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OF ALL THE SCHOLARS and critics who have interpreted Euripides in the last hundred years no one—at least in the English-speaking world—can match Gilbert Murray (1866-1957) in terms of influence and popularity. But Murray's most substantial work on Euripides was done before the First World War, and there is something to be said for trying, at this distance, to put his reading in context and to account for the remarkably strong impact that it made both in its own time and for many years afterwards. The task is all the more relevant nowadays, when Murray is more likely to attract attention as a "Cambridge Ritualist" than for his reading of Euripides, and we need to make a real effort to grasp what made this so distinctive.[1]

The first point to note is the sheer range and extent of Murray's contribution. His Oxford text (Vol. I 1902, Vol. II 1904, Vol. III 1909) has only recently been replaced by that of James Diggle (Vol. I 1984, Vol. II 1981, Vol. III 1994);[2] by the time of his death his verse translations had between them sold more than a quarter of a million[3] copies; his famous monograph *Euripides and His Age* (1913) was reissued in a second edition in 1946 and turned into an Oxford Paperback as late as 1965.

Then there is the fact that as an interpreter of Euripides Murray became well known to an unusually wide public.[4] The extraordinary success of the productions of plays in his translations, from *Hippolytus* in 1904 until the War and again for a decade or more after it, was felt at the time to have made a significant difference to British theatre history.[5] The fact that Murray had given up his chair at Glasgow in 1899 and was living nearer London must have helped him to devote more of his creative energy to writing for the theatre, but his interest went back earlier: he had written plays of his own in the

1. For evaluations of Murray's work see Dodds (1960); Kitto (1965); Lloyd-Jones (1982) 195–214; Ackerman (1985-86); Wilson (1987) 193-203; Fowler (1990), (1991). On the Cambridge Ritualists: Arlen (1990) (80-297 on Murray); Ackerman (1991a, 1991b); Calder (1991). See also Turner (1981) for the wider intellectual context, and Michelini (1987) for criticism of Euripides.
2. For Diggle's balanced opinion of Murray's text see his Vol. I (1984) x.
3. If one adds the translations of the other dramatists the figure is nearer half a million; cf. Wilson (1987) 198.
4. There is a parallel here with the success of Wilamowitz's translations in the German and Austrian theatre; see Calder in Bierl, Calder and Fowler (1991) 1-2.
5. See especially Thorndike in Smith and Toynbee (1960) 149-75; Wilson (1987) 103-12; Macintosh (forthcoming).

1890s, and two of them, *Carlyon Sahib* and *Andromache,* were eventually staged, though without success.[6] From the published versions of these plays, just as from his writings on Euripides, it is clear that Murray saw theatre as a medium for exploring social issues, and his friendships with William Archer, the dramatic critic and translator of Ibsen, with Bernard Shaw, and with Harley Granville Barker, were all extremely important to his thinking about the relationship between drama and society. Something of the atmosphere of these early days can be guessed from Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1905), in which Murray was cast as the unlikely *jeune premier* (to use Shaw's own ironic phrase)[7] Adolphus Cusins, the idealistic professor of Greek repeatedly addressed as "Euripides" by the arms manufacturer who convinces him that in order to have any effect on society he must go into the business of producing weapons.

From 1902, when he published his translations of *Hippolytus*, *Bacchae* and *Frogs*,[8] Murray was involved in making the ancient dramatists accessible to a non-specialist readership. This interest in a wider public is also reflected in *Euripides and His Age*, which was one of the early volumes in the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge. Here, indeed, was another example of Murray's social engagement: the aim of the series, of which he was a founder Editor, was to "place at the disposal of students, wherever they might be [i.e., typically not in universities], the fruits of sound learning in all the important branches of present-day knowledge."[9] But *Euripides and His Age* was also widely used by scholars and treated as standard for years. His first academic publication, *A History of Ancient Greek Literature* (1897), had also appeared in a series intended to reach a wide readership.[10] From the start, therefore, he was refusing to pursue a narrowly scholarly path,[11] although his interest in producing a critical edition of Euripides can be dated at least as early as 1894, when he wrote his famous letter in Greek to Wilamowitz,[12] and work on the Oxford text must have been his main preoccupation all through the decade after he left Glasgow. At the

6. Wilson (1987) 78-91.

7. In "Facts about Major Barbara," press release drafted by Shaw, New York, December 1915; Shaw, Vol. III (1971) 197.

8. Vol. III of a series entitled The Athenian Drama, a Series of Verse Translations from the Greek Dramatic Poets, with Commentaries and Explanatory Essays, for English Readers.

9. On the series and its history see Wilson (1987) 187-92.

10. In Heinemann's series of Short Histories of Literature edited by Edmund Gosse. Murray's *History* went through three editions and was last reprinted (astonishingly) in New York in 1966. Wilson (1987) 58-60 discusses its reception.

