

# “ΛΟΓΟΣ ΜΕΝ ΕΕΤ’ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΣ”: STORIES AND STORY-TELLING IN SOPHOCLES’ *TRACHINIAE*

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The *Trachiniae* is often described as a tragedy of late learning. In it, as in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, characters come to realize the meaning of an oracle and the significance of their own actions only when such a realization can do them no good. Deianeira learns that the love potion Nessus gave her is a poison; Heracles learns that the oracle he thought meant that he would spend the rest of his life free from toil means instead that he will die. But perhaps because the play is so similar in theme to the *Oedipus*, it has suffered in the comparison. In particular, the numerous long narratives, though no longer considered evidence for an early date, are still often criticized as inert and undramatic or pronounced simply atmospheric.<sup>1</sup> It is appropriate that a play about Heracles, that most storied of Greek heroes, should be full of stories; they provide, as Charles Segal has observed, a “formal rendering of a mythic vision.”<sup>2</sup>

The following abbreviations will be used: Easterling=P. E. Easterling, ed., *Sophocles: Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982); Heiden=B. Heiden, *Tragic Rhetoric: An Interpretation of Sophocles’ Trachiniae* (New York 1989); Jebb=R. C. Jebb, ed. *The Trachiniae* (*Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, Part V) (Cambridge 1908); Kamerbeek=J. C. Kamerbeek, ed. *The Trachiniae* (*The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries*, Part II) (Leiden 1970); Kitto<sup>1</sup>=H. P. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1939); Kitto<sup>3</sup>=H. P. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*<sup>3</sup> (London 1961); Lawrence=S. E. Lawrence, “The Dramatic Epistemology of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*,” *Phoenix* 32 (1978) 288–304; Machin=A. Machin, *Cohérence et continuité dans le théâtre de Sophocle* (Québec 1981); Reinhardt=K. Reinhardt, *Sophocles*, trans. H. and D. Harvey (New York 1979) (orig. published 1933, 1947<sup>3</sup>); Scodel=R. Scodel, *Sophocles* (Boston 1984); Segal=C. P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (Cambridge, Ma. 1981); Segal YCS=C. P. Segal, “Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*: Myth, Poetry, and Heroic Values,” *YCS* 25 (1977) 99–158; Whitman=C. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Ma. 1951); Winnington-Ingram=R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980). Easterling’s text is used throughout.

<sup>1</sup> By “narrative,” “story,” and “λόγος” unless otherwise indicated I mean not the content but the form of the discourse, a story-telling “monologue” in Reinhardt’s terms. On Sophoclean narrative see most recently D. H. Roberts, “Different Stories: Sophoclean Narrative(s) in the *Philoctetes*,” *TAPA* 119 (1989) 161–76. She notes (163) that “the separateness of the two main characters [in the *Trachiniae*] is reinforced by the difference between their stories of the past.” Arguing for an early date for the *Trachiniae* on the basis of (un)dramatic technique and/or Aeschylean ὄγκος are, e.g., Reinhardt 41–42, 56 (“the ‘monologue-type’ reserve” as typical of early drama); T. F. Hoey, “The Date of the *Trachiniae*,” *Phoenix* 33 (1979) 210–32; Machin 510n. 716; not specifying an early date but allowing that the play may be “episodic, or carelessly composed”: Whitman 47–48, Kitto<sup>1</sup> 295–97 (on the prologue in particular).

<sup>2</sup> YCS 103, cf. also 105, 106. On the appropriateness of the monologue-form to the mythic content see also, e.g., Jebb xlviii; Reinhardt 37 (“essentially fairy-

Yet the *Trachiniae* depends on narrative both structurally and thematically.<sup>3</sup> The stories in the play, which reach into the distant past in order to shed light on the present, are closely connected with the *Trachiniae*'s major preoccupations: knowledge and learning, past and present.<sup>4</sup> The converse of late learning is premature decision: making a judgment about the meaning of a word or an action before one has all the information about it. Telling a story is one way of making a judgment about the meaning of experience, since a story gives a shape—a beginning, middle, and end—to an action or series of actions. The characters in the *Trachiniae* use their stories to organize their experience; they then often use the meaning they have assigned to that experience as the basis for further action. Throughout the play characters claim that a given action has reached a λύσις or a τέλος and that they know what that τέλος means. Deianeira is the chief example: though she opens the play by quoting Solon's proverb, "call no man happy until he is dead"—that is, interpret no one's story until it's over—she immediately asserts that she knows the end of *her* story and can call herself unhappy now. But before the play reaches its own λύσις Sophocles shows that neither endings nor meanings are ever foregone conclusions, and his characters repeatedly find either their narrative of the past or their interpretation of it radically questioned. Even long-finished events are part of a still-evolving causal chain that renders definitive interpretation impossible. These interpretative crises in the *Trachiniae* most frequently result from the revelation that a critical detail has been left out of a story. Unless every item in the chain is fully narrated the meaning of the whole cannot be correctly read, and the missing information is invariably the locus of catastrophe.<sup>5</sup>

tale material"), 62 ("the *Trachiniae* is dependent on the art of the story-teller in the same way as the *Ajax* is dependent on the epic"); Heiden 157.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Reinhardt's telling description of the play's structure: "The succession of situations in the *Trachiniae* may be compared with archaic sentence-structure in which ideas are strung in a row, in which one phrase is set next to another without link or connection..." (36). Though the play in fact abounds in the "parallelisms, transitions, reverses and echoing of voices" that Reinhardt does not find in it, the individual stories, each complete and yet forming part of a larger narrative, are very much like beads on a string. Smaller units of a tragedy often repeat the movement of the tragedy as a whole; see the interesting studies by David Porter, "Structural Parallelism in Greek Tragedy," *TAPA* 102 (1971) 465–96 and *Only Connect: Three Studies in Greek Tragedy* (Lanham, Md. 1987).

<sup>4</sup> On these themes see Easterling 3–4 and the discussions of Whitman, Lawrence, Scodel, and most recently Heiden. My argument in some places parallels theirs, especially Heiden's, whose book appeared only after most of the work for this study had been completed; no earlier critic, however, has discussed the stories *qua* narratives.

