CHAPTER FOUR

rhei pan adelon: Everything Flows

I Deianeira describes her fears to the Chorus, 663-730.

As in previous instances, Deianeira's anxiety, which she manifests as soon as she emerges from the house, constructs a protective shell of evasion around her. Her first word, γυναῖκες (663), projects onto the Trachinian maidens a maturity and strength on which she fancies she can rely for protection, and they accept this role by addressing her as τέκνου Οἰνέως (665).[1] Asked by the Chorus what frightens her (665), she does not explicitly mention the possible effect of the robe on Heracles for forty-four lines (709). First she says that she simply doesn't know what she fears (οὐκ οἶδ' 666). Then she adds that her appearance or reputation may be damaged (φανήσομαι . . . κακὸν . . . ἐκπράξασ' 666-667),[2] recalling how her erotic turmoil due to Heracles' affair with Iole was effaced first by her appearance as καλή (436-469) and then by her fear of becoming known as Heracles' old lady (550-551). As her final evasion she draws a moral from her experience (669-670), thus completing the experience, rendering it past, certain, and known, and finally objectifying it by casting it on to someone else whom Deianeira as an uninvolved party can advise (τῳ παραινέσαι 670).

Despite her evasions, Deianeira continues to use the rhetoric of knowledge. She distinguishes the evil she may have actually done (κακὸν . . . ἐκπράξασ' 667) from her hope (ἐλπίδος 667), and renounces deed (ἔργου 670) which is not clearly to be seen (ἄδηλον 670).[3] She fears that her misdeed will be brought to light (φανήσομαι 666). Her description of the cause of her apprehension also emphasizes its visual basis: εἴσω δ' ἀποστείχουσα δέρκομαι (693), "walking back in I see," the present tense rendering the presentation more immediate. In describing the reaction of the drug, sunlight, and wool she endeavors to make the Chorus see it very precisely, likening it to familiar sights (βλέψειας 700), wood shavings and

new wine (699-704). She herself sees the deed she has done (ὁρῶ . . . μ' ἔργον . . . ἐξειργασμένην 706).

The precision of Deianeira's description in fact suggests contemporary scientific writing. Her illustration of nature by means of likeness (εἰκαστόν 699) to a quotidian mechanical process, sawing, should recall, for instance, Empedocles' description of the working of the eye (DK B 84). Her particular words describing the foaming of the dissolved wool, ἀναζέουσι θρομβώδεις ἀφροί (702), have scientific associations. θρομβῶδης and θρομβοειδής both occur in Hippocrates, but apparently occur only here in a literary text. All words built on the θρομβο- root are virtually restricted to medical writers.[4] ἀναζέω in the literal sense of "foam up" is found elsewhere only in Arist. *Mir.* and Aretaeus, a medical writer. Although ἀφρός is not as specialized as θρομβώδης and ἀναζέω it too is found in medical writers. Deianeira's description would probably have had a distinctly medical ring to the well-educated Athenian. But some details of her own speech challenge Deianeira's reliance upon observation. Her appeal to the Chorus' sight of wood shavings and wine (699-704) is not empirical since it does not present the event in question, the dissolving wool, but instead offers substitutes. The strategy is the same she recommended to the Chorus for learning about her suffering (τὴν αὐτοῦ σκοπῶν πρᾶξιν 151-152).

The character of the event itself poses an even more radical problem for Deianeira's rhetoric. An empiricist studies phenomena, the appearances of things, but the drug manifests its power not through appearance but through disappearance (ἠφάνισται 676). Deianeira has seen not a clear, stable thing that can be grasped mentally, but an unclear, unstable flux (ῥεῖ πᾶν ἄδηλον 698).[5] Such an observation cannot be the basis for truthful language; it can neither be expressed nor understood (φάτιν ἄφραστον, ἀξύμβλητον 693-694). Indeed, the division between language and reality, fundamental to empiricism, breaks down entirely in this moment. Deianeira's words imply that what she sees is already language (δέρκομαι φάτιν 693).

The unforeseen action of the drug stimulates Deianeira's anxiety by exposing a gap between her intentions and the consequences of her actions, as well as the one between the consequences and language. Desperately she tries to close this gap by affirming the exact correspondence between her action and the instructions given to her by Nessus:

> ἐγὼ γὰρ ὧν ὁ θήρ με Κένταυρος πονῶν
> πλευρὰν πικρᾷ γλωχῖνι προυδιδάξατο
> παρῆκα θεσμῶν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἐσῳζόμην,
> χαλκῆς ὅπως δύσνιπτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν·
> καί μοι τάδ' ἦν πρόρρητα, καὶ τοιαῦτ' ἔδρων,
> τὸ φάρμακον τοῦτ' ἄπυρον ἀκτῖνός τ' ἀεὶ
> θερμῆς ἄθικτον ἐν μυχοῖς σῴζειν ἐμέ,
> ἕως νιν ἀρτίχριστον ἁρμόσαιμί που.
> κἄδρων τοιαῦτα· (680-688)
>
> For I neglected none of the injunctions which the beast, the centaur, taught me when he was laboring with a bitter barb in his side, no I preserved them, like an inscription that is hard to wash from a bronze tablet. Now these were his orders, and this is what I did: to keep this charm in the interior of the house, ever away from fire and untouched by the warm sunbeam, until I should apply it, newly smeared, somewhere. And this I did.

The correspondence between the copy in Deianeira's mind and the original words uttered by Nessus produces the illusion of direct access to reality, so that no room for error remains. She has copied not merely what he said but what he taught (προυδιδάξατο 681), implying further correspondence between Nessus' words and a reality that they convey. They are laws (θεσμῶν 682) which virtually by definition correspond to a reality that they both copy and determine. Finally Deianeira endows Nessus' words with material reality (χαλκῆς . . . δέλτου 683) in her mind.[6]

So convinced is Deianeira of the substitutibility of her mental copy for Nessus' original that in describing the correspondence of her deeds to the words that direct them she skips her mental copy and refers directly back to Nessus: τάδ' . . . πρόρρητα, καὶ τοιαῦτ' ἔδρων (684). Yet in specifying what his words were she quotes him in indirect speech, that is, in paraphrase (685-687), a fact especially striking in view of her previous direct quotation (569-577). The direct and indirect accounts of Nessus' speech, moreover, have no elements in common. Deianeira's direct quotation had entirely omitted Nessus' instructions for preserving the drug, showing that even an undistorted transmission may still have important gaps. On the other hand, the present account does not preserve Nessus' exact words at all, and obviously distorts them in avoiding mention of Heracles (ἁρμόσαιμί που 687) and changing κηλητήριον (575) to φάρμακον (685) (unless the direct quotation was inaccurate). At the very moment when Deianeira has insisted most strongly upon the solid reality of language it begins to decompose for her.

Yet even if perfect transmission were possible it would still not achieve for Deianeira the correspondence between language and reality that she requires. A clear copy cannot be made from a vague original; in this case the

putative original, Nessus' words, is already an elliptical and misleading impression of Nessus' intention.