11. By contrast (e.g.) with the man who Housman said should have been appointed Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, as Murray was in 1908: Herbert Richards, Fellow of Wadham. See Grant Richards (1941) 83: "Herbert Richards, the elder of my two uncles, was not offered the Greek chair. Mr Asquith was, one supposes, responsible for the appointment of Dr. Gilbert Murray. My uncle had been a contemporary of Asquith's at Balliol, and he may well have hoped for the chair, but Gilbert Murray, who had married the daughter of the Earl of Carlisle, a Liberal peer, was much better known to the world outside the Universities. 'A Wadham man, now deceased'—I quote from a letter of the Rev. John Richards, Herbert's younger brother—'told me (I know not on what authority) that Asquith wrote to Herbert admitting Herbert's great claims but explaining that Gilbert Murray had done so much to popularize the study of Greek, then rather under a cloud.'"

12. Wilamowitz's reply is preserved (Bierl, Calder and Fowler [1991] 9-21). This was during Murray's time as Professor of Greek at Glasgow, a post to which he had been appointed at the age of twenty-three.

same period he was making his influence felt in important new directions: *The Rise of the Greek Epic* appeared in 1907 and *Four Stages of Greek Religion* in 1912.

Murray would not himself have wanted to draw the commonly made distinction between popularising and scholarship.[13] There is a magnificent sentence in the preface to Vol. I of his Oxford text which sums up his consistent attitude to all aspects of his work on Euripides: "*Plus interpretationis eget, me iudice, Euripides quam emendationis; nec, puto, bene interpretis vice fungetur homo quamvis doctus, nisi artis scaenicae aliquid sapiat, nisi cum magno homine magnoque poeta se rem habere semper intellegat, nisi denique in unoquoque* δράματι *non solum versus et sententias sed etiam homines* δρῶντας*—agentes dolentes timentes furentes—constanter sibi ante oculos proponere meminerit*" ("In my judgement Euripides is more in need of interpretation than of emendation; and however learned a man may be I don't think he will succeed in doing the job of interpretation well unless he knows something of the art of the theatre, unless he always understands that he is dealing with a great man and a great poet, and unless he remembers, with each *drama* [lit. 'thing done'], to have constantly before his eyes not only the verses and the sentiments but also the human beings *drôntas* [lit. 'doing things']—their actions, their grief, their fears, their madness"). In 1902 this was a radical claim to make; Murray's own example did much to make it seem normal.[14]

The scholars singled out for special thanks for help with the preparation of the Oxford text are A.W. Verrall and U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff; it was these two who also inspired his work on Euripides more broadly, and Murray was already responding in detail to Verrall's ideas when he wrote his chapter on Euripides in the *History* (Verrall's *Euripides the Rationalist* had come out in 1895), but much as he admired them (in their very different ways) it would be wrong to see Murray as merely imitating, or reacting to, their work. There is little to justify Robert Ackerman's view of Murray as "the last of Euripides' partisans of the older sort for whom the task was to champion his author's 'ideas' in the face of hostile readers and critics in the English-speaking world."[15] A closer look at the internal evidence should help us to form a more nuanced impression of Murray's contribution, and the sentence quoted above can serve as a starting point, since each clause offers a clue to his reading of Euripides.

(1) "The art of the theatre." In *Euripides and His Age* there is a fascinating and extremely perceptive chapter on the chorus, which includes some observations on the interplay between what Murray calls "flesh and blood"

13. Cf. Wilson (1987) 200: "Murray's expository writings, even the most popular of them, were the work of a scholar, who wanted to communicate his knowledge widely, rather than of a visionary or a propagandist with some pretence to scholarship." Fowler (1990) 327-28 writes of his "conscious amateurism," but this is in the context of a comparison with Wilamowitz, like whom Murray "conceived his function as a professor exclusively in terms of teaching, not research." Cf. Fowler (1991).

14. Cf. Dodds's comments on Murray's modernity (1960).

15. Ackerman (1985–86) 329.

and "unearthliness" in the treatment of choruses. He was sharply aware of the need for a sophisticated approach which allows for shifts in levels of reality or symbolic function: "In the *Heracles*, for instance, when the tyrant Lycus is about to make some suppliants leave the protection of an altar by burning them . . . the Chorus of old men tries for a moment to raise its hand against the tyrant's soldiers. It is like the figures of a dream trying to fight—'words and a hidden-featured thing seen in a dream of the night,' as the poet himself says, trying to battle against flesh and blood; a helpless visionary transient struggle which is beautiful for a moment but would be grotesque if it lasted. Again, in the lost *Antiope* there is a scene where the tyrant is inveigled into a hut by murderers; he manages to dash out and appeals to the Chorus of old men for help. But they are not really old men; they are only ancient echoes or voices of Justice, who speak his doom upon him, standing moveless while the slayers come."[16]

The main example chosen by Murray is the murder scene in *Medea* which "has, until very lately, been utterly condemned and misunderstood . . . Medea has gone to murder her children inside the house. The Chorus is left chanting its own, and our, anguish outside. 'Why do they not rush in and save the children?' asked the critics. In the first place, because that is not the kind of action that a Chorus can ever perform. That needs flesh and blood. 'Well,' the critic continues, 'if they cannot act effectively, why does Euripides put them in a position in which we instinctively clamour for effective action and they are absurd if they do not act?' The answer to that is given in the play itself. They do not rush in; there is no question of their rushing in: because the door is barred. When Jason in the next scene tries to enter the house he has to use soldiers with crowbars. The only action they can possibly perform is the sort that specially belongs to the Chorus, the action of baffled desire.

