a nearby prince, Dexamenus (whose name, indeed, means "the receiver"), whose daughter he saved from the centaur Eurytion. After he had finished the Labors, Heracles returned to Elis at the head of an army, took the city, and killed Augeas, making Phyleus king in his place.

It was after this expedition that Heracles was said to have instituted the Olympic Games, the greatest of Greek festivals, held every four years in honor of Zeus. He marked out the stadium by pacing it out himself, and he fetched an olive tree from the land of the Hyperboreans to be, as Pindar described it, "a shade for the sacred precinct and a crown of glory for men" (*Olympian Odes* 3. 16–18), for at that time there were no trees at Olympia, and at the games the victors were awarded a garland of olive leaves.[11]

6. The Stymphalian Birds Heracles was required to shoot these creatures, which flocked together in a wood by the Arcadian lake Stymphalus. He flushed them by clashing brazen castanets given him by Athena and then shot them.[12]



Heracles, Assisted by Athena, Cleans the Augean Stables. Marble metope over the east porch of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, ca. 460 B.C.; height 63 in. This local legend is given the place of honor as the final one of the series of the Labors of Heracles in the metopes of the temple of Zeus (see p. 114). Athena is helmeted and clothed in the Doric *peplos,* her left hand resting on her shield. With her spear (now missing) she directs Heracles as he labors to open (with a crowbar) the stables so that the river Alpheus can flush them clean. *(From metope no. 12 of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Courtesy of Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)*

THE NON-PELOPONNESIAN LABORS

7. The Cretan Bull This bull was one that Minos had refused to sacrifice to Poseidon. Heracles caught it and brought it back alive to Eurystheus. It was then turned loose and eventually came to Marathon, where in time Theseus caught and sacrificed it.

8. The Mares of Diomedes Diomedes, son of Ares, was a Thracian king who owned a herd of mares that were fed human flesh. Heracles, either alone or with an army, got possession of them and tamed them by feeding them Diomedes himself. He took them back to Argos, where Eurystheus set them free and dedicated them to Hera. On his way to Thrace Heracles was entertained by Admetus, king of Pherae, who disguised his grief at the recent death of his wife, Alcestis. Heracles discovered the truth and himself wrestled with Thanatos (Death), forcing him to give up Alcestis, whom he restored to her husband.

9. The Girdle of Hippolyta Hippolyta was queen of the Amazons, the warrior women at the northern limits of the world. Heracles was sent to fetch her girdle, which had magic powers. He killed Hippolyta in battle and took the girdle. It was displayed at Argos in historical times.

While returning from this labor, Heracles came to Troy and there rescued Hesione from the sea-monster (see p. 443). Cheated by King Laomedon of his reward, he returned later (after his time as the servant of Omphale) with an armed force and sacked the city, giving Hesione to his ally Telamon and leaving Podarces (Priam) on the throne of the ruined city.

10. The Cattle of Geryon The last three labors are most clearly conquests of death, with the abduction of Cerberus as their climax. Geryon lived on the island of Erythia, far away to the west. Geryon was a three-bodied monster, offspring of the Oceanid Callirhoë and Chrysaor; he tended a herd of cattle, helped by a giant herdsman, Eurytion, and a two-headed hound, Orthus (or Orthrus). Heracles' labor was to bring the cattle back to Eurystheus. To reach Erythia, Heracles was helped by Helius (the Sun), who gave him a golden cup in which to sail upon the River of Ocean, which girdles the world. He killed Orthus, Eurytion, and Geryon, and then sailed back in the cup to Tartessus (i.e., Spain) with the cattle. He returned the cup to Helius and then began to drive the cattle back to Greece.

As a monument of his journey to the western edge of the world, he set up the Pillars of Heracles at the Atlantic entrance to the Mediterranean. They are sometimes identified with the rocks of Calpe (Gibraltar) and Abyla (Ceuta), which flank the Straits of Gibraltar.

Heracles' journey back to Greece has many *parerga*. While crossing the south of France, he was attacked by the tribe of the Ligurians and exhausted his supply of arrows defending himself. He prayed for help from Zeus, who sent a rain of stones that gave Heracles the ammunition he needed to drive off the attackers. He then crossed the Alps and traversed Italy, where he was said to have founded several cities.[13]

Heracles' wanderings in Italy also took him across the strait to Sicily. Here he wrestled with Eryx (king of the mountain of the same name at the western end of the island), whom he killed. He returned to Greece by traveling around the head of the Adriatic and through Dalmatia. At the Isthmus of Corinth he killed the giant and brigand, Alcyoneus. As for the cattle, Eurystheus sacrificed them to Hera.