Earlier, in noting that both the drug and Nessus' instructions are preserved in bronze (the latter only metaphorically) we suggested a parallelism between the drug and the word. Two features of our present passage confirm this parallelism. Deianeira refers to the chest in which the drugged robe has been sent to Heracles as a ζύγαστρον (692), which in Delphic inscriptions has the technical sense γραμματοφυλάκιον, a thing in which writing is kept.[7] She preserves the instructions as if engraved in a tablet from which they cannot be washed (δύσνιπτον 683). The threat of flux against which the words must be protected is the same as that against which the drug must be protected, for when exposed to the sunlight it liquefies and flows away (ῥεῖ 698).

Earlier we discussed Achelous' significance as life force. Deianeira's description of the drug's flowing action suggests that it too is a life force. When Deianeira first describes what has happened to the wool with which she applied the drug, she emphasizes as an unexpected marvel (θαῦμ' ἀνέλπιστον 673) the fact that the wool was not eaten by anything, but consumed itself (ἐδεστὸν ἐξ αὐτοῦ 677). To describe this marvelous self-consumption she uses φθίνει (677), the basic meaning of which is "wilt."[8] It suggests the natural death and decay of vegetable and indeed of any life. This θαῦμα is the most natural thing of all.

Deianeira's description of the reaction's final stage, moreover, connects the drug with Aphrodite and Dionysus:

> ἐκ δὲ γῆς ὄθεν
> προύκειτ' ἀναζέουσι θρομβώδεις ἀφροί,
> γλαυκῆς ὁπώρας ὥστε πίονος ποτοῦ
> χυθέντος εἰς γῆν βακχίας ἀπ' ἀμπέλου. (701-704)
>
> And from the earth where it lay exposed clots of foam seethed up, just as when the rich juice of the blue fruit is poured forth into the earth from the vine of Dionysos.

Earlier we noted the medical associations of ἀναζέουσι θρομβώδεις ἀφροί (702). Other associations must also be taken into account. Classical authors sometimes use ἐπιζέω of emotions. Since ζέω and ἀναζέω are also so used by later authors, probably the idea of seething carried with it the suggestion of emotional tumult. ἀφροί clearly suggests Aphrodite. Then Deianeira compares the drug to wine, which, liquid itself, liquifies the mind of whoever

drinks it, producing a release of passion. Its association with Dionysus of course suggests that god's role as a deity of fertility, but also possibly his connection with the souls of the dead, since the poured wine of Deianeira's simile is probably a libation.

In a maneuver we have observed before, Deianeira now transfers the supposed certainty of what she has seen (which is actually the uncertainty of disappearance) to an inference.[9] She stresses triply the reality on which her knowledge is based: ὁρῶ . . . ἔργον . . . ἐξειργασμένην (706). It is a deed; she has completely done the deed; and she sees herself to have done it. The deed is the murder of Heracles (μόνη . . . αὐτόν . . . ἐξαποφθερῶ (712-713), but for this she has no empirical evidence, only conjecture, as she herself admits (δόξῃ . . . ἐμῇ 718). Yet she rejects the possibility of misjudgement, using another of those protases that exclude a potential source of doubt: εἴ τι μὴ ψευσθήσομαι γνώμης (712-713).

As Deianeira explains her conclusion, it becomes clear that she bases it not on what she has seen, but instead upon two *logoi*. The dissolution of the wool merely reminds her of what she already knows that could lead her to expect that the drug might be harmful, Nessus' lack of motive for doing her good (707-710) and the deadliness of Heracles' arrows (714-717).[10] Obviously Nessus did a very poor job of deceiving Deianeira; she had to deceive herself, and therefore she had to suspect that Nessus' drug might not be beneficial. We have already suggested that Deianeira had ample reason for wishing Heracles dead, and that her obsession with the possibility of his death may conceal a wish for his death. It also seems possible that such an unconscious wish may have led her to resort to Nessus' drug.[11]

Yet although Deianeira knew as much about the drug before her accidental experiment as she knows after it, there still remains room for doubt whether this should lead her to the conclusion that it will kill Heracles (πῶς οὐκ ὀλεῖ καὶ τόνδε; 718). Her strongest argument is based on the character of the philter (714-718). It is a perfect syllogism: (1) Heracles' arrows kill whatever touches them. (2) Heracles has been touched by the poison from his arrows. Therefore, (3) Heracles must die. Nevertheless, all of Deianeira's information about the arrows must come from rumor. Furthermore, only if Heracles' arrows are invariably lethal can she infer that the drug will kill Heracles, but she cannot be sure that this is the case. In fact, Cheiron was an exception (714-715). Moreover, unlike his victims, Heracles is not a monster (κνώδαλ' 716). Deianeira also assumes that the poison will be just as effective when applied to a robe as when applied to an arrow. Yet an arrow is a lethal weapon in itself and might be expected to kill its target

even without poison. Thus Deianeira cannot be sure that the deaths of Heracles' adversaries were due to his poison rather than to his arrows.

Deianeira's argument from Nessus' intentions (706-710) is somewhat weaker than that from the poison on Heracles' arrows, since whatever Nessus' intention might have been, its realization depends upon a concatenation of circumstances, among them an effective means of killing Heracles. As we have seen, Deianeira cannot be sure that the drug offers such a means.

Deianeira also exaggerates in naming herself the sole killer (μόνη 712) of Heracles. Clearly Nessus shares some responsibility for whatever happens. Yet in taking all the blame upon herself Deianeira acts as the accuser, thus rhetorically stepping out of her role as criminal.

The critique of Deianeira's reasoning would have point even if the events of the play eventually confirmed her belief that she is the killer of Heracles. Indeed the Chorus, when they have heard Deianeira's argument, reply with the same skepticism that we have brought to our reading of the passage (724). As a matter of fact, however, Deianeira's belief is not confirmed. The cause of Heracles' death will be the pyre, not the robe. The assumption that Heracles would have died from the poison had he not been cremated first is open to doubt. Since the pyre will destroy all the evidence, complete certainty is withheld.

In Deianeira's speech, everything about the drug has been characterized by instability: its physical obscurity, transformability, and fluidity, the disparity between what it seems likely to do and what Deianeira intended it to do, even and perhaps especially the accidental way in which its power revealed itself (694-695). As she emerged from the house after beholding the action of the drug Deianeira had attempted to distance herself from her anxiety about its consequences. Now at the end of her speech she resorts to the same strategy. In concluding as she does that Heracles must die, she determines the outcome of her unstable situation.[12] Her euphemistic reference to Heracles' death (εἰ σφαλήσεται 719) puts further distance between herself and the possibilities that overwhelm her. She erroneously identifies a single cause of Heracles' demise, herself (μόνη . . . ἐγώ 712-713). Casting off the insecurity with which she had approached the Chorus (663), she announces that her deliberations are already concluded (δέδοκται 719). The course of action upon which she has resolved is one that establishes exact correspondence between her fate and Heracles', uniting them in death as they have never been united in marriage (ταύτῃ σὺν ὁρμῇ κἀμὲ συνθανεῖν ἅμα 720).[13] At the same time she objectifies the cause of her death (ὁρμῇ 720). Deianeira's express purpose in this death, however, is to shield herself from the lack of correspondence between her nature (μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι 722) and the reputation she would have if she survived Heracles (κακῶς κλύουσαν 721). She wishes to die not because of grief (she does not utter a word of concern for Heracles in this speech or afterwards) but to preserve her reputation in her own eyes.[14]

In order to establish correspondence between copy and original one must have an original in the first place. In Deianeira's correspondences this original is fictional. Rhetorically her death will correspond to Heracles', but Heracles hasn't died yet. (As things turn out Deianeira will die before Heracles does.) The death of Heracles rhetorically corresponds to a single cause (μόνη . . . ἐγὼ . . . ἐξαποφθερῶ 712-713), but in fact arises from a complex of causes. Deianeira fears that her reputation (κακῶς κλύουσαν 721) will not correspond to her nature (μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι 722), but since προτιμᾷ (722) indicates a wish,[15] Deianeira does not affirm that she has any particular nature. Her words imply that if she tolerates a bad reputation, her wish to avoid a bad nature will be thwarted. Therefore reputation, instead of merely copying nature, serves as the original from which Deianeira creates her nature as a copy.

