CHAPTER THREE

A Pain that Cures

I Deianeira explains her situation, 531-551.

Deianeira emerges from the house to share her worries with the Chorus and inform them of the action she has taken (534-535). She wants to arouse their pity (συγκατοικτιουμένη 535), indicating that her speech will have a theatrical character, like the tragic performance which itself aims at exciting pity in the onlookers. Moreover, the fact that Deianeira expects the Chorus to join her in pity shows that she already pities herself, and that as her audience the Chorus will only add to the dramatization of her life that Deianeira has already effected by herself, as we glimpsed her doing in her prologue soliloquy.

The rhetoric of Deianeira's speech does not so much justify her plan (she never mentions justice) as dignify it by depicting Heracles' infidelity as an indignity to her and perhaps even to himself, while representing her decision to use the love philter as proceeding from a rational and dignified impulse. Thus she feels insulted by the presence of Iole in her house (λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα 538), and Heracles' act shows that he is wrongly called faithful and good (πιστὸς . . . κἀγαθὸς καλούμενος 541). Ultimately Deianeira is motivated by fear for her reputation (οὖν φοβοῦμαι μὴ . . . καλῆται 550-551). On the other hand, she disavows any unbecoming emotions: she cannot feel angry at Heracles (θυμοῦσθαι . . . οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι 543), to do so would not be καλόν (οὐ . . . ὀργαίνειν καλὸν γυναῖκα νοῦν ἔχουσαν 552-553). She presents the philter, therefore, as the thinking woman's alternative to anger.[1]

Deianeira does not say that Iole excites her with sexual jealousy; to assume ἢ with ἀνήρ (551)[2] misses the force of Deianeira's rhetoric. Deianeira's failure to acknowledge that she feels sexually deprived tacitly contributes to her dignified self-portrayal. Yet one cannot deny that the temptation to interpret Deianeira's unhappiness in sexual terms has a strong

basis in the text, for despite a rhetoric that places her above passion, anger explicitly and eros implicitly, Deianeira's description of her situation reveals preoccupation with sex, indeed with the sex act itself. Three expressions in her speech refer to it, ἐζευγμένην (536), δύ' οὖσαι μίμνομεν μιᾶς ὑπὸ χλαίνης ὑπαγκάλισμα (539-540), and ἀφαρπάζειν ἄνθος (548-549). In addition, given the frequency in old comedy of nautical metaphors for sexual intercourse,[3] Deianeira's reference to herself as a sailor who has taken on cargo, preceded by the image of Iole's yoking and followed by that of Iole and herself in bed, may also suggest the particular effect that Iole will have on Deianeira's sex life, interfering with her sailing, as it were.[4]

All of these allusions to sexual intercourse characterize it as degrading and/or violent for the woman. The first and third concern defloration, and since they suggest application of force to the girl (whom the man yokes like a beast [536], whose flower he tears away [548-549])[5] Deianeira may intend them to alarm the Chorus' "maiden sensibilities."[6] ὑπαγκάλισμα probably has an extremely sarcastic ring, since despite the graphic and hence coarse reference to the sex act imparted to it by the context, ὑπαγκάλισμα, ὑπαγκαλίζω, and ὑπαγκάλιος normally concern an affectionate, though not necessarily sexual, embrace of a beloved person. For example, Euripides uses ὑπαγκάλισμα of a child (*Tr.* 757). Hence for Deianeira to refer either to Heracles or herself and Iole as a ὑπαγκάλισμα suggests a bitter contrast between the affectionate embraces that she might expect to share with Heracles and her subjugation to him as, in essence, an occupant of his harem.[7]

Although, as we have stated, in using such language Deianeira may have hoped to shock the virgins of the Chorus, as the implied audience of her speech they are projections of Deianeira herself, and indeed we have already made note of Deianeira's idealization of the maiden state and her aversion to marriage. Her reference to the sex act as one in which a woman is yoked or torn leave no doubt that the thought of it fills her with revulsion. Furthermore, here as before she associates it with the depredations of the life process, since change that occurs as a woman grows produces deteriorative change in her union with her spouse (547-549).