Quite a different version of the legend of Geryon is told by Herodotus. In this, Heracles journeyed to the cold lands beyond the Danube and there lay with Echidna (Snake Woman), a monster who was half woman and half serpent, who bore him three sons, Agathyrsus, Gelonus, and Scythes. When the three grew up, only Scythes was able to draw a bow and put on a belt that Heracles had left behind. The other two were driven away by Echidna, and Scythes became king and ancestor of the Scythians.[14]

11. The Apples of the Hesperides The Hesperides were the three daughters of Night, living far away to the west; they guarded a tree upon which grew golden apples. They were helped by the serpent Ladon, who was coiled around the tree. The apples had originally been a wedding gift from Ge to Hera when she married Zeus, and Ge put them in the garden of the Hesperides. Heracles first had to find the sea-god Nereus and learn from him the whereabouts of the garden. Nereus would tell him only after he had turned himself into many different shapes, being held all the while by Heracles. At the garden, in Euripides' version, he killed Ladon and plucked the apples himself. In the tradition represented by the metopes at Olympia, however, he got the help of the Titan Atlas, who held up the heavens. Heracles, helped by Athena, took the heavens on his own shoulders while Atlas fetched the apples. He then returned the load to Atlas' shoulders and brought the apples back to Eurystheus. Athena is then said to have taken the apples back to the garden of the Hesperides.

This labor is a conquest of death. The apples are symbols of immortality, and the tree in the garden of the Hesperides is a kind of Tree of Life. As in the labor of Geryon, the journey to a mysterious place in the far west is really a journey to the realm of death.

On his journey to the garden of the Hesperides, Heracles killed the king of Egypt, Busiris, who would sacrifice all strangers to Zeus.[15] In Libya he conquered the giant Antaeus, son of Ge and Poseidon, who would wrestle with those who came to his kingdom. He was invincible, since every time an opponent threw him he came in contact with his mother (Earth) and rose with renewed strength. Thus Antaeus had killed all comers and used their skulls in building a temple to his father, Poseidon. Heracles held him aloft and crushed him to death.

Some versions of this story take Heracles to the Caucasus Mountains. Here he found Prometheus chained to his rock and released him after killing the eagle that tormented him. Prometheus advised him to use Atlas in getting the apples and foretold the battle against the Ligurians. On this occasion, too, Prometheus took over the immortality of Chiron and satisfied Zeus by letting Chiron die in his place.

12. Cerberus The final labor was to fetch Cerberus, the three-headed hound of Hades. This labor is most clearly a conquest of death, and Heracles himself (in the *Odyssey*) said that it was the hardest of the Labors and that he could not have achieved it without the aid of Hermes and Athena. In the

Heracles Shows Cerberus to Eurystheus. Etruscan hydria from Caere, ca. 530 B.C.; height 17 in. The terrified Eurystheus leaps into a storage jar to escape from the Hound of Hades, which bares its three sets of teeth while its snakes furiously hiss at him. Heracles, with club and lionskin, strides forward confidently, guiding Cerberus with a leash. The humor in this splendid vase is remarkable. *(Musée du Louvre, Paris. Reunion des Musées Nationaux.)*

Underworld he wrestled with Cerberus, brought him back to Eurystheus, and then returned him to Hades.

In Hades, Heracles saw Theseus and Pirithoüs, chained fast because of their attempt to carry off Persephone. He was able to release Theseus, who out of gratitude sheltered him after his madness and the murder of Megara. He also saw the ghost of Meleager, whose sister, if he still had one living, he offered to marry. Meleager named Deïanira, "upon whose neck was still the green of youth, nor did she know yet of the ways of Aphrodite, charmer of men" (Bacchylides, *Epinician Ode* 5. 172–175). Thus the train of events was set in motion that led eventually to the death of Heracles.

In conclusion we translate a chorus from Euripides' *Heracles*, which tells of the great hero's Labors. This choral ode also reveals the nature of our sources

for Greek legends, where the dry facts are enlivened by poetic expression (Euripides, *Heracles* 352–427):

I wish to offer a glorious crown for labors done, by singing the praises of him who descended into the darkness of earth's realm of shades—whether I am to call him the son of Zeus or of Amphitryon. For the renown of noble deeds is a joy to those who have died. First he cleared Zeus' grove of the lion; and he wore its tawny skin upon his back, with the fearful jaws of the beast framing his fair head.

He laid low the mountain race of savage Centaurs with his deadly arrows, slaughtering them with his winged shafts. The beautiful stream of Peneus was a witness and the vast extent of the plains without crops and the vales of Mt. Pelion and the places on the green glens of Homole—all haunts where they filled their hands with weapons of pine and, galloping as horses, brought fear to the land of the Thessalians.

He slew the dappled hind with golden horns and dedicated this ravaging plunderer to the huntress Artemis of Oenoë.

He mounted the chariot of Diomedes and mastered with the bit the four mares, who ranged wild in stables drenched in blood and reveled in their horrid feasts of human flesh with ravenous jaws.

In his labors for the king of Mycenae, he crossed over the banks of the silver-flowing Hebrus; and along the sea-cliff of Pelion, by the waters of the Amaurus, he killed with his bow Cycnus, the guest-murderer who lived alone near Amphanaea.

He came to the western home of the singing maidens, to pluck from amid the golden leaves the fruit of the apple, and the fiery dragon who kept guard coiled around the tree, hard even to approach, him he killed.

