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Formal Debates in Euripides' Drama[1]

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The prime dramatic character of Greek tragedy is agonistic. Its myths for the most part show men struggling toward some goal, in conflict with one another, or against some force of circumstance or destiny, which is often personified in a god. Tragedy is at the same time a dramatic form restricted severely by theatrical conditions. The number of its speaking actors is held to three. It avoids the staging of any physical action like an assault or battle, let alone catastrophe, or death—for whatever reasons of narrative tradition, aesthetic convention, or simple impracticability. Despite certain ritual or symbolic aids to representation such as music, dance, and gesture, it is in consequence a drama of extreme, sometimes exclusive, verbal concentration. Exposition, development, climax, resolution, action and reaction—all movement occurs in the narrow room of at most three stage persons at any one time debating to confirm or change their attitudes or intentions—often, with a single character so placed debating within himself, in monologue or soliloquy, or in relief or opposition to another voice. My subject here is this last *mise-en-scène*: the deliberate working up of the ordinary exchange between characters into the opposition of one character to one or two others in a formal debate.

Jacqueline Duchemin has claimed[2] that tragedy's agonistic character—and particularly its formal debates—are in part its natural inheritance from a long popular or pastoral tradition of dramatic poetry—a primitive mimetic poetry, she means, of alternating or amoibaic form, which represents two contrasted characters or interests. She notes that debates as an established dramatic form, the *agōn*

[1] A paper read to the Liverpool Branch of the Classical Association in March 1974. I have condensed the main text but added the notes.

[2] Duchemin 1969, 247–75, a supplement to her analytical study Duchemin 1945, esp. pp. 11–37.

of tragedy, appear first in Sophocles and Euripides (that is, in the surviving plays, the earliest of which, the *Ajax*, is generally put at *c.*450 BC); but they are absent from Aeschylus. Earlier, she had drawn attention to two other literary forms strongly reliant on the formal opposition of characters or forces. One of these, comedy, developed its idiosyncratic *agōn* well before the formal debate became established in tragedy; Duchemin's other analogy, the historians' use of contrast as mode in dramatic narrative or reported argument, is less cogent from the point of synchronism, but indicative in a general way of her truth. The spoken word, and especially the reported argument, is as natural to Greek historiography as it is to Greek poetry, let alone poetic drama, when we consider the chief place of oral epic in time and influence in the Greek literary tradition. Duchemin therefore sees Aeschylus' use of alternating and pointed dialogue, especially stichomythia, as the linear ancestor of the more stylized exchanges in Sophocles and Euripides; she suggests that, while the sudden appearance of formal debates in Sophocles and Euripides around 450 is chiefly through the influence of contemporary developments in sophistic argument and rhetorical technique, it is certainly not due entirely to the sophists or rhetors. Rather, tragedy owes much to the sophists, but may itself have influenced them, from the time of its own sudden growth in Aeschylus' lifetime; it may actually have provided some kind of model for their agonistic discourses or *ἀντιλογίαι*.

I begin with these general remarks because, despite warnings by sensitive critics,[3] there is still an instinctive temptation to isolate Euripides' formal debates from their dramatic setting. The temptation stems from their often rigidly antithetical and symmetrical appearance in the printed text; I doubt whether these symmetries are quite so immediate to a theatre audience, but an audience is as likely as a reader to pick up the measured matching of arguments within the debates; and Euripides sometimes gives the impression of presenting and matching debating points for their own sake. Older critics of Euripides told us that our instinct is right, and that the poet is guilty

[3] Since Tietze's important corrective to older views of Euripidean rhetoric (1933), I would name: Dale 1954, xxvii–xxix (cf. 1969, 151 f., 274 f.); Clemen 1961, 45–7; Strohm 1957, 3–49 (the richest and most sympathetic study of the *agōn*, to which this paper is more widely in great debt than the particular acknowledgements may suggest); Stinton 1965, 38 f. For other literature on the Euripidean formal debate see: Schwinge 1968*a*, 33 n. 1 ('symmetry'); Lesky 1972, 507 n. 4 (dissertations), and Collard 1975*b*, commentary on lines 87–262: C (general).

