CHAPTER SIX

"What SPLENDOUR, IT ALL COHERES"

I Heracles arrives: anapaests and song, 971-1042.

The suffering of his father causes Hyllus to cry out in despair (971-973), but the Old Man who is caring for Heracles warns him to be silent. For Heracles still lives (ζῇ γὰρ προπετής 976) and mourning is not appropriate; indeed it is highly inappropriate, since it may awaken Heracles and renew his anguish (974-977, 978-981). Yet Hyllus cannot control himself (981-982), and his lamentation awakens Heracles (983). The Old Man rebukes Hyllus, saying that it would have been beneficial for him to have hidden (κεύθειν 989) his feelings, but Hyllus replies that his expression could not but correspond to what he saw (κακὸν τόδε λεύσσων 992). For Hyllus, therefore, correspondence of his feelings with reality, and of his expression with his feelings, is an overriding imperative.

Although Heracles' wounds are not available to the characters for inspection, his screams tell something about his sensations. The disease seems to devour him (βρύκει 987), creeping through him (ἕρπει 1010), and altogether destroying him (διολοῦσ' ἡμᾶς 1029). No relief or cure is possible, except through Zeus (998-1003). It sounds horrible, as the Chorus acknowledges (κλύουσ' ἔφριξα 1044), but it is an account, not something the characters can examine or experience for themselves, and the possibility of exaggeration or distortion must not be dismissed, especially since the very first thing that Heracles says about his pains, that they are ceaseless (ἀλλήκτοις 985) is obviously wrong in view of Heracles' repose as he is brought on stage and the testimony of the Old Man, given only a few lines before (φοιτάδα . . . νόσον 979-980). Heracles himself will soon admit that the pain varies in intensity (1009) and increases when he is touched or moved (1007). Heracles' insistence upon Zeus as the disease's cause (994-995) and only possible cure (1002) may in fact be a reaction to the special embarrassment of having been worsted by a woman, on which he will lay much emphasis in his long speech

(1062-1075). His heroic stature would not have been so seriously damaged if Zeus alone were his conqueror. If Zeus did intend his death, however, then cure at the hands of mortals is unthinkable. Heracles' heroic stature, therefore, may require him to regard his disease as uncurable. In any case in interpreting Heracles' positive wish to die (1005-1006, 1010-1017, 1031-1032, 1042-1043) it is important to remember that for the hero death may be an expedient escape from embarrassment.

The feeling that his disease is an embarrassment, which was dominant in his words to Hyllus while they were still on Euboea (797-802), remains prominent in Heracles' mind now.[1] Zeus has visited him with a dishonorable mutilation (λώβαν 996), one which he wishes he had never seen (μήποτ' . . . προσιδεῖν . . . ὄσσοις, . . . καταδερχθῆναι 997-999). This embarrassment is based on the disease's incongruity with Heracles' heroic role, as his long iambic rhesis (1046-1111) will show. Even here, however, Heracles displays his outrage at the lack of correspondence between the disease and his true worth by sardonically characterizing the disease as reward for his sacrifices at Cenaeum (ἱερῶν οἵαν οἵων . . . χάριν ἠνύσω 994-995).

Heracles manifests his expectation of correspondence also in his anger at the soldiers who have not taken fire or sword to end his life (1010-1014). Having purified the whole world on land and sea (1012) he expects reciprocation from those he has benefited. Since the bystanders do not so reciprocate Heracles considers them unjust (ἀδικώτατοι 1011) and rhetorically asks where they come from (πόθεν ἔστ' 1010), since whatever their provenance they owe him a debt. This expectation of correspondence also governs his anger at Deianeira, since he wants her to suffer exactly what she has done to him (αὔτως, ὧδ' αὔτως, ὡς μ' ὤλεσεν 1040). In calling her ἄθεος (1039) Heracles suggests that such reciprocation would normally be expected to come from the gods. Like Hyllus, moreover, he will not apply to Deianeira a name with which her being is inconsistent. She is now called Hyllus' mother (σὰ μάτηρ 1039), not Heracles' wife.

Heracles' rhetoric in the anapaests and lyrics of his awakening has a rather elliptical trend, and interpretation of it may admittedly seem strained. The iambic section which follows, however, repeats many of the same themes in more extended form and affords better foundation for explanation.

II Heracles complains of his suffering and begs to kill Deianeira, 1046-1142.

The main topic of the long speech that Heracles now delivers is difference and incongruity.[2] His present sufferings are unlike those he endured before (κοὔπω τοιοῦτον . . . οἷον τόδ' 1048-1050), his present adversary unlike those he faced before (1048-1050, 1058-1063) in that she has used guile rather than force (δολῶπις 1050, φασγάνου δίχα 1063).[3] In Heracles' rhetoric he has changed from a man into a woman (θῆλυς ηὕρημαι 1075), and an ignominious sign of defeat has joined if not replaced the signs of his noble birth (1102-1106). As a response to the inconsistency that the disease has produced in his life, Heracles wishes to pay back (ἐτεισάμην 1111) Deianeira, proving that death has not affected his ability to exact justice (καὶ ζῶν . . . καὶ θανών 1111).[4] In order to do this, however, he must persuade Hyllus to bring Deianeira to him, and he argues that by obeying Hyllus will prove himself a true son of Heracles (μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος 1064), one, that is, whose being corresponds to the phrase "son of Heracles".

The structure of the speech, moreover, reveals that Heracles always subordinates description of his actual physical condition to his account of the difference it has caused. Thus in the first section of the speech, dealing with the unusual nature of his suffering and his enemy, Heracles begins by exclaiming upon the special nature of his new affliction (1046-1052). Then in explanation (γάρ 1053) he describes the disease itself (1053-1057). Later, when trying to persuade Hyllus to bring Deianeira to him, he appeals in the name of pity (οἶκτιρον 1070), and then reveals his body to Hyllus in order to evoke the pity he requires (ὡς οἰκτρῶς ἔχω 1080).[5] His self-exposure therefore belongs to his rhetoric. Of the seizure that immediately follows (1081-1089) we can at least say that it comes at the most rhetorically opportune moment.[6] Heracles' last description of his disease (ἄναρθρος καὶ κατερρακωμένος 1103) supports an account of his present situation (ἐκπεπόρθημαι 1104) that tells nothing about the disease itself but rather serves to point a contrast with his previous undefeated state.

From the rhetorical standpoint, therefore, Heracles uses the disease to enhance the pathos of his downfall. In this light we perhaps should suspect that the disease may not be as serious as he says. To be sure, he describes it much more vividly in this section than in that which preceded: the disease continually sucks the vessels of his lungs (1054-1055) and has drunk the blood out of him (1055-1056), it has undone his joints (ἄναρθρος 1103) and turned his flesh to rags (κατερρακωμένος 1103).[7] Nevertheless Heracles' diagnosis clearly involves exaggerations, since if his lungs were shrivelling or his blood all drunk he would be dead, and he isn't. Nor may he even believe his own

diagnosis; he is utterly confident that he can mangle Deianeira with his bare hands (ἐς χεῖρα 1067), if only she is brought to him (1066, 1109-1111). While Heracles' condition may be serious, it cannot be as serious as he declares. Moreover, references by the Chorus and Hyllus to Heracles' condition after they have seen his body suggest that they no longer regard his death as a foregone conclusion: the Chorus speaks of Hellas' grief *if* deprived of him (ἀνδρὸς τοῦδέ γ' εἰ σφαλήσεται 1113),[8] and Hyllus, blaming Iole for killing his mother, blames her only for making Heracles as he is (ὡς ἔχεις 1234),[9] not for killing him.