At the same time, however, Deianeira's speech suggests that her emotional affinity for women, expressed in her intimate friendship with the Chorus, her deep concern for the Oechalian captives, and her close identification with both, has an erotic aspect. By depicting Iole and herself as awaiting Heracles together she represents in the strongest possible way her identification of Iole with herself, since in her depiction they both share the same function with respect to Heracles.[8] Yet the fact that Deianeira's feeling of

solidarity with Iole finds its full expression in terms stopping just short of shared, if not simultaneous, intercourse with Heracles, implies a sexual union of the two concubines that excludes their common abductor.[9] Deianeira's description of the two of them "under a single cloak" (μιᾶς ὑπὸ χλαίνης 539-540) confirms this suggestion, since μία χλαῖνα frequently symbolizes a pair of lovers.[10]

Deianeira's desire to appear καλή, however, allows her affection for Iole (actually her affection for a projection of herself, whom she identifies with Iole), and her hostility to Heracles and male sexuality, to appear only briefly and refractedly. Deianeira reveals much bitterness toward Heracles in describing herself as a carrier of his freight (537-538), hence as bearing only a temporary, commercial relationship to him, and as his ill-paid housekeeper (οἰκούρι' 542), in her use of ὑπαγκάλισμα whether it refers to Heracles or to his concubines, and in her sarcastic reference to his reputation as faithful and good (ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῖν κἀγαθὸς καλούμενος 541).[11] Yet before she can pass beyond such obliquities and confront her anger directly, she reverses direction and denies it, separating Heracles' lust from her image of him by proclaiming it a disease and thus deflecting her hatred away from him (θυμοῦσθαι . . . οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι νοσοῦντι κείνῳ 543-544). Instead she speaks of Iole as the source of discord (545-546). But ultimately she can explicitly acknowledge no jealousy, only a fear of damage to her reputation (550-551).

Especially in her irony Deianeira reveals that her feeling of violation by Heracles combines with a paradoxical desire that he render her whole again. In this sense at least we can say that Deianeira "loves" Heracles. This love, almost indistinguishable from hate, motivates Deianeira to bring Heracles under her control by using the power she has kept in reserve for such a moment, the power of the philter.

II Deianeira discloses her plan to the Chorus, 552-581.

Ambiguity and the φάρμακον

Deianeira now reveals to the Chorus her plan to ensure Heracles' love for her by administering to him the drug that she obtained from the centaur Nessus. The words λυτήριον λύπημα (554), apparently describing the drug, have been suspected by many critics.[12] The purpose of the drug is to release Deianeira from the uncertainty of her relationships with Iole and Heracles. The λυ- root, however, has twice before been used of releases that proved deceptive (21 and 181). Deianeira's release from the wooing of Achelous

failed to be a release in that she was not actually possessed by the river and also in that it initiated the uncertainty and confinement of her marriage with Heracles. The drug of Nessus will also bring more pain and uncertainty than it dispels, and its designation as a λύπημα, a pain, also suggests this ambiguity. Stinton has defended λύπημα by explaining in essence that Deianeira may not denote the drug by it, but rather a real pain, either Nessus' pain or her own shame at using a device such as the drug.[13] The former interpretation seems the more easily derived from the immediately following context, but I would suggest that instead Deianeira may refer to her experience of assault, which she then narrates. Thus her narration would explain how she has a "releasing pain."

If the expression λυτήριον λύπημα is perfectly acceptable Greek it remains rich in ambiguity, denoting a pain that also ends pain. Deianeira hopes to have only deliverance, as if pain were not already part of her strategy; yet the drug of Nessus will bring more pain than it dispels. The ambiguity of Deianeira's strategy, and her hope to evade that ambiguity and derive only benefit from it, inevitably recall the ambiguity of φάρμακον, denoting both medicine and poison; indeed Deianeira will later apply this word to the love philter (685).[14]

The circumstances under which Deianeira obtained this drug also suggest its ambiguity and instability. It was the gift of a polymorph, the centaur Nessus (θὴρ Κένταυρος 680), whose name, like those of other centaurs, denotes an inarticulate roar,[15] and thus carries ambiguity to its limit. Himself inhabiting the realms of both man and beast and thus constituting a boundary between them, as his work in life Nessus conveyed mortals across a boundary, the river Evenus (559-560), and the critical exchange between Deianeira and Nessus occurred, according to Deianeira, at the precise edge of this boundary (μέσῳ πόρῳ 564).

Opposites always mingle at a boundary, but especially at the particular boundary plied by Nessus, since it consists of the most unstable element, water. Indeed, the Evenus has been described as "one of the fiercest and most treacherous torrents in Greece,"[16] and must have suggested a scene of great confusion and wildness to any in Sophocles' audience who were familiar with it. Its description as βαθύρρουν (559) brings special attention to both its flowing essence and its depth or lower boundary, which is not easily reached. Nessus, however, is suited to this chaotic habitat, since he navigates it without any mechanical assistance.[17]

Even the formation of the drug displays its ambiguity, for it is not a simple substance but a mixture of the centaur's blood and the hydra's poisonous bile (572-574). Both substances are fluids. The hydra itself has a

name that suggests water and it lives in water, so that water may be understood as the producer of the drug and not merely a circumstance of its creation.