Deianeira's insistence that bad plans offer no hope (ἐν τοῖς μὴ καλοῖς βουλεύμασιν οὐδ' ἐλπίς 725-726) appears to postulate correspondence between plan and result in the crudest way, by simply declaring the actual result irrelevant and decreeing the true result identical to the original plan. In fact, though, Deianeira's reasoning works in exactly the opposite way. When she devised her plan it seemed good, and only in view of its effect does it seem bad. She therefore changes the cause to suit the expected effect. Then Deianeira rhetorically concludes that, in view of the bad plan, the result must also be bad.

In arguing that her plans leave no room for hope, Deianeira has essentially announced that her suicide is imminent. In an effort to dissuade her from this action, the Chorus tries to allay her fear of a bad reputation by claiming that reputation corresponds to intention, for those who fall unintentionally do not arouse anger (727-728).[16] Thus they suppose correspondence between the *logos* and its original (the intention) even as they admit that the result may not correspond to the intention. Deianeira, however, refuses to accept the relevance of any gap between intention and result. She has in essence taken upon herself the burden of the intention to kill Heracles without admitting that she actually had this intention. Blame cannot be divided; whoever shares in it (ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ κοινωνός 729-730) bears all of it.

II Hyllus reports what has happened to Heracles, 731-820.

The appearance of Hyllus with news of Heracles raises the concern with correspondence to a new level of intensity. The first words he utters are ὦ μῆτερ (734), and the necessity for this mode of address impresses upon him the profound disjunction between the way things are and the way they ought to be.

> ὦ μῆτερ, ὡς ἂν ἐκ τριῶν σ' ἓν εἱλόμην,
> ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι ζῶσαν, ἢ σεσωμένην
> ἄλλου κεκλῆσθαι μητέρ', ἢ λῴους φρένας
> τῶν νῦν παρουσῶν τῶνδ' ἀμείψασθαί ποθεν. (734-737)
>
> O mother, indeed I would have chosen one of three things concerning you: that you were no longer living, or, if alive, were called the mother of someone else, or that you had from somewhere gotten in exchange a better mind than the one you have now.

Hyllus can imagine three ways of restoring correspondence: either his mother should die, since (as he thinks) she has killed Heracles; or living she should not have been called his mother, since she has not behaved as a good mother to Hyllus in killing (as he thinks) his father, and thus has created a gap between her reality (killer of Hyllus' father, her husband) and her *logos* (mother of Hyllus, wife of Heracles); or she should have been a different person than she is and thus acted in a manner suitable for a mother. (Hyllus, like Deianeira, does not even contemplate discord between intention and act; the problem with Deianeira is explicitly her mind [φρένας 736], not her behavior.)

Unable to change Deianeira's being and not prepared to kill her, as his actual course of adjustment Hyllus changes the *logos* about Deianeira:

> τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν σὸν ἴσθι, τὸν δ' ἐμὸν λέγω
> πατέρα, κατακτείνασα τῇδ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ. (739-740)
>
> Know that today you have killed your husband; nay, I mean my father.

Jebb and Kamerbeek are mistaken in their explanation of these lines, Jebb in arguing that δέ and λέγω both function to mark a second relationship in a

blending of two expressions, Kamerbeek in suggesting that λέγω has no bearing on the construction. Both err in taking δέ as a copulative particle and thus finding λέγω, which in the sense of "mean" usually functions in a parenthesis without a conjunction, redundant. As Campbell and Longo have seen, Hyllus' words do not mark a second relationship but make a correction.[17] Campbell translates, "'Thy husband? no, I mean my father.'" Thus he takes δέ as a strong adversative rather than a copulative particle. Soph. *Trach.* 536-537[18] affords a fine example of this use of δέ: κόρην γάρ, οἶμαι δ' οὐκέτ', ἀλλ' ἐζευγμένην,/παρεισδέδεγμαι, "for I have received a maiden, no, a maiden no longer, I think, but one already yoked." In this way Hyllus' words rhetorically erase the difference between Deianeira's reality and her *logos*.

Also in reporting to Deianeira what she has done to Heracles Hyllus' rhetoric draws the straightest and shortest line it can between the reality and his report, endeavoring in fact to erase the difference altogether. Not only does the report claim to convey knowledge, but Hyllus commands Deianeira immediately to possess this knowledge (ἴσθι 739). His word has been fulfilled (τελεσθῆναι 742), which means, as Jebb explains, "found to correspond with reality," "(proven) true". The rhetoric of reality as the completion of a word suggests a virtually organic connection between them, as if they were the same thing viewed at different times or from different points of view. In this sense the fulfilment or end of a word means not only its confirmation but as a result of that confirmation its obsolescence. In Hyllus' rhetoric ἔργον, the putative foundation of knowledge and truth, replaces λόγος.

Hyllus then reinforces his rhetoric of direct presentation by (implicitly) basing his report on sight (τὸ φανθέν 742-743) and then identifying τὸ φανθέν with τὸ γενόμενον (τὸ γὰρ φανθὲν τίς ἂν δύναιτ' ἂν ἀγένητον ποεῖν; 742-743). Finally he insists that the sight was his personal experience (αὐτὸς . . . δεδορκώς 746-747) and was not conveyed to him through the medium of speech (κοὐ κατὰ γλῶσσαν κλύων 747), and even suggests the physical interpenetration of subject and object by adding ἐν ὄμμασιν (746) to δεδορκώς. If he saw the sight not merely with his eyes but in them, then the last possible gap, the medium of perception, is eliminated.

The content of Hyllus' report, moreover, his narrative, is also such that no gaps occur in the event it relates. As we have seen, in Hyllus' rhetoric Deianeira's mind (φρένας 736) is at no variance with her behavior. The conclusion of her behavior, moreover, is at no variance from its apparent intention: Deianeira has killed Heracles (κατακτείνασα 740).

