

The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides

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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900) the philosopher receives ever-increasing attention: the first critical edition of his complete works and correspondence is now available; a monumental biography in three volumes appeared in 1978–79; and year after year his philosophical *oeuvre* is critically assessed in numerous books and journals, including the annual *Nietzsche-Studien*.¹ Classicists, however, are for the most part reluctant to share this growing enthusiasm.² In their eyes, he continues to rank as a fallen genius who rose to early fame as the youngest classics professor of his time and made a respectable contribution to learning in his articles on the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* before he became a renegade and made the mistake of publishing *The Birth of Tragedy* (hereafter *BT*) in 1872.³ Nietzsche's first book credits Apollo and Dionysus (taken as two complementary "art impulses") with the birth of Greek tragedy and blames Euripides and Socrates—in Nietzsche's view the sum total of Athenian rationalism before Plato—for its demise. True tragedy, Nietzsche argues, reflects man's deepest emotions, not his reason; the true tragic hero, embodied in Prometheus and Oedipus, owes his strength to existential suffering, not to cold calculation and optimistic self-confidence. It is

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, G. Colli and M. Montinari, edd. (Berlin/New York 1967– [hereafter *Werke*]); Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, G. Colli and M. Montinari, edd. (Berlin/New York 1975–); C. P. Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche. Biographie I–III* (Munich/Vienna 1978–79); for relevant articles in *Nietzsche-Studien* [*NSI*] see nn.2, 18, 22, 32, and 43 *infra*.

² Sympathetic assessments of Nietzsche's contributions to the study of Greek antiquity include E. Howald, *Friedrich Nietzsche und die klassische Philologie* (Gotha 1920), on which see J. Mansfeld, "The Wilamowitz-Nietzsche Struggle: Another New Document and Some Further Comments," *NSI* 15 (1986) 41–58; H. Lloyd-Jones, "Nietzsche and the Study of the Ancient World," in J. C. O'Flaherty, T. F. Sellner, and R. M. Helm, edd., *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*² (Chapel Hill 1979) 1–15, repr. in H. Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts. Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London 1982/Baltimore 1983) 165–81; W. G. Arnott, "Nietzsche's View of Greek Tragedy," *Arethusa* 17 (1984) 135–49.

³ Nietzsche's philological writings (1867–73), including those on the *Certamen*, are now available in a new edition by Fritz Bornmann and Mario Carpitella, in *Werke* II.1 (1982).

no easy task to appreciate the chaotic mixture of fact and fiction, of outright nonsense and brilliant insights, of fleeting fancies and real issues that makes *BT* so infuriating to read. Not surprisingly, then, the recent book-length study of *BT* by Silk and Stern, the combined effort of a classicist and a Germanist, is not the last word on Nietzsche's treatment of Dionysus and Euripides.⁴ The authors are pre-occupied with *BT per se* and virtually ignore Nietzsche's pivotal rôle as mediator between the Romantic tradition, which shaped much of his thinking, and the twentieth-century reaction to historicism, which he helped prepare. His influence on the study of Greek literature and religion was considerable;⁵ Dionysus and Euripides are two key figures in whom, for Nietzsche, these pursuits converge.

Does Nietzsche merely repeat the trend-setting condemnation of Euripides by the Schlegel brothers, or does he add a new dimension to the moral and aesthetic arguments of his predecessors? Assuming that the *Bacchae* could indeed pass as the old poet's palinode (as Nietzsche thought, with Karl Otfried Müller and, later, Walter Pater), why is the prophet of a new Dionysian experience so reluctant to give Euripides credit for his alleged conversion and his accomplishment? Did Nietzsche's negative interest in Euripides pave the way for the poet's eventual rehabilitation by Wilamowitz, Gilbert Murray, and Karl Reinhardt? These are the main questions I propose to discuss here. What follows is, on the whole, less concerned with the tenability of Nietzsche's positions, judged in absolute terms, than with their intrinsic coherence, or lack thereof, and with their relevance for a historical understanding of the modern response to Euripides.

I. "A Bad Tragedian": The Euripides Nietzsche Inherited

Thanks to more than a hundred years of concentrated effort on the part of editors, literary critics, translators, and stage producers, the

⁴ M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge 1981), fail to consider the Schlegel brothers in their discussion of Nietzsche and Euripides (n.29 *infra*) and underestimate the relevance of the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, the suffering god who is the divine model for Nietzsche's suffering tragic hero (*cf.* A. Henrichs, "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard," *HSCP* 88 [1984] 205–40, esp. 220–23).

⁵ The most prominent classical scholars influenced by Nietzsche include Erwin Rohde (1845–98; n.97 *infra*), Jane Harrison (1850–1928; n.23 *infra*), Gilbert Murray (1866–1957; n.24 *infra*), Walter F. Otto (1874–1958; n.37 *infra*), Karl Reinhardt (1886–1958; n.83 *infra*), and Eric R. Dodds (1893–1979; n.83 *infra*), perhaps the last classicist whose concept of Greek civilization was essentially Nietzschean, *i.e.*, dualistic in the Romantic tradition.

work of Euripides is nowadays perhaps more easily accessible and more widely appreciated than that of either Aeschylus or Sophocles. The modern rediscovery and revival of Euripides that began during the last quarter of the nineteenth century achieved full momentum only after the traumatic experience of World War I. Since then the vindication of Euripides has been so successful, and his place as an ancient playwright who appeals more directly to modern sensibilities than his predecessors has been so universally accepted, that it is easy to lose sight of an earlier period, *ca* 1800 to 1880, when his plays were distinctly less popular and when critical appreciation of them was on the whole inadequate.

Anyone familiar with Greek tragedy discovers with surprise, on reading *BT* for the first time, that Euripides is portrayed as a follower of Socrates and as the villain who caused “the death of tragedy” by sacrificing its true “Dionysian spirit” to two sophistic tendencies, rationalism and optimism.⁶ Nietzsche presents the case against Euripides with his customary flair and eloquence, but his arguments are neither original nor profound. In the main he followed the lead of August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), whose notorious condemnation of Euripides and his art was inspired by his younger brother Friedrich (1772–1829).⁷ Half a century before Nietzsche was born, Friedrich Schlegel had ranked Euripides a distant third among the three major tragedians: in his opinion, it was Sophocles who represented the highest artistic achievement, by which Aeschylus and Euripides must be judged. He came to the conclusion that Aeschylus typifies harsh grandeur (“harte Grösse”) and Sophocles harmony and perfect beauty (“vollendete Schönheit”), whereas the name of Euripides stands for uncontrolled vigor and luxuriousness (“zügellose Kraft und Reichtum”), the two hallmarks of incipient decline.⁸

While more sympathetic to Euripides’ genius than August Wilhelm would prove to be, Friedrich Schlegel was equally alert to the poet’s

⁶ *BT* 10–15. *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (January 1872) is quoted by section number, and in Walter Kaufmann’s English translation (New York 1967). The page and line numbers refer to the standard German edition in *Werke* III.1 (1972) 21–152. The two quotations are from *BT* 11 (71.23f, “Tod der Tragödie,” an idea that goes back to *Ar. Ran.* 868f) and 19f (123.3f and 126.29, “Wiedergeburt des dionysischen Geistes”).

⁷ For an exhaustive treatment of the *Euripidesbild* of both Schlegels see E. Behler, *supra* 335–67, esp. sections III–IV.

⁸ The relevant works of the younger Schlegel are quoted according to *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* [hereafter *KA*] I: *Studien des klassischen Altertums*, ed. E. Behler (Paderborn/Munich 1979); VI: *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur*, ed. Hans Eichner (1961); XI: *Wissenschaft der europäischen Literatur*, ed. E. Behler (1958). For Schlegel’s comparison of the three tragedians see *e.g.* *KA* I 14f, 55–64, 296–301, 537; VI 35f, 42; XI 79–82, 203–10.

deficiencies as a playwright. His most substantial critique of Euripides can be found in his essay on female characters in Greek poetry, where Euripides is praised for his powerful portrayal of women.⁹ At the same time, he is criticized for indulging in exaggerated depiction of raw passion (“Leidenschaft”) at the expense of true nobility of character (“Schönheit des Charakters”), and for destroying the dramatic coherence and unity of his plays by his penchant for excessively long speeches and philosophical argument.¹⁰ From the standpoint of today’s critics, who have learned from Freud, Schlegel’s first objection carries less weight than the second. Nietzsche inherited these same objections from the elder Schlegel, and like his contemporaries took them both seriously, blaming Euripides for his use of “fiery affects” on the one hand and “cool, paradoxical thoughts” or “sophistical dialectic” on the other.¹¹ Friedrich Schlegel believed, surprisingly, that Euripides’ first fault reflected the actual sensuality and immorality of Athenian women, while the second was due to the bad influence of contemporary philosophers.¹² He likened Euripides to Alcibiades: abundantly talented, they both lacked moderation and harmony.¹³ Compared with Sophocles, the model tragedian, Euripides marked the decline (“Verfall”) of the tragic genre.¹⁴ Schlegel implies that the erosion of artistic perfection he saw in Euripides was a manifestation of a more general disease which had destroyed the moral fibre of Athenian society at large.¹⁵ Finally, Euripides at his worst is seen as the precursor of New Comedy, helping to precipitate the loss of vitality and creative power that would lead to the emergence of a new dramatic genre devoid of strong characters and subservient to the monotonous and feeble taste of public opinion.¹⁶ Friedrich Schle-

⁹ “Über die weiblichen Charaktere in den griechischen Dichtern” (1794), *KA I* 45–69, esp. 60–65. This essay was first published in the *Leipziger Monatsschrift für Damen*.

¹⁰ *KA I* 61–63.

¹¹ *BT* 10, 12 (71.9, 80.30ff).

¹² *KA I* 63–65; XI 81.

¹³ *KA I* 60f.

¹⁴ *KA I* 537; XI 81.

¹⁵ *KA I* 64–69. Schlegel’s Romantic notion of widespread moral and cultural decline in late fifth-century Athens was consciously adopted by Wilamowitz and unconsciously by E. R. Dodds, both of whom claimed that the Athenians became superstitious and turned to new gods to compensate for the alleged deterioration of their traditional values; see A. Henrichs in W. M. Calder III, H. Flashar, T. Lindken, edd., *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren* (Darmstadt 1985) 301. The validity of this influential but dubious claim and of the evidence on which it is based has to my knowledge never been examined. Cf. Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4) 156ff and 262 for the received opinion in a Nietzschean context.