Furthermore, Nessus' drug will work by disrupting the chain of correspondence between reality, vision, and mind. Heracles will not love any woman more than Deianeira (μήτιν' . . . στέρξει γυναῖκα . . . ἀντὶ σοῦ 576-577), although he will see other women (εἰσιδών 576). Infidelity therefore produces the drug's putative effect of fidelity.

Finally, and most importantly, the words Nessus speaks to Deianeira are open to a range of interpretations. As he is about to tell Deianeira how to obtain the charm that can control Heracles' lust, Nessus gives her a reason to believe that it will be beneficial: "because you were the last whom I carried" (ὀθούνεχ' ὑστάτην σ' ἔπεμψ' ἐγώ 571). Only by reporting these words does Deianeira explain her trust in Nessus. Yet as an explanation they are quite puzzling, for although ὀθούνεχ' rhetorically indicates that its clause is explanatory, it is far from clear how the clause explains Nessus' gift: why should his final passenger deserve special treatment? In asking this question we in essence state that Nessus' words require interpretation and ask how he and Deianeira interpret them. The text itself supplies no conclusive answers, and we may choose to say that Nessus offers Deianeira the mere impression of a reason, and she convinces herself with that. Somewhat more speculatively, we might imagine that Deianeira interprets Nessus' explanation as referring to a relationship of exchange existing between them, in which Nessus regards his final passenger as deserving a special reward in return for a payment that is especially valuable because it was made to him at the point of death. Such an interpretation would accord with the rhetoric of exchange and reciprocation found throughout *Trachiniae* (e.g. the Chorus at 94-140, Deianeira at 91-2, the Messenger at 190-191, Deianeira at 227-228, Lichas at 230-231 and 248-283, Deianeira at 494) and especially with Deianeira's assumption that Nessus could have done her a favor only in exchange for something else (ἀντὶ τοῦ, "in exchange for what?" 707). Deianeira's acceptance of the rhetoric of exchange therefore could have convinced her that Nessus' gift might repay her for a favor. Yet the kind of exchange Deianeira could expect depends upon the interpretation of ὑστάτην (571): is Deianeira the dying centaur's helper or his killer?

Nessus' description of the drug's effect also has more than one meaning. Does Deianeira believe that the charm will enhance Heracles' love for her, or only diminish his love for Iole? The adverb πως ("somehow" 584: ἐάν πως τήνδ' ὑπερβαλώμεθα τὴν παῖδα) may suggest that Deianeira actually does not have a clear idea herself. But the Chorus' prayer that Heracles return

"full of desire" (πανίμερος 660; the codices read πανάμερος) indicates that they at least expect the charm to arouse Heracles' desire for Deianeira. And later Hyllus will use the following words to explain to his father why Deianeira sent the robe:

> Νέσσος πάλαι Κένταυρος ἐξέπεισέ νιν
> τοιῷδε φίλτρῳ τὸν σὸν ἐκμῆναι πόθον. (1141-1142)
>
> The centaur Nessus long ago persuaded her to excite your desire with a charm like this.

Nessus' promise, which at least grammatically is purely negative (μήτιν' . . . γυναῖκα) has become extremely positive. In a common enough maneuver, Nessus' negation has been taken as the figure of litotes or understatement, an elusive figure that calls for understanding an expression in a sense exactly contrary to that implied by its grammar. Nothing in Nessus' words themselves allows a secure choice between two quite different potential meanings.[18]

The drug itself, therefore, and all the circumstances surrounding it, feature compresence of opposites, ambiguity, or polymorphism. Turning our attention from the rhetoric of Deianeira's speech to that of the whole play, we can see that the drug may have a quasi-allegorical significance as language itself. Deianeira's characterization of the drug as a gift (δῶρον 555) kept in a jar, which will wreak havoc when released, should recall the story of Pandora in Hes. *Op.* 60-105. Pietro Pucci has convincingly interpreted this story as an account of the origin of difference in the world through the introduction of imitation and language.[19] Moreover Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* explicitly equates λόγος and φάρμακον in a context of seduction.[20] In using the drug Deianeira smears it on a woven garment, and weaving often substitutes metaphorically for poetry.[21] Deianeira's word for the box in which she places the robe, ζύγαστρον (692), in some contexts denotes a γραμματοφυλάκιον, a thing in which writing is kept.[22] The drug's operation through melting (ῥεῖ πᾶν 698) and the frequent association of poetry with flowing liquids such as honey[23] and the Muses' inspirational spring on Mt. Helicon, may also link the drug and language. The Chorus explicitly connects the drug to Persuasion (661). Most importantly, the drug acts largely through language: Nessus' persuasion of Deianeira, Deianeira's deception of Lichas and Heracles, and finally Heracles' interpretation of what the drug has done to him and how he must respond.