<sup>5</sup> The technical term for a narrative retrogression that (usually) fills in an earlier gap is analepsis; the whole discussion by G. Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. J. Levin (Ithaca 1980) 48–67 is helpful. There is a similar movement from certainty to radical re-interpretation throughout the *Oresteia* that in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroe* in particular is accomplished through narrative. See, e.g., the discussion by S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative, the Oresteia* (Cambridge 1984). The technique of withholding details until they are needed is typical of ancient narrative in general (cf. Fraenkel ad Aesch. *Agam.* 59 with Appendix A), but the characters in the *Trachiniae* do so repeatedly and significantly.

Moreover, the narratives organize the unfolding of the action on the level of dramatic structure as well as on the level of the plot, since each major action taken by a character is explained in some way by a story. Each story describes a series of actions—a plot—that has (apparently) come to an ending. So too the *Trachiniae* is the dramatic representation of a series of actions that comes to an ending that is interpreted both by the characters in the play (Heracles and Hyllus each pronounce a verdict on the meaning of the plot and its λύσις) and by the audience/readers outside the play. But as the ending of each internal story is shown to be insufficient, so each proposed dénouement of the play itself is rejected: to take just one example, Deianeira's final solution, her suicide, ends her tragedy, but her death is not the end of the play, and a further λύσις is required—that of Heracles—which coincides with the λύσις of the plot.<sup>6</sup> Sophocles' use of the stories further suggests that the ending of the play is no more fixed than the ending of each story within the play and that those who detect a reference to the Oetaean apotheosis are justified. The movement from certainty to reversal is quintessentially tragic; in the *Trachiniae*, a drama preoccupied with knowledge and the unstable nature of report, the process of revision takes place in and by means of the characters' narratives.<sup>7</sup>

From lines 1–946 the *Trachiniae* is structured by nine stories arranged in pairs around a choral narrative; in the exodos Heracles tells two more tales. Some of these are self-contained, others are imbedded in longer *rheseis*.<sup>8</sup> Nine of the eleven fall in what Reinhardt called the “Deianeira drama” and constitute a unit with a defined beginning, middle, and end, thus further enhancing the much-commented on separation between the two sections of the play. They center around the fifth, the only choral one, which is placed almost at the center

<sup>6</sup> The intimate connection in the *Trachiniae* between content and form encourages one to attend closely to the dramatic technical terms that are scattered throughout; see below, 81–82, 93–94. On a similar effect in the *Hippolytus* (also involving the term λύσις) see F. I. Zeitlin, “The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the *Hippolytus*” in *New Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian (Durham 1985) 52–111, 189–208.

<sup>7</sup> On narrative itself as an instrument of comprehension see the studies by L. O. Mink, especially “History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension” and “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” both in *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Each is clearly marked as a story by conventional features, usually introductory ἐπεὶ (uel sim., cf. Jebb ad 750) and/or γάρ (9, 38, 155, 359, 680 750, 900, 1159); one also finds the standard promise of a (long) account (154, 553–54, 679, 749, 899) and descriptive ἔστι/ἦν (9, 237, 555 [with παλαιόν and ποτε], 753, 1159 [with πάλαι], cf. Plato *Prot.* 320C δοκεῖ τοίνυν μοι, ἔφη, χαριέστερον εἶναι μῦθον ὑμῖν λέγειν. ἦν γάρ ποτε χρόνος... and our “once upon a time...”). The fifth story (the first stasimon) has slightly different narrative markers, the story proper being introduced by questions reminiscent of the epic narrator's questions to the Muse (505–6, cf. *Il.* 1.8, 2.484–87) and characterized by repeated use of descriptive ἦν (507, 517 bis, 520 bis). Heracles' lament at 1046–1111 is somewhat anomalous and some may not wish to include it; it does however contain narrative elements and serves some of the same functions as the other narratives. I divide the play at the end of the Nurse's *rhesis*; on the division see now Machin 355–58.

of the first part of the tragedy (lines 497–530, centering on 514).<sup>9</sup> In addition, they are capped by a restatement of the proverb with which Deianeira opens the play (943–46):

τοιαῦτα τάνθάδ' ἐστίν. ὥστ' εἴ τις δύνῃ  
ἢ καπὶ πλείους ἡμέρας λογίζεται,  
μάταιός ἐστιν· οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ' ἢ γ' αὔριον  
πρὶν εὖ πάθῃ τις τὴν παροῦσαν ἡμέραν.

This ring composition suggests that a final interpretation is possible now that she *is* dead. It is not coincidental that the nurse's last words echo not only the first lines of the play but also the last lines of other tragedies—they are a formulaic ending.<sup>10</sup> When the play opens out again with the entrance of Heracles the new start is all the more marked.

The deployment of the first nine narratives is careful and striking. The iambic stories are organized by their speakers, plots, and time-settings. Each section begins with two tales told by Deianeira (A), followed by a pair divided between different speakers (B; the pattern corresponds to interwoven word-order, ABAB); superimposed on this arrangement is a chiasitic one in which the outer pairs of the whole sequence narrate events that follow one another chronologically while the inner pairs present two versions of the same event, the second story revising the interpretation offered in the first (ABBA).

These stories follow two distinct plot lines, the story of Deianeira's marriage and its consequences and the story of the potion made from the Hydra's blood and its application. Though the two events are intertwined—Deianeira received the charm on her way from her father's house with her new husband and uses it in response to a threat to her marriage—the two plot lines are presented separately in the λόγοι. Furthermore, Sophocles explicitly marks the break between them with the first stasimon. There the present, Iole and Heracles' passion for her, is indirectly represented by the story of Deianeira and Heracles' passion for *her*.<sup>11</sup> By returning to that moment in history the chorus not only makes a comparison between the two brides but also jogs the time-setting of the narratives, resetting it at the beginning. The four λόγοι preceding the stasimon tell the plot of the marriage, culminating in Heracles' return from

<sup>9</sup> Such careful placement is by no means unusual in Sophocles. The only stasimon in the *Philoctetes* (676–729, midpoint at 703), comes halfway through the “human” part of the drama (1–1408). That is also a play in which several false resolutions are capped by an apparently final one emphasized by stage action, the exit—reversing previous false exits—of Neoptolemus and Philoctetes (accompanied by a change to tetrameter at 1402). As in the *Trachiniae*, that solution is negated by the sudden appearance of Heracles. In the *Trachiniae* Heracles is not unexpected, but the closing of the first section is none the less precisely achieved. For other structural correspondences in Sophocles see J. Irigoin, “Structure et composition des tragédies de Sophocle,” in *Sophocle*, Fondation Hardt Entretiens XXIX (Geneva 1983) 39–76.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Soph. *Ai.* 1418–20, *OT* 1528–30 (even if an actor's interpolation), Eur. *Alc.* 1159–63, etc. and Winnington-Ingram 75, “the Nurse's words ring like the end of a play.”