¹⁶ *KA I* 65–68.

gel's earliest comments on Euripides were published in 1794 and soon forgotten. In the end, however, they delivered a far more serious blow to Euripides' reputation than did his first defeat in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, whose ambiguous portrayal of Euripides had been very much in Schlegel's mind. The negative *Euripidesbild* created by Aristophanes and reinforced by the younger Schlegel pointed the way for the more painstaking and damaging criticism of the poet by August Wilhelm in his celebrated Vienna lectures of 1808 (published in 1809), which inaugurated, in Ernst Behler's apt phrase, the nineteenth century's *damnatio* of Euripides.¹⁷ The verdict pronounced in these lectures prejudiced the entire world of European letters against the poet. Nietzsche was no exception. His own criticism of Euripides echoes August Wilhelm's at every turn, but he apparently had no direct access to Friedrich's earlier thoughts on the three tragedians.¹⁸

Born in 1844, less than a year before the death of the elder Schlegel, Nietzsche was raised in an intellectual climate rife with harsh criticism of Euripides. When he entered the elite boarding school of Schulpforte in the fall of 1858, the modern depreciation of Euripides that began, in Germany, with Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and culminated in the Schlegels had attained the status of absolute academic orthodoxy. Two generations of schoolmasters and university professors had managed to deprive August Wilhelm's verdict of its finer, more conciliatory touches and to reduce it to a crude catalogue of the poet's worst sins against dramatic convention and good taste. The list is long and tedious, and it mixes half-truths with truisms. It blames Euripides for his realism, his rationalism, and his love of rhetoric; for tendentiousness, sentimentality, theatricality, and indifference to dramatic unity; for irreligiosity and immorality; for his distance from Aeschylus and Sophocles and his affinity with New Comedy.¹⁹ In short, Euripides is rejected as unpoetic as well as untragic, if not anti-tragic. Theodor Mommsen's eloquent condemnation of Euripides, first published in 1856, was merely a conspicuous in-

¹⁷ "Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur, Erster Teil" [hereafter *DK*], in A. W. von Schlegel, *Sämliche Werke [SW]*, ed. Eduard Böcking, V (Leipzig 1846); *Kritische Schriften und Briefe [KSB]*, ed. Edgar Lohner, V (Stuttgart/Berlin 1966); *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, tr. John Black (London 1815, followed by a second edition in 1840 and revised in 1846 [repr. New York 1973]). See Behler, *supra* 354–59.

¹⁸ E. Behler, "Nietzsche und die frühromantische Schule," *NSr* 7 (1978) 59–96, esp. 70–72, 93; "Friedrich Schlegels 'Rede über die Mythologie' im Hinblick auf Nietzsche," *NSr* 8 (1979) 182–209, esp. 193f n.81.

¹⁹ A. W. Schlegel's criticism of Euripides can be found in *DK*, lectures 8–10; see 376–85 *infra*.

dication of a deep and widespread dissatisfaction with Euripidean drama.²⁰ A. W. Schlegel was in, and so was Aristophanes, whose criticism of Euripides received high praise first from Schlegel and later from Nietzsche.²¹ Through the combined effect of Schlegel and Aristophanes, Euripides was out, barely read and ill-understood in the German schools of the mid-nineteenth century. Neither Euripides nor Aeschylus was on the official reading list of the school Nietzsche attended from 1858 to 1864; the two Greek tragedies that were required reading when Nietzsche was a senior were both by Sophocles: *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*.²²

The proscription of Euripides was by no means confined to Germany. The prevailing attitude in England in the late 1870's is vividly illustrated in an episode recalled by Jane Harrison, then an avant-garde student at Newnham Hall, Cambridge. There she reluctantly met William Ewart Gladstone, once and future Prime Minister and one of the most prolific Homerists of the Victorian age, and provoked him with her progressive views on Greek literature: "He sat down and asked me who was my favourite Greek author. Tact counselled Homer, but I was perverse and not quite truthful, so I said 'Euripides'. Aeschylus would have been creditable, Sophocles respectable, but the sceptic Euripides! It was too much, and with a few words of warning he withdrew."²³ The young Harrison, still strug-

²⁰ T. Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* II (Munich 1976) 436–40 (= *The History of Rome*², tr. W. P. Dickson, III [New York 1898] 166–70). According to Mommsen, Euripides "managed to destroy ancient tragedy but failed to create modern tragedy." A. W. Schlegel observed that Euripidean drama appeals to "modern taste" (*KSB* [*supra* n.17] III 293).

²¹ On Aristophanes' *Frogs* as the starting-point for the modern condemnation of Euripides by A. W. Schlegel and Nietzsche, see B. Snell, "Aristophanes und die Ästhetik," in *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*⁴ (Göttingen 1975) 111–26.

²² R. Bohley, "Über die Landesschule zur Pforte. Materialien aus der Schulzeit Nietzsches," *NSI* 5 (1976) 298–320, at 309. Seniors at Schulpforte were encouraged to study Aeschylus and Euripides on their own (S. L. Gilman, "Pforta zur Zeit Nietzsches," *NSI* 8 [1979] 398–426, at 401), but to judge from his Schulpforte notes and vita, Nietzsche read some Aeschylus and Sophocles but no Euripides: Nietzsche, *Werke. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe* [HKA] II: *Jugendschriften 1861–1864*, ed. H. J. Mette (Munich 1934) 252–54, 334; for the Schulpforte vita (1864), see K. Schlechta, *Der junge Nietzsche und das klassische Altertum* (Mainz 1948) 8; Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. K. Schlechta (Munich 1966) II 118.

²³ J. E. Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* (London 1925) 45, repr. in *Arion* 4 (1965) 327. Harrison gives no year. The date of Gladstone's stay at Cambridge (26–30 October 1878) is recorded in H. C. G. Matthew, ed., *The Gladstone Diaries* IX (Oxford 1986) 356f (diary entry under Oct. 29): "Went over Nuneham [*sic*] College: much pleased with the structure & all I saw." On Gladstone's religious dedication to finding elements of divine revelation and Christian theology in Homer see Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts* (*supra* n.2) 110–25, and F. M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven/London 1981) 159–70. In 1877 Harrison had played the title rôle

gling to overcome the prejudices of her mid-Victorian upbringing, foresaw, as Gladstone did not, that the world was ready for a new vision of the Greek achievement, one in which both Euripides and Nietzsche would play a leading rôle.²⁴

Beware of Euripides! This was doubtless the lesson that Nietzsche, still under twenty, took home from Schulpforte, where he, as well as Wilamowitz, had studied German literature under the direction of August Koberstein (1797–1870), one of the leading Germanists of his generation and author of a comprehensive history of German letters in which the Schlegel brothers are treated at length.²⁵ Koberstein will have seen to it that his students remembered A. W. Schlegel's verdict regarding Euripides. Direct documentation for Nietzsche's attitude in his most formative years is lacking, except for a casual reference to Euripides' "pathetic scenes" ("Pathosscenen") and "drawn-out outbursts of emotion" ("breit angelegte Gefühlsergüsse"). His remark dates from spring 1864, his last term in school, and reflects conventional dogma derived from Schlegel.²⁶ The early

in Euripides' *Alceste*, performed by the Oxford University Dramatic Society. Later, under the guidance of Gilbert Murray and his translations, she explored Euripides and became for a while a self-declared "disciple of Nietzsche" (Henrichs [*supra* n.4] 229), perhaps under the influence of F. M. Cornford (1874–1943), one of the first (and few) professional classicists to recognize *BT* as a work of genius (*From Religion to Philosophy* [London 1912] 111).

²⁴ Writing some fifteen years before Schlegel's Vienna lectures, Richard Porson (1759–1808) had defended Euripides eloquently against his earlier critics: "Sophocles we praise, but Euripides we read" (*Praelectio in Euripidem*, Inaugural Lecture, Cambridge 1792, in J. H. Monk and C. J. Blomfield, ed., *Ricardi Porsoni Adversaria* [Cambridge 1812] 3–31, at 12). On the mixed reputation enjoyed by Euripides in Britain between 1832 and 1912 see the inadequate remarks of R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1980) 106–10. He quotes A. W. Verrall (n.90 *infra*) and G. Norwood (nn.48, 90 *infra*), who revived interest in Euripides for the wrong reasons, but fails to mention Gilbert Murray, whose Oxford text of the poet (OCT, 1902–09), subsequent monograph (*Euripides and His Age*, London 1913), and translations marked the final victory of the Euripidean renaissance that had been initiated by Wilamowitz a quarter century earlier. Cf. Lloyd-Jones, "Gilbert Murray," in *Blood for the Ghosts* (*supra* n.2) 195–214; R. Ackerman, "Euripides, Gilbert Murray, and T. S. Eliot," *CJ* 81 (1985/6) 329–36.

²⁵ A. Koberstein, *Grundriss der Geschichte der deutschen National-Litteratur*⁴ II (Leipzig 1856) 1714–16, 1862–78. On Koberstein as an admirer of Friedrich Schlegel and teacher of Nietzsche and Wilamowitz see E. Behler, *NSt* 7 (1978) 70; J. Wohlleben in *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren* (*supra* n.15) 3–30; J. Mansfeld (*supra* n.2) 43f.

²⁶ Nietzsche, *HKA* (*supra* n.22) 375, where he follows Schlegel to the letter when he explains Aristotle's characterization of Euripides as "the most tragic" of the tragedians (*Poet.* 1453a29f) with reference to the poet's display of pathos. See A. W. Schlegel's Berlin lectures "Über die dramatische Poesie der Griechen" (1802/3), published in *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst* [= *SK*], ed. Jakob Minor (Heilbronn 1884) II 351f = *KSB* (*supra* n.17) III 293f; *DK*, lectures 8 and 10 (*SW* V 134 = *KSB* V 102; *SW* V 166 = *KSB* V 122).

opinion of Wilamowitz is available to fill the gap. Nietzsche's schoolmate and junior by four years, he compared the three tragedians in his senior thesis of 1867, to the extreme disadvantage of Euripides, who was rated "an average poet and a bad tragedian."²⁷ The young Wilamowitz was quick to remind his readers that he had Lessing and Schlegel as well as Aristophanes on his side. Nietzsche inherited the same canon and the same verdict. But unlike Wilamowitz, he never unlearned the lesson that Euripides, the worst of the tragedians, had (in Schlegel's words) "not only destroyed the external order of tragedy, but missed its entire meaning."²⁸ In fact Nietzsche took that lesson far more seriously than anyone before or after him and applied it with a vengeance in his first book. Yet his dependence on Schlegel has not received the attention it deserves.²⁹ Nietzsche may not provide important insights into Euripides, but his use of Schlegel illustrates with almost microscopic accuracy the interplay of "influence and originality," of "reception and revision," that has been recognized as the principal creative impulse behind much of Nietzsche's work.³⁰

II. Euripides at Second Hand: Nietzsche's Use of A. W. Schlegel

After his graduation from Schulpforte (summer 1864) Nietzsche spent two uneventful semesters studying at Bonn before going to

²⁷ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *In wieweit befriedigen die Schlüsse der erhaltenen griechischen Trauerspiele? Ein ästhetischer Versuch*, ed. William M. Calder III (Leiden 1974) 95f, 125; cf. J. Wohlleben in *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren* (*supra* n.15) 17–19, and W. M. Calder III, 409–30 *infra*, esp. section II.