Yet Deianeira strives to control the instability of the forces that act through the drug precisely by using language. Her rhetoric never explicitly acknowledges that Nessus was half-human, referring to him in this speech only as a beast (θηρός 556, θήρ 568), later as a "beast Centaur" (θήρ . . . Κένταυρος 680).[24] Her quotation of Nessus' instructions does not explicitly indicate that the hydra's poison is part of the drug, it being only Nessus' blood taken from a certain place (ἐὰν . . . αἷμα . . . ἐνέγκῃ . . . ᾗ . . . ἔβαψεν ἰοὺς θρέμμα 572-574). Nor does it acknowledge that the substance applied to the arrows was poison; she calls it merely θρέμμα . . . ὕδρας (574).[25] Only by suppressing the presence of the hydra's poison in the philter can Deianeira imagine that it is beneficial; later she regards the poison alone as proof that the philter must kill Heracles (ὅδε . . . ἰὸς . . . πῶς οὐκ ὀλεῖ καὶ τόνδε; 716-718).

Deianeira's use of the philter ultimately depends upon her suppression of the ambiguity in Nessus' words about the philter's effect. She reveals her determination to arrest the flow of meaning by attempting to quote the dying words of Nessus directly (569-577), suppressing thereby the act of interpretation that she has already tacitly performed in supposing, or appearing to suppose, that the charm should make Heracles love her. Yet not only can she not fix the meaning of Nessus' words and exclude undesirable possibilities, she cannot even repeat them perfectly, for she will show in the next scene (685-687) that her direct quotation of Nessus omitted his instructions about preserving the drug.

All of Deianeira's exclusions participate in her effort to feel that she can master Nessus' drug and use it to benefit herself. Deianeira hints at her sense that the drug requires such control in saying that she had kept it locked up (ἐγκεκλῃμένον 579), as if it had a force of its own and threatened to break out. Her attitude toward the drug itself therefore resembles that which she holds toward Nessus' language, whose power to engender meaning she apparently hopes to arrest by verbatim quotation. Moreover Deianeira's effort to control the drug by keeping it hidden in a bronze urn (λέβητι χαλκέῳ κεκρυμμένον 556) looks forward to her effort to control the transmission of language by inscribing it in her memory like an engraving on a bronze tablet (χαλκῆς ὅπως δύσνιπτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν 683).

Clearly Deianeira does not passively fall victim to the centaur's persuasion; Nessus can deceive her only if she deceives herself by repressing the general interpretability of his words and the specific interpretation that suggests his hostility. Yet self-deception is not ignorance, but rather a kind of suspicion, and the suspicion that Deianeira suppresses may actually motivate her to keep and use the drug. For Deianeira's very acceptance and

preservation of the drug bespeaks her desire to control Heracles, and thus her fear that he requires control and her resentment of the instability he has already caused since taking her from her father's house. Although she only produces Nessus' charm at a moment when her marriage seems to be threatened, and her use of the charm can credibly be represented as an act of love, her preservation of the charm suggests a deeper dissatisfaction that she cannot acknowledge. Similarly, while Deianeira must interpret and represent the φάρμακον as a love charm, her repressed suspicion that it may be something else may also motivate her to use it.

The crime of Nessus

Scholars often cite Nessus' attempted rape of Deianeira and Heracles' murder of the centaur as a straightforward case of crime and deserved punishment, suiting the traditional picture of Heracles the civilizer purifying the world of savage monsters.[26] Yet Deianeira's own account says only that he touched her (ψαύει 565), albeit with "wanton hands" (ματαίαις χερσίν 565). Within an instant Heracles had responded to Deianeira's shout and pierced the centaur with an arrow (565-568). Under such circumstances both Nessus' deed and his intention are doubtful; only Deianeira's interpretation is clear.[27]