He made his way into the farthest corners of the sea and made them safe for men who ply the oar.

Having come to the abode of Atlas, he extended his hand to support the vault of heaven in its midst, and by his manly strength held up the starry homes of the gods.

He crossed the swell of the Euxine Sea to the land of the Amazons, who rode in force where many rivers flow into Lake Maeotis. Mustering a band of friends from Hellas, he sought to win the gold-encrusted adornment of the warrior maid—the deadly booty of her girdle—and Hellas captured the renowned prize of the foreign queen, which is kept safe in Mycenae.

He seared the many heads of the deadly monster, the Lernaean Hydra, and dipped his arrows in its venom; with that he killed three-bodied Geryon, the herdsman of Erythia.

He won the glorious crown for these and other labors; and he sailed to the tearful realm of Hades—the final task of all.

Other Deeds of Heracles

Cycnus, Syleus, and the Cercopes

Heracles fought and killed a number of harmful beings. Cycnus, son of Ares, used to rob men passing on their way through Thessaly to Delphi. Heracles,

helped by Athena and with Iolaüs as charioteer, killed Cycnus (who was helped by Ares) in single combat.[16] Another robber was Syleus, who lived by the Straits of Euboea. Heracles destroyed his vineyard, in which Syleus compelled passers-by to work, and then killed Syleus himself.

Closer to folktale is Heracles' encounter with the Cercopes, whose home is placed in various parts of Greece or Asia Minor. They were a pair of dwarfs who

Heracles and the Cercopes. Limestone metope from Selinus, ca. 540 B.C.; height 58 in. Heracles looks straight at the viewer, like the bull in the metope from the same group (p. 376), and the faces of the Cercopes are also shown frontally. Despite the archaic formality of the composition, the hero's power is forcefully expressed. *(Museo Nazionale, Palermo, Italy. Courtesy of Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)*

spent their time playing tricks on people. They had been warned by their mother "to beware of the black-bottomed man." Now as Heracles was asleep under a tree, they attempted to steal his weapons, but he caught them and slung them from a pole across his shoulders upside down. They thus had an uninterrupted view of his backside which, since the lionskin did not cover it, had been burned black by the sun. They joked about the sight so much that Heracles, himself amused, let them go. Later they tried to trick Zeus and were punished by being turned into either apes or stones.

Hylas

Heracles was among the heroes who sailed on the *Argo*. But he was too important to be subordinate to other heroes in the saga, and so he soon dropped out of the expedition. In one version he went looking for the boy Hylas, whom he loved. When the *Argo* put in at Cios (in Asia Minor), Hylas went to a nearby spring to draw water, and the water-nymphs were so entranced by his beauty that they pulled him into the water, to remain with them forever. Heracles spent so long searching for him that the rest of the Argonauts sailed away without

Hylas and the Nymphs. By J. W. Waterhouse (1849–1917); oil on canvas, 1896, 38 × 63 in. The young Hylas is lured to his fate by seven water-nymphs. The artist brilliantly combines English Victorian ideals of female beauty and landscape (the latter in colors of great beauty) with psychological insight that anticipates Freud. *(Manchester, England, City Art Gallery.)*

him and he returned on his own to Argos. A cult of Hylas was established at Cios by Heracles. In late antiquity the people still searched for him annually, calling out his name.[17]

Military Expeditions

Heracles took part in Zeus' battle against the giants, during which he slew the terrible Alcyoneus. He attacked Laomedon, king of Troy, and Augeas, king of Elis, who had both cheated him. He made an expedition against Neleus, king of Pylos, who had refused to purify Heracles after the murder of Iphitus. He killed eleven of the twelve sons of Neleus; the twelfth, Nestor, eventually became king of Pylos and took part in the Trojan War. According to Hesiod, one of the sons of Neleus was Periclymenus, to whom Poseidon had given the ability to transform himself into every sort of bird, beast, or insect. With the help of Athena, Heracles recognized him in the form of a bee settled upon the yoke of his horse-drawn chariot and shot him with an arrow.

In this expedition also, says Homer, Heracles wounded the god Hades, "in Pylos among the corpses" (*Iliad* 5. 395–397), as if the expedition were another conquest of death. Homer also mentions that Heracles wounded Hera, and says that this was another example of Heracles' violence—"brutal and violent man, who did not scruple to do evil and wounded the Olympian gods with his arrows" (*Iliad* 5. 403–404). This is an older view of Heracles, and is more likely to represent the character of the original mythical hero than that of Pindar, who makes the following protest (*Olympian Odes* 9. 29–36):

> How would Heracles have brandished his club with his hands against the trident, when, in defense of Pylos Poseidon pushed him back, and Apollo shook him and drove him back with his silver bow, nor did Hades keep his staff unmoved, with which he drives mortal bodies to the hollow ways of the dead? Hurl this story, my mouth, far away!