²⁸ A. W. Schlegel, *SK* (*supra* n.26) II 352 = *KSB* (*supra* n.17) III 294.

²⁹ Readers of *BT* who are unaware of Nietzsche's immense but tacit debt to Schlegel are bound to come to the wrong conclusions. M. Hinden, "Nietzsche's Quarrel with Euripides," *Criticism* 23 (1981) 246–60, makes the futile attempt to answer the question "why Nietzsche . . . militated so vehemently against Euripides" without a single reference to Schlegel and the anti-Euripidean sentiments in Europe in the 1870's. Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4) mention Schlegel's criticism only in passing (37), and never in connection with Nietzsche's treatment of the poet (258–62). W. G. Arnott, in his review of Silk and Stern, underestimates Nietzsche's dependence on Schlegel when he concludes that "he took many of the details of his criticism from Aristophanes' *Frogs*, much of its tone from Schlegel's lectures" (in J. Richmond, ed., *Themes in Drama* 4 [Cambridge 1982] 205). By contrast, Snell (*supra* n.21) 116f recognizes the full extent of Nietzsche's debt to Schlegel but does not go into particulars.

³⁰ H. von Staden, "Nietzsche and Marx on Greek Art and Literature: Case Studies in Reception," *Proc. Am. Acad. Arts and Sciences* 105 (= *Daedalus*, winter 1976) 79–96, esp. 80 and 91; A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 62–67, 89–92, and 107–09 on "interpretation," or a universal "perspectivism," as the fundamental mode of Nietzsche's philosophy.

Leipzig in the fall of 1865, at the same time as his teacher Friedrich Ritschl. While a student at Leipzig (until spring 1869) he did some lexicographical work on Aeschylus (summer 1866); later, in 1868, he laid the groundwork for a course on the *Choephoroi*, the Aeschylean tragedy he seems to have known best.³¹ There is no evidence of any serious interest in either Sophocles or Euripides during this period.

The Basel professorship to which he was appointed in 1869 offered an incentive to take a closer look at the Greek tragedies, but it did nothing to change his attitude towards Euripides. In his lecture course on *Oedipus Rex* (summer 1870) he censured him in the conventional vein.³² His lecture notes illustrate his particular debt to Schlegel, whose name is mentioned several times: Euripides “consciously violates dramatic unity”; “in Euripides intellect turns against instinct”; “Euripides marks a breach in the development of tragedy.”³³ He concludes with a final bow to his predecessor: “The veneration of Euripides is very old and very common: up to A. W. Schlegel.”³⁴

During his Basel years Nietzsche was not only a professor at the University but also a schoolteacher, contractually obliged to read Greek texts six hours each week with the upperclassmen of the exclusive preparatory school, the Pädagogium. Between 1869 and his release from school duties in 1877, the readings included Aeschylus’ *Prometheus* and *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and *Electra*, as well as Euripides’ *Alcestis* and *Medea*.³⁵ In the summer of 1870, while lec-

³¹ Janz (*supra* n.1) I 189, 243. On the *Choephoroi* see n.32 *infra*.

³² Nietzsche’s *Werke* [GA] XVII: *Philologica* I: *Gedrucktes und Ungedrucktes aus den Jahren 1866–1877*, ed. Ernst Holzer (Leipzig 1910) 293–325, esp. 323–25. Nietzsche returned to Euripides in the first part of a later lecture course on the history of Greek literature (winter 1874/5). Apart from including fewer than a dozen references to *Alcestis*, *Hippolytus* (388f *infra*), *Supplices*, *Ion*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae* (391ff *infra*), and some fragments, he apparently provided synopses for several or all of Euripides’ plays; these plot summaries are omitted from the partial edition of his lecture notes in GA XVIII: *Philologica* II: *Unveröffentlichtes zur Literaturgeschichte, Rhetorik und Rhythmik*, ed. Otto Crusius (Leipzig 1912) 1–198, esp. 51. During eighteen semesters of teaching at the university, Nietzsche gave at least six lecture courses and seminars on *Choephoroi*, two on *Oedipus Rex*, and another on the ancient Life of Sophocles; see R. Meister, “Nietzsches Lehrtätigkeit in Basel 1869–1879,” *AnzWien* 85 (1948) 103–21, esp. 104–07; C. P. Janz, “Friedrich Nietzsches akademische Lehrtätigkeit in Basel 1869–1879,” *NSI* 3 (1974) 192–203, esp. 196ff. The absence of Euripides is significant.

³³ GA (*supra* n.32) XVII 308 (“verletzt [die Einheit] mit Bewusstsein”), 318 (“bei Euripides wird [das Denken] destructiv gegen das Instinctive”; cf. esp. nn.53–55 *infra*), 323 (“ein Bruch in der Tragödienentwicklung”); for Schlegel’s name see 304, 307, 325 (n.34 *infra*).

³⁴ GA (*supra* n.32) XVII 325: “Der Euripides-Cultus ist der älteste und der verbreitetste: bis auf A. W. Schlegel.”

³⁵ According to Nietzsche’s annual reports as published by H. Gutzwiller, “Friedrich Nietzsches Lehrtätigkeit am Basler Pädagogium 1869 bis 1876,” *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 50 (1951) 147–224, esp. 169, 177–83; S. L. Gilman, ed.,

turing on *Oedipus Rex* and working on a series of essays that would eventually crystallize into *BT*, Nietzsche became interested in the *Bacchae*. One purple passage in particular caught his imagination: the beginning of the first messenger speech (*Bacch.* 677–711), which describes the waking of the maenads and presents them as acting in perfect harmony with their natural surroundings. Nietzsche incorporated a paraphrase (later expanded into a verse translation) of these striking lines in his lectures as well as in two of his preliminary studies.³⁶ In all three cases, the passage serves as an illustration of “a world enchanted” and transformed by the power of Dionysus; what is more, Nietzsche takes the scene on Mt Cithaeron as concrete evidence for the Greek worship of Dionysus and for its decency, in contrast with the general license of the Sacaia, a Babylonian festival.³⁷ In order to make his point, however, he had to ignore the second part of the messenger speech, where the maenads’ idyll turns into sudden bloodshed. An enthusiastic and demanding schoolteacher, he immediately shared his newly-acquired interest with his pupils at the Pädagogium and asked the graduating class of 1870/1 “to write about the impression the *Bacchae* of Euripides had made on them, and about the nature of the cult of Dionysus [das Wesen des Dionysoskultes].”³⁸ These two aspects, the aesthetic and the religious, have

Begegnungen mit Nietzsche. Studien zur Germanistik, Anglistik und Komparatistik 98 (Bonn 1981) 134–36; Janz (*supra* n.32).

³⁶ The passage is first paraphrased in Nietzsche’s lecture notes (early May to mid-July 1870: *GA* XVII [*supra* n.32] 299f), whence “Die dionysische Weltanschauung,” section 1 (July/August 1870: *Werke* III.2 50.28ff); partially translated in “Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens” (December 1870; *Werke* III.2 78.26ff). Later, while writing the final version of *BT*, Nietzsche changed his mind about the value of this passage and adduced *Bacch.* 678f rather awkwardly as an instance of inspirational sleep induced by the gift of Dionysus (*BT* 5; *Werke* III.1 40.20ff). The time of day described by Euripides is, of course, early dawn. Nietzsche invariably took it as high noon, a curious error for which he was taken to task by Wilamowitz, *Zukunftsphilologie!* (Berlin 1872) 42 n.18 (available in K. Gründer, *Der Streit um Nietzsches “Geburt der Tragödie”* [Hildesheim 1969]).

³⁷ The context in which the passage is quoted anticipates portions of *BT* 1–2. Nietzsche’s moral interpretation of *Bacch.* 693 (θαῦμα ἰδεῖν εὐκοσμίαις, “ein Muster edler Sitte[n]”) or, at *GA* XVII [*supra* n.32] 299, “ein Muster edler Sittsamkeit”) is not shared by Dodds or Roux, the two most recent commentators. W. F. Otto, a Nietzschean classicist, adopted Nietzsche’s concept of the “verzauberte Welt” in his influential book on Dionysus and used it as the title of a chapter on Dionysiac miracles (*Dionysos. Mythos und Kultus* [Frankfurt a. M. 1933, English tr. Bloomington 1965], ch. 8); see H. Cancik, “Dionysus 1933. W. F. Otto, ein Religionswissenschaftler und Theologe am Ende der Weimarer Republik,” in R. Faber and R. Schlesier, ed., *Die Restauration der Götter. Antike Religion und Neo-Paganismus* (Würzburg 1986) 105–23, esp. 117–19.

³⁸ According to Nietzsche’s annual report for 1870/1 (*apud* Gutzwiller [*supra* n.35] 182), confirmed by the reminiscences (*apud* Gilman [*supra* n.35] 124f) of the eminent

dominated the modern controversy over this play. To deal with both simultaneously is a difficult task, which Nietzsche himself was to confront in the spring of 1871 as the work on *BT* approached its final stage. In the end, however, his bias against Euripides led him to divorce his guarded comments on the *Bacchae* as a tragedy from his enthusiastic evocation of the powerful emotional effect experienced by the worshippers of Dionysus (395f *infra*). Without the help of the *Bacchae*, Nietzsche could not have appreciated this effect. Yet his debt to Euripides is never made explicit, least of all in *BT*. It was left to Erwin Rohde and, ultimately, E. R. Dodds to apply the Nietzschean concept of “the psychology of the Dionysian state” to the *Bacchae*, thereby restoring it to its proper source.³⁹

With the publication of *BT* in January 1872, Nietzsche established himself as a cultural critic and ruined his reputation as a classicist to boot. He consciously violated the conventions of aesthetic criticism and ignored the methods of classical scholarship in his ambitious attempt to trace an evolutionary cultural history of Greek tragedy in three successive stages, which he called birth, death, and rebirth. In Nietzsche’s view, Dionysus and Apollo, the combined symbols of the terrors of existence mitigated by the medium of art, had presided over the birth of tragedy in the sixth century B.C.; Euripides and Socrates had conspired, as the creative age of Athens reached its end, to hasten the death of tragedy; and finally, Richard Wagner and his “music drama” signaled the modern rebirth of the true tragic spirit in a new art form.⁴⁰ Nietzsche thus approached the literary genre of Greek tragedy as if it were a living organism that underwent birth, maturation, and death.⁴¹ To perceive a life-cycle in art was more than

linguist Jacob Wackernagel (1853–1938), one of Nietzsche’s pupils in 1870 and his successor at the university in 1879, and by one of Nietzsche’s notes (fragment 4[9], August/September 1870, in *Werke* III.3 93); cf. Janz (*supra* n.1) I 351.

³⁹ Cf. 391ff *infra*. “Die Psychologie des dionysischen Zustands,” or the prevalent mood of Dionysiac cult according to Nietzsche, is analyzed in *BT* I and, more than fifteen years later, in “What I Owe to the Ancients” (4), in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), whence the preceding phrase (*Werke* VI.3 158f).