of self-indulgent digression for the sake of rhetorical display, at the cost of dramatic continuity and relevance. Besides, Euripides' formal debates tend to compare badly with those of Sophocles. In this poet the debates are less rigid in structure; they are more naturally accommodated to episodic development; they are always more circumstantial in their argumentation; there is a sense of firm dramatic control as well as harmony of style.[4] Yet debates in Sophocles are often not less evidently 'formal' than in Euripides; at the end of *Ajax*, for example, Menelaus forbids Teucer to bury his brother, in a long rhesis (1052–90); Teucer replies in kind (1093–1117), but then debate gives way to angry argument; the episode ends without resolution, and after a stasimon the final episode (1223 ff.) begins with another formal exchange between Teucer and Agamemnon, running on into the reconciliation worked by the selfless broker Odysseus. There is no stiffness, no lack of circumstance, no feeling of abstraction about these debates, in this earliest surviving play of Sophocles as in the last, the *Oedipus at Colonus*: here, in the long central episode (720–1043), formal exchanges, in rhesis and dialogue, first between Creon and Oedipus, second between Theseus, Creon, and Oedipus, surround a central passage of vigorous action as Creon abducts Antigone and Ismene and then threatens Oedipus—but Sophocles gives the whole episode fluent variety. Form never dominates. Unitary structures, 'blocks' of action or matter, are avoided, for the long speeches are kept at differing lengths and dialogue never settles into stichomythia; there is constant shift in focus and mood, in the pace of argument as well as of action, fitting the busy movement of the characters onto, from, and across the stage.

What is 'formality', then, that it marks off one scene from another, distinguishing organized debate from ordinary exchange? The easier and less satisfactory distinction is purely according to form, less satisfactory because it subjects to taxonomy something not originally specific. Nor can taxonomic description be rigid: formal debates are too various and loose in structure, despite frequent responsion or symmetry between their various elements in position, length, or even content.[5] The only constant features are long 'set' speeches from

[4] Debates in Sophocles, perhaps for these very qualities, have had little separate discussion, but see Webster 1969, 148–55, and Long 1968, 155–60; both note other literature.

[5] It was the major achievement of Tietze (1933) and Duchemin (1945 and 1966) to insist on the irregularity, rather than the regularity, of formal debates.

each of, or all the antagonists—for sometimes there are three, not two, participants—but the length, structure, and style of these speeches are very flexible. Other elements vary even more, and may indeed be altogether absent, so that, at the barest, two opposing speeches stand almost on their own, with little introduction, or consequence, dramatic or thematic. These other elements are, first, animated dialogue, stichomythic or irregular in form, sometimes very long, preceding or following the two main speeches, or, very rarely, between them; second, shorter single speeches by the participants, usually at the end of the debate; and last, brief interventions by the chorus, normally two lines in length, to mark important divisions in the whole structure—that is, they punctuate the debate at the end of the long set speeches, where they tend to have a flatly neutral or sententious character.

The further definition of 'formality' relates to content and style. It is something more, however, than the concentration of the long speeches, or the whole debate, on a single issue toward which the parties have opposite views or intentions. We might describe many dialogue scenes in those terms, most of all those in which one character makes a long appeal to another and receives acceptance or rejection in reasoned terms, quite often in a long reply. It is rather that an issue, or the problems inherent in a crisis, become the subject of a debate through their explicit proposition by one of the participants, in Euripides sometimes through a positive challenge to argument. Indeed, Euripides commonly signals a formal debate with such words as *ἀγών*, *ἀγωνίζεσθαι*, *ἄμιλλα λόγων* ('argument, debate; to argue, to debate; contest of words'). Such headlines, or combative premisses, mark out Euripides' formal debates most obviously from those of Sophocles; and they show his more deliberate recourse to the modes, even formulas, of forensic debate or sophistic argument. So, for example, Tyndareus reviles Orestes for the matricide:

> What argument could there be about wisdom with Orestes here? If what is good and what is not good are clear to all, was ever man more fool than he, who did not look for justice nor had resort to Greece's common law? (*Or.* 491–5)[6]

[6] 491 *πρὸς τόνδε σοφίας τίς ἂν ἀγὼν ἥκοι πέρι*; ('What argument could there be about wisdom with Orestes here?') Porson: *πρὸς τόνδ' ἀγών τις σοφίας ἥκει πέρι* ('Some argument . . . is coming with this man' (unmetrically)) *codd.* Dramatic context and the logic of the argument (cf. below, p. 78) bar Bothe's *ἀσοφίας* ('about unwisdom') and it must be struck from Murray's OCT.

Such headlines often draw responses which accept the ground of argument marked out by the opponent, as Orestes takes up this attack by Tyndareus:

> Old man, I truly fear to speak against you when I am likely to outrage you. I know, for killing my mother I am impure, but under another head, pure, in that I have avenged my father. (*Or.* 544–7)