One clue to a better understanding of Heracles' injury may be the fact that he exposes himself immediately after insisting that the disease has made him a woman (1071-1075) in causing him to scream like one. Perhaps we should suppose that Heracles' genitals have been mutilated. His description of the robe's effect on his skin is such that his genitals could hardly have been left intact. Such an injury would have been a fate much worse than death for the typical hero of Greek epic.[10]

Even if we do not go so far as to suppose that Heracles has actually been castrated by Deianeira's robe, we must acknowledge that he rhetorically characterizes himself as emasculated,[11] and this emasculation results not from Deianeira's ability to kill him, but rather from the pain which he feels and his failure to endure it silently (ὥστε παρθένος βέβρυχα 1071-1072). From the standpoint of Heracles' heroism, therefore, whether the robe will actually kill him is of little relevance, for it has already dishonored him in the worst possible way.[12]

Significantly, when he speaks of testing Hyllus by forcing him to behold his mother's punishment and measuring his reaction against that which he feels when beholding his father, Heracles does not say that he will kill Deianeira but rather that he will defile her beauty (λωβητὸν εἶδος 1069), comparing this to what she has done to him (τοὐμὸν . . . ἡ κείνης . . . εἶδος 1068-1069). He also expresses his loss of manliness in terms of how he is seen and what is said about him: previously nobody had been able to say that he had seen Heracles screaming in pain (οὐδ' ἂν εἷς . . . φαίη . . . ἰδεῖν 1072-1073). Referring to his previous invincibility, in the manner characteristic of the heroic ethos in the *Trachiniae* Heracles substitutes the signifier for the referent: nobody had erected a trophy signifying his defeat (κούδεὶς τροπαῖ' ἔστησε 1102). Likewise in referring to his ancestry he substitutes the reputation of his ancestry for the ancestry itself: he is *called* the son of the noblest mother (ὁ τῆς ἀρίστης μητρὸς ὠνομασμένος 1105), *called* the offspring of Zeus (ὁ . . . Ζηνὸς αὐδηθεὶς γόνος 1106). Thus he wants to teach Deianeira to give a report about him (ἀγγέλλειν 1110) that will in part repair the damage she has done to his fame. The drug of Nessus has injured Heracles' vanity as certainly as it has any part of his body.[13]

In view of Heracles' vanity it may seem surprising that he so willingly exposes himself as an object of pity, but our previous discussions of pity in the play have shown that pity, especially self-pity, can afford compensation to the sufferer. The pity that Heracles feels for himself and that which he hopes to arouse in others is the keener for their awareness of the greatness which they behold destroyed. Thus in exposing and bewailing the full extent of his fall (or more than the full extent) he simultaneously asserts his former greatness, actually recounting many of his exploits (1089-1102).[14]

While concentrating on the character of Heracles' pain in analyzing this passage we have lightly passed over his demand that Hyllus bring Deianeira to him and the complex assumptions of correspondence that underlie Heracles' words. But since the theme of correspondence becomes even more prominent in the lines that follow, we should return to Heracles' demand and examine it carefully. Heracles frames his demand in terms of three propositions that are implicitly contingent upon one another: (1) Hyllus is a born son of Heracles (γενοῦ μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος γεγώς 1064) if and only if (2) Hyllus does not honor the name of mother more (than the reality of father) (μὴ τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα πρεσβεύσῃς πλέον 1065), which is the case if and only if (3) Hyllus brings Deianeira to Heracles (δός μοι . . . τὴν τεκοῦσαν 1066-1067). Heracles therefore attempts to persuade Hyllus to do his bidding by establishing a chain of correspondence between Hyllus' presumed φύσις and what Heracles wants him to do. While the persuasive power of this chain depends upon the assumption that it is tautological, each link can be forged only by assuming further correspondences on which to base the tautologies. Therefore Hyllus can prove that he honors his father more than the name of mother by bringing Deianeira to Heracles only if honoring the father means never disobeying him, and only if the name of father and the reality correspond while that of mother and reality do not. Underlying both of these assumptions is the further assumption that the son is a copy of the father, produced from the father's body without any outside help.[15] Therefore he has no mother, only a name of mother, on the one hand, and on the other he cannot disobey his father since he is only his father's creation. Similarly, dishonoring the name of mother reveals a true son just because reduction of motherhood to a mere name already implies the direct generation of son by father.

This sort of fatherhood entails not only the son's complete obedience to the father's commands but his virtual reflection of the father's every wish. Therefore the son will honor his father more than his mother, recognizing

that she is his parent in name only, and when confronted by both father and mother in distress will instinctively mirror the pain of his father, for he is the only true parent (1067-1068). He will moreover express this pain visibly so that it can be seen (ὁρῶν 1068).

Hyllus has shown that he shares these assumptions. He rhetorically denies that Deianeira actually is his mother (μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα δρᾷ 818) and on that basis denies her the name of mother (817-818). He also cannot remain silent when beholding his stricken father (991-992). Yet Hyllus could not completely ignore Deianeira's maternity, addressing her as mother even as he accused her (μῆτερ 807), and neither can Heracles, referring to her as τὴν τεκοῦσαν (1067). Traces of rhetorical forcing thus remain visible in the scheme.

Indeed the existence of woman, even as the mere carrier of the father's seed, creates difference and uncertainty, for though the mother may not be a parent, the identity of the father may be doubtful. Heracles in fact does not only use this doubt regarding parentage as a means of persuading Hyllus to bring Deianeira to him, but he himself wants to torture Deianeira partly in order to ascertain whether he is Hyllus' father (ὡς εἰδῶ σάφα etc. 1067-1069). Perhaps he invokes the absolute identity of father and son partly because he actually has his doubts about whether Hyllus meets this requirement.

Heracles' concern with Hyllus' authenticity coincides with the emasculating effect on him of the robe. In creating a difference between himself as he was and as he is, the robe heightens his desire for identity with his son, for through his son he can regain his former condition by punishing Deianeira (1110-1111). Indeed if Hyllus really is an identical copy of Heracles then Heracles has not been harmed. Therefore Heracles' heroism, which consists of the repression of difference that he calls justice, finds its complete expression in the production of a son who is his exact copy.

From Hyllus' standpoint Heracles does not think in accord with reality when he wishes to punish Deianeira, for she did not intend to harm him and she is already dead. He describes Heracles' feelings essentially as non-correspondent (μάτην 1119, "vain") and emphasizes that this reflects their faulty relationship with reality (ἐν οἷς χαίρειν . . . κἀν ὅτοις ἀλγεῖς 1118-1119). In order to set Heracles straight he first must speak to him, and when Heracles finishes his long speech Hyllus bids for his attention precisely by suggesting that, having received Hyllus' patient attention, he should reciprocate and give his attention to Hyllus (ἀντιφωνῆσαι 1114, ὧν δίκαια τυγχάνειν 1116). When Heracles refuses to hear Deianeira even mentioned, Hyllus replies that her reality (ἔχει . . . οὕτως 1126) is such that silence about it would not be fitting (μὴ σιγᾶν πρέπειν 1126).

When Heracles finally consents to allow Hyllus to speak of Deianeira he again implies that Hyllus' attitude toward Deianeira will reveal whether he is truly Heracles' son (μὴ φανῇς κακὸς γεγώς 1129). As Heracles' earlier words had indicated (1064-1069), he assumes a loyalty to one's parent that is both instinctive and undivided, correspondence between son and father approaching identity. Hyllus had in fact demonstrated his low birth merely by mentioning Deianeira to his father (ὦ παγκάκιστε, καὶ παρεμνήσω . . . τῆς . . . μητρός 1124-1125).