In a case such as Deianeira's account of Nessus' death we should not attempt to supply what it omits from "the myth," since the text does not suggest the possibility of an account more authoritative than Deianeira's. Such an account might derive from the Muses, but nowhere in *Trachiniae*, or in any of his other surviving plays, does Sophocles claim, as Homer does, that the Muses have authorized the versions of the myths he has dramatized, or any versions at all. Instead Sophocles treats the stories as deriving entirely from human sources, an approach to myth essentially the same as that found in Herodotus or Thucydides. Therefore as an eyewitness Deianeira offers the most reliable testimony possible of the occurrence in the Evenus. The deficiencies of her account, whether due to error, reticence, or lying, will afflict any subsequent transmission. By showing that the story of Nessus' rape arose not from a rape, but from an anticipation of rape, Sophocles undermines the credibility of the more usual version. He suggests that any verbal account arises from its speaker as an interpretation of phenomena rather than from the phenomena it supposedly represents or from a divine authority such as the Muses.

III Deianeira seeks the Chorus' advice, 581-597.

When she has described to the Chorus the action she has taken Deianeira asks their advice about it (581-587), reiterating her disavowal of anything unseemly in her behavior (κακὰς δὲ τόλμας μήτ' ἐπισταίμην ἐγὼ μήτ' ἐκμάθοιμι, τάς τε τολμώσας στυγῶ 582-583). Deianeira's description of the crisis characteristically evinces her anxiety and simultaneously shields her from it by representing the flow of events as halted. Thus in Deianeira's words the work is both already complete (πεπείραν̣ται τάδε 581, μεμηχάνηται τοὔργον 586) and still incomplete. In fact, if the Chorus disapproves of her plan Deianeira will already have stopped (πεπαύσομαι 587). The repetition of contradictory perfects seems to express Deianeira's indecision and uncertainty (because she contradicts herself) and her desire to see the uncertainty dispelled and the crisis at an end (because she uses perfects).

The Chorus' reply to Deianeira advises caution, as Friedrich Solmsen has recently shown.[28] While Deianeira regards the appearance of success (τὸ δοκεῖν 590) as offering some ground for confidence (πίστις 590), the Chorus insists that she who acts must already have knowledge (εἰδέναι χρὴ δρῶσαν 592) derived from experience (πειρωμένη 593). Thus the Chorus confirms what they had already shown in the parodos, that they believe that the future can be inferred from the past, as known by empirical observation; for events follow a regular pattern. This argument should have had some likelihood of persuading Deianeira, whom we have seen to appeal regularly to the possibility of inferring the future from the past; and she, not the Chorus, was the first to point out that though her plan held the appearance of success, experience was lacking (πείρᾳ δ' οὐ προσωμίλησά πω 591). Yet it does not persuade her.

It does not persuade her because her deliberation is interrupted by a chance event, the emergence of Lichas from the palace.[29] Here above all we must recognize the limitations of the positivist criticism that accepts the text at its putative face value and forbids interpretation between the lines. Not a word of the text draws attention to this moment as the most crucial of the play or announces its thematic import. Chance plays a role in the dramatic action that is far out of proportion to the prominence of τύχη in the text.[30] And the decisive intrusion of chance at this juncture refutes the Chorus' assumption of a pattern in events that is both observable and predictable.

Deianeira had avoided recognition of her confused feelings about Heracles and Iole by verbalizing the problem of their affair as a threat to her reputation (καλῆται 551). Now she suppresses her anxiety about the outcome of her use of the drug by treating its potential failure as a danger

merely to her reputation (596-597), evincing once again her heroic stance and its assumption that a signifier (αἰσχύνῃ 597) replaces the referent (πράσσῃς 597). Yet in trying to maintain control of her reputation Deianeira resorts to darkness (σκότῳ 596), precisely the source of the uncertainty that she fears most. This very darkness will in fact prove damaging to her reputation, for Heracles and Hyllus will think that she acted with intent to do Heracles harm. Deianeira's attempt to control the *logos* about herself, like her attempt to control Nessus' drug, will not have the effect she intends. Deianeira attempts to divide reality from reputation, but her reckoning that shame is only what others know deceives her. Deianeira's own self-estimate causes her death (729-730).

This scene also blurs the sharp rhetorical division between good and evil as determined by the concord of appearance and reality on the one hand and their discord on the other. Earlier (383-384) the Chorus had strongly condemned those who in secret exercise unseemly evils, but now they themselves advise such a course, deeming it not bad (οὐ βεβουλεῦσθαι κακῶς 589). Deianeira had lectured Lichas on the unworthiness of lying (453-454), but now she herself has chosen to act deceitfully.[31]

IV Deianeira gives Lichas the robe and his instructions, 598-632.