Even to define formal debates risks isolating them still further in criticism from their dramatic setting. Their success as scenes depends very much on the skill of their introduction to the stage, in the incident from which they spring, and in the harmony of their theme with the main direction of the plot, in terms of the motives or feelings they expose. They can reveal the grounds of disagreement or hostility, present or past (for they are often necessarily retrospective, like the arguments of Theseus and Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 902–1089), or, in *Electra* (998–1146), between Clytemnestra and Electra). In leading to conflict subsequently dramatized or reported by a messenger, we might expect them to occur either at the start of a play or at a critical turn of the action; indeed, most do occur before the climax. Or they may expose the history of a conflict already fought to its end, and so have no outcome except to deepen enmity or confirm hatred, as in the debate between Hecuba and Polymestor at the end of *Hecuba* (1129–1292). Or they may, exceptionally, end in agreement, rather than continuing or exacerbated hostility: so the final scene of *Heracles* in which Theseus argues the hero into enduring life, in continued proof of his ἀρετή ('heroic nature') (1214–1404: see below). Or they may have a more subtle function, as the debate between Admetus and Pheres in *Alcestis* (614–740) serves to reveal Admetus' helpless and angry disillusion after his wife's death. Or, in this same dramatic intention, they may tend to dispose the audience's sympathies towards one or other of the disputants. Here, it is worth noting that the 'winner' of a debate, where victory in it means success for a policy, or 'moral victor', whose just or sympathetic case is rewarded by victory in a subsequent conflict—the 'winner' normally speaks second, and there is no come-back for the first speaker in a reasoned speech of rebuttal, only retaliation with abuse in fast and often colloquial stichomythia.[7]

[7] On the order of speakers in formal debates see Schlesinger 1937, 69 f., and, e.g., Dale 1954 on *Alc.* 697.

The starkest debate, least 'natural' in effect, will be one between two characters which pre-empts the dramatic room of a whole episode, thrust abruptly on an audience. The only surviving debate which risks this impression is that in the early *Alcestis* (614–740). Indeed, Euripides moves steadily throughout his work away from two-character debates cast rigidly in block-form towards the greater freedom of three-person scenes incorporating debates, rather than debates simply among three participants.[8] Conflicts most of the debates remain, usually without resolution, and they still most often precede the climax, but there is a refinement in their quality. They tend to show more of the internal constitution of the debaters, in a way consistent with their general role in the action (and this we might expect when we recognize the dovetailing of the debates into episodes): they circumstantiate inflexibility of attitudes, usually in one only of the debaters. The recognition of this more precise but subtle function is due to Strohm,[9] whose book was published before the nature and mode of characterization in Greek tragedy received its newest discussion.

In the early plays, Euripides frequently presents the issues of 'suppliant' drama in a formal debate,[10] which resembles a trial, either of the suppliant or of his persecutor, sometimes of both together. Trial-scenes are as common in the late plays, where the expansion from two to three characters increases variety and flexibility, in stage-movement of the parties, their disposition and sympathies, but also in emotional range. Scenes in which one of two debaters is judge, perhaps even also prosecutor, of the other, are strong but simple drama; it is enough to think again, and only, of Theseus and Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 902–1089). There is at once greater richness, however, in scenes where two debaters plead before a third person who judges them, like Eurystheus' herald and Iolaus before Demophon at the start of *Heraclidae* (111–287), Helen arguing for her life against Hecuba before Menelaus in *Troades* (860–1059)—or where the third party waits helplessly on the outcome of a debate in which one of the debaters has power of decision, like Andromache the beneficiary of Peleus' worsting Menelaus (*And.* 547–765), or in *Phoenissae* (435–637: see below), Jocasta the victim of Polynices' and Eteocles' sterile confrontation. Trial-scenes inevitably are formal debates and

[8] Strohm 1957, 44 f. [9] Strohm 1957, 46 f.
[10] Strohm 1957, 16 ff.; cf. Gould 1973, 89 n. 76, etc.

feel most successful as drama, for they accommodate convincingly the strongest single external influence on the tragic *agōn* as a whole, the law-court *plaidoyer*. The Athenian audience no doubt responded as readily as we to courtroom drama, because of its immediacy to our own experience and our easy identification with the emotions of the stage-persons—and because the formalities of forensic debate by their very familiarity seem less obtrusive, less interruptive of the illusion of tragic myth. That is something of a paradox, but it relates to the further problem of apparently incongruous intellectual content of these debates which I touch below. In trial-debates the speeches are shot through, exactly as they were in the law-courts of contemporary Athens, with all manner of emotional colour and narrative, or special pleading; and they are carefully organized with calculated switches from attack to defence, pre-emptions of the opponent's argument, appeals to probability, sententious or self-righteous recourse to moral truths.[11] The imagination of transfer from δικαστήριον ('law-court') to σκηνή ('stage') is completed by the accompanying dialogue, carefully phased, where it precedes the long speeches, in its range from methodical question and answer to sudden accelerations in pace as a crack in the defence is widened, or, after the main speeches, impassioned charge and rebuttal, recrimination, hostility and defiance, which are the regular stuff to end formal debates, gain theatricality from the forensic ambience.