<sup>11</sup> Winnington-Ingram 87–88, Easterling 133–34.

Oechalia with a rival woman; the four that follow tell the plot of the love potion, culminating in Deianeira's death.

Both sequences move from the distant past to the present. The first ends with Heracles' arrival at Cape Cenaean and all the events recounted in it happen outside the physical space of the theater. The second, on the other hand, ends with Deianeira's suicide and includes events that happen not only behind but also on the border of the σκηνή—i.e., entrances and exits through the central door. The first sequence concentrates on Heracles (his rescue of Deianeira, his infrequent visits to her, his last departure and activities while away), the second on Deianeira (her meeting with Nessus, use of the potion, its effect, and her death) but both look forward to Heracles' eventual arrival, which is announced at the end of the third speech in each section.

The table on the following page represents the stories schematically.

### Marriage Stories

Deianeira begins the play with a λόγος that she defines as age-old (1–3):

λόγος μὲν ἔστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς  
ὥς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν  
θάνηι τις, οὔτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ' εἴ τωι κακός.

As she continues it becomes clear that she refers not to a story but to a proverb that counsels against trying to assign meaning to anyone's life until it is over.<sup>12</sup> But the proverb itself is a story whose meaning Deianeira immediately challenges: she herself, she says, can read her own life now. In her first five lines Deianeira plays out the movement that will be characteristic of the drama as a whole, revising the interpretation of a past event or λόγος on the basis of new information (in this case, her life adds new evidence to an age-old accumulation) and stating that new interpretation in absolute terms. In addition, she uses something that happened (or was said) long ago as a basis on which to evaluate the present and presents that inference in the form of a priamel (capped by ἐγὼ δέ at line 4).<sup>13</sup> Though the content of these lines stresses the mutability of fortune the proverb's intimate connection with story-telling and the interpretation of stories is of primary importance.

The reason Deianeira gives for her present certainty is the example of her own past, which she explains in a λόγος of her own (6–48), the story of her courtship by Achelous and Heracles. She underscores her own distance from the

<sup>12</sup> The proverb is traditionally assigned to Solon; see Jebb ad Soph. *OT* 1529. On the significance of λόγος as the first word of the play see especially Lawrence 289–90 and P. E. Easterling, "Sophocles, *Trachiniae*," *BICS* 15 (1968) 58–59. The meaning of λόγος is itself liable to revision in the course of line 1. In the expression λόγος ἐστίν it usually means "story" (LSJ VI.3, cf. Soph. *El.* 417–18 λόγος τις αὐτὴν ἐστὶν εἰσιδεῖν πατρός... ὁμιλίαν, Herod. 7.129.1 τὴν δὲ Θεσσαλίην λόγος ἐστὶ τὸ παλαιὸν εἶναι λίμνην); the (postponed) addition of ἀνθρώπων suggests the meaning "proverb" (Easterling ad loc.), which is confirmed by the next lines.

<sup>13</sup> On the priamel form see further below 82, 86, 95; Heiden 22 note 4 gives useful references. On Deianeira's use of inference as a way of learning see Heiden 43 and *passim*.

The Stories of the *Trachiniae*

Lines	Speaker	Main Subject	Time span	Relation to previous
6-48	Deianeira	Achelous & Heracles; marriage	courtship—married life	----- [start]
154-77	Deianeira	H's last departure; oracle	marriage—H's departure/present	continuable
248-90	Lichas	Omphale; Oechalia; Euryus; Iphitus	H's last absence—Cape Ceneaeum	continuable
351-68	Messenger	Iole	H's activities during last absence	corrective
507-30	Chorus	Achelous & Heracles	courtship—wedding journey	----- [restart]
553-81	Deianeira	Nessus & Heracles; robe	wedding journey—D's activities during 1st stasimon	continuable
672-706	Deianeira	Nessus' instructions; tuft of wool	Nessus' death—potion's action during last episode	continuable/corrective
749-806	Hyllus	H's sacrifice; attack of robe	Hyllus' arrival at Ceneaeum—H's attack	continuable
899-942	Nurse	Deianeira's suicide	D's entrance into house—D's death	continuable
1046-63, 1090-1106	Heracles	Past labors, present pain	unspecified past of labors/present	none
1157-73	Heracles	Zeus' oracles	H's reception of oracle, visit to Dodona	none

happenings—and hence their status as reported rather than experienced events—by describing the fight as a spectacle (τῆς θεᾶς 23); even more significantly, she is unable to tell the whole story since she could not watch the battle itself (22–25). This is the first narrative omission in the play, one which will be later filled in ways that Deianeira cannot anticipate. The fight is ended by a dispensation from Zeus that Deianeira initially believed good: τέλος δ' ἔθηκε...καλῶς (26). Subsequent experience has taught her, however, that this τέλος might be subject to another interpretation: εἰ δὴ καλῶς (27). The apparent λύσις (ἐκλύεται με 21) has turned out to be the beginning of other troubles which Deianeira “receives” in series (διαδεδεγμένη 30) as she once “received” Achelous as a suitor (προσδεδεγμένη, 15).<sup>14</sup> The echo emphasizes the essential similarity between events Deianeira has tried to separate both in time (χρόνῳ δ' ἐν ὑστέρῳ 18) and in essence (καλῶς 26, 27 vs. δύστηνος 16), while the image of an endless series resists her attempts to close it. What is more, compounding her old fears about Heracles is a new one (νῦν δέ 36) that again comes in response to an apparent ending. Heracles has finished his labors (ὑπερτελής 36), but like the first τέλος this one is both an end and a beginning: the end of the series of labors coincides with Heracles' killing of Iphitus at Tiryns which initiated (ἐξ οὗ γάρ 38) the latest stage of fear for Deianeira.<sup>15</sup>

Deianeira uses this λόγος to confirm her pessimistic assertions about her life, but it seems instead to prove the danger of interpreting things as final. She *has* endured dreadful terrors, but her vision of the past has so far needed consistent revision by present experience. The very rhetoric of her first speech with its alternation of security and worry subverts her attempt to confirm the present either through similarity or by contrast with the past. Deianeira begins this final day of her life by demonstrating an unhappy tendency not to learn from experience.

