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ERRATA

p. 27, l. 11 -- 'Sophocles' should read 'Baxter's'
p. 30, l. 12 -- 'Adamemnon' should read 'Agamemnon'
p. 32, l. 8 -- 'of' should read 'to'
p. 38, par. 2 -- quotation marks not completed
p. 47 -- a line is omitted in the second long quotation
p. 54, l. 9 -- subject and predicate not in agreement;
       l. 13 -- 'politeness' should read 'politeness'
p. 62, l. 7 -- 'demon' should read 'demonic'
p. 66, last line -- 'extend' should read 'extent'
p. 81, par. 1 -- 'over come' should be one word
Greek Myth in Four Plays by
James K. Baxter

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Chapter 1  

Introduction

As a writer of verse with a mind to be a playwright, I think I brought with me to the theatre a subconscious certainty that the Greek myths and legends are never out-of-date since they form that mythical stratum in the mind of modern man which enables him from time to time to make a pattern out of the chaos of his experience.¹

This thesis examines four plays by James K. Baxter: The Sore-footed Man, The Bureaucrat, and Mr. O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, all first produced in 1967 and early 1968, and The Temptations of Oedipus, first produced in 1970. Each play has a Greek mythical structure, and consideration is given to the relevance and effectiveness of that mythical structure as a vehicle for Baxter's dramatic themes in general, and in each of the four plays under particular consideration.

Baxter's plays are examinations of man's condition, in which man is seen as the victim of a modern society which is out of step with his true nature and his deepest needs. Baxter claims that he has feared the annihilation of human freedom in Western society.² This society not only seriously hinders a right relationship between the individual and his fellows, but also between the individual and the universe, that is, with nature, and with the divine and demonic forces.

In his published talk, 'Conversation with an Ancestor', Baxter attaches symbolic importance to the destruction of the Scottish clans, a process which began at Culloden, because in the death of the tribal grouping, Baxter sees the


end of an organic relationship between the individual and his society. This organic relationship is demonstrated in the collective warmth, in the powerful bond of love, which the tribe extends to the individual. This love is based on an understanding, at least partially subconscious (and therein Baxter says, lies its strength), of the individual's instinctive needs, and the suffering which is inherent in life - 'the unanswerable weight of the human condition itself, which breeds a deep dread, compassion and catharsis'.

In his analysis of Burns' Poem, Baxter suggests that Tam o' Shanter experiences this support in the inn at Ayr, where for a time he is safe from the calamities of life

... that is, sickness, poverty, domestic strife, social disadvantages, the death of those one cares for, the dread of one's own death - a cold pressure never absent from the adult mind; and this burden is cast off for a moment, not just by intoxication, but by what it stands for - the Roman fraternitas, the Maori aroha, the appearance or reality of group love, a merging in the collective warmth of the tribe.

This collective warmth nurtures the individual on his journey to self-knowledge, and makes healthy growth possible. Apart from relationships with other individuals, however, the tribe also develops a right relationship between the tribesman and the earth, and the cycle of nature, and between the tribesman and the cycle of birth, copulation, and death.

Unlike the tribal community, the impersonal State is out of touch with the natural man, and Baxter regards this partly as the result of the historical development of Protestantism. He speaks of the doctrines and ethics of Calvinism of which New Zealand, and modern Western society, 'carries like strychnine in its bones a strong unconscious residue'.

4 Ibid., pp.104-5.
5 Ibid., p.91.
The Calvinist ignores or repudiates the instinctive, passionate part of man's nature:

The Calvinist theosis that the Fall is absolute and the natural man totally depraved has led, by devious byways, to a kind of idolatry - a deep reliance, torn still by an anguish of uncertainty, on the civilising influence of education, culture and the power of the State - as if these could eradicate the turbulence of the passions and put in their place an abstract social benevolence. ⁶

Baxter, on the other hand, is clearly in the modern Romantic tradition, which seeks to understand and express the 'turbulence of the passions'. Human nature is essentially feeling, and the experiences of the heart and soul are truer guides than reason. In his study of psychoanalysis, Norman O. Brown speaks of the rationalizing abstraction, which is rejected by Baxter:

Partial impulses in the human being (the human body) which in modern civilization have become tyrant organizers of the whole of human life; abstraction from the reality of the whole body and substitution of the abstracted impulse for the whole reality are inherent in Homo economicus... In the area of science, it is related to Whitehead's philosophy of organism. Whitehead's critique of abstraction is a critique of the abstract, impersonal, quantifying rationality; and his objection to abstraction is precisely that through it a partial impulse becomes equated with the whole. ⁷

The influence, of which Baxter speaks, begins early in the child's life, and is fostered in the schools by an education system which, Baxter believes, ultimately robs the children of their personalities. It denies the creative potential of the individual in favour of the development of the analytical mind and the competitive faculty. Baxter distinguishes between two types of learning which he believes are mutually exclusive: 'the first... the discovery of a sacred

⁶ Ibid., p.21.

pattern in natural events; the second the acquisition of
the lens of abstract thought, which sees nothing sacred in
heaven or on middle earth.8 In this way the individual
quickly acquires the values of his society. New Zealand,
and other Western European societies, value the ideal of
economic liberalism, which is commonly manifested as the
simple pursuit of material gain. Vincent O'Sullivan notes
that

The final destruction of the tribal unit, a
later and more decisive Culloden - an important
symbolic event for Baxter - came when the
Cumberland of materialism struck dumb what was
numinous in the land, or spiritual in the people.9

The pursuit of material success engenders an individualism
which further encourages social disintegration. It is seen
in the New Zealand city suburb where the nuclear family
occupies its separate bungalow and is out of contact with
even immediate neighbours. Thus, New Zealand suburbia is
the breeding ground for what Baxter calls 'bourgeois neurosis -
the edge of falseness, the thin fog of complacency, the
intellectual blindness of a person who has forgotten who
he is - the extreme vulnerability to the devil of boredom.'10
This 'bourgeois neurosis' is encouraged by the role-playing
expectations which modern society has of its members. An
individual is identified by his occupation and is expected to
conform with certain behavioural patterns which society
associates with his particular activity. Human nature is not
consistent, but it must appear to be so when the individual is
filling his social role. In becoming identified with that
role, the individual loses touch with his own real impulses
and inner feelings. His true nature is inevitably falsified, as
he becomes, what Carl Jung calls, his persona. (In his 'Notes
on the Education of a New Zealand Poet', Baxter speaks

8 The Man on the Horse, p.132.
9 Vincent O'Sullivan, 'After Culloden,' Islands 3, 1 (1973), 27.
10 The Man on the Horse, p.20.
of his early reading of Jung's study, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, and his attraction to Jungian thought.)*

Modern society also encourages man to despoil nature rather than to live as part of her. Thus, Baxter speaks of the way the forefathers of modern man 'tore out the communal vision of those who love the sacred earth in order to achieve the knowledge of technological power which does not love but uses her, and remains in itself barren'. The tribesman understands well the interdependence of the earth and the well-being of the tribal community. This relationship is embodied in the ritual of the tribe. The contrast with his own society is drawn sharply by Baxter:

If this were another time and place, I could suppose that the birdtracks printed here were made by the feet of human dancers, meeting around an altar or a bonfire in a nightlong dance, men and women joined, or perhaps women only, honouring the Earth Mother. But the glass-fronted houses above the bay will supply no ritual, nothing to join the intellect or body to the earth it came from - only TV aerials, trucks of bricks, washing hung out to dry, ice cream cones stacked behind the counter of a shop - the trivia of a culture that has ceased to understand itself.

Finally, just as relationships between individuals in modern society are superficial and fragmented, there is what Baxter regards as an inevitable breakdown in the sexual relationship. This breakdown is partly a symptom of the general social disintegration. Women are moving away from their basic function as wives and mothers and seeking emancipation into what is a man's world. Baxter, like Jung, believes that the sexes are strongly differentiated psychologically as well as physically, and that women themselves will find little satisfaction in a liberation movement which is carrying them away from their natural

11 Ibid., p.127.
12 Ibid., p.21.
function. Modern women do not want children, and in thus evading fertility, they are denying their true nature, for Baxter contends that when a woman refusing to make a man's seed fertile, she is denying man potential immortality, merely gratifying the senses and divorcing the sexual act from the deeper implications of procreation.

But failure in the sexual relationship, Baxter believes, has also been inherent in that relationship since the Fall. He speaks of his own experience:

Over twenty years I fought the wars of Venus, the bitterest of all to lose. Those wars are lost because each is compelled by the Fall to regard the loved one as a betrayer or a victim and judge. The whole heart is unacceptable to any human, because it contains both good and evil... Thus human love is a compromise: to give only what is acceptable: a stone, a kiss, a lie.14

According to Baxter, Burns spent much of his life in the wars of the anima which 'an artist must do in order to acquire knowledge of the human heart...'15 The words might equally apply to Baxter himself. The anima, another concept adopted by Baxter from Jung, is man's archetypal image of Women, derived from the collective image of women which man has acquired over centuries, each man's personal experiences of women, and the latent feminine principle within each man himself. Thus, the anima is largely within the unconscious or subconscious parts of the personality, and, according to Baxter it

... changes according to the motives of those who approach her - a violent man will see her as a wolf; a sensual man, as a temptress; a Puritan, either not at all, or as a poisonous reptile; a saint, as a helpless child who needs to be looked after; a poet, as his difficult Muse...16

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p.120.
16 Ibid., pp.117-8
According to Baxter, 'The anima represents... all that is not-self. She cannot be constructed; she has to be discovered.' It is clear, from the quotation referring to his own experience, that Baxter's anima contains an inherent disillusion and a deep-seated sense of loss. From the time he is conceived, the male is utterly dependent on woman as the nurturing, tender other, whose generous love urges him to be confidently himself. But, later, at least in modern society, woman alternately uses and derides him, forcing him to be a man and value his masculinity, denying his tenderness as weakness, provocatively exciting his lust and then shortselling him by denying his immortality, as mentioned before. In this way, woman forces man to be angry and frustrated, helping to create what she herself fears, the threatening, bullying male who would dominate and destroy her. Referring to Burns' 'Tam o' Shanter', but relevant here, Baxter states:  
this dance of life is also, if not a dance of death, at least a dance in the jaws of the grave. The dancers are not young women but grim hags. They signify the decay of female sexuality into a malicious energy that belongs partly to the grave. The dance exhibits the inevitable loss of fertility and death of innocence. The bonnie lass conceals the potential hag, the witch who will harm and destroy the sexuality of man if she is able.

Baxter's association of sex with fertility points again to the integrated, organic attitude towards the basic realities of birth, copulation, and death, held by his tribesman. He refers, elsewhere in the same discussion, to his belief that Burns was rare in his capacity for genuine bawdry, and continues:

Today, because of the basic dualism of romantic or clinical versus obscene which has gripped the mind of Western man, the mode is no longer possible; it requires the support of some tribal or village matrix of thought and feeling which, to our disadvantage, we have to do without. The modern phenomenon of sex wholly separated from fertility

17 Ibid., pp.116-7.

18 Ibid., p.115.
has probably dealt it its death-blow... Yet the attempt to rediscover a natural mode goes on in modern literature, and can hardly be abandoned, because it signifies a deeper attempt to reintegrate the sexual impulse as part of a unified personal cosmos. 19

For Baxter, the failure to achieve this 'reintegration' is a major source of trouble in modern marriage. He believes that modern married man is contorted in what he calls a 'marriage crouch', and that the state of marriage itself is a kind of cave in which men and women dwell twisted out of shape to fit into the condition. In Autumn Testament, Baxter speaks of the 'Draconian choice' - to 'be married and go mad; or be single and stay sane'. 20

Change in society, Baxter believes, comes only through change in the individuals who form the society. The individual must get back in touch with himself, and with the underlying reality in life, by coming to understand and cultivate the shadow - the instinctive, uncivilized natural man within. Baxter himself has always been aware of a scarcely veiled chaos beneath the surface of his own life, and he believes that the main step towards self-knowledge is to recognize this chaos in oneself, and at the heart of life itself. Those who perceive this reality most acutely at present, are not the bourgeois inhabitants of New Zealand suburbia, but drunks and other social outcasts, who live with it at each moment; he speaks of 'the great tribe of drunks... who hold a mirror to the world of chaos we inhabit.' 21 

This is partly the reason, that for Baxter, as for Graham Greene, the outcast is potentially much closer to God's saving grace than the smug and righteous citizen. Man has no real understanding of good, unless he has known and struggled with temptation and evil. (Vincent O'Sullivan speaks of 'the dramatic figures who carry Baxter's approbation, in the expanding situation where God's love seems to be in

19 Ibid., p.97.
direct proportion to physical distress and social anathema. (22)
In Baxter's mind, it is infinitely better to be aware of the
chaos, and to fear it, than to live as though it does not
exist. The failure to recognize it, he sees expressed in the
Theatre of the Absurd:
I see evidence of a gigantic spiritual struggle
to express the tragedy that occurs when tragedy
loses its meaning... Fear, whom Bernanos called
the daughter of God, has left us, to be replaced
by the devil's daughter, Vacuity. (23)
Vacuity, or the void which is mere emptiness and absence of
feeling, makes growth impossible, whereas the chaos
accommodates growth. It is only when something is known,
and faced, that there is some chance of altering it; while
it remains unknown or unadmitted, nothing changes.

Thus, Baxter, the artist, inhabits Bohemia, cultivating
and even deliberately willing the chaos; not only does it
take him closer to the human heart, but also the creative
process of ordering it in his art can continue:
A writer cannot avoid the task of exploring and
understanding the private hell which lies just
below the threshold of his own mind. I doubt if
he can begin to understand the threefold aspect
of the modern world - monotony, atrocity, anarchy -
if he has not first done this. (24)
In one of his earliest poems, 'Love-Lyric IV', Baxter states:
'Man cannot stamp his/ mark of mind on/ night-universe whose
quiet surpasses reason.'(25) As O'Sullivan points out, Baxter
believes that it is not the logical analytical mind which
can deal with this 'night-universe', but 'only the poetic
mind which works deeply enough to touch the sources of order.'(26)

23 SPNZD, p.7.
24 The Man on the Horse, p.128.
25 Beyond the Falisade (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1944)
26 O'Sullivan, p.20.
The sources of order may be discovered in what Baxter, following Jung, calls the collective unconscious, the sub-stratum of mind common to men of all cultures and periods of history, which is the source of mythological material. It is in myth that man expresses the feelings and emotions associated with his basic psychological experiences, especially the typical and crucial human situations, such as birth and death. As Baxter says of the archetype of the anima, myth is discovered not constructed; it is found typically in 'dreams and nightmares, when certain archetypes of the unconscious mind become active. 27 Baxter believes, with Jung, that when man becomes alienated from the myth-making sub-stratum of his being, he not only loses touch with the creative forces of his being, but life itself loses meaning and significance: 'He [a friend] was mythologising his life; and that's what a writer does. The trouble is, I can't demythologise it. What happens is either meaningless to me, or else it is mythology.' 28

Especially in his later years, Baxter sees himself as artist-prophet, endeavouring by writing and example to change the New Zealand society of which he is part. The availability of the Glove Theatre in Dunedin, and the ready co-operation of its resident producer, Patric Carey, encourages Baxter to explore his social themes in the theatre, where he believes he might have a positive influence on the community. He claims, then, that 'drama is the most communal of all art forms, so that a viable New Zealand drama, if it were to appear, might profoundly modify our social conceptions, our view of ourselves and the world.' 29

However, after a life of struggling to stay clear of the various 'mental jails', which prevent him from staying

27 The Man on the Horse, p.110.
28 Ibid., p.122.
29 SPNZD, p.1.
in contact with the underlying reality, Baxter seems negative, if not sceptical, in his last years. His search for order ends in a 'hard-won acceptance', made clear in his poem, 'The Waves', which concludes his collection, *The Rock Woman*:

Wings of the albatross whose shadow
Lies on the seas at noon
I take as the type of a spirit bent
By abstract solitude,
Accepting all ...
Poems are trash, the flesh I love will die,
Desire is bafflement...  

The same negative acceptance is evident in the last section of his 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet', when Baxter says, 'We are immobilised by our compassions', and continues, 'For the sake of the communal good - the order of a household, work, conjugal tenderness and patience, the care of children - I have let the sea flow away from me and not tried to follow it.' Baxter can not avoid some regrets that he has remained stationary, where he is, not acting to break the established pattern. The quotation contains the idea that a man is hampered by domestic and family ties in his search for self-knowledge and fulfilment. It foreshadows the solitary Baxter, at least physically free of these ties, resident at Jerusalem on the Wanganui River. Baxter's death comes early, but he sees himself increasingly as an old man. Through self-abnegation, he has learnt what he regards as a necessary detachment towards life, and has come to accept, and even welcome, the prospect of his own physical death, which is the ultimate chaos.


As far as the individual's relationship with society, and with the earth, is concerned, Baxter's experience is more hopeful. In the New Zealand context, Maori *aroha*, providing the individual with an organic relationship both with his society and with the earth, fills, for Baxter, part of that gap which he feels in modern Western society. But this development, plain in *Jerusalem Daybook* and *Autumn Testament*, becomes clearly formulated in Baxter's sensibility only after the time of writing at least three of the four plays considered in this thesis.

If recognition of the chaos at the heart of the life of the individual is the prerequisite for changing the life of society, which is the sum of the individuals who constitute it, then it follows that the revelation of that chaos is a central concern for Baxter. He states, in fact, that 'The unveiling of this chaos is perhaps the theme of all my plays.' In each of the plays discussed in this thesis, the central action is a movement in the main character towards a change in perception, which is an increase in personal awareness of the chaos at the heart of life. Each play has what R.S. Crane has called a 'plot of thought', in which 'the principle is a completed process of change in the thought of the protagonist and consequently in his feelings, conditioned and directed by character and action.' The move to increased awareness, achieved mainly through a series of fairly static dialogues in which the main character exchanges various ideas with a succession of contacts, is made by each of the main characters in this group of plays: in *The Sore-footed Man*, Philoctetes learns from Odysseus to face the chaos and, swallowing his fear, to act in spite of it; in *The Bureaucrat*, John Fireman is led

33 *SNTQ*, pp. ix-x.
to face his true situation, although not acting to change it; in Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, John Ennis is broken by his unsuccessful marriage, before he can recognize both his own true nature, and the cultural void of which he is part; and in The Temptations of Oedipus, Oedipus learns acceptance through self-abnegation, facing alone the ultimate chaos of death. In the last of the four plays, there seems to be a change in Baxter's thinking, which matches the gap in time between its composition and the composition of the other three plays. Baxter points to this when he compares The Temptations of Oedipus with the earlier The Sore-footed Man, suggesting that 'the scales of "beat" and "hip" are somewhat reversed. It is Oedipus the yogi who wins by losing to Theseus the Commissar.' In these two plays, there is an explicit conflict between two opposing ways of regarding experience, whereas in The Bureaucrat and Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party the issue is less clear-cut, and Baxter's exploration of his basic themes at different levels, personal and social, makes these two plays less coherent and structurally whole.

It was stated earlier that Baxter believes the sources of order are to be found in the mythopoeic substratum of the mind of man. J.E. Weir poses the problem in relation to Baxter's poetry, but his statement is equally applicable to the plays:

According to such a conception of the poetic process, two elements must be reconciled: the chaos of human existence laid bare by imagination, feeling and sense faculties, and the discovery of a mythical pattern in the sub-conscious which will provide a pattern of meaning, an ideal image pursued, a shape implicit in the original situation which can be adapted for the purposes of an aesthetic. This notion of myth-making lies just below the surface of all Baxter's poetry.  

35 Weir, p.17.
In the four plays discussed in this thesis, Baxter has sought the pattern of meaning in Greek myth in the material of the plays of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. Baxter claims the relevance of the myth to the modern day in the quotation at the beginning of this introductory chapter. The dramatic problem in the plays, which is central to this thesis, is the suitability of the Greek myths as vehicles for Baxter's themes. At best, the myth should both order and give ultimate significance to the local, particular individual or social situation, but to do so, it must be genuinely discovered in that situation.

However, as suggested in the quotation from Weir, the use of myth is not only to give greater significance to the social or domestic situation, but, as Hal Smith observes, comes from the need felt by the lyric poet turned playwright for 'a form or story which will provide him a priori with that deep poetic structure - the musical form for his new sounds and images.'37 Smith argues that this choice of poetic drama, in which the play itself is poetic in conception, and not only the language, was a natural one for Baxter, and this idea is confirmed in Baxter's own concept of a play as 'a metaphoric structure in which the multiple statements of the characters correspond to the accumulated images of a poem.'38

The questions remain: whether the mythical pattern has been discovered in, or imposed upon the material of the plays; given the use of Greek myth as the structural basis for the plays, whether it is best handled by retaining the characters, setting and situation of the Greek original, as in The Screefooted Man and The Temptations of Oedipus, or by transporting


38 SMTO, p.vii.
the myth to the present day, using modern characters, setting and situation, as in The Bureaucrat and Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party; and, indeed, as Hal Smith observes, 'whether the reliance on alien, time-smothered, and now cryptic myth... in today's world, is the best way out of... [Baxter's unveiled] chaos, either artistically or philosophically'.