If in trial-scenes the mere illusion conspires with the formality, perhaps even artificiality, of some debates, in other places Euripides seems to yield to extraneous pressures in allowing the long speeches to develop a momentum of their own, as a character pursues an argument for its own sake and not that of the basic issue. Sometimes there is damage to the consistency of these persons' ἤθη καὶ διάνοια ('character and thought'), but A. M. Dale wisely told us how to take such excursions as Euripides' own instinctive response to the 'rhetoric of his dramatic situation'.[12] We need to recognize there the poet's intellectual personality breaking poetic convention in an unprecedented way. This greater immediacy, like the whole illusion of the trial-scene, stands with the rhetorical cast Euripides gives not only most speeches in formal debates, but many other long speeches in scenes of quite differing temper (it helps create the impression that

[11] For these technical devices see Duchemin 1945, 167–216.
[12] Dale 1954, xxvii–xxix.

there are many more formal contrasts of argument than there actually are). So the easy yielding of any speech to technical analysis, or to taxonomic description with rhetorical labels, must not *de suo* induce its further misappreciation on grounds of irrelevant or digressive content as one governed entirely by its own ends, self-contained and self-indulgent.

The rest of this paper illustrates very selectively the development in Euripides' use of debates between his early and late plays, in the general ways I have described. Some other aspects of debates are left to implicit example.

First three early plays, in which Euripides sets an agonistic scene, or formal debate, at their very end, in order to show a conflict or hatred which lasts beyond the action the whole play has resolved: *Medea*, *Heraclidae*, *Hecuba*. Medea, her cruel vengeance taken, escaping on the μηχανή ('machine') in her magic chariot, calls down in triumph to the helpless and embittered Jason (*Med.* 1317 ff.). She rejects his accusation of the children's murder, defiantly refusing him their burial. There are short rheseis, of unequal length, and fierce stichomythia (1323–88), then a final curiously dissonant exchange, in anapaests, half-abusive, half-pathetic; familiar idioms of lamenting parents help the play to its end on a note of tragedy (1389–1414).

This agonistic setting for the final display of Medea's fury is comparable with the end of *Heraclidae*, which shows Alcmena cruelly insistent on the death of captive Eurystheus in vengeance for his persecution of Heracles and the family (*Hcld.* 928 ff.).[13] While Alcmena is clearly the prosecutor (and judge), and Eurystheus the defendant, yet the premiss of her attack is contested before Eurystheus speaks. Euripides brings out the repellent vindictiveness of Alcmena by showing her ride down the moral objection that she flouts the law (of Athens, where they now are), which forbids the execution of captives. Such an objection cannot come from the equally immoral Eurystheus, so that it is raised by a third party, hesitantly by one of Alcmena's own side and, not less significantly, by a servant. Nor is it raised in a rhesis, only in a dialogue between the servant and Alcmena (961–74),[14] which divides her speech of accusation

[13] The interpretation of this scene is made hard by major textual uncertainty: see Zuntz 1963, 125 ff., and 1947, 48 ff.
[14] For the distribution of 961–74 between Alcmena and her servant (Barnes, Tyrwhitt) see Zuntz 1963, 125 ff.

(941–60) from Eurystheus' speech in defence (983–1017). Form is adapted to accommodate the priority in dramatic logic. Or, Euripides' conception of the scene required separation of two issues both meriting exposition by formal contrast, the general problem of rights over captives and Eurystheus' particular excuse to Alcmena of being made the agent of Hera's cruelty. So Euripides wrote one loosely agonistic scene, from which the formality of plaintiff and defendant still comes strongly out.[15] That Eurystheus picks up the servant's moral objection, at the end of his speech, in his ambiguous appeal for a life which he admits is justly forfeit (1009 ff.), is in character with his special pleading. It does not lessen the impact of this extraordinary conflict: the former victim is now callous in revenge, the former persecutor now helplessly protests—just as the end of *Medea* reverses the sympathies the play's whole course has fostered. How could Jason merit such vengeance? Is justice truly justice in the hands of Alcmena?

Like Medea, like Alcmena, Hecuba too is extreme in vengeance. The end of the play, it has to be admitted, is weak in dramatic logic. It is hard to know whether Euripides uses the trial-scene (*Hc.* 1129 ff.) to help out this weakness theatrically, or the debate is his chief purpose. The treacherous Polymestor has been lured into the women's tent by Hecuba, with Agamemnon's acquiescence, and blinded; and his sons have been killed. Polymestor returns to the stage, stumbling about in a frenzy of pain, crying his fury in a broken dochmiac song, groping for Hecuba (1056–1107). The noise brings Agamemnon, who is aghast at Hecuba's vengeance, but prevents Polymestor falling on her. 'Stop,' says Agamemnon, 'put away your savagery and speak, that I may listen to you and her in turn and decide the justice of your suffering' (1129–31).