"Medea is in the house; the Chorus is chanting its sublimated impersonal emotion about the Love that has turned to Hate in Medea, and its dread of things to come (1267ff.):

> For fierce are the smitings back of blood once shed
> Where Love hath been: God's wrath upon them that kill,
> And an anguished Earth, and the wonder of the dead
> Haunting as music still . . .

when a sudden cry is heard within. The song breaks short, and one woman speaks:

> Hark! Did ye hear? Heard ye the children's cry?
> *Another.*
> O miserable woman! O abhorred!
> *Voice of a Child within.*
> What shall I do? What is it? Keep me fast

16. Murray (1946a) 239.

From Mother!
The Other Child.
I know nothing. Brother! Oh,
I think she means to kill us.
One of the Chorus.
Let me go!
I will!—Help, help! And save them at the last!
Child.
Yes, in God's name. Help quickly or we die!
The Other Child.
She has almost caught me now: she has a sword.

One sees the Women of the Chorus listening for the Children's words; then they break, as it were, from the spell of their own supermortal atmosphere, and fling themselves on the barred door. They beat in vain against the bars and the Children's voices cry for help from the other side.

"But the inrush of violent horror is only tolerated for a moment. Even in the next words we are moving back to the realm of formal poetry:

Women Beating at the Door.
Thou stone, thou thing of iron! Wilt verily
Spill with thine hand that life, the vintage stored
Of thine own agony?
Others.
A woman slew her babes in days of yore,
One, only one, from dawn to eventide . . .

and in a moment we are away in a beautiful remote song about far-off children who have been slain in legend. . . . "[17]

This is not a technical discussion of stagecraft for its own sake, but an imaginative reconstruction of theatrical dynamics in the interest of interpretation, and Murray's idea that there is a link between the stress here on the Chorus' failure to go in and the emphasis given in the next scene to the fact that the doors are barred is seriously thought-provoking:[18] methodologically the approach is interesting because it goes beyond noting a convention of the genre and asks why the convention is given particular attention in this passage. As usual, Murray is less concerned with what actually happened on stage at the first performance than with what the scene would mean if it were played as he suggests.

The modern reader may of course be distracted from Murray's argumentation by some now dated features of his style. "Standing moveless while the slayers come" sounds affected to a modern ear, and critics nowadays hesitate to talk much about beauty, but "the action of baffled desire" is a fine expression of an important insight, and like Jane Harrison, Murray wrote a great deal better than many of his later critics. The really troublesome distraction, to my mind, is in the translations, where phrases like "And an anguished

17. Murray (1946a) 240-42.
18. Page (1938) on 1275 refers the reader to "Murray's admirable treatment of these lines."

Earth, and the wonder of the dead / Haunting as music still . . . " seem to introduce oddly alien elements (this is Murray's rendering of the corrupt ἐπὶ γαῖαν αὐτοφόνταις ξυνιῳδὰ θεόθεν πίτνοντ' ἐπὶ δόμοις ἄχη, 1269-70: "wonder" in particular is hard to get out of the text or any of its variants). It is important, though, to avoid dismissing the translations with easy labels like "bland" and "sentimental," and instead to ask why their style was as congenial to most of Murray's contemporaries as dozens of witnesses—and the remarkable sales figures—testify that it was.[19] Speakability in the theatre was certainly one factor; readability as non-technical literature was another.[20] The hardest thing to account for is the seriousness with which scholars took the translations; some examples are discussed below under (3).

(2) "A great man." Clearly Murray felt the need to work on a writer who commanded his admiration as well as appealing to his literary or dramatic taste. Many critics have noted the link between Murray's own stance on social and political issues and the picture he draws of Euripides. According to Robert Fowler's careful assessment,[21] Murray saw Euripides as a "rational critic of tradition, a progressive promoter of social causes, and a wise agnostic in religion." He did not hesitate to draw comparisons between ancient and modern writers: for example he links Euripides with Ibsen in his treatment of women.[22] In another passage of the *History of Greek Literature* there is a revealing comparison with Tolstoy: "Another motive which was always present in him, and now [in the later plays] becomes dominant, is a certain mistrust of the state in all its ways—the doctrine explicitly preached to the present generation by Tolstoi. The curse of life is its political and social complication. The free individual may do great wrongs but he has a heart somewhere; it is only the servant of his country, the tool of the 'compact majority', who cannot afford one."[23] In the *History* there is a recurrent sense that Euripides, by contrast with some of the more widely admired poets of the fifth century, was free from what to Murray were the sins of conformism, religious prejudice and establishment complacency.