⁴⁰ According to F. Schlegel, Euripides rivals modern opera in ostentatiousness (*KA* [*supra* n.8] XI 81f). Nietzsche merely extended the analogy when he recognized the Wagnerian “music drama” as a modern adaptation of the “Dionysian world view” (n.45 *infra*) first expressed by Aeschylus and Sophocles (*BT* 16–25). On Richard Wagner as “the new Aeschylus” see Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4) 195, 219, 256f, 262f.

⁴¹ Most explicitly in a fragment of 1868/9 entitled “The three Greek tragedians,” in which Nietzsche equates the succession of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides with the “development, flowering, and decline of tragic art,” analogous to “the natural growing, flowering, and withering” of a plant; Euripides is characterized as “the withering plant” (*HKA* [*supra* n.22] V: *Schriften der letzten Leipziger und ersten Basler Zeit 1868–1869*, edd. Carl Koch and Karl Schlechta [Munich 1940] 218).

a biological metaphor for Nietzsche: it was one of his most fundamental convictions. Significantly, it was also an adaptation of a Romantic concept that had been applied to Greek tragedy by Friedrich Schlegel, who equated the acme (“Blütezeit”) of Attic tragedy with Sophocles and its eventual decline (“Verfall”) with Euripides.⁴²

BT is a book whose complex genesis is still reflected in its structure. The overall arrangement follows the basic concept of the organic development of tragic art in three successive stages. Sections 1–10, on the birth of tragedy, contain Nietzsche’s best and most influential ideas, notably his view of existential suffering and its representation in Greek tragedy; sections 11–15, on the death of tragedy, form the bulk of his criticism of Euripides and Socrates; sections 16–24, on the rebirth of tragedy, discuss Wagnerian opera with constant recourse to the Greeks. These three parts are not of one piece. They reflect their separate origins in a series of overlapping preliminary studies dating from the first three years (1869–71) of his professorship in Basel. Before that period, as a student first at Bonn and later at Leipzig, he showed little interest in tragedy, and none whatsoever in Euripides, but was preoccupied with his studies of Greek wisdom literature and of Diogenes Laertius.⁴³ The decisive turning-point came in early 1870, with two public lectures entitled “Greek Music Drama” and “Socrates and Tragedy.”⁴⁴ The first lecture laid the foundation for the Wagnerian part of *BT*, while the second contains Nietzsche’s first criticism of Euripides, anticipating parts of sections 11–14 of *BT*. In the summer of the same year he drafted the substance of sections 1–6 of *BT* under the title “The Dionysian World View.”⁴⁵ By that time he evidently saw a connection between the birth, death, and rebirth of Greek tragedy, even though each stage had been conceived separately and in reverse chronological order, beginning with the rebirth. Nietzsche added the finishing touches to the published version of *BT* in December 1871, less than three weeks before the printed

⁴² *KA* I 537, VI 35, XI 80f; cf. E. Behler, *NSt* 8 (1979) 190; G. Billeter, *Die Anschauungen vom Wesen des Griechentums* (Leipzig/Berlin 1911) 325–29, 432–35. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) set the stage when he envisaged the history of Greek art as a process of growth, maturity, and decline.

⁴³ See *Werke* II.1; J. Barnes, “Nietzsche and Diogenes Laertius,” *NSt* 15 (1986) 16–40; cf. *supra* 377.

⁴⁴ *Werke* III.2 (1973) 5–22 and 25–41. An expanded version of “Socrates und die Tragödie” was printed at Nietzsche’s own expense and circulated privately in June of the following year (*Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie* [Basel 1871]); it corresponds roughly to *BT* 8–15 (*Werke* III.2 95–132); cf. nn.53, 56 *infra*.

⁴⁵ *Werke* III.2 45–69. Nietzsche presented an abbreviated version to Cosima Wagner (“Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens” [Christmas 1870], first published in *Werke* III.2 73–91; cf. *supra* n.36).

copies left the bindery. It is obvious from the peculiar genesis of *BT* that it was Nietzsche's intense interest in music as well as in Wagner that predetermined his view of the origin and nature of Greek tragedy and confirmed his inherited prejudice against Euripides.⁴⁶

Nietzsche was never a mere parrot of the views of others. Typically, he pushed the Romantic metaphor of birth, maturity, and death beyond its natural limit when he extended the life cycle of ancient tragedy into his own time by adding the post-mortem phase, which he perceived as a new birth, or a modern renaissance. In Nietzsche's eyes, interest in the past and concern for the present were inseparable. On the basis of this dual perspective, it was natural for him to juxtapose ancient and modern culture and to criticize the intellectual self-confidence and moral self-righteousness of the German middle classes through his criticism of Euripides and Socrates. He regarded the scholars of his own time as latter-day reincarnations of the two Athenian "rationalists" and as incurable "optimists" who failed to understand the Greek attitude towards life.⁴⁷ By contrast, Greeks like Aeschylus and Sophocles were "pessimists" who faced "the terrors of nature" in their tragedies and who had the rare ability to make "the suffering inherent in life" more bearable by representing it through the visual and verbal arts of Apollo and by transcending it simultaneously through the "Dionysian art" of music embodied in the chorus (*BT* 9 and 16). Compared with his predecessors, Euripides was found wanting: "Euripides is clever, Aeschylus shakes our soul."⁴⁸

Euripides was an easy target; A. W. Schlegel had forged the weapons Nietzsche would use against him. But although he depends heavily on Schlegel, he does not always follow him blindly. In fact Nietzsche interprets Euripides only to the extent that he reinterprets Schlegel's criticism to suit his own very different conception of Greek tragedy. Whereas Schlegel's points are always specific and based on a close reading of Euripides, Nietzsche never advances beyond generalities. In the relevant sections of *BT* only one Euripidean play, the *Bacchae*,

⁴⁶ Cf. Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4) 31–61; Janz (*supra* n.1) I 410–14.

⁴⁷ *BT* 18 (Socrates as "the archetype and progenitor" of "Alexandrian culture"); cf. the devastating picture of the classical establishment presented in the collection of fragments entitled "Wir Philologen" (composed in 1875; *Werke* IV.1 [1967]; partial English translation by W. Arrowsmith, *Arion* 2.1 [Spring 1963] 5–18, 2.2 [Summer 1963] 5–27).

⁴⁸ G. Norwood, *Essays in Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley/London 1954) 49. Norwood (1880–1954; n.90 *infra*) was one of the most outspoken and at the same time sympathetic critics of Euripides in the twentieth century. Like Lessing (n.66 *infra*), he described Euripides and Socrates as "friends" (*Greek Tragedy* [London 1920] 318; *Essays* 50, 84), a description that would have appealed to Nietzsche (386ff *infra*).

receives any attention (391ff *infra*). Apart from Pentheus, Cadmus, Tiresias, and Dionysus, all from the *Bacchae*, no Euripidean characters are mentioned in Nietzsche's discussion.⁴⁹ Not a single line or phrase from Euripides is quoted, in sharp contrast to the critical method of Aristophanes and Schlegel, who cite chapter and verse. With the exception of the brief reference to the *Bacchae*, which goes beyond Schlegel's comments, there is nothing in Nietzsche's criticism of Euripides that he could not have found, without direct recourse to Euripides, in Schlegel. This is true not only for *BT* but also for Nietzsche's earlier remarks about Euripides in his lecture course on *Oedipus Rex*.⁵⁰ His treatment of Euripides suggests that he had barely read the author of whom he was so critical, and that such limited knowledge as he did have was for the most part secondhand and derived from Schlegel, whose Vienna lectures he had excerpted in the fall of 1869.⁵¹ The case of Lessing and Euripides proves that it is not impossible to form a valid opinion of a dramatist on the basis of a small selection of his extant work.⁵² But while Lessing had something new to say, Nietzsche covers familiar ground.

In his lecture notes Nietzsche acknowledged his debt to Schlegel, but in *BT* he no longer did so. Where Schlegel's name occurs, in sections 7 and 8 of *BT*, he is mentioned because Nietzsche disagrees with one of his most famous critical concepts, that of the tragic chorus as "the ideal spectator." In connection with Euripides, however, Nietzsche adopts and reinterprets several of Schlegel's most memorable criticisms without naming him: he knew that his readers would recognize the source. In sections 11–14 of *BT*, as already in the lecture notes of 1870, Euripides is criticized for his "destruction of the chorus" (*BT* 14), his use of the prologue and the *deus ex machina*

⁴⁹ In *BT* 8 (*Werke* III.1 59.30ff) Euripides' Admetus, who is overcome by memories of his wife as he recognizes her likeness in the veiled woman brought to him by Hercules, serves as a metaphor for the spectator who recognizes the suffering Dionysus behind the tragic hero (*supra* n.4).

⁵⁰ *GA* XVII (*supra* n.32) 293–325.

⁵¹ *Cf.* n.53 *infra*. In his scathing attack on *BT*, Wilamowitz complained that Nietzsche's view of Euripides was not only derivative but singularly ill-informed: "Aber H(er)r N(ietzsche) kennt den Euripides nicht" (*supra* n.36: 24–30, at 27). He was right. During the early years of his Basel professorship Nietzsche regularly borrowed editions of, and commentaries on, Aeschylus and Sophocles from the university library; not a single transaction concerning Euripides is on record. Some of the texts of Aeschylus and Sophocles from his own library are heavily annotated, those of Euripides are not. The documentation can be found in M. Oehler, *Nietzsches Bibliothek. Vierzehnte Jahresgabe der Gesellschaft der Freunde des Nietzsche-Archivs* (Weimar 1942) 1–5, 46–56.

⁵² The young Wilamowitz remarked scornfully in his senior thesis (*supra* n.27: 96 and 125) that Lessing based his opinion of Euripides on a mere three plays: *Hercules Furens*, *Hecuba*, and *Ion*.

(12), and his indulgence in argument and rhetoric (11); for allowing his intellectualism to get in the way of genuine artistic instinct (12–13); and for having paved the way for the New Comedy of Menander and Philemon by domesticating the tragic hero (11). All this is straight from Schlegel, down to the German version of Philemon's lines in which that poet—or rather one of his characters—declares that he would hang himself to see Euripides in the underworld, provided he could be sure that the dead were still possessed of sensation (*αἴσθησις*).⁵³

Nietzsche borrowed another memorable Greek aphorism from Schlegel, this time adding his own touch. According to ancient biographical tradition, Sophocles once said that Aeschylus “did all the right things as a poet, but did so without knowing it” because he wrote his plays while he was drunk.⁵⁴ Schlegel quoted this *bon mot* in the last sentence of his lecture on Aeschylus to support his Romantic conclusion that Aeschylus was a genius who accomplished what he did by following his own instincts (“ein bewusstlos wirkender Genius”).⁵⁵ Nietzsche was so fond of the Sophoclean dictum that he referred to it six times between 1868 and 1872.⁵⁶ Each time he gave it a revealing twist by adding that Euripides would have disagreed with Sophocles about Aeschylus' talent; Euripides would have said that Aeschylus did everything *wrong* precisely “because he created unconsciously” (BT 12). In Nietzsche's eyes, it was the insistence on knowledge and self-consciousness that made Euripides a bedfellow of Socrates and alienated both men from the true tragic spirit, which appealed to the emotions rather than the intellect.