The prologue shows the quintessential movement of the play thrice repeated, and shows too Deianeira's method of dealing with her present anxieties and with what lies ahead of her. In addition, it betrays a marked self-consciousness about language and presentation. Deianeira does not merely appeal to traditional wisdom, she identifies it as such—the only thing missing is the name “Solon”—giving her arguments an authority that they maintain despite her challenging their validity in her particular case. The reference to the proverb reaches outside of the immediate context to establish contact with the contemporary Athenian audience—the ἄνθρωποι of line 1 are both Deianeira's fellows and 6th-5th century Athenians—producing an effect similar to that of certain Euripidean prologues that open with specific references to mythological lore, especially those that add ὡς λέγουσι (e.g., *Ores.* 5, cf. *Her.* 1 τίς τὸν Διὸς

<sup>14</sup> Easterling ad 29–30; Iole becomes part of the same series at 536–37 (κόρην...παρεισδεδεγμαι, cf. 376).

<sup>15</sup> Kamerbeek ad 36 on the play between ὑπερτελής and τέλος; on the unstable τέλος see Heiden 29. The γάρ at 38, associated with the introductory ἐξ οὗ (cf. *Hom. Il.* 1.6 ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα, *Pind. Ol.* 6.71), parallels that in 9 as the move away from their home in Tiryns parallels the move from Pleuron (left to be inferred, but cf. 529–30) after Deianeira marries Heracles (27).

σύλλεκτρον οὐκ οἶδεν βροτῶν),<sup>16</sup> and emphasizing the prologue's role as a bridge between the spectators' and the characters' worlds. The opening *rheis* of the *Trachiniae* further draws attention to this bridging function by suggesting that one view the events of the past as events on a stage: the combat between the beast and the beastkiller is watched by spectators (23), Deianeira suffers from ἔκπληξις (24), and endings are described as λύσεις. While these terms are not out of place here, as they recur later in the elaborate pattern of stories and messenger reports they alert the audience that there is a closer affinity between the characters' experiences and their own than may at first meet the eye.<sup>17</sup>

Deianeira's second story (154–77) is closely paired with her first. Between the two she learns from Hyllus that Heracles is alive and besieging Oechalia; rather than reassuring her, however, the news aggravates her worry about the prophecies that he left behind. In her second narrative she again presents her own example as the illustration of a general truth, that married women are unhappy (144–52). Not only is she the paradigmatic example of married misery, but from all her troubles she can single out one that is worse than any that have preceded it. This most painful suffering, again presented as the cap of a summary priamel (153–54), forms the content of Deianeira's narrative, the continued story of her marriage and the account of Heracles' actions before his last departure.<sup>18</sup> The extreme nature of her πάθημα (142) is emphasized by the repetition of τέλος: Heracles has set out on his ὁδός...τελευταία (155)<sup>19</sup>; this is the τέλος of the time that the oracle fixed (167); the oracle says that certain things are destined to issue (ἐκτελευτᾶσθαι) from Heracles' labors (170)<sup>20</sup>;

<sup>16</sup> Easterling makes a similar point, though she seems to refer such appeals to traditional wisdom to the *poet's* own belief, an implication that I resist (*Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry by Former Pupils Presented to Sir Denys Page on his Seventieth Birthday* [Cambridge 1978] 153, quoted by Garvie ad Aesch. *Choeph.* 316; cf. also *Agam.* 750 παλαίφατος δ' ἐν βροτοῖς γέρων λόγος).

<sup>17</sup> Above, note 6 and see R. Scodel's remarks in "Euripides and *Apatē*" in *Cabinet of the Muses*, edd. M. Griffith and D. Mastronarde (Atlanta 1990). (Ἐκ)πλήσσω occurs elsewhere in the play at 386 (Deianeira struck by the messengers' λόγοι); 629 (Lichas struck with joy seeing Deianeira's reception of Iole), and 931 (Deianeira struck by the sword); see further below, 94. The lack of an obvious addressee for the *Trachiniae's* prologue exposes for some (especially those who regard the prologue as Euripidean and expository) the artificiality of the dramatic illusion. While the prologue is clearly *not* purely expository (Scodel 32, Easterling 71) and would not in any case require an addressee (O. Taplin, *Stagecraft in Aeschylus* [Oxford 1989] 131 note 9), Deianeira does appear to speak to no one, an effect that is heightened if the Nurse enters with her but remains in the background.

<sup>18</sup> On the form see W. H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius* (Leiden 1982) 35 note 8, 112 note 194.

<sup>19</sup> Τελευταίαν can refer simply to the last in a series that so far admits of no end (so Easterling ad loc., "his most recent departure")—like the endless succession of troubles at 29–30—but Deianeira's previous assertion that she can judge a series while it is in progress gives the word substantial weight. The journey is of course actually Heracles' last.

<sup>20</sup> Lines 169–70 were deleted by Bergk, followed by Dawe; Easterling and Lloyd-Jones/Wilson retain them. If the lines are genuine they both strengthen the sense that the καιρός is at hand and introduce a punning allusion to the τέλος



the old oracles match the present time, so that they must be fulfilled (τελεσθῆναι 174). The density of τέλος words helps effect the change of emphasis in the reporting of the oracle from a coincidence of place (Oechalia, 76–77) to one of time (164–74)—now that Deianeira has learned from Hyllus *where* Heracles is she remembers that he thought this time dangerous enough to make a will before he left and to reveal the existence of the ancient prophecies. The oracle, whose wording and meaning are unstable, is about to become active.<sup>21</sup> Deianeira's interpretation of Heracles' actions, however, assumes a finality that may or may not be justified: she speaks of Heracles' acting like a dead man (ὥς ἔτ' οὐκ ὦν 161) but the ὥς betrays the subjectivity of her reading. In her search for certainty in the face of unpredictable alternation she emphasizes the oracle's negative alternative—τέλος as death rather than an intermediate stopping point.