Despite Deianeira's consultation with the Chorus, the robe is sent to Heracles not because of a rational decision but in part because Lichas appeared from the house before the matter could be considered further (594-595).[32] Thus even at this point the work of the drug is beyond Deianeira's complete control. Yet her instructions to Lichas are meant to extend her control over it even when it has left her hands. Not only must Lichas be instructed, but his instructions are instructions for Heracles (604-609), so the operation of the drug now depends not only upon transmission of the drug itself, but also upon transmission of words through two stages of removal from their apparent origin. The possibility of miscarriage at either stage is manifested by Deianeira's adjuration of Lichas to observe the custom of heralds (φύλασσε . . . νόμον 616) and not exceed the boundaries of his instructions (μὴ 'πιθυμεῖν . . . περισσὰ δρᾶν 617), since Deianeira knows that in concealing the identity and status of Iole Lichas has already violated the bounds of the message he was to bring from Heracles to her. Lichas, as oblivious to his record of untrustworthiness as Deianeira, promises to deliver her gift and her words without any alteration (ὡς ἔχει 622, λόγων . . . πίστιν 623).[33] Deianeira's concern with the accuracy of Lichas as transmitter of her

message to Heracles mirrors her rhetoric of presence when he brought her Heracles' message. In both instances an intermediary stage substitutes for a terminus, the origin before, here the goal.

Yet Deianeira herself first tampers with the message. Although at 616 she had already told Lichas to be on his way, in 624-625 and 627-628 she vaguely indicates that Lichas is to report on the condition of the household and the reception of Iole. Moreover, she expects him to speak on these subjects without special instructions (ἐξεπίστασαι 624, οἶσθα 627). She never really completes her message, as her question in 630 shows, and her concluding words seem to add an element of extemporization to it, since the ambiguity of the subject of εἰδέναι (632) leaves Lichas unable to know whether he is to speak for Deianeira if he comes to know Heracles' feelings, or whether he should wait for further instructions when she knows. If the character of the message may change according to the reception it meets, then it cannot remain true to its source.

Part of the message that Deianeira wishes to send to Heracles concerns how he is to wear her gift, but part is designed to persuade him to follow her instructions. She hopes both to flatter Heracles by suggesting that in his robe he will be a special sight even for the gods (612-613) and to convince him that his compliance is demanded by the principle of fidelity of deed to word. In following Deianeira's instructions Heracles will be fulfilling a sacred oath (ηὔγμην 610), but not, however, an oath that he himself has sworn. Since the proper donning of the robe will represent a collapse of origin and goal, Heracles must also be assured that no gap separates the robe from its origin. Therefore he will be told that the robe is the work of Deianeira's hand (τῆς ἐμῆς χερός 603), which will be present and visible (ἐπ' ὄμμα θήσεται 615)[34] in the seal. (Yet part of the robe, the drug, does not originate in Deianeira's hand, but with Nessus, and before Nessus with the hydra.)

Deianeira's flattery of Heracles also promises an erasure of difference, inasmuch as Heracles, in becoming visible to the gods, will become present to them. For Heracles such presence means a return to his father and confirmation of his divine nature, a sort of apotheosis.

Lichas, of course, does not know that the robe has been treated with a drug, and that Deianeira's message concerns this drug. In transmitting the message and the robe, Lichas acts with only the intention of bringing Heracles a gift from Deianeira. One might be tempted to say that he is merely Deianeira's instrument, since she does know that the drug has been applied. The intention, therefore, is hers. Deianeira, however, is in the same position with regard to Nessus that Lichas is in with regard to her. Although she thinks she knows what she is sending Heracles and what her message

means, she does not. Although her instructions to keep the robe from the light until it is worn derive from Nessus' instructions about the preservation of the drug (685-687), she apparently has no idea of why the drug must be kept from the light, as her amazement at its destruction of the wool (672-705) shows. Her words therefore transmit from Nessus a meaning of which she is unaware. They are also open to an interpretation that she cannot be understood to have intended. Deianeira's administration of the drug through an elaborate gift to Heracles that thanks the gods for his homecoming may recall to the drama's spectators and readers Clytemnestra's presentation to Agamemnon of the purple carpet (Aesch. *Aga.* 914-974); Kamerbeek compares Deianeira's promise (ηὔγμην 610) with that which Clytemnestra would have made (πολλῶν πατησμὸν δ' εἱμάτων ἂν ηὐξάμην Aesch. *Aga.* 963), and Deianeira's word ταυροσφάγῳ (609) suggests to him the scene of Agamemnon's murder at *Od.* 11.411 (ὥς τίς τε κατέκτανε βοῦν ἐπὶ φάτνῃ) and Cassandra's vision at Aesch. *Aga.* 1125-1126 (ἄπεχε τῆς βοὸς τὸν ταῦρον).[35] Deianeira's idea of thanking the gods by dressing Heracles up and showing him to them in itself suggests that Heracles himself will be sacrificed, since normally thanksgiving would be rendered by means of a sacrifice, often of a specially decorated animal.[36]

