CHAPTER ONE

# Fear out of Fear

## I Deianeira's lamentable life, 1-48.

### Remedial discourse

*Trachiniae* begins in a manner not typical of the surviving plays of Sophocles: a character, speaking not to another character but to no one in particular,[1] delivers a speech that recounts some of the events forming the background of the play. Such a gesture threatens the dramatic illusion, since the character seems to address the audience[2] and not to inhabit the universe of the drama; but by thus breaching the screen that separates the character from the audience, it exposes not merely the dialogue between the actor and the audience in the theater, that is, the immediately performative aspect of his language as it affects his listeners, but also the theatricality of the character represented *within* the drama, *her* need for an audience and her speech as a theatrical simulation, a calculated illusion. Within the drama, however, she is her only audience as she delivers this speech. It follows, therefore, that even within the drama her speech will affect an audience, that audience being the speaker herself.

Inasmuch as the speaker thus becomes her own audience, her performance becomes the object of her perception: like the theater audience which contemplates the drama as sympathetic outsiders, she too becomes an outsider. At the same time, as an actress, indeed as the poet of her speech, the character becomes the creator of her drama. As both subject and object, therefore, poet, performer, and audience, she inhabits a theater of her own imagining.

When our analysis takes into account the performance's unmistakeable quality of lamentation it becomes for us, as it must have been for at least the lovers of tragedy in the audience and certainly for the tragedian Euripides,

recognizable as an instance of "remedial discourse," expression of pain or sorrow that gives its speaker pleasure by creating the illusion that the pain, like the speech, is a production under the speaker's control. By dramatizing pain and self-consciously indulging in it, one cures or at least beguiles it. We shall see this painful remedy acted out in the prologue speech of the *Trachiniae* and elsewhere in the play.[3]

Deianeira (for she is the speaker--having no awareness of any audience besides herself she does not identify herself) begins her lament by citing a version of a well-known proverb. Such a choice manifests sound rhetorical instinct, for it places her in apparently indisputable agreement with her audience on a subject of concern to all, the knowledge and predicament of mortals. Yet Deianeira employs this λόγος only as a foil[4] for her own lot, which appears the more exceptional to the extent that it violates a rule that elsewhere applies universally.

> Λόγος μέν ἐστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανεὶς
> ὡς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν
> θάνῃ τις, οὔτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ' εἴ τῳ κακός·
> ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἅιδου μολεῖν,
> ἔξοιδ' ἔχουσα δυστυχῆ τε καὶ βαρύν. (1-5)[5]
>
> There is indeed a saying of men that made its appearance long ago, that you cannot know whether the life of a mortal is good or bad, until he dies. But in my case, I know, even before going to Hades, that I have an unfortunate and heavy life.

Deianeira rhetorically suggests that she has the worst life of any mortal, or at least one unique in its badness.[6] The surprise, and hence the effectiveness, of Deianeira's opposition to the proverb, will have been enhanced by the fact that in other versions it usually served to suggest that mortal *prosperity* might be subject to sudden change, and thus that a mortal could not be described as blessed (ὄλβιος and related words are routine in other citations; see Jebb *ad O.T.* 1529 for the passages) until all possibility of change had been exhausted, that is, until he was dead. Deianeira, however, extends the scope of the proverb to the fortunes of the miserable in order to establish her own case as contradictory to it.

The sharp, pathetic contrast thus achieved obviously exaggerates Deianeira's woe, but as other instances of this type of lament show, it does so to provide her a special source of consolation and pleasure.[7] Each alternative seems more extreme by contrast with the other. Hence while the proverb serves as a foil for Deianeira's suffering, her suffering also serves as a foil for the proverb, a way of evoking the life normal for mortals and enhancing the evaluation of it. Of course, this is Deianeira's life too, except in her rhetoric, so that Deianeira's exaggeration of her misery tacitly places in a better light the life she actually lives.



Deianeira's depiction of her misery, however, offers psychological comfort even in its extremity, indeed precisely in the kind of extremity it reaches. The proverb that Deianeira cites is based upon an understanding, implicit in Deianeira's words, that the lives of mortals are subject to unforeseeable changes;[8] in most versions of the proverb such changes are clearly changes for the worse. In denying the applicability of the proverb to her case, however, Deianeira implies that her life is free from change, even if only because it remains always miserable.[9] Since, as we shall see, instability constitutes the major source of Deianeira's unhappiness, this precise exaggeration provides her with ideal consolation.[10]

Akin to instability as a source of Deianeira's unhappiness, Deianeira's uncertainty of knowledge is also imaginarily relieved by her self-pitying lament. Most versions of the proverb Deianeira utters concern what a person's life may be called or reckoned (e.g. καλέειν, Hdt. 1.32). Deianeira speaks in terms of knowledge (ἐκμάθοις 2, ἔξοιδ' 5). Her uniquely bad, uniquely stable life permits her knowledge, uniquely hers among mortals, of her own fate. We had suggested that merely by lamenting her suffering Deianeira could adopt the role of a spectator and thus view it as an object, something apart from herself. But even by emphasizing Deianeira's knowledge of her suffering, her lament characterizes the suffering as already objectified, indeed doubly so, since what Deianeira knows is that she has (ἔχουσα 5) an unfortunate life. The miserable life is separate from the Deianeira who possesses it, who in turn is the object of the Deianeira who knows this, that is, the speaker, who in turn is the pitied object of Deianeira the spectator.