Heracles again displays his idea of justice as correspondence of crime and punishment when he learns that Deianeira is already dead. He does not regard death alone as sufficient punishment for her; she was supposed to have died by the hand of him she had killed (χρῆν σφ' ἐξ ἐμῆς θανεῖν χερός 1133). This failure of correspondence shocks Heracles so that he can hardly believe it, and calls it a τέρας (1131).

The notion of correspondence most important to the passage, however, is that of intention and result. According to Hyllus the fact that his mother did not intend to harm Heracles absolves her of guilt significantly or even totally (νιν ματαίως αἰτίᾳ βάλοι 940). But Heracles will not consider that intention might be relevant; Deianeira's deed becomes an attribute that is inseparable from her (τῆς πατροφόντου μητρός 1125). Furthermore, lest any gap be suspected between Deianeira's former excellence and her murder of Heracles, he retrospectively proclaims her past criminal as well (τοῖς . . . πρόσθεν ἡμαρτημένοις 1127). When Hyllus states more clearly the distinction he has drawn between Deianeira's act and her intention (ἥμαρτε χρηστὰ μωμένη 1136), Heracles obviously cannot even understand him, since in his reply he renders the good things the object of the verb indicating what Deianeira actually did (χρήστ' . . . δρᾷ 1137) and does not mention her intention at all. For Heracles intention and result correspond so closely that intention is simply lost and cannot be distinguished from result even in theory.

Heracles' vision does not include error; he does not even realize that ἁμαρτάνω primarily means "to err" and not "to commit a crime". In fact only this allows Hyllus to persuade Heracles to grant him a hearing at all. For when Heracles has acknowledged that Deianeira's past ἡμαρτημένα (crimes) ought to be talked about, Hyllus replies that Heracles will acknowledge the same to be true of her present ἡμαρτημένα. His obsession with consistency forces Heracles to concede that Deianeira's past and present ἡμαρτημένα must be treated in the same way. But whereas Heracles understands ἡμαρτημένα in the sense of "crimes", Hyllus uses it in the sense of "errors". Thus Hyllus essentially tricks Heracles into allowing him to clear

his mother's name, establishing correspondence between her λόγος and her reality, by exploiting a lack of correspondence within the word ἁμαρτάνω itself.

III Heracles reveals the oracles, 1143-1173.

When Hyllus reveals that the substance which has maimed him was obtained by Deianeira from Nessus, Heracles' train of thought abruptly changes. Three objects occupy his thought: (1) he is going to die, (2) Nessus is the cause of his death, and (3) his father's oracles have been confirmed. The declaration that the oracles have been fulfilled, like the similar declaration of the Chorus in the third stasimon (821-830), apparently casts the action of the *Trachiniae* into its definitive narrative shape. It proclaims that certain particular statements, the oracles, truthfully signify that which has actually taken place. Thus its rhetoric, like so much of the characters' rhetoric in *Trachiniae*, is the denial of rhetoric. There are, however, strong reasons, some of them suggested nearly forty years ago by I.M. Linforth and largely disregarded since,[16] to doubt that the oracles have been fulfilled, and therefore to doubt that the play represents, as it seems to, the possibility of a referent for language that is not ultimately an interpretation. These doubts in turn call the foreknowledge of Zeus into question.

In reading Heracles' words we are first of all entitled to ask what motivates him to mention the oracles at precisely this moment. Until now Heracles has believed that his killer was Deianeira; and until a few lines before (1130) he had believed that Deianeira was alive. If Heracles had died at that time, as he expected and wished to, according to his own judgment he would not have been killed by "an inhabitant of Hades" (Ἄιδου . . . οἰκήτωρ 1161). Yet he never indicated that the oracle concerning his death had not been fulfilled, or that on the other hand, it proved that he couldn't die at this time or in this way. Moreover he never mentioned the oracle predicting the end of his labors at "the present time" (1169) either to note its refutation, or to reinterpret it, or to derive from it confidence that his present situation was only temporary. Given Heracles' virtual obsession with correspondence, it should have been necessary for him to deal with the oracles, since they apparently failed to correspond with reality.

Heracles therefore mentions the oracles only when he thinks that they do correspond with reality, not when they don't. Yet although in doing so Heracles appears somewhat uncritical and dishonest, to appreciate his behavior we must understand what is at stake. The Theban chorus of *Oedipus the*

Tyrant, when the prophecy concerning Laius' death seems not to have been fulfilled, declares that they will no longer visit oracles in reverence (σέβων, Soph. *O.T.* 898) unless the prophecy proves to fit with reality (ἁρμόσει 902) in a way that is visible to all mortals (χειρόδεικτα πᾶσιν . . . βροτοῖς, *O.T.* 901-902). Then when they pray to Zeus for fulfilment of the oracle they must wonder if he hears them (εἴπερ ὄρθ' ἀκούεις, *O.T.* 903). Non-fulfilment of divine prophecy occasions a crisis of faith. For Heracles, however, this crisis must be especially intense, since the prophecies derive from the god who is said to be his father, Zeus. If Zeus cannot make reality correspond to his word, or his word to reality, then perhaps he doesn't exist, or perhaps at least he fathers children who do not correspond to him.[17] Such questions undermine Heracles' heroic status even more fundamentally than emasculation. Not surprisingly, therefore, Heracles avoids raising them. Instead, he tries to quell any doubts by either attributing his downfall to Zeus (993-995) or begging Zeus to end his misery (1086-1088), suggesting by both that Zeus is real and powerful.[18]

Hence even though the oracles do not offer Heracles any hope of relief from his physical distress, it is in what he would perceive as his interest that they be recognized as true. The same can be said of the identification of Nessus as Heracles' killer. Heracles' acceptance of Hyllus' exoneration of Deianeira might seem extremely hasty in view of his previous unwillingness even to consider that Deianeira might have acted innocently. The only cognitive basis for Heracles' belief is the congruence of Hyllus' explanation with the prophecy about his death, which is yet another instance of word corresponding to word rather than to reality. Heracles' belief should therefore have a motive. I would suggest that Heracles might want to believe that Nessus was his killer, because then he would not be said to have been killed by a woman, but instead by one of the monsters he fought, perhaps the most powerful, since he has the power to act from beyond the grave. Heracles' killer would also be someone that Heracles himself had killed, suggesting a sort of justice in Heracles' death that could be the handiwork of Zeus. Finally, believing that Nessus was his killer allows Heracles to affirm that his father's oracles are true.[19]

Heracles' possible motives for believing in the fulfilment of the oracles need be considered because his belief is by no means necessitated by the manifest correspondence of reality and prophecies, and in fact requires some manipulation of both the prophecies and reality in order to achieve the appearance of correspondence between them. First of all until Heracles dies nobody can truthfully be said to have killed him. Therefore since Heracles is not yet dead he prematurely declares the prophecy fulfilled. Indeed,

although the truth of the oracle can be determined only by reference to reality, the reality of Heracles' death appears to be determined by the oracle,[20] since when he has connected Nessus, the oracle, and his predicament he declares that his end is at hand "as if he realised his state for the first time."[21] When Heracles dies, moreover, the cause will be the pyre on Mt. Oeta, not Deianeira's robe,[22] at least as far as anyone can tell, and his killer will be the person who kindles the pyre, as Hyllus makes clear (μ' ἐκκαλῇ . . . φονέα γενέσθαι καὶ παλαμναῖον σέθεν 1206-1207).[23] Heracles chooses this death as a result of the prophecies (ἐπειδὴ λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει, . . . δεῖ etc. 1174-1175). Therefore instead of having in the prophecies words that are true because they correspond to reality, we have in Heracles' death a reality that interprets words and attempts to correspond to them, that is, a scripted performance. Word and reality therefore interpret one another, neither is an original, and neither can be true in the sense of corresponding to a source that is not an interpretation. Thus, as elsewhere in the *Trachiniae*, reality as a Being independent of language disappears, and the putative correspondence of language and reality proves to be correspondence between language and language.