⁵³ BT 11 (*Werke* III.1 72.10ff, 73.34–74.2) = “Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie” (1871), *Werke* III.2 96.8ff, 97.29ff, preceded by “Socrates und die Tragödie” (1870), *Werke* III.2 26.2ff, 28.8ff; cf. fr.1[91], from fall 1869, in *Werke* III.3 (1978) 34 (Schlegel's German translation of Philemon fr.130 Kock as excerpted by Nietzsche); A. W. Schlegel, *SK* (*supra* n.26) II 358 = *KSB* (*supra* n.17) III 299, and *DK* (*supra* n.17) lecture 8 (*SW* V 144 = *KSB* V 109). Cf. M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore/London 1981) 98f; B. Knox, *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore 1979) 270, concludes his chapter on “Euripidean Comedy” with the Philemon fragment.

⁵⁴ Chamaeleon fr.40a–b Wehrli = *TrGF* IV τ52a–b Radt = G. Lanata, *Poetica pre-platonica* (Florence 1963) fr.3: ὦ Αἰσχύλε, εἰ καὶ τὰ δέοντα ποιεῖς, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰδώς γε ποιεῖς. Wilamowitz, *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin 1875) 201, still took this comparison literally and offered it as his own opinion: “Sophocles ab Aeschylea praestantia non deflectit nisi quod sciens rectum facit.”

⁵⁵ *DK* (*supra* n.17) lecture 6 (*SW* V 111 = *KSB* [*supra* n.17] V 87).

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, fragment of 1868/9 on the three tragedians, *HKA* V (*supra* n.41) 219; fragment 1[44], fall 1869, in *Werke* III.3 18; “Socrates und die Tragödie” (1870), *Werke* III.2 31.29ff; lecture notes on *Oedipus Rex*, summer 1870, *GA* XVII (*supra* n.32) 317; BT 12 (*Werke* III.1 83.13ff) = “Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie” (1871) *Werke* III.2 117.34–118.4.

In one major respect, however, Nietzsche parted company with Schlegel. In his lecture notes of 1870 he appealed to the authority of Lessing to defend Euripides' prologues against the strictures of Schlegel, who had condemned them as undramatic on account of their undisguised expository purpose.⁵⁷ In *BT* the expository prologue is discussed at greater length as an integral component of Euripides' dramatic programme, which comprises, according to Nietzsche, a rhetorical as well as a didactic dimension, exemplified, respectively, in stichomythic dialogue and in the prologue. By turning the tragic hero into an eloquent mouthpiece of "bourgeois mediocrity," Euripides "brought the spectator onto the stage."⁵⁸ By using his prologues, on the other hand, to convey information about the play and its characters, he redirected attention from the course of the action to the "passion and dialectic of the protagonist." Once the emotional distance between the audience and the stage hero has been narrowed, suspense gives way to empathy.⁵⁹ Nietzsche clearly recognized the dramatic effectiveness of this device, but in the end he too condemned it on the grounds that Euripides' preoccupation with "conscious knowledge" was Socratic and contrary to the true spirit of tragedy found in Aeschylus, who "creates unconsciously."⁶⁰ Euripides and his prologue speakers are thus exposed as "rationalists" and as "masks" of Socrates, the antipode and archenemy of Dionysus. Here and elsewhere, Nietzsche's "Dionysian" philosophy impaired his considerable abilities as a critic, and he missed his chance to make a more constructive contribution to our understanding of the Euripidean prologue and its dramatic function.⁶¹

The fundamentals of Nietzsche's case against Euripides are demonstrably derived from Schlegel's Vienna lectures. His perfunctory com-

⁵⁷ *GA* XVII [*supra* n.32] 324; G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1769) nos. 48f; cf. A. W. Schlegel, *DK* (*supra* n.17), lecture 8 (*SW* V 141-43 = *KSB* [*supra* n.17] V 107f), who attacks Lessing.

⁵⁸ *BT* 11 (*Werke* III.1 73.4ff); cf. *Ar. Ran.* 954ff. Again Nietzsche was merely rearticulating Schlegel's complaint that Euripides' characters embodied the worst qualities of his Athenian contemporaries (*DK* [*supra* n.17], lecture 8: *SW* V 135-37 = *KSB* [*supra* n.17] V 103f). Schlegel himself quoted the dictum ascribed to Sophocles according to which Euripides portrayed people, not "as they should be" but "as they really are" (*Arist. Poet.* 1460b34 = Sophocles *TrGF* IV τ 53a Radt).

⁵⁹ *BT* 12 (*Werke* III.1 81f); fr.1[90] and 1[101], fall 1869, in *Werke* III.3 34-36. The observation that the information imparted in the prologue enhances the audience's empathy with the stage hero is derived from Lessing (*supra* n.57).

⁶⁰ *BT* 12 (*Werke* III.1 81f); see *supra* nn.54-56.

⁶¹ Although Lessing's appreciative comments have served as the starting point for several attempts to assess the artistic merit of Euripides' prologue technique, Nietzsche's clever reinterpretation of Lessing, with its negative bias, is usually ignored—most recently by H. Erbse, *Studien zum Prolog der euripideischen Tragödie* (Berlin/New York 1984) 6-19.

ments on the *Bacchae*, a play he knew well, make one doubt that his criticism of Euripides would have been more constructive if it had been informed by a more extensive reading of the poet's work. Nietzsche was not interested in Euripides *per se*, but he needed him as a reverse image of Aeschylus, the true tragedian, and as negative proof for his overall concept of tragedy. That concept, for better or worse, turned out to be an infinitely greater source of inspiration for subsequent critics than anything Schlegel ever said on the subject of tragedy. Schlegel condemned Euripides on purely aesthetic grounds, guided by the Romantic premise of an organic balance between a dramatic work as a whole and its constituent parts. Nietzsche added a new dimension to the criticism of tragedy. He did not abandon the aesthetic criteria he inherited but subordinated them to his own existentialist definition of the tragic hero as a paradigm of the human condition: a defiant, even jubilant acceptance of life in spite of "the certainty of annihilation."⁶² Euripidean heroes fail to live up to Nietzsche's expectations because they attempt to hide "the terror and horror of existence" (*BT* 3) behind a deceptive veil of rational and moral arguments. They are, like Plato and Socrates, "cowards in the face of reality."⁶³

Most classicists today would disagree with Nietzsche's conclusion that Euripides, in joining forces with Socrates to become a 'rationalist' (*BT* 12), had deserted Dionysus. Given the same alternative, they would place Euripides on the side of Dionysus, and at a considerable remove from Socrates. The case is, of course, not remotely so simple. The notorious difficulty of making Euripides conform to clear-cut categories will be abundantly illustrated when we examine Nietzsche's arguments for divorcing the poet from Dionysus and associating him with Socrates.

III. Euripides and Socrates: A Fragile Connection

Nietzsche was generally more interested in the "pre-Platonic" philosophers (as he called them in 1872) and in Aeschylean tragedy than in most other aspects of Greek thought and culture. The figure of Socrates represented for him the great divide between the high-spirited thinkers and poets of Greece's most vigorous centuries and the sterile Alexandrianism of their epigones (*BT* 15, 18). Socrates

⁶² Lloyd-Jones (*supra* n.2) 9 (=repr. 174); cf. *BT* 16, last paragraph.

⁶³ Nietzsche's description of Plato in "What I Owe to the Ancients" (*supra* n.39) 2 (*Werke* VI.3 154-56).

never ceased to arouse strong and ambivalent feelings in him, doubtless because the two were kindred spirits whose relentless examination of their own conscience and that of others reflected a similar missionary zeal and an equally deep concern for the moral and intellectual integrity of their contemporaries.⁶⁴

By February 1870 Nietzsche had convinced himself that Socrates was the ultimate personification of "rationalism" and "optimism," the two deadliest sins against the tragic spirit.⁶⁵ By making Euripides a close ally of Socrates and by ascribing to him the very faults that he found so reprehensible in the philosopher, he could rationalize his instinctive aversion to the poet. There was both ancient and modern precedent for postulating some connection between the two. Lessing, writing more than a century before Nietzsche, had already considered Socrates "the teacher and friend of Euripides."⁶⁶ Although A. W. Schlegel denied that Euripides and Socrates had been more than casual acquaintances, he nevertheless blamed the poet for attending the schools of the philosophers; especially Anaxagoras, and for hiding his sophistic aspirations under the poet's cloak.⁶⁷ Nietzsche by contrast went out of his way to make the connection between Euripides and Socrates appear much more intimate than it ever was (*BT* 12).

In doing so he relied upon three pieces of ancient biographical information, all of which lack proper credentials, as Wilamowitz was quick to point out.⁶⁸ According to several of the comic poets, includ-

⁶⁴ Nietzsche confessed in 1875 that his antagonism to Socrates stemmed from his close affinity with him (fragment 6[3] in *Werke* IV.1 [1967] 173). On Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates see E. R. Dodds, ed., *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford 1959) 387-91, and most recently W. J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* (Ithaca/London 1974); on nineteenth-century perceptions of Socrates, including Nietzsche's, see Turner (*supra* n.23) 264-321.

⁶⁵ In "Socrates und die Tragödie" (*supra* n.44).

⁶⁶ *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (*supra* n.57) no. 49.

⁶⁷ *SK* (*supra* n.26) II 353f = *KSB* (*supra* n.17) III 295, repeated verbatim at *DK* lecture 8 (*SW* V 139 = *KSB* [*supra* n.17] V 105); cf. *BT* 12 (*Werke* III.1 83.1ff). The principal sources for Euripides' alleged apprenticeship under Anaxagoras are *Vita Euripidis* 10ff, 115ff Méridier (trans. Lefkowitz [*supra* n.53] 164, 168): "he attended lectures by Anaxagoras, Prodicus and Protagoras," and "after he had studied with Archelaus the natural philosopher and with Anaxagoras he started to write tragedies"; Alexander of Pleuron fr.7 Powell (Euripides as "nursling of Anaxagoras"); Diog. Laert. 2.10 ("his disciple"); Cic. *Tusc.* 3.14.10; Vitruvius *De arch.* 8 praef. 1 (*auditor Anaxagorae*). On possible echoes of Anaxagorean doctrine in Euripides' plays see Satyr. *Vit. Eur.* (*P.Oxy.* IX 1176) fr.37 coll. i-iii; Wilamowitz (*supra* n.54) 163-65, and *Euripides. Herakles I: Einleitung in die griechische Tragödie* (1889) 25f; L. Parmentier, *Euripide et Anaxagore* (Paris 1893); E. Röhde, *Psyche* II² (Leipzig/Tübingen 1898) 254-61 (tr. [London 1925] 435-38); W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* II (Cambridge 1965) 323-25.