We can see that by Pindar's time (the first half of the fifth century B.C.) the transformation of Heracles was already well advanced, from the primitive strongman into a paragon of virtue. Heracles also made an expedition against Hippocoön, king of Sparta, and his sons, who had given assistance to Neleus. Iphicles was killed in this campaign. While returning home from Sparta, Heracles lay at Tegea with Auge, whose father, fearing an oracle that Auge's son would kill her brothers, had made her priestess of Athena. The son she conceived was Telephus, and mother and baby crossed the sea to Asia Minor floating in a chest. There Telephus eventually became king of the Mysians.[18]

In Thessaly, Heracles appeared as an ally of Aegimius, king of the Dorians, against the attacks of his neighbors, the Lapiths and the Dryopes. This legend brings Heracles back to central Greece, where the legends of the last part of his life are placed.

Heracles, Deïanira, and Iole

Marriage to Deïanira

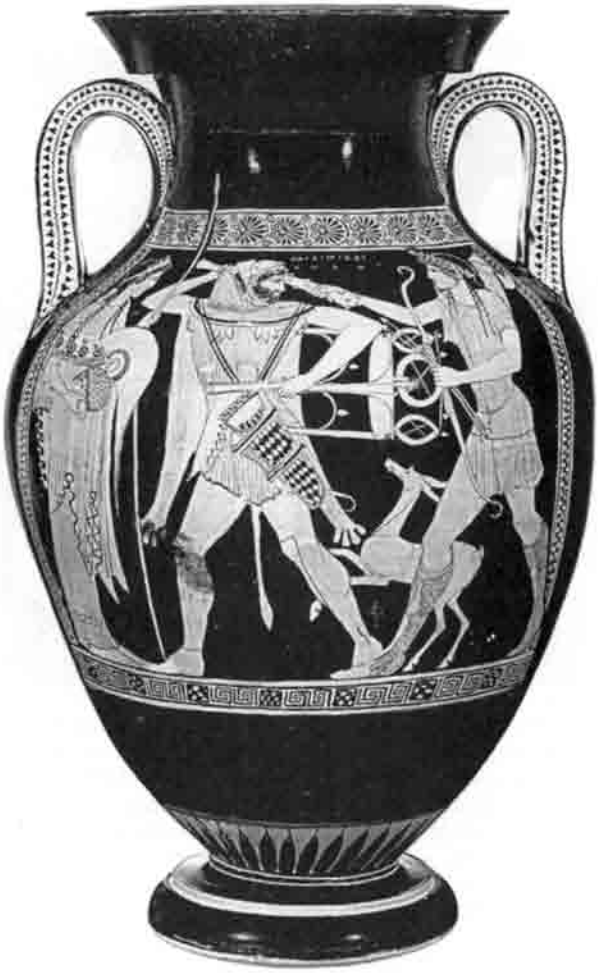
Some time after the completion of the Labors, Heracles fulfilled the promise he had made to the soul of Meleager, to marry his sister Deïanira, daughter of Oeneus, king of Calydon. To win her Heracles had to wrestle with the river-god Acheloüs, who was horned like a bull and had the power of changing himself into different shapes. This is how Sophocles describes the scene (*Trachiniae* 513–525):

> They came together desiring marriage; alone between them as umpire was Aphrodite, maker of marriages. Then was there confusion of sounds, the beating of fists, the twang of bow, the clash of bull's horns. There were the wrestling holds, the painful collision of heads, and the groans of both. But she, the prize, fair and delicate, sat afar upon a hill, waiting for him who was to be her husband.

In the struggle Heracles broke off one of Acheloüs' horns; and after his victory, he gave it back, receiving in return the miraculous horn of Amalthea, which could supply its owner with as much food and drink as he wished.[19] Heracles returned with Deïanira to Tiryns. On the way the centaur Nessus carried Deïanira across the river Evenus. He attempted to violate her, but Heracles shot him with his bow (see Color Plate 9). As he was dying he advised Deïanira to gather some of the blood that flowed from his wound, which had been caused by an arrow that had been dipped in the Hydra's poison. It would, he said, prevent Heracles from loving any other woman more than he loved Deïanira. She therefore kept the blood, and for a number of years she and Heracles lived at Tiryns, where she bore him children, including a son, Hyllus, and a daughter, Macaria.

Iole

But Heracles fell in love with Iole, daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia, who had once taught Heracles archery. Eurytus refused to let him have Iole, even though he won an archery contest that was to decide whose wife (or concubine) Iole should be. Heracles returned to Tiryns, bitter at the insult, and when Iphitus, brother of Iole, came to Tiryns in search of some lost mares Heracles threw him from the citadel to his death. For this murder, he had to leave Tiryns, going first to Pylos, where Neleus refused to purify him. Having obtained purification at Amyclae, he went to Delphi to find out what more he should do to be cured of the madness that had caused him to kill Iphitus. When the Pythia would not reply he attempted to carry off the sacred tripod, intending to establish an oracle of his own. Apollo himself wrestled with him to prevent this, and their fight ended when Zeus threw a thunderbolt between them. Finally Heracles ob-



Heracles and Apollo Struggle for the Pythian Tripod. Attic red-figure amphora attributed to the Geras Painter, ca. 480 B.C.; height 22 in. Heracles rushes off holding the tripod and threatening Apollo with his club. He wears the lionskin and a bow and quiver are slung in front of him. On the left stands Athena, wearing the aegis and holding a crested helmet and spear. Apollo grasps the tripod with his left hand (which also holds his bow and arrows; the quiver is on his back) and with his right restrains Heracles' club. He wears the laurel wreath and hunter's clothing and boots, appropriate for the god who has slain Python with his arrows. The deer is also a lively hunting motif. *(Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California.)*

tained the advice he had asked for, which was that he must be sold as a slave and serve for one year.