Having asserted the correspondence with reality of the prophecy concerning his death, Heracles attempts to confirm its truth by demonstrating its correspondence with a second prophecy.

> φανῶ δ' ἐγὼ τούτοισι συμβαίνοντ' ἴσα
> μαντεῖα καινά, τοῖς πάλαι ξυνήγορα,
> ἃ τῶν ὀρείων καὶ χαμαικοιτῶν ἐγὼ
> Σελλῶν ἐσελθὼν ἄλσος εἰσεγραψάμην
> πρὸς τῆς πατρῴας καὶ πολυγλώσσου δρυός,
> ἥ μοι χρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι καὶ παρόντι νῦν
> ἔφασκε μόχθων τῶν ἐφεστώτων ἐμοὶ
> λύσιν τελεῖσθαι· κἀδόκουν πράξειν καλῶς.
> τὸ δ' ἦν ἄρ' οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν θανεῖν ἐμέ.
> τοῖς γὰρ θανοῦσι μόχθος οὐ προσγίγνεται.
> ταῦτ' οὖν ἐπειδὴ λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει . . . (1164-1174)

> And I shall reveal new oracles that come out in agreement with this old prophecy and corroborate it. I wrote them down in the grove of the Selloi, who dwell on the hills and make their bed on the ground; these oracles came from the many-tongued oak of my father, which declared that at the time which lives and is present now, release from the toils laid upon me would come to pass. And I expected to fare well. But as it turns out, the meaning was only that I would die; for the dead have no toil. So since these things clearly tally . . .

Heracles' description of the second prophecy as supporting the plea of the first (ξυνήγορα 1165) shows that in presenting it he means to confirm the truth of the first oracle. This would hardly be necessary if the first oracle had actually been fulfilled in reality, but it hasn't been, and Heracles' presentation of additional evidence should rather confirm the inadequacy of his first argument, that of correspondence between the oracle and reality, which is the only argument that could be either valid or necessary. The second argument asserts correspondence not between language and reality but between two instances of language, but such correspondence, as we have noted before, does not prove the correspondence of either instance with reality. Heracles' second argument therefore could not prove the truth of the first oracle even if the two oracles really did correspond. In fact, however, the two oracles that Heracles regards as equal (ἴσα 1164) may be entirely disparate in content. The first predicts a certain mode of death for Heracles but specifies no time when it will occur, while the second, mentioning nothing about death, predicts that a certain event will occur at a definite time. Now at best the congruence of these prophecies is quite obscure, hardly clear as Heracles claims (λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει 1174). In order to find the more recent prophecy congruent with the older one Heracles must exploit two ambiguities in the second prophecy (the meaning of "accomplish a release from toils" and the time at which the release should occur; for as we have said before, with ancient methods of timekeeping such a time would have been impossible to determine with precision twelve years in advance), to show that it could agree with the first, and then declare the congruent meaning to be the true meaning of the prophecy. The possibility of the first step, which is based upon the unfixed meaning of language that allows it to be interpreted in any imaginable way (as Heracles demonstrates by his far-fetched exegesis), is inconsistent with the second, which supposes that the oracle stands in a fixed relationship to reality. Or to put it another way, the openness that allows Heracles to interpret the oracles precludes their possessing a definite meaning that they can share, and *a fortiori* precludes the fulfilment of such a meaning.[24] Heracles therefore cannot know what the oracles mean or whether they have been fulfilled. He uses them as a device to give satisfactory narrative closure to his representation of himself: they are *oracula ex machina* in the drama of which he is the poet, subject, star actor and audience.

In proclaiming what he regards as the truth of the oracles and determining the course of his fate Heracles reveals the same delusory need for certainty that afflicted Deianeira and Hyllus. His conviction that the end of his life had been determined beforehand stands parallel to Deianeira's analysis of her life's unchangeable pattern (1-5), which in banishing change essentially decrees an end to her life. Like Deianeira, Hyllus, and the Chorus, what he regards as spoken truly he rhetorically endows with visibility: his death was "foreshown" (πρόφαντον 1159, 1163) by Zeus, he will "bring to light" (φανῶ 1164) the more recent oracle, the prophecies coincide (whether with one another or with reality is left unclear) "shiningly" (λαμπρά 1174).[25] He speaks of himself not as dying but as already dead (οἴχομαι 1143, ὄλωλα 1144, πατὴρ . . . οὐκέτ' ἐστί 1146, and elsewhere), much as Deianeira used perfects to give herself a sense that her trial had been completed (581-587). Finally, just as Deianeira had memorized as if engraved in bronze the ambiguous words of Nessus, in the belief that by doing so she was controlling their meaning, so Heracles had written down (εἰσεγραψάμην 1167) the words of the many-tongued tree (πολυγλώσσου δρυός 1168), in the belief that by doing so he unified its voice.

Even apart from the multivocal character of the Dodonaean oak, Heracles' faith in the univocity of his father's oracle displays indifference to certain important features of Dodonaean observance. According to Jebb,

> The aspect in which Zeus . . . was . . . worshipped at Dodona was expressed by the epithet Νάιος, the god of streams, and, generally, of water. Achelous, as the type of that element, received special honours at Dodona . . . . In course of time the Dodonaean cult of Zeus became associated with a cult of Dione, Διώνη. This goddess, usually described as a Titanid, daughter of Uranos and Ge, was at Dodona the symbol of the fertilised Earth, answering to Zeus Naios as the fertilising water-god. She was his wife, σύνναος with him; their daughter was Aphrodite, who . . . had a temple in the temenos.[26]

All the elements that the rhetoric of the characters in *Trachiniae* has tried to repress--water, eros, vitality, dissemination--come together at Dodona. One may wonder whether the Zeus of Dodona could really have been regarded as Olympian, given the chthonic associations of all streams.[27] Indeed, as god of all water Zeus Naios appears to be identical to Achelous and Dionysus.[28] This god may indeed be Heracles' father, but in another sense than Heracles supposes.

IV Heracles' commands, 1174-1258.

Heracles seizes the putative unity of the oracles with reality and with one another as the occasion for unifying his family. He commands Hyllus to convoke his mother Alcmena (1148) and his seed (σπέρμα 1147), a word that may suggest that his offspring are the products of his body alone. But despite the apparent homecoming of the oracles, Trachis is not Heracles' home, and most of his family is not there. Indeed they are scattered among Trachis, Tiryns, and Thebes (1151-1155). Hyllus alone will have to carry out his will, which will unify him with Heracles by proving that he is Heracles' son in deed as well as name: φανεῖς ὁποῖος ὢν ἀνὴρ ἐμὸς καλῇ (1158). As we suggested before, for Heracles the only index of Hyllus' authenticity is his obedience, which he tries to obtain before requiring any particular action of him. He first demands that Hyllus be his ally (σύμμαχον 1175), but even though Hyllus agrees Heracles forces him first to give his right hand, then to swear an oath binding him to do whatever he is told. Therefore besides unifying Hyllus and Heracles, and Hyllus' name as son of Heracles and his reality, Heracles aims also to unify his words and reality, τὸ λεχθὲν ἔργον ἐκτελεῖν (1187). The gods, moreover, will punish Hyllus for any deviation, so that justice as correspondence will rule the transaction.