19. See, e.g., Bertrand Russell in Smith and Toynbee (1960) 205-06; Sybil Thorndike (1960); Charles Archer, John Masefield and Harley Granville Barker in Thomson and Toynbee (1936); Wilson (1987) 88–91, 120–21. As Ackerman notes (1985–86), T.S.Eliot, whose adverse opinion (1920) 77, first published in *Arts and Letters* (1920) 36-43, later became famous (it was reprinted in *Selected Essays*[1951]), was not an influential shaper of taste at the time he wrote his review. It is interesting to see F. L. Lucas as early as 1922 (187) describing the translations as "excellent verse, but most misleadingly romantic; in fact, more of an adaption [sic] than a translation." Ackerman (1985–86) 334 writes of the "feebleness amounting to ineptitude that Murray displays as an English versifier," but this is too crude an assessment.

20. George Winter Warr's translation of the *Oresteia* and John Phillimore's Theban plays of Sophocles in the same series (n.8 above) enjoyed nothing like the popularity of Murray's Euripides.

21. Fowler (1990) 326; cf. Fowler (1991).

22. Murray (1897) 263. Wilamowitz, too, had seen links between Ibsen and Euripides; cf. Lloyd-Jones (1982). There is no missing the Ibsenite preoccupations of Murray's closest theatrical collaborators; cf. n.5 above.

23. Murray (1897) 253; cf. 256, where he writes of Euripides' "sympathy with the dumb and uninterpreted generally," and his tendency to find "his heroism in quiet beings uncontaminated by the world." Cf. the Preface to his translation of *Medea* (1910b) ix for further comparison with Tolstoy.

This comes out strongly in what he has to say about Sophocles, the object of late-Victorian reverence for his "serenity" and perfection:[24] "He won a prodigious number of first prizes. . . . He dabbled in public life, and, though of mediocre practical ability, was elected to the highest offices of the state. He was always comfortable in Athens, and had no temptation to console himself in foreign courts, as his colleagues did. We may add to this that he was an artist of the 'faultless' type, showing but few traces of the 'divine discontent'. His father was a rich armourer. . . . "[25] Murray found Sophocles brilliant but charmless, conventional in his use of language as well as in his religious and social attitudes, whereas Euripides "broke himself against the bars both of life and of poetry."[26]

There is a telling passage in which he contrasts Sophocles' treatment of the incest of Oedipus and Jocasta with the way in which Euripides handled it: "Sophocles is always harping on it and ringing the changes on the hero's relationships, but *never thinks it out* [my italics]. Contrast with his horrified rhetoric, the treatment of the same subject at the end of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, the beautiful affection retained by the blind man for Iocasta, his confidence that she at any rate would have gone into exile at his side uncomplaining, his tender farewell to her dead body. What was the respectable burgher to say to such a thing? It was defrauding him of his right to condemn and abominate Iocasta. No wonder Sophocles won four times as many prizes as Euripides! A natural concomitant of this lack of speculative freedom is a certain bluntness of moral imagination, which leads, for instance, to one structural defect in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. That piece is a marvel of construction: every detail follows naturally, and yet every detail depends on the characters being exactly what they were, and makes us understand them. The one flaw, perhaps, is in Tiresias. That prophet comes to the king absolutely determined not to tell the secret which he has kept for sixteen years and then tells it—why? From uncontrollable anger, because the king insults him. An aged prophet who does that is a disgrace to his profession; but Sophocles does not seem to feel it."[27]

Two points call for attention here, first the way in which the contrast between Sophocles and Euripides is made in broadly political terms, and second Murray's choice of an example dealing with the subject of incest, which can be placed in a precise contemporary context.

24. Perhaps this is why Murray has so little to say about Sir Richard Jebb, who had been his immediate predecessor at Glasgow and published his great commentaries on the plays of Sophocles between 1883 and 1900.

25. Murray (1897) 232. No wonder Verrall in his review of the *History* remarked that "the reader who turns to Sophocles will not, unless he is exceptional in his tastes, allow Professor Murray for an absolute guide, and it is not impossible that he will be angry" (1898).

26. Murray (1897) 238. Cf. the Introductory Essay to his translations of *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae* (1902a) for more illustrations (e.g., xlvi on *Hecuba*).

27. Murray (1897) 239-40. There are some other "anti-clerical" remarks in the *History*; cf. what he says about Pindar (111): "He lived through the Persian War; he saw the beginning of the great period of Greek enlightenment and progress. In both crises he stood, the unreasoning servant of sacerdotal tradition and racial prejudice, on the side of Boeotia and Delphi." "Sacerdotal" always has pejorative overtones in Murray's writing.