Deianeira's second narrative continues to demonstrate her method of dealing with things whose interpretation is uncertain: analogy. In her introductory lines she speaks of the chorus' inability to understand her misery because of its own innocence (141–43); as she sees it, only someone who can compare their own πρᾶξις to hers can comprehend her present plight (151–52). In her narrative proper the framing repetition of παλαιός (157 of the oracle, 171 of Zeus' oak), juxtaposed with the repeated νῦν (νῦν δέ 161 of Heracles' departure, χρόνου / τοῦ νῦν παρόντος 173–74 of the dramatic present), underscores the notion that the present and the past are intimately related. But Deianeira's inability to read the precise nature of that relation leads to her present anguish and instability in which, instead of the past offering a comparandum for the present so that anxiety can be eliminated, pleasure and fear continue to alternate in an unpredictable series: ὥσθ' ἡδέως εὔδουσιν ἐκπηδᾶν ἐμὲ / φόβῳ, φίλῳ, ταρβοῦσαν... (175–76).

The first two stories in the *Trachiniae* provide background and reveal how Deianeira approaches the problem of interpreting her life and, by extension, the lives of others. The second two stand in a somewhat different relationship to one another. The third, Lichas' messenger speech, continues the marriage story, beginning where Deianeira left off and bringing the internal narrative virtually up to the present of the dramatic action, ending with the announcement that Heracles will be on stage at any moment (289–90). But the fourth story, that of the Messenger, does not continue the third; instead it corrects it and triggers a new twist in a plot which seemed to be nearing its dénouement (prematurely announced by the Messenger himself at 180–81).<sup>22</sup>

Lichas' complicated story (248–90) is obtrusively marked as a λόγος (λέγε 236, λόγου 250, λέγει 253, λόγου...λεχθέντος 289–90) and is introduced

πόνων (cf. Eur. *Her.* 427), which is close to the wording of the oracle (1170–71 μόχθων...λύσιν τελείσθαι).

<sup>21</sup> On the problem of the oracle(s) see most recently Machin 151–62.

<sup>22</sup> Δέσποινα Δηιάνειρα, πρῶτος ἀγγέλων/ὄκνου σε λύσω. A structural parallel can be drawn with Jocasta's prayer for a λύσις (*OT* 921) which is followed by the disastrous unraveling of the riddle (Lawrence 294). In the *Trachiniae* the λύσις has the same ironic quality and its early announcement is all the more noticeable, since Deianeira keeps trying to get to the end before her fate or the play is ready to do so.

conventionally with ἀκτὴ τίς ἐστ' Εὐβοίς (237).<sup>23</sup> But Lichas is immediately interrupted by the over-eager Deianeira who cannot wait for him to tell the story, though she has already learned the gist of it both from the Messenger (180–91) and from Lichas himself (229–35) in the question-and-answer exchanges that regularly precede messenger speeches. The doubling of the herald-character (pointed out by Deianeira at 192, αὐτὸς δὲ πῶς ἄπεστιν) and consequent repetition of his preamble emphasize the importance of Lichas' report and call attention to the rhetoric of the scene itself, underscoring its status as tragic narrative.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Deianeira's stories, however, which open out at the end with expressions of her anxiety about the future, Lichas' λόγος is decisively marked as a final one by a framing repetition of τέλος: Heracles offers the due sacrifices to Zeus Ceneaeus (τέλη 238), while Lichas performs his own duty (τελῶ 286). These τέλη, while each has a specialized meaning in context, look back to the τέλος so prominently featured in Deianeira's last narrative and establish that this is indeed the καὶρός and that Heracles has completed something, the narrative of which—the verbal reification, as it were—Lichas is now himself completing. The only consequence remaining is the arrival of the hero, the announcement of which is couched in superlative terms as befits the end of a series: φρόνει νιν ὡς ἤξοντα· τοῦτο γάρ λόγου / πολλοῦ καλῶς λεχθέντος ἥδιστον κλύειν (289–90).

Lichas insists that a series has come to an end. He has a corresponding need to assign responsibility and hence meaning to Heracles' recent actions, a meaning that he tries to confirm by dwelling on the authority by which he speaks as herald. (So Deianeira initially relied on the authority of traditional knowledge.) He begins by claiming twice (249, 253) that he heard the story about the hero's enslavement to Omphale from Heracles himself. By stressing its direct link to Heracles Lichas can claim that his story is true, as indeed it is; but by thus asserting the validity of his source he can also claim that his interpretation of the events—his determination of their real cause—is true, which it is not.<sup>25</sup> Lichas' insistence on the "earwitness" nature of this report contrasts strongly with Deianeira's inability to watch and hence to tell about a painful episode in her own past. But, like Deianeira, Lichas omits something from his narrative of the past that will turn out to be vital for the correct interpretation of the present. Unlike her, however, he does so deliberately.

Lichas' concern to identify the ultimate cause is further betrayed by his speech's elaborate time scheme that uses the archaic narrative regression familiar

<sup>23</sup> Barrett ad Eur. *Hipp.* 125–28.

<sup>24</sup> On the doubling see A. E. Hinds, "Binary Action in Sophocles," *Hermathena* 129 (1980) 51–59, and for αὐτὸς Easterling ad 192; it is simplest to take it as referring to Lichas—and so the Messenger understands it—but problems remain.