Yet Heracles' hope for a natural unity between himself and Hyllus is contested by the means he chooses for enforcing this unity. Although at first he expects Hyllus to submit of his own free will (αὐτὸν εἰκαθόντα συμπράσσειν 1177) the idea of yielding (εἰκαθόντα) already implies some difference of opinion between father and son. Then he classes the obedience of son to father as a law or custom (νόμον 1177), indicating a conventional rather than a natural relationship. Although Hyllus agrees to obey at this point, Heracles' first command applies another conventional bond to Hyllus, the pledge (1181). Hyllus' demand to know what he is pledging brings a forceful rebuke from Heracles, and Hyllus gives his hand, but Heracles then compels him to swear an oath by Zeus, implying that as estranged parties their converse must be mediated by a third party. Far from acting out of natural sympathy for his father, Hyllus is to act under threat of punishment. The rhetorical natural unity of father and son becomes a totalitarian tyranny where pure force erases natural difference.

Having obtained his oath to perform whatever he is commanded, Heracles instructs Hyllus to burn him on Mt. Oeta (1191-1202) and marry Iole (1219-1229). His reasons for these requests are quite obscure. He says that Hyllus will cure him (1208-1209), but one might well ask, as Hyllus does, how he can cure Heracles by burning him (1210).[29] Heracles does not

answer the question. As for Iole, he explains that Hyllus should marry her and keep her from other men because she was his father's paramour, but he does not explain why her relationship to Heracles necessitates marriage to Hyllus. The possibility that Heracles might have received oracles that apparently mandated this behavior[30] does not really solve the problem, because, as we have seen, oracular signifiers do not have fixed signifieds. Therefore any attribution of meaning to an oracle, even the "literal" or usual meaning of its words, will necessarily be interpretive. If Heracles did receive oracles other than those he shares with Hyllus, he cannot have known what they meant, and his determination of their meaning would reveal a personal choice, if only the choice to accept the oracles at face value, whatever they might mean.

Many readers have felt deeply disoriented by Heracles' commands and the exodos in general.[31] It is easy to see why. Nothing that has occurred in the play so far can have led us to expect Heracles' commands, and nothing in the play informs us of what to expect from them; they have no clear cause and no clear effect: as far as we can see, they just happen. Whereas earlier the mysterious contingency of events had been somewhat disguised by the characters' rhetoric of cause, effect, fate, and truth, now even that rhetoric disappears. In denying Hyllus an explanation of his wishes, Heracles denies us an explanation as well, leaving us to gaze upon events that may well be meaningless.

Few readers of *Trachiniae*, however, have been content to recognize the condition of ignorance in which the exodos of the drama places them.[32] The majority instead have sought to relieve their uncertainty by supplying interpretations which, they suggest, really arise from the text and thus do not count as interpretations at all.[33] Recently both Charles Segal and P. E. Easterling have favored supplementing the text of *Trachiniae* with mythological tradition, seeing in Heracles' commands the hero's apotheosis and the origin of the Heraclidae.[34] Easterling explains that Sophocles "select[s] aspects of the myth as the subject of ironic allusion."[35] The irony lies in the audience's knowledge of a future that the characters cannot see: "For Hyllus, who does not know the future of the great clan that he is to found, there is nothing but horror in his father's request. But for us there must be a more complex significance, even though our pity for him is not lessened by our knowledge of the future."[36] For the spectator who regards his or her interpretation as a form of knowledge gleaned from the text, the exodos of *Trachiniae* seems to distinguish the audience from the character as god from man. But for the rhetorically self-conscious spectator, whose seat in the theater we have pretended to occupy, the mysterious exodos should produce

a recognition of the predicament that both characters and audience share, the predicament of continual uncertainty and interpretation. And in turning now to discussion of Heracles' commands we shall freely admit that we no more than others can meet philology's demand for knowledge, for a text that speaks for itself. Aware that to read the text at all is to speculate, we shall speculate on the motives for Heracles' commands.

We have already suggested that by arranging to be burnt Heracles establishes his death as a certainty, at the same time guaranteeing rhetorically the fulfilment of the oracles. The same effect, however, could be achieved by any mode of death, so Heracles' particular choice still lacks explanation. Although the absence of any such explanation in the text prohibits us from supposing that Heracles actually has a conscious intention, his rhetoric here and elsewhere in the play suggests that he interprets his predicament in terms of shame and dignity. In ordering his own death Heracles rhetorically escapes his entire ignominious situation.[37] His suicide makes it impossible to say that he was killed by Nessus, Deianeira, or anyone else, an important victory for a hero.[38] (Of course it also means that the oracle about his death is not fulfilled even in the sense in which he understands it, but Heracles has every reason to overlook that detail.) If suicide, therefore, relieves Heracles from the disgrace of being murdered, we may ask whether self-immolation in any way relieves Heracles of the ignominy of his special injury. The answer should be that it does, for besides the pain that it causes, Heracles seems most enraged by the disfiguration the robe has caused him (λωβητὸν εἶδος 1069, σκέψαι etc. 1077-1081, κατερρακωμένος 1103). Complete incineration will transform Heracles' body beyond disfiguration to an absolute state that may itself be regarded as a kind of form, as James Redfield has suggested apropos the cremations of the *Iliad*.[39] Moreover, since the robe works by burning (ἔθαλψε 1082), Heracles can best prove himself superior to it by burning himself.

Heracles' self-chosen immolation may amount therefore to an assertion of his own indomitability.[40] He seems to elaborate this assertion in the special instructions that he gives Hyllus, for they associate Heracles' death in numerous ways with dryness, hardness, and maleness. Two kinds of wood are to be used on the pyre, wild olive, specifically called male (ἄρσεν' 1196),[41] and oak,[42] which he describes as deep-rooted (βαθυρρίζου 1195), suggesting solid connection with the ground. There shall be no wailing or weeping, suggesting that the event shall be free of both femininity (compare the contrast of ἀστένακτος and θῆλυς 1074-1075 and the use of ἀστένακτος here 1200) and water (μηδὲν . . . δάκρυ 1199, κἀδάκρυτος 1200). Contrast of βαθυρρίζου δρυός (1195) and βαθύρρουν ποταμόν (559), though unintended

by Heracles, emphasizes the symmetry between the absolute control and stability sought by Heracles and the absolute flowing of the Evenus.

In selecting Mt. Oeta as the particular spot for his cremation Heracles further ennobles himself by connecting himself closely with (Olympian) Zeus, whom he believes to be his father. The peak is sacred to Zeus, as Heracles specifies when he mentions it (Οἴτης Ζηνός 1191) and Zeus has often received sacrifices there (θυτήρ . . . πολλά 1192). Since sacrifice was usually thought of as a gift to the gods, and Heracles' immolation closely resembles a sacrifice,[43] his cremation on Mt. Oeta will return Heracles to his supposed origin, Zeus. Of course this differs considerably from apotheosis, since sacrificed bulls did not achieve immortality on Olympus. Heracles gives every sign of expecting to go to the underworld after death (e.g. νέρθεν 1202).

In classical times sacrifices were still made on Mt. Oeta, and they were said to commemorate the cremation of Heracles on that spot,[44] an explanation in which the burning of Heracles clearly represents an origin and the later sacrifices represent copies. Perhaps some in Sophocles' Athenian audience thought that in concluding the *Trachiniae* with the preparations for this event Sophocles had surpassed the repetition of ritual and, helped by the Muses, connected with historical truth.[45] Anyone who knew about the sacrifices on Mt. Oeta might be excused for forming this impression. But one critical detail subverts it. Hyllus mentions that sacrifices were occurring on Mt. Oeta even before Heracles was burned there (θυτήρ . . . πολλά 1192). The apparent original therefore copied that which was later said to be its copy.