Deianeira's description of her life also alleviates her pain by preempting it. Her knowledge differs from that of other mortals precisely in that it includes the future; Deianeira claims to know the suffering her future will bring, perhaps not in detail, but in any way that might matter. She therefore resembles the σοφός who avoids pain by mentally preparing himself for the worst.[11]

Deianeira's strategy, however, poses a serious danger to her, for in claiming for herself a condition which she explicity understands as normally unattainable by the living, she rhetorically conjures the equivalent of her own death. Suicide can be one way of attempting to exempt oneself from change,

and as the case of Deianeira will reveal, the step from a self-inflicted imaginary death to suicide may be easily taken.

## Achelous

As we have noted, Deianeira's successive citation and contradiction of the λόγος ἀρχαῖος functions as a priamel to introduce the miseries she has endured since adolescence, which in turn will set off her present distress. She begins her reminiscence by characterizing a certain time in her life according to her residence: she was still living in the house of her father (πατρὸς . . . ἐν δόμοισιν . . . ναίουσ' ἔτ' 6-7). The importance to her of this location will become apparent when she nostalgically describes to the Chorus the carefree, protected life of the maiden who lives "in a place of her own" (χώροισιν αὑτοῦ 145). Like the soil in which the young plant flourishes, the house of Deianeira's father is her natural home, since the child presumably grows naturally from the parent.

When Deianeira thinks of the advent of unhappiness in her life, she recalls a time when a natural unity prevailed between herself and her surroundings. This unity is disrupted by fear of marriage (νυμφείων ὄκνον 7), and although Deianeira goes on to attribute her fear to one particular suitor she had, she confirms her indication that she feared marriage in general when speaking to the Chorus later, for she tells them that marriage will be the beginning of worries for *any* woman (148-149).[12] In the prologue, however, she fails to elaborate upon the disruptive effects of marriage and shifts her attention entirely to her suitor.

Deianeira's description of her suitor has left no interpreters unconvinced that her revulsion was appropriate. He was the river Achelous:

> μνηστὴρ γὰρ ἦν μοι ποταμός, 'Αχελῷον λέγω,
> ὅς μ' ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν ἐξῄτει πατρός,
> φοιτῶν ἐναργὴς ταῦρος, ἄλλοτ' αἰόλος
> δράκων ἑλικτός, ἄλλοτ' ἀνδρείῳ κύτει
> βούπρῳρος, ἐκ δὲ δασκίου γενειάδος
> κρουνοὶ διερραίνοντο κρηναίου ποτοῦ. (9-14)
>
> For I had as suitor a river, Achelous, who sought me from my father in three forms, coming now in visible form as a bull, now as a coily shimmering serpent, now with a man's torso, ox-fronted; and from his shady beard founts of spring water sprinkled in all directions.



Perhaps the most basic source of the horror that Achelous arouses is his non-human form. But besides not being anthropomorphic, Achelous is actually polymorphous, changing his form from one appearance to another. He can even combine several forms, since in his last manifestation as wooer he has a composite form. This power of self-transformation characterizes several water-deities in Greek myth and probably symbolizes the physical instability of water.[13] Deianeira's wooer, therefore, may be understood as a personification of instability.[14]

Allied to the river's polymorphism is his purely epistemological uncertainty. Achelous is hard to know, for he never appears to Deianeira in his own form, and the forms he uses change each time he appears. Deianeira's language, moreover, emphasizes their progressive inscrutability. We have already noted Achelous' movement from single forms to a double form. In Deianeira's description his forms also move from brightness to darkness: first he is ἐναργής, then αἰόλος (shimmering), and finally his beard is described as δάσκιος (dark, shady). Each form reflects light less clearly than its predecessor and thus is harder to come to know by visual observation.

Achelous' repulsiveness may also derive from unstable sexual polymorphism, of particular relevance to his role as a suitor. Dorothea Wender has suggested that all three of the river's shapes "represent male sexuality in fabulous form, as fantasized by a frightened young girl. . . ."[15] The bull of course seems acceptable as a figure of masculinity, its horns suggesting the wooer's power of penetration and his abundance of vital fluid.[16] A coily snake, however, is not much like an erect phallus; the coils may indicate rather a power to enfold more suggestive of female than male anatomy.[17] The third form is actually a combination of two forms, bull and man, from whose dark beard streams of fountain-water are sprinkled. According to Wender "the water pouring out of a bush of hair seems like another fairly transparent image," by which she means that it represents the male's ejaculation.[18] This interpretation is hard to accept, however, since the male's semen does not spurt from a bush of hair. If the beard is to be interpreted genitally at all it would seem more closely to resemble the female genitals. Thus one might infer that the three forms of Achelous represent first masculine sexuality, then feminine sexuality, and finally a combination of masculine and feminine.

Achelous therefore appears to manifest and perhaps personify instability of being, of knowledge, and of sexuality. His subhuman incarnations seem to hold potential for violence.[19] Yet Deianeira also says that Achelous came as her suitor, asking Oeneus for her hand (μνηστὴρ . . . ὅς μ' . . . ἐξῄτει πατρός 9-10).[20] Indeed, he was rather patient (and, to be sure, persistent), visiting several times (φοιτῶν 11; notice also the imperfect tense of ἐξῄτει 10). As Segal notes,[21] Achelous woos Deianeira rather more honorably than Heracles does Iole.