This headline to the ensuing *agōn* is not a little forced, because when Hecuba got Agamemnon's complicity in luring Polymestor to the tent, she gave him a long explanation (760–802) how she sent her son Polydorus for safety to live with Polymestor, together with much gold; and how the discovery of Polydorus' body points to Polymestor as traitor, thief, and murderer. Now, Polymestor, as the unsympathetic defendant, speaks first, and a remarkable speech it is: a specious narrative of how he killed the Trojan Polydorus to prevent an enemy of Agamemnon growing strong behind his back, and then

[15] Cf. Duchemin 1945, 76 and 121.

an account, *misericordiae causa*, of the horrible vengeance Hecuba took on him inside the tent (1132–82). In its richly evocative language this is more a messenger-speech than a law-court defence, but Hecuba rebuts it with a conventionally methodical demolition of Polymestor's case (1187–1237).

Agamemnon's role as judge in this trial is artificial: he has already conceded Hecuba the justice of her revenge. Besides, this is no ordinary trial, a debate *post factum*, but one in which both opponents have done murder and injured the other, in which they argue their cases after both have acted in them. Agamemnon thus serves only dramatic realism, in a simple way, compounding the illusion of a stage trial which upholds the justice and immunity of Hecuba, and she is vindicated when Agamemnon banishes Polymestor, the formal act which ends the play. Without Agamemnon we would have a scene like the end of *Medea* or *Heraclidae*, when unquenchable hatred crushes its now pathetic victim. Hecuba and Polymestor come out from Agamemnon's verdict only for a bitter stichomythia (1252–79) in which Hecuba's triumph is turned to ashes when Polymestor prophesies her transformation into a dog and her daughter Cassandra's death from Clytemnestra. Euripides' penchant for aetiology (Hecuba's death and transfiguration at the headland Cynossema: 1271–3) invades even stichomythia here, its function a weak corroboration of the plot's veracity; but it also provides in its harsh meaning for Hecuba Polymestor's only satisfaction for his punishment at her hands. Once again, as in *Medea* and *Heraclidae*, it brings a readjustment of sympathies in the play's last words; it makes us re-examine the extremity of Hecuba's vengeance.

The *Heracles* too, from Euripides' 'middle' period, has a final debate (1214–1404), but one which achieves harmony rather than confirms estrangement. This outcome is implicit from the start in the long-standing friendship of the disputants, Heracles and Theseus. The *agōn* between the two is a contest of will; Theseus forces Heracles to resist the suicide that tempts him as punishment for, and escape from, the shame of having killed his children: he must be true to his ἀρετή ('heroic nature'), must live to surmount dishonour. This is a long scene in which the formality of debate is skilfully concealed. There are four long speeches, two shorter ones by Theseus each preceding a longer one by Heracles, but the central pair are the important ones; and Theseus as 'winner' speaks, as usual, second. Formal variety matches shifting emphasis in theme. Theseus' first

speech (1214–28), with its charge to Heracles to brace up, is not answered at once: a stichomythic dialogue (1229–54), in which Theseus presses home this encouragement, avoids the immediate formal opposition of rhesis to rhesis. Heracles' first speech (1255–1310) half takes up Theseus' charge, half moves to new argument; Theseus' second speech (1313–39) has the same form: its first half insists again on Heracles' holding firm, its second half anticipates his concession with its promise of Athenian reward. Similarly again in Heracles' last speech (1340–93), his concession, the formal conclusion of the debate, gives way to pathetic farewells to his father, wife, and dead children. The whole scene thus gets a natural forward movement, avoiding rigidity and 'block-form' for the debate.

In this fluent handling of a debate the *Heracles* has the accomplished style of a late play. The first debate in *Hecuba* (216–443), even earlier than *Heracles*, is also of interest for the greater variety the form enjoys in later Euripides. In a lyric scene Hecuba and Polyxena together lament the daughter's imminent sacrifice to Achilles' ghost (154–215): so two of the participants to the debate, whose sympathies are close and who form one side of it, are shown together before the entry of the third, Odysseus, to fetch the girl (216 ff.). Argument between Hecuba and Odysseus for the girl's life begins at once, but cannot affect what is determined. The victim Polyxena listens in silence, then accepts. Further, the unsympathetic party speaks second here, for good dramatic reasons: the tragedy of the helpless victim is emphasized.

Thus the scene in *Hecuba*, in which a debate is easily incorporated; the episode runs out on one of Euripides' favourite motifs, the voluntary death of a sacrificial heroine. Look now at the strikingly similar course of a scene in *Phoenissae*, which shows perfected technique (435–637).[16] It too has a lyric prelude, in which Jocasta welcomes Polynices on his return to Thebes. She sings a monody (301–54) which conveys passionately an aged mother's yearning for her estranged sons' reunion in happiness. A dialogue between Polynices and Jocasta (357–434) introduces the debate, associating these two participants and building sympathy for Polynices as the wronged exile. His final words to Jocasta are the headline to the debate proper: 'it lies with you, mother, to resolve these wrongs, reconciling