Although Heracles would clearly prefer that Hyllus himself be the one to light his pyre (χρὴ . . . σε . . . πρῆσαι 1193-1199), he is finally satisfied with a promise that Hyllus will make all the preparations himself and, implicitly, see to it that someone else does the rest (1214). Heracles' second demand, however, can be fulfilled only by Hyllus himself. Heracles' demand that Hyllus marry Iole,[46] like his demand that Hyllus cremate him, is not clearly explained by him, and we therefore cannot assume that he has a clear idea of what he wants. We can, however, suggest some of the terms in which he might have understood his desire. Kamerbeek credibly explains Heracles' demand in terms of pride: "It would be, according to his selfcentered notions, a diminution of his glory, if Iole were to become the wife of anybody lower than his own blood."[47] The passage of *Oedipus the Tyrant* where Oedipus explains his standing as prosecutor of Laius' murderer shows a precise reason why a hero might think this way: a woman shared by two men is felt to forge a very close bond between them, actually a blood relationship

mediated by the children of the womb they have sown in common (Soph. *O.T.* 260-262). Whoever inseminates Iole may therefore be understood to have such a relationship with Heracles, particularly because a child begotten on Iole by her second lover may even be mistaken for Heracles'. If such a man should be Heracles' inferior, then in sharing a woman with him Heracles would appear, or perhaps in his mind actually be (since for the man obsessed with the correspondence of appearance and reality, appearance is reality) the father of inferior offspring. Obviously he could not tolerate such a gap between himself and his children. But since Hyllus presumably already shares Heracles' φύσις, he and only he could share a woman with Heracles without endangering the purity of Heracles' seed.[48]

Despite the fact that he considers the union of Hyllus and Iole a small favor to ask (χάριν βραχεῖαν 1217, σμικροῖς 1229) Heracles clearly suspects that Hyllus will not grant it, since even before he has told Hyllus what he wants he reminds him of his obligation to obey (εἴπερ εὐσεβεῖν βούλει, πατρῴων ὁρκίων μεμνημένος 1222-1223). Hyllus indeed recoils from the proposal, giving as his reason Iole's responsibility for his mother's death and his father's condition (1233-1234). Such a marriage would be an invitation to ruin brought on by avengers ('ξ ἀλαστόρων 1235),[49] a transgression of divine law (δυσσεβεῖν 1245). Yet although Hyllus, unlike Heracles when making his demands, explains himself clearly, his explanation still should not be accepted as a definitive account of his "thought" on the subject. Hyllus' explanation might be credible if Iole had incurred blood guilt for involvement in the death of Deianeira and the injury of Heracles, but no reasonable person could conclude that she had done so. Her involvement is extremely tangential; she neither intended any harm to Heracles nor was the instrument of any harm. Certainly if Hyllus could exonerate Deianeira because she acted without intent (νιν ματαίως αἰτίᾳ βάλοι 940) and can avoid guilt in the burning of his father just by not touching the pyre (μὴ ποτιψαύων χεροῖν 1214) then he can exonerate Iole on the same grounds. Far from doing so, however, he hugely exaggerates her responsibility to the point where she is virtually the sole cause of the disaster (μόνη μεταίτιος 1233-1234). This expression implies that Iole shares guilt with only one other party, but since the party is anonymous, Iole seems to bear all the blame alone (μόνη). Yet Nessus, Eros, the gods in general, Zeus, Heracles himself, and even Deianeira have been suggested by commentators as Iole's partner in guilt. In fact all of these (except perhaps the gods) play a more direct role in the disaster than Iole.

Hyllus' expression for Iole's guilt, μόνη μεταίτιος, is in fact the same as that used by Lichas in explaining how Eurytus had caused Heracles' enslave-

ment to Omphale (μεταίτιον μόνον βροτῶν 260-261), an explanation that endeavored to cover Eurytus' innocence by a rhetorical veil of guilt. Moreover Hyllus' insistence that a marriage between himself and Iole is simply impossible, something that nobody could tolerate (τίς ποτ' ἂν φέροι; 1231, τίς γάρ ποθ' . . . τίς ταῦτ' ἄν . . . ἔλοιτο; 1233-1236) should recall the arguments from impossibility made by Deianeira where she deceives herself about her erotic feelings (οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτ' 449, τίς ἂν γυνὴ δύναιτο; 545-546). Hyllus' exaggeration therefore suggests rhetorical forcing in an attempt to avoid expressing, or even recognizing, something intolerable. Hyllus cannot be repelled by Iole's guilt because she isn't guilty, and he knows it (as μεταίτιος reveals). Moreover Heracles persuades Hyllus to do his bidding without ever addressing the question of Iole's guilt, but rather by permitting Hyllus to assure himself that the union will bring him no disgrace (οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε κακὸς φανείην 1250-1251). Hyllus' overheated rhetoric about impiety and avengers suggests that marriage to Iole is unthinkable to him because Iole has been his father's concubine, and he regards sharing a woman with his father as a prohibited act.[50] Greek literature does not, to my knowledge, provide any instances where the union of a man with his father's concubine was permitted. But a case like that of Phoenix, who slept with his father's concubine (Hom. *Il.* 9.449-457) and was cursed by him, shows why Heracles' command might have frightened Hyllus. Heracles has to convince Hyllus that taking his father's concubine is lawful if the father approves:

HP. οὐ δυσσέβεια, τοὐμὸν εἰ τέρψεις κέαρ.
ΥΛ. πράσσειν ἄνωγας οὖν με πανδίκως τάδε;
HP. ἔγωγε· τούτων μάρτυρας καλῶ θεούς.
ΥΛ. τοιγὰρ ποήσω κοὐκ ἀπώσομαι, τὸ σὸν
θεοῖσι δεικνὺς ἔργον. οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε
κακὸς φανείην σοί γε πιστεύσας, πάτερ. (1246-1251)

HER. It is not impiety, if you give pleasure to my heart.
HYL. Then are you commanding me to do this with full justification?
HER. Indeed. I call upon the gods as witnesses.
HYL. Then I shall do it and not refuse, showing the gods that the deed is yours. For I would never appear base, at least while I obeyed you, father.

Hyllus expects to be judged ultimately by the gods (θεοῖσι δεικνὺς ἔργον

1250), who will forgive him, but not necessarily the deed, considering Heracles the responsible party (τὸ σὸν . . . δεικνὺς ἔργον 1249-1250).[51]

Hyllus may therefore resist marriage to Iole in part because it means replacing, or appearing to replace, his father and thus stepping out of his allotted position in the sequence of generations. Heracles, however, seems to desire precisely such replacement. The assumption of physical identity between himself and Hyllus allows him to use Hyllus to control his seed by controlling the womb in which it has been placed. Moreover since Hyllus is Heracles' seed itself, Heracles must exercise complete control over Hyllus. There can be no differences whatsoever between Heracles' wish and Hyllus' behavior: even a minor instance of disobedience would negate the effect of major instances of obedience (1228-1229). When Hyllus seems reluctant to do Heracles' bidding, Heracles immediately begins to regard him as a stranger, no longer his son (ἀνὴρ ὅδ' 1238).