Baxter faces two further important dramatic problems in this group of plays. The first is closely associated with his use of Greek myth in the exploration of local themes - the difficulty this creates in the choice of a suitable language. Baxter states that

A modern dramatist will naturally wish to use the language of his time at its most vital level; and it seems that he will find it in holes and corners, most of all perhaps in the explosive metaphors and jokes of pub conversation... The two poles of modern literary language are the deadpan banalities of our bureaucracies (invaluable for satiric use) and the explosive language of the street and the pubs and the farms and the wharves... the theatre should and must offer its stages to playwrights who use street language, and put aside its remnants of middleclass decorum. The reward will be a spoken language that flows easily into physical movement on the stage.

In fact, both his choice of Greek myth, and his own natural literary inclinations led Baxter in the other direction, away from a genuine New Zealand 'folk idiom', towards a metaphoric prose rhetoric. He recognizes this himself in a statement, in his Introduction to The Sore-footed Man and The Temptations of Oedipus, which seems to contradict his insistence on 'street language':

A half-memory of the gloss and panache of good English versions taken from the French [plays by Giraudoux and Sartre] helped to give me courage in forging out my own stage language - a prose rhetoric with some precision and some use of poetic

39 Smith, p.12.
40 SPNZD, pp.14-5.
images... I see no reason why we should not introduce a strongly metaphorical prose into the theatre since all stage language is constructed for an aesthetic purpose.41

In practice, a real difficulty occurs when Baxter attempts some kind of compromise between the poetic language of myth and the 'street language'. The two mingle unhappily in all four plays, and there are special problems in the two plays which retain a Greek setting and situation, where the playwright also introduces modern words and concepts.

The final significant dramatic problem, which Baxter faces in these plays, is his close personal involvement with his characters. In each play, the playwright is there at the centre, in no way a detached observer, and the characters themselves frequently come close to being undisguised projections of Baxter himself, speaking his words. Thus, Hal Smith claims:

In a Baxter play we are involved at all times with the man himself, and his own life values are projected with committed clarity against his power-ridden bureaucrats, petty bourgeoisie, inactive contemplators, Establishment victims, whores, drunks, sensual deviates, Puritan fanatics, well-meaning consolers, self-immolating prophets, and indulgent humanists. Within this sort of kaleidoscope he defines his own basic elemental drama of life versus death in all its forms, as he sees it...42

Each play carries a strong element of self-dramatization, Baxter arguing with himself, and he himself refers to the characters in a play as being part of the 'menagerie of interior selves'43 of the dramatist, again echoing Jungian thought, that the parts of the mind can be divided and personified. In the same way, the audience will see in the different members of the cast different aspects, conscious or unconscious, of their own personalities:

41 SMTO, p.viii.
42 Smith, p.4.
43 SPNZD, p.2.
Luther and Julius Caesar and Prometheus, aesthetically speaking, are in their separate plays not men but gods, principles, powers disguised as men (or in the case of Prometheus, a demi-god without disguise) - and ... what we go to the theatre to see is the conversation and battles and liaisons of the gods, who inhabit our own breast...

However, the close identification of Baxter with his characters frequently endangers the viability of those dramatic characters. As Hal Smith points out:

Through the character speaking the words in a stage situation we spy the author speaking ex cathedra. A character will go on talking, not out of dramatic necessity (which might even have dictated that he should not speak at all), but because the playwright has a few more things to say.45

The evidence in this group of plays suggests that this is a problem with which Baxter never really comes to terms, surprising perhaps in view of his awareness of it. He claims that 'when a playwright assigns particular words to a particular character in a play, he cannot, without sabotaging the whole dramatic structure, allow those words to contain his own considered view of life.'46 On the same question of the playwright's necessary detachment, he refers to a play written by a colleague, but the words apply equally to parts of his own writing:

This playwright was trapped by an identification with the dramatic illusion he had created in the person of the chief character. One had the impression that the rebellious and Utopian statements of the chief character were intended to convey a truth, a preferred view of life....47

In his strictures against New Zealand society, there is little doubt where Baxter's sympathies lie. He tends to simplify situations into black and white, the two poles of

44 Ibid., p.12.
45 Smith, p.4.
46 SPNZD, p.1.
47 Ibid., p.17.
'for' and 'against', with no place between. Howard McNaughton speaks of the resulting social drama of 'drunken angels in conflict with arrogant puritans'. In this scheme, the playwright's sympathy is always with the loner, the outcast, the hunted one. In this connection, Vincent O'Sullivan suggests that Baxter's social views

... were emblematic, frequently with the cut-and-dried clarity of a medieval carving. Baxter spoke more trenchantly about New Zealand emotional impoverishment than any other writer we have had. But we misread him if we do not allow its presentation as drama. In later years the fuzz assume the malice of devils; the junkies stand beside the children of light. The invasion of a pad, as well as a gross human infringement, was again the cosmic struggle, the expulsion once more from Eden.

In the analysis of each of Baxter's plays in the following chapters, attention is first given to the Greek play which provides the mythical structure for Baxter's version. Then follows an examination of Baxter's own play, and the working out, in dramatic terms, of the key themes discussed in this introduction. The relevance and effectiveness of the Greek myth as a vehicle for these themes is considered both from the thematic and structural point of view. The associated dramatic problems, such as the choice of a suitable language, and the playwright's tendency to identify with his characters, are also considered as they affect each play.

48 'Baxter as Dramatist,' Islands 4, 2(1973), 189.
49 O'Sullivan, p.28.
Sophocles' *Philoctetes* provides Baxter with the mythical framework for the *Sore-footed Man*. In *Philoctetes*, Odysseus and Neoptolemus have been sent on a mission to the island of Lemnos to recover Philoctetes and the bow of Hercules which is in Philoctetes' possession. It has been revealed to the Greeks by the captured Trojan prophet, Helenus, that victory in the Trojan war depends on bringing both Philoctetes and the bow to Troy. Philoctetes has been earlier abandoned on the island by the Greeks after being wounded by the serpent of the goddess Chryse. However, it is not the gods against whom Philoctetes nurses a deep-seated grievance, but against the Greeks, who have left him on the island, and especially Odysseus for whom he has a particular hatred.

Odysseus' characteristic stratagem to obtain the bow involves Neoptolemus in a deception of Philoctetes. He is to convince Philoctetes that they have equal cause to resent their treatment at the hands of the Greeks, Neoptolemus lying that the Greeks have refused to hand over to him Achilles' weapons, but have given them instead to Odysseus. Neoptolemus, however, shares his father's respect for the aristocratic code of honour, which finds the simple act of treachery in itself abhorrent. At first, he agrees to the stratagem, wooed by Odysseus' claims of political necessity and promises of public honour to follow; in fact, as Bernard Knox suggests, Odysseus 'subtly presents the deceitful role Neoptolemos [sic] is asked to play not as falling below the Achillean standard, but as rising above it, extending its narrow dimensions of physical prowess to include moral audacity.'¹ But Neoptolemus' doubts remain

strong: 'Deceit is not my nature; nor, I am told,/
Was it my father's. I'd rather beat this man/ By force
than by deception...' (p.166.)

At the centre point of the play, after the successful
achievement of the first part of the plan, the chorus
speaks of the wretched state to which Philoctetes has been
brought, and the suffering which he has undergone. H.D.F.
Kitto reminds us that the Greek chorus 'could bring to the
surface, when necessary, the broad general principles
underlying the particular action of the play', and in
his own analysis of Philoctetes, Kitto demonstrates the
structural centrality of the chorus in guiding the audience's
attitude towards Philoctetes' suffering, and in emphasising
that it is the Greeks and not the gods who have caused it.
This suffering is brought dramatically before Neoptolemus,
who already has many misgivings, when Philoctetes entrusts
the bow to him during one of his violent spasms of pain.
Finding the deceit too much to contain, Neoptolemus cries:
'The offence is here! A man betraying himself/ To do such
deeds as are not of his nature!' (p.193.) He confesses to
Philoctetes that it is his intention to conduct him to
Troy, not to his home as he has promised. Odysseus'
incredulity, and his argument that Neoptolemus will incur
the wrath of the whole Achaean army, does not induce the
latter to refrain from returning the bow to Philoctetes.
Neoptolemus claims: 'With justice on my side, I don't
fear anything/ That you can do.' (p.204.) We are left
in no doubt that Neoptolemus has made the honourable
choice; victim of a real moral struggle, he is finally
convinced by his own right instincts.

Despite his actions, Neoptolemus is unsuccessful at
persuading Philoctetes back to the Greek cause. Philoctetes

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2 All page references are to Sophocles, 'Philoctetes',
trans. E.F. Watling, in Electra and Other Plays,

3 Form and Meaning in Drama (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1960),
p.103.
becomes the tragic hero of his play in his steadfast refusal to compromise with his oppressors. Edmund Wilson observes that

The superiority of Philoctetes does not reside merely in the enchanted bow... Philoctetes becomes completely demoralized every time he has one of his seizures, and yet this only heightens our admiration for the pride which prevents him escaping at the expense of helping those who have deserted him.\(^4\)

The refusal to comply with the Greeks outlasts, not only the complete defeat of Odysseus' stratagem, but also the persuasion of one who has been proved a trustworthy friend. Only the intervention of Heracles himself, deus ex machina, brings about Philoctetes' submission. Philoctetes, like Oedipus, endures deprivation and disability and acquires almost superhuman powers in his total resolve.

Apart from this revelation of Philoctetes' essential nobility, there is a key conflict in the play between the moral relativism of Odysseus, with his claims of political necessity and victory by any means, and Neoptolemus' Achillean nobility. Thus, Kitto reads Philoctetes as a political play, in which

The really theological end... is the idea that the Atreidae and Odysseus are frustrated by what they themselves have done, with the further idea that men like Odysseus, with their apparently clever arguments and schemes, are morally repulsive and politically disastrous; and that they are this because what they do, or attempt to do, runs counter to the will of the gods, or the whole order of things, which is Dike. Odysseus may worship Athena Victory and Hermes the Deceiver, but victory eludes him, and if anybody is deceived it is Odysseus.\(^5\)

From a study of political morality in a world where Dike ultimately prevails, we move in *The Sore-footed Man* (according to Baxter himself) to an examination of 'the enigma of human freedom',\(^6\) in which the conflict is between the contrasting ways of regarding experience of Odysseus, the man of action,


\(^5\) Kitto, p.136.

\(^6\) *NT*, p.viii.
and Philoctetes, the intellectual. Although he has retained the Greek characters (with the important addition of a woman, Eunoe), setting and situation of Philoctetes, Baxter's emphasis in his play is quite different from Sophocles'. In particular, he is involved with the character of Odysseus, who, in Baxter's own words, 'became... the main character in my own play'. Indeed, Baxter claims to have been haunted by Odysseus over many years,

... from the time I began to realise that neither conventional ethics nor the theology of Aquinas were much use in determining what choices a man should make who wishes to win a war, or court a woman, or even free himself from the chains of family conditioning.

In his poetry, it is the restless, searching Odysseus, of the 'omnivorous' heart, who attracts Baxter. Time alone defeats Odysseus, as it does Tennyson's Ulysses, with whom Baxter's character has more in common than with Sophocles' Odysseus. Baxter speaks of his Odysseus in the early poem, 'Letter to Noel Ginn':

What land shall receive me save as a stranger?
Sea-blown Ulysses said: and Ithaca
More alien was than Troy. Nor could Minerva
Content him long: aged he craved for danger
For withered fame. So Time was Troy's avenger.

The idea that Odysseus has grown beyond his home, that he will no longer find either peace or fulfilment there - 'Ithaca more alien was than Troy' - is echoed in the later 'The Homecoming'. In this poem, the wandering son returns home to his mother's love 'demanding all'. The love inhibits his natural adventurous spirit - still she would fold him within her - and, although he remains at home, he can find no real peace there. This idea that women - mothers or wives - can inhibit the male need for spiritual

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Beyond the Palisade, p.38.
fulfilment is a recurring one in Baxter's writing, and is important in *The Sore-footed Man*.)

Odysseus has come home, to the gully farm
Where the macrocarpa windbreak shields a house
Heavy with time's relics...

A Love demanding all,
Hypochondriacal, seadark and contentless:
This was the scur ground that nurtured a boy's
Dream of freedom; this, in Circe's hall
Drugged him; his homecoming finds this, more relentless.

And he - rebels; and yields
To the old covenant - calms the bleating
Ewe in birth travail. The smell of saddle leather
His sacrament; or the sale day drink; yet hears
Beyond sparse fields
On reef and cave the sea's hexameter beating.10

However, it is not only the move from home and the ability and need to accept and deal with new challenges, that one finds in Baxter's *Odysseus*. He also has the ability to face himself and his true situation squarely, and to act in spite of what he sees. He understands the 'chaos' at the heart of life, and accepts the ultimate chaos of death. He is like Tennyson's *Ulysses* who recognizes death as the end, and thus has an insatiable appetite for life, living it for what it offers in each moment:

> every hour is saved
> From that eternal silence, something more,
> A bringer of new things...
> Death closes all: but something ere the end,
> Some work of noble note, may yet be done...11

Significantly, this understanding and acceptance of death is not shared by the women. Thus, in Baxter's early sonnet, 'Odysseus', Calypso and Penelope are 'trees guessing not the snow':


Troy died in me long ere her ashes died; On shore or alien quicksand or drowned deep In deepsea night; my death-born brethren hide Their trusting eyes. What though Calypso weep Or blind Penelope, trees guessing not the snow - Death is more deep than love: death is my spirit now. 12

The restless seeking for new experience, and the ability to act in the existential moment, is linked with Odysseus' ability to face death unflinchingly, in yet another poem which Baxter himself quotes in his introduction to The Sore-footed Man:

How then shall your heart that like the sea Becomes omnivorous, a sepulchre of storms, Love concord and an old man's idleness? You, who even in Hades would walk with a heavier Tread from the wisdom of stratagem, the power Learnt by looking at your life's plague pit with An unflinching eye.' 13

The evidence in his poetry points to Baxter's interest in the hipster's response to modern day existence, as described in Norman Mailer's essay, 'The White Negro'. Baxter refers to this essay in the introduction to The Sore-footed Man, when he indicated the central character contrast in his play:

Philoctetes in my play is essentially a 'beat' type (as Norman Mailer expresses the distinction in his remarkable essay, The White Negro) where a universe of ideas rotates around his own navel, whereas Odysseus derives his sanction from the unknown fertilising power of action itself. 14

Mailer's own words are a useful introduction to Baxter's view of Odysseus in his play:

If our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State as l'univers concentrationnaire, or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled... if the fate of

13 SMT0, p.ix. (I have omitted, in the interests of right sense, a comma which appears after the word 'Love' in SMT0.)
14 Ibid., p.viii.
The world which Mailer is speaking about, and the world of Baxter's play, differ significantly from that of Sophocles' Philoctetes: there is no ultimate order and justice, Dike, which will prevail, and which makes the deus ex machina and capitulation of Philoctetes a satisfying conclusion in Sophocles, allowing Philoctetes' absolute refusal to compromise while not preventing the ultimate restoration of order; and the aristocratic code of military honour at the heart of Philoctetes is omitted by Baxter, as he believes it has little relevance to a modern audience 'accustomed, at least by way of the mass media, to the regular functioning of impersonal army machines and genocidal massacres in the swamps of Asia.'16 Because of this second major difference between the two plays, Neoptolemus, who is the pivotal

16 SMT0, p.viii.
character in whom the conflict in Sophocles' play takes place, becomes in The Sore-footed Man merely a 'necessary fencepost' (Baxter's own words) who acts as soundingboard for the rhetoric of Odysseus and Philoctetes.

Odysseus' philosophical position is established in the opening dialogue, when he explains to Neoptolemus the purpose of their mission and his stratagem for obtaining Philoctetes and the bow. When Neoptolemus suggests that Philoctetes should not have been abandoned on the island, but either taken with the Greeks or put out of his misery, Odysseus tells him that the human condition is to suffer and man has a right to that suffering: 'Men are born to suffer. You might say, the definition of a man is: a creature, not a god, whose suffering seems to him almost infinite.' (p.1) Further, Odysseus faces clearly that to live is to die, that 'Time is Troy's avenger': 'Age is the common denominator. An old slave or an old king - they're under the same curse.' (p.3) Both the awareness of suffering, and the facing of death, of course, are very positive values for Baxter.

At the same time, it becomes quickly obvious that Odysseus embodies the same ethical relativism represented by Sophocles' character. He does not allow compassion to get in the way of the expedient action, as he reveals to Neoptolemus while speaking of his abandonment of Philoctetes on the island. And with no ultimate purpose or absolute truth outside the self, self-preservation is the most important end; to ensure this, duplicity and the study of men's hearts are essential:

What did Ajax call me?... Odysseus the spider. And he was quite right. I have to be a spider. I have to sit in the middle of my web, knowing what each man thinks and appearing to know nothing. An army can't survive without at least one intelligent leader. Nobody really likes him; they fear him. A rational man among the irrational is like a leper, but they need him. You know, I've envied Ajax - that brave, mutton-headed butcher! He could be absolutely candid; an open face and an open sword. But when I saw him last that face was covered with

All page references are to SWTO.
mud and the sword was buried in his own ribs. (p.5.)

Shortly after this statement, a further important question is asked, and left unanswered at this point, when Odysseus asks Neoptolemus where he thinks Odysseus obtains his knowledge of men's hearts. Neoptolemus cannot answer the question, and Odysseus significantly begins a discussion of his own and Neoptolemus's sexual relationships. There is an implication here, also to be developed later in the play, that the two matters are in some way related. However, where Baxter's Odysseus differs most from his mythical forbear is in the motivation for his ethical relativism. Sophocles' Odysseus is apolitical; he does not at all believe the argument he uses with Neoptolemus that political expediency necessitates duplicity. The argument of the 'common good' has helped to win over Neoptolemus, but Odysseus' own belief is much more pragmatic:

> When is a liar not a liar? When he's lying for the common good. Can the common good ever be helped by a lie? What solemnity! Die and tell the truth or lie and live. (p.7.)

Although Odysseus is introduced as morally unscrupulous, the audience is required to suspend conventional judgements until more is revealed about the things which qualify this relativism.

Philoctetes, who provides the central contrast with Odysseus, in the play, is introduced in a short dialogue with his wife, Eunice. Baxter explains in his introduction that, for him, Sophocles' Philoctetes 'cogitating in solitude on his island... mirrored exactly the predicament of the modern intellectual.' This gives the character quite a different emphasis from the frustrated military hero in Sophocles' play. And, yet, he has little in common either, with the Philoctetes of André Gide, as described by Edmund

18 SMTO, p. viii.
Wilson. Gide's Philoctetes is also, in a sense, an intellectual, whose isolation has allowed him to develop his mental faculty undisturbed. In fact, his solitary pursuit of the secrets of life becomes an almost mythical search; he is relieved when the bow is finally stolen, as there is no longer a reason for people to seek him out.

Baxter's Philoctetes quickly shows that his philosophizing brings him no real satisfaction at all. Philoctetes' lame foot is symptomatic of a deeper malaise of spirit which has afflicted him. Eunoe speaks of his dreams about the Trojan War: 'You've never got over being left behind, have you?' (p.8.) She tells also of Philoctetes' useless fondling and polishing of the bow and arrows: 'What use are they? You've never even used them to shoot at a hedgehog!' (p. 8.) (This image finds an important echo in the final scene of the play.) Philoctetes has lost his confidence and will, and fears engagement in action; in terms of the Greek myth, he has been bitten by the goddess, Chryse, and his wound is self-destructing fear. In his state of self-pity, he can only bewail his lot, and accepts no responsibility for it:

Can I help being a cripple? Can I help having been cursed by the goddess? It's absurd! Can I help having a complicated mind? Life's utterly absurd! (p.8.)

There is none of the Sophoclean noble endurance here. He is 'beat' in Mailer's sense, imprisoned by his own 'muted icy self-destructing rage'. Although demoralized by his pain, Sophocles' character is in no doubt about life's meaning.

A more important feature of this first appearance of Philoctetes, is what is shown of his relationship with his wife. Philoctetes feels imprisoned in an unsatisfactory marriage relationship; his sense of obligation towards his wife has turned into a heavy resentment. Philoctetes has allowed Eunoe to dominate and manipulate him, and it seems that his fear is not only fear of action, but an
inhibiting fear of the sexual relationship which has made him passive and negative with Eunoe. There is a developing connection in the play between vital sexual activity and action in other spheres.

Baxter's addition of Eunoe to the cast of the play is an important one. She is significant in *The Sore-footed Man* both structurally and thematically: structurally, because, as already shown, the playwright uses her to reveal Philoctetes' dreams which give the lie to his words, and because she provides the opportunity for Odysseus' humiliation of Philoctetes in the final act; thematically, because she brings the question of the marriage relationship into the play's examination of individual freedom. As a character, however, Eunoe remains undeveloped; her own dissatisfaction with the marriage becomes increasingly clear, but her reactions are, for Baxter, those of a typical woman in a typical situation.

After the opening dialogues, Baxter introduces his chorus of three sailors. Except for the brief appearance of the First Sailor near the beginning of the play, the chorus stands apart from the action of the play. In their two appearances, at the end of Acts I and II, the sailors serve the double function of commenting on the characters and action of the play, and at the same time, Baxter intends that they should provide a ribald and semi-comic chorus to balance the more decorous exchanges of the main characters. In guiding audience reaction to characters and action, in the play, the chorus focusses almost exclusively on Odysseus. This is in sharp contrast with Sophocles' play where the chorus focusses on Philoctetes' suffering. The contrast shows something of the different interest Baxter has in the myth.