More importantly, however, Deianeira omits a number of features from her description of Achelous, chief among them the fact that Achelous was not just a river, but a god. The Chorus too omits this from the first stasimon, where they call Achelous ὁ . . . ποταμοῦ σθένος (508), and despite a lengthy note on Achelous' divinity in Jebb's commentary[22] critics too have entirely overlooked it. The omission of any reference to Achelous' divinity in the *Trachiniae* suggests that the characters either have deliberately suppressed it or do not know about it.

Not simply the god of a big river in north-west Greece (though Achelous, now called Aspropotamo, is the largest of Greek rivers), Achelous was honored by a pan-Hellenic cult as the god of *all water*, and his name served as a synonym for water (as at Eur. *Bacch*. 625-6, δμωσὶν 'Αχελῷον φέρειν/ἐννέπων, "telling the servants to bring water"). Farmers in particular, in Attica as elsewhere, venerated him as the donor of fertility. In this regard we may note his connections to Dionysus, the divinity whom the ancient Greeks regarded as having the most general association with liquids. Dionysus' cult titles include *Pelagios* and *Dualos* (both apparently meaning god of the sea), *Halieus* (the sailor), *Aktaios* (of the seashore), *Limnaios* (of the marsh), and *Hyes* (of the rain).[23] According to Plutarch *On Isis and Osiris* 365A the Greeks regarded Dionysus as the master not only of wine but of the entire liquid element: οὐ μόνον τοῦ οἴνου Διόνυσον ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσης ὑγρᾶς φύσεως Ἕλληνες ἡγοῦνται κύριον καὶ ἀρχηγόν. Dionysus and Achelous have many similarities and at least one direct and intimate connection. Both gods could take on many forms, and those in which Achelous appeared to Deianeira, bull, snake, and man with bull's horns, resemble those in which the Chorus of Euripides' *Bacchae* entreat Dionysus to appear: "a bull, a many-headed snake, or a fire-breathing lion" (φάνηθι ταῦρος ἢ πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν/δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων ὁρᾶσθαι λέων 1017-1018). Dionysus was often represented as a man with bull's horns, and many monuments exhibit Achelous in the same guise.[24] Both gods are associated with the horn of plenty, which was said to have been one of Achelous' horns; pictures of Dionysus often show him carrying it.[25] Finally, the Greeks must have commonly thought of Achelous and Dionysus together, because they drank their wine mixed with water, and this water could be called Achelous, as Verg. *Georgics* 1.9 makes clear: *[tellus] pocula . . . Acheloia miscuit uvis*, "the earth has mixed cups of Achelous with the grapes." Despite differences in scope, Achelous and Dionysus both appear to embody the power of life itself.[26]



Achelous' divinity obviously does not mean that Deianeira could have been expected to welcome him as a dream husband; the kind of divinity he and Dionysus represent combined life and death, peace and violence, form and formlessness. But Deianeira's disgust exhibits as little awareness of Achelous' ambiguity as it does of his positive side as creator of fertility. More importantly, since nobody in the *Trachiniae* recognizes Achelous' divinity, much less his special power as life force, nobody recognizes his inevitability. Yet in the *Trachiniae* Heracles' polymorphous victims somehow subdue him, and the text suggests that Achelous is among those taking revenge.[27] The violent and ultimately ineffective rejection of Achelous, and the denial of divinity, thus remind one of the fateful rejection of Dionysus as staged in tragedies about Lycurgus and Pentheus, and perhaps cryptically in other tragedies as well.[28]

We shall discuss more implications of the rejection of Achelous in the course of our commentary, including his relation to the oracle at Dodona, which no character in the *Trachiniae* mentions despite the importance of Dodona in the play.

## Fear as remedy

Deianeira, therefore, while living in the stable contentment of her father's house, had to confront a force of instability that threatened to displace her from it: the force of life understood by her only in its negative aspect. Her pain, however, does not derive from the river, but from her fear of marriage (νυμφείων ὄκνον ἄλγιστον 7-8). Her description is consistent with the rest of her lament, for she always complains of fear, but never says Achelous did anything to her, nor that her father actually betrothed her to him.[29] Given Achelous' repeated visits (ἐξῄτει 10, φοιτῶν 11) Oeneus doesn't seem to have been in a hurry to do so. Yet Deianeira regarded her marriage to Achelous as a certainty (προσδεδεγμένη 15), and Heracles had to release her from it (ἐκλύεταί με 21). Her imagination made certain a situation still very uncertain to judge from her own words. As her pessimistic evaluation of her life showed (4-5), Deianeira can endure the certainty of suffering more

easily than an uncertain expectation of either prosperity or disaster. Her fear of Achelous, therefore, again exhibits the τέχνη ἀλυπίας of anticipatory preparation.[30] Indeed, her fear leads to an imaginary escape, death (κατθανεῖν ἐπηυχόμην 16), proving accurate our detection of suicidal potential in her declaration that she knew her life's full character (4-5) and establishing how strongly the temptation to suicide could affect her when confronted by uncertainty.[31] Deianeira's failure to watch the combat of Heracles and Achelous (21-25) likewise illustrates both her tendency to fear the worst when confronted by uncertainty and her inability in such a situation, perhaps even her unwillingness, to see things as they are.[32]