Heracles expects Hyllus to be motivated by a belief in and desire for correspondence. He reminds Hyllus of his oath (ὁρκίων μεμνημένος 1223) to fulfill Heracles' every word as deed (τὸ λεχθὲν ἔργον ἐκτελεῖν 1187), thus urging Hyllus to make his behavior also correspond to his words in the oath. He claims obedience from Hyllus as something due to him that Hyllus does not deliver (μοῖραν 1239), implying lack of correspondence in the transaction between father and son. Hyllus must fear, however, lest this imbalance be corrected by the gods (θεῶν ἀρά 1239-1240) by a means, the curse, which itself involves correspondence between word and deed (indeed such close correspondence that Heracles can metonymically substitute the curse for the punishment it promises).

Hyllus' crime, of course, is not only violation of his oath but more fundamentally disobedience of his father, as Heracles stresses (ἀπιστήσαντα τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις 1240, οὐ . . . δικαιοῖς τοῦ φυτεύσαντος κλύειν 1244). This correspondence should itself be deemed just by Hyllus (οὐ . . . δικαιοῖς), a correspondence that corresponds to natural law.

Yet precisely this step threatens to unravel Heracles' vision of order and justice. For if the order of correspondences is natural, the threat of punishment should not be necessary to enforce it. Heracles calls Hyllus to remember the oath sworn with his father (πατρῴων ὁρκίων 1223), paradoxically implying a direct obligation between son and father and a mediated obligation between strangers. Similarly the expression τοῦ φυτεύσαντος κλύειν (1244) combines intimacy of substance with distance of speech. Yet with respect to both of Heracles' commands Hyllus' affinity for his father prompts resistance rather than obedience. Heracles uses the rhetoric of paternity to palliate his entirely coercive method for gaining Hyllus' agreement.

The contradiction between the conventional unity that Heracles attempts to impose and the natural unity that he suggests authorizes it makes itself more and more apparent in the scene as Heracles' demand for the correspondence of obedience sets itself against other types of correspondence, for instance that of intention and result (violated when Hyllus swears an oath that obligates him to act without a particular intention) and the self-correspondence of familial status (violated when Hyllus promises to marry his father's concubine). Ultimately justice, reverence, and the putative source of such putatively natural correspondences, the gods, stand exposed as rhetorical disguises for Heracles' egotism (1246-1248).

Yet it appears that Heracles has understood Hyllus' mind very well, for in calling the gods to witness his right to command his son he provides Hyllus with the excuse he needs to do Heracles' bidding. If the gods can accept Hyllus' abdication of intention, then they can regard the deed as Heracles' rather than Hyllus', for intention is understood to correspond to result and non-intention to non-result. Therefore Heracles, who has the intention, will appear to have the deed (τὸ σὸν . . . ἔργον 1249) and Hyllus, who lacks intention, will bear no responsibility for the deed. The justice of Hyllus' marriage to Iole, however, can only be appearance; he shows the deed to the gods (δεικνύς 1250) and cannot appear base (φανείην 1250-1251). For the hero, appearance is reality.

Rhetorical forcing, however, indicates a gap in Hyllus' argument. In order for Hyllus to have no intention and thus no responsibility for his marriage to Iole he must be compelled to it by Heracles, not merely commanded (κελεύεις κἀξαναγκάζεις 1258). But Heracles has no means of compelling Hyllus to do anything. The exonerating compulsion of Heracles is therefore a fiction, and Hyllus seems to recognize this in asking the attendants for forgiveness (συγγνωμοσύνην 1265).

V Mythic tradition and the exodos.

In the previous pages we have endeavored to interpret Heracles' commands and Hyllus' replies in terms of their rhetorical services to the hero and his son. As we noted earlier, however, recent interpreters have tended to read the exodos in terms of the mythic traditions on which it touches, seeing it as preparation for Heracles' apotheosis and the noble clan descended from Hyllus and Iole. In general this approach is perfectly legitimate; I would especially stress that the absence of explicit reference to the apotheosis and the Hylleids in no way invalidates it, since any intepretation necessarily

involves creative supplementation of the text. The rhetoric of the scene, moreover, encourages us to remember its continuation in mythic tradition, for Heracles' imperious commands and his imposition of narrative closure make him resemble the Euripidean *dei ex machina*, who often establish cults and arrange marriages.[52] Nevertheless the fact that many in Sophocles' audience probably did think of the mythic tradition when watching *Trachiniae* does not tell us *how* they thought of it. Recent interpreters have treated the tradition as if it were actually present in the text of *Trachiniae*; Segal states for example, "it follows naturally from the view suggested here that Sophocles means us to think of Heracles at the end as moving toward his apotheosis. Yet the poet has handled this subject with the greatest delicacy and restraint."[53] In this analysis Segal performs the operation we have described as "interpolation", the substitution of an interpretation for the text it supplements. Some Athenian spectators may well have done the same. But a rhetorically self-conscious spectator will have recognized that he could connect the mythical tradition to *Trachiniae* only through a process of interpretation.

In ending *Trachiniae* as he did Sophocles therefore exposed the role of the audience in creating the myth whose representation it was watching. Anyone who observes this exposure also observes that his relationship to the poet Sophocles is quite unlike his relationship to poets such as Homer, Hesiod, or Pindar. For the archaic poet and his audience, myth was a special knowledge made available by the Muses only to selected individuals, the poets, who in turn transmitted it to ordinary humanity.[54] This unequal arrangement was of course highly useful to the aristocratic clans whose power rested in part on the cults of their heroic ancestors and the myths surrounding them.[55] But in remaining silent at the conclusion of *Trachiniae*, Sophocles abdicates the role of the archaic poet, simultaneously disclaiming any authority derived from the Muses and granting the right of interpretation to his entire audience. In fact throughout *Trachiniae*, Sophocles depicts myth as a story about the historical past that comes into being through the interpretations of ordinary mortals. Although the characters regard the story as knowledge, it is δόξα. Thus Sophocles raises the possibility that anybody might question the authority of any myth: he makes myth democratic. And he does this in a play that concerns one of the most ideologically charged of all Greek myths, the myth of Heraclid descent.

VI Final anapaests, 1259-1278.

Heracles

One purpose of Heracles' suicide, we have suggested, is to make his life complete by ending it (τελευτὴ τοῦδε τάνδρός 1256). As Heracles is raised his final words attempt to complete his self-portrayal as the solidest most self-correspondent hero possible. He addresses his soul as hard (ὦ ψυχὴ σκληρά 1260), asking it to bind together his lips like stones set in a steel clamp (χάλυβος λιθοκόλλητον στόμιον παρέχουσ' 1260-1261). Therefore he depicts himself as made of solid material joined together without gap by an equally hard and solid brace. The purpose of the brace is to prevent a cry from issuing through his lips (ἀνάπαυε βοήν 1262), indicating the superfluousness and undesirability of language (which we note arises from a gap) to the solid, self-correspondent hero.

The image of Heracles' correspondence, however, is undermined by any one of a number of possible readings of the participial phrase that concludes his anapaestic speech (ὡς ἐπίχαρτον τελέουσ' ἀεκούσιον ἔργον 1262-1263). If ὡς is explanatory with τελέουσ' as present or future participle (Jebb's interpretation), Heracles aims to force his external conduct into accord with his inner feeling (i.e., that the deed is joyous, ἐπίχαρτον). Yet Heracles' unwillingness (ἀεκούσιον 1263) contests his joy, revealing a gap even in his inner feeling. If τελέουσα is a future participle expressing purpose, then Heracles would aim to create his inner feeling through his outer disposition (i.e. he would be silent "in order to complete an unwilled deed as a thing of joy," that is, to make it a thing of joy). The putatively original feeling would thus copy its putative copy, the expression. If ὡς is taken with ἐπίχαρτον then the joyfulness of the deed is merely an appearance which conflicts with its unwilled reality ("so as to complete an unwilled deed as if it were joyful"). Heracles' solidity is also contested by the absurdity of a hard soul (ψυχή, breath).