⁶⁸ *Zukunftsphilologie!* (*supra* n.36) 48-50.

ing Aristophanes in his first *Clouds* (423 B.C.), Socrates collaborated with Euripides on some of his plays.⁶⁹ Nietzsche in *BT* 13 reports this story (“Sage”) with obvious approval. In an earlier draft of his lecture on “Socrates and Tragedy” (1870) he had recognized it more explicitly as gossip (“Gerede”), while already accepting it as a valid indication of “how the Athenians thought about the two.”⁷⁰ Nietzsche’s second illustration is taken from Aelian (*VH* 2.13), who claims that Socrates rarely attended tragic performances but made a point of seeing the plays of Euripides. Even if it were true that Socrates was attracted by Euripides as a playwright, it does not necessarily follow that the attraction was mutual. Nietzsche’s third piece of evidence consists of a fabricated oracle in iambic trimeters according to which Sophocles was wise, Euripides wiser, and Socrates the wisest of all men.⁷¹ The second verse of this oracle (ἀνδρῶν δὲ πάντων Σωκράτης σοφώτατος) was lifted from a late fifth-century comedian; the preceding verse with the comparison of the two tragedians must have been added before the first quarter of the first century B.C., when the rhetorician Apollonius Molon exposed the oracle as a forgery.⁷² The inclusion of Sophocles should have been enough to disqualify these lines as evidence for an intellectual affinity between Euripides and Socrates. Aware of the difficulty, Nietzsche ultimately settled for less and concluded that the oracle confirms Sophocles’ intermediate status as a “transitional figure” between Aeschylus and Euripides: “Sophocles was named third in order of rank—he who could boast that, as compared with Aeschylus, he did what was right because he *knew* what was right” (*BT* 13). Instinct, not knowledge, guides the true tragedian.⁷³

⁶⁹ Teleclides fr.39f Kock; Callias fr.15 Kassel/Austin; R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* III.2 (Berlin/New York 1984) on Ar. fr.392, cf. *Ran.* 1491–99; Nietzsche, *GA* (*supra* n.32) XVII 325 and XVIII 50 (Socrates as “Mitarbeiter des Euripides”).

⁷⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, edd. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Munich/Berlin 1980) XIV 100.

⁷¹ *TrGF* IV τ106a–e Radt; J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1978) 245; H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford 1956) II 170 no. 420; G. Wolff, *Porphyrii de philosophia ex oraculis haurienda librorum reliquiae* (Berlin 1856) 76f.

⁷² Σ RV Ar. *Nub.* 144; K. Latte, *Kleine Schriften* (Munich 1968) 670f. Nietzsche’s lecture notes from the summer of 1872 (“The Pre-Platonic Philosophers,” last section, on Socrates) indicate that he was well aware of the oracle’s doubtful authenticity; see *GA* (*supra* n.32) XIX: *Philologica* III: *Unveröffentlichtes zur antiken Religion und Philosophie*, edd. O. Crusius and W. Nestle (Leipzig 1913) 229, 403.

⁷³ Cf. *supra* nn.54–56. For Nietzsche’s reservations about Sophocles see *BT* 14, “even with him the Dionysian basis of tragedy is beginning to break down” (*Werke* III.1 91.12f), explained in *BT* 17 (on character portrayal in tragedy) as a tendency to substitute “psychological refinement” of individual characters for “eternal types”

Nietzsche was desperate to prove a “close connection between Euripides and Socrates” (*BT* 13). His reckless use of ancient sources here and elsewhere in *BT* makes many of his arguments vulnerable and often invalidates his conclusions, even though his intuitions tend to point in the right direction and should not be taken lightly. The question of Euripides’ Socratic connection has been much discussed in recent decades, almost always without reference to Nietzsche.⁷⁴ But the focus of discussion has shifted from the dubious biographical evidence used by Nietzsche to Euripides’ own work and to one passage in particular. In *Hippolytus* (380ff) Phaedra argues that mere knowledge of what is right is not enough to make one do what is right. Wilamowitz, reacting against Nietzsche’s Socratic Euripides, interpreted Phaedra’s lines as expressly anti-Socratic; his followers include Snell, Dodds, and Guthrie.⁷⁵ Barrett replied that Euripides’ characters are not his mouthpieces, and that Phaedra, far from engaging in anti-Socratic polemic, is merely concerned with “the much simpler view” that it is lack of moral resolve that leads people astray, even if they know better.⁷⁶ The point is well taken, yet it must have been this “simpler view,” held by the majority of Athenians, which the Socratic paradox tried to correct, thereby making it an issue of intellectual debate.⁷⁷ Phaedra’s argument, dramatically appropriate as it doubtless is in her mouth, seems to reflect Euripides’ interest in, if not comment on, this debate between Socrates and the Athenian public.⁷⁸

(109.15ff). On Sophocles as a “transitional figure” (“Uebergangsgestalt”) see *GA* XVII (*supra* n.32) 323.

⁷⁴ The most recent and systematic discussion is T. H. Irwin, “Euripides and Socrates,” *CP* 78 (1983) 183–97 (beneficially brought to my attention by Harvey Yunis).

⁷⁵ *Zukunftsphilologie!* (*supra* n.36) 51–53, cf. *Einleitung* (*supra* n.67) 24f; B. Snell, *Philologus* 97 (1948) 125–35 (revised in *Scenes from Greek Drama* [Berkeley/Los Angeles 1964] 56–68), and *Entdeckung* (*supra* n.21) 120–23; E. R. Dodds, “Euripides the Irrationalist,” *CR* 43 (1929) 97–104 (= *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* [Oxford 1973] 78–91), and *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1951) 186f; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* III (Cambridge 1969) 258. At the same time, Snell (*Entdeckung* 124f, cf. *Scenes* 67f) adduces *Hipp.* 380f in support of his Nietzschean claim that the rise of Socratic ethics caused the death of tragedy and that the work of Euripides marked “the transition from tragedy to [the new Socratic] philosophy.”

⁷⁶ W. S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) 229.

⁷⁷ Barrett’s “simpler view” is, of course, the commonsense view ascribed by Plato’s Socrates to *οἱ πολλοί* (*Prt.* 352D4ff), which Euripides presumably shared.

⁷⁸ Irwin (*supra* n.74) 189ff comes to a similar conclusion: Euripides’ Phaedra and Medea (at *Med.* 1042ff) are indeed, like Socrates, concerned with the problem of ‘incontinence’ (lack of moral resolve, or ‘the weakness of the flesh’ [n.80 *infra*]), but unlike Socrates, and most probably in deliberate departure from him, Euripides does not deny its existence.

If Euripides himself was not “the poet of the Greek enlightenment,” as Wilhelm Nestle, one of the editors of Nietzsche’s *Philologica*, portrayed him in 1901, nevertheless it remains true that many of his characters, including Phaedra and Medea, exhibit a degree of intellectual keenness and moral introspection never before witnessed on the tragic stage. In this respect only, Phaedra might be said to resemble the Nietzschean Socrates, even when she disagrees with the historical Socrates. Nietzsche never searched the tragedies of Euripides for traces of “Socratism,” and he never ascribed any particular “community of opinion” to the two men.⁷⁹ He must have sensed that, to judge by his best-known plays, Euripides’ view of human nature and moral behavior was utterly un-Socratic.⁸⁰ In the only comment on Phaedra’s speech that I have been able to find in Nietzsche, he fittingly describes her argument as “the sophistry of passion deep inside, which gets in the way of one’s better judgment.”⁸¹ If “sophistry” equals “Socratism,” as it demonstrably did for Nietzsche when he wrote *BT*, it follows that what he would have considered “Socratic” in Phaedra’s speech was not so much her moral position (which he virtually admits to be un-Socratic) as the argumentative, self-conscious manner in which it is presented.

For Nietzsche, the combination of sophistry and passion is a quintessential quality of Euripidean tragedy, but a negative one. Euripides is seen as the misguided genius whose critical bent prevailed over his poetic and dramatic talent and who, under the influence of Socrates,

⁷⁹ Lloyd-Jones (*supra* n.2) 9 (=174) considers “belief in a community of opinion” between the two men “wholly unacceptable.” Few would disagree, but Nietzsche merely postulated a “close connection,” which he defined in the most general and commonplace terms as a “sophistical tendency” (*BT* 13) characterized by rationalism and optimism.

⁸⁰ Wilamowitz, in 1872 and again in 1889, was perhaps the first scholar to articulate the fundamental difference between Euripides and Socrates (*Einleitung* [*supra* n.67] 24): “The philosopher relies on the strength of the human will, which, provided it perceives what is right, will do it. The tragedian finds the root of evil in the weakness of the flesh [*cf. Zukunftsphilologie!* (*supra* n.36) 51, where he quotes Matthew 26.41], which hinders the realization of good intentions. In superficial and modern terms, the former is an optimist, the latter a pessimist. There is no way of reconciling the two.” For Nietzsche both Euripides and Socrates were “optimists” (*BT* 14–15). Wilamowitz consciously adopted Nietzsche’s “modern” terminology only to disparage it in correcting Nietzsche’s perception of Euripides.

⁸¹ Lecture course of 1874/5, in *GA* XVIII (*supra* n.32) 49: “Die innere Sophistik der Leidenschaft, welche sich dem bessern Bewusstsein entgegenstellt.” In *BT* 13 Nietzsche defends Aristophanes’ portrayal of Socrates as the “first and supreme *sophist*” (*Werke* III.1 84.24f). But in his lecture course on the “Pre-Platonic Philosophers,” first given in the summer of 1872, some six months after the publication of *BT*, he abandoned his earlier conflation of Socrates with the sophists and differentiated sharply between the historical Socrates and the distortion of him by Aristophanes.

became an excessively self-conscious playwright, preoccupied with intellectual concepts at the expense of tragic suffering.⁸² His main faults were that he left nothing unexplained, not even the supernatural—or, in the case of Phaedra, her tragic flaw—and that he replaced heroism with realism, thereby depriving tragedy of its “enigmatic depth” (*BT* 11). By definition Euripidean heroes suffer from the same faults. No longer victims of higher powers, they fall victim to their own ratiocinations. Their heroism in shambles, they emerge from Nietzsche’s analysis as the earliest case histories of the so-called “crisis of the hero,” which stirred some of the best minds among the next, post-Nietzschean and post-Freudian generation of classicists.

Karl Reinhardt (1886–1958) and E. R. Dodds (1893–1979) were deeply influenced by Nietzsche, but not so much by *BT* as by his later works. At the same time, both scholars had learned from Wilamowitz, Erwin Rohde, and Gilbert Murray to question the nineteenth-century bias against Euripides. Moved by an acute sense of cultural crisis inherited from Nietzsche and reinforced by the experience of world war, Dodds and Reinhardt proceeded to replace rationalism and optimism with irrationalism and pessimism, even nihilism, as the prevailing tendencies that shaped the Euripidean theater, and to appreciate its fallen heroes as classical paradigms of the fragility of human nature, torn by incomprehensible forces outside and by uncontrollable passions within.⁸³ Among the various plays said to exhibit these tendencies in signal fashion, the *Bacchae* occupies a prominent place.