OMPHALE

Accordingly Hermes auctioned Heracles, and he was bought by Omphale, queen of the Lydians; he served her for a year and performed various tasks for her in keeping with his heroic character. Later versions, however, make Heracles perform women's work for the queen and picture him dressed as a woman and spinning wool. At the end of his year, he mounted the expedition against Troy and then returned to Greece, determined to punish Eurytus and to win Iole.

The Death of Nessus. Detail of an Attic black-figure amphora, ca. 620 B.C.; height of vase 48 in., of painting 14 in. The scene is painted on the neck of the vase, with owls, a swan, and a pigeon on the handles. The names of Heracles (written right to left) and Nessus (spelled "Netos") are given. Heracles finishes Nessus off with a sword, grasping his hair and violently thrusting his left foot into the Centaur's back. He ignores the pleas of Nessus for mercy, shown by the gesture of touching the chin. The hero does not wear the lionskin, nor does he carry his club and bow. *(National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece/Foto/Marburg/Art Resource, New York.)*

The Death of Heracles

Deïanira, meanwhile, was living in Trachis, where King Ceyx had received her and Heracles after they left the Peloponnese. According to Sophocles, whose *Trachiniae* is the most important source for the last part of Heracles' life, she knew nothing of Oechalia and Iole until the herald Lichas brought news of the sack of the city. She had not seen Heracles for fifteen months, before his servitude to Omphale. In this account Heracles killed Eurytus and sacked Oechalia on his way back from Asia, sending Iole and the other captive women back to Trachis with Lichas. When she realized that Heracles loved Iole, Deïanira, hoping to win him back, dipped a robe in the blood of Nessus and sent it to Heracles by Lichas' hand for him to wear at his thanksgiving sacrifice to Zeus.

As the flames of the sacrificial fire warmed the poisoned blood, the robe

clung to Heracles and burned him with unendurable torment. In his agony, he hurled Lichas to his death in the sea and had himself carried back to Trachis, where a huge funeral pyre was made for him upon Mt. Oeta. Deïanira killed herself with a sword when she realized what she had done, while Hyllus went with his father to Oeta. There Heracles instructed Hyllus to marry Iole after his death and gave his bow to the shepherd Poeas (father of Philoctetes), since he alone had dared to light the pyre. So the mortal part of Heracles was burned away and he gained immortality, ascending to Olympus, there to be reconciled with Hera and to marry her daughter Hebe. This is Pindar's version (*Isthmian Odes* 4. 61–67):

> To Olympus went Alcmena's son, when he had explored every land and the cliff-girt levels of the foaming sea, to tame the straits for seafarers. Now beside Zeus he enjoys a perfect happiness; he is loved and honored by the immortals; Hebe is his wife, and he is lord of a golden palace, the husband of Hera's daughter.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* ends with Heracles, in torment, being carried from his palace to the pyre on Mt. Oeta. In this scene, Hyllus says: "No one foresees what is to come" (1270), thus leaving the destiny of Heracles shrouded in ambiguity. Ovid's description is explicit (*Metamorphoses* 9. 239–272):

> And now . . . the flames were attacking the limbs that did not fear them and him who despised them. The gods were anxious for earth's champion [Hercules] and them did Jupiter . . . in happiness thus address: "Your fear is my joy, O gods . . . let not your hearts tremble with empty fear, despite Oeta's flames! He who conquered all will conquer the flames which you see, and only his mother's part will feel the power of Vulcan [i.e., fire]. That part which he inherited from me is immortal, immune to death, impervious to fire, and it will I receive in the heavens when its time on earth is done. . . ." The gods approved. Meanwhile Vulcan had consumed all that fire could consume, and the recognizable form of Hercules was no longer to be seen. He kept no part of himself that came from his mother, and he kept only the features drawn from Jupiter. . . . So, when the hero of Tiryns had put off his mortal body, his better part kept its vigor. He began to seem greater in size and awe-inspiring with august dignity. The almighty Father received him as he ascended into the surrounding clouds in a four-horse chariot, and placed him among the shining constellations.

HERACLES: MAN, HERO, AND GOD

Odysseus describes his meeting with the ghost of Heracles in this way (Homer, *Odyssey* 11. 601–603):

> Then saw I mighty Heracles—his ghost, but he himself delights in feasting among the immortal gods, with fair-ankled Hebe for his wife.