<sup>25</sup> See Winnington-Ingram 332–33, Heiden 53 and "Lichas' Rhetoric of Justice in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Hermes* 116 (1988) 13–23 on Lichas' speech. Lawrence (293) remarks that Heracles' authority cuts both ways: "this story depends on subjective experience.... The subjective element may be taken either as tending to render the account authoritative, in this case all the more because it comes from Heracles himself, or as drawing our attention to the human source and his motivation. The audience is thus alerted to possible irony: the messenger thinks that Heracles is an unimpeachable witness; the audience realise that the great hero may have motives for deception."

from the proem to the *Iliad* and Herodotus' introduction to his history (1.6–18).<sup>26</sup> The time of the events he narrates continually recedes: from Cape Ceneaeum he moves to Omphale and thence back to the insult at Oechalia and the reason for Heracles' anger at King Eurytus. The most distant point in the narrative is marked by παλαιός (263), already established as a signal that an important and determinant point has been reached (e.g., 157, 171). But though Lichas makes Eurytus' insult of his old friend Heracles the start of all the trouble, he notably leaves out the reason for the offense, which was connected to the archery contest (265–66) for which Iole was traditionally the prize.<sup>27</sup> Otherwise the herald freely assigns responsibility: Zeus is the agent of Heracles' slavery (251), Eurytus was the ἀγχιστήρ of these deeds (256) and the only mortal responsible for them (260–61), Heracles' deceitful killing of Iphitus was the reason for his enslavement (274), the gods punish insolence (280), the Oechalians in their insolence brought about their own ruin (281–83). Easterling describes Lichas' emphases on Omphale (250–53) and on Zeus (274–78) as diversions; one can go further and say that the whole speech is a red herring, designed to distract Deianeira from the questions that will turn out to be the most important—why did Heracles do these things? what led to this ending?—by providing her with a wealth of answers, none of them particularly relevant.<sup>28</sup>

The beginning of Lichas' speech was interrupted by the anxious Deianeira; his neat ending is subverted by the Messenger's revelation that the τέλος is not as he claimed. The fourth story in the Deianeira drama is also the shortest, half as long as Lichas' (351–68 including the introductory lines); only Heracles' final narrative is shorter. Its brevity is partly due to its limited function: instead of advancing the marriage story it retells and explicitly corrects part of the previous narrative. Though his account consists of information available to all the Trachinians (351–52, 423–24), the Messenger speaks secretly to Deianeira (and the chorus) alone. He reveals what was hidden in Lichas' speech, thereby allowing Deianeira to reinterpret the present in the light of new information about the past. His insistence on secrecy in telling his story both contrasts ironically with the effect of his information—that of bringing the truth to light—and prepares for Deianeira's own secret act which will be made fully public only after she receives another piece of previously missing information.

<sup>26</sup> M. Lang, *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse* (Cambridge, Ma. 1984) 3–4. Like the Herodotean narrative, Lichas' describes the shape of a modified ring: Omphale—Oechalia—Eurytus/Iphitus—Omphale—Oechalia; cf. Easterling 110 and on the structuring device in general see W. G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore 1984) 21–24. Lichas uses relative pronouns in a way that recalls epinician and archaic narrative (262, 269); cf. Bond ad Eur. *Her.* 2 and E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* (Berkeley 1962, 1986) 8 note 27.

<sup>27</sup> Jebb ad 265ff.; cf. Winnington-Ingram 332–33 and Heiden (above, note 25) 18–19.

<sup>28</sup> It is interesting, however, that several details in Lichas' speech correspond to very relevant elements of the plot: Heracles is enslaved to a woman (Segal 79); Heracles kills an unsuspecting (innocent?) man by swinging him by the foot and dashing his brains out (Kitto<sup>3</sup> 294); the consequences of having one's mind on one thing and one's eye on another can be fatal (for the lesson in Iphitus' fate for Deianeira see Lawrence 293).

Like Lichas, the Messenger stresses the quality of his evidence, recalling λεχθέντος (290) and ὡς αὐτὸς λέγει (253, cf. 249) with λέγοντος (351) and λέγει (358). His final words emphasize the absence of pleasure as Lichas' did its presence (οὐχ ἥδομαι 374, cf. ἥδιστον 290 and the Messenger's own καθ' ἡδονὴν κλύειν 197). Both in form and in content, then, his speech is a pendant to Lichas'. In it he rejects the causes Lichas adduced—the Lydians, Omphale, Iphitus—and concentrates on the scene at Oechalia. He does not say that Lichas was lying, only that he thrust something aside (παρώσας 358), and simply begins where Lichas left off in his search for the ultimate cause of Heracles' actions: ἀλλ' ἡνίκ' (359) formally resumes the story, as Jebb notes. He tells the one detail that Lichas left out: Heracles requested Iole as a κρύφιον λέχος (360). κρύφιον characterizes the secrecy concerning Iole both in the characters' lives and in the dramatic narrative, since Iole's λέχος was hidden from Deianeira first by Heracles' physical absence and then—verbally—by Lichas.<sup>29</sup>

The Messenger's rejection of alternative explanations to concentrate on the one true cause recalls Deianeira's narrative technique (the priamel), suggesting a parallelism between this story about Iole and Deianeira's stories about herself. The story about Iole is more important than the girl herself, who is a mute, a non-speaking sign that is clearly significant but that by itself transmits no meaningful message.<sup>30</sup> Like the place in Lichas' ornate narrative that stands revealed as having hidden her after the Messenger provides the necessary information, she is a place waiting to be filled, a sign waiting to be interpreted. Deianeira offered one possible interpretation of her identity (is she the king's daughter? 316), while Lichas implied that she meant nothing by pretending ignorance about her name (317–19).<sup>31</sup> But only the Messenger can tell who she is and what she means. When Deianeira invites the Messenger to speak she says χὼ λόγος σημαίνεται (345); as Kamerbeek ad loc. remarks, her “anxious concern for the tale makes her personify it...here there is hardly any difference between μῦθος and λόγος (the speech, the story told, tale in the sense of the account of the matter).” For Deianeira, the λόγος about Iole is as physical an object as the girl herself, a new basis on which to evaluate the situation. And like Deianeira's own autobiographical accounts, the two tales she has just heard should—but do not—act as a warning.

The next narrative (507–30) is contained within the first stasimon which begins with the familiar priamel, capped by the example of Deianeira.<sup>32</sup> This ode has several striking features: it concentrates on the preliminaries to Deianeira's marriage rather than on Iole, an unexpected topic matched by the

<sup>29</sup> Noticed also by Segal 95; Lawrence (297–98) draws an analogous connection between Deianeira's secrecy (λάθραι 533) and the hidden poison (κεκρυμμένον 556).