Obviously the impression of solid completion and presence in Hyllus' report has required some forcing, for Heracles is not dead[19] and Deianeira did not intend to kill him, at least not consciously. Hyllus leaves many traces of this forcing in the language he uses to establish the report's epistemological certainty. Hyllus does not present Heracles' death as a fact, but rather as something to be known (ἴσθι 739). This periphrasis displays an intellectual step between Heracles' death and Deianeira's mind that would have been better concealed had Hyllus said "My father is dead and you killed him." Then Hyllus couches his insistence that his report has been fulfilled (τελεσθῆναι 742) in terms of possibility (οὐχ οἷόν τε μὴ τελεσθῆναι 742), leaving some uncertainty exposed. Although τελεσθῆναι implies replacement of λόγος by ἔργον, οἷόν τε implies exactly the opposite operation, creating a general category from particulars and allowing inference about other particulars from their participation in the general, that is, the λόγος. οἷόν τε tells what is possible for a thing from the kind of thing it is, not from direct examination of its τέλος, its complete and immediate reality. In other words, Hyllus paradoxically affirms the particular facticity of Heracles' death in terms of its general logicality.

If Heracles' death were a fact *tout simple* Hyllus wouldn't need to give a reason for thinking it a fact. But he does give a reason (τὸ γὰρ φανθέν etc. 742-743). Recognizing that no explanation ought to be necessary, he tries to make the explanation he gives as tautological as possible, basing it, as we have observed, on the identification of τὸ φανθέν and τὸ γενόμενον. The scholars who comment on this line to the effect that τὸ φανθέν and τὸ γενόμενον are sometimes equivalent do not explain why Hyllus did not just use the same word twice and avoid confusion.[20] τὸ φανθέν and τὸ γενόμενον do not usually mean the same thing (although Hyllus obviously expects Deianeira to believe that they do) and this passage is the best case in point one could hope for. τὸ γενόμενον is reality as a bare object; τὸ φανθέν is reality as object with the addition of light at the very least and probably a spectator as well. Reality is grasped with less certainty through the medium of light than it would be through no medium at all, and even without a spectator a twofold reality is less certain than a simple one. Hyllus' tautology imparts to the at least duplex reality of object plus light the certainty of reality as simple object.

Hyllus assists the illusion of identification between τὸ φανθέν and τὸ γενόμενον by expressing it periphrastically in a rhetorical question (τίς ἂν δύναιτ' . . . ποεῖν; 743). This phrasing assumes that τὸ φανθέν and τὸ γενόμενον are identical and insists that intervention would be necessary to separate them, putting the listener in the position of wondering whether they

can be separated, rather than whether they are really identical in the first place.

Given Hyllus' extremely strong assertion of his message's veracity (742-743), culminating in his assurance that he saw it all with his own eyes (ἐν ὄμμασιν . . . δεδορκώς 746-747), any demonstrable failure of accuracy in his report should arouse critical doubts. Yet the report whose veracity Hyllus guarantees is that of Heracles' *death*: no conclusion but that Heracles is dead can reasonably be drawn from κατακτείνασα (740),[21] and not until almost seventy more lines have been spoken does Hyllus give any indication that Heracles may still be alive. During all this time Hyllus allows, indeed compels, Deianeira to believe that she has killed Heracles, although he should know all along that this may not be the case. The contradiction in Hyllus' report may have struck some in the Athenian audience very sharply, for until Hyllus says ἦ ζῶντ' ἐσόψεσθ' ἢ τεθνηκότ' (806) they could only have imagined that Heracles would not be represented alive in this play.

The rhetorical forcing of Hyllus' report clearly deceives Hyllus himself just as much as it does Deianeira. Hyllus' self-deception is closely akin to Deianeira's in confronting intolerable uncertainty, for uncertainty is the main characteristic of Hyllus' epistemic situation. He asserts not only that Heracles is dead but that Deianeira is responsible and that she acted intentionally. The first and last assertions are not true, and the middle lies beyond Hyllus' power of knowledge. All Hyllus can really be said to know at this point is that something very, very weird has happened to his father.

Hyllus is not alone in his self-deception. In the previous scene Deianeira had already concluded that Heracles was bound to die as a result of the robe she sent him. But when Hyllus arrives and declares that she has killed Heracles Deianeira refuses to own up and acts as if no thought of such an occurrence had ever entered her head. Structurally her reactions closely resemble those she had when the Messenger arrived (184-192): she does not accept the truth of what she has heard and questions its relationship to reality, suggesting that it must originate in another report (τοῦ πάρ' ἀνθρώπων μαθών; 744). But whereas the Messenger brought news that Deianeira was predisposed not to believe, here Hyllus brings news that she is already predisposed to believe.

The most plausible explanation of Deianeira's "stonewalling" is that she, like Hyllus, finds utterly intolerable the incongruence of her situation (or rather, what she believes to be her situation) as Heracles' wife and murderess. Hyllus cannot tolerate even temporary incongruity: he wishes that Deianeira were already dead (μηκέτ' . . . ζῶσαν 735) or that she had been called (κεκλῆσθαι 736) the mother of someone else. Given Deianeira's own

fondness for perfect tenses in moments of anxiety (581, 586-7, 719) one may easily imagine that she feels the same way. Yet since she has not killed herself, and cannot deny that she is Hyllus' mother, the only way for her to preserve face, even for a moment, is to pretend that she has a "better mind" than she does. This is not to say that Deianeira acts rationally here; no rationale can reconcile her reluctance to believe Hyllus with the preceding scene. But her madness has a method.

In her unwillingness to concede that Hyllus' report may be true Deianeira will not even credit his assertion that he has visual evidence, but instead asks about his physical proximity to the event (ποῦ δ' ἐμπελάζεις . . . καὶ παρίστασαι; 748). Only when Hyllus assures her that he and Heracles were together in one place does she give up her resistance to Hyllus' report.

In reply to Deianeira's question Hyllus reluctantly (for he thinks that as the guilty party Deianeira must already know everything; 749) renders a lengthy, vivid ecphrasis of the harm that has befallen Heracles. This ecphrasis does not simply inform Deianeira of what has happened to Heracles, it offers itself as infallible evidence of the event and thus convicts Deianeira of the crime.[22] Consequently Hyllus concludes the speech by declaring that Deianeira has been caught (ἐλήφθης 808).

The speech begins with a mixed construction that expresses as the subject of an independent clause the place where Heracles made the sacrifice.

> ὅθ' εἶρπε κλεινὴν Εὐρύτου πέρσας πόλιν,
> νίκης ἄγων τροπαῖα κἀκροθίνια,
> ἀκτή τις ἀμφίκλυστος Εὐβοίας ἄκρον
> Κήναιόν ἐστιν, ἔνθα πατρῴῳ Διὶ
> βωμοὺς ὁρίζει τεμενίαν τε φυλλάδα·
> οὗ νιν τὰ πρῶτ' ἐσεῖδον, ἄσμενος πόθῳ. (750-755)
>
> After sacking the famous city of Eurytus, he went on his way with the trophies and first-fruits of victory. There is a sea-washed headland of Euboea, Cape Cenaeum, where he dedicated altars and a sacred grove to the Zeus of his fathers; and there, delighted because of my longing, I first beheld him.