[16] For the affinities cf. Duchemin 1945, 122.

kin to amity, and to end the suffering for me, yourself, and the whole city' (435–7).[17]

Three lines from the chorus announce Eteocles' entry, and twice repeat the key-word 'reconciliation'. Eteocles' first words give the debate a familiar start: 'Mother, I am here; it is a favour to you that I have come. What must I do? Let someone start the talking' (446–7). Briefly, Jocasta enjoins the brothers to drop their hostility and to present and receive each other's arguments fairly: 'Let some god be judge and reconcile the wrong', she ends (467–8). Thus, dexterously, Euripides withdraws the third participant, indeed the promoter of the debate, from the position of judge into that of witness and, finally, victim. The brothers argue: Polynices the simple justice of his case, to be restored to Thebes where Eteocles broke their agreement (469–96); Eteocles his greed for sovereignty once enjoyed, unashamedly (499–525). Now Jocasta adds a long plea for reconciliation in which she matches the arguments of her two sons (528–85). Helpless victim Jocasta may be, but Euripides uses her as an independently strong voice in the debate—in the way an audience might react. A clever speech, this: it satisfies the internal logic of the debate proper, answering the general questions it raises; but it also suits the dramatic and ethical needs of the scene. Jocasta has brought the brothers into debate: her speech shows the possible accommodation of their mutual stubbornness and in that throws up the tragedy of what follows. For at once Eteocles rejects further argument (588–93); and the closing dialogue, in the deliberately faster rhythm of tetrameters (594 ff.), typically inflames incompatible stances into implacable enmity. This is well-chosen variation in tempo, matching διάνοια ('thought'), but the quality of the scene goes beyond careful development and pace. Jocasta lays bare Polynices' motives before the debate proper begins; his antagonist, Eteocles, enters only at the start, for he needs no preparation: he is not an exile seeking reparation and his motives are otherwise straightforward. Euripides purposely builds this sudden and vivid conflict of two quite differing personalities, their contrast starker because Eteocles has a rugged selfishness; so it exposes Jocasta's helplessness more cruelly.

Groupings of three participants similar to that in *Phoenissae*, where the sympathy of two is matched against the inflexibility of the third, are found also in *Bacchae* (170–369) and the *Aulic Iphigenia*

[17] 438–42 are an interpolation: Fraenkel 1963, 25 f.

(1098–1275). In *Bacchae* the overtones are more resonant than in *Phoenissae*, the sense of theatre more telling. After the parodos evoking the power of Dionysus, the aged Cadmus and Tiresias affirm their worship of the god in an uneven but natural sequence of short speeches and dialogue (170–214). Then Pentheus enters to deliver a tirade against the Lydian stranger (215–62), blind in his prejudice as he is stage-blind to the old men in their Dionysiac livery. A sure dramatic imagination conceived this argument, in which antagonisms of conviction and submission, of wisdom and arrogance, have countervailing and ironic theatrical contrasts between physical weakness and strength, age and youth. There is no dialogue in the debate, no stichomythic widening of the gulf argument cannot bridge: after the long, responding speeches of Pentheus and Tiresias come irregular shorter rheseis from both sides when Pentheus, isolated by his inflexibility, can retreat only to harsher threats.[18]

The debate in the *Aulic Iphigenia* similarly fills an episode but is even more tersely expressive. Clytemnestra has found out Agamemnon's intention to sacrifice Iphigenia; with her weeping daughter she comes out to confront Agamemnon with his deception (1098 ff.). Iphigenia listens silently to their exchange, as irregular in form as the emotions it depicts. Then Clytemnestra launches into a long repudiation of the sacrifice (1146–1208). The rhesis of Iphigenia follows, supplicating Agamemnon for her life (1211–52); this is a pleading speech, but it deploys pathos, evoking situations of filial love and its return, methodically, like arguments. Both these speeches are set off by distichs from the chorus, but not Agamemnon's reply, for that closes the episode (1255–75). Its brevity, too, is the measure of the scene's success. Agamemnon admits his misery, but also his inability to resist the pressure from both gods and Greeks to punish Troy. The shortness of his answer and the speed of his exit mark his discomfort; and there is no final angry stichomythia to the debate to weaken the impact. The scene leaves an impression of naturalness, therefore—nothing too rigid in the opposition of arguments, though they have been presented and countered in formal style, for these have been subjective and emotional pleas to which surrender or defiance are equally impossible.

[18] The sensitive appreciation of the episode by Winnington-Ingram 1948, 40–58, recognizes the real but deftly concealed formality of argument; for the long speeches see pp. 45–53.