<sup>30</sup> Among other things she initiates the corruption of the exchange of messages, both verbal and physical, among the other characters (Segal 96, Scodel 33–34).

<sup>31</sup> The word he uses, (ἀν)ιστορεῖν, is the leitmotif of the section (317, 382, 397, 404, 415, 418). ιστορία is, of course, the basis of narrative (Herod. 1.1.1 with How-Wells' note): Lichas has in effect refused to do even the groundwork to construct a story about Iole.

<sup>32</sup> 497–506; Race (above, note 18) 90–91.

anomalous participation of the chorus in the story-telling.<sup>33</sup> In narrative terms its importance lies in its return to the temporal setting of the prologue to tell the one detail of Deianeira's youth that she had omitted—the battle between Heracles and Achelous. The ring composition closes this portion of the *Trachiniae*, reflecting the note of finality in Lichas' farewell words with their stress on the (illusory) stability of the spoken word (484–87):

ἐπεὶ γε μὲν δὴ πάντ' ἐπίστασαι λόγον,  
κείνου τε καὶ σὴν ἐξ ἴσου κοινὴν χάριν  
καὶ στέργε τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ βούλου λόγους  
οὗς εἶπας ἐς τήνδ' ἐμπέδως εἰρηκέναι.

Iole has been brought to the house as a new bride and Deianeira's role as wife may be finished; her Trachinian companions mark this by evoking the beginning of her marriage.

But Iole's arrival signals not only an end but also a beginning, not least because a new character has been introduced into the play. Moreover, she is introduced in a scene that by its reference to the staging of the entrance of Cassandra in the *Agamemnon* draws attention to its own theatricality, inviting the audience to consider the possible reasons for the quotation.<sup>34</sup> Will Iole provide Deianeira with an excuse for murdering her husband? Will she, like Cassandra, eventually speak and lay open new dimensions of responsibility and pain lying behind the plot's events, wrenching them from the domestic to the prophetic, mystical realm? She remains silent, however, and her wordless exit forces the chorus—and the audience—to transfer its attention from the mystery of Iole to the mystery of her effect on Heracles' wife. Deianeira and Iole are fused in the stasimon rather than one replacing the other, just as Deianeira imagines them lying together under one blanket waiting for Heracles (539–40). Furthermore, Heracles' behavior toward Iole at Oechalia was in all likelihood very similar to his violent wooing of Deianeira, so in its return to the combat that Deianeira failed to describe the chorus also recalls and fills, by description this time rather than by report of another narrative, the ellipse in Lichas' story.<sup>35</sup>

Thematically, then, the stasimon both brings Deianeira's marriage to a close and assimilates her to Iole (and vice-versa), both victims of a bestial love. On a narrative level by supplying the omitted detail the chorus, like the Messenger, provides important new information, suggesting that the present needs to be reinterpreted.<sup>36</sup> Also, by returning to the beginning the chorus resets

<sup>33</sup> This type of lyrical narrative is quite unusual in tragedy, unique in Sophocles. See W. Kranz, *Stasimon* (Berlin 1933) 253–59 (connecting it with dithyramb), Reinhardt 242 note 5, R. W. B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980) 54–55 (epinician affinities).

<sup>34</sup> See most recently R. Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry* (London 1990) 102 and note 7.

<sup>35</sup> On the parallel see Winnington-Ingram 86–88.

<sup>36</sup> If Zielinski's *θατήρ* in 526 (tentatively accepted by Easterling; Lloyd-Jones/Wilson delete the whole line) is right, the chorus also claim to have been an eyewitness—clearly an impossibility, but giving them an authority that matches that of Lichas and that of the Messenger. *θατήρ* would echo Deianeira's description of the person who could recount the fight, *θακῶν ἀταρβῆς τῆς θεάς*

the stories' timeframe. With the Messenger's and Lichas' speeches the marriage narrative was brought up to the moment before Heracles is due to enter—that is, still in the past, but barely. The stasimon throws the time back again to the earliest moment in Deianeira's story as the audience knows it; consequently in the second part of the Deianeira drama a new narrative begins, temporally parallel to the first one but diverging widely from it in content. This story-line does not concern the marriage but the love potion that Deianeira received from Nessus, and it starts at the point the chorus stops singing, the moment the new bride leaves her mother, suddenly.

### Poison stories

When Deianeira reemerges from the palace with the robe at 531 she begins the new story-line with the first of two narratives (553–81) that balance her introductory pair. She has discovered a λύσις (λυτήριον 554) for her present troubles, the source of which lies far in the past: ἦν μοι παλαιὸν δῶρον ἀρχαίου ποτὲ / θηρός (555–56).<sup>37</sup> The gift is the potion from the dying Nessus, given to her on her wedding journey (562–63). Its importance is highlighted by its age and by the centaur's announcement that she is his last passenger (ὑστατὴν σ' ἔπεμψ' ἐγὼ 571), a statement that lends authority to his words and provides a guarantee of good faith. The assurance that something is the last in a series would be especially reassuring to Deianeira. It is likewise reassuring in a narrative sense as an attempt to counteract the tendency of the λόγος to resist final interpretation.<sup>38</sup> Deianeira even quotes Nessus directly (569–77) to increase the trustworthiness of her report—in this instance she too was an eyewitness—and assures the chorus that she has done exactly as he told her in reserving the potion for a critical time.<sup>39</sup>

Deianeira is aware that with the gift of the robe she is now venturing from the realm of speech into that of action. The accumulation of perfect tenses (581, 586, 589) emphasizes the finality of her deed.<sup>40</sup> She is also aware that she can only be sure about what the potion will do by trying it; the chorus tells her so (592–93), but it is something she already knows (cf. 151–52). She can, however, try to infer what it will do, and here she operates on familiar principles, making a decision about the present on the basis of a narrative

(23), and the idea of spectacle fits in with the play's general self-consciousness of its own μῦθος (in both senses). In this light, it is interesting that Burton (above, note 33) 54 implies that the chorus derives their information from Heracleian saga material.