Jebb notes that "the mixed construction here comes from a wish to make the narrative at once consecutive and graphic."[23] Hyllus tries to convince Deianeira that he has seen Heracles' doom by making her see it too, reasoning that only an eye-witness could give such a vividly detailed account. (Recall Lichas' observation ταὐτὸ δ' οὐχὶ γίγνεται, δόκησιν εἰπεῖν

κἀξακριβῶσαι λόγον 425, where exactitude of speech functions as an equivalent for proof of truth.) Since Hyllus first saw the cape as he approached, making it the subject of the main clause allows Deianeira to share his point of view. Then he reinforces this point of view by explicitly identifying the moment when he first glimpsed Heracles (755). Once this link between Heracles and Hyllus' eyes has been established, the abundant visual details of the speech confirm it again and again. He concludes the ecphrasis, moreover, by promising that Deianeira will immediately see Heracles with her own eyes (αὐτίκα . . . ἐσόψεσθ' 805-806).

Yet close examination of Hyllus' report shows that despite its continued eloquent reliance upon the rhetoric of vision its content fails at precisely the most important point: the description of Heracles' physical condition. Despite the richness of his description of the sacrifice (756-766) and the death of Lichas (779-782), Hyllus' description of Heracles' tormented body strangely lacks anatomical detail. He describes Heracles breaking into a sweat and the garment adhering to his limbs (767-769). Later he describes him as leaping around (786-787, 789-790). These are in fact the only visual details regarding Heracles' physical condition. Hyllus mentions the pain in his father's inner organs (ὀστέων 769, ἐδαίυυτο 771, πλευμόνων 778) but he could not have seen them.[24] Hyllus' speech, therefore, far from furnishing the eyewitness testimony of Heracles' death that it promises, offers no evidence that Heracles has been maimed in any way. This becomes especially clear when Hyllus' speech is set beside that which reports the deaths of Glauke and Creon in Euripides' *Medea*.

> The wreath of gold that was resting around her head
> Let forth a fearful stream of all-devouring fire,
> And the finely woven dress your children gave to her,
> Was fastening on the unhappy girl's fine flesh.
> She leapt up from the chair, and all on fire she ran,
> Shaking her hair now this way and now that, trying
> To hurl the diadem away; but fixedly
> The gold preserved its grip, and, when she shook her hair,
> Then more and twice as fiercely the fire blazed out.
> Till, beaten by her fate, she fell down to the ground,
> Hard to be recognized except by a parent.
> Neither the settling of her eyes was plain to see,
> Nor the shapeliness of her face. From the top of
> Her head there oozed out blood and fire mixed together.
> Like the drops on pine-bark, so the flesh from her bones

Dropped away, torn by the hidden fang of the poison.
. . . her wretched father, knowing nothing of the event,
Came suddenly to the house, and fell upon the corpse,
And at once cried out and folded his arms about her,
. . . and when he had made an end of his wailing and crying,
Then the old man wished to raise himself to his feet;
But, as the ivy clings to the twigs of the laurel,
So he stuck to the fine dress, and he struggled fearfully.
For he was trying to lift himself to his knee,
And she was pulling him down, and when he tugged hard
He would be ripping his aged flesh from his bones.
At last his life was quenched, and the unhappy man
Gave up the ghost, no longer could hold up his head.
There they lie close, the daughter and the old father,
Dead bodies . . . (tr. Warner, 1186-1221).

It can hardly be argued that Hyllus avoided a description of this kind because of his (or Sophocles') stylistic reticence,[25] since his description of Lichas' smashed and oozing brain (781-782), though brief, is as gruesome as anything in the Euripidean speech, and leaves no doubt about Lichas' condition. Hyllus could have indicated equally briefly some visible injury that Heracles sustained. The fact that he did not do so must reveal that Hyllus did not actually see any such injury. Indeed, he couldn't have, since the robe covered Heracles.

Hyllus does, however, devote much description to Heracles' screams and moans (᾽βόησε 772; βοῶν, ἰύζων 787; βοῶν 790; βρυχώμενον 805), and quotes his speech twice indirectly (774, 791-793) and once directly (797-802), including Heracles' indications that he believes himself to be dying (θανόντι . . . ἐμοί 798; μηδ᾽ αὐτοῦ θάνω 802). Thus despite his insistence that he has seen Heracles' doom (δεδορκώς 747) and not just heard about it (κοὐ κατὰ γλῶσσαν κλύων 747), most of what Hyllus reports about Heracles' condition comes not from observation but from the tongue of Heracles.

Questions may be raised, moreover, even about the accuracy of Hyllus' description of the death of Lichas. His specification of the part of the foot where Heracles grabbed Lichas is Homeric in style[26] and the whole passage echoes *Od.*9.288-290, where Polyphemus brains two of Odysseus' companions.[27] Thus while the description through its Homeric style suggests the authentic witness of the Muses, it also suggests derivation from Homer rather than from the event itself. Both Sophocles' use of Homer and Hyllus' reliance upon the cries of Heracles as clues to his condition thwart Hyllus'

distinction between visible reality and language. As before in the *Trachiniae*, what has been taken for mute reality upon examination stands exposed as language.

Many of the details of Hyllus' speech are not merely evidence that he was present but contribute to shaping the event into an argument against Deianeira. The heavy emphasis upon Heracles' sacrifices makes him seem very pious and thus particularly undeserving of the fate that he meets (compare Heracles' own words ἱερῶν οἵαν οἵων . . . χάριν ἡνύσω, ὦ Ζεῦ 994-995). Heracles' joy before the altar at the moment the drug is about to work furnishes a touch of pathos (763-764). The fact that Heracles' ruin was brought from the home (ἀπ᾽ οἴκων 757) by Heracles' own herald (κῆρυξ . . . οἰκεῖος 757) makes it seem especially ill-deserved, and aggravates the charge against Deianeira, much as Lichas had aggravated his charge against Eurytus by mentioning that Heracles was his house guest and a ξένος of long standing (262-263). All of these details achieve their force by depicting Heracles' doom as involving egregious lack of correspondence.

Since Hyllus knows only that Heracles has been put in pain by a robe brought to him by Lichas, he must demonstrate that the robe connects the intention of Deianeira with the death of Heracles in order to accuse her of murder. Besides insisting that Heracles has already died, or may die very soon (806)[28] Hyllus must show that the death was not caused by accident. Therefore he introduces the robe as the θανάσιμος πέπλος (758), making deadliness a property of the garment and not just a coincidental attribute. He closes the gap between the gift and its result by depicting the result as already present in the gift.

Then he must establish that the gift originated with Deianeira, not with Lichas, who brought it. Despite his claim to have knowledge gained by observation rather than hearing, as evidence that the gift is Deianeira's Hyllus has only Lichas' word (τὸ σὸν μόνης δώρημ᾽ ἔλεξεν 775-776). On this basis he entirely exculpates the herald (τὸν οὐδὲν αἴτιον 773; ὁ δ᾽ οὐδὲν εἰδώς 775). In fact in Hyllus' speech the exculpation precedes the evidence, so that the listener must accept Lichas' innocence as a given before any reason for believing in it is offered. The very first time he mentioned the robe Hyllus identified it as Deianeira's (τὸ σὸν . . . δώρημα 758). Just as the adjective θανάσιμος makes death a property of the robe (758), the adjective σόν makes the robe part of Deianeira, so that Deianeira, and not merely the robe, killed Heracles.