The First Sailor best understands Odysseus' position; he perceives clearly the self-interest and instinct for

19 Ibid., p.vii.
self-preservation which drive Odysseus. To the Second Sailor's complaint that Odysseus does not behave honourably, 'the way a general should', the First Sailor replies:

I don't want a good man for general. A good man thinks there's something more important than staying alive. Goodness makes a man stupid. Achilles was a good man. Ajax was a good man. They're both dead... Some die sooner than others. The last of them all will be King Odysseus... There was a bubble inside Achilles' head. It told him, 'You've not been treated right.' There's a bubble inside Adamemnon's head. It tells him, 'I'm the King of all the Greeks.' Ajax' head was one big bubble. But there's no bubble inside the General's head - just a little old snake moving very gently in the dark. The beginning and the end; that's what the General's got inside his head. (p.27.)

Odysseus' shrewd perception of life - 'the beginning and the end' - is clearly understood in the First Sailor's words. The First Sailor understands also what Odysseus' position means in terms of the drive for fresh challenge and self-fulfilment, which depend on the satisfaction of oneself at the expense of others. The hipster, however, is amoral - such considerations do not concern him, in his restless obedience to the self. The words of the First Sailor's song reveal the same relativism but also something of what, one suspects, Baxter sees as the insatiable appetite of the psychopathic military man.

The General came on parade
In his bloody big battle chariot.
He said, 'I've got a guts-ache,
I need to eat a Trojan.
If I can't eat a Trojan
Then I'll have to eat a Greek.
If I can't eat a Greek
Then I'll have to eat a woman.
If I can't eat a woman
Then I'll have to eat a boy.
If I can't eat a boy
I'll have to eat - shit! (p.26.)

The contrast between the First Sailor and the Third Sailor points to the similar contrast between Odysseus and Philoctetes, and adds emphasis to it. The First Sailor shares with Odysseus the hipster response to life - the
living with 'death as immediate danger', the obedience to the 'rebellious imperative of the self', the existing in the 'enormous present which is without past or future'. His god is not an external agent, but resides in the depths of his own senses:

I've a god in my belly — ... a personal god, my property, and he tells me, 'Go ahead! I'll back you up.' And maybe she has a goddess — a snake goddess, a small one — sitting just behind her navel... Of course it's dangerous! What isn't dangerous? (p.12.)

This attitude to life contrasts with that of Third Sailor, who, like Philoctetes, has allowed fear and caution to take him over, making effective action impossible. It is reflected, significantly, in view of what is known of Philoctetes, in his attitude towards the First Sailor's sexual adventures, shown in the above quotation. The Third Sailor's advice to the others is to 'Leave the women alone. You don't know what risks you might be running.' (p.12.)

After the opening definition of the characters and situation in Act I, the movement of the play is towards a full revelation of the character of Odysseus, and towards a change in Philoctetes. Act II opens with Neoptolemus putting the first part of the stratagem into effect, by attempting to win Philoctetes' sympathy. He does not reveal that he knows Philoctetes' identity, and this provides Philoctetes with the opportunity to speak of his grievance against the Greeks, and, as in Sophocles' play, for Neoptolemus to claim an equal resentment. Odysseus enters in disguise with the fraudulent message that both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are being pursued by the Greeks. This section of plot development in Act II follows closely its structural original, and Baxter's new emphasis comes through only in some increased understanding of his Philoctetes. Philoctetes' feeling of indebtedness to his wife is made explicit:
Dear Eunoe - that was the girl in charge of the shrine - she looked after me. She fed me and bathed my wound. We were married by a simple ceremony. It was the least I could do to repay her. (p.17.)

There is a hint here that Philoctetes' wound, his fear of action, was fostered by his marriage. Further on, in the same dialogue, he describes his interest in philosophy of Neoptolemus, and it becomes clearer that this is a form of escape from a failure to come to terms with an unsatisfactory marriage. Eunoe, he claims, lives too much on the 'biological level', and this is what Philoctetes fears and retreats from; in Mailer's terms, he is drained sexually - 'the sex of the beatnik circles in, and mysticism becomes the Grail'. Philoctetes speaks of Eunoe's sexuality and 'bullying manner':

In some ways she lives far too much on a biological level. It's one of my greatest difficulties with her, along with a certain bullying manner she's adopted lately. It has me at a disadvantage. It's a problem no one ever brings up - not in serious conversation - but how do you deal with a woman who speaks roughly to you? A word can be like a blow... She has no sense of the dignity of marriage. (p.20.)

The next section of Act II shows Odysseus' duplicity dramatically realized, as he initiates a further action in his seduction of Eunoe. The seduction contrasts with Philoctetes' description of his sexual relationship with Eunoe, which immediately precedes it. Eunoe is easy prey to Odysseus' flow of flattering words; by dominating her sexually, he takes the initiative which Philoctetes has long lost in his relationship with her. Eunoe points to the difference between Odysseus and Philoctetes, when she says to Odysseus: 'There's a god inside you. There's no god inside Philoctetes.' (p.25.) This idea of the god inside the senses of the body has already been introduced by the First Sailor, and is developed further in the final act of the play. The implication in the seduction scene is that women like Eunoe do not really want the dominance which the men have frequently allowed them to achieve in the marriage

20 p.335.
situation. Her position of dominance has certainly brought Eunoe no happiness.

Act III opens with Philoctetes and Neoptolemus in conversation; Philoctetes speaks eloquently of what he believes is his new found vocation of philosopher, and his awareness of a spiritual dimension which is in conflict with his marriage relationship:

One has to keep the soul-case alive for the soul to spread its wings... but a philosopher should really be celibate. You mightn't understand at your age - I wouldn't have - but women are so biological! They have no appreciation of the extra spiritual dimension. Talking to Eunoe is like talking to a crab - clack-clack-clack: 'Have you put a bandage on your foot? Why don't you look more cheerful? Why don't you shave?' That's the real wound, not the one in my foot... To bottle up one's thoughts day by day, week by week, month by month - till you think perhaps you're crazy - perhaps the only world is the world of bandages and rheumatism and pots boiling over - all that squalor! All that personal domestic fug - and the endless background noise of complaint. Don't ever get married, my friend. It's like living in one's own grave. And all the time, alongside it, the world of abstract reality - luminous, transcendent, like the sun shining in at the cave door. Incommunicable - that's the horror of it. And then suddenly the gods have mercy - the fog lifts - and you meet another human being who can understand what you're driving at... (pp.29-30.)

Here is some of Baxter's most persuasive prose, and there seems a certain sympathy for the man tied to a woman who has no appreciation of a world beyond the mundane household demands. Again the woman does not appreciate a man's need of spiritual adventure. However, in this context, the audience has already been made well aware of the gap between Philoctetes' philosophizing, and his real, sublimated feelings. For this reason, his poetic vision of an ideal world can not be taken seriously. Also, there is the irony of Neoptolemus's boredom, and the withdrawal of his hand, while Philoctetes is speaking. As he reports to Odysseus:
I've just spent the most hideous hour of my whole life. My head's going to split in half. The person we came in search of has become mentally deranged - he's under the impression that he's a philosopher... I find him a most crashing bore. (p.31.)

In the ensuing dialogue with Neoptolemus, the character of Odysseus is further revealed to the audience. Odysseus suggests that, apart from being a necessary action for the achievement of his plan, his using of Eunoe is a kind of service to Eunoe herself, even though he has no intention of pursuing the relationship. In explaining this, he further develops the familiar Baxter theme of the unsatisfactory nature of relationships between the sexes:

I may not see her often again. But one day she'll be old - and what do you think an old woman remembers?... Her lovers; like a book that she's never tired of reading. What this one said and that one did. I've added a leaf to her book. I may add a few more leaves... Fairness is impossible between the sexes, either way - man to woman, or woman to man. Women grow weary of faithful lovers but remember the unfaithful ones all their days. (p.33.)

But more important is the introduction of the idea that Odysseus' action is destined to help to produce change in Philoctetes. Baxter notes that only Odysseus 'has the power to liberate Philoctetes from his intellectual roundabout'. But Odysseus similarly describes Philoctetes to Neoptolemus as 'caught in the burrow of his own mind, going round and round endlessly like a dog in the straw.' (p.33.) It is now clear that Odysseus sees himself as Philoctetes' saviour, releasing him from the crippling fear that has killed action, and ruined his marriage, and restoring him to himself. His explanation of how he discovered this role, and indeed of the basis of all his actions, is thematically central in the play. In reply to Neoptolemus' question about how he intends to deliver Philoctetes, Odysseus replies:

I didn't know till a few minutes ago. Oh you think I'm able to plan things - I'm no planner - the best ideas come to me out of the dark, fully made, and they come to me best - have you any idea when?...

21 SMTO, p.viii.
When I've just slept with a woman. On the way here, while the boat kept on swaying and the rowers were singing, I turned the matter over in my mind - not just how I should do it - get the bow and arrows, bring back Philoctetes - but also, what should be done? To act is a great responsibility; to do the unpredictable, the new, the fully made thing... What I know is never any use to me. What I don't know is the key to action. I had to look for it in the belly of Philoctetes' wife... It was all there, wrapped in a dark bundle - her boredom with a dull husband, his hatred of a wife too strong for him, the desire for freedom and the dread of freedom - the issues that will fight for ever in the heart and head of their son; and I moved against them and broke them and came away free. (pp.33-4.)

This is Odysseus' central statement of the hipster view of experience - the 'unknown fertilising power of action itself', of which Baxter speaks. It is not Odysseus' reason or thought, but what he feels at each moment, the god inside the senses of his own body, which is the impulse for creative action. In Mailer's words, Odysseus is close to the 'God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated, and nonetheless megalomaniacal God who is It, who is energy, life, sex, force...' However, Odysseus rejects Neoptolemus's suggestion that he is made of iron, when he admits to a fear of 'The terrible darkness. The darkness out of which action is born.' (p.34.) This last idea is explained by Odysseus in the last section of this act when his character is revealed more fully.

Neoptolemus and Odysseus are interrupted by Philoctetes, who has discovered that his bow has been stolen. Philoctetes recognizes Odysseus and accuses Neoptolemus of treachery; when Odysseus denies possession of the bow, Eunoe enters and hands it to Odysseus. Then follows the final humiliation of Philoctetes, as Odysseus embraces Eunoe in front of her husband. Odysseus claims that this action has 'scrubbed out' Philoctetes' wound; he can now feel free of his sense of obligation towards Eunoe. The final

22 Mailer, p.316.
confrontation between Odysseus and Philoctetes, leads to Philoctetes' sudden capitulation.

Odysseus first repeats that he rejects philosophical, religious or political attachments, being guided only by the 'god' inside himself. He no longer believes, as he did in his youth, that 'the gods followed men like vultures - waiting for a wrong step, a broken taboo, a sign of weakness.' (p.35.) Nor does he any longer care who wins the Trojan War: 'Iron clashing on iron. Blood and corpses every day of the week - ten years of it.' (p.37.) Whatever it means in the violation of interpersonal and group relationships, Odysseus believes only in the individual's free choice to act.

Philoctetes, however, persists with his escapist desire for security and withdrawal:

A little hut beside the sea, with a few olive trees growing near the door. A wife who loved me and kept the hut in order; the conversation of intelligent friends; perhaps two or three of a family. A simple life, Odysseus. A philosopher's utopia - without hate, without bloodshed. (. 38.)

In Autumn Testament is a poem addressed to his wife in which Baxter proposes a very similar kind of retreat for himself. Attractive though it may seem, Baxter must see that his hope is a basically escapist wish which is as unreal and would bring him as little real happiness as it brings Philoctetes:

To you and me he [Te Atua] will give
A whare by the seashore
Where you can look for crabs and kina
And I can watch the waves
And from time to time see your face
With no sadness,
Te Kare o Nga Wai. 23

Philoctetes' desire, and his obviously inadequate conception of an ideal marriage relationship, which has not at all come
to terms with the 'biological level', earn Odysseus' scorn. As he replies, we hear again the voice of the poet of 'The Homecoming', and other poems, courting the 'chaos' and fleeing the inhibiting security of domestic life:

When I return to Ithaca, Philoctetes, I'll go back to the customs and habits of a tribal chief. It will be my duty to do so. In a sense, I'll be a secure man - respected, recognised, even admired. But will that be any solution? - a fire damped down with ashes! Security is the demon I fled from, sailing to Troy - a wife's arms, a quiet hearth, a dead soul! Will your philosophy give you security?... Then you'll be like a log of wood, firm on the outside, eaten by ants from within. (p. 39.)

Odysseus returns the bow to Philoctetes, offering him the opportunity to shoot Odysseus in the back. At this crisis in the play, Philoctetes undergoes an abrupt, and dramatically not well prepared for, change. Philoctetes does not shoot, and when Odysseus tells him that he (Odysseus) did not know what would happen, his words reveal finally the motivation which drives him... He faces the 'chaos' squarely, and by swallowing his fear, is able to act in spite of it:

I didn't know, and that's the knife blade I walk on; darkness on each side of me and a blade of fear in the centre. Then my life obeys me; it shudders and obeys my will. If my fear of death were stronger than I am, I'd no longer be Odysseus. I carry my fear inside me like an unborn child... What was Hercules? A man. A man whose soul came alive and gave strength to his body when he swallowed his fear and lived inside the jaws of death. And you are carrying his bow. Either throw it into the sea, or else use it. The bow of Hercules, carried by a man who wishes to be secure, is useless as a stalk of grass. You have to become Hercules - or rather, become Philoctetes. (p. 40.)

Here one feels the playwright's unqualified approval of Odysseus. However, the dramatic effect on Philoctetes - it seems that he is now able to swallow his fear and become
fully himself - is rather unconvincing. Philoctetes agrees to accompany Odysseus to Troy, but Eunoe will be left behind. The spiritual journey to self-discovery is one that man must make alone. It will be achieved more successfully without the inhibiting presence of a woman. Odysseus tells Philoctetes that Eunoe will not travel 'on this voyage. She may travel in another boat.' (p.40.) Odysseus himself has faced another challenge and won another victory. But not without a touch of irony at the end - as they leave the stage, the voice of the First Sailor returns with the first stanza of his song to remind the audience that none of Odysseus' actions has been disinterested.

The theme of The Sore-footed Man is found in the central conflict between Odysseus' positive engagement in life, in the face of the chaos and of death, and Philoctetes' contrasting desire for philosophical withdrawal, which is shown to be mere rationalization of that fear which prevents action. One is free and becomes oneself to the extent that one is able to accept life's suffering and to contain one's fear, while 'living in the jaws of death. It is in this degree of self-awareness that Baxter believes Odysseus is wholly admirable.

While Baxter draws on qualities of the Sophoclean characters, the focus of his play is quite different from Sophocles' study of political morality and Achillean nobility in the context of ancient Greece. It is a measure of these different emphases of the two playwrights that, in The Sore-footed Man, Philoctetes is won over by Odysseus, the very last person who could have achieved that victory in Sophocles' play.

While Baxter's emphasis is quite different from Sophocles' use of the Greek myth, his material certainly appears to have been discovered at a deep level in Sophocles' play.
In particular, the character of Odysseus had long attracted Baxter, and was well imbedded in his emotional consciousness, as his poems testify over a number of years. This long familiarity enables Baxter to distance himself from his main character so that he can view him ironically when necessary. Odysseus was a natural image of that restless, searching individual who is without a spiritual place of belonging. And, although the motivating drive is different between Sophocles' Odysseus and the modern hipster, Baxter did find a relevant modern equivalent in Mailer's description of the hipster experience of life. Furthermore, in Sophocles' play, Baxter has discovered what for him is a central contrast between the intellectual isolated on his island of thought, and the man of action fully aware of the 'chaos' at the heart of life and acting in the face of it.

Structurally, The Sore-footed Man gains by Baxter's absorption in this key contrast. The play has a tighter focus than many of his plays, because of his interest in the central argument. His retention of the Greek situation and plot line is also an advantage in this respect. The dramatic interest, which lies in the deception of Philoctetes, saves the play from becoming a static exchange of points of view, and also provides a unifying plot. The tighter structural focus also gives less opportunity for Baxter to be diverted on to irrelevant social preaching. His introduction of the woman, Eunoe, is absorbed into the central contrast in the play, by being linked integrally with Philoctetes' fear of engagement in life. Despite what has been said, however, Baxter has not avoided a certain structural rigidity, which comes from the closely patterned series of dialogues, and the setting of the two chorus scenes almost completely apart from the main action.

While the chorus scenes do develop the central character contrast in The Sore-footed Man, they point most clearly to
the play's language weakness. There are many shifts in tone backwards and forwards between philosophical rhetoric and 'street language'. Once one has accepted that the metaphorical language of poetry is an appropriate medium for conveying the Greek myth in this play, the shift from it is strangely disharmonious. The New Zealand colloquial idiom, which Baxter develops in the sailors' conversation, does not 'balance the more decorous exchanges of the main characters' (as he intends it should) but provides a jarring contrast. The New Zealand colloquial 'sponging off her', 'boozed up', 'shut her ugly trap', 'Garbage Guts', and many more such examples, sound quite out of place alongside the philosophical rhetoric used by the main characters. And the main characters themselves lapse from rhetoric into slang, such as Philoctetes speaking of giving Eunice 'a clout on the side of the head'. The difficulty is compounded by Baxter's introduction of modern concepts into an ancient Greek setting, as when Odysseus speaks of 'labouring under a paranoid delusion', and Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus that he sees life in 'a materialist way'. This is the problem mentioned in the introductory chapter, of choosing an appropriate language register, and then developing it consistently. It will be seen to be a vexed one for Baxter in all the plays discussed in this thesis, and a central problem inherent in the use of Greek myth as the structural basis of these plays.
Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* provides Baxter with the mythical framework for *The Bureaucrat*. Prometheus has opposed Zeus' intention to destroy mankind. By bringing fire stolen from heaven, and the knowledge and skills which have enabled man to develop beyond his aboriginal state, Prometheus has given man the initiative to effectively oppose Zeus' destructive intention. Zeus punishes this challenge to his authority, by having Prometheus bound to a rock where he remains exposed to weather and scavenging creatures.

While chained to the rock, Prometheus is visited successively by the chorus, Oceanus, Io, and Hermes, each meeting revealing more clearly Prometheus' inaccessibility to compromise with Zeus, and his determination to stand firm against Zeus' tyranny. The movement of the play culminates in his pronouncement to Hermes, messenger from Zeus himself:

> You waste your breath; you may as well exhort the waves. Never persuade yourself that I, through fear of what Zeus may intend, will show a woman's mind, or kneel to my detested enemy, with womanish hands Outspread in supplication for release. No, never!  

Prometheus alone possesses the secret on which the safety of Zeus' rule depends – that Zeus will be challenged by his own more powerful son, Heracles. Prometheus' secret, which becomes his key weapon against Zeus, is gradually disclosed to the audience during the play. Although Prometheus chooses to refuse a compromise with Zeus within the context of *Prometheus Bound*, such a reconciliation is implicit in the movement established in the play, and presumably achieved later in the trilogy of which it is part. Prometheus' stubbornness does nothing to ameliorate his present position, but is not the reason for it. As H.D.F. Kitto states:

> Prometheus has often been given a hamartia. He may indeed be accused of stubbornness and self will, but this is not the same thing... Prometheus' stubbornness increases his suffering but is not the cause of it.

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This is that he pitied the human race and saved it
from Zeus, which may have been a mistake, but cannot
be called hamartia - not at least by us. We are bound
to accept the act as meritorious and to see the source
of the tragedy therefore in the fact that, until Zeus
has learned to be merciful, there was no room in the
universe for both him and Prometheus. It is essentially
a tragedy of situation. The purpose of the subbornness is
to prepare the way for the reconciliation.

Relevant to Baxter's reading of the myth is Shelley's
attitude towards Prometheus. In his 'Prometheus Unbound',
Shelley refuses to allow any compromise on the part of Prometheus,
who, Shelley believes, is impelled, as champion of mankind, by
the purest motives and towards the noblest of ends. His
Prometheus does not buy release from bondage by disclosing the
secret to Zeus, but remains steadfast until the appointed hour
when Zeus himself is inevitably overthrown.

Apart from Prometheus, the only Aeschylean character
used explicitly by Baxter, is Io. In Promethes Bound, Io is
a fellow victim of Zeus; his attraction towards her has
resulted in the jealous Hera turning Io into a heifer, and driving
her restlessly from country to country, stung by a gadfly.
During these restless wanderings, she meets with the bound
Prometheus, who foretells her future.

The central conflict, however, is between Prometheus
and Zeus, and it is possible to view the conflict on different
levels: between rebel and tyrant, who has overthrown the
traditional rule of justice; between knowledge and force, or
violence; between man and the would-be destroyer of man.
It is in this sense of two opposing principles, the life-giving
and the life-destroying, the two poles of black and white
mentioned in the introductory chapter, that one can expect
Baxter to view the Promethean myth. But, accepting the fact
that The Bureaucrat is a modernized version of this myth,
placed in a contemporary New Zealand setting, Baxter's use of it is not related in any consistent fashion to its development in Aeschylus.