## Fear and instability

Even after Heracles defeated Achelous and took Deianeira as his wife her bad life continued, the cause, according to Deianeira, being fear, as before. The fear that Deianeira makes explicit primarily concerns the safety of her husband (κείνου προκηραίνουσα 29; πῆμ' ἔχοντά νιν 43); she does not in this speech indicate expressly that she fears for herself in any way. To this extent Deianeira tacitly represents herself as exteriorizing her suffering, for Heracles is the one who must undergo the real danger and risk of life, while Deianeira's concern manifests sympathy rather than full participation in his experiences; she is a spectator of Heracles' drama. Moreover, as with her fear of Achelous, her fear for Heracles arises from lack of knowledge,[33] and, at least in Deianeira's imagination, supplies her with the knowledge she desires. Although nobody knows Heracles' whereabouts, for he has sent back no herald (40-41, 45), Deianeira's very uncertainty becomes in her mind a virtual guarantee of calamity (σχεδὸν δ' ἐπίσταμαί . . . γὰρ . . . ἀκήρυκτος μένει 43-45). Finally she concludes that she does know that Heracles has met disaster (46).[34] Deianeira's pattern of generating fear from fear (ἐκ φόβου φόβον 28) also suggests that her fear arises not from any circumstances known to be real but rather from the anxiety of ignorance.

But if Deianeira's fears for Heracles permit her an illusion of knowledge and prepare her for disaster beforehand, they also distract her from instability that concerns more than knowledge. She reveals this distraction in her speech by mentioning the instability to which she herself is subject while attributing her suffering only to her fear for Heracles. When Heracles defeated Achelous and married Deianeira, he seemed to have averted from her the instability that Achelous threatened to bring. Thus she speaks of Heracles' victory as an "end" (τέλος 26), and while superficially she refers



only to the conclusion of the fight, Deianeira seems to imply also the establishment of stability, an end of change in her life.[35] Yet this stability proved deceptive. Even when her marriage to Heracles permitted her enough stability that she could compare herself to a plot of ground (ἄρουραν 32), the comings and goings of her husband made Deianeira feel that she, and not the mobile farmer, was out of place (ἔκτοπον 32).[36] Moreover she has with this farmer no natural, necessary connection like that she had with her father, for in her figural description of herself as ploughland she is an alienable object, a field that the farmer has acquired (λαβών 32). Similarly she speaks of herself as a chosen bed (λέχος . . . κριτόν 27), that is, a piece of furniture. Even now that this episode in their marriage has come to an end[37] Deianeira knows no stability. Indeed, her instability is aggravated; she is out of place not only figuratively but literally, an exile dwelling with a stranger (39-40). Deianeira's exact words suggest an unhappy contrast with her childhood in her father's house, where the tale began:

> ἥτις πατρὸς μὲν ἐν δόμοισιν Οἰνέως
> ναίουσ' ἔτ' ἐν Πλευρῶνι . . . (6-7)
>
> ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχῖνι τῇδ' ἀνάστατοι
> ξένῳ παρ' ἀνδρὶ ναίομεν, . . . (39-40)

The contrast is stronger and more apparent if νῦν δ' (36) responds to μέν (6), taken by most commentators as μέν *solitarium*.[38]

Despite her emphasis on her fears for Heracles, Deianeira herself has undergone considerable hardship. She does not explicitly blame her husband for this; on the contrary. Yet she also does not reveal that for years she has guarded in her possession and her memory the charm whose only purpose is to control him. Deianeira expresses less in what she says than in what she leaves unsaid; her solicitude for Heracles beguiles her own pain, the pain he has caused her.[39]

## Heracles the farmer

Lines 31-33, in which Deianeira compares herself to a field, Heracles to its farmer, and their children to his crop, have caused much confusion among commentators. The issue focuses on κάξαμῶν (33): what can it mean to "thoroughly reap" one's children?[40] Almost all scholars deny that ἐξαμῶν need take οὓς (31) as its direct object or can meaningfully do so. But since

both grammar and some clues of sense (sowing is like making children) urge the rejected reading, it behooves us to consider what the text might imply by it. When a farmer reaps he takes a blade to his crop and cuts it down. Seen in this light, the metaphor of reaping suggests that Heracles kills his own children.[41] Since in myth Heracles did kill his children by Megara, it seems quite possible that the text might be alluding to that story. A second reason for so interpreting the word ἐξαμῶν is that the *Trachiniae* contains yet another passage that creates the impression of the same allusion. When Deianeira beholds the captives whom Heracles has taken from Oechalia she prays that no fate such as theirs befall her *offspring* (σπέρμα 304). Here too Deianeira's words suggest that Heracles might use against his own children the violence that he routinely uses against others.

Recognizing the impression of allusion created in these passages may solve the grammatical problem of 31-33, but only to replace it with a more profound difficulty. Since Heracles' murder of his children is never mentioned explicitly in the *Trachiniae*, and seems not to belong to its dramatic universe, how are allusions to it to be understood? A psychological explanation might hold that since Heracles' marriage to Megara was supposed to have preceded that to Deianeira, Deianeira had heard about Heracles' deed and alluded to it unconsciously. Alternatively she might only have sensed in her husband the potential for such an act. Nothing in the text, however, besides the allusions themselves, supports such interpretations.