Helen shows the same grouping of three participants but in a situation of much lighter charge (857 ff.). Helen and Menelaus plead together, each in long speeches (894–943, 947–95),[19] for the help of Theonoe in escaping her brother Theoclymenus. Theonoe is thus in the role of judge. But the debate is remarkable in two ways. It has extraordinary compactness and symmetry: it begins and ends with a rhesis by Theonoe, its arbiter, and these two speeches (865–93, 998–1029) enclose the two by the appellants, there being no other dialogue. Further, it lacks all hostility, even contrast in argument, for the appellants make common cause for the judge's favour. It is significant here that of the three plays usually classed together as romantic melodramas or intrigues, *Ion*, the *Tauric Iphigenia*, and *Helen*, only *Helen* has this fully formal debate: that in *Ion* (517–675) is very loose in structure, and the *Iphigenia* has only an 'embryonic' *agōn* (674–722).[20] There are no conflicts or explicit animosities between characters in these plays which lend themselves to exposition in the usual way of formal debates. If Euripides does intend contrast with debate-form in *Helen*, and does not simply stage the scene for its own effect or to emphasize formally the crisis, the contrast is subsidiary and ethical: it lies in the differing tones of Helen, who mixes supplication with the claims of right, and of Menelaus, who rests his case straightly and sturdily on right alone.[21]

The very long second episode of the *Orestes* (348–806) is the most subtly contrived of all scenes incorporating a formal debate, and makes the best conclusion to this paper. The chorus sing of the misery and madness in Agamemnon's family. Menelaus enters on his return from Troy (348); he is aware of Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's death—and of Orestes' condition. Orestes at once engages him in dialogue, entreating his protection against death by public vote for the matricide (380–455). Menelaus' reply is prevented by the entry of Tyndareus, whose joy at greeting him is cut short by finding him in Orestes' company (456–80). A very brief dialogue (481–91) headlines the debate which now follows between Tyndareus and Orestes: the prize is the sympathy of Menelaus, who relapses into the role of third party, or silent judge; he must decide whether to honour his obligations to Orestes as his nephew, or to respect his father-in-law Tyndareus' disgust for Orestes. In this introductory dialogue

[19] For the structure of these two speeches, and of the episode as a whole, see Ludwig 1954, 43–50 and 100–4.

[20] See Duchemin 1945, 76–8 and 121.

[21] Cf. Duchemin 1945, 118; Ludwig 1954, 48 ff.; Lesky 1972, 419 f.

Menelaus protests to Tyndareus that it is the Greek way always to honour kinship; Tyndareus retorts that it is also the Greek way not to put oneself above the law, as Orestes has done. Then Menelaus: 'Wise men reject slavish servitude to necessity.' Tyndareus: 'Well, you go on in that belief; it's not going to be mine.' Menelaus: 'Your anger is as little wise as old age generally.' Tyndareus: 'What argument could there be about wisdom with Orestes here?'[22] This is the extraordinary start to the debate about wisdom, *σοφίας ἀγών*, between Tyndareus and Orestes: Menelaus, initially sympathetic to his nephew, has prompted its theme, but takes no part in it; and when it is done he comes out with his sympathy for Orestes almost destroyed.

For Tyndareus' long rhesis (491–541) develops naturally from the relation between wisdom, or sense, and law, into an attack on Orestes' lawlessness, which he invites Menelaus not to condone; and Tyndareus strengthens the honesty of his case by admitting the lawlessness of his own two daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra. Orestes' answer (544–604) protests the rightness of his matricide, putting down a lawless woman (and he hits at Tyndareus on Tyndareus' own admissions); and Orestes blames Apollo's command, who now deserts him.

Tyndareus and Orestes argue, without concession. After their speeches, there is no exacerbation, only a stiffly angry rejection of Orestes' plea by Tyndareus; he will go to the assembly, he says, to incite its condemnation of Orestes to death. With Tyndareus' second and briefer speech (607–29), the debate proper ends. Orestes turns to renew his case to Menelaus, but finds him reflecting, in doubt where he earlier defended Orestes to Tyndareus. So Orestes pleads again (640–79), formally marking out his case, claiming a return for Menelaus' debt to Agamemnon in the Trojan war, and for Menelaus' duty to the family. Menelaus' reply (682–715) is subjective and evasive, half promising help, half expressing helplessness: this is no considered reply, no argued rejection. He goes out immediately, much as Agamemnon runs from Clytemnestra and Iphigenia (*IA* 1275).

Now Orestes is deserted, his friend Pylades comes in, still within this one episode, to give it a logical climax in a mood of despair and yet hopeful excitement (725–806): two old friends, alone again, find

[22] Cf. n. 6 above.

for Orestes a new strength: he resolves to confront the assembly while it deliberates his execution, and defend himself before it.