The character of Heracles' suicide as a kind of rhetorical forcing is emphasized as well by the frequent indications in this part of the play that Heracles' pain has abated.[56] Twice he urges Hyllus to carry him off and burn him quickly, before the pain can return (1253-1254, 1259-1260).[57] In charging that Hyllus' reluctance to marry Iole arouses the pain which has been sleeping (σὺ . . . μ' ἀπ' εὐνασθέντος ἐκκινεῖς κακοῦ 1242) Heracles also suggests that the pain is partly of psychosomatic cause. While these remarks hardly indicate that Heracles is in no danger, they confirm and amplify the uncertainty about his condition that arises from his decision to be killed by

Hyllus before the robe can kill him. The displacement of reality by the oracles removes any possibility of discovering whether their relation to reality was one of truth. Sophocles withholds certainty from his audience just as he does from the characters of the *Trachiniae*.

The inconclusiveness of the exodos also opens a deep rift within the play's rhetoric, for throughout *Trachiniae* the characters have again and again maintained the possibility of a τέλος, for example the τέλος of speech in action, the τέλος of Heracles' life, and the τέλος of the period of time predicted in Heracles' Dodonaean oracle. Yet just as the rhetoric proclaiming the achievement of the τέλος becomes most insistent, it is undermined by the incompleteness of the dramatic action.[58]

Hyllus

In his final lines, Hyllus asks the attendants to pardon him for what he is about to do; for they should gaze instead upon the cruelty of the gods, who have brought about his family's suffering, if only through neglect (1264-1269). These words represent a rhetorical about-face for Hyllus, who only fifteen lines before (1249-1250) had stated that he would justify his union with Iole before the *gods* by pointing to the responsibility of his *father*. The stance Hyllus now adopts relieves Heracles of any responsibility for what has occurred, and could even be seen as exonerating Iole, whom Hyllus had earlier somewhat irrationally declared a special cause of the disaster (μόνη μεταίτιος 1233-1234). We must feel sympathy for this character, a young man who has lost his mother and now anticipates losing his father in the same day, one who moreover may feel that his own misjudgement has contributed to the catastrophe. Still we should not overlook the rhetorical veil that prevents Hyllus from confronting the complexity of events, the diffusion of responsibility, and especially the cruelty and vanity of his father.

In explaining why his role in the incineration of his father ought to be forgiven, Hyllus again relies on justice as correspondence. The indifference or cruelty of the gods (μεγάλην . . . θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην 1266) should be answered by the pardon of mortals (μεγάλην . . . συγγνωμοσύνην 1264-1265), a parallelism whose rhetorical forcing appears in the word συγγνωμοσύνη, found only here and probably created just to rhyme with, and thus create an illusion of correspondence with, ἀγνωμοσύνην. Furthermore rather than imitate the gods, Hyllus asks mortals to oppose their cruelty with leniency. Hyllus clings to an illusion of correspondence, therefore, even when he understands quite well that correspondence has failed. For the cruelty of the

gods lies precisely in the inconsistency of their paternity (φύσαντες 1268) and honor as parents (κληζόμενοι πατέρες 1268-1269) with their indifference or hostility to their creation (ἐφορῶσι πάθη 1269). Similarly the little hope of future order that Hyllus can muster is based only on the disorder that makes the future unknowable (τὰ . . . μέλλοντ' οὐδεὶς ἐφορᾷ 1270) and thus possibly better than the incomprehensible present (1271-1274). Hyllus' hope for certainty shields him from the full terror of uncertainty, but he understands that hope is not knowledge. Thus at the end of the play he returns to the teaching pronounced and rejected by Deianeira at its beginning (1-3).

Hyllus also retains the rhetoric of vision at the end, bidding the attendants behold the neglectfulness of the gods (ἀγνωμοσύνην εἰδότες 1266-1267). Yet the gods show their neglectfulness precisely by their inactivity, their role as spectators (ἐφορῶσι πάθη 1269). All that can be beheld of the gods therefore is their invisibility, their negativity. In this respect, as in denying the possibility of foresight and deploring the whole present situation, Hyllus is much more pessimistic than Heracles, for whom his fate was actually the work of Zeus (995) and the fulfilment of his prophecies (1159, 1168), who expects Zeus to defend his oath (1185, 1239-1240) and for whom, finally, his death is joyful (ἐπίχαρτον 1262).

The Chorus

Lines 1275-1278 belong to the Chorus, as shown by the incompatibility of Hyllus' reproach of the gods' passivity (ἐφορῶσι πάθη 1269) with the attribution of everything to Zeus in 1278.[59] Like Hyllus they retain the rhetoric of vision (ἰδοῦσα 1276) combined with a recognition of instability (νέους θανάτους . . . πήματα . . . καινοπαθῆ 1276-1277) that ought to qualify the certainty of their observation. Yet the very invitation to observation again shows their self-deception, since they have not actually seen either Heracles' death or Deianeira's. Instead of losing faith in the possibility of knowledge, in the most desperate and extensive rhetorical forcing in the play they reassert the unity of all in the name of Zeus.

Yet taken as part of the whole play's rhetoric, the Chorus' words may suggest another, less comforting meaning. We have seen that the Zeus of Dodona, Zeus Naios, was a god of flowing water and fertility. Greeks persistently etymologized "Zeus" by connecting it with ζῆν, to live.[60] Is the Zeus of *Trachiniae* another name for Dionysus, another name for life? The Chorus' final words resemble the proverb concerning the rare appearances of Dionysus in tragedy, οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον.[61] Dionysus seems present

and absent in them at once, as in a mask. And this, the mask, was his most typical mode of epiphany.[62] As we have said earlier, the cosmic instability of the *Trachiniae*, which renders knowledge impossible, seems to indicate a life force of constant movement and change. If Zeus is such a life force, then perhaps everything in the world of *Trachiniae* is indeed Zeus, not as a stable unity imposed from Olympus, but as an unstable immanent power of self-differentiation, creation, and destruction.

* * * * *

In the foregoing pages we have attempted to interpret Sophocles' *Trachiniae* in a rhetorically self-conscious way, a "Dionysiac" way, to borrow the terminology of Charles Segal. We have regarded the utterances of its characters, and of the play itself, as persuasive performances, and tried to remain aware of their effects as such, warding off forgetfulness of that which the characters would hide, or has escaped their detection, and escapes ours too even as we search for it.

It is in some way such as this, I believe, that the play would have been interpreted by a sophist, or Euripides, or Aristophanes, or even Aeschylus. And we cannot confidently deny that Sophocles too might have interpreted *Trachiniae* in this manner. His other surviving tragedies do not, in themselves, even begin to resolve our doubts, for we will only know whether they can be fruitfully interpreted from a rhetorically self-conscious perspective when we have performed the experiment of reading them in that way. But Sophocles was certainly no less a man of the theater than the others we have mentioned, no less conscious of his own closet of masks. He lived to see his plays parodied by Aristophanes, and had certainly seen much paratragedy in the earlier comic poets. He may even have written paratragedy himself in satyr plays now lost to us. So he must have been aware that among his audience would be some who would not completely suspend disbelief, and who would interpret his work creatively.

By no gesture, however, did Sophocles attempt to control the scattering of meaning that inevitably occurred when *Trachiniae* was staged and read. If we conclude from his silence that he accepted and enjoyed dissemination and interpretation, we must also admit that this conclusion is purely conjectural. But I will confess as well a certain pleasure in contemplating a Sophocles who consciously desired interpretive scattering; for to this fictitious desire the study of Sophocles remains always faithful, whether it chooses to do so or not.

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