The one undoubted attraction of the Promethean legend for Baxter, was the figure of Prometheus himself. In his 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet', Baxter states that the image of Prometheus recurred in his poems as the 'principle of the rebellious energy in man that enlarges our order by breaking it and allowing it to re-form in another pattern - an energy that our way of life dismembers and disregards.' In a poem, which concludes the final section of the same Notes, he speaks of a return to that image in times of drought and despair:

It is a long time since he brought The fire of Zeus to us Lightening our chaos. For many aeons Hour by hour the sea vulture Had been tearing at his guts. We had All but forgotten his pain and his gift. Calamity, time, deeply thwarted desire, Bring us again to the place of the dark Titan, And there are others... From clay mounds they gather To share the Titan's blood with us.

This return to and appeal to the life-giving, the creative principle, comes at a time when Baxter feels that he himself is giving 'an inch or two in that lifelong battle' against the 'administrative machines which act out the fantasies of the dull man-killing brain of Caesar'. He has accepted the Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago, and is still close to personal, and not very happy, experience as teacher and officer in the School Publications Branch of the Department of Education. That department is

3 The Man on the Horse, p.154.
4 Ibid., pp.154-5.
5 Ibid., p.14.
the subject of special attention as one of Baxter's targets in a wide-ranging attack on New Zealand society, in The Bureaucrat. In that attack, he does not hesitate to use the 'gross satire' which he regards as legitimate in the circumstances:

I see it as my own chief function, as a man and as a writer, to struggle - by whatever means I find available, including gross satire - against the devil of acedia who rises from that swamp of economic liberalism and inhabits, like an honoured guest, our Government Departments, our business offices, our churches, our schools, our places of entertainment, our art galleries and our homes.6

Baxter believes that at the heart of the New Zealand ideal of economic liberalism is an education system which is dedicated to the imparting and accumulating of information - an imposition from without - rather than the nurturing of the creative centre - an enabling from within. Thus he speaks of his own schooldays:

I don't think any school ever touched me where I live... The educative process never touched me, that's what I mean - as soon as it came near me, I instinctively slipped my mind into neutral, became passive, inert, allowed myself to be pushed around mentally or physically, and in a sense came as near as I could to a state of suspended animation... It seems that the schooldays were mainly a blank period, a time of waiting - waiting for what? For action, I suppose; for the dinosaur's egg I carried inside me to hatch and break open. It did in the long run; but schools had very little to do with that.7

Baxter's bureaucrat, and spokesman for education conceived as an accumulation of knowledge, is John Fireman, head of a government department involved in preparing bulletins for schools. (The parallel with Baxter's own experience is obvious.) For much of the play, at least, Fireman is identified ironically with Prometheus; he is an anti-hero or anti-Prometheus, who has all the opposite qualities to those which Baxter admired in the mythical

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p.129.
Prometheus. Fireman is afraid, defensive and negative; he has become chained to an office desk by the Zeus of modern Western society, which is reflected in the bureaucratic organization. The subsequent central action of The Bureaucrat is towards a change in perception in Fireman, an increased understanding of his situation and how it affects him. In a way, Fireman is put in touch with Prometheus' secret, the knowledge which could produce change. In fact he is made to face the chaos at the heart of life, and the suffering which is the human condition. Both the chaos and the suffering have been veiled by the bureaucratic trivia and routine, which deny their natural expression. It is the same unveiling of the chaos, which Baxter claims is his central theme, which is given expression in this play.

The central contrast between the chaos of real experience, and the unnatural bureaucratic order, is indicated in the first brief dialogue in the play, when the Tea Woman, Mrs Mulligan, offers Fireman tea at his office desk. She speaks of the teacher she had as a child; he was a morose, introverted man, who had finally cut his own throat. Fireman assures a scarcely convinced Mrs Mulligan that no such disorder could now occur.

It is in Fireman's interview with a young member of his staff, Tom Harness, which follows this brief opening exchange, that Fireman reveals or defines something of his own situation and beliefs, as he sees them at that time. First, it is clear that he is inordinately preoccupied with trivial matters, which, it seems, are a protection from dealing with real feelings and issues. Thus, he takes Harness to task for his inappropriate use of the hyphen: 'I'd appreciate it if you'd pay more attention to these details. They may appear insignificant. But education itself depends on an endless attention to apparently minor details.' (p.3) Next Fireman comes to the real point of the interview, which is to object to Harness's conduct with Io Gould, another younger member of the departmental staff. Miss Stevens, the office Hera

8 All page references are to 'The Bureaucrat,' TS, (James K.Baxter papers, Hocken Library, University of Otago).
(if one stretches the mythical connections sufficiently), is apparently jealously resentful of Harness's fondling of Io in the office corridor. Fireman appears quite unable to deal adequately with the situation. His own insecurity is revealed, and his reaction to the affair suggests a sexual inadequacy in Fireman himself, reflected in the sublimation of his own natural drives in his devotion to the bureaucratic order. Fireman's language shows this, in its caution, repetition, qualifications, and tittering sexual innuendo:

Personally I've never been in favour of that kind of relationship among people who're working together. It makes for friction. Friction. I appear to have made a Freudian pun... well, well... It makes for animosity, disturbances, even subconscious jealousy. The point I wish to make Tom is this - I value your work, don't think I don't - I have some personal affection for you - but in this matter you've acted most irresponsibly -

Later in the interview, Fireman confirms suspicions about the cause of his feelings of anxiety and insecurity. His wife has died after a clearly unsuccessful marriage. He does not really believe his own suggestion that it might have been different if they had had children, and the failure is related specifically to their sexual relationship, by Fireman's comment that the possible alternative of adoption of children missed the real point at issue between them. At the same time, the Promethean parallel is made explicit:

Since Ursula died, I've had a difficult life. Not on the surface. I can't say that I've exactly missed Ursula. She was a strange woman. Perhaps with children - I don't know. We did think of adoption... However, that's hardly the point. I've felt as if there was a vacuum somewhere. Sometimes I've actually hated this desk and this office. I've felt as if the desk was a great rock, and I was chained to it. And flashes of violent anxiety. The old story of Prometheus, that's it. A vulture pecking at my liver. (p.5.)

Finally, in this dialogue with Harness, Fireman speaks of his theory of education. His belief that it is a process
which involves information and order imposed from without is related to his denial of feeling at the personal level. The link between bureaucracy and the inability of those involved in it to stay in touch with their natural instincts is a developing theme in the play. Fireman speaks of his work in terms of the Promethean myth—the bringer of fire, while, ironically, his name Fireman suggests the extinguishing of the spark:

We're the fire-bringers! The fire-bringers! Like Martin Luther. Can't you see what I'm getting at? All this monotony—secolons even—committees at your elbow—piles of waste paper—that's only the outward shell of what we're doing. Somewhere a child picks up a bulletin—he reads about—Gambia!—and suddenly his world in enlarged. He becomes a different person. (p. 4.)

Fireman must learn the Baxter lesson that knowledge alone does not drive back the darkness, before he can come to terms with his own unsatisfactory life. In the meantime, the ironic Promethean parallel is developed further, when Fireman asserts that he brings knowledge which lightens the darkness, the aboriginal chaos, in the children at whom it is directed:

Knowledge. It shines out like a lamp. The darkness outside and the darkness inside—they get driven back by it. If you could see it as I see it, Tom, you wouldn't be cynical about it. Admittedly we can't conquer death. We pay for civilised life—the accident rate of infant mortality goes down. But knowledge is a blessing in itself. Sanitation. Good housing. Art galleries. A merciful humane attitude to other people. We're helping to make it possible. (p. 4.)

In confirming, here, the end of economic liberalism—'sanitation', 'good housing', and so on—at which his theory of education is aimed, Fireman shows how far this is from answering the needs of the individual. Far from keeping the individual in touch with the chaos at the centre of his life, and helping him to face and accept his own death, Western society would 'drive back' the chaos and 'conquer death' if it could.

Fireman's move to awareness can be traced from this initial definition of his situation and beliefs, through a series of dialogues between himself and Harness, Io, and Mrs Mulligan.
These successive dialogues parallel structurally, those in Aeschylus' play. Fireman's various meetings are developed out of the issue of the relationship between Harness and Io. The questions raised in the dialogues are given clearer definition by the chorus of cleaning women who make two appearances.

Tom Harness, the other character in the first main dialogue, exists only at the level of his cynical detachment which offsets Fireman's commitment. As far as alternative values are concerned, Harness has nothing to affirm; he can offer Fireman only his negative scepticism. He clearly defines Fireman's sense of inadequacy – his failure on the sexual level – when he answers Fireman's complaints about his conduct with Io Gould in blunt 'street language': 'I was stroking her tit'; 'I've got balls as well as brains'; and so on. However, this reveals Baxter's insensitivity to the total language texture, even allowing for the 'gross satire'. It is another example, in this group of plays, of Baxter's failure to achieve a happy union of the banalities of bureaucratic language and the explosive language of the streets. Taken at a naturalistic level, much of Fireman's language in the first part of the play effectively satirises the prevaricating rhythms of bureaucratic language, but by having Harness interrupt in bald 'street language' Baxter overstates the case. Harness's comments are simply improbable in the circumstances of the office interview, and employer-employee relationships.

Io Gould, with whom Fireman next meets, is a more complex character, and it is by no means clear how Baxter wishes his audience to take her. She has her operate at both the symbolic level, and the level of the particular social problem. It is obvious that some identification with Aeschylus' Io is intended, not only through the name, but through the explicit connections drawn by Io in this first conversation with Fireman. She, like her mythical forbear, is afflicted; she suffers from a sense of absolute aloneness and from the sting of the gadfly of her
own sexuality. But, even read symbolically, this comes close to farcical improbability when it is given expression in a dance, which Baxter in his stage directions suggests should 'indicate conflict and reluctance; that is, the heifer tormented by the gadfly.' (p.7.) And, in another similarly unlikely example, especially given the realistic modern office setting and the relationship between Fireman and Io, she states: 'If a man touches me, I feel I want to get down on all fours and moo like a cow.' (p.7.) In one respect at least, the identification with the mythical Io is clear enough. The Greek Io was worshipped as Isis, representing the female productive force in nature, and in this capacity her symbol was the cow. (It is relevant to note that Baxter's bacchae in Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party have their 'wild woman dance' during which they call to Io in the above capacity.) Taken at this level, both Io and Harness stand for the creative physical vitality in woman and man respectively - the sexual vitality which Fireman has sublimated, and which is sublimated also in Miss Stevens, who as Hera resents its intrusion into an established pattern. At the symbolic level, then, the implication is that Io's natural expression of her sexuality is not allowed to go unchallenged and unpunished in our bureaucratically organized society.

However, Baxter does not leave Io at this point. In her second dialogue with Fireman, her sufferings are shown to have a concrete and particular cause which is not amplified or given greater significance by the mythical identification. Io's sense of solitude, she tells Fireman, dates from the night of her first love affair, when she wore her lover's coat and first felt completely part of another person; on that same night her lover killed himself on his motorbike. Baxter is here simply providing the predictable stock response of the bikie as rebel and victim of modern society. Io has reacted by avoiding relationships
which have made any demands on her, unable to stand being exposed to another's pain: 'People have so much pain—so much pain inside them! When I'm part of it, I can't stand it. Not for long.' (p.20.) Io's perception about her own condition does not lessen her suffering; she has already learnt the lesson, which many Baxter characters must learn, that suffering is inherent in the human condition. Like Oedipus, Odysseus, and others, she knows that to be alive is to suffer. She says, 'I see all people as—afflicted.' (p. 6.) Fireman, however, has yet to learn that knowledge. Io finds momentary, if insubstantial, peace, in her physical relationship with Harness, but this liaison is possible precisely because it makes no demands and requires no further commitment. In explaining this to Fireman, she reveals her understanding of the difference between Harness and Fireman, the difference between the committed and the uncommitted, to which she gives fuller expression at the end of the play:

Some people stay in their place. They don't move except when—except at the end. I've seen my brother digging out rabbit burrows—he's a farmer, you see—he has to. The spade slides down and opens out the little tunnel—so dark, you'd think it was built to last for ever—and there's the rabbit, right at the end, not moving, curled up against the wall. Tom isn't like that. He's a kind of messenger. Both ways. Up and down. Between the dark inside and the cold outside. (p.6.)

After Fireman has interviewed both Harness and Io about the fondling incident, the time changes to evening, and three cleaning women occupy the office. They constitute a comic chorus of Baxter's own invention, having no connection with the chorus which sympathises with Prometheus in Aeschylus. They do, however, guide our response to Fireman, by underlining the negative aspects of the marriage and sexual relationships. These are sterile in almost all their manifestations in the play, with man commonly the impotent partner. This idea relates to the main action by pointing to the reasons, developed later, for Fireman's unsuccessful marriage.

The cleaning women quickly show where Fireman's
educational theory leads one. The 1st Woman speaks of her son's belief that 'You can't get anywhere without education.' (p.9.) For her son, Douglas, education has led to a dedication to material success, which includes a 'lovely house' in Australia, and no 'parcel of kids' to tie him down. This obviously limited view, the inevitable vulgarization of the ideal of economic liberalism, is antithetical to Baxter's view of man's real needs. The 3rd Woman, Granny, is dream-ridden and superstitious, and, thus, for Baxter, is quite possibly closer to the truth than the rationalizing, clock-watching bureaucrat. Granny points to a different set of values:

> Education means the end of religion. All those books... There is no clock. The people who make the books try and tell themselves there is a clock. It makes them feel safer. And all the time there's only God and us. (p.9.)

Fireman's obsession with time and routine are at the basis of the failure in his marriage; he has sought in them protection from the natural, instinctive response to life.

In their own experiences of the marriage relationship, the cleaning women make clearer what has gone wrong in Fireman's case, and develop the Baxter theme of failure in modern marriage, which receives more particular attention in Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party. A natural, organic attitude towards the sexual relationship has been twisted into a vengeful, castrating form in the 2nd and 3rd Women, Ivy and Granny respectively. In Ivy's estimation, 'all men are pigs', and she resents her second husband's sexual demands: 'I didn't get married just to get mauled about.' (p.9.) Granny is equally castrating, but in a different way, in her attitude towards her husband and other men as dependent children. One's responsibility is to be patiently forbearing, and reach the end of life with one's wedding ring intact. The male dependence is expressed by Granny, in a witty speech reminiscent of Jaques' ages of man speech in As You Like It:
You see them quiet in their bassinettes. And then they start yelling all of a sudden and they look ugly. Sheer bad temper! And then when they're older, it's this and that - a pound for the pictures, Mother, and the dirty clothes on the washhouse floor - up all hours and never a word of thanks. And later on the big ideas - guns and boomerangs - nothing will content them. And at the last you have to change the sheets for them - the same little old ugly face looking up at you from the pillow - not wanting to be quiet! Asking, asking, asking. And when you bury them, they come back in your dreams - 'Roll over in the bed, Agnes, I'm cold. Give me a piece! Give me a pound! Give me a kiss!' I've carried the lot of them on my back - for sixty years, and I'm tired of it. (pp. 7-8)

The castrating effects of marriage are related to the main action of the play through Fireman's relationship with his wife, and its contribution to his present state. Instead of facing and coming to terms with his failure to establish a satisfactory sexual relationship with her, he has simply sublimated his natural sexual drive in giving himself to his bureaucratic occupation. There is an implication here, that the male-dominated bureaucracies partially owe their perpetuation to the impoverished personal life of those involved in them.

After the first appearance of the cleaning women, the time changes again, to the following morning. A young policeman, Constable Power, enters the office to inform Fireman that he has overseen Harness and Io engaged in sexual intercourse in the office on the previous evening. Here, Baxter allows his own social prejudices to intrude beyond 'gross satire' even, to the point where his policeman is a caricature which can not be taken seriously in any respect. As with Io, Baxter has Power working at incompatible levels; his name suggests that he is the symbolic representative of the bureaucratic social order which is under attack in the play, yet he is also the realistic type, for Baxter, of the Irish Catholic Puritan cop. In fact, Power is drawn as an insensitive and inexperienced young man, who can not refrain from calling Mrs Mulligan 'mother', as he speaks to her. In this first meeting with Mrs Mulligan, the action of the play virtually
stops while the playwright takes the opportunity to attack what he sees as some of the inadequacies of the New Zealand police force. The playwright himself intrudes, with no dramatic necessity, in statements such as the following:

I'm always suspicious of a man whose shoes aren't brushed - if he doesn't look after himself, then he'll get into trouble some other way - sooner or later. Or if he has a stubble - I arrested one man the other day just because he had a black stubble - and we got him on three charges - bad language, resisting arrest, and loitering with intent to commit a felony - (p.11.)

After the policeman has made his report to Fireman, the latter has successive dialogues with Mrs Mulligan and Harness, in which an increased awareness of his own condition becomes apparent. Fireman's first reaction to the policeman's report, expressed to Mrs Mulligan, still suggests his belief that order can be imposed on the natural disorder and chaos of experience:

There's no loyalty - no decency! This branch could be an island - an island of decency and order - it's being swamped! I built it up. I turned it into something worthwhile. I wanted us to have quality! Not for myself - for the children - for the teachers. A cell of good living in a corrupt society... (p.13.)

Mrs Mulligan responds maternally to Fireman, and, in her response, she makes clearer what, for Baxter, are the opposites of natural warm reaction, and the 'politeness' which is the death of feeling. She claims that the incident involving Harness and Io was simply the natural eruption of feeling, which is repressed in the bureaucratic organization. Such a situation, she believes, would not occur on a farm, where one finds a natural acceptance of sexual activity. But it is difficult to take seriously the suggestion, which Baxter gives her, that on a farm Io would help Harness 'take the cow to the bull, and there'd be no trouble.' (p.14.) Contrasted with the acceptance of the normal sexual drive, is Mrs Mulligan's description of
the 'politeness' which kills feeling and the natural response. Baxter distinguishes between politeness of this sort, and what he believes is true courtesy, in Autumn Testament: 'Politeness is a different thing from courtesy. Politeness may come from fear. Courtesy always comes from love. A courteous man may swear at his friend either to make a strong point or to put him at ease.'

It is the politeness which fears real feeling which in Baxter's mind, permeates government department and classroom. Speaking of the department, Mrs Mulligan says, 'It's the whole place, sir! It drives the lot of you crazy... Oh, it's not in the body, it's in the mind. It's a matter of politeness....' (p.14.) And referring to the classroom, she speaks again of the same danger: 'It's the teaching, sir. They've got to be polite with the children — nasty polite, often enough, not nice polite — and it gets to be a habit. And if you can't break it, then it kills you....' (p.14.)

In the ensuing dialogue with Harness, Fireman displays a significant change in attitude, and attributes some of that change to Mrs Mulligan:

Tom, for the first time in thirty years, I reckon I've seen a small glimpse of light... As if I'd been living in the dark, and got so used to it, I didn't notice it was dark — and then the door opened a crack — and I could see the bloody dust and cobwebs! I'll admit Mrs Mulligan had something to do with it. She spoke up for you and Ic. (p.15.)

At this stage, it is his concept of his work which he comes to question; he has not yet faced the basic reason for the more crucial personal anxiety which he has experienced. As far as his work is concerned, he describes to Harness a dream which he has had since their first conversation; on one side, he saw 'an old teacher with a hard face sitting beside me. He was talking about education. The way it helps people to be themselves....' (p.16.)

9 p.44.
other side, he could see boys and girls playing on 'the
rock of puberty':

Every now and then I'd hear a scream. And a body
would hurtle down the face of the rock. A boy.
Or else a girl in a black-and-white gym dress.
The rock was twice as high as this building. Some
of them got up and walked away. Some had to crawl
away... I knew I hated every bit of it. The talk
of education - the kids pushing one another off
the rock - the absolute bull-shit! - the concealed
sadism - (p.16.)

Fireman has perceived that an education which takes no
account of individual needs and human feeling is unsatisfactory.
However, his disillusionment is at a surface level; he is
thinking still within his own frame of reference, and is not
called on to question the assumptions underlying his theory
of education.

Following this dialogue, the cleaning women reappear
and are this time interrupted by the policeman. The women
are now in the role of the avenging Erinyes - made unnecessarily
explicit in the 3rd Woman's words, 'We are the Gentle Ones'
(p.20.) - and carry out a symbolic castration of the policeman.
Power enters to investigate the disturbance in the office
where the women are drinking sherry and singing after completing
their work. The 2nd Woman plays out with Power the type of
situation she creates with her own husband, recalling what
was said about the sexual relationship in the introductory
chapter. Having behaved thoroughly seductively, the 2nd Woman
turns on Power and accuses him of making advances, denying
his aroused sexuality. For his part, Power has been ready
enough to co-operate despite his earlier moralistic attitude.
(This foreshadows the moralistic John Ennis's readiness to
dance, in Mr. O'Dwyer's Dancing Party.) The 2nd Woman ties
an apron around Power's waist and the three women advance
on him with a pair of scissors. After circling around him,
they lift the apron and symbolically castrate him. By this
action, the women take their revenge on the representative
of a bureaucratic system, (the *symbolic* Power in this case),
which has denied the natural chaos. In the cleaning women,
as suggested before, this stifled force emerges in a twisted vengeful form. This compares with its sublimation in Miss Stevens and Mrs Mulligan. In Io's case, the fact that she is pursued and 'stung' by her sexuality suggests that the instinctive drive is not allowed its natural expression in her either.