In this very early passage, the ambiguity of Heracles' status as man and god is evident. That he was a man before he became a god is shown by his name

The Apotheosis of Hercules, by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). Oil on panel, 1636; 11 × 12¾ in. In this oil sketch for Philip IV's hunting lodge near Madrid, Rubens represents Ovid's narrative at the moment when Hercules ascends from the pyre to Olympus. The flames can be seen at the bottom left and the bulky hero (Ovid says that "he began to seem greater in size") climbs on the chariot provided by Jupiter. A flying putto puts the victor's wreath on his head, and a second guides the chariot. Rubens does not show Jupiter, so as not to detract from the focus on the triumphant hero. *(Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.)*

(which means "glory of Hera"), since Greek gods do not form their names from compounds of other gods' names.

Since his legend is particularly associated with Argos, Mycenae, and Tiryns, his saga may have had its origin in a prince of Tiryns who was vassal to the lord of Mycenae. This fits with the theme of subservience to Eurystheus. But other areas with which he is especially associated are Boeotia (the traditional setting of his birth and of a group of his exploits) and Trachis, scene of his final exploits and death.

This leads to one of two possibilities: either legends of the hero of Tiryns spread to Boeotia and other parts of Greece, where his fame attracted local leg-

ends, or else he was brought into Greece by early settlers from the north and his fame spread all over Greece. The latter explanation seems the more acceptable, but it has led many people to believe wrongly that Heracles was a Dorian hero, brought in by invaders who entered Greece at the end of the Mycenaean Age. It is better to suppose that Heracles is an older hero common to all the Greek peoples but associated more with certain areas (Argos, Thebes, Trachis) than with others. Thus we find his exploits covering the whole of the Greek world and his legends and cult flourishing in areas of Greek colonization, such as Asia Minor and Italy (where as Hercules he passed into the Roman state religion).

Many people have thought of him primarily as a god. Herodotus believed that Heracles the god was quite distinct from Heracles the man and that the god was one of the twelve ancient gods of Egypt. He himself even traveled to the Phoenician city of Tyre, whose chief god, Melkart, was identified with Heracles, to find support for his theory. Since the mythology of Melkart is virtually unknown, the similarities between him and Heracles remain unclear; nor can we establish the exact relationship between Heracles and other Oriental figures with whom he shares many similarities, for example, the Israelite hero Samson, the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh, and the Cilician god Sandas. These figures may have contributed elements toward the Greek hero's legend. In general, it is safe to reject Herodotus' theory and accept the nearly unanimous view of the ancients that Heracles the man became a god.

Still, the origins of Heracles are a subject of great interest. The similarities to the Eastern figures mentioned are undeniable, as are similarities to the Indian hero Indra, who killed the three-headed monster Visvarupa and released the cattle penned in his cave. The monsters that Heracles overcame, such as the lion and the many-headed Hydra, belong more to Eastern mythology, yet Heracles is very definitely a Greek hero, and his myths are Greek traditional tales. Many different tales, then, have become attached to the hero called Heracles. The process can be seen in the large number of *parerga* that cluster around several of the Labors. Some of the myths have a structure consistent with Propp's Quest (see pp. 13–14), and in these the basic structure of the myth remains, despite its varied appearances. The primitive origins of much of Heracles' mythology are apparent from his violence and brutality. His association with many different types of animals has led some scholars to see in him a kind of "Master of Animals," not least because of his association with cattle, the chief source of food in a pastoral society. There is much that is persuasive in Walter Burkert's conclusion:

> *Heracles is, basically, not a heroic figure in the Homeric sense: he is not a warrior fighting warriors, he is mainly concerned with animals, just as he is a savage clad in a skin; and his main job is to tame and bring back the animals which are eaten by man.*[20]

The Greek hero, son of Zeus and exemplar of strength and patience, is also the man wielding the primitive weapon of the club and wearing the lionskin, whose origins lie perhaps far from Greece and certainly in a time long before the development even of Mycenaean culture.

The Choice of Heracles. By Annibale Carracci (1560–1609); oil on canvas, 1596, $65\frac{3}{4} \times 93\frac{1}{4}$ in. Formerly the central painting in the ceiling of the *camerino* (private office) of the Farnese Palace, Carracci's painting is a lucid interpretation of Prodicius' parable. Heracles, identified by his club and lionskin, ponders the choice between Pleasure (to the viewer's right), whose attributes include an actor's mask and a musical instrument. On the other side, Virtue, holding a sheathed sword, points to the rocky upward path, at the top of which stands Pegasus. At the bottom left a poet sits ready to record the deeds of the hero, whose eyes indicate that he has already made his choice of Virtue. In the central background is a palm tree, source of the future victor's wreath. *(Naples, Galleria di Capodimonte.)*

So diverse a character attracted a variety of interpretations and uses. Indeed, as Aristotle pointed out in the *Poetics* (8), his very diversity made it impossible for a unified epic or tragedy to be written about him. Only three extant Greek tragedies deal with his legend—Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Heracles* and *Alcestis* (the latter almost incidentally). To the comic poets like Aristophanes, he is good material for slapstick; in the *Frogs*, for example, he is largely motivated by gluttony and lust.

