

**XXVII. Fortune's Wheel: The Symbolism of  
Sophocles' *Women of Trachis***

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Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* is a deeply moving play of sharp peaks and troughs of violent emotion. It is unfortunate that its order in the sequence of Sophocles' plays and its relationship to Euripides is still unclear: some, perhaps most, scholars would place it at an early date; others, following the lead of Wilamowitz, would date it closer to the end of the playwright's career. Indeed, the versatile German critic August von Schlegel felt it was not composed by Sophocles at all, but by his son Iophon. In general, though tending to date the play earlier in accord with the stylo-metric analyses of F. R. Earp, I feel that more study is needed, especially along the lines of poetic and dramatic analysis, before a definitive judgment can be reached.

The plot of the play is one of deceptive simplicity. Deianira anxiously awaits the return of her husband Heracles to their somewhat temporary home in Trachis. Hyllus, her son, who has been informed that Heracles is sacking the city of King Eurytus in Euboea, goes off in search of his father. But as a foretaste of victory, Heracles' commander, Lichas, returns with a band of captive women, headed by a girl whom Deianira learns is Iole, the king's daughter. Indeed, it was for Iole's sake that the city of Oechalia had been taken. Deianira, realizing that Heracles' love for her is fading, prepares a tunic that has been anointed with what she believes to be a love-philtre. Prepared from the blood of the dying centaur Nessus, she little realizes that the philtre is a cunning poison. When she learns of its fatal effects on Heracles, she takes her own life. With the play three-quarters over, the hero finally enters, racked with pain and shrieking vengeance on Deianira. In a last gesture, he bequeaths the girl Iole to his son Hyllus in marriage and urges him to prepare his pyre on Mt. Oeta.

Perhaps more than any other of Sophocles' plays, the *Trachiniae*

has suffered from the unfavorable comments of the nineteenth-century scholars.<sup>1</sup> But a modern re-examination of the play would suggest that their judgment was based on a misunderstanding of its subtle dramatic and poetic structure.<sup>2</sup> For one thing, there has been perhaps too much emphasis on the so-called "diptych" character of the play,<sup>3</sup> to the extent of underestimating the subtle treatment of the play's symbolic themes. There is a peculiar charm in having a woman dominate the scene, while the man, the hero Heracles, is present by his absence. And present he is all through the episodes which precede his entrance; the entire play is a kind of arched tension, a waiting for his coming. Heracles' presence-in-absence is achieved by the image that is projected by Deianira, by the chorus, and by Lichas; and, as we examine it, we find it subtly changing. At the outset (28 ff.), Heracles is the absent lord, the faithful husband, the son of Zeus (97), the loved one desired by Deianira and all the maidens of Trachis (205 ff.). In the second phase of the image, we see Heracles through the eyes of Lichas, as the scrupulous son of Zeus (240 ff.), performing the due sacrificial rites, the stern and vengeful warrior who brooks no opposition (260 ff.). This is the great heroic image of antiquity, and it corresponds to the desires and expectations of the women on stage. But then, with the revelation of the messenger after the entrance of Iole and the captive maidens, we are given a new image of the hero: it is the weak Heracles, Heracles the deceiver, Heracles the captive of Eros (354 ff.). This third phase in the image of Heracles forms the central turning point of the play. And yet, it is against the background of this image that Deianira's character is projected all the more strongly. When she has recovered from the shock of the message, in a spirit of almost maternal forgiveness and

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion, see R. Jebb, *Sophocles' The Plays and Fragments. Part V: The Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1892) xxxi ff. and *passim*, especially Jebb's reply to Wilamowitz' objection that "the play is only barely held together by the oracles in a kind of external unity," on page xlii f.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent bibliography, see my *Symbol and Myth in Ancient Poetry* (New York 1961) 192 f., and on the *Trachiniae* especially see C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944; repr. 1960) 116-61; G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca [N.Y.] 1958) 110 ff.; S. M. Adams, *Sophocles the Playwright* (Toronto 1957) 108-33; J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries. Part II: The Trachiniae* (Leiden 1959) esp. pages 9-27, with the bibliography cited.