The culmination of the movement towards self-awareness in Fireman is reached in the ensuing conversation, the last main dialogue in the play, between Fireman and Io. He now faces squarely his part of the responsibility for his unsatisfactory relationship with his wife, Ursula. The stifled creative drive seems to have affected Ursula differently from the other women in the play. She has simply turned in on herself, effective communication with her husband long cut off. Fireman now understands and admits to what happened: 'I'd seen the look in her face - as if she was dying inside a cell - and I hadn't the strength to break the wall down... Politeness! Politeness killed her!' (p.22.)

Io is fully in touch with her feelings, and, with her compassion, she is able to see beneath Fireman's shell, and feels acutely his deep-seated guilt and pain. When Fireman suggests to her that they could come together, Io perceives clearly that any such relationship between them is impossible: 'When you kissed me then, I thought - "Oh yes. I could stay here. I'd be happy." But I knew it was nonsense. It was the gadfly talking.' (p.21.) Io knows she can find no fulfilment in any relationship which Fireman could offer her, and she understands, in any case, that Fireman has to come to terms with his new-found understanding of his own situation, and will not find any ultimate satisfaction in escape into another. As Io points out to Fireman, 'You can't be free by becoming someone else.' (p.22.) Io makes clearer now the contrast which she indicated earlier between the uncommitted Harness and the committed Fireman:
If you're on a railway station - and you see the trains coming and going - but you're not on any of them - it's easy to meet somebody else - you feel - you can do what you like... If you're on a train, it's quite different.... (pp.20-1.)

To Fireman's protestations that he is not committed, Io replies, 'Oh yes - you are - whether you like it or not. You've started out and you can't go back.' (p.21.) Fireman finally appears to understand this also, when he says, shortly after, to Io, 'I belong here then. Nailed to the bloody rock!' (p.22.)

Fireman's development leads him to this place of self-awareness. He has faced the non-feeling 'politeness' in himself, the nasty destructive politeness of which Mrs Mulligan speaks. This was the politeness which was the death of his marriage with Ursula. In the introduction to this thesis, Baxter was quoted as saying that one is 'compelled by the Fall to regard the loved one as a betrayer or a victim and judge.' In Fireman's case, his guilt derives from the fact that he has seen Ursula as the victim of his inability to break through into the cell in which she is slowly dying. The same inability to break this 'politeness' is the basis of his own increasing involvement in the bureaucratic order. The education system, of which Fireman is part, is part of the bureaucratic order; it worships the acquisition of knowledge - 'the lens of abstract thought', which works against man's need to be in contact with his own true nature. Fireman now rejects that theory of education. However, he accepts resignedly what he sees as inevitable, that he is committed to a particular path from which it is no longer possible to depart. Baxter's own words about the protection which habit offers apply well to Fireman's situation:

Once it seemed simple to remove the accumulated mummy-cloths of habit from the spirit that lay under them like a sleeping child, just ready to wake. One
had only to reach out and find another being in the same predicament. But now the scales are reversed. Habit is the strength of the old. And the spirit must remain in that cocoon till the Judgement Day.\[10]

The hope for Fireman lies in the fact that, as does Prometheus, he at least now knows the nature of the vulture eating at his liver. He is in possession of the secret which may one day topple the Zeus of modern society: that change depends on each individual's awareness of the chaos at the heart of his existence, and of the suffering which is inherent in the human condition. In the meantime, like Shelley's Prometheus, he can only await, in hope, the day when the tyranny of Zeus will lead to his inevitable downfall, and a new social order of peace and harmony may be born, as happens in Prometheus Unbound.

The parallel here with Baxter's own experience is interesting. At the time he is writing the play, he is feeling very much part of the system, which he is criticizing, and is still living in a conventional domestic situation. Perhaps, like Fireman, he can see no way out of the commitment which binds him. The break, for Baxter, from the ties of work and family comes only some time later, and is not foreshadowed in this play.

The Bureaucrat is a negative play; there seems little hope for the future, either for Fireman or for the society of which he is part. The only character in the play who is free in any real sense is Harness, and one can scarcely value his uncommitted scepticism. Io is far from free, driven as she is by an unsympathetic society and/or a personal crisis. When she speaks of the gap inside her, which only God could fill, she hints at a search for spiritual values, indicated also by Granny, but this hint is given no prominence in the structure of the play. And, as has been shown, Fireman's awareness of his situation is only the first step towards

10 The Man on the Horse, p.153.
freedom - it has not enabled him to step outside the system.

Despite the fact that much of The Bureaucrat reflects deeply felt personal experience on Baxter's part - and possibly partly for that reason - the play does not hold together. It suffers from a structural incoherence, which comes partly from an ambiguous use of the Greek myth. The myth is used ironically at least for a start; Fireman is chained to his desk for a wrong ideal, and without understanding his own real motives. He does not possess the secret, which is Prometheus' weapon against Zeus. When he finally achieves knowledge of himself and his situation, Baxter does not make at all clear what use he is to make of that knowledge. Therefore, it is uncertain how we are to regard Fireman at the end of the play - whether, in fact, we are to regard him ironically in that last dialogue. The inference that Fireman will carry the secret, as in Shelley, until Zeus himself hopefully falls, is certainly not made explicit.

Apart from Fireman, Io Gould is the only other character with explicit connections with Aeschylus' play. But her relationship with the mythical Io is not an organic one; the superficial connections which Baxter draws often brink on the absurd. The difficulty with Io points to the whole uneasy association of symbolism and realism in The Bureaucrat; it is a problem: which is inherent in the importation of myth into a modern realistic setting, and which will be considered in more detail in the conclusion to this thesis. In The Bureaucrat, it is most evident in the symbolic status which Io and Power are asked to assume, and the symbolic actions which occur in relation to them. Given the realistic modern office setting and situation, actions such as Io's dance, and the castration of Power, seem improbable and strangely out of place.

The other dramatic problems, which recur in Baxter's plays occur also in The Bureaucrat. The same mingling of symbolism and realism, which creates difficulties in the action of the
play, also presents problems in the language. An effective naturalistic use of bureaucratic language for satiric purposes in Fireman's early speeches, is spoiled by the improbable introduction of Harness's 'street language' into the situation. But there is inconsistency also in the development of the language of a single character, as in Fireman's abrupt change from bureaucratic language to a metaphorical rhetoric in describing his and Harness's role as the fire-bringers.

The other recurring problem, evident also here, is Baxter's readiness to be diverted into irrelevant social preaching. This tendency contributes to the structural incoherence of the play, as for example, when Baxter's particular social views intrude irrelevantly in Power's description of his work as a policeman. This happens, also, when Baxter digresses into particular social causes for the actions of characters, such as Io's experience with her bikie friend. In fact, his very close involvement with a number of the issues he raises in the play - government departments, classrooms, domestic commitment, and so on - prevent selective detachment. As used by Baxter, Aeschylus's _Prometheus Bound_ does not convey that genuine deeply sensed pattern which could order the situations and experiences being described in _The Bureaucrat_.

Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, although put in a modern setting, closely follows the structure and movement of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, and is linked to that play by a number of explicit character parallels. The central conflict in Euripides' play is between Dionysus, one of the Olympian gods, and Pentheus, ruler of Thebes, who has challenged Dionysus' authority.

Disguised in human form, and accompanied by a band of Asian bacchic devotees, who are the Chorus, Dionysus has entered the city of Thebes. Because his mother's sisters have claimed that he is not the son of Zeus, Dionysus has initiated his revenge by driving the Theban women in a state of frenzy from the city. He has resolved that Thebes and Pentheus will accept his authority as a god. However, Pentheus not only refuses to worship Dionysus, but imprisons him as well, despite the warnings of the blind seer, Teiresias, who realizes that 'this god is a prophet; for the Bacchic ecstasy and frenzy contains a strong element of prophecy.' (p.190.)

Like Teiresias, Cadmus, the former ruler and grandfather of Pentheus, goes along with Dionysus, but in Cadmus' case, it is with motives of political expediency, as can be seen in his sophism in discussion with Pentheus. (pp. 191-2.) Pentheus himself is intransigent, the first dialogue between Dionysus and him revealing that there is no chance of compromise. Pentheus' moralistic attitude, especially towards what he unjustifiably believes is the women's lechery, veils his deep ignorance of his own nature. As Dionysus tells him, 'You do not know what life you live, or what you do, or who you are.' (p.197.)

This absence of self-knowledge makes Pentheus vulnerable to Dionysus' revenge, which follows on Dionysus' realization that his rival will not the changed. Pentheus is an easy victim, and the abdication of his own personality...

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is marked by his ready acceptance both of Dionysus' offer to show him the Theban women, and of the condition that he disguise himself in the woman's clothes of a Bacchic reveller. The god achieves complete ascendancy, and a messenger carries the news of Pentheus' death at the hands of the Theban women, including his own mother, Agave.

Dionysus' remorseless and pitiless nature are demonstrated not only in his revenge on Pentheus, but in the tragic recognition that Agave is forced to make, that she has carried her own son's head back to the city. In interpreting the significance of The Bacchae for Euripides himself, and his audience, William Arrowsmith states:

> The divinity of Dionysus represents... the incarnate life-force itself, the uncontrollable chaotic eruption of nature in individuals and cities... As such, he is amoral, neither good nor bad, a necessity capable of blessing those who (like the Asian Bacchantes) accept him, and of destroying or maddening those who (like Pentheus) deny him.2

This interpretation of Dionysus, as a necessity in his own nature which man ignores or denies at his own risk, points to the main action in Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, a version of the Euripidean play which uses a contemporary New Zealand setting and characters. The central movement in Baxter's play is towards John Ennis's forced recognition of the chaos at the heart of his existence, and of the void in the Western culture of which he is part. There seems to be an important distinction in Baxter's play between the meaning of 'chaos' and the meaning of 'void'. Awareness of the chaos beneath the surface of one's life is the prerequisite of any growth or change, whereas the void, at least as used in Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, is simply the emptiness and absence of meaning which Tom O'Dwyer later asserts is created by New Zealand society. Far from accommodating growth, as does an awareness of the chaos, the void is

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the absence of feeling which prevents it. The claim which Dionysus makes to Pentheus, 'You do not know what life you live, or what you do, or who you are', is the same assertion which Tom O'Dwyer makes to John. The main symptom of John's lack of self-knowledge is in his relationship with his wife, and it is by his wife's riding of him – both figuratively and literally – that he is made to face reality. Tom, the 'disguised' representative of the chaotic life force itself (symbolized as the god of the dance), acts as a catalyst in this process of change. Also set against John's bourgeois self-satisfaction is the sense of tradition, and rich cultural heritage, represented by the elderly Jewish neighbour, Ephraim Fiengold, whose age and blindness identify him with Teiresias in The Bacchae.

The first scene consists of a dialogue between Ephraim and John, who are playing chess at John's home. Two of the principal themes of the play are introduced. The first of these is the contrast between the bourgeois materialism of New Zealand suburban life, of which John is clearly part, and the rich European civilization, from which Ephraim comes. John, who is a builder, speaks with pride of his new home built on the edge of a cliff, and of the suburbs of glass and concrete boxes built over sanitation holes, suburbs which he has helped to establish:

The first thing we put in the ground is the drains – the sanitation comes before the house – without sanitation you can't build. Each house is built round a concrete hole in the ground. That's the way it's done – a glass and concrete box built round a hole – you've got to have the sanitation – and then the timber goes up, and then the roof, and then the furnishings. And the time comes, where you had a dirty big useless patch of scrub, you've got five hundred people living in their houses – TV sets, hot and cold water, electric blankets, booze in the cupboard – that's civilisation! (p.7.)

3 All page references are to 'Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party,' TS, (James K. Baxter papers, Hocken Library, University of Otago).
John's concrete holes are a symbol for that cultural void, over which, Ephraim and Tom recognize, the New Zealander builds his protective shelter of material possessions. Baxter himself speaks ex cathedra in Ephraim's response to John's claims:

You plant shrubs - and they grow up into trees - but still there is only the wind from the mountain whistling outside. And the people stare all night at the little TV screen and say nothing to each other. It is the country of death! No real words! No people! No voices! The synagogues are empty! The churches are empty! The women do not want to have children! .... (p.8.)

For Ephraim, New Zealand is 'the country of death', and at the basis of that death is the isolation of the individual, and the social disintegration, which have resulted from the absence of any real communication. Ephraim points to the contrast in his own experience in Europe:

In the old times, in Vienna, we would bring out our chairs on the street - in front of the houses - we would sit and talk together - about politics - or whether one wine was better than another wine - or the beauty of some actress - or even the little devil of gossip whispering about how one man's wife had fallen in love with another man - but the talk was good - (p.7.)

Ephraim has lived fully as part of a rich cultural heritage, which he spends much of his time recreating in his mind. Wisdom for Ephraim is contained in the accumulated knowledge and traditions of the Jewish people. His counterpart in The Bacchae, Teiresias, speaks also for Ephraim when he states:

We entertain no theories or speculations in divine matters. The beliefs we have received from our ancestors - beliefs as old as time - cannot be destroyed by any argument, nor by any ingenuity the mind can invent. (p.187.)

This first theme which is the contrast between New Zealand bourgeois materialism, and a rich European civilization,
is related to the main action of the play only insofar as it 'places' John. His blindness to the void in the culture, of which Ephraim speaks, is symptomatic of, and also the result of, his blindness to himself.

The second theme introduced in Scene One is more integral. John speaks to Ephraim of his wife's joining of Tom O'Dwyer's expressive dance group, and so introduces the question of the marriage relationship. John has determined to use force in his fight against his wife's wish to have the group meet in their house. But it already appears that John's rigidity masks a basic weakness. Ephraim understands this when he suggests that John should be more accommodating of his wife's desires. But John replies: 'Not me. I've been "accommodating" too long. Each time I've let her win hands down! This time I'm going to dig my toes in.' (p.9.) The situation, and John's response to it, mirror Pentheus' assertion that it is 'past all bearing if we are to let the women so defy us!', (p.205.) and his refusal to heed the warning of Teiresias: 'Come Pentheus, listen to me. You rely on force, but it is not force that governs human affairs.' (p.191)

However, there is a suggestion in this dialogue of something more fundamentally wrong in the state of marriage itself. It relates to the 'inevitable breakdown in the sexual relationship' discussed in the introductory chapter. In the first place, there is something not entirely natural about the completely exclusive relationship between two people. Ephraim, who seems to embody the wisdom of experience and tradition for Baxter in this play, and who claims with evidence to have loved his wife - note his frequent references to her death, and his expectations of rejoining her - states that fidelity between husband and wife can even be destructive
of the relationship:

A man who is faithful to his wife is a man who has no dreams. He is like a child resting in the shade of its mother. A woman will always wonder, when her husband is faithful to her, whether it is because he likes only her, or because he is too stupid and ugly for another woman to want him. (p.9.)

Later, when John reveals his own marital infidelity, he speaks of his resulting strong feelings of guilt, despite the fact that the infidelity might not have been a bad thing in itself:

All the same - looking back - maybe I wasn't such a bastard after all. It's as if I was fighting to keep myself alive - partly for Mildred as well as myself - though most people would reckon that was quite barmy... If a man wakes up in the morning, ten thousand times, feeling like shagging his wife - and he knows there's not a bloody chance of it - in the end it stops hurting - it just dries up on you - (p.34.)

The blame for John's infidelity is thus attributed entirely to Mildred's failure to acknowledge his physical needs. Baxter himself seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards this matter. Certainly the unfaithful male is not to be judged harshly, as Mildred judged John - 'Mildred found out about it - there was a hell of a stink' (p.33.) - as his actions reveal only an understandable human frailty. The truly loving wife may well understand her husband's frailty in this respect. The only thing, which the husband may be justifiably blamed for, is his failure to consider the hurt which his wife may suffer by his action. Speaking of this matter in 'Conversation with an Ancestor', Baxter says:

It does not signify a fault against chastity - that could be accepted within the general tolerance of the tribe extended to human weakness - but a fault against the ancient tribal charity and responsibility. It is hard to see how men and women can have anything to do with each other without some kind of betrayal - to leave one for another, to abandon the one who depends on you to her own resources. The young are more careless in these matters because they cannot see the depth or extend of the wounds they inflict. 4

4 The Man on the Horse, p.32.
Also, as far as modern marriages are concerned, there is a hint here, to be developed later, that women do not really want the emancipation which they demand. Ephraim states:

To live with a modern woman a man has to become a woman. There is no way out of it. They are all emancipated. If a man does not agree with them, they will look for a divorce. If he does agree, then he is like a woman living with another woman. (pp.8-9.)

When John says, 'They don't like that either', Ephraim agrees, 'No. But there is no way out.' (p.9.)

Scene Two begins with a quarrel between John and his wife, Mildred. Their unsatisfactory marriage appears, at this stage, to be based on the related facts of Mildred's financial independence, and a failure to come to terms with their sexual relationship. Mildred goads John with his supposed affairs, while John shows his underlying resentment of Mildred's financial independence: 'We don't all come from Remuera - with Daddy's pocket book'. (p.15.) The quarrel is interrupted by the arrival of John's young draughting student, Sylvia King, who is also one of the dance group. Alone with Sylvia, after the departure of his wife, John feels an immediate release of tension, due apparently to Sylvia's youth and the fresh, natural warmth of her response to him. The implication is plain that these qualities can not survive in the marriage situation; in John's words to Sylvia:

The trouble is, in the long run, marriage cuts your balls right off - you can't go up to your wife and say - 'Look, let's go upstairs and hit the sack together.' And maybe by twelve o'clock at night you just want to get to sleep. (p.19.)

This shows the castrating effect of the state of marriage itself, but also (bearing in mind Mildred's middle age) further evidence of Baxter's theme of the 'decay of female sexuality into a malicious energy', what Baxter in 'The Man on the Horse', calls 'the inevitable loss of fertility and death of innocence'.

5 Ibid., p.115.
Sylvia still possesses both, but John has no illusions that they would be carried long into marriage; he says to Sylvia: 'At first you'd reckon it was fine - but after a while - ... When the bad weather comes, we're always on our own.' (p.19.)

John and Sylvia are interrupted by Tom O'Dwyer. The final of the three dialogues in Scene Two follows, this time between John and Tom. O'Dwyer, an Irishman in exile, and the disguised god in Baxter's play, is also in some measure the detached artist. The latter role, in which he speaks for Baxter himself, becomes explicit in the final scene of the play. Baxter's description of an artist, in 'Conversation with an Ancestor', could be applied here to Tom:

You could call an artist a tribesman cut off from his tribe - perhaps they never existed; perhaps they did exist, when men were aware of a sacred relation between themselves as a local interdependent group, and the life of nature, that other half of the creation which passively or actively confronted them.

Tom represents something of the mystery and ritual in his own Celtic background, the tribal life, from which he is now cut off. He speaks of the wedding and funeral ritual at his home in Ireland, and carries his equivalent of Dionysus' thyrsus in his magic pine cone. In The Bacchae, Teiresias speaks of Dionysus as a prophet, 'for the Bacchic ecstasy and frenzy contain a strong element of prophecy.' (p.190.) Tom also, in keeping with Baxter's concept of the function of an artist, has prophetic attributes, but in this dialogue they are limited to vague warnings to John: 'Be careful, Mr Ennis. You mightn't have it all your own way... A thing can happen that's not meant to happen' (pp.23-4.)

In Scene Three, the five women, supervised by Tom, are engaged in their creative dance activity. It is difficult to take their fantasies seriously, especially when the comparison with The Bacchae, and the vitality of its Bacchic devotees, is made. However, this scene does develop the idea of female emancipation, which is closely
related to the main theme of the marriage relationship
In Liz's and Rona's dances, the motivating fear seems
to be that of an isolation which is not really desired.
Tom, later in the play, suggests this when he states:
'The women also find their weakness - when they stand
apart, each on her own.' (p.48.) Liz speaks of being
locked inside herself, and of reaching out for another
person who turns out to be only a projection of herself.
It is difficult to break through the reflecting mirror
to reach the 'self' of another person. Rona, also, wishes
to reach out to another person, in her case to the
conventional tall and dark, handsome man. A puritanically
based fear of the sexual relationship inhibits her; as he
dances with her, she recognizes the obviously phallic
horns of the devil on his head. Rona resembles the gaunt
housewife in Baxter's poem in Pig Island Letters, in
which he writes of the love which 'Pig Islanders' dread:

Love is not valued much in Pig Island
Though we admire its walking parody,
That brisk gaunt woman in the kitchen
Feeding the coal range, sullen
To all strangers, lest one should be
Her antique horn-red Satan.7

In Emily's and Mildred's dances, the motivating fear
seems to be the loss, which was mentioned before, of
innocence and/or fertility. In Emily's dance, a man who
looks like the sun touches her forehead, her breast and
her womb, so that she is filled with 'crystal fire'. But
then she changes, and although there are associated regrets,
she is not entirely sad about the loss of such a freedom:

I begin to change - it's sad to be changing, but
not really sad - I'm changing into a tree - my
feet are taking root - my hands are turning into
leaves - now I can move my body and my hands but
I can't move my feet - (p.25.)

