

LOVE, AGGRESSION, AND MOURNING  
IN EURIPIDES' *HERACLES*<sup>1</sup>

by

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ABSTRACT: The paper's main focus is the mourning process in Euripides' *Heracles* (1087–1428) and the approach to it is based on psychoanalytic interpretive methods. Most of the play is characterized by what can be called the splitting of good and bad images of the self and of objects to which the self relates, which means that characters are presented as either all-good or all-bad and in an unrealistic and ahistorical manner. The murder of Heracles' family is the first moment when love and aggression meet, because Heracles' violence is directed at those who are dearest to him. The process of his mourning, described in the *Exodus*, is characterized by an attempt to overcome splitting and to tolerate the coexistence of love and aggression, goodness and evil, in the heroic self. Theseus' presence enables Heracles to accept his destructive side and to move towards a hopeful resolution of this fundamental human conflict, which is one of the main dimensions of the play.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is an analysis of the last part of Euripides' *Heracles* in terms of the conflict between love and aggression, based on psychoanalytic ideas and interpretive methods. Most scholars tend to agree that Euripides' play falls into two or three parts which seem to be rather loosely connected<sup>2</sup>, even though there have been some attempts to find considerable unity or meaning

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<sup>2</sup> The advocates of the bipartite composition are: LESKY 1972: 379; MURRAY 1946: 112; HARSH 1948: 199 f.; NORWOOD 1964: 46 f.; RILEY 2008: 15, and of the tripartite one: SHEPPARD 1916: 7; KITTO 1966: 237; CHALK 1962: 7; KAMERBEEK 1966: 2; BURNETT 1971: 180; SILK 1985: 2.