⁸² Cf. *BT* 12 (*Werke* III.1 82.32ff) on Euripides as “the poet of aesthetic Socratism.” A. W. Schlegel had already invested Euripides with the “dual personality” of poet and sophist (*DK* [*supra* n.17] lecture 8 [*SW* V 139 = *KSB* [*supra* n.17] V 105]). According to Vitruvius (*supra* n.67), Quintilian (*Inst.* 10.1.67), Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 1.288), Athenaeus (4.158E, 13.561A), and others, the Athenians called Euripides σκηνηκὸς φιλόσοφος, a description accepted at face value by C. A. Lobeck (*Aglaophamus* [Königsberg 1829] 623), Wilamowitz (*supra* n.54) 162, and, more surprisingly, E. R. Dodds: “Euripides happens to be, like Bernard Shaw and Pirandello, a philosophical dramatist” (in “Euripides the Irrationalist” [*supra* n.75] 97=79).

⁸³ E. R. Dodds, “Euripides the Irrationalist” (April 1929 [*supra* n.75]), where Euripides is characterized as “pessimistic and irrationalist” (103=89), a tacit reversal of Nietzsche’s characterization of Euripides, achieved with the help of Nietzschean categories. Karl Reinhardt’s most revealing and penetrating piece on Nietzsche dates from February 1928: “Nietzsche und die Geschichte,” in *Vermächtnis der Antike. Gesammelte Essays zur Philosophie und Geschichtsschreibung*² (Göttingen 1966) 296–309. A quarter century and another world war later, Reinhardt assigned to the later Nietzsche of the 1880’s a major rôle in the de-masking and redefinition of the tragic hero: “Die Krise des Helden” (November 1953), in *Tradition und Geist* (Göttingen 1960) 420–27 (= *Die Krise des Helden* [Munich 1962] 19–51). Finally, a few years later, he analyzed the flawed heroes of Euripides against the background of Nietzsche and “modern European nihilism” in one of his most influential essays, “Die Sinneskrise bei Euripides” (fall 1957), in *Tradition und Geist* 227–56 (= *Krise* 19–51).

IV. The “Death-Bed Conversion”: Euripides’ *Bacchae*

The Athenian judges who awarded Euripides’ posthumous trilogy first prize would have agreed with Goethe, A. W. Schlegel, and numerous other nineteenth-century critics who rated the *Bacchae* one of the poet’s best plays, if not the best.⁸⁴ It stands apart by virtue not only of its quality, but also of its content. It is the only extant tragedy that dramatizes a Dionysiac myth and in which Dionysus himself not only appears on stage but dominates the action from start to finish with his superior presence. Neither Prometheus nor Oedipus, Nietzsche’s favorite stage heroes, fits his conception of the suffering hero who duplicates “the suffering Dionysus of the Mysteries” (*BT* 10), the dismembered god, nearly so well as Pentheus, who is torn to pieces by the maenads. As the prophet of a new “Dionysian world view” Nietzsche could hardly afford to ignore a play whose subject matter was so germane to his theory of tragedy, even though its author was Euripides. The sharp discrepancy between the powerful portrayal of Dionysus and of the Dionysiac mood in the *Bacchae* and the alleged “un-Dionysiac tendency” (*BT* 12) of Euripidean tragedy in general should have been a serious stumbling block for Nietzsche. But far from it: with almost reckless aplomb, he disposes of the potential obstacle on a single page, one of the least rewarding of the whole essay.⁸⁵ As Nietzsche sees it, the life-long champion of unmitigated rationalism had finally lost confidence in the power of reason, made his peace with Dionysus, and written the *Bacchae* as a recantation (“Widerruf”).

Nietzsche’s answer to the “riddle of the *Bacchae*” was anything but new. The so-called palinode theory can be traced back to Thomas Tyrwhitt (1730–1786), the learned editor of Chaucer.⁸⁶ His successors included Karl Otfried Müller (1797–1840) and Karl Friedrich Nägels-

⁸⁴ Goethe in conversation with the Jena classicist Karl Wilhelm Götting on 3 March 1832, less than three weeks before his death: “I consider the *Bacchae* his most beautiful play. Is it possible to portray the power of divinity more splendidly, and the infatuation of man more ingeniously, than has been done here?” (E. Grumach, *Goethe und die Antike* [Berlin 1949] I 298); cf. E.-R. Schwinge, “Goethe und die Poesie der Griechen,” *AbhMainz* 1986.5, 26f, 30–33. Schlegel considered the *Bacchae* Euripides’ best play after *Hippolytus* (*DK* [supra n.17] lecture 10: *SW* V 171 = *KSB* V 126).

⁸⁵ *BT* 12 (*Werke* III.1 78f) = “Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie” (1871), *Werke* III.2 112.31–114.3. Nietzsche adopted the palinode theory not only in *BT*, but also in his lectures of 1870 (*GA* XVII [supra n.32] 299) and 1874/5 (*GA* XVIII 49, where the *Bacchae* is characterized as “a sort of palinode full of deep resignation”).

⁸⁶ In Tyrwhitt’s “Emendationes in Euripidem” as reported by S. Musgrave, *Exercitationum in Euripidem libri duo* (Leyden 1762) 151.

bach (1806–1859), with whose works Nietzsche was well acquainted.⁸⁷ It would be unfair to find fault with Nietzsche merely because he adopted the palinode theory, which was still the standard interpretation of the *Bacchae* in 1871. Less than four years earlier, the young Wilamowitz had done the same in his senior thesis.⁸⁸ But in a characteristic departure from his predecessors, who had portrayed Euripides as a genuine convert to Dionysus, Nietzsche chose to see him as a doubtful believer who reluctantly yielded to a superior force (*BT* 12): “Is the Dionysian entitled to exist at all? Should it not be forcibly uprooted from Hellenic soil? Certainly, the poet tells us, if it were only possible: but the god Dionysus is too powerful.” Ever the rationalist, Nietzsche’s Euripides finally comes to terms with the irrational even though he would prefer to expel it if he could.

The assumption that Euripides had intended the *Bacchae* as an *ex cathedra* pronouncement on the dangerous but irresistible power of Dionysus is as unfounded as the palinode theory it was designed to support. That theory was conclusively laid to rest in 1871 by the Anglo-Irish scholar R. Y. Tyrrell (1844–1914) and had for all practical purposes become a dead issue by the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ Nietzsche’s concept of Euripides the rationalist, on the other hand, continued to enjoy wide popularity, especially in England, thanks to the ingenious efforts of A. W. Verrall (1851–1912), who took ‘rationalist’ to be synonymous with ‘anti-clerical’ and interpreted the *Bacchae* accordingly.⁹⁰ The ghosts of Nietzsche and Verrall, revived

⁸⁷ K. O. Müller, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur bis auf das Zeitalter Alexanders* (Breslau 1841, 1856²) II 176; K. F. Nägelsbach *Die nachhomerische Theologie des griechischen Volksglaubens bis auf Alexander* (Nuremberg 1857) 463–66. It may be relevant that Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), whose philosophy underlies *BT*, condemned the *Bacchae* as “an outrageously bungled piece of work for the benefit of the pagan clergy” (“ein empörendes Machwerk zu Gunsten der heidnischen Pfaffen”), *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* III 37 Suppl., in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. A. Hübscher, III (Leipzig 1938) 496.

⁸⁸ Wilamowitz (*supra* n.27) 144–46, with reference to Nägelsbach (*supra* n.87), whose interpretation of *Bacch.* 200–03 (Tiresias the traditionalist as the mouthpiece of the converted poet) was followed by Wilamowitz as well as Nietzsche (*supra* n.85). By 1889 Wilamowitz had abandoned the palinode theory (*Herakles* [*supra* n.67] II 134 n. 26).

⁸⁹ R. Y. Tyrrell, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (London 1871, 1892²) xvi–xxvii, reviewed with approval by R. C. Jebb, *The Dark Blue* 1 (1871) 652f. Both names, as well as Nietzsche’s, are omitted from the brief history of the palinode theory and its opponents in E. R. Dodds, *Euripides. Bacchae*² (Oxford 1960) xl–xlvii. The early decades of this century still saw sporadic revivals of the theory.

⁹⁰ Verrall demolished Walter Pater’s version of the palinode theory in his revealing review of Pater’s posthumous *Greek Studies* (*CR* 9 [1895] 225–28). His own interpretation, in *The Bacchantes of Euripides and Other Essays* (Cambridge 1910) 1–163, was intended as a supplement (p.16) to Gilbert Norwood’s avowedly Verrallian *The Riddle of*

through an infusion of Freud, still haunt the peroration of Winnington-Ingram's monograph on the *Bacchae*, published in 1948: "Euripides recognized Dionysus for the danger that he was. . . . The worship of such a god he could not commend. . . . Euripides recognized, but hated Dionysus. He recognized his power, and saw that there was only one weapon to employ against him, which was to understand him and to propagate understanding of him."⁹¹ Here, as in Nietzsche, the means are mistaken for the end, and the *Bacchae* is read as if it were an expression of Euripides' personal credo.

Nietzsche adopted the palinode theory for the same reason as his predecessors: as a last resort by which to account for the special character of the *Bacchae* compared with the rest of the poet's extant *oeuvre*. But he did so less than half-heartedly. If taken at face value, the theory would have undermined his concept of the decline of tragedy, which required a Euripides who was an incorrigible rationalist and agnostic. Nietzsche escaped the dilemma by resorting to the desperate argument that Euripides' recantation came too late because tragedy had already been destroyed by the very poet who at the end of his career committed intellectual suicide in a vain attempt to come to its rescue (*BT* 12): "When the poet recanted, his tendency had already triumphed. Dionysus had already been scared from the tragic stage, by a demonic power speaking through Euripides. Even Euripides was, in a sense, only a mask: the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysus nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn demon, called *Socrates*." Nowhere are the shortcomings of the palinode theory more glaringly revealed than in Nietzsche's futile recourse to it.

Ruling the *Bacchae* out of court was as convenient as it was intellectually dishonest. If Nietzsche had taken the play seriously, he would have faced the difficult task of having to reconcile its two protagonists, Pentheus and Dionysus, with his definition of the tragic

the Bacchae: The Last Stage of Euripides' Religious Views (Manchester 1908), which perceives Euripides' Dionysus "as a shameless impostor" and the *Bacchae* as "an exposure of sham religion" (*Essays* [supra n.48] 59). In 1954, in the evening of his life, Norwood recanted (*Essays* 52-73). Verrall's method had been exemplified in *Euripides the Rationalist: A Study in the History of Art and Religion* (Cambridge 1895), in which the *Bacchae* is not discussed. The memorial tablet in the Ante-chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge, pays fitting tribute to Verrall, whose work "Aeschylus artem illustravit, Euripidis famam vindicavit" (cf. Verrall's *Collected Literary Essays Classical and Modern*, edd. M. A. Bayfield and J. D. Duff [Cambridge 1913] ciii).