The best commentary on Murray's ideological standpoint is offered by his own reminiscences of his early life. He was brought up as a member of the colonial "ruling class," the son of an Irish Catholic father, who was a stock-farmer and magistrate in New South Wales and ultimately President of the Legislative Council, and a Protestant mother of Welsh descent, who came from a long line of teachers. His parents were tolerant and cultivated, and the way of life he describes was probably a good deal freer than that of upper-class English society of the time. This is his account of the children's attitudes: "We tended to be 'agin the Government' whatever the government might be. 'Pity is a rebel passion' and we were apt to be rather passionately on the side of those likely to be oppressed. Of course we were all Home Rulers. We suspected British governments of behaving elsewhere as they had behaved to the Catholics in Ireland. We joined the Aborigines Protection Society, and we were keen on the protection of animals, children, foreigners, heretics, unpopular minorities and the like. If a boy was unhappy or unpopular at school we assumed it was the fault of the school and the other boys. We were all greatly interested in religion and all sceptical, though Hubert in middle life became a rather devoted Catholic. Only gradually as we reached positions of responsibility did we get to see that there was something to be said for the authorities, and that mostly they were doing their best."[28]

The family were not always well off: when Murray and his mother came back to England after his father's death he went to Merchant Taylors' School as a scholarship boy. In his adult life his agnosticism in religion and his radical and sometimes unconventional Liberalism in politics went hand-in-hand with passionate commitment to many causes in support of the oppressed or deprived: women's rights, teetotalism, vegetarianism, animal rights—and later his extremely demanding work for the League of Nations and the United Nations fitted into the same ideological framework. His reading of Euripides is in tune at a very deep level with his notion of how a person of conscience in a modern society might construe the possibilities of action open to him.[29] Shaw's sympathetic caricature in *Major Barbara* brings this out very clearly.

To return to the issue of incest. As Fiona Macintosh has shown,[30] this had become the focus of contemporary debate. At the time when Murray wrote the *History* the Lord Chamberlain's Office was refusing to allow the staging of plays dealing with the subject, in reaction to the controversial staging of Shelley's *The Cenci* in 1886. Between 1895 and 1910 the Examiner of Plays consistently refused to license performances of translations of *Oedipus the King*, and Murray became active in the wider campaign to abolish censor-

28. Murray in Smith and Toynbee (1960) 25-26.
29. Wilson (1987) 69-77 gives a thoughtful account of Murray's unorthodox political position, especially at the time of the Boer War. Calder (1991) 3-4 puts him too tidily into the pigeonhole of "Gladstonian Liberalism."
30. Macintosh (1995).

ship in the theatre. The campaign did not succeed outright, but a new Advisory Board was set up in due course, and in late 1910 a licence was granted to Murray's translation, which was eventually staged at Covent Garden in 1912 in a production by Max Reinhardt. It is interesting to see Murray's revised view of the play in the Preface to his translation: he now credits Sophocles with a finer sense of motivation in his treatment of Tiresias, and apologises for his earlier view;[31] perhaps, too, he sees glimpses of a less complacent Sophocles,[32] but the model he now uses in order to make sense of the play is that of anthropology: the theme of incest is best understood if one sees traces in Jocasta of the Earth-Mother and in Oedipus of what he calls a "Medicine King," while Apollo "is not a mere motiveless Destroyer but a true Olympian crushing his Earth-born rival."[33] The interpretation of the play thus does not depend on a view of Sophocles' contemporary social concerns: the poet "has allowed no breath of later enlightenment to disturb the primaeval gloom of his atmosphere," a clear pointer in the direction of themes that would be developed in *Four Stages of Greek Religion.* With Euripides Murray was always on more comfortable terms.

(3) "A great poet." It seems to have been natural for Murray to associate poetic greatness with struggle and imperfection. He was evidently deeply excited by the contradictions he found in Euripides between reason and mysticism, and although he admits to finding them perplexing and liable to lead to artistic failure this does not reduce their fascinating power. Rather, "in the end, perhaps, this two-sidedness remains the cardinal fact about Euripides: he is a merciless realist;[34] he is the greatest master of imaginative music ever born in Attica. He analyses, probes, discusses and shrinks from no sordidness, then he turns right away from the world and escapes 'to the caverns that the Sun's feet tread', or similar places, where things are all beautiful and interesting, melancholy perhaps, like the tears of the sisters of Phaethon, but not squalid or unhappy."[35] This characterisation of Euripides' poetry may strike a modern reader as odd if not bizarre, just as it is extraordinary that Murray was so unresponsive to the ironic complexities of Sophoclean idiom, but the interesting point is not how tastes have changed under the influence

31. "I assumed then, what I fancy was a common assumption, that Tiresias was a 'sympathetic' prophet, compact of wisdom and sanctity and all the qualities which beseem that calling; and I complained that he did not consistently act as such. I was quite wrong. Tiresias is not anything so insipid. He is a study of a real type, and a type which all the tragedians knew. The character of the professional seer or 'man of God' has in the imagination of most ages fluctuated between two poles. At one extreme are sanctity and superhuman wisdom; at the other fraud and mental disease, self-worship aping humility and personal malignity in the guise of obedience to God. There is a touch of all these qualities, good and bad alike, in Tiresias . . . " (1911) ix-x.

32. " . . . if anything in the nature of a criticism of life has been admitted into the play at all, it seems to be only a flash or two of that profound and pessimistic arraignment of the ruling powers which in other plays also opens at times like a sudden abyss across the smooth surface of his art" (1911) vii.

33. (1911) v–vi. The language here echoes terms already used by Murray in a lecture on archaic literature, which he delivered at Oxford as a contribution to a series entitled Anthropology and the Classics, subsequently published by Oxford University Press, ed. R. R. Marett, 1908.