Another approach might be to suppose that the apparent allusions hint that Heracles may kill his children *during the course of the Trachiniae*. One can feel quite certain that if Sophocles had shown Heracles arriving home from his labors and killing his children, as in Euripides' *Heracles*, scholars would have pointed to the apparent allusions I have mentioned and identified "Sophoclean irony" in them. Both apparent allusions occur before it becomes clear what direction the plot of the *Trachiniae* will take, so some in the audience might have found them foreboding. Yet Sophocles does not in the *Trachiniae* stage Heracles' murder of his children. His allusions, therefore, are illusions, hints, but misleading hints. Sophocles' ability to throw out such hints will have consequences for our interpretation of the hints, not unreasonably found in the text, that Heracles becomes a god on Mt. Oeta.



II Deianeira and the Nurse, 49-63.

Correspondences

Deianeira's Nurse, who has listened in silence to part or all of her mistress' lament, now comes forward to offer Deianeira advice about easing her mind. Before she can do so, however, she must apologize for her conduct. Though apparently an idle detail, her apology points to a theme that will prove important to the *Trachiniae* later on.

> νῦν δ', εἰ δίκαιον τοὺς ἐλευθέρους φρενοῦν
> γνώμαισι δούλαις κἀμὲ χρὴ φράσαι τὸ σόν, (52-53)

> But now, if it is right to instruct the free with a slave's advice,
> and if it is my duty to suggest what you should do . . .

The Nurse says that she can advise Deianeira only if it is δίκαιον for servile minds to counsel the free. Obviously she hopes to forestall a potential objection from Deianeira. We can reconstruct what such an objection might have been from our knowledge of the usage of δίκη, δίκαιος, and related words. Since they denote a correspondence,[42] the objection that it would not be δίκαιον for a slave to counsel the free would probably mean that no correspondence obtains between the condition of servitude and the mental and verbal freedom that would enable a slave to counsel her mistress; therefore for a slave to behave thus would not be δίκαιον. The Nurse, however, judging it δίκαιον so to behave, must therefore suppose there to be correspondence between her words and Deianeira's free condition, not to mention between her words and reality. (Notice that the Nurse does not claim a free mind for herself: γνώμαισι δούλαις 53). Deianeira concedes this when she declares that her slave has spoken an ἐλεύθερον λόγον (63).

The Nurse's apology illustrates first of all the relativity of the δίκαιον, for an act that corresponds to one standard may fail to correspond to another; whether the act is found δίκαιον will depend upon which standard is chosen. Second, the above relativism arises in part because certain correspondences deemed natural are actually conventional, if not indeed entirely fictitious. Deianeira is quite surprised that her slave should speak a free word (61-63). One might gather from her fear of the polymorphic Achelous that she expects a slave to be servile in mind and tongue as well as condition; yet in her free-speaking slave she has a polymorph right in her own home. Third, a word in particular may not conform to its putative origin.

### The rhetoric of presence

In the Introduction we stated that this study of *Trachiniae* would place more emphasis than others upon the effects produced by language in the play. The ending of Deianeira's prologue speech brings the efficacy of language forcefully into prominence. In Deianeira's concern her lack of a report about Heracles (ὅπου βέβηκεν οὐδεὶς οἶδε 40-41; ἀκήρυκτος 45) competes with, if it does not entirely supplant, the absence of Heracles himself. Then, referring to a tablet Heracles has left her, she adds that she often prays to have received it without calamity (τὴν . . . ἀρῶμαι πημονῆς ἄτερ λαβεῖν 47-48), as if in receiving Heracles' message she might also have received that which she takes it to signify. For Deianeira the language of the tablet achieves effect through a process of figuration; not the figuration of the tablet's language, but the figuration of Deianeira's response, which metonymically substitutes the tablet for its putative referent, the calamity. This can be called a rhetoric of presence because the presence of the signifier (the tablet) metonymically stands for the referent, which remains absent.

The Nurse's advice to Deianeira also employs the rhetoric of presence, for she hopes to relieve her mistress' sorrow (49-51) not, as first appears, by sending Hyllus after Heracles himself (ἀνδρὸς κατὰ ζήτησιν 55) but rather after a report about him (πατρὸς . . . ὤραν τοῦ καλῶς πράσσειν δοκεῖν 56-57). When speaking to Hyllus Deianeira confirms that getting a report is precisely the idea (τὸ μὴ πυθέσθαι . . . αἰσχύνην φέρειν 66). Thus the report of Heracles has replaced Heracles himself as the object of Deianeira's longing. Indeed, one may see even a further, tacit extension of the rhetoric of presence in the way the Nurse's mere suggestion instantly brightens Deianeira's spirits (61-63), producing part of the effect that the presence of Heracles himself might be expected to produce.

### Probability

The Nurse's advice presents the first example of enthymemic reasoning in the *Trachiniae*: Hyllus, who could reasonably be expected to go (ὅνπερ εἰκός . . . εἰ . . . 56) ought to be sent for news of Heracles. Yet the Nurse's very act of offering advice seems to Deianeira to occur almost by chance (μῦθοι . . . πίπτουσιν 62) and violates what might reasonably be expected of a slave (δούλη μέν, εἴρηκεν δ' ἐλεύθερον λόγον 63). τὸ εἰκός therefore is a fallible guide to truth.