In Mildred's dance, she returns completely to a state of
innocent and dependent, childhood, in a world of sweet-
smelling apples and falling rose petals, and a granny whom
she never again intends to leave.

7 Pig Island Letters (London: Oxford University Press, 1966),
p.4.
Sylvia's dance is different from the others; she enjoys her freedom and isolation. In her fantasy, the moon enters inside her and, as Diana the huntress, urges her 'to hunt' and 'to run'. Sylvia's uninhibited joy in the 'chase' contrasts with the fear and disillusion which exists in the marriage relationships of the other women, and particularly in the main relationship between John and Mildred.

The scene ends with the women performing their 'wild women dance' in which they move in patterns across the stage. The stage directions suggest that 'These patterns may have some of the quality of the weaving and intermingling of birds in flight.' (p.29.) In that image is the freedom of flight but also the flocking together, which offers protection and prevents isolation. During the dance, the women call to Io, who (as was noted in the discussion of The Bureaucrat) represents the fertility, the female productive force, which the older women lose.

In Scene Four, Tom returns to the Ennis's home to apologise to John for his earlier call. His false display of neighbourly mateship achieves its end of gaining John's trust; just as Pentheus is vulnerable to Dionysus' plan for revenge, so is John an easy victim for Tom. In both cases, it is the lack of self-knowledge on the part of the victim that makes them easy targets. John quickly reveals to Tom the basis of the failure of his marriage with Mildred. Their sterile sexual relationship seems to be related partially to Mildred's financial independence. She has gained the upper hand, in a battle of the sexes, and 'wears the pants', as she later reveals herself when she demands John's trousers as her personal property. John attributes Mildred's 'high-handedness' to her financial independence:
Mildred has the money - her old man has a ton of it stacked away - he owns half the crockery shops in the country - ironmongery and so on - Mildred has her own income - and all this - (he indicates the house) - without her money we couldn't do it - he owns more than half the shares in my business. It makes Mildred a bit high-handed. I've seen her even question what I spend my money on - how many cigarettes I smoke - that kind of thing - (p.32.)

John's weakness is in allowing himself to be kept in this way; he has lost the initiative, and allowed himself to be manipulated by Mildred in other areas, such as taking responsibility for their daughter's future. But, more importantly, it has extended to their sexual relationship which is now conducted solely on Mildred's terms. There is an additional implication that failure in this area is inherent in the state of modern Western marriage. John speaks of the change which occurred after he and Mildred were married:

Sex was no trouble - and when I first met Mildred, it was me that did the job. If I said - 'O.K. honey, we're going to the flat' - and then she'd come - she'd do what I said - and her old man didn't even have a look in... But as soon as we got married, it began to change. First Mildred was worried about the kid - then about the house - everything else came first - it's as if sex got pushed off the end of the table. At first I used to get angry - then, I suppose I accepted it - the Saturday night arrangement, after a party maybe - but it was always Mildred who had the stage set. It was my job to co-operate. (p.33.)

John tells Tom of his subsequent affairs, which alternated with attempts to settle down to be 'the good husband and father', and the guilt associated with these affairs. The outcome is that he has allowed himself to believe that he no longer has any urgent sexual need: 'I've given up fighting... I've become a good man - that's the real trouble - it's the game of cops and robbers - I've been pushed over to the side of the cops....' (p.34.) This belief that his marriage has castrated him is an illusion; his sexual need has been sublimated in his occupation, and his chase after material success. He has rationalized
this passive acceptance away by blaming Mildred's financial independence for their marriage failure. It is this passive acceptance which Tom sees as his necessary function to change. His role as catalyst in this process becomes clear in the final scene. His success at this point is measured by John's readiness to go along with him, and at the end of the scene, he even has John dancing.

In Scene Five, the theme of marriage is further developed, this time from the women's point of view, as they talk together while awaiting Tom's arrival. Despite their lack of respect for their husbands, who, they believe, have each withdrawn from the marriage relationship in some way, each displays a proprietary interest in her own husband. In Liz's words:

I think a husband's rather like a dress. You know it's there, hanging in the cupboard - it cost you far too much for you ever to want to get rid of it - so you take in the seams - and you lift the hem - and then you let out the seams - and you drop the hem - and still it doesn't suit you! (p.38.)

The women appear to prefer the security of remaining within the marriage situation, while complaining about it, to the alternative of being single. John is the butt of Mildred's jokes about his supposed impotence, - 'I doubt if he's really capable any longer. I used to think it was me - and being a man, he let me go on thinking that...' (p.38.) - but she objects to the other women implying the same thing. For Mildred, marriage is a trap which one falls into, partly because of social pressure:

Sometimes I wonder why the hell I ever did get married. It's a kind of trap. You don't want to be left on the shelf. And you think - 'Maybe he'll be different from the others' - but of course he's no bloody different! (p.40.)

It seems that her 'emancipation' is a compensatory thing to relieve an unsatisfactory situation. Sylvia understands this when she says that emancipation is 'not in the right
direction'. (p.40.) When a woman is single she is not free, as men will use her and leave her at will, but when she becomes married she takes all the initiative, and as Sylvia observes 'The men don't like it.' (p.40.)

At this point in their conversation, the women are interrupted by the return of Tom with John, whom he has now made completely drunk. After John passes out on the floor, the women continue with their Io dance. When he gets in their way, the women who are now fully aroused become avenging furies and attack him, pulling off his clothes. Finally when he becomes conscious again, Mildred mounts him and rides on his back around the room, performing literally the metaphorical riding which has been the pattern of their marriage. In doing so, she breaks his back, the stiffness and soreness of which seems to have been a symbol for his rigid, authoritarian concept of his Kiwi manhood. As Tom explains later to Ephraim: 'He was unable to bend. If a man can bend like the grass, the strongest wind will never blow him over.' (p.47.) The state of John's back has been a measure of his progress on the journey to this point. When his rigidity bends a little, at the end of Scene Four, and he begins dancing with Tom, he himself says: 'I reckon you've cured my back!' (p.36.) And, conversely, when his wife is 'riding' him in Scene Two, he complains that his back is hurting him. Now that it is completely broken at the hands of his wife, there is hope that he will act to change the marriage, and, by extension, the rest of his life. Like Pentheus, John has denied the feminine part of his nature, the irrational Dionysiac necessity in himself, which was clearly manifested in his sublimated sexuality, his readiness to dance and his drunkenness. In this respect, John has been forced to make the same recognition which Pentheus had to make after being delivered into the hands of the fully roused Theban women. John's recognition is one positive result of the 'malicious energy' of Baxter's
roused women. The destructiveness of John's and Mildred's failed marriage is the force which may in turn help to destroy the wrong individual and social values which went in to the making of the marriage and its subsequent failure.

Tom's part in John's self-discovery is made explicit in Scene Six, the final scene, in which Tom and Ephraim converse on the morning after the events described in the earlier scenes. As suggested earlier, Tom is the artist who claims to perceive clearly the chaos which is at the heart of the life of the individual and the society. It is the chaos, which Baxter speaks of, out of which art is born:

Art, the mainstay of culture, is not bred by culture but by its opposite: that level of hardship or awareness of moral chaos where the soul is too destitute to be able to lie to itself. Tom understands this when he speaks of 'The chaos that comes out of the sea - the chaos that was there before the houses were built', (p.48.) and is inside each individual. Tom's personal affirmation in the face of this chaos is his dance, the natural expression of the Dionysiac life force. As in The Bureaucrat, bourgeois materialism and bureaucratic processes are shown to be empty in themselves, and, in fact, veil the essential chaos beneath the surface. They are the values by which John Ennis lived, and Tom believes that the crisis which he precipitated was essential for John's own salvation: 'To a man or woman who has been buried alive, calamities are greatly to be desired. Every blow of the hammer on the rock is a blow of deliverance.' (p.48.) Tom sees himself only as the agent of the change in John: 'I led him into the void of his own mind. He was broken by himself - by what he found there. I cannot break anyone.' (p.48.)

8 The Man on the Horse, p.17.
The process, in which Tom is engaged, is essentially destructive, but it is the necessary first step towards change. Tom speaks for Baxter himself, the artist-prophet, in his claim that his work 'is to change the living'. (p.48.) He speaks to Ephraim of the destructive function he is called on to perform, and, in Freudian terms, describes his view of Western society:

Some men were made to build and others to destroy. The past is full of old tombs. They have to be broken, for the people to live again... Money is shit - security is shit - half the marriages are made of shit - the State is shit! You need somebody with a hose to wash it away. (pp.49-50.)

Unfortunately, Baxter obscures the central action, and Tom's part in it, by re-introducing Ephraim. While Ephraim is a suitable foil for Tom's ideas, he introduces another dimension, as in the first scene, which is not related to the main theme. Tom recognizes in Ephraim a moral strength which is belied by his physical weakness and blindness. Like Oedipus, Ephraim has learned that 'A blind man can still see. Sight is a faculty of the mind.' (p.10.) After a lifetime of tragedy and alienation, he can face his own death without flinching - 'The angel of death is also the angel of peace' (p.48.) - and this is one important sign for Baxter that a person has faced the chaos in his own existence. Therefore, this is not entirely unrelated to John's forced discovery of that same chaos.

However, at other places in this final dialogue between Tom and Ephraim, Baxter brings in quite irrelevant material. For example, when Ephraim speaks of the three roads open to the Jew - 'to be assimilated... to be a Jew among the goyim... to be a Jew in Israel' (p.46.) - Baxter's own views intrude quite unnecessarily: 'This war is not entirely good - the Arabs are men, and we have
taken their land - tomorrow they will take it back again." (p.46.)

Also, irrelevantly and incongruously as Howard McNaughton shows, alludes to Adrian Mitchell's "Fifteen Million Plastic Bags", when he has Tom set up his dance against the destructive power of the State, represented by the nuclear bomb:

Somewhere in England, in a vault underground there are thirty million plastic shrouds - neatly packed in bundles of a thousand - thirty million, with half-sized ones for the children - it would have to be plastic, to put them in when they scrape them off the ground. That's what the State has to offer - thirty million plastic shrouds, if the Bomb happens to explode. Wouldn't you say my dance is better than that? (p.49.)

While both Pentheus and John Ennis have been forced to face the necessity within, - 'the incarnate life-force itself, the uncontrollable chaotic eruption of nature in individuals and cities' - in John's case, the necessity has specifically sexual connotations, and the implications of the lesson are quite different for each. Pentheus' primary lesson is one of obedience to the authority of an Olympian god; Tom O'Dwyer's god carries no such authority, and his credibility is very much at stake. Ephraim asks Tom, 'What right have you to make trial of another man's strength?' The question would not be asked of Dionysus, in the world of Euripides' play.

Furthermore, it is not very clear what use John is to make of the lesson he has been made to learn. It may be that Baxter is offering no particular solutions, but only revealing what can happen to individuals and societies who fail to apprehend the vital forces within the self or within the group of selves who make up the society, and pointing in the direction that a solution may be sought. One possible solution, however, is implied in the suggestion that women do not really want the emancipation they have secured, and that they would be happier in their more passive role as wives and mothers. Mildred's financial
independence has made it less likely that she will come to terms with her husband's demands and especially with his sexuality. By stirring up the women, O'Dwyer forces change on the men, and the implication follows that the men may then re-establish their rightful dominance in the marriage relationship. This is the positive effect, mentioned earlier, of the malicious energy. However, there has also been plenty of evidence that the state of marriage itself, in modern Western society, is likely to destroy a successful relationship.

Baxter's judgements are plain at various points in the play, but they do not cohere in a dramatic whole. This lack of coherence comes mainly from his attempt to accommodate too much diverse material in one play. The Dionysiac force, Tom's dance, is set against various targets, such as the destructive violence of the State, which are only marginally related to the main character and action concerning him. In particular, the character of Ephraim, who, McNaughton suggests, was introduced 'to make up for the lack of tragic resonance in John', takes Baxter off at unrelated tangents. Many of Ephraim's sententious speeches are further examples of Baxter's tendency to intrude irrelevantly in the action of the play, and identify with particular points of view expressed by the characters. Ephraim's references to his experiences as a Jew in Vienna during the war, as with the baptism of his child, and as a Jew in exile, have no bearing at all on the main theme of the play. And Baxter's political views on the situation in the Middle East are another such irrelevant intrusion. These examples are part of the major weakness of this play, which is the failure to focus consistently on the central theme.

There is also inconsistency in the language of the play, although it does not come from the use of Greek myth, in this case. Baxter attempts a naturalistic dialogue which is not very successful, mainly for the reason indicated in the introductory chapter, that his natural literary

10 Ibid.
inclinations led him away from this mode towards a poetic metaphorical use of language. The dialogue varies from the sententiousness of much of Ephraim's speech to the affected New Zealand idiom of John Ennis. Perhaps the most effective naturalistic dialogue is in the lively argument in Scene Two, between John and Mildred, but alongside that are the dialogues between John and Ephraim, and John and Tom, where Baxter seems bent on including in John's speeches every available example of Kiwi slang which occurs to him. This is particularly so in Scene Four, when John delivers his embarrassing self-exposure to Tom - an actor would have much difficulty in making John's speeches in that scene realistically convincing.

Finally, the same uneasy mingling of naturalism and symbolism is apparent in the action of this play as in The Bureaucrat. It occurs especially in the scenes involving the women, as when they are possessed by the 'bacchic frenzy' in Scene Five. Their symbolic action in riding and breaking John provides an unreal, if not absurd, climax in what is an ostensibly realistic play. Much of the difficulty is created by Baxter's close structural dependence on Euripides' play, and by the explicit character parallels he draws. His modern equivalents are simply not as impressive as the mythical characters; his equivalent of Dionysus is pale by comparison with the youthful vitality of the Greek god, and certainly has none of his authority, and the dancing women have none of the exuberance of the Bacchic devotees who give so much life to Euripides' play. In fact, the connections with the Greek play are tenuous and overstressed; they are unhelpful in that they do not offer an ultimate significance to Baxter's local themes. In this case, the myth is clearly imposed on, rather than organic to, Baxter's material.
Chapter 5  The Temptations of Oedipus

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* provides Baxter with the mythical framework for *The Temptations of Oedipus*. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus, accompanied by Antigone, approaches his final resting place at the grove of the Furies outside Colonus in Attica. Facing, at that place, deceit, force and persuasion from those who would shift him from his destined path, Oedipus withstands all and is transformed from dependent, blind outcast into a man of superhuman powers, who in death imposes himself on the future and the world of men. This apotheosis is achieved through a series of confrontations which serve as tests for Oedipus. Kitto suggests that 'since the play does not, in the old manner, display the inevitable march of a course of tragic action,... The real meaning must be looked for through the event, not in it; it lies... in the contribution it makes to the presentation of Oedipus.'

As he approaches Colonus, Oedipus realizes that his longed-for death is near; he appears to have become acquiescent in the lessons of pain and time: 'Three masters - pain, time, and the royalty in the blood - / Have taught me patience.' (p.71.) The idea is introduced early that Oedipus' can not be entirely blamed for his acts of incest and murder, but that he is the victim of peculiarly malignant circumstances. While Oedipus will blame others and the gods for his circumstances, Sophocles himself does not question that such circumstances are simply among the hazards inherent in the human condition. In Kitto's words:

> it is the very core of Sophocles' philosophy, that virtue alone cannot assure happiness nor wickedness alone explain disaster. Oedipus has suffered anthropinon ti, one of those things which may happen to us whatever we are. His innocence... is accepted instinctively by the fine intelligence of Theseus, and his acceptance of it is enough for the chorus.  

1 Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, p.410.
3 Kitto, p.418.
The first incident, which serves as a test for Oedipus, in the episodic structure of the play is the arrival of his second daughter, Ismene, who brings news from Thebes that Polynices has been ousted by Eteocles and his uncle, Creon, and is soliciting help in Argos for an attack on Thebes. She carries the further news of the Delphic oracle's indication that Oedipus' body in life or death is necessary for the protection of the Theban people. This is the first indication that Oedipus is to be changed in the hour of his death, and, drawing his thoughts back to his home and the political situation there, he faces the first temptation to turn back.

When Theseus of Athens comes on the scene, his humanity and compassion are immediately obvious; he remains uncorrupted in the world of politics. He refuses to stand in judgement of Oedipus, as he recalls his own past experience and the common fate of all men:

I do not forget my own upbringing in exile,
Like yours, and how many times I battled, alone,
With dangers to my life, in foreign lands.
I could not turn from any fellow-man,
Coming as you come, or deny him help.
I know that I am man; in the days to come
My portion will be as yours, no more, no less. (p.88.)

Theseus clearly understands man's mortality. It is clear that Oedipus has come through his first test when he tells Theseus that his body is a gift to Athens, a gift which will be fully appreciated only when the inevitable rift develops between Athens and Thebes.

Oedipus' next confrontation, in an ascending series, is with the morally unscrupulous Creon, who claims to have come to make amends on behalf of the Theban people for the treatment Oedipus received at their hands. His plea to Oedipus to return to Thebes meets with outright rejection; Oedipus is in no doubt of Creon's duplicity. When deceit proves unsuccessful, Creon reveals his true nature by resorting to threats and violence. Only Theseus' arrival prevents Oedipus being taken hostage along with his daughters. The political ideal which Creon represents is the antithesis of the political moderation of the Athens Sophocles recreates in his mind.
Recapturing, and returning, with Oedipus' daughters, Theseus brings news of Polynices' coming. Any prospect of a meeting with his son is abhorrent to Oedipus, and he agrees to hear him only out of respect for Theseus, and for the god Poseidon, at whose altar Polynices prays. Before Polynices' entry, the Chorus foreshadows Oedipus' death with a song of yearning for the release which death offers; Oedipus is pictured as assailed but not over come by miseries:

Show me the man who asks an over-abundant share
Of life, in love with more, and ill content
With less, and I will show you one in love
With foolishness.
In the accumulation of many years
Pain is in plenty, and joy not anywhere
When life is over-spent.
And at the last there is the same release
When Death appears,
Unheralded by music, dance, or song,
To give us peace. (pp.108-109.)

When Polynices enters and asks his father for assistance in war against Thebes, his hypocrisy is met by Oedipus' total silence. Polynices' unsuccessful attempts to disguise the fact that he wishes to make political use of his father finally draw the full force of Oedipus' wrath. He invokes on his sons the curse that they may die by each other's hand. Oedipus' uncompromising reaction to this final test is what C.M. Bowra calls 'an exhibition of heroic wrath against wickedness. As such it overrules any authority that might be given to the more charitable but merely human Theseus and Antigone.' Oedipus is transformed, achieving here a superhuman stature. His sight is restored — an inward, spiritual vision — and he leads the way into his place of death. The Furies, who await him, are not in this play the avenging Erinyes, but very much the Eumenides, succourers of the oppressed.

Oedipus at Colonus is Sophocles' own testament of old age and approaching death. Oedipus is transcendent in

death, and is far from crushed by his suffering and adversity. The humane Theseus elicits only admiration, and he alone perceives something of the divine significance of Oedipus' passing, a significance not grasped by the daughters of Oedipus, who feel only the depth of their human loss. Unlike their brothers, however, they have stood by their father through his trials. Polynices' and Creon's 'sharp practice', on the other hand, is despicable in Sophocles' eyes, and typical, for him, of the political opportunism of the new Athens.

If Oedipus at Colonus is a personal testament of age and death for its playwright, this is no less true of Baxter's The Temptations of Oedipus, in which Baxter, like Sophocles, makes a close personal identification with his principal character. Baxter retains most of the characters and the Greek mythical structure of the Sophoclean play in a similar examination of the preparation for, and significance of death. The play, the last written by Baxter, was first produced in 1970. By this time, although only in his forties, Baxter is looking on himself as an old man, weary of life and accepting of death as a kind of release, recalling Sophocles' chorus song in Oedipus at Colonus. His own death, in fact, was only some two years in the future. In understanding the significance which Baxter discovers in the myth of Oedipus, it is helpful to consider his own attitude to death as revealed in his other writing, especially in the later poetry and prose in Jerusalem Daybook and Autumn Testament.

According to Baxter, man is not able to face the fact of his own inevitable death, and, until he can, he will not even begin to fully live. Instead of accepting that all life is part of a process of dying, man spends a lifetime warring against, and trying to overcome, death. Norman Brown expresses Baxter's belief precisely:

Humanity is that species of animal that cannot die...
This incapacity to die, ironically but inevitably, throws mankind out of the actuality of living, which for all normal animals is at the same time dying; the result is denial of life... The distraction of human life to the war against death, by the same inevitable irony, results in death's dominion over life. The war against death takes the form of a preoccupation with the past and the future, and the present tense, the tense of life, is lost... Civilized individuality... does not want itself, but wants children, wants heirs, wants an estate. Life remains a war against death - civilized man... is not strong enough to die - and death is over come by accumulating time-defying monuments.\(^9\)

The belief that man must come to face and accept his death, and not devise ways, consciously or not, of evading it, is the understanding which underlies all the following recurring themes in Baxter's work.