34. Murray does not, however, go very far along the same road as Verrall: there are some acute criticisms of Verrall's views in the *History.*

35. Murray (1897) 273; cf. 269-70 on *Ion.* In the Preface to his translation of *I.T.* (1910a) xi, he writes that "the lyrics are usually the very soul of Euripidean tragedy."

of Modernism and Post-modernism, but how seriously his scholarly contemporaries took his reading and rendering of the tragedians.

S. H. Butcher, for example, in an essay entitled "The dawn of romanticism in Greek poetry," quotes from the *Bacchae* to make a point about Euripides' emphasis on the "intimate sense of union between man and the world outside him," which is reflected in nature's own response. "In the *Bacchae* the whole woodland thrills with a strange sympathy. The sombre and romantic setting of the play, its unearthly terror and beauty, form a background in keeping with the wild ecstasy of the worshippers; and when the Bacchants raise the mystic cry to their god—

> all the mountain felt
> And worshipped with them, and the wild things knelt
> And ramped and gloried, and the wilderness
> Was filled with moving voices and dim stress."

Butcher notes that this is Murray's translation, "an expansion of the original—πᾶν δὲ συνεβάκχευ' ὄρος / καὶ θῆρες, οὐδὲν δ' ἦν ἀκίνητον δρόμῳ—but true to the spirit of the context."[36]

Underlying all this there seems to be a strong belief on Murray's part, shared no doubt by his contemporaries and by many later interpreters (it is a very seductive view), that the way to reach close intellectual and emotional contact with a period is through an intense reading of its poetry. But for all the modernity of his ideas, his own poetic taste had been formed by Shelley, Tennyson, Morris and Swinburne, and it was in their works that he always found his models for rhythms and vocabulary. This makes it hard for readers in the late twentieth century to recapture the freshness of his insights; perhaps the best we can do is to try to trace his imaginative response to a particular text (see on *Bacchae* below).

(4) "*Drama* and *drôntas*: human beings and their actions, grief, fears, madness." Murray's ideas about human experience are very closely linked with all that has been touched on so far: his interest, for example, in the effects of the Peloponnesian War, and his reading of the plays of revenge as a response to social and political circumstances, look less dated nowadays than they did at a time (not so long ago) when Greek tragedy was read more or less ahistorically.[37] But equally important in Murray's thinking about human doing and suffering is his intense exploration of the relation of men and women to whatever is beyond their rational understanding. Although he emphatically rejected a theological approach he was deeply interested in religion and ritual, and his "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Drama," published as an appendix to Jane Harrison's *Themis* (1912), became

36. Butcher (1904) 280. In the first version of this essay (published in 1893) Butcher makes no reference to *Bacchae* at this point; in the new edition of 1904 he has taken the trouble to insert the passage in Murray's translation; cf. Verrall (1910) 85, who quotes it with approval. Verrall's Essay engages in detail with Murray's translation, criticising the "colouring" that it gives to the play, but taking it seriously none the less.

37. See, e.g., Vickers (1973) Ch.1 for a polemical defence of this approach.

his most famous, if not notorious, contribution to the ideas of the Cambridge Ritualists.[38] The work done in recent years by scholars like Burkert, Seaford and Henrichs has created a new and more sympathetic perspective in which to look at Murray's approach, even if no one has attempted to resurrect the Year Daemon in all his original glory, but I must limit myself here to his reading of Euripides, and try to trace the interconnection between the different strands of his thinking during the period between his first meeting with Jane Harrison (1900) and the publication of *Euripides and His Age* (1913).

Bacchae makes an ideal test case for attempting to see how Murray's ideas developed. We can follow his work on the play through three publications: the *History* in 1897, the translation with Introductory Essay in 1902, and *Euripides and His Age* in 1913, bearing in mind that Verrall published a long essay on the play in 1910 (in a collection dedicated to Murray).

In the *History* Murray dedicates only two or three pages to *Bacchae,* but he is already grappling here with a sense of the contradictions within the play, which seem to have special appeal for him because they are so intimately implicated in religious feeling. The main lines of his interpretation are expressed in a single paragraph (272-73), which was to be developed later in interesting ways:

> What does it all mean? To say that it is a reactionary manifesto in favour of orthodoxy, is a view which hardly merits refutation. If Dionysus is a personal god at all, he is a devil. Yet the point of the play is clearly to make us understand him. He and his Maenads are made beautiful . . . Pentheus is not a 'sympathetic' martyr. And there is even a tone of polemic against 'mere rationalism' which has every appearance of coming from the poet himself. The play seems to represent no *volte-face* on the part of the old free-lance in thought, but rather a summing-up of his position. He had always denounced common superstition; he had always been averse to dogmatic rationalism. The lesson of the *Bacchae* is that of the *Hippolytus* in a stronger form. Reason is great, but it is not everything. There are in the world things not of reason, but both below and above it; causes of emotion which we cannot express, which we tend to worship, which we feel, perhaps, to be the precious elements in life. These things are Gods or forms of God: not fabulous immortal men, but 'Things which Are', things utterly non-human and non-moral, which bring man bliss or tear his life to shreds without a break in their own serenity. It is a religion that most people have to set themselves in some relation to; the religion that Tolstoi preaches against, that people like Paley and Bentham tried to abolish; that Plato denounced and followed. Euripides has got to it in this form through his own peculiar character, through the mixture in him of unshrinking realism with unshrinking imaginativeness; but one must remember that he wrote much about Orphism in its ascetic and mystic side, and devoted to it one complete play, the *Cretans*.[39]