Identification of Heracles' death with Deianeira is not complete, however, until Hyllus has shown that Deianeira acted intentionally. In specifying that Heracles used the robe exactly according to Deianeira's instructions (ὡς σὺ

προυξεφίεσο 759) Hyllus implies that Deianeira understood what the robe could do and sent the instructions to ensure that it would do its work properly. Heracles' fidelity to the instructions, on the other hand, proves that the effect of the robe was not an accident. Thus Hyllus can refer not only to the robe, but also to the crime, as Deianeira's: τοῦ σοῦ κακοῦ (773). Like the adjectives σὸν and θανάσιμος (758), σοῦ has the effect of rendering the deed and its attribute inseparable.

Finally, Hyllus frames the climax of his speech, Heracles' appeal to him, which he quotes directly (797-802), with two direct accusations of Deianeira, first that of Heracles (791-793) and then his own (807-808). Thus just as emotions aroused by Heracles' pathetic condition reach their peak Hyllus channels them against Deianeira. Coming as they do from the sufferer himself, Heracles' words carry immense conviction. Hyllus' accusation makes explicit his attribution to Deianeira of intent (βουλεύσασ' 807) as well as act (δρῶσ' 808).

By using the present participle δρῶσ' Hyllus probably means not that Heracles remains alive, and that Deianeira's crime remains incomplete,[29] but rather that she has been caught in the act (δρῶσ' ἑλήφθης 808),[30] so that the evidence against her is as firm as possible. The common explanation is unsatisfactory first because even if Heracles is still dying Deianeira's criminal activity has ended, as Hyllus acknowledges by using the aorist when accusing her elsewhere (κατακτείνασα 740, κτείνασ' 812; he does use presents in some vaguer expressions: δρᾷ 818, δίδωσι 820), and second because Hyllus does not in fact know whether Heracles is alive (ἢ ζῶντ' . . . ἢ τεθνηκότ' 806) and is rather inclined to err on the side of assuming him dead, as shown by his repeated accusations of Deianeira as his killer. On the other hand the assertion that Deianeira has been caught in the way that leaves least doubt about her guilt conforms to the direct contact with reality that Hyllus claims to have throughout the scene. Of course, Deianeira has not been caught in the act, but then Heracles is not dead either. Hyllus' statements do not necessarily correspond with fact.

Such being Hyllus' case against Deianeira, it clearly continues the pattern of rhetorical forcing that Hyllus displayed in his first remarks of the scene. Heracles is not dead and Deianeira did not act with intent; by rhetoric alone he creates the illusion that things stand otherwise. As Lichas did when he arrived at the palace, Hyllus deploys an elaborate rhetoric of justice. But Hyllus' rhetoric, unlike Lichas', deceives its own speaker as well as Deianeira.

In fact, like the gift which Lichas innocently brought from Deianeira to Heracles, which Deianeira, ignorant if perhaps self-deceived, had received from Nessus, the report that Hyllus brings to Deianeira contains unexamined

rhetoric acquired from Heracles. We observed earlier that Hyllus' conclusion that the robe had been fatal to Heracles or was sure to kill him soon was not based upon the empirical evidence that Hyllus had promised. Heracles himself is the source of this diagnosis of his condition. He tells Hyllus that he is about to die (θανόντι . . . ἐμοί 798). Now quite apart from the question of whether Heracles has the medical expertise to make such a diagnosis (a question perfectly admissible in the intellectual universe of this play, and easily asked by the educated fifth-century Athenian), the context in which he makes it furnishes ground for suspicion. He is concerned not about dying but about being *seen* dying (μή τις ὄψεται 800, ἔκ . . . τῆσδε γῆς 801, μηδ' αὐτοῦ 802; the scholiast explains ἐνῄσχυνται γὰρ αὐτοῦ θανεῖν μὴ ἐγγελασθῇ ὑπὸ τῶν Οἰχαλίων, "for he was ashamed to die there lest he be ridiculed by the Oechalians"). This casts doubt upon the accuracy of his diagnosis for the simple reason that a Sophoclean hero, when embarrassed, may *wish* to die. Deianeira exhibits this reflex (721), as does Ajax (e.g. Soph. *Aj.* 394-403 and especially 479-480 ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι τὸν εὐγενῆ χρή. Heracles already feels embarrassed by what has happened, as he will make more clear when brought on stage, and his death does come at his wish.[31]

Even Heracles' pain may be of psychic as well as somatic origin. Hyllus' description of the spasm that causes Heracles to kill Lichas suggests that it was a reaction to Lichas' words (ὡς ἤκουσε καὶ . . . σπαραγμὸς . . . ἀνθήψατο 777-778) and not purely the effect of the drug.[32] Heracles himself, in fact, will later tell Hyllus quite explicitly that by refusing to obey his father and marry Iole he aroused Heracles' otherwise dormant disease: σὺ γάρ μ' ἀπ' εὐνασθέντος ἐκκινεῖς κακοῦ (1242). Heracles as well as Hyllus, therefore, may be deceiving himself.

Hyllus' speech carries meanings of which he is unaware even apart from Heracles' diagnosis of his injury. In particular it continues the characterization of the outbreak of uncertainty and flux which Deianeira's two immediately previous long speeches had suggested. It does this not only through the uncertain relations of Hyllus' report to reality and of the robe to Deianeira's intention, but also through its emphasis upon actual liquids in the scene. Heracles had erected his altar on a headland surrounded by surging sea (ἀκτή . . . ἀμφίκλυστος 752) and Lichas meets his death amid waves (πρὸς ἀμφίκλυστον . . . πέτραν 780). The action of the drug, moreover, directly or indirectly reveals the body itself as a container of fluids, sweat (ἱδρώς 767), brain (μυελὸν ἐκραίνει 781), blood (αἵματος 782) and tears (δακρυρροοῦντα 796). The robe itself seems to tear Heracles apart (ἀντίσπαστος 770, ἐσπᾶτο 786) and scatter him (σπαραγμός 778), though in

context these words refer only to muscular spasms. The word σπαραγμός (778; also 1254), suggesting the dismemberment of the sacrificial victim in the Dionysiac ritual, indicates that in Heracles' defeat by the forces of life and disorder Dionysus claims him as subject to his rule.[33] Finally, in comparing the close fit of the robe to the work of a sculptor (ἀρτίκολλος, ὥστε τέκτονος 768) Hyllus suggests that where unity is found it will be artificial rather than natural.

Hyllus' peroration (807-812) and words to the Chorus as Deianeira leaves the stage (815-820) demonstrate how little he understands the implications of that simile. Having fixed on Deianeira responsibility for Heracles' death he prays that Justice and Fury repay her deed (ὧν . . . τείσαιτ' 808-809, τὴν δὲ τέρψιν ἣν τώμῷ δίδωσι πατρί, τήνδ' αὐτὴ λάβοι 819-820), evincing a typical view of justice as correspondence of crime and punishment. Although he suspects that it may not be lawful for him to make such a prayer (εἰ θέμις 809), probably because Deianeira is his mother, he concludes, again on grounds of reciprocity, that it is lawful, since unlawful action legitimates an unlawful response.[34]

Hyllus resolves the contradiction of correspondence justifying injustice by regarding Deianeira as having abrogated her rights as his mother by killing his father. Since Deianeira is not his mother Hyllus may lawfully pray that she pay for what she has done. As he implied at the beginning of the scene (735, 739-740) the need for correspondence between reality and language permits a mother to lose her name if she does not live up to it.