First, death is a spiritual journey which one begins at birth and ends with a reunion with the mother in a return to the womb of the earth. In his collection, *Runes*, Baxter speaks of living in 'Exile from the earth I came from',\(^6\) and this is an insistent theme in his poetry from the beginning. At first, it is a vague romantic desire, as in his early volume, *Blow, Wind of Fruitfulness*: The peace of night is yours when earth receives/ Her vain and wandering children to that breast/ Where no man strives nor loves, and nothing grieves.'\(^7\) In a sonnet in the same collection, he begins, 'Earth does at length her own sweet brood devour',\(^8\) and this idea of a return to the mother becomes more specific and more urgent in his later poetry, as in 'The Hollow Place' in *Pig Island Letters*:

Again and again I came  
And was healed of the daftness, the demon in the head  
And the black knot in the thighs, by a silence that  
Accepted all. Not knowing I would come again,  
My coat of words worn very thin,  
Knocking, as if lame,  
With a dry stick on the dumb

\(^5\) pp.284-6.  
\(^7\) p.16.  
\(^8\) p.21.
Door of the ground, and crying out:
'Open, mother. Open. Let me in.'

The relevance of this idea to the Oedipus legend, for Baxter, is plain in his own statement in his introduction to the play: 'Whether or not Freud was in the right of it, the Oedipus tragedy is fundamental to all men, since we marry our mother when we descend into the grave.'

A second element in the preparation for death, one which becomes central in The Temptations of Oedipus, is the necessity for a person to achieve a detachment from life, one which comes partly through material poverty. The acquiring of material possessions is one of the most obvious ways modern man tries to deny his own death. The connection between the journey back to the earth, and the state of detachment is seen in the following verses from Autumn Testament: 'We... will certainly each of us one day return/ To our mother the grave. The darkness of oneself/ Comes from knowing nothing can be possessed.'

Central to Baxter's interest in the death of Oedipus is the state of destitution of Sophocles' character as he approaches Colonus. For Baxter, this is a clear sign of his spiritual availability and his acceptance that 'nothing can be possessed'. In the first place, one only begins to develop one's spiritual awareness by a self-emptying which makes one accessible to God:

One thing Te Atua (God) told me, among several I need not mention, when he gripped my soul as the hawk grips the rabbit -
'Be te tutua' - 'Be a nobody' - 'Be that chaos and void on which Te Wairua Tapu can rest.'

And in his poem, 'In Praise of the Taniwha', which concludes Jerusalem Daybook, Baxter ends: 'Therefore, great angel, bless us, bring us to Te Whaea, to the Mother of all men, to the Void and the Beginning, - only the very poor have

9 p.31.
10 SWTO, p.ix.
11 pp.17-8.
eyes to see you.\textsuperscript{13} Material possessiveness is one of the chief hindrances to achieving this state of awareness, and Baxter witnessed to his belief, during his last years, in his actions and words - 'I feel the need for a spirit of destitution.'\textsuperscript{14} In Jerusalem Daybook and Autumn Testament he makes frequent references to poverty as being the way of peace with one's fellows. Writing about a prayer of Charles de Foucauld, Baxter conveys his own personal struggle to achieve detachment through material poverty - a human struggle which may well not be resolved at the grave:

> It is the prayer of poverty, of a man who is becoming the void. My friend Charles, pray for me. Ask God to give me the peace of poverty.

> This poor man has got a little fruit on his tree. Most of it is doing well, but some has blight. Charles, detachment is the hardest thing. Ask God to give me, from the heaven of the poor, the holy indifference that does not mind whether it has a splinter in the heel of its foot or not, or whether there is rain or sun, or whether men are friendly or hostile, or whether people do or don't go into mental hospitals, or do or don't hang themselves in borstal cells, as long as God's will is being done, as long as the door is open to God... My soul wants to go into God, into the night sky, and be lost there. It cannot happen yet. One cannot be entirely poor. That is where the pain lies.\textsuperscript{15}

Another important aspect of the spiritual journey back to the earth, in Baxter's mind, is the knowledge and acceptance of self, which is part of the knowledge and acceptance of death. This means the awareness of the darkness, the 'chaos', within oneself and at the heart of life, and is the familiar, central theme in Baxter's plays, recurring here in perhaps its most unambiguous form. In The Temptations of Cadipus, Baxter indicates, the Furies represent the chaos 'in its present and most aboriginal form'.\textsuperscript{16} In so far as Baxter's Furies can be compared with those of Sophocles, they are

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} p.57.
\item \textsuperscript{14} The Man on the Horse, p.26.
\item \textsuperscript{15} JD, p.23.
\item \textsuperscript{16} SMTO, p.x.
\end{itemize}
cast very much in their role of avenging Erinyes, and not, as in _Oedipus at Colonus_, as the gentle Eumenides.

Many of these key themes of Baxter are introduced in the first scenes of the play where Oedipus defines his philosophical position to Antigone, as they approach the grove of the Furies near Colonus. First, he speaks of his imminent death as a return to the earth, following a rejection of all worldly attachments:

I am going to the shrine of my father Poseidon—god of earthquakes, god of the sea—and there I will become what I am—not Oedipus—no longer Oedipus. I will be what I am—the dead peaceful child who lies always at the breast of the Queen Persephone. I am already that child. All tribes, all creatures, are at rest in me. (p.48.)

In Baxter's play, however, Antigone carries a baby to which Oedipus is closely attached. The baby is a symbol of the desire to overcome death, of the hope for his own immortality, and though Oedipus is already far on the journey of self-abnegation, he recognizes his continued attachment to the child as a danger: 'I love this child—but when I carry it, then it is heavier than a stone, because to love is to hope and to hope is to fear.' (p.48.)

Apart from hindering an awareness of one's true nature, possession implies the possibility of dispossession and loss, which puts man in wrong relation with his fellows. As Baxter wrote in _Jerusalem Daybook_, 'A man without detachment sees enemies behind every bush. They are enemies because they might want to take away his possessions.'

Oedipus knows with his intellect, but not yet fully with his feelings and emotion, that what the child represents can not offer him ultimate protection:

17 All page references are to _SMTO_.
18 p.41.
The child provides me with something you may not understand, Antigone. When I hold it in my arms, the world is no longer an alien place. I think—foolishly—'The children of Oedipus will be alive when Oedipus is dead. They will walk in the sun'—as if that could deliver me from the power of the Furies and the ice-cold region of Persephone. (p.46.)

The central movement of the play is towards Oedipus' forced acceptance of the loss of the child, as the last step on his journey to complete acceptance and self-abnegation, to where he can really know what it is to die.

The other, closely related, Baxter theme, introduced in this opening dialogue, is the inability of man to know himself, that is, to know the chaos at the centre of his being, and to face and accept that knowledge. Oedipus insists that his acts of incest and murder do not make him unique, or different in any way from other men:

These happenings—it is not what they are in themselves. Every boy has killed his father and slept with his mother before he is fifteen. 'Ah,' they will say, 'but that is only in a dream. You Oedipus, did what others dream of. Therefore you alone carry the everlasting anger of the gods.' That is the talk of children... Certain happenings—like those I have had to endure—they release one man in a hundred thousand out of nature into... the inescapable knowledge that man is monstrous. A creature made of chaos. To know chaos is to know what man is. (p.47.)

When Antigone protests that the child is not a monster, Oedipus claims that the child carries within him the seeds of his later inability to know himself and carry the weight of that knowledge. In Brown's words, 'The incapacity of the human species to die and therefore to live begins at birth.' However, Oedipus, like Sophocles' character also, has learnt that the human condition is to suffer, and in this respect his trials are no more nor less than any other's. As Odysseus tells

19 p.284.
Neoptolemus, 'Men are born to suffer'. And as Io tells Fireman, 'I see all men as - afflicted.' It is an important lesson, which Baxter characters must learn, and it is voiced again as Oedipus speaks to Antigone, 'To be - that is the calamity.' Oedipus claims that this awareness of suffering and death will make itself felt through the irrational, instinctive self, as in one's dreams. Baxter himself can be heard through Oedipus' words:

Man is a monster who does not know his own heart. Wherever he goes, the sun becomes an ulcer, bread becomes rotting flesh, water is turned into blood - because the weight man has to carry, and cannot, is his own weight. To be - that is the calamity. Your dreams tell you this, but you ignore your dreams. In your dreams you desire death - you desire not to be. I am the man Oedipus who killed his father and slept as a man in his mother's bed. If you think, 'He is unfortunate and we are fortunate' - then you are lying as you have always lied. The fortunate and the unfortunate carry the same burden. (pp.47-8.)

In the two playwrights' attitudes towards Oedipus' past wrongdoing, there is a significant difference which reflects the difference between the worlds of Sophocles' and Baxter's plays. Baxter sympathises with and excuses Oedipus' incest, in Freudian terms, and in later exploring the question, in the dialogue between Antigone and Ismene, defends it as entirely natural - 'the people we love best - with sex and soul and everything - are our own relatives' (p.66.) For Sophocles, on the other hand, there was no question of the moral wrong committed by Oedipus; he was saved by the fact that the wrong was unintentional, that he was the victim of evil circumstances.

Baxter's Oedipus has already progressed far on his spiritual journey towards death, because he perceives and accepts the dark side of himself. To be pursued by the Furies is the human state; Oedipus has learnt to
live with and adapt to them, and not to rationalize them away or deny their very existence. After the First Citizen has spoken with Oedipus and Antigone, and has left to seek the other citizens' assistance, Oedipus prays to the Furies, making explicit his relationship with them. His personal acquaintance with the chaos which the Furies represent keeps Oedipus, (as it keeps others who acknowledge it), fully in touch with his true nature and situation:

O you terrible Mothers! I know that your eyes penetrate the walls of houses, the skulls of men - stone, bone, earth, wood - nothing can ever be hidden from you... your punishment of us - your unending pursuit of the children of men - what is that absolute attention, that solicitude which cannot be evaded? To be punished is to be confirmed in existence. If there is punishment then there must be a crime. If there is a crime, there must be a criminal - you deliver us, dear Ladies, from the mistake of supposing that because nine-tenths of our lives are fantasy, we ourselves are merely shadows. No; a shadow cannot scream. A shadow cannot lie awake and sweat. A shadow cannot be required to give an account for what it has failed to do. The other gods maintain the boundaries of life. But you continually demonstrate that we are what we are - (pp.52-3)

With the arrival of the First Citizen to interrupt the opening dialogue between Oedipus and Antigone, Baxter introduces a central contrast in the play, between what he, following Arthur Koestler, describes as the Yogi and the Commissar views of life. In his Introduction to the play, Baxter suggests that, in his play, Oedipus the yogi wins by losing to Theseus the Commissar. In defining these two opposing ways of regarding experience, Koestler states

the real issue remains between the Yogi and the Commissar, between the fundamental conceptions of Change from Without and Change from Within... Apparently the two elements do not mix... The Commissar's emotional energies are fixed on the relation between the individual and the universe.

20, SHTO, p. ix.

For Baxter, of course, the man who understands best his true nature is the man who is focussing on inner change. Change in society will be ineffective while those in the society are in wrong relationship with the universe. Theseus, the Commissar, in the dichotomy, is introduced by the First Citizen as the perfect politician - 'The best of kings' (p.50.) - who manipulates and schemes to bring about social improvement in terms of new aqueducts. This is reminiscent of the economic liberal end of good sanitation, and so on, promulgated by Fireman and others. Whatever apparent social improvement may be brought about, Baxter has made perfectly clear that it need not necessarily answer the real needs of man. The First Citizen's story of the woman slave being tortured enables Oedipus to define what he sees as Theseus' position. He tells Antigone:

You missed the point. He wasn't interested in the torture. He's a good bureaucrat. 'The ritual has to be right' - that's all he was worried about. And the King - the great Theseus, the master-bureaucrat - he puts all his worries to rest. Now he can sleep quiet in his bed. The right libations have been poured. (p.52.)

This is another familiar Baxter theme, that the mind of the bureaucrat is well satisfied if the forms and procedures have been slavishly followed, even if the bureaucrat himself is out of touch with his real being, as well as with the spirit of the question at issue.

Later, when Theseus himself enters, it becomes quickly clear that routine and the rule of law do not protect him from the same attention which all men are bound to receive from the Furies. He confesses what is no surprise to Oedipus, and shows that neither the public nor the private Theseus escapes. He refers to his past experiences - the Minotaur, the desertion of Ariadne, and the suicide of his father, who believed him dead - and admits to his present pursuit by the Furies:
Their affection reaches into my bedchamber. I am rarely able to sleep. When I do lie down, it seems that a fire is kindled in my entrails - not physical - and even in the daytime, when I put on my robes... (p.62.)

Nor can Theseus, as symbol of the state, protect the individual from personal responsibility and from accepting the consequences of his actions. Ultimately, every individual is called to account for his own life, and can not abnegate responsibility for it. Theseus offers the subtle political temptation otherwise, when he addresses the citizens who threaten to lynch Oedipus. Oedipus - and Baxter - would find no justification for Theseus' claim that he can assume responsibility for the individual:

If a man is ignorant, he may fail to observe a necessary point of ritual; if he is clever, he may trouble the Invisible Ones by - as it were - thrusting himself forward, pretending to be more than a clod of earth. There is a simple solution to these problems. Act as wisely as you can - but bow your heads to the State - and I, your King, the Head of State, will accept the penalty of misdirection... You can see, then, there's no problem. You are free to act because you have a ruler who takes responsibility... (p.59.)

Theseus reveals a further aspect of this same political point of view in his reference to Oedipus' past. He has the political habit of manipulating facts to accommodate a particular point of view: 'facts on their own are meaningless - [he claims] the problem is always one of interpretation -' (p.60.)

It becomes plain that, in order to develop his Yogi-Commissar contrast, Baxter has made a quite different character of Theseus when compared with Sophocles' character. In Oedipus at Colonus, Theseus is entirely admirable and represents a political system which is also admirable in its justice and its moderation. Baxter's Theseus, on the other hand, is a scheming politician whose whole position
Baxter finds untenable, and who represents a political system which is unaware of the true needs of the individual. He has more in common with Sophocles' Creon, a character omitted in The Temptations of Oedipus, although Theseus is not perhaps as unscrupulous or inhumane as Creon proves to be.

Prior to Theseus' first entry, the First Citizen returns to the grove of the Furies with fellow citizens and women. This group constitutes a Chorus representing the common man from a variety of points of view. The chorus amplifies ideas introduced by the main characters, and guides our judgements of these. The First Citizen, who has appeared earlier in the play, speaks for Theseus in claiming the 'common good'. He stands for a moral relativism in the political field when he assures his fellow citizens that 'No promise can be kept if the keeping of it will harm the State.' (p.57.) He begins an interrogation of Oedipus - 'What's your name?'; 'Who are your ancestors?' (p.56.) - which brings to mind Baxter's descriptions of some police activity, revealing a depersonalized, legalistic view of the world. The Second Citizen speaks for those who deny the inner chaos:

We prefer to turn our eyes away when we go by their dwelling place - not talking, travelling as quickly as possible - not from any dislike - no! - but because what is Gentle and Beautiful is not for us to hear or behold... But this madman - this criminal - he has invaded their sacred enclosure, where they live... (p.54.)

Of all the Chorus, the Second Woman best understands Oedipus' position. She warns Oedipus against the quietness of the grove, but offers what is an alternative danger - her protection:

Over there among the trees, where the grass doesn't move at all, where they pour the libations on to the lip of the spring where it runs out so quietly - don't walk near it - don't go there! That kind of
quietness is worse than – I mean, be careful. Come down and talk with us. I’ll see you don’t get hurt! (p.55.)

This temptation to retreat into the arms of a comforting mother figure, is one of the minor temptations Oedipus must come to terms with on his journey to self-abnegation. When the Chorus turns on Oedipus, the Second Woman remains sympathetic. Both of those in the play who understand Oedipus best are women, Ismene being the other, and both have reputations for sexual profligacy. There is a suggestion here, which is developed in the conversation between Ismene and Antigone, that their very sexual profligacy keeps them in closer touch with the chaos which Oedipus understands.

The dialogue between Ismene and Antigone takes place after the first meeting between Oedipus and Theseus. The development of the incest theme in this dialogue, and in the play as a whole, is not closely related to the central action of The Temptations of Oedipus, which is the move towards Oedipus' final acceptance and abnegation. While it allows, through Antigone's and Ismene's contrasting views, a fuller revelation of Oedipus' character and situation – Baxter states that 'Ismene is the daughter who understands best the situation of her father'22 – the incest interest leaves the way open for some digression on Baxter's part, which is irrelevant to the main movement of the play.

By turning Ismene into a nymphomaniac, and, at the same time, making her an entirely sympathetic character, Baxter is asking us to suspend our moral judgement of her actions in favour of her understanding of her father, and the natural vitality of her response, as in her statement, 'I am tired of oracles. A little humanity... ' (p.74.) However, her first words to Antigone, uncover another key Baxter theme. It appears that Ismene's loose sexual behaviour hides a basic loneliness and a fear that she can not have the child she desires:

22 SMTO, p.ix.
If I had a child, I wouldn't let it out of my sight. Antigone - perhaps - do you think I might be barren - all my life - unable to bear a child?... It's the wrong way round; I sleep with men - you have a child. (p. 64.)

Baxter confirms in his own statement about Ismene - 'She is, I think, the heroine of many modern novels of female emancipation.' 23 - that she, like his other women, Mildred, Eunoe, and so on, is in possession of a freedom which she does not really want. Her natural function is, like Antigone, to be a mother caring for a child.

There is some more special pleading on Baxter's part in the same development of the ideas about incest. Ismene affirms Oedipus' belief that the act of incest was neither calamitous, nor even unusual. What was abnormal about her father was that he brooded unnecessarily about, what she calls, his 'mistakes':

He's always been abnormal; I don't mean his marrying mother - that was a mistake, just like stubbing your toe in the dark - and killing his own father - I can't see what the fuss is all about - it was self-defence. But he broods on everything. Why did he have to put his eyes out? Another man would have said, 'Look, I've made a frightful mistake; it wasn't my fault; I'll just do the best I can from now on.' (p.65.)

Ismene claims that the normal family situation is comprised of naturally incestuous relationships which can not be consummated. In fact, she suggests that her real love for her brother, Eteocles, is the basis of her present sexual behaviour. She tells Antigone,

The problem - dear stupid darling sister - is actually love. I loved Eteocles; I love him still. You love father... The people we love best - with sex and soul and everything - are our own relatives. We're not peculiar. The savage hatred people have towards father - the mud-slinging, the endless whispers - it comes from their knowledge that they love their relatives. (p.66.)

Baxter's preoccupation with the incest theme is shown

23. Ibid., p.ix.
in many small incidents in the play. For example, there is a hint in the first conversation between Oedipus and Antigone that he is the father of her child; in the same dialogue, Antigone's instinctive maternal response is to open her blouse to Oedipus when he complains of hunger; Ismene speaks to Antigone of the fact that her first seducer was her brother, Éteocles; and Ismene's flirtation with the Captain, in front of Antigone, seems designed only to show that her particular attractiveness for the Captain is her resemblance to his small sister. It seems that none of these natural family love relationships will be allowed to develop in peace; it is not the function of the gods to preserve love, as Ismene observes, (p.67.) recalling Oedipus' statement that 'to love is to hope and to hope is to fear'. For the same reason, Ismene rejects Antigone's suggestion that psychoanalysis would help her:

That rubbish! The priest of Aesolepius leaves you in the shrine - and you dream a little dream, and you're 'all better now' - and all the bad thoughts driven out! But after a day or two, when you come out, it's the same world outside the temple door - thunder, lightning, people, death - if you were actually cured you'd be a misfit. (p.66.)

This is a further development in Baxter's central theme that each man must ultimately face the darkness alone. But it is also, incidentally, one of a number of examples in the play where Baxter introduces modern concepts into his ancient Greek context. (Another particular example is his comparison of the descent of the locusts with helicopters.) By breaking into the non-naturalistic, convention, which Baxter has adopted by retaining the Greek mythical setting, these produce the same jarring effect which is noticeable in The Sore-footed Man.

At the end of the dialogue between the sisters, Antigone shows that she has not really understood her father. She believes she has learned to see with his blind eyes while on the road, and that what she sees is
'Endless peace. Rock - air - water... The silence behind the anger of the gods.' (p.69.) This is not the discovery which Oedipus has made; this peace may be found only in death, as Ismene suggests, and Antigone's belief that it can be found in life is an illusion. This points to the end of the play, where, after Oedipus' death, Antigone believes that her father would have been glad to hear of the disappearance of the plague. Ismene, on the other hand, understands that Oedipus has moved beyond either pleasure or displeasure at such movements or fluctuations in the natural world. (p.82.)

Oedipus faces his main temptation to re-involve himself in the political life of his home country, when the exiled son, Polyneices, arrives to solicit Oedipus' support against Eteocles and Creon. Baxter states that the 'interior crux' of the play lies in the ensuing dialogue between Oedipus and Polyneices. In their discussion, there is none of the terrible wrath, which Sophocles' Oedipus summons in the matching section of Oedipus at Colonus. Oedipus is content to speak to Polyneices of the lessons he has learnt since his sons drove him from Thebes, in the hope that Polyneices may come to share these. He tells Polyneices that he had cursed his sons at the time, not realizing that by their action they were setting him free:

I was ignorant. I did not see - with my blind eyeballs - that you had set me free... Free of hatred - free of money - free of plotting and swindling - free of the soldiers who are both guards and - free of the shirt of power that eats into the bones like acid! (p.72.)

The authentic voice of the Baxter of the Jerusalem years can be heard in Oedipus' words, which make the clear connection between true freedom and the state of detachment.