## III Deianeira and Hyllus, 64-93.

In the first part of their dialogue (64-75) Deianeira learns what Hyllus has heard about his father, and in the second (76-93) she tells him about the prophecy Heracles left and sends him to help. The former features a number of important rhetorical moves. First, the likelihood, mentioned by the Nurse, that Hyllus would act to enhance his father's reputation (56-57) is understood by Deianeira to be based upon Hyllus' concern for his own reputation (τὸ μὴ πυθέσθαι . . . αἰσχύνην φέρειν 66). She hopes to motivate Hyllus not by the benefit of the search to Heracles or even to her, but by the benefit to Hyllus himself of seeming to have searched. Her words imply recognition of the purely rhetorical value of a report, its value, independent of its referent, in the social relationship of the reporter and his community. Deianeira's focus upon a report and the reputation it brings assumes that for Hyllus, as for herself, a report about Heracles can be accepted as a substitute for Heracles, and moreover that Hyllus really desires the reputation of a reporter, a report of a report. In other words, she assumes that the rhetoric of presence functions as a principle of Hyllus' thought and a basis for his values. Since the value appealed to, the desire to win glory and avoid shame, is so central to the heroic ethos of Heracles and his family, we can see that the rhetoric of presence functions in the *Trachiniae* not merely at the surface of the speeches but even in the minds of the characters; that is, the characters of *Trachiniae* may think as well as speak with signifiers, their thought may perform the same rhetorical maneuvers as their speech, and among these maneuvers is the metonymic substitution of a signifier for its putative referent.[43]

The second rhetorical move is Hyllus' assertion that his news about Heracles can be accepted as truth. When he declares that he knows Heracles' whereabouts, he apparently qualifies his knowledge by subjecting it to the condition that reports can be believed (μύθοις εἴ τι πιστεύειν χρεών 67). The condition seems to raise the possibility that reports cannot be believed.[44] Nevertheless since Hyllus proceeds to relay his information without further qualification his purpose in stating the condition must be to *reject* any doubt about the trustworthiness of report. εἰ means in essence "since"; the Nurse's rhetorical proviso εἰ δίκαιον (52), where she obviously assumed that her action was δίκαιον, furnishes another example of the same usage. Stating the obvious in this manner amounts to the figure of meiosis. In the case of Hyllus' statement, far from qualifying the trustworthiness of report it rejects the very possibility of qualification. Hyllus' tendency to exaggerate the extent of his knowledge, so important later in the play, here is already in evidence. But the negative form taken by Hyllus' assertion of truth

may reveal ambivalence despite the motive that we infer he regards as his "intention." Moreover it illustrates the insufficiency of grammar to determine the meaning of statements and their consequent openness to interpretation.[45] This, we shall see, is one of the drama's chief themes.

The third operation is Deianeira's τέχνη ἀλυπίας, anticipatory imagining of suffering. Despite the vagueness of Hyllus' message Deianeira's certainty that disaster has befallen Heracles remains steadfast. She puts the worst possible construction upon the news that her husband has been serving a Lydian woman: "if he endured even this, then one could hear anything" (71). Thus she transforms Hyllus' report, which lacks any suggestion of calamity, into the possibility of a report of the doom she had feared. Recognizing Deianeira's fears, Hyllus tries to allay them by adding good news (ἀλλ' 72), but Deianeira then asks whether Heracles is dead or alive (73), although Hyllus had in no way indicated that he might be dead, rather the opposite in fact. Hyllus again replies with good news, indicating that Heracles is both alive and already near. But this too Deianeira adjusts to her expectation of disaster, connecting to Hyllus' mention of Oechalia a "trustworthy" prophecy that Heracles would either conquer that city and have an easy life thereafter or die (76-81).

It is very striking that Deianeira should say that Oechalia was specifically mentioned in the oracle, since in that case she should have suspected Heracles' whereabouts, especially if she considered the oracle "trustworthy" as she now says she does (μαντεῖα πιστά 77). Moreover, although this oracle is surely the same as that inscribed on the δέλτον (47) and those referred to by Deianeira at 164-172, the Chorus at 824-826, and Heracles at 1169-1171,[46] none of the other accounts of the oracle mention Oechalia or any other particular place that will be the scene of Heracles' life-crisis, and all mention that the crisis will occur when a certain length of time has elapsed (though they do not clearly agree as to the length). The most credible explanation of the disparity was offered by Jebb: the text of the prophecy left by Heracles did not actually mention Oechalia, but Deianeira infers that Oechalia is meant, since that is where Heracles is when the specified time elapses.[47]

We have in essence therefore an interpolation in the text of the oracle, for Deianeira has not only interpreted the oracle, but also inserted her interpretation into the text. This interpolation can be understood in rhetorical terms as another metonymic substitution, one that rhetorically establishes the truth of Deianeira's interpretation by regarding it as identical to the text itself. Such an operation in fact repeats the rhetoric of presence, rhetorically eliminating the distance between the interpretation and its object, the oracular text, and thus allowing Deianeira rhetorically to pass beyond truthful interpretation to absolute certainty. This certainty is based in turn upon the



rhetoric of truth that establishes belief in the correspondence of the oracle to an assumed reality (μαντεῖα πιστά 77). Thus Deianeira can overlook the fact that the referent which her interpretation rhetorically replaces is itself a signifier and not the reality she seeks.