The "Introductory Essay on the Bacchae in relation to Certain Currents of Thought in the Fifth Century," with which Murray prefaced his volume of translations published in 1902, gives the first sign of the impact that Jane Harrison's approach had made on his reading of Euripides. (He expresses his gratitude to her in the Preface for "frequent consultations . . . on points of ancient religion.") There are other changes of emphasis, too: Murray sticks

38. Cf. Schlesier (1991) 208–10.
39. Part of this passage sparked off the correspondence between Jane Harrison and Murray; cf. Ackerman (1991a) 11.

to his earlier analysis, in which the year 415 is seen as the turning point in Euripides' career and the embittered tone of most of the later plays is associated with his deep disillusionment with Athens in the later stages of the Peloponnesian War, but there is greater emphasis now on the corrupting effects of imperialist ambitions. It is hard to avoid associating this emphasis with Murray's own feelings of revulsion from British attitudes to the Boer War (which he strongly opposed).[40] As always in his writing, there is a powerful impulse towards the integration of all the aspects of a text or an issue that seem to be important. The solution that he offers to the enigmatic tone and subject matter of the *Bacchae* is to see it as a reflection of Euripides' disillusionment and despair "followed at last by a final half-prophetic vision of the truths or possibilities beyond that despair" (xxi). He begins with a familiar enough point, that the play does not carry a moral message: "Now it is no use pretending that this is a moral and sympathetic tale, or that Euripides palliates the atrocity of it, and tries to justify Dionysus. Euripides never palliates things. He leaves his savage story as savage as he found it" (liv). Nor is there anything sympathetic about Pentheus (lvi). But the really important factor, he now sees, is "real and heartfelt glorification of Dionysus" (lvii-viii).

For Murray at this stage in his thinking Dionysus is a curious mixture of straightforward pagan attributes ("the God of all high emotion, inspiration, intoxication . . . the patron of poetry, especially of dramatic poetry," lix), unmistakably Christian overtones ("He has given man Wine, which is his Blood and a religious symbol. He purifies from Sin. It is unmeaning, surely, to talk of a 'merely ritual' purification as opposed to something real," lix; loving your neighbour, lxiii; "the Kingdom of Heaven," lxvi) and qualities that sound more Nietzschean than anything else (" . . . he [Dionysus] gave to the Purified a mystic Joy, surpassing in intensity that of man, the Joy of a god or a free wild animal," lix-lx). The final part of the Essay, written with striking ardour, interprets the emotions expressed by the chorus—their longing for escape from the oppressor, and for communion with nature—as echoes of the emotions of Euripides when he got away from imperialist Athens and was able to experience the joy of escape from his corrupt, power-seeking contemporaries who denied true religion. This is the context in which the play's emphasis on the simple people and the wisdom of their beliefs can best be understood (lxii, lxiv): once more, Murray links the political and the religious. He ends by relating the insights of *Bacchae* to the Stoicism and Platonism (and Neoplatonism) that were to come.

Some of this discussion is very close to what Jane Harrison had to say about the worship of Dionysus and about Orphism in *Prolegomena*.[41] But there is always a strong pressure in Murray's argument towards a compre-

40. Cf. his acknowledgement of contemporary problems, xl.
41. Cf. Schlesier (1991) 222–26.

hensive reading of Euripides which will give full weight to his social and political commitment and to the poetic intensity of the writing. Shaw seems to have grasped this perfectly,[42] particularly in the words he gives to Adolphus Cusins in Act II of *Major Barbara*: "You do not understand the Salvation Army. It is the army of joy, of love, of courage: it has banished the fear and remorse and despair of the old hell-ridden evangelical sects: it marches to fight the devil with trumpet and drum, with music and dancing, with banner and palm, as becomes a sally from heaven by its happy garrison. . . . It takes the poor professor of Greek, the most artificial and self-suppressed of human creatures, from his meal of roots, and lets loose the rhapsodist in him; reveals the true worship of Dionysos to him; sends him down the street drumming dithyrambs [*he plays a thundering flourish on the drum*]." Shaw then makes Cusins quote a lyric from Murray's translation of *Bacchae* (905–11), replacing "gold and power" with "money and guns" and ending with lines to which Murray gives some prominence in the Introductory Essay (lxii):

> But whoe'er can know, as the long days go,
> That *to live is happy*, hath found his Heaven!