> ὄγκον γὰρ ἄλλως ὀνόματος τί δεῖ τρέφειν
> μητρῷον, ἥτις μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα δρᾷ; (817-818)
>
> Why should anyone uselessly keep the name of mother, when she does nothing as a mother does?

Hyllus' words imply that the name of mother is actually the mother's offspring (ὄγκον . . . ὀνόματος . . . μητρῷον, the maternal bulk of a name. For ὄγκος as a fetus see Eur. *Ion* 15 and Arist. *HA* 515^{b}1.). Since she no longer behaves as a mother (μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα δρᾷ 818) she must no longer nurse (τρέφειν 817) the offspring of her condition, the name of mother.[35] Language, therefore, must correspond to reality because reality actually creates it. A natural bond connects the two, or so Hyllus' rhetoric supposes. On the other hand, this concept of truth also implies that a child must be true to his parent just as a word is true to its putative origin. The *Trachiniae* has already suggested the impossibility of leading language back to a non-linguistic origin, and reality's evasion of language's categories. A slave can utter the words of a free woman, a wife can kill her husband. The confrontation of Heracles and Hyllus in the final scene will show whether a son must, or can, be true to his father.

Concluding our discussion of this section, let us note that the Chorus' address to Deianeira as she silently enters the house contests perhaps the most important verbal distinction in this play, that between speech and non-speech. For in saying that Deianeira's silence speaks on behalf of her accuser (ξυνηγορεῖς σιγῶσα τῷ κατηγόρῳ 814) they imply that even silence is not a wordless true being distinct from speech, but only speech of a special kind.

III Third stasimon, 821-861.

With Heracles' death now apparently a certainty and Hyllus' condemnation of Deianeira ringing in its ears, the Chorus produces the account of the events of *Trachiniae* routinely accepted by readers, constructing in all its essentials the narrative chain linking the oracle that predicted the end of Heracles' labors, the hydra, Nessus, Heracles' lust for Iole, Deianeira's jealousy, her error, Heracles' death, and the fulfilment of the oracle. In effect the Chorus' narrative vindicates Deianeira: the oracle has come true, as she feared (str. A, 821-830), Heracles is sure to die as she reasoned (ant. A, 831-840), and Deianeira herself is innocent of intentional wrongdoing (841-850), as they know from her account of how she obtained the drug.

Again employing the rhetoric of vision, the Chorus calls upon itself to behold the visible proof of the oracle's fulfilment (ἴδ' 821). Since no gap now separates the words of the oracle from the reality that completes them, they say that the oracle has come to close quarters (προσέμειξεν 821). The line between word and thing is straight (ὀρθῶς 827) and their relationship is solidly grounded (ἔμπεδα 828). The divine foreknowledge and the oracle in which it was given utterance are also now united (τοὖπος τὸ θεοπρόπον 822, the prophetic word, i.e., word as knowledge; τᾶς παλαιφάτου προνοίας 823, the foreknowledge spoken long ago, i.e., knowledge as word).

The Chorus' description of this oracle, however, furnishes some surprises. When Deianeira informed them of the oracle she said that when Heracles had left Trachis a year and three months before he had told her that either he would die within a year and three months or live painlessly for the rest of his life (164-168), in accordance with an oracle that he had received at Dodona (169-172). Although Deianeira did not say when the oracle had originally been pronounced to Heracles, or how long a period of time in total

it had predicted from the moment of utterance to its fulfilment, the Chorus speaks of a twelve-year period (τελεόμηνος . . . δωδέκατος ἄροτος 824-825). The Chorus' oracle, moreover, never speaks of either Heracles' death or his painless future life, but only of an end of his taking on of toils (ἀναδοχὰν τελεῖν πόνων 825). The Chorus' source for this oracle cannot be Deianeira's account of the oracle given to her by Heracles (164-172). Whatever the means by which the Chorus came by it,[36] their account of the oracle is verified, or at least rendered credible, by its correspondence with Heracles' account, which also mentions release from toils (μόχθων . . . λύσιν 1170-1171) rather than either death or continued life.

Since the fulfilment of the oracle depends upon Heracles' death, which is not known to have happened yet, the Chorus must explain why they believe Heracles' death is at hand. This they do in the first antistrophe. Their argument, based upon probability, closely follows that of Deianeira (706-718). The deadly nature of the hydra's poison (834) and its application to Heracles (831-833) which has now taken effect (προστετακώς 837) leave him no possible escape (πῶς . . . ἂν ἀέλιον ἕτερον . . . ἴδοι; 835; cf. πῶς οὐκ ὀλεῖ καὶ τόνδε; 718).

The second strophic pair deals with the attribution of blame for the disaster. They allege that Deianeira had no forethought of what befell Heracles (ὧν . . . ἄσκνος 841), which proceeded from the intention of another (ἀπ' ἀλλόθρου γνώμας 844-845). The drug itself (τὰ μέν 843) is sharply distinguished from its effects (τὰ . . . μολόντ' 844-845). Ultimately the Chorus declares Aphrodite the responsible party (860-861).

Critical examination of the Chorus' rhetoric, however, reveals numerous problems. In four places they support their narrative with rhetoric of vision. The Coryphaeus begins by calling upon the Chorus to behold the visible proof of the oracle's fulfilment (ἴδ' 821). Visual evidence of the oracle's fulfilment might indeed be persuasive, but the Chorus has seen nothing yet, and even their sources, Deianeira and Hyllus, have seen rather less than they claim. Moreover, although the grammatical object of ἴδ' is the action of the prophecy (οἷον . . . προσέμειξεν . . . τοῦπος . . . ἡμῖν 821-822), a word obviously cannot be seen. Then in strophe B the Chorus says that Deianeira acted when seeing a great harm to her house, consisting of a new marriage, rushing upon her (μεγάλαν προσορῶσα δόμοις βλάβαν νέων ἀίσσουσαν γάμων 842-843). They use the participle of seeing only figuratively, however, since Deianeira could not understand Iole's significance merely by looking at her, but needed to be told of it by the Messenger and Lichas. At the end of strophe B the Chorus proclaims that the oncoming doom shows forth (προφαίνει) great blindness caused by deception (849-850). Again, the

Chorus has not seen the meeting of Nessus and Deianeira, the deception (though they may be said to have seen Deianeira's ἄτη in their dialogues with her). Finally they proclaim that Aphrodite appeared clearly as the πράκτωρ of the deeds narrated (φανερὰ . . . ἐφάνη 860-861). But Aphrodite has not appeared at all.

The rhetoric of vision does not pose the only problems. The phrases τοῦπος τὸ θεοπρόπον (822) and τᾶς παλαιφάτου προνοίας (823), which bind into an indivisible unity the divine knowledge and the word conveying it, grammatically split them apart again, since the word is said to belong to the knowledge (τοῦπος . . . τᾶς . . . προνοίας 822-823), which would be its origin. Yet the origin that stands outside language disappears altogether when the Chorus says that the oracle proclaimed itself (τοῦπος . . . ὅ τ' ἔλακεν . . . 822-824).