<sup>3</sup> See the shrewd discussion of the diptych-problem by H. Willem van Pesch, *De Idee van de menschelijke Beperktheid bij Sophocles* (Wageningen 1953) 187 ff.

understanding, she protests that her lord means no harm—and least of all the young Iole—but that he suffers from a common *nosos*, a disease brought on by Cypris (445, 547), a disease whose ultimate source is the avenging *alastores* (1235). Very aptly after Iole's entry, Sophocles devotes his second stasimon<sup>4</sup> to the wrestling match between Heracles and the river-god for the hand of Deianira (497 ff.): here Cypris, goddess of love, stands as the umpire (516), Cypris who later will be seen as "the silent worker of this deed" (860 f.). Subtly the two levels of past and present seem to merge into one: the play dramatizes a new struggle, a new toil, indeed Heracles' last toil against the forces of destruction embodied in the blood of Nessus. The hero who wrestled with the Hydra and the river-god, who slew the Hyrcanian lion, dies at the hand of the woman who loves him most dearly.

The entire play, is, in a sense, a dramatized *peripeteia*. Heracles, the all-desired one (660), whose advent is promised all through the play—in the silent, brooding Iole, as well as the imagery created by Deianira and the chorus—must at last come. The final scene is a necessary one, for now the fourth stage in the changing image of Heracles fuses with the reality. We see him now in the flesh, arriving not in desire and triumph, but as an object of terror and in humiliating defeat. Such is the destructive power of the forces that have made Heracles what he now is, and we must see and feel its effect in the racked and feeble body of the once majestic hero. There are thus four stages in the changing image of Heracles as it is projected from the outset of the play to the final scene. We can, if we like, add a fifth stage implicit in the last lines: the apotheosis of Heracles the son of Zeus. In any case, it is wrong to describe the play as a diptych; Heracles is present all through the first part, just as Deianira is present, in the innocent destruction she has wrought, all throughout the final part. The fact that little is said of her tragic end in the scene between Hyllus and his father brings out a peculiar, unfeeling facet of Heracles' character; but it also underlines the poignant, wasteful quality of her suicide.

The total coherence and intricately woven texture of the

<sup>4</sup> The Bacchic choral song, 205–25, should, I feel, be taken as a true (first) stasimon with Nauck, and not as a mere interlude with Jebb, Kamerbeek, and others. There is no parallel elsewhere in Sophocles for such a "hyporcheme" which does not divide epeisodia.

play will become clearer with an analysis of the images and symbols that occur throughout.<sup>5</sup> The chief images are the sea, the wheel of Fortune, the wrestling contest, the tender blossom, the disease of Heracles, the blood of Nessus, the tunic, and Deianira the forlorn heifer and lonesome bird. These are the eight dominant symbols of the play. The first image, the sea of trouble (*ponos*), develops in an explicit comparison in the parodos, lines 112 ff:

His troubled life like the Cretan sea  
Now tosses Cadmus' son, now raises  
Him on high—just as one might see  
Wave after wave driven over  
The broad deep by the sleepless  
Notus or Boreas. . . .

This is resumed by the sea-imagery in the joyous third stasimon (649 ff.). But as Heracles' many-oared ship is coming to harbor, we find he has brought a strange cargo (536–38); as Deianira is painfully aware,

I have received a maiden in my house,  
Or mistress rather—as a sailor takes on cargo,  
A merchandise destructive of my love.

Indeed, the symbol of Heracles' sea of trouble may be fruitfully compared with the Sea of *Atê* in Sophocles' *Antigone* 583 ff. There the sea is suggestive of the wild forces of the subconscious which the gods allow to lead man on to final destruction.<sup>6</sup> Here the idea of *ponos* seems a subtle playing on the notion of toil, labor—for the play, indeed, enacts the final labor of Heracles, the struggle with Love, after which as the prophecies foretold he was to have rest. Thus, in the *Trachiniae* it is the Sea of Trouble, the *polyponon pelagos* which precisely fits the destruction that is to be achieved in the person of Heracles.

The image of the wheel of Fortune occurs in the same choral ode (126 ff.):

For Cronus' son, who rules all things,  
Has meted out to men no painless  
Lot: sorrow and joy come round  
To everyone, like the wheeling path  
Of the Bears.

<sup>5</sup> For a preliminary discussion, see my *Symbol and Myth in Ancient Poetry*, pages 73–75.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Symbol and Myth*, pages 81–83.

For so the starry night abides  
Not forever, nor the *kéres*, nor wealth,  
But all soon shifts, and then another  
Must take his turn of joy and sorrow.