24. Ibid.
from all worldly possessions, attachments, and the desire for security in position. This relationship has already been seen in Baxter's other writing; in a poem such as 'Summer 1967' it is stated explicitly: 'To want nothing is/ The only possible freedom.' 25 Oedipus tries unsuccessfully to persuade Polyneices to his point of view:

The Furies drive men to death by their own passions - anger, hatred, greed, honour, hope, grudges; and the conqueror, the master of some little dunghill - it may be Thebes, it may be Athens - he cannot sleep at night. If you fight you will die - death is the fate of all men - but you, Polyneices, will die without a grain of peace in your soul - (p.73.)

Polyneices rejects Oedipus' plea; in Baxter's words, he prefers 'the freedom to wear his warrior's mask and die, to the alternate freedom of being a man without a fixed dramatic role.' 26 This is a clear statement of Baxter's central belief that man devises innumerable ways, both consciously and subconsciously, to avoid coming to terms with his true nature. Polyneices' warrior's mask is just one of the means used to cover the chaos at the heart of man's existence. This chaos must ultimately be faced if one is to achieve freedom in this lifetime or peace in death.

When his appeal to Oedipus proves unsuccessful, Polyneices, like Creon in Oedipus at Colonus, resorts to force, taking his sisters as hostages. Oedipus, who appears to have attained a state of resigned acceptance, remains unmoved:

I thank you, goddesses. There is no anger in my heart. Those who will die will die. The wind smells of the sea; bright; it carries the smell of - dark-blue and - I am content to have nothing. (p.75.)

After despatching soldiers in pursuit of Polyneices, Theseus brings Oedipus news of the plague which is attacking his people. The plague is carried over by Baxter from Oedipus

25 Runes, p.50.
26 SMTO, p. ix.
the King, the first play in Sophocles' trilogy, to serve an important structural function in his own play. Theseus again proposes education of the people to the need for good sanitation as the cure for social ills; he clings to his trust in the Commissar belief in imposed change from without:

I need reasonable sanitation. The people throw their rubbish into the streets. Their children play with dogs. I don't know the cause, but the plague is always worse where the people have no sense of hygiene. In time I'll stamp out even the plague. But the people have to be educated... (p.76.)

In the following incident, Baxter uses the plague to show plainly where the political, manipulatory view of life can lead one. The Chorus of citizens enters, ripe for a lynching; by finding a scapegoat, they can evade any personal responsibility for the situation, and Oedipus is a suitable victim. This attitude is mixed with the politically expedient wish to avoid doing anything that might incur Theseus' wrath. As before, it is the Second Woman who best understands Oedipus' position. She perceives that Oedipus is in a particular relationship with the gods, who will decide when Oedipus is to die: 'The old man belongs to Them. They'll decide - not us; they'll decide when... ' (p.78.) She rejects the First Citizen's assertion that the political decision makers can still have an effect on the course of events. And, furthermore, she understands the true nature of the plague as part of the rhythm of the natural world:

The plague will ride over us. The same as when the god Poseidon shakes the earth and the big waves come up to flood the houses. There always have been plagues. (p.78.)

Because we find that the Second Woman understands best what is occurring, Baxter corners us into accepting, along with her understanding, the fact of her prostitution as well. There is another example of Baxter's irrelevant preaching,
about the marriage relationship this time, in the
Second Woman's account of her 'work':

I'll admit I've even earned money - you know
how - and you can't do that if you are stupid.
The customers want somebody to talk to -
somebody to listen, and say the right word;
not a wife; they've had that - they're sick
of being told about the faults they know
better than - (p.77.)

Baxter entertains the idea, made clear here, that the
prostitute is capable of more warmth towards the
male than is the wife. This relates to the comments,
made in the introductory chapter, about Baxter's
attitude towards the marriage relationship. The wife
tends to belittle, demand and castrate, whereas the
prostitute simply responds warmly to her recognition
of man's basic physical needs, and elicits Baxter's
pity and sympathy.

Despite what she says to the other citizens, the
Second Woman does not persuade them to her point of
view, for, at the crucial moment, the First Woman
arrives carrying Antigone's baby and announcing the
coming of the locusts. This sets the scene for
Oedipus' final, and probably only real, trial within
the context of the play. Theseus arrives in time to
prevent a lynching, and it is he who is left with the
delicate political decision of how to save his own
political skin, by appeasing the citizens, while at
the same time appeasing the gods. Theseus does know,
at least, that the time and manner of Oedipus' death
are beyond his (Theseus') power to determine. The
crisis of the play is reached when Theseus finds the solution
of sacrificing the child: 'Good people, this child is the
answer. It carries in its veins the taint of incest.
Yet it is too young to be counted a guest.' (p.80.)
This was a situation which Oedipus has not foreseen, and which he certainly does not accept with resigned acceptance. It shows that his preparation for death was incomplete. While he remained attached to the child - the future, and his own continuation in the world - he had not come to final terms with the fact of his own death. He rails at the Athenians: 'You're mad! Baboons! Cretins! Mad! Mad! Can't you see the child is the future?' (p. 81.)

In Theseus' explanation to Oedipus of his decision, he speaks of the message which the baby will carry to Persephone. In doing so, Theseus unconsciously shows again how the material concerns of the individual hinder his right relationship with the universe, and, in particular, his understanding of his own death. Of his own people, Theseus says:

> When you ask them to die, they will die willingly. They wish to be your subjects for ever. But each one has a small amount of business to attend to - the planting of a field, the building of a house - and they desire to do these things... (pp. 80-1)

In Theseus' explanation is yet another example of the irrelevant intrusion of Baxter's particular social concerns whenever the opportunity presents itself. This time he has Theseus speak directly to the audience about abortion:

> If one of you - a woman - finds that she is bearing a child - (He turns and begins to address the audience.) - yes, any of you - if a woman's life is in danger, or in some cases, when the child's father is not her husband - when it would be inconvenient to - well, you know as well as I do, the child will die. Quietly - unobtrusively - with regret - not without compassion - but the child will die before its natural birth. (p. 80.)

With the loss of the child, Oedipus has been separated finally from all worldly attachments and his preparation for death is complete. The Furies have pursued him to the end, and the peace of his final abnegation and acceptance is achieved only with sore mental pain.
Old, foul Nurses - daughters of Chaos - now I feel the grip of your teeth! You must have your blood - blood out of the soul itself! Now Oedipus is broken. Child-killers! Child-killers! Old hags! I deny you. I give you no more worship. Feed on the living! All men belong to you. What is there left in me for you to take? Now the parricide will die - the incestuous son - incestuous father - he will marry the Earth. You have lost your power. (p.87.)

For Baxter, it seems that peace, if it comes at all, will never be easy; it can not be anticipated, but may come as a gift. Thus, Baxter speaks of himself, in Jerusalem Daybook, as 'butchered by my longing for the apparently impossible harmony which will come at the end of all things.' 27 Having faced the chaos in oneself, and the ultimate chaos of one's own mortality, one can prepare for death, only by learning acceptance and resignation, the lessons learnt by Oedipus - and by Baxter himself:

Hard, heavy, slow, dark,
Or so I find them, the hands of Te Whaea

Teaching me to die. Some lightness will come later
When the heart has lost its unjust hope

For special treatment...

In Oedipus at Colonus, attention is never diverted from Oedipus in the ascending series of confrontations to his final apotheosis. His final majestic wrath, prior to his death, transforms him into a superhuman being fit to be elevated alongside the gods. As Kitto observes, 'In taking Oedipus to themselves as a Hero the gods are but recognizing facts. By his stature as a man Oedipus imposes himself on the gods...' 29 The movement in The Temptations of Oedipus, on the other hand, is towards the full revelation of Oedipus' character, together with the final self-abnegation, rather than in the progressive change which Sophocles' character undergoes. In spite of the title of the play, the

27 p.40.
28 Ibid., p.23.
29 Kitto, p.420.
temptations which Baxter's Oedipus has to face are mainly in the past, with one major exception, which the child represents - Oedipus' hope for his own continuation in the world. The other tests, those of family, home, political attachments, possible hero stature, and so on, are revealed to the audience, but turn out to be non-trials for an Oedipus already well on the road to total self-abnegation.

However, Baxter is interested in at least two additional themes which divert him from this main theme - the preparation for death of its main character; these are the incest theme, and the contrast which he draws between the Yogi and the Commissar views of experience. The use of Oedipus myth is undoubtedly an unfortunate temptation for Baxter to be diverted into an exploration of family relationships. This exploration is made partly through his new contrast between Antigone and Ismene. His treatment of this theme provides some support for the tentative suggestion that, for Baxter, there is a natural instinctive response of the individual to his parents and siblings, a kind of umbilical cord which is never entirely broken, and which contrasts with the quite different relationship which must be established in the marriage of two adults. In this play, the instinctive family relationship is shown as a basically incestuous one, not only in Oedipus' 'accident', but in the other examples noted earlier. The second theme, which diverts Baxter, is the Yogi-Commissar contrast. It is in order to sharpen this contrast that he makes a different character of Theseus. Because of the part he plays in the action as king of Athens, Theseus is on hand during much of the play, and this facilitates the dichotomy which Baxter presents. However, as far as the development of Oedipus is concerned, Theseus' attempts to ameliorate the human lot by outward change do make clearer the nature of Oedipus' inner, spiritual development.
The tendency for Baxter to be side-tracked from the central action is particularly unfortunate in *The Temptations of Oedipus*, as it detracts from the otherwise effective presentation of the main theme of growth towards death, which is a deeply felt Baxter concern, well accommodated in the material of Sophocles' play. Baxter's own play is diverse in its development, and he could have gained much by a greater dependence on the strong single action of *Oedipus at Colonus*. The structural development of Sophocles' play is based on the series of confrontations by which Oedipus is transformed, and all else is subordinated to that end; in Baxter's play, on the other hand, there are incidents, such as the meeting between Antigone and Ismene, which have only a limited relationship with the central movement. However, the use of the chorus avoids the structural problem presented by the chorus in an earlier play, like *The Sore-footed Man*. By integrating the chorus fully in the events of *The Temptations of Oedipus*, instead of setting it apart from those events, Baxter achieves a more unified structure than was evident in the rigid organization of the earlier play. Baxter himself, with some justification, calls *The Temptations of Oedipus* 'probably the most developed play I have written'.

Certainly, as far as the language is concerned, this play contains some of Baxter's finest poetic rhetoric, especially in the philosophical speeches of Oedipus. The retention of the Greek setting and situation, which do not pretend to be realistic, helps to accommodate the 'weight' of Baxter's metaphorical prose, which is his natural mode. However, he still does not avoid the quite unnecessary introduction of anachronisms, such as helicopters, and

30 *SMTO*, p.ix.
contemporary idiom, such as 'daughter's brat', 'brains in the arse', 'cunning little swine', and so on. His use of 'mother-fucker' is a particular example of contemporary idiom, which illustrates Baxter's habit of making the 'clever', rather than the organic, connection with his mythical material. The anachronisms and the contemporary idiom are out of place in this context. Thus, they do not, as Baxter intended, offer a very adequate solution to the dramatic problem presented by the long speeches, with little accompanying action, which makes The Temptations of Oedipus more effective in reading than in acting.
Chapter 6  Conclusion

This thesis begins with Baxter's assertion that 'The Greek myths and legends are never out-of-date since they form that mythical stratum in the mind of modern man which enables him from time to time to make a pattern out of the chaos of his experience.' The success of the plays discussed here is dependent to a large extent on whether the pattern which the mythical structure provides has been discovered at a deep level in the material of Baxter's local, contemporary concerns, or alternatively, is not genuinely felt but is imposed on that material.

In The Sore-footed Man and The Temptations of Oedipus, in which he retains the Greek characters, setting and situation, Baxter's themes are deepened by their embodiment in the Sophoclean plays. One reason for this is that the myth in Baxter's plays corresponds with the use of it in Sophocles at several levels. In the case of The Sore-footed Man, the main character, Odysseus, is deeply felt by Baxter, as his poems witness over many years. Baxter has wrestled with spiritual experiences, especially in relation to home and security, analogous to those of the mythical Odysseus, and he has found an exact modern equivalent in the hipster experience described by Norman Mailer. But, further than this, he has discovered, in the situation of Philoctetes, an effective parallel which underlines his contrast between the modern intellectual and the man of action. In The Temptations of Oedipus, the situation of the main character preparing for death is even more personally felt by Baxter. Oedipus' experience is one of those crucial human experiences basic to all times and places - the facing and acceptance of one's own death. And, in the inner transformation of Oedipus, Baxter has discovered what is also, for him, a key contrast with the double-
dealing of a politician manipulating outward change.

While the Greek myth is congenial to the development of his own themes in both *The Sore-footed Man* and *The Temptations of Oedipus*, Baxter does not avoid the temptation offered by the myths to digress into secondary themes which blur the main action. This is less apparent in *The Sore-footed Man*, where the dependence on Sophocles' plot - the deception of Philoctetes - provides a tighter focus. In *The Temptations of Oedipus*, however, Baxter does not resist the opportunity, presented by his choice of myth, to develop the secondary incest theme. This theme may be of passing interest to Baxter, but it diverts attention from the main theme of the growth towards death, which is a quite different deeply felt concern of the playwright.

In *The Bureaucrat* and *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party*, in which the myth is given modern characters and setting, the connections with the framework provided, respectively, by Aeschylus and Euripides are much more contrived. In *The Bureaucrat*, there is little consistency in Baxter's use of Aeschylus; it is not at all clear how we are to take his Prometheus at the end of the play, after what begins as a clearly ironic contrast with the mythical character. His modern Io gains nothing from the mythical parallel, and Baxter's attempts to identify her in that way, in a device such as the dance in which she pretends to be the heifer stung by the gadfly, can not be taken seriously, if, in fact, they are not merely ridiculous. The parallels in *The Bureaucrat* are contrived, and scarcely reveal an underlying pattern which offers any significance to the situation of his main characters. For an effective, organic use of the Prometheus image, it is necessary to turn to Baxter's poem, part of which was quoted in Chapter 3, appearing at the end of 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet'. In *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party*, Baxter's
structural dependence on Euripides' play, creates many difficulties. The connections are again over-strained, Baxter's modern equivalent characters being neither as exact nor nearly as impressive as Euripides'. Furthermore, there is at best only a tenuous parallel between the situations of the central characters, Pentheus and John Ennis, centring on the submission they both must learn to the Dionysiac force in themselves. The littérateur might enjoy making the connections, but, as in The Bureaucrat, they do not order the diverse material which Baxter introduces in his play.

The problems, apparent in The Bureaucrat and Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, are increased by the use of Greek myth. In both plays, Baxter's themes are social and domestic - bureaucracy, marriage, and so on - rather than the larger issues, such as the meaning of human freedom and of death, which are basic to all men. These crucial experiences are those which are well accommodated in Greek myth, which is concerned with these large issues of man in relation to the universe - the outside forces beyond and larger than man. When the myths are bent to accommodate trivial domestic detail, or extraneous, peripheral ideas about abortion, women's emancipation, and so on, they become strained and lose their real significance. They do not serve well as a structure within which to examine particular social ills.

In The Bureaucrat and Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, there is a further tension between the mode of poetic drama, and the semi-realism of the modern situation. This tension exists in the action and the language of each play. Baxter warns, in his radio talk, 'A deliberate realism will always tend to butcher and deform the necessary illusions of the theatre', and that 'Without myth the result is barren spectacle and melodrama.' However, in both the above plays,

1 SPNZD, pp. 8-13.
the poetic, symbolic action mingles uneasily with the melodramatic realism of the stock social situation. Thus, Io in *The Bureaucrat* is required to work at two incompatible levels: as mythical symbol of the female productive force, and, with her bikie boyfriend, as representative of a contemporary social problem. And the symbolic castration of Power is placed alongside Baxter's use of him in the social criticism of methods used by the New Zealand police force. In *Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party*, also, the women are cast as both realistic Remuera housewives, and avenging Erinyes who carry out the symbolic action of breaking John's back. Tom O'Dwyer, likewise, is both Irish god, with the gift of prophecy, and the local dancing teacher who goes drinking with his New Zealand mate. Baxter is aware of the problem, as the comments in his talk indicate, but he himself does not overcome it, particularly in the plays where the myth has been modernized. Baxter's natural mode of poetic drama is better served, in this group of four plays, by the retention of the Greek legendary structure and characters, than by giving the Greek myth what he calls a 'skin of modern realism'. In *The Sore-footed Man* and *The Temptations of Oedipus*, the non-naturalistic format precludes a total psychological realism, and thus the Greek myth more easily accommodates the symbolic actions of Baxter's characters, and the polarization of views in the contrasts he draws between them. However, these other plays suffer from another problem, by Baxter's unnecessary introduction of anachronisms, such as helicopters and paranoid delusions, and the drawing of the crude parallel with psychoanalysis by Ismene. The anachronistic use of such concepts certainly does not contribute to any modern relevance which the plays might have, and is quite out of place in the ancient Greek context of the two plays.

2 [SMTO, p.vii.](#)
As far as the language of the plays is concerned, Baxter's natural leaning towards philosophical rhetoric is also best absorbed in the two Greek plays. There is fine poetry in many of the speeches of Odysseus, Philoctetes, and especially Oedipus. However, Baxter does not overcome the dramatic problem of these becoming wordy, set pieces slowing the action in plays which are mostly talk, in any case. This drawback is another problem associated with the use of Greek drama, in which there is likely to be little external action. A Baxter play is constantly endangered by its sheer weight of words; it is dramatically effective only insofar as the audience is absorbed in the developing ideas which are being expressed. Baxter's solution of enlivening the dialogue with a dash of contemporary idiom — 'without the vigour of street language, a modern play is inclined to become dessicated' — does not solve the problem. The various shifts in tone simply jar, once one has accepted the non-naturalistic convention in which the play is presented.

Some of these difficulties of language are avoided by the modern setting in The Bureaucrat and Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party. But Baxter's attempts at naturalistic dialogue are not nearly as successful as his metaphorical use of language, and are not developed consistently. Alongside the effective dialogue in Mr O'Dwyer's Dancing Party, in the argument between John and Mildred in Scene Two, for example, there is the sententiousness of the language given to Ephraim, and the pseudo-New Zealand idiom of John's self-exposure to Tom. In The Bureaucrat, a successful satiric use of bureaucratic language is spoiled by Baxter's over-emphasis by the inappropriate contrasting language of Harness, in the first main dialogue in the play. In his use of 'street language' and obscenity, it is not a question of offending the 'remnants of middleclass decorum', which he claims inhabit the theatre, but of the failure to

3 'Introduction,' The Devil and Mr Mulkahy, p.vii.
4 SPNZD, p.15.
to discover a language which is appropriate to his chosen mode, and then to develop it consistently in the particular play.

Furthermore, Baxter never really comes to terms with his tendency to identify with particular points of view in his characters. Not only is the Baxter 'truth' hammered home, but quite irrelevant material is introduced whenever the opportunity is presented. As already mentioned, this happens a number of times in each play, as when Theseus presents the Baxter view of abortion, and Ephraim the Baxter view of the political situation in the Middle East. The intrusion of Baxter's particular social prejudices, prejudices which may or may not have been deeply considered, or become truly part of Baxter's emotional consciousness, is a feature of much of Baxter's writing. In this group of plays, the intrusions reflect a lack of detachment, which threatens the structural coherence of each, and detracts from the exploration of Baxter's true concerns. The plays could have benefited by a closer concentration on these deeply-felt themes, and by a greater structural dependence on Greek tragedy's strong focus on a single main action.

All of Baxter's work has involved him in a search for that deeper pattern which will shape and order his local themes. Given his need for an aesthetic structure for his poetic drama, he has sought this in various mythologies, such as Maori and Norse, apart from Greek, and also in the framework offered by Christian ritual (as used in his play, The Band Rotunda).

Hal Smith shows how the folk ballad has effectively provided the structure in another Baxter play, The Devil and Mr Mulcahy. It is the same folk ballad formula which is used successfully in Baxter's poetry. In poems such as 'Lament for Barney Flanagan' and 'Calvary Street', Baxter's social comment is expressed in simple, lively terms which avoid the heavy moralising that is a common danger in his
work. As used in *The Devil and Mr Mulcahy*, the folk ballad formula provides an ordering structure which works well dramatically, and avoids many of the problems which are evident in the use of Greek myth for the same purpose. In Smith's own words:

The folkballad... can be made to substitute for myth or ritual as a clean-limbed, simple, but firm structure providing the ordered framework required by the aesthetics of poetic drama. Myth and ritual, of course, have their structural lines established *a priori*, but in place of this the folk ballad establishes its order and stability by a fatalism - a foreseeable inevitability. Its advantage for the poetic dramatist is that it also provides a genuine natural integration with actual life and with popular idiom, which the other devices do not. In Baxter's play, its use resulted in the least pretentious, but also the most humanly convincing, of all his essays onto poetic drama. Also, being more intrinsically dramatic in an active narrative sense, it afforded less encouragement to one of Baxter's major dramatic weaknesses - the tendency to write monolithic set speeches and to make characters talk too much and too long.

Perhaps Baxter himself should have the last word... In *Jerusalem Daybook*, he writes...

*All our fables blow away like smoke before we come to God.* ⁶

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⁵ Smith, p.13.

⁶ *JD*, p. 7.
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