The prophecy Deianeira relates poses a second difficulty just as disturbing as the interpolation discussed above. Here and at 164-168 Deianeira reports that the prophecy predicted alternative possibilities: either Heracles would die, or he would lead a good life. When Heracles himself recounts the oracle (1169-1171) he says that it predicted only an end to his toils, and he declares that he therefore thought he would fare well, indicating that no hint of his death was present either in the text of the oracle or in his own mind. The Chorus' account of the oracle (824-826), moreover, agrees with that of Heracles. If we do not take this inconsistency as a breach of dramatic illusion but continue to accept the play as a representation of events, the conclusion that someone in reporting the oracle is altering the text by either addition or suppression seems inescapable.[48] Fuller discussion of the problem will follow in due course, but at this point it is enough only to note that if Deianeira has corrupted this part of the oracle, she would seem to have done so by adding the possibility that Heracles might die, which of course would only confirm the pessimism she has already explained in lines 6-35.

Hyllus' explanation of his previous inactivity (86-89) reveals a rhetoric of the unity of events like that used by Deianeira in asserting that she knows the character of her life as a whole from the part already lived (4-5). But unlike his ever-fearful mother, Hyllus is never very fearful, because his father's customary fate makes Hyllus confident that no calamity can befall him. Hyllus' rhetoric of unity, like Deianeira's, rests upon an appeal to experience. Heracles' previous toils are regarded as a sort of experiment confirming that toils are not harmful to him. The concrete experiences of the past (known to Hyllus, however, only through report) are gathered into a single *logos* of Heracles' fate from which even the future can be inferred. Hyllus' faith in the correspondence of language and reality provides him with his evidence. To this implicit use of the rhetoric of truth Hyllus then applies the rhetoric of unity, a faith in the correspondence of reality with itself that allows him to regard the events of Heracles' life not as separate occurrences but as manifestations of a single *logos* that will continue to determine the future. And indeed the piece of new evidence that undermines Hyllus' faith in this *logos* is not empirical evidence but still another *logos*, that of the oracle, the trustworthiness of which he characteristically accepts without question. Yet as we have seen, what Hyllus has accepted in the prophecy is not a *logos* about reality but a *logos* about a *logos* (i.e., an interpretation), whose fidelity

to its original is compromised through Deianeira's interpolation even before the fidelity of the original (the oracle) to *its* original (the predicted reality) can be considered. Moreover, the disagreement between Hyllus and Deianeira about what self-consistent *logos* can describe Heracles' life shows that each individual event of Heracles' toils is itself already divided and ambiguous, available for recruitment into a pattern of disaster or one of good fortune.[49]

In her parting words to Hyllus Deianeira says that faring well brings benefit to him who learns of it (ἐπεὶ πύθοιτο 93). In other words, the report itself will bring gladness to the hearer and win in return a reward for the reporter, the one who has learned of the success. More than meaningful, the report is effectual; it substitutes for its signified, τὸ εὖ πράσσειν, and itself becomes an instance of τὸ εὖ πράσσειν. The notion that language can be exchanged for a tangible gain (κέρδος ἐμπολᾷ 93) also suggests the terminology in Euripidean reflections on remedial discourse,[50] which is, after all, only a special employment of substitution of signifier for referent, the rhetoric of presence.

## IV The parodos, 94-140.

The entering Chorus of Trachinian maidens does not think Deianeira justified in worrying about Heracles as she does. To relieve her (ποθουμένᾳ γὰρ φρενί 103), and not because they themselves need to know, they call upon the Sun to report the whereabouts of her husband. Like Hyllus (88-89) they derive confidence from Heracles' survival of his previous labors (119-121), but their reasoning differs from his. Whereas Hyllus mentioned only Heracles' usual fate (ξυνήθης πότμος 88), as if his life contained only one kind of experience, the Chorus bases their optimism upon change. This change, however, proceeds in a regular cycle (129).[51] The suffering of Heracles is bound to be adjusted in time by Zeus.

The Chorus' argument utilizes extensively what might be called the rhetoric of vision. In the *Trachiniae* the commonest means for supporting the believability of a statement is the claim, explicit or implicit, that it is based upon sight. For example, when Deianeira skeptically refuses to believe Hyllus' charge that she has murdered Heracles, he insists first that the event was visible (φανθέν 743), then that he saw it himself and his report did not just repeat something heard elsewhere (αὐτὸς . . . ἐν ὄμμασιν . . . δεδορκὼς κοὐ κατὰ γλῶσσαν κλύων 746-747). In the next episode the Chorus, disbelieving the Nurse's report of Deianeira's suicide, asks if she saw the deed herself (ἐπεῖδες . . . τάνδ' ὕβριν; 887-888), and the Nurse replies that she did, as a close bystander (ἐπεῖδον, ὡς δὴ πλησία παραστάτις 889).[52] Thus here in the parodos the Chorus, rather than hoping for some rumor of Heracles to arrive from abroad, beseeches the Sun to report what it has seen of him (ὦ κρατιστεύων κατ' ὄμμα 102). They base their confidence in Heracles' eventual salvation upon the fact that nobody has ever seen (εἶδεν 140) Zeus act so inconsiderately toward his children. They support their notion of a regular cycle of joy and sadness (129-130) by reference to a cycle observable in nature, that of the constellation Arktos (130-131). Their elaborate invocation of the sun as "he to whom star-spangled night when slain gives birth and whom in flame she puts to sleep" (94-95) suggests another visible phenomenon that foreshadows their argument from natural cycle.