Heracles' lot, too, as we soon shall see, is but another illustration of this general law. For *Tyché*, Zeus' handmaid, embodies both the providence of the gods and the irresistible law that involves all mortal men in common tragedy. Horace's portrait of winged Fortuna snatching the crowns from the heads of kings (*Odes* 1.34) is gayer in comparison, and serves to support Horace's newly found faith in Jupiter's providence. For Sophocles, however, the wheel of Fortune is set against the background of the mysterious starry night into which men are thrust; there is "naught here that is not Zeus," as the chorus chants at the close of the play. The providence that destroys the very son of Zeus is surely one that cannot be explained in human terms.

The wrestling contest between Heracles and Achelous (18 ff., 507 ff.) belongs to the *primaeval*, mythological texture to which Sophocles refers only by flashback. Here is the Heracles of tradition, brandishing club and spears, conquering all the powers of the world, no matter how monstrous or terrifying. Here is the Heracles whom Deianira once loved, a superman breathing confidence and stability, a projection of all men's fantasy of wish-fulfillment. But what is so ironic now is that Deianira is no longer the tender heifer leaving her dam, following after her master Heracles. It is Iole who has usurped that place, she is now the prize of the contest, and the wrestling now is with Love and Death. The drama concerns the last of Heracles' toils (170), even though he can be overcome by "no creature that breathes on earth" (1160). Thus the poignancy of the description touches both the rejection of Deianira and the final defeat of Heracles. Just as Aphrodite was the umpire of his wrestling with Achelous (516), so she will carry the victory in the present contest; in silence she achieves her will (860-61)—indeed, as we shall see, by the mysterious operation of the poisoned tunic.

It is part of Sophocles' charm to portray how the giant Heracles can be softened at the sight of the "lovely, tender beauty" of Deianira (524 ff.), who

Sat on a distant hill  
Waiting to see who would be her lord.

It is to the chorus of young Trachinian girls that Deianira can disclose the image of the tender blossom (144 ff.). A strange anguish, she tells them, gnaws her in Heracles' absence—a feeling that she hopes the young girls will never have:

For the tender shoot blossoms in its native  
Soil; nor do the elements of the gods—  
Heat, wind or rain—in any wise disturb it.  
It's a carefree life it leads—until one day  
The girl becomes a woman and a wife.

The young girls of the chorus, in a sense, stand for the Deianira that used to be, echoing her longings, her enthusiasms, and trepidations. In another vision of an earlier, happier time, Deianira paints a picture of the shy, inexperienced maiden following Heracles across the river Evenus borne on the back of the centaur Nessus (562 ff.). Trustful and still unused to the treachery of men, she screams at the lustful monster's touch.<sup>7</sup> Though told for a different purpose, the story fills in the charming portrait of Deianira before the blossom faded. But fade it did, and here precisely is the conflict of the play. Again she opens her heart to the young girls, for her modesty and her youthful beauty were both sacrificed to Heracles (539 f.). Now both she and Iole must share the one embrace. Yet (545 ff.)

What woman could share her husband in this way?

Yes, I know she is in the very blossom of her youth—

<sup>7</sup> The scene is illustrated by a charming carved agate in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y. (#46.112.1). A nymph, with billowing veil, is riding on the back of an androcentaur. As the centaur is tugged along by a tiny, impatient Cupid at the right (the head has been knocked off at the end), he turns his head and touches the nymph's bosom with his right hand. This lovely piece but a few centimeters in length is perhaps from the third or second century B.C., but surely reflects an earlier tradition which may throw light on the background of the Nessus incident. The Nessus painting from the Casa del Centauro (A.D. 40/50) in Pompeii in the Museo Nazionale, Naples (H.1.52), however charming, stems from a different version of the story; on it see K. Schefold, *Pompejanische Malerei: Sinn und Ideengeschichte* (Basle 1952), Tafel 24 and note, page 198.

It is interesting to note that Deianira's advice to the young maidens in 147–52 was perhaps adapted by John Chrysostom in his treatise *On Virginity* composed about A.D. 386/90 at Antioch: in §56 (Migne, *Patres Graeci*, Vol. 48.577) he describes the growing anxieties of the young bride, comparing them to the growth of a plant, with her fears for husband, for children, and all things else. In §77 (PG 48.584) he mentions the danger of the bride's husband being charmed by a rival's "philtre," perhaps her beauty. The purpose of the treatise, of course, is to urge young people to remain unmarried.