More significant was the use made of his virtues by the moralists and philosophers, to whom he became a model of unselfish fortitude, laboring for the good of humankind and achieving immortality by his virtue. This process is best typified by the famous parable told by Prodicus of Ceos:[21] As a young

man, Heracles was faced with the choice between two women, representing Vice (with ease) and Virtue (with hardship), and chose the latter. Heracles was especially important as a paradigm of virtue in Roman Stoicism, whose doctrines set high value on the Heraclean qualities of endurance and self-reliance. In a modern setting, the character of Harcourt-Reilly in T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1949) combines the Heracles of the myth of Alcestis with the virtues of a Christ-like hero.

Perhaps we would do better to leave Heracles by returning to the ancient invocation to him in the *Homeric Hymn to Heracles, the Lion-Hearted* (15); here we may focus on the man who after a lifetime of toil became a hero and a god:

Of Heracles will I sing, son of Zeus, whom Alcmena bore in Thebes, city of delightful dances, when she had lain with the son of Cronus, lord of the dark clouds, to be by far the greatest of men on earth. He traversed long ago vast distances of land and sea at the order of King Eurystheus; many were the bold deeds he did, many were the things he endured. Now he dwells in joy in the beautiful palace of snowy Olympus and has for wife slender-ankled Hebe. Hail, lord, son of Zeus. Grant [me] both excellence and wealth.[22]

THE HERACLIDAE

ALCMENA, EURYSTHEUS, AND THE CHILDREN OF HERACLES

After the death of Heracles, his mother Alcmena and his children were persecuted by Eurystheus. King Ceyx was unable to protect them and they fled to Athens. The Athenians fought Eurystheus, who died in battle with his five sons. His head was brought to Alcmena, who gouged out the eyes with brooches.

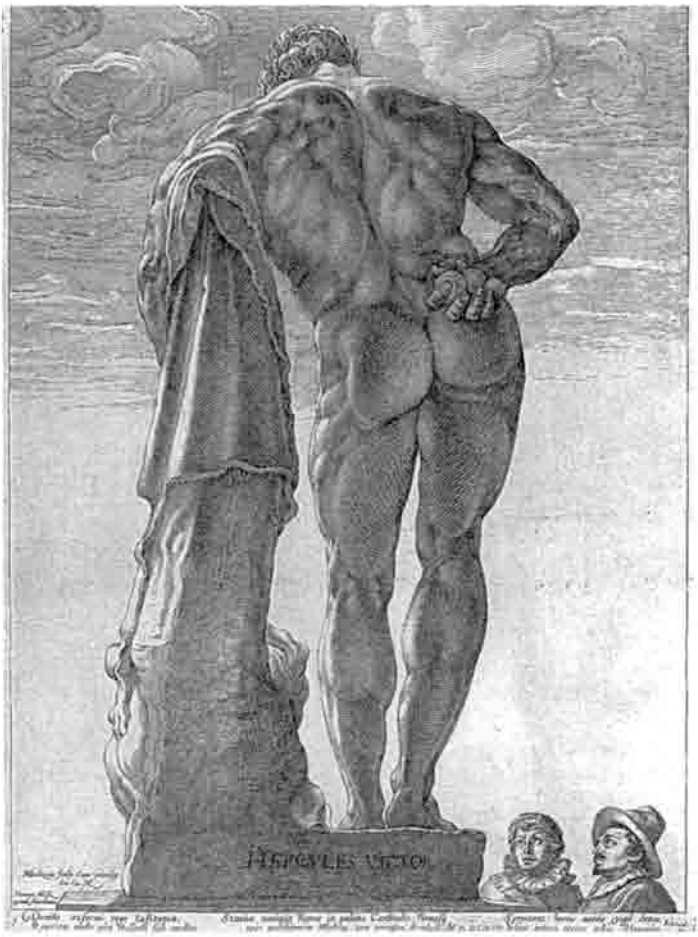
According to Euripides, however, in his drama *Heraclidae,* Alcmena and her grandchildren were received at Athens by King Demophon, son of Theseus. Demophon was ordered "by all the oracles to sacrifice a virgin, daughter of a noble father, to the daughter of Demeter [Persephone], to be the defeat of our enemies and the salvation of the city" (*Heraclidae* 407–409, 402). Macaria, daughter of Heracles, voluntarily offered herself for the sacrifice and so brought victory to the Athenians. In the battle, Iolaüs, the nephew of Heracles, was miraculously rejuvenated by Heracles and Hebe and pursued Eurystheus, whom he captured and brought back to Alcmena. The play ends with Alcmena gloating over her prisoner and ordering him off to be executed. With his last words Eurystheus prophesies that his body, if it were buried in Attica, would protect the land from invaders.