The cleverness of this scene is its richly convincing dramatic sequence, the introduction and interplay of three persons in a variation upon a straightforward debate with three participants. The power of decision over Orestes' life lies with Menelaus, who veers from instinctive sympathy, from actual defence of Orestes, to desertion—but the moment, the process of this change is artfully concealed by the place and order of the forces: for the set debate is between Tyndareus and Orestes, and Menelaus responds only with doubt. The same artful disposition of formal elements makes his final speech appear none the less as the delayed judgement in the debate. Menelaus and Orestes begin the episode in dialogue; Tyndareus arrives and Menelaus listens to his *σοφίας ἀγών* ('argument about wisdom') with Orestes; then Orestes and Menelaus confront one another again. This in a sequence of rigid dialogue, formal debate comprising two rheseis, then two rheseis again—but while Orestes' second rhesis, to Menelaus, is formal in method, agonistic in tone, Menelaus' final speech is not a rebuttal of argument but a natural confession of helplessness. So Euripides avoids a stiffly abrupt end to the debate, working a smooth transition to the episode's climax between Pylades and Orestes. This is his mastery of form.

ADDENDUM

The text of 1975 has not been changed, apart from a few small corrections to references; to have rewritten it would have been false to its original conception as a lecture (see n. 1).

The paper has generally been cited with approval, but not everything has gone unquestioned. I would, I think, now concede something to criticism on two points: (1) that I have applied the term 'formal debate' rather too widely, by including scenes which have many, but not all, of the compositional elements typifying the *agōn* as narrowly defined at pp. 66–7 and 70–1 of the paper (see in particular Lloyd 1992); my now more circumspect approach may be seen in the discussion of *Hecuba* 216–443 (p. 74 of this paper) in my *Hecuba* (Collard 1991, ad loc.); and (2) that I have sometimes used inappropriate criteria of rhetorical relevance or texture, e.g. at pp. 65–6 (see in particular Heath 1987, 130–7, whose own position is

given by, e.g., p. 131, 'rhetorical ethos is a matter of assuming in a given speech the *persona* which best suits and supports the thought there expressed'; and Goldhill 1986*a*, 230 ff.). I might defend myself against those criticisms by observing that my intention in the paper was to evaluate the 'formal debate' as a dramatic form in its totality—something recognized by Conacher 1981, 3–25 and pp. 81–101 below, who (esp. at 94–101) has very useful supplementary remarks on the *agōn*; to his generally wider treatment of rhetoric in drama should be added especially Buxton 1982, with (pp. 162 ff.) remarks on the *agōn*; and on Euripides, Knox 1985, 327–30.

Two details:

n. 6: the text of *Or.* 491 continues to exercise editors. Bothe is followed by Willink 1986, who dismisses Porson as involving 'too much alteration' and 'inferior'. West 1987 changes to *πρὸς τόνδ' ἀγών τις τοῦ σοφοῦ γ' ἥκει πέρι* ('What has an intelligence contest to do with this fellow?'), *σοφοῦ* like Porson giving the *agōn* the positive headline ('wisdom') which I am sure it must have. The line is obelized by Diggle (1994).

n. 17: *Pho.* 438–42 are retained as authentic by both Craik 1988 and Mastronarde 1988.

4

Rhetoric and Relevance in Euripidean Drama

D. J. CONACHER

The highly rhetorical nature of Greek Tragedy in general, and the agonistic character of much Sophoclean and Euripidean Tragedy in particular, have nowadays become so well recognized that most Classicists accept the fact and its implications: this was the convention within which, for whatever reason,[1] the Greek poets composed their tragedies (at least in the latter half of the fifth century) and modern critical judgments as to what is probable and relevant in any given dramatic speech or debate, and what is consistent with the overall characterization of the speaker, must undergo drastic revision when applied to Greek Tragedy. Indeed, now the pendulum has swung the other way. When one reads critics like Dawe on Aeschylus, Tycho Wilamowitz (admittedly a bit ahead of his time) on Sophocles, Zürcher and (more moderately) A. M. Dale on Euripides, one finds so much emphasis on the effects of the individual speech or scene, that it is now the critic who looks too closely for the larger dramatic relevance of various speeches or (God forbid!) some consistent thread of characterization in their speakers, who is under fire.[2] The present

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[1] Jacqueline Duchemin (cited by Christopher Collard in his interesting paper, Collard 1975*a*, 58: above, pp. 64–80, claims that this characteristic of Tragedy was inherited from a pastoral tradition of dramatic poetry composed in alternating form. See the supplement to Duchemin 1945, Duchemin 1969, 247–76. I prefer the more general explanation given in Duchemin's original study, 236–8, that the antithetical form sprang from 'des tendances les plus profonds de l'esprit grecque et en particulier l'esprit athénien', which Sophocles and especially Euripides developed in their individual ways.

[2] See Dawe 1963, 30; Wilamowitz 1917, *passim*; Dale 1954, xxii–xxix (and articles noted below, nn. 6 and 7). The whole question of 'characterization' in Greek Tragedy has been much debated in recent years; the reader is referred to two excellent studies,

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