While mine is fading. Men's eyes love to pluck the tender  
 Blossom, but from the faded turn their foot.  
 This then is my fear: that Heracles  
 Will be my spouse in name—but hers in fact.

And this brings us to the image of disease. When Lichas, Heracles' loyal lieutenant arrives, he says (234–35):

Heracles I left alive and vigorous,  
 Blossoming, and unburdened by disease.

But this flower, too, is tainted, as Deianira long knew; her generous heart cannot blame him any more than if he were stricken by disease (445–46); Heracles was never able to resist a woman's beauty (459 ff.); she cannot be angry at his helplessness, just as though he were ill (544), but yet she will take the means to counteract Iole's influence. But, in the final scene, Heracles is indeed in the throes of physical disease (981), and the old man—who is probably an attendant military physician—warns Hyllus not to rouse or stir up the furious visitations of racking pain. Thus the two levels of *nosos*, psychic and physical, complement each other throughout the play.

And what of the blood of Nessus, one of the most mysterious symbols of the entire play? Gushing from the arrow wound inflicted by Heracles, the blood was infected by the poison from the Lernaean Hydra (572 ff.); but ultimately it was begotten by Death, *Thanatos*, himself (834). Protected and kept in a dark vial, it does no harm; but exposed to the heat of the sun and in contact with human flesh, it consumes all to the very bone, eating its way like acid with excruciating pain.<sup>8</sup> Used as a love-philtre by Deianira, the clotted ointment becomes symbolic of the jealous love which will ultimately destroy the very object of her affection. And the racking pain it causes in Heracles seems an outward expression of the moral disease from which Deianira

<sup>8</sup> Sophocles' description of the effect of the prepared tunic seems to have been derived from contemporary accounts of the effects of various herbs used by shamans and witches. Cf. the effects of the poisoned robe given by Euripides, *Medea* 1168 ff., and the preparation of the love-philtre in Horace, *Epodes* 5.17 ff. The first century pharmacopoeia of Dioscorides of Cilicia mentions herbs which, when anointed on the body, cause profound sweating (*Materia medica* 3.170; 4.26); others that can dissolve the flesh of animals (4.81); and herbs that can be brewed into a love potion but may be fatal if taken in large doses (4.75). For the references, see R. T. Gunther, *The Greek Herbal of Dioscorides* (New York 1959).

knows he is suffering. But the preternatural power of the philtre emerges especially from the account of its effect on a piece of wool (695 ff.). As the sun grows warm in the sky, the tuft disintegrates into a kind of powdery dust; but then from the bare earth spurt up foamy, blood-like clots which terrify Deianira (701 ff.). In Aeschylus, blood on the ground that will not be absorbed stands for a deed of blood that must be avenged.<sup>9</sup> Here, the blood bubbling from the earth stands for the death of Nessus which is to be avenged; it is a realization of the oracle Heracles once received from Zeus (1159 ff.): a power will emerge from Hades to destroy him. It is an oracular portent for Deianira even though she cannot understand its full significance.

The animal imagery of the play perhaps recalls the more primitive style of Aeschylus, Archilochus, and Semonides. The three-shaped monster Achelous, the "andro-centaur" Nessus fit into the vast mythological context of Heracleian legend, the raw material from which Sophocles has created his drama. The picture of Deianira as the forlorn heifer who must leave her mother to follow her master (529-30) delicately underlines the pathos of Deianira's earlier life; so does the image of the bird, perhaps the nightingale, lamenting the absence of its mate (105-6). The nest is the great bed on which she tosses sleeplessly—the same bed that she is destined to share with a concubine; and it is on this bed, as we shall see, she will kill herself in a kind of tragic immolation.

The final image is that of the tunic which Deianira anoints with the poisonous ointment. It is a tunic (580) which is to be worn next to his skin, although sometimes it is called more generically a *peplos* (602), or *peplōma* (613). For Heracles it is a "woven net of the Furies" (1052), causing the gnawing disease with which he must wrestle to the end (1083-84). But for the trustful Deianira, the tunic is a love-gift that only Heracles must wear, ironically, on the day when the bulls are slain in special sacrifice to his father Zeus (609 ff.):

For so I promised myself, that should I see  
My spouse returned alive and call his name,  
I should duly clothe him with a tunic  
And so present him to the gods.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Choeph.* 66-70, and see my *Symbol and Myth*, page 68.