For the Chorus all nature is divided into complementary pairs. First there is night and day (94-95). Heracles may be on land or sea (ποντίας αὐλῶνας . . . ἀπείροις 100), and in either east or west, if ποντίας αὐλῶνας refers to the straits of the Black Sea and δισσαῖσιν ἀπείροις to the Pillars of Hercules.[53] Of continents there are two (δισσαῖσιν ἀπείροις), probably Europe and Asia including Africa. Heracles' troubles are like waves stirred up by either of two winds, south or north (ἢ νότου ἢ βορέα 113), waves which are past and oncoming (βάντ' ἐπιόντα τ' 115); in this way his troubles both turn him from his course (στρέφει 117) and lift him up (αὔξει 117). Calamity and joy take turns (129-130). Rejoicing is paired with deprivation (χαίρειν τε καὶ στέρεσθαι 136), and when they leave one man they approach another (132-135). The ode itself manifests parallel structure in its strophic part, the strophes dealing with Heracles' troubles, the antistrophes with Deianeira's worries.[54]

The world, however, will not divide up quite as the Chorus wishes to represent it. Division into land and sea (100-101) omits sky and Underworld, places where, according to myth, Heracles actually did go. Division into east and west omits north and south, which then turn up at 113. Division of the land into two continents is especially puzzling, though not unheard of; Herodotus mocks the cartographer who depicted a symmetrical earth (Hdt. 4.36). Division of waves past and coming makes two of one, since all the waves are the same, and the opposition of στρέφει and αὔξει would be easier to accept if we could be sure that στρέφει is the right reading and could clearly visualize what it denotes.[55]

Even if the natural world were naturally divided just like the periods of the heavenly bodies, however, from that pattern the Chorus could demonstrate the regular succession of pleasures and pains only by inference.

Like Hyllus when he spoke of Heracles' ξυνήθης πότμος (88), the Chorus projects a comprehensive *logos* from a few particulars. They may be empiricists when they look at the sky, but not when they infer a pattern in human events. Their peroration shows that in human affairs they can point to change, but not to pattern. Night, disasters, and wealth are all mobile and all common, but only night actually leaves and returns. Disasters like death and serious illness seldom leave once they have come and wealth seldom comes to the poor or leaves the rich. In asserting otherwise the Chorus' rhetoric must invoke the paternity of Zeus (139-140) to support the cycle as the special guarantee of Heracles' safety.

The reference to Zeus at the ode's conclusion points to a theme which, though faintly figured here, will soon become more prominent. The Chorus' appeal to change suggests that a person's lot in life is neither consistent in itself nor consistent with the person; that is, the ills or joys that a person experiences are not *her* ills or joys, but phenomena common to all mortals like the sun, night, and money. Just as the money one acquires was recently the property of another, so one's pleasures and pains. This condition is necessary to change, for only thus can one either lose old circumstances or acquire new ones. The alternative would be a destiny peculiar to oneself and ultimately determined by birth; Hyllus may mean something like this when he speaks of Heracles' ξυνήθης πότμος (88).

The Chorus thus seems to have rhetorically destroyed the basis for the kind of personal *logos* that Deianeira attributes to herself. As we saw, however, they do not abjure *logos* altogether but merely relocate it outside the individual, in the world order. This transpersonal destiny will not be an incidental property of the world, like the joys and griefs of individuals, but built-in, connected to the world's birth, for if it were artificial, the result of an outside force, then it might be subject to alteration. One means of rhetorically ensuring that the world has such a natural *logos* is to provide it with a parent whence its nature is derived. This parent is, of course, Zeus, ὁ πάντα κραίνων βασιλεύς (127); Lichas will refer to him as ὁ τῶν ἀπάντων . . . πατήρ (275). While mortals will not be self-consistent, but rather will passively accept the sorrows and joys that come from without, Zeus as the accomplisher and king, origin and organizer, of all, can and must be self-consistent, if there is world-order. Thus the Chorus' final appeal to Zeus the father depends upon the faith that he will not become alienated from his own creation and will not do what he has never done before.

The doubtfulness of Zeus' paternity, however, may be suggested by the use of patronymics in the ode. In the first place, when Zeus is first mentioned he is called not by his own name but Κρονίδας (128). Thus the accomplisher of all turns out to have been himself accomplished by someone further back. More curious yet, at 116 Heracles, said to be the son of Zeus, is called τὸν Καδμογενῆ. This name refers not to any variant myth in which Heracles was physically descended from Cadmus, but to the Theban political fiction that all Theban citizens were offspring of Cadmus: Heracles became a descendant of Cadmus when adopted into the Theban nobility. Fatherhood, then, the definitive case of φύσις, here appears as νόμος, a myth of ethnic sameness that disguises difference. The possibility of creating such a myth of fatherhood suggests that Zeus' fatherhood may also be mythic.

Ultimately the Chorus relies upon a specious use of the rhetoric of vision to certify the reliability of Zeus. In asking who has seen Zeus so neglectful they imply that Zeus has been seen taking care of his children; but they don't affirm that Zeus has been seen by anyone, and he surely never appears in the *Trachiniae*. Here too, therefore, his paternity appears to be a production of the Chorus' rhetoric.

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# Tragic Rhetoric

## An Interpretation of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*

PETER LANG
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