We previously saw frustrated the attempt to trace report back to reality, for each report was found to originate in another. Here one might be tempted to trace a deceptive message back to an original intention, Deianeira's. That intention, however, is itself not original. Yet attributing the origin to Nessus is not satisfactory either, for as we have suggested, Deianeira herself has reasons for wanting to be rid of Heracles, and in effect she cooperates with Nessus by repressing the sinister implications of his words. Neither she nor Nessus is an independent agent, nor is either purely the other's auxiliary. Intention and instrument are inextricably connected.

V Second stasimon, 633-662.

We observed in the parodos and first stasimon a tendency on the part of the Chorus to make divisions into pairs. The same tendency is evident also in the first strophe of the second stasimon. In addressing the inhabitants of their region they rhetorically divide it into two sectors, each of which is further subdivided into two areas each denoted by a noun, the λουτρὰ καὶ πάγους (634) and the μέσσαν . . . λίμναν (635-636) and the ἀκτάν (637). As in the previous two lyrics, the divisions have been achieved only at the cost of some distortion. The two regions, each subdivided into two, ought to yield

four regions, but may in fact yield only three, for the μέσσαν . . . λίμναν cannot clearly be distinguished from the ἀκτάν.[37] Almost all scholars regard them as identical, and if they are right then the Chorus' rhetorical employment of τε . . . τε has no topographical significance. According to Pausanias (1.4.3), however, there was a marshy area near Thermopylae, and the Chorus' word λίμναν (636) may denote this rather than the Malian Gulf.[38] But since Pausanias' description suggests that the marsh and the gulf ran together (τοῦ κόλπου τοῦ Λαμιακοῦ τέλματος πρὸς ταῖς Θερμοπύλαις ὄντος) it remains unclear that the Chorus' distinction between the λίμναν and the ἀκτάν has a convincing topographical basis.

The Chorus' first division of the area also poses problems. The λουτρά are subdivided into ναύλοχα and πετραῖα (633), so the first major region actually has three sections rather than two. Moreover, only by taking ναύλοχα as an adjective, as most scholars do, can we preserve a symmetrical arrangement of two nouns in each clause. But ναύλοχα could itself be a noun.

Obviously the Chorus' division of the Malian landscape into four sectors denoted by four nouns has a purely rhetorical basis, the words καὶ . . . τε . . . τε. But perhaps it has a frustrated intention. The first words, ὦ ναύλοχα καὶ πετραῖα (633) suggest the division of land and sea, important to the ode since it concerns Heracles, who has been at sea (πελάγιον 649) but who is returning to Trachis on the mainland, before which he must complete a sea voyage (655-659). The second major region apparently covers all of the seashore, so if the first region does not overlap with it then it must encompass the inland area. For the most part it does, the ναύλοχα . . . λουτρά being the only exception. The apparent division into land and sea therefore fails, since even the land region turns out to be partly near the sea.

The Chorus' scheme faces more difficulty if the division into land and sea is supposed to separate wet from dry. This certainly seems to be the case at the beginning of the ode, where ναύλοχα is paired with πετραῖα, the latter suggesting something very dry. Yet both ναύλοχα and πετραῖα are then found to modify λουτρά. Even the rocky part of Malis, therefore, may be undermined by water. Moreover, as Pausanias informs us, part of the Malian mainland, perhaps that denoted by λίμναν (636), lay under water all the time. Division between wet and dry becomes extremely problematic.

In view of our discussion of Nessus, the Evenus, and the hydra, the Chorus' inability clearly to divide their region, and especially their inability to exclude water from any part of it, seems to suggest the specious stability of language. The divisions they make are language, but they are threatened precisely by the ubiquity and indivisibility of water, which reappears on both

sides of each division. The divisions of language are thus as transient as those of water.