And the chorus prays (660 ff.) in those mysterious lines:

So may he return, the all-desired one,  
Dissolved in the anointed pretext  
Of the beast.

But when her worst forebodings are fulfilled, the distraught Deianira can only blame herself. As her loyal maidservant tells the story of her suicide (914 ff.), she goes directly to the bed-chamber of Heracles and prepares the bed as though to sleep with her lord. But then she climbs up and sits upon the bed—the sitting is a posture of prayer as well as lament—and bids farewell to the room that was the symbol of her married happiness. Then with a violent despairing gesture she rips her own *peplos* down the middle, exposing the body that had born so many children to her wayward husband. Her final gesture is an heroic act of self-immolation, as she destroys herself on the altar-bed by a peculiar kind of suttee, for it was by her own hand that she had destroyed Heracles and the love which the bed of Heracles symbolized. Thus the clothing imagery forms a single texture throughout the play: the tunic of Heracles, the *peplos* of Deianira, the coverings of the master-bed, the single coverlet which was to be shared by wife and concubine. They are symbols of love destroyed by the misguided jealousy of Deianira, consumed by the poisoned blood of the centaur Nessus. Rightly then does she rip her own *peplos* on her marriage bed and slay herself there as on a sacred pyre. She is a sacrifice to Cypris, “the silent achiever of this deed.”

The minor characters of the play are beautifully moulded to fit the major theme. Iole, the silent, the innocent victim of Fortune, stands as a mute reminder to Deianira of the beautiful girl she too once was; and this makes her silent presence all the more poignant. Hyllus is a boy of simple unsubtle reactions, unschooled in the complexities of adult passion and betrayal. But just as it is the family bond that is being attacked by Heracles' love for Iole, so rightly does he restore the balance at the close of the play by offering her to Hyllus as his bride. Thus the final betrothal of Hyllus and Iole is not included simply to satisfy the demands of the myth. The love relationship which was destroyed by Heracles and Deianira is now fulfilled in the two young people; and the “troublesome cargo,” so destructive to a

mature marriage, now becomes fruitful under the protection of Heracles' own son. In Hyllus' betrothal a certain equilibrium is foreshadowed and, in a sense, achieved.

The character of Lichas is one that has not perhaps been fully appreciated. He is the brave, loyal second-in-command; sensitive and not wishing to offend, he is imaginative in inventing a tale to deceive his mistress. But, as we learn, the deception is not malicious; loyal to both master and mistress, he is even more delicate than Heracles in not wishing to reveal to Deianira the meaning of Iole's presence. Gay with the ladies, garrulous and self-confident, he is innocently condemned by Heracles on his return. The hurling of his body out to the sea is an act of frightfulness which recalls the legendary image of the Heracles of tradition—even while the beginning of the poison's action is turning Heracles into a pitiful shell of a man. Lichas' character is exactly tooled to the demands of the tragedy; his double loyalty has destroyed him and spattered his blood over the sea-girt rocks. Like Iole, he too has been innocently caught up into the woven web of the Furies.

The young girls of the chorus form one of the most charming groups of Greek tragedy. In their role as chorus as well as actor, they form a link between Deianira and Iole, between Deianira young and Deianira old. They are the confidantes of her innermost feelings, just as they are an extension of her emotions and her visions of the past. As chorus they can enjoy a kind of prophetic hindsight and describe, as though present, the wrestling-contest between Heracles and Achelous for the hand of Deianira.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as Heracles finally enters, the chorus serves as a link with the past scenes of the play: the terror reflected in their eyes as the shattered hero is carried in on a litter recalls all the emotion and the atmosphere of the early part of the play, all the fear and expectation which they shared with Deianira as they prayed for Heracles' safe return.

<sup>10</sup> *Trachiniae* 507–30. The Greek of the famous crux (526), "I tell the tale as her mother (might)," should not be changed. It is Sophocles, by a special licence, making use of the chorus as prophet (see *Symbol and Myth*, pages 13–14); the dramatist wishes to tell the story of the wrestling, but no one but the chorus can so step out of character as to tell the story as Deianira's mother might have observed it. But this literary clairvoyance is admittedly a licence quite unique in tragedy. For a textual discussion, see Jebb, *ad loc.*; and Kamerbeek, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) page 124, who interprets the line: "I tell the story as *my* mother told me." But this translation does violence to the Greek; the omission of a word for "my" would be exceptional.