An oracle such as this one can hardly be said to find fulfilment directly (ὀρθῶς 827), since it requires the rather crooked interpretation of ἀναδοχὰν τελεῖν πόνων as ἀποκτείνειν. Its firm grounding (ἔμπεδα 827) is contested by its marine voyage to fulfilment (κατουρίζει 828). Its clarity, suggested by ἴδ' (821) as well as ὀρθῶς (827), is called into question by the Chorus' word for the oracular proclamation, ἔλακεν (824), for although λάσκω is often used of oracles, it regularly denotes an inarticulate utterance or sound, and its application to oracles may be due to their frequent incomprehensibility. Finally, perhaps the most incomprehensible element of the oracle is its specification of a time at which it will be fulfilled. Deianeira, the Chorus, and Heracles all suppose that this time can be determined precisely, and that in fact it has come. Yet ἄροτος (825) is a very imprecise equivalent of a year, and the precision added by τελεόμηνος "with full complement of months" (824) is specious, since nobody in the ancient world could know how many months would be contained in any twelve-year period (because of intercalary months) and the number might not have been the same in any two given cities.[37]

The Chorus' argument for the imminence of Heracles' death can of course be no stronger than those of Deianeira (706-718) and Hyllus (739-806), the inadequacies of which we have already discussed. One respect in which their presentation is a rhetorical improvement is their fathering of the hydra's poison on death (ὃν τέκετο θάνατος 834), which makes death an aspect of the poison's nature. Yet this is purely the Chorus' own embroidery, simultaneously rendering their proof a virtual tautology and allowing them to indulge their fondness for pairs by giving the poison two parents, death and the hydra (reading τέκετο . . . ἔτεκε with Kamerbeek and the MSS.).

In exculpating Deianeira the Chorus expresses itself in a way that leaves some opening for doubt. ἄοκνος (841), if it is the correct reading, more often means "not shrinking from" than "not anticipating" and suggests at least a passive willingness for Heracles' death. While μεγάλαν προσορῶσα . . . βλάβαν . . . ἀίσσουσαν (842-843) is obviously meant to support the view that Deianeira intended only to avert the loss of Heracles' love, it could also serve as her motive for killing Heracles. Although the bad effects of the drug come from the intention of one other than Deianeira (ἀπ' ἀλλόθρου γνώμας 844-845), they came about through destructive exchanges (ὀλεθρίαισι συναλλαγαῖς 845), which suggests Deianeira's exchange of gift for gift with Heracles (494) as readily as it does her converse with the centaur.

The final words of the second strophe expose again the circular dance of evidence and conclusion that has characterized so much of the discussion of Heracles' fate.

> ἃ δ' ἐρχομένα μοῖρα προφαίνει δολίαν
> καὶ μεγάλαν ἄταν. (849-850)
>
> And the coming doom foreshadows great blindness caused by deception.

The doom (μοῖρα 849) is said to reveal beforehand (προφαίνει 849) great blindness caused by deception (δολίαν καὶ μεγάλαν ἄταν 849-850). In fact, however, the doom, which is still coming (ἐρχομένα 849), is known by inference from its causes (831-840). Thus the conclusion becomes the evidence from which its own evidence is inferred, and the past is predicted (προφαίνει 849) by the future (ἃ δ' ἐρχομένα μοῖρα 849).[38]

In the second antistrophe the Chorus seeks an ultimate cause for Heracles' suffering. Recognizing that the sack of Oechalia began the present chain of events they first address the spearpoint (λόγχα 856) that brought Iole (νύμφαν . . . τάνδ' 857-859) to Trachis. Then, assuming that the scholarly consensus is right in translating πράκτωρ (861) as "doer," they settle on Aphrodite as the cause. But the spearpoint could not sack Oechalia by itself; it had to be wielded by Heracles. More importantly, Aphrodite is only the servant (ἀμφίπολος 860) of Heracles' desire. The Chorus therefore has suppressed, though incompletely, the crucial responsibility of Heracles himself for his misfortune. The close verbal resemblance between their words assigning responsibility to Aphrodite (Κύπρις . . . ἐφάνη πράκτωρ 860-861) and Lichas' words blaming Zeus for the enslavement of Heracles (Ζεὺς . . . πράκτωρ φανῇ 251) indicates that in exculpating Heracles the Chorus deceives itself with the same rhetorical convenience, the omnipotence of the gods, that Lichas uses to deceive others.

It is not improbable, however, that πράκτωρ (861) should be translated as "avenger," a meaning that is much commoner than "doer." The antecedent of τῶνδε therefore would be the rape of Iole, referred to in the immediately preceding sentence; and ἀμφίπολος would mean "attendant of the gods, fulfilling their purposes," as Easterling suggests. The Chorus' attribution of Deianeira's death to an Erinys (895) indicates that they see the disasters befalling the house of Heracles as a form of divine retribution. If πράκτωρ does mean avenger, then the Chorus' rhetoric has designated Heracles' spearpoint the ultimate cause of the trouble. Thus they free both man and god from blame.

In isolating Aphrodite (or the spearpoint) as the cause of Heracles' death the Chorus contradicts Deianeira, who declared herself sole cause (μόνη γὰρ αὐτόν . . . ἐγὼ . . . ἐξαποφθερῶ 712-713). Thus they cast doubt on the authority of both accounts.[39]

In fact, despite its attribution of ultimate blame to Aphrodite (or the spearpoint), the Chorus in the third stasimon suggests the bewildering array of causes that have contributed to the doom they foresee. The obvious ones are Aphrodite (860-861), the spearpoint (856-859), Nessus (831, 838), the robe (φονίᾳ νεφέλᾳ 831, interpreting νεφέλᾳ as "net"), and the poison (833), which was itself produced by death and the hydra (834). The hydra itself may be an active cause if δεινοτάτῳ . . . ὕδρας . . . φάσματι (836-837) is taken as dative of agent with the perfect participle προστετακώς (837; the object of προς- would be πέπλῳ understood). Then there are Iole (νέων . . . γάμων 843; cf. μόνη μεταίτιος of Iole 1233-1234), Deianeira (841-850), and Heracles, whose role is suggested by his relationship to the spear and perhaps Aphrodite (857-861). Finally the Chorus' language can suggest that necessity (δολοποιὸς ἀνάγκα 832) smeared Heracles' sides, and that the twelfth year itself accomplished his fate (ἄροτον must be understood from ἄροτος as the subject of τελεῖν 825).

Like Hyllus, the Chorus unwittingly depicts the situation in general as an outbreak of confusion and especially fluidity. The centaur is a cloud (Κενταύρου φονίᾳ νεφέλᾳ 831), the hydra a phantom (ὕδρας . . . φάσματι 836-837), both suggesting non-solid, amorphous, deceptive appearances. Heracles is maimed in a mixed-up way (ἄμμιγα 839). He is melted, liquefied (προστετακώς 837), as is the hydra's venom (προστακέντος ἰοῦ 833). The hydra itself is of course watery (833, 836-837). The disease has been poured forth (κέχυται νόσος 852), and is the occasion of many tears (ἀδινῶν . . . τέγγει δακρύων 847-848) which have burst out as from a fountain (ἔρρωγεν

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