The indivisibility of water in turn suggests the hydra, whose own resistance to division perhaps explicates its name. Heracles thought that he had subdued the hydra, but as an ingredient in the drug the hydra's bile will subdue him. The heroism of Heracles, therefore, which allegedly tamed the world by ridding it of monsters, was apparently an adversary of the deviant reality that eluded the categories of language,[39] as well as an adversary of the flow of meaning in language itself.[40] Yet both forms of deviance (if they really are different, as we shall examine further on) prove impossible to repress.

The first stasimon should also be recalled here. In that ode the sharp division between Heracles and Achelous was undermined when both appeared to be victims of Aphrodite. This division was of course another between the stable and the unstable, between the solid (Heracles) and water (Achelous). Yet Aphrodite herself was born of water, and her effect upon lovers is to liquefy them (e.g. ἐντακείη τῷ φιλεῖν 463). As in his battle with the hydra, Heracles' victory over water in the person of Achelous appears to have been a defeat.

In dividing up the region of Malis the Chorus seems intent upon an exhaustive account of its sub-regions; all the inhabitants of the whole area are invoked, suggesting that the reunification of Heracles and Deianeira is something in which all the Malians have a united interest. The suggestion of unity is further extended to the whole of Greece in their reference to the meetings held at Malis of the pan-Hellenic Amphictyonic Council (Ἑλλάνων ἀγοραί 638).[41] The presence of *ar-* roots in the account of Heracles' return also suggests joining and unity.[42] The music of the flute, normally not well fit together (i.e. harsh), will now not be so (οὐκ ἀναρσίαν 641), and Heracles rushes home bearing the spoils of total excellence (πάσας ἀρετᾶς 645).

The Chorus' account of Heracles' return also suggests the unity of truth. For the flute will produce sound equal to the lyre (ἀντίλυρον 643) of the divine muse (θείας . . . Μούσας 642-643).[43] But if the Muses are the source of truthful poetry, as Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar aver, they are also, as Hesiod reminds us, the source of lies that resemble real things (ψεύδεα . . . ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, *Th.* 27). In insisting upon the flute's harmony when Heracles returns the Chorus draws attention precisely to its usual harshness, and especially to its use in mourning[44] and the frenzied rites of Dionysus. Finally, the Chorus wrongly claims that Heracles' return home (ἐπ' οἴκους 646) provides the occasion for this unity, since Trachis is not Heracles' home; his family are ἀνάστατοι there (39).

In the second strophic pair the Chorus' confident expectation gives way to somewhat more anxious meditations. In strophe B they look back upon the long period of Heracles' absence, during which Deianeira lamented him constantly (647-652). The fact that nothing was known of him (ἴδριες οὐδέν 649-650) is connected to his being at sea (πελάγιον 649), water again suggesting instability. Although this period of struggle for Heracles and uncertainty for Deianeira and the Chorus has been ended by the enragement of Ares, the Chorus' words (ἐξέλυσ' ἐπίπονον ἀμέραν 654) may also suggest that the sack of Oechalia "lets loose the fatal Day".[45]

The optatives of the second antistrophe (ἀφίκοιτ' ἀφίκοιτο· μὴ σταίη . . . πρὶν . . . ἀνύσειε 655-658; μόλοι 660), in contrast with the indicatives of the first antistrophe (ἐπάνεισιν 642; σοῦται 645) express some uncertainty on the Chorus' part. Their impatient hope that nothing delay Heracles in completing the sea voyage that separates him from Trachis is their first recognition that Heracles' presence is not immediately at hand. Similarly, in mentioning that Heracles is said to be a sacrificer at the island hearth (κλῄζεται θυτήρ 659) they acknowledge for the first time that the report about Heracles is a report and not reality. Most importantly, though, in hoping that when Heracles returns he will be in love with Deianeira (660-662 must have this general import on any reading of the text) they suggest that even if Heracles does return safely he may not be reunited with Deianeira. And the unity and truth for which they hope are achievable only through the deceit (τᾶς Πειθοῦς 661) and mixing (συγκραθείς 662) of the polymorph (θηρός 662).

The final three lines of the antistrophe are a major textual crux for which no completely convincing solution has been proposed. Nothing detailed, therefore, can reliably be said of them, except that τᾶς Πειθοῦς can be taken as denoting Deianeira's device for winning Heracles, the drug, an interpretation that reinforces the equation of the drug with language suggested earlier.

Hermeneutic Commentaries

Pietro Pucci
General Editor

Vol. 1

PETER LANG
New York • Bern • Frankfurt am Main • Paris

Bruce Heiden

Tragic Rhetoric

An Interpretation of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*

1989

PETER LANG
New York • Bern • Frankfurt am Main • Paris