Deianira, finally, is perhaps one of the greatest characters in all of ancient literature.<sup>11</sup> Moving into middle age, she still follows her husband faithfully, as many good Greek wives must have followed their husbands through the maelstrom of Greek war and colonization. Loyal, tender—she acts towards Heracles almost as a mother as well as a wife. She realizes he must be off on his mysterious travels—visiting her almost as a landowner inspects his fields at seed time and the harvest (31–33). She realizes he must fall in love with other women: it is a disease with which she is familiar. Tolerant and understanding, she harbors no hatred for the pathetic Iole, who neither seduced Heracles nor asked for the privilege of sharing his household. In her naïve trust in human nature, Deianira can see no evil in the ambiguous promise of the dying Nessus, that Heracles “will love no other woman.” She believes to the end, and only blames herself for what happens. Her character is clear, even as that of Heracles is peculiarly ambiguous. He oscillates between the two worlds of mythology and reality: now he is the son of Zeus, accomplishing all things with the might of his arm; and now he is the pathetic mortal, showing his miserable, pain-racked body to his recalcitrant son. Are we to admire him or dread him, pity him as the lover of Iole or revere him as the archetypal hero whose sufferings are crowned with final apotheosis? This opposition or tension between the two aspects of Heracles is perhaps precisely what Sophocles intended; and the climax of this ambiguous portrayal is seen in the final scene, where we behold the hero waiting for apotheosis on Mt. Oeta while he whines and pleads like a helpless child. For it is to this that the forces of destruction have reduced him. In the sobbing Heracles is implicit the entire meaning of the play.

In conclusion, then, the theme of the *Trachiniae* is love and its power to destroy. As the poisoned blood of Nessus, bred of Death, destroys the tunic, so does Heracles' disease destroy both him and Deianira. And although Zeus is the ultimate source of the tragedy, it is Aphrodite who is the immediate *praktôr*, the perpetrator; for the gods destroy men only through the forces that are within them and within the physical potencies of the universe. The *atê* that is here Heracles' final destiny comes from

<sup>11</sup> For good discussions of her character, see Adams, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) pages 114 ff., and Kirkwood, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) pages 110 ff.

Zeus, his father, but it is wrought by the hand of a dead centaur and a loving woman. Deianira is, in a sense, the eternal woman in whom the forces of Cypris are physically expressed. And yet, it is especially here that Sophocles has chosen to portray the dark, destructive power of love and not its vital, procreative aspect. Indeed, the theological dimension of the *Trachiniae* is kept by Sophocles in the background, but it is still present throughout. What Hyllus at the close says of his father may indeed be applied to all of suffering mankind (1264 ff.):

Lift his body high, my friends,  
And pardon me this deed; but know  
That great is the gods' neglect  
In the tragedy that is ours—that they  
Who bring forth children, and yet as fathers  
Can look with calm upon such suffering. . . .  
Though pitiful for us, it is shameful  
For the gods above. . . .

Hyllus is rightly bitter, and his almost blasphemous comment need not be taken as from the mouth of Sophocles. Hyllus is still young; and for Sophocles, wisdom comes only with old age. For the play is not completely pessimistic; there is always Heracles' apotheosis in the background. And there is naught in this that is not Zeus, as the chorus sings at the close.<sup>12</sup> The delicate theological dimension had been symbolized by the wheel of Fortune, the circling of the Bears in the starry night, the cycle of the harvest seasons. Though it is human passion that is delineated in the drama, it is clear that Zeus and Cypris are at war, and that the struggle in the cosmos is echoed in the wasteful deaths of Heracles and Deianira. And yet the cycle of life must go on—as we see it in Hyllus and Iole—and Heracles' death leaves no trace of change in the heavens. The tender, sheltered blossom must be despoiled and return to the soil again. The eternal Bears must continue to wheel in the nightly sky.

<sup>12</sup> The last lines of the play, 1275–78, would fit in rather with the pious chorus than with the character and bitterness of Hyllus; so Kamerbeek, page 256. The “maiden” in line 1275 is the corporate body of the chorus, addressed by the chorus-leader, and requested not to remain any longer, as young girls, from their own homes.