Yet another version was given by Pindar (*Pythian Odes* 9. 79–84):

Seven-gated Thebes knew that the Right Time (*Kairos*) favored Iolaüs. Him they buried, after he had cut off the head of Eurystheus with his sword, deep in the earth in the tomb of Amphitryon the charioteer. His grandfather [Amphitryon] lay there, guest of the Spartoi, who lived as a foreigner in Cadmeia, city of white horses.

Hercules Prodicius. Engraving by T. van Thulden after a design by Peter Paul Rubens, from C. Gevartius, *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi,* Antwerp, 1642. The virtuous hero of Prodicus' parable of the Choice of Heracles is at the center of baroque political allegory. The victorious Archduke Ferdinand, wearing Heracles' lionskin and holding his club, refuses the temptations of women representing Love and Pleasure (a cupid tugs at the lionskin), as he prepares to ascend the rocky path of Virtue pointed out to him by Athena, toward the temple of Virtue and Honor. The allegory is set in a triumphal arch erected over the processional way along which Ferdinand made his "Joyful Entry" into Antwerp in 1635 after his victory at Nördlingen, to which the cannon at the lower right of the panel alludes. (*The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*)

The Farnese Hercules. Marble copy by Glycon, early third century A.D., of an original by Lysippus, mid-fourth century B.C.; height 125 in. This huge statue was found in the Baths of Caracalla at Rome, for which it had been specially copied. The weary hero leans on his club, which rests on a stump over which the lionskin is draped. His vast body is bursting with mountainous muscles. It has been suggested (by M. Robertson) that he is "an athlete in decay"; more likely his stance is one of weariness after his labors. *(Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy/Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)*



Hercules Victor (The Farnese Hercules), by Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617). Engraving 1589; published 1617. Goltzius's engraving shows the overmuscled body of the hero from the rear, clutching the Apples of the Hesperides in his right hand. The two contemporary observers emphasize the vastness of his body silhouetted against the sky. The Latin iambic lines (to the left and right of the caption) say: "I, Hercules, terror of the world, rest, weary after subduing the three-formed king [Geryon] of further Spain and after taking the apples from the turning-point of Hesperus, where the never-sleeping serpent had guarded them in gardens of gold." *(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Henry Walters, 1917.)*

In this version, Iolaüs killed Eurystheus, and his body, rather than that of Eurystheus, protected the foreign land that had welcomed him—in this case Thebes (which was Pindar's own city).

Alcmena herself also became associated with a cult. In one version, she died in Thebes and was transported by Hermes to the Elysian Fields, where she mar-

ried Rhadamanthys, brother of Minos. In the version of Apollodorus, she married Rhadamanthys in Thebes after the death of Amphitryon and was reunited with him in the Underworld. As she was being carried out to burial in a coffin Hermes, at the command of Zeus, substituted for her body a large stone, which the sons of Heracles discovered (for the coffin had suddenly become very heavy) and set up in a shrine sacred to her.[23]

The Return of the Heraclidae

The saga of the descendants of Heracles (the Heraclidae) explains the occupation of a large part of the Peloponnese by Dorian tribes in the period after the end of the Mycenaean Age. Hyllus married Iole as his father had commanded and consulted Delphi about his return to the Peloponnese. He was advised to wait "until the third fruit" and that victory would come "from the Narrows." After waiting two more years, he attacked by way of the Isthmus of Corinth. He himself was killed in single combat by Echemus, king of Tegea; his army withdrew, and a truce of one hundred years was agreed upon. At the end of that time, the Heraclid Temenus again consulted the oracle, who told him that the "third fruit" meant not the third harvest but the third generation, and that "the Narrows" meant the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth. Temenus therefore invaded the northwest Peloponnese, crossing over near Patrae and taking as a guide a "three-eyed man" in accordance with the advice of the oracle; this was an Aetolian exile named Oxylus, whom he found riding a one-eyed horse. With his help, the Heraclids defeated the Peloponnesian defenders, who were led by Tisamenus, son of Orestes. Thucydides (1. 12) relates these events to the disruptions in Greece that followed the Trojan War and the return of the Greek leaders. He says that "the Dorians with the Heraclidae took possession of the Peloponnese in the eightieth year [after the fall of Troy]."

Thus the "Return of the Heraclidae" took place. The leaders divided up the three principal areas which they had conquered. Lacedaemon (Sparta) was given to Procles and Eurysthenes, sons of the lately dead leader Aristodemus, and they became founders of the two royal houses of Sparta. Argos fell to Temenus, and Messene to Cresphontes. Temenus was killed by his sons, whom he had passed over in the succession to his throne; Cresphontes was also murdered, along with two of his sons, by a rival Heraclid, Polyphontes. His widow, Merope, was forced to become Polyphontes' queen, but she succeeded in getting her surviving son Aepytus out of the kingdom to Aetolia, where he grew up. Later he secretly returned to Messene and was recognized by Merope, with whose connivance he killed Polyphontes and recovered his father's throne. Of the three Dorian kingdoms, Sparta and Argos flourished for many centuries, but Messene was subjugated by the Spartans within a comparatively short time.