By 1913 Murray has incorporated his ideas on the origins of tragedy and uses them in the case of *Bacchae* to account for the "given" elements in the story that Euripides chooses to tell:

> A reader of the *Bacchae* who looks back at the ritual sequence described above . . . will be startled to find how close this drama, apparently so wild and imaginative, has kept to the ancient rite. The regular year-sequence is just clothed in sufficient myth to make it a story. The daemon must have his enemy who is like himself; then we must have the contest, the tearing asunder, the Messenger, the Lamentation mixed with Joy-cries, the Discovery of the scattered members—and by a sort of doubling the discovery of the true God—and the epiphany of the Daemon in glory. All are there in the *Bacchae*. . . . The mortals go forth to their dooms, still faithful, still loving one another. The ghastly and triumphant god ascends into heaven. The whole scheme of the play is given by the ancient ritual. It is the original subject of Attic tragedy treated once more, as doubtless it had already been treated by all or almost all of the tragedians. (181-82)

It is typical of Murray's approach to ritual that he does not see it as a key to explaining meaning;[43] he finds the analysis useful in that it helps us to understand the context in which Euripides was composing, but in confronting the "riddle" of the play he appeals to a more complex set of considerations. The methodology underlying this approach is interesting; it provides Murray with a basis from which to criticise the uncompromisingly rationalistic interpretation of Verrall (he does this on pp. 184-87 without

42. Smith (1978) takes Shaw's use of *Bacchae* seriously, but regards Cusins as "a joke" (463). Of course Shaw makes Cusins abandon the Army for the weapons factory, but he does not devalue his passionate commitment to society.

43. Ackerman (1991a) 13-14 is disappointed by Murray's failure to give any sense in this book "of the terror or darkness of the chthonic *cultus*"—but this is to separate Murray's interest in ritual from the much wider nexus of issues that seemed to him crucial for the understanding of Euripides.

mentioning Verrall by name, though he has quoted him with approval earlier [159] on a different subject), and it allows him to offer an elusive, incomplete and also sophisticated reading of his own:

> The poet cannot simply and without a veil state his own views; he can only let his own personality shine through the dim curtain in front of which his puppets act their traditional parts and utter their appropriate sentiments. Thus it is doubly elusive. And therein no doubt lay its charm to the poet. He had a vehicle into which he could pour many of those "vaguer faiths and aspirations which a man feels haunting him and calling to him, but which he cannot state in plain language or uphold with a full acceptance of responsibility." But our difficulties are even greater than this. The personal meaning of a drama of this sort is not only elusive; it is almost certain to be inconsistent with itself or at least incomplete. For one can only feel its presence strongly when in some way it clashes with the smooth flow of the story. (184-85)

There is much in Murray's discussion of the play that strikes a reader of the *History* or the "Introductory Essay" as familiar, but this version is more coherent and perhaps more guarded than the Essay. The quasi-Christian language has largely gone, but Murray still lays stress on the glorification of Dionysus,[44] on the idea of escape, and on the notion of there being "something beyond" rational knowledge (195-96 are particularly telling), which makes the wisdom of simple people a theme of continuing importance. The new features in the argument are a sense of death-longing (192), and an equation between religion and poetry (197), which is one way of dealing with the "mystic" elements so strongly felt by Murray.

These notes on Murray's reading of Euripides are best seen as a preliminary sketch: a fuller and deeper discussion would call for detailed study of his work on the other Greek poets, particularly Aeschylus, and closer attention to the (direct or indirect) influence of such writers as Nietzsche and Tolstoy, to his debates with contemporaries and to the impact of his work on later Euripidean scholars like E. R. Dodds and R. P. Winnington-Ingram. But even this sketch can claim to have a case to argue, namely that the writing on Euripides, for all its superficial datedness, offers corroborating evidence for the extraordinary impression made by Murray on people who knew him and were able to judge the quality of his response to Greek literature, such as Isobel Henderson[45] and Hugh Lloyd-Jones.[46] The secret is perhaps as Kitto formulated it: he saw the outstanding quality of Murray as an interpreter of Euripides as "the continuous but never uncontrolled energy of his imaginative response";[47] one might add that even when Murray is deliberately expressing hesitation there is a very strong sense of the wholeness and coherence of his thinking.

44. He now qualifies the idea by putting quotation marks round Dionysus and adding "No doubt it is Dionysus in some private sense of the poet's own" (188). There is an interesting further qualification towards the end of the chapter: "I am not attempting to expound the whole meaning of the *Bacchae*. I am only suggesting a clue by which to follow it. Like a live thing it seems to move and show new faces every time that, with imagination fully working, one reads the play" (196).
45. Henderson (1960).
46. Lloyd-Jones (1982).
47. Kitto (1965) xi.

As a young man Murray wrote of Euripides: "He was a man of extraordinary brain-power, dramatic craft, subtlety, sympathy, courage, imagination; he pried too close into the world and took things too rebelliously to produce calm and successful poetry."[48] He would have been glad to be admired for the same qualities himself, and although in the course of his life he earned a reputation for being exceptionally "calm and successful" he probably continued to feel like Euripides.[49]

48. Murray (1897) 274.

49. A preliminary version of this paper was given in July 1996 at the Institute of Classical Studies in London. I am grateful to the audience on that occasion, particularly Fiona Macintosh and Michael Silk, for helpful suggestions.