⁹¹ R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge 1948) 179. Compare Verrall's review of Pater (*supra* n.90) 228: "Euripides, it is true, did not despise the bacchic religion as he despised the average religion of the Hellenes; indeed he did not despise it at all; but he feared it all the more, and he disliked it, we should imagine, certainly none the less."

hero. In reconstructing the origins of tragedy, Nietzsche proceeded from the false assumption, first advocated by K. O. Müller and later revived by Gilbert Murray, "that Greek tragedy in its earliest form had for its sole theme the sufferings of Dionysus and that for a long time the only stage hero was Dionysus himself" (*BT* 10).⁹² Nietzsche perceived the recorded history of Attic tragedy as a progressive departure from this primitive but ideal state. Prometheus and Oedipus, the perfect embodiments of the Aeschylean and Sophoclean hero, "are mere masks of this original hero, Dionysus," whereas in Euripides the god "ceased to be the tragic hero" (*BT* 10). It is tempting to speculate about how Nietzsche would have dealt with the juxtaposition of Pentheus and Dionysus as dramatic and ideological adversaries. Far from being an invention of Euripides, their rôles had been defined by the traditional myth, attested in vase-painting as early as the last quarter of the sixth century and first dramatized, apparently, in Thespis' *Pentheus*. Dionysus presumably made a stage appearance in Aeschylus' *Pentheus*, and he certainly did so in the *Edonians*.⁹³ Long before Euripides' *Bacchae*, then, the god had appeared at least once, if not twice, on the tragic stage alongside a human adversary, the tragic hero proper, who according to Nietzsche's definition was the god's surrogate and whose fate reflected the sufferings of Dionysus. We cannot know for certain what Nietzsche would have made of this constellation, but he could easily have turned it to his advantage by arguing that the combined presence of a suffering mortal hero and his divine archetype marked the transition from an earlier to a more developed form of tragedy. But such an argument, however

⁹² Cf. Nietzsche's lecture notes of 1874/5 (*GA* XVIII [*supra* n.32] 41): "Tragedy originated from the representation of the myths of Dionysus, which are terrible and full of suffering." For K. O. Müller's derivation of tragedy from a re-enactment of τὰ Διονύσου πάθηα (modeled on Hdt. 5.67.5) see his *Griech.Lit.* (*supra* n.87) I 485, *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (Göttingen 1825) 395, and letter to G. A. Schöll (1805–82), 8 May 1828, in O. Kern, *Aus dem amtlichen und wissenschaftlichen Briefwechsel von Carl Otfried Müller* (Göttingen 1939) 93 no. 47; G. Murray in J. Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1912, 1927²) 341–63, esp. 346 (Pentheus as "another form of Dionysus"). Recent critics of this approach include G. F. Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1965) 18, 26ff (where, strangely, Murray is blamed for the sins of Müller and Nietzsche), and *ICS* 2 (1977) 70–87; B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy: Drama, Myth, Society* (London 1973) 33–42; H. C. Payne, "Modernizing the Ancients: The Reconstruction of Ritual Drama 1870–1920," *ProcAmPhilSoc* 122 (1978) 182–92, esp. 184ff; Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4) 142–50; Henrichs (*supra* n.4) 222 n.35.

⁹³ *TrGF* III F61 Radt and pp.298f; H. Oranje, *Euripides' Bacchae: The Play and Its Audience* (Leiden 1984) 124–30 (Dionysus on the tragic stage). On reconstructing Aeschylus' Dionysiac trilogies see T. Gantz, *AJP* 101 (1980) 140f, 154ff; M. L. West, *BICS* 30 (1983) 63–71.

appropriate for Aeschylus, would hardly work in the case of Euripides. The Dionysus of the *Bacchae*, far from being a suffering god, acts and talks like a sophist. More human than divine, he must have struck Nietzsche's Dionysian mind as a devil in disguise, "a mask of Socrates." Yet Nietzsche refrains from comment. Had he confronted the problem of Euripides' Dionysus, he would have come to the inevitable conclusion that by juxtaposing Pentheus, the suffering hero, to an utterly un-Dionysian Dionysus, Euripides creates a dramatic situation in which Dionysus has turned not only against his human surrogate, the tragic hero, but also against himself, his true nature. Seen in this light, the *Bacchae* is found to be in flagrant contradiction to the very principle of tragedy, as defined by Nietzsche.

It remains to ask why Nietzsche chose to skirt the fundamental issue raised by the *Bacchae*. His argument would have been more consistent—and more honest—if, instead of following the *communis opinio* by adopting the palinode theory, he had rejected it and used the Dionysus of the *Bacchae* as evidence against Euripides and as ultimate proof of the poet's "un-Dionysian art" which destroyed tragedy. Here lies Nietzsche's dilemma. He could not afford to condemn Euripides' Dionysus outright because doing so would have cast a shadow of suspicion on the religion he represents and on its portrayal in the *Bacchae*. Although Nietzsche never reveals his debt to Euripides in *BT*, his own concept of the Dionysian relies heavily on the parodos and the first messenger speech of the *Bacchae*, whence its key elements are derived: the unity of man and nature, and the breaking down of conventional barriers (*BT* 1); "the duality in the emotions of the Dionysian revelers" (*BT* 2); and the merging of the individual in the group, or the sublimation of individual experience into collective behavior (*BT* 1, 7f).⁹⁴ Though intentionally obscured in *BT*, Nietzsche's dependence on the *Bacchae* was explicitly acknowledged in his lecture course of 1870 (above, II). There, in a highly important passage, part of which he repeated in two of his preliminary studies, he equated "the idea of the tragic" with "the idea of the cult of Dionysus" and proceeded to characterize that cult on the basis of a close paraphrase of the beginning of the first messenger speech (*Bacch.* 677–711).⁹⁵ At this stage, in the summer of 1870, he was exclusively concerned with articulating the Greek concept of the Dionysian, without reference to its archenemy Socrates, which explains his positive

⁹⁴ Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4) 171–74 do not exhaust the range of connections between Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian and the *Bacchae*.

⁹⁵ *GA* XVII (*supra* n.32) 298–300; *cf. supra* nn.35f.

interest in the *Bacchae*. A year later, however, when he combined his essay on "The Dionysian World View" with his earlier study of Socrates to form the first two parts of *BT*, he suppressed his appreciative comments on *Bacch.* 677ff, doubtless because they were difficult to reconcile with his overall portrayal of Euripides as a rationalist and close associate of Socrates. It was then that he made the unhappy decision to separate the discussion of the *Bacchae* from his own representation of the Dionysian (*BT* 1–10) and to make it part of his criticism of Euripides (11–13). In doing so he steered a perilous and shifting course between the Scylla of outright condemnation, which would have been inconsistent with the palinode theory, and the Charybdis of open approval, which would have given Euripides too much credit. His vacillating response to this dilemma explains the puzzled reaction of his critics, who continue to wonder why Nietzsche failed to make better use of the *Bacchae*.⁹⁶ The answer is that he had reached an impasse that was entirely of his own making.

Let me summarize. Nietzsche's criticism of Euripides repeats Schlegel's arguments and presses them into the service of his own conception of Greek tragedy as an existential event. In the end, readers of *BT* learn little of value about Euripides, at least directly. But they learn much about Nietzsche's general view of Greek tragedy and Greek culture, which, after all, is the point of reading *BT*. Euripides was not responsible for the death of tragedy, nor did Nietzsche's criticism bring about a further decline in the poet's reputation. On the contrary, Nietzsche's attack, like Euripides' supposed palinode, came too late and remained singularly ineffective. Erwin Rohde, his best friend in 1872, interpreted Euripides twenty years later in striking and admiring terms as a poet of modernism, a restless searcher for new values that constantly eluded him.⁹⁷ One of Nietzsche's closest colleagues in Basel, the historian Jacob Burckhardt, continued until his death in 1897 to offer his students a negative portrayal of Euripides that is taken directly from Schlegel and does not contain the slightest trace of Nietzsche's reinterpretation.⁹⁸ As for Wilamo-

⁹⁶ In his review of Silk and Stern (*supra* n.4), C. Segal, *JournModHist* 55 (1983) 102–05, offers perceptive comments on how Nietzsche could have used the choral parts of the *Bacchae* to support his own concept of the Dionysiac experience, but he fails to recognize the dilemma that made it impossible for him to do so.

⁹⁷ Rohde (*supra* n.67) 247–62 (tr. 432–38), discussed by Calder, 425–28 *infra*; cf. H. Cancik, "Erwin Rohde—ein Philologe der Bismarckzeit," in W. Doerr, ed., *Semper Apertus. Sechshundert Jahre Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 1386–1986* (Berlin 1985) II 436–505, esp. 470ff (on Rohde/Nietzsche and *Psyche*).

⁹⁸ J. Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* III, *Gesammelte Werke* VII (Basel 1957) 204–31 = *Griech. Kulturgesch.* III, edd. Felix Stähelin and Samuel Merian (Berlin 1931)

witz, Nietzsche's worst enemy in 1872, he abandoned the condemnation of Euripides that he and Nietzsche had inherited and initiated the modern revaluation that is still in progress.⁹⁹ I suspect that Nietzsche's excessive and highly idiosyncratic criticism of Euripides, by inviting a strong reaction, contributed to the rising fortunes of the tragedian in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. What is more, Nietzsche's emphatic affirmation of the dark and irrational forces beneath the bright surface of Greek culture made a deep impression not only on Rohde but also on Gilbert Murray, E. R. Dodds, and Karl Reinhardt, and thus influenced their new understanding of Euripides. Without realizing it, Nietzsche had done the poet a favor.¹⁰⁰

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
September, 1986

206–33. In his account of the origins of tragedy, however, Burckhardt follows Nietzsche's reconstruction (including the suffering Dionysus) to the letter and refers to *BT*.

⁹⁹ Calder, 409ff *infra*. An instructive illustration of the ongoing debate is the recent examination of Euripides' concept of divinity, against the background of the criticism of the poet since Schlegel, by W. Kullmann, "Euripides' Verhältnis zur Philosophie," in S. Jäkel, H. Koskenniemi, and V. Pyykkö, edd., *Literatur und Philosophie in der Antike* (= *Annales Univ. Turkuensis* SER. B 174 [1986] 35–49), and R. Schlesier, "Daimon und Daimones bei Euripides," *Saeculum* 34 (1983) 267–79, and "Götterdämmerung bei Euripides?" in H. Zinser, ed., *Der Untergang von Religionen* (Berlin 1986) 35–50.

¹⁰⁰ A German version of this paper was delivered at the Freie Universität Berlin on 13 June 1986. I thank Mr Scott Scullion for numerous improvements in both style and substance, and Professor W. M. Calder III for several corrections and references.