<sup>37</sup> On ἀρχαίου, daggered by Dawe, see Jebb ad loc; 555 may deliberately echo line 1 since it begins the second of the play's two major story sequences.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lichas' closural gestures at 286 (τελῶ) and 290 (ἡδιστον) discussed above, 84.

<sup>39</sup> Kamerbeek ad loc. assumes Deianeira quotes the centaur for vividness and to convince herself and the chorus of the rightness of her actions; more importantly, his dying words carry prophetic power and function like an oracle (cf. Scodel 41). Direct speech, not found in the earlier tales, is a feature of these last narratives (also at 797–802, 920–22). The effect is at least partly to demonstrate the insistence with which the past increasingly encroaches on the present.

<sup>40</sup> So also Heiden 91.

account of the past. In this story as in the others she claims that an action is final and finalizing—the robe will provide a λύσις—and bases her decision to take that action on an interpretation of the past that she believes is stable. She is unsure about the outcome, but not about the past.<sup>41</sup>

This λόγος has several disturbing aspects. By representing speech it graphically opens the possibility that the reported words are still active, not yet fully interpreted—like the potion itself. And indeed Nessus' words will turn out to be subject to more than one interpretation, just as the oracle will mean something different than it seemed to. Moreover, this narrative reveals that in her first story Deianeira left out a detail beside that of the contest between Achelous and Heracles: something very similar, the fight between Nessus and Heracles, also for possession of Deianeira. She urged Lichas to tell the whole truth without distortions or omissions (453), but she herself does not represent the past fully and accurately.<sup>42</sup> Her solution can at best be only a partial one if she does not take the whole μῦθος into account, and though she can now report this incident of sexual violence and near-rape, like the other suppressed details it will become the locus of danger.

The sixth story moves from the distant past up to the present when Deianeira decides to use the potion and anoints the robe with it (578–81). The emphasis on the centaur's presence, dead and alive (κείνου θανόντος 579, ζῶν κείνος εἶπε 581), ties present and past closely together so that the jump in narrative time from the ferrying to the immediate past (i.e., the time elapsed during the preceding stasimon) is less abrupt. By mentioning Nessus first as dead and then as alive in the same sentence Deianeira both prepares for his reappearance in the seventh story and mimics the role he will play in the plot, that of the dead who comes alive to kill.

As Deianeira goes back into the house the chorus sings happily of Heracles' victorious return in an ode that, as often in Sophocles, proclaims joy just before the catastrophe.<sup>43</sup> The mood is not wholly positive, however, especially in the declaration that Ares now releases Heracles and Deianeira from their "days of toil": ἐξέλυσ' ἐπιπόνων ἡμερῶν (654). In introducing the potion Deianeira referred to it as a potential solution, but Ares' normal "release" is that of death (e.g., λύντο δὲ γυῖα Hom. *Il.* 7.12, 11.260; λῦσε μένος *Il.* 16.332) and the ambiguity in this phrase is especially marked, given its echo of the oracle. Moreover, this is the first time λύω has been applied to Heracles—

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence (297) remarks of this scene, which he rightly calls "the epistemological crisis of the play," that "the crowning difficulty [in Deianeira's attempt to influence the future] stems from the tragic truth that only knowledge of what is present or past can properly be said to be within the domain of mortal knowledge at all, leaving aside the obscure prophecies of deity." But the play is less interested in the future than in versions of the past and it is as much Deianeira's precipitousness about reading the past that destroys her as her struggle to anticipate the future.

<sup>42</sup> The hidden potion and its story, like the ancient prophecy that Heracles leaves behind, becomes relevant—and therefore active—only when it is needed; but Deianeira's explicit refusal to describe the monstrous fight for her hand implies a similar reluctance to mention this second bestial episode.

<sup>43</sup> Kamerbeek 143, Burton, (above, note 33) 59; on the ode's darker undertones see Kitto<sup>3</sup> 293, Burton 60–61, 64, and Easterling's notes.

previously it was used by or about Deianeira.<sup>44</sup> By drawing Heracles into Deianeira's semantic field, as it were, the chorus suggests that the spouses' λύσεις will be linked, as they will be (λύει 924 of Deianeira's death, λύσις 1171 of Heracles'; cf. 719–20), and prepares for Heracles' literal dissolution by the poison.

The love potion's effect on the wool used to apply it to the robe, which she describes in her last story (672–706), forces Deianeira to revise her reading of the charm. This narrative is formally identical to a messenger speech. Someone comes out of the house to report, in vivid language, a violent, destructive act; the report is introduced with a summary (672–79) which is then expanded (μείζον' ἔκτενῶ λόγον 679). It continues the sixth tale, moving temporally from the last reported event (the application of the potion to the robe) to the immediate past: the starting point for the tale of the θάῤμα itself is Deianeira's entrance through the palace door at 632 (εἴσω δ' ἀποστέιχουσα 693). But the past intrudes again, complicating the chronology. Deianeira begins with the long-ago gift of the potion and Nessus' instructions (680–88), then describes her care of the potion in the intervening years; only at 688 with νῦν δέ does she arrive at the immediate past—the time of the blood's application (ὅτ' ἦν ἐργαστέον)—and conclude her narrative with a reference to the chorus' witnessing of her recent stage action (ὥσπερ εἶδετε 692).

The past enters into the story of the wool's destruction to provide critical background information, the instructions to keep the potion out of the sun. Again the past has a direct and unpredictable effect on the present: Deianeira has written the instructions down in her mind χαλκῆς ὅπως δύοντιπτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν (683), a *deltos* that recalls the tablet with the oracle (47, 157). Unlike the oracle this tablet gives clear directions for the future, a recipe; but like it, it is dangerous since it fails to explain what the recipe is for. The centaur's directions have a critical narrative function as well. Like the combat of Achelous and Heracles, Heracles' passion for Iole, and Nessus himself, the detail of the heat in the instructions is a detail that was left out of a previous narrative—and like these previous ellipses this detail is the crisis point.<sup>45</sup> Keeping the poison out of the light, hiding it—a concealment that corresponds to Deianeira's narrative hiding—keeps it inactive. Its exposure activates its fatal nature both in the physical world and in the verbal account of that world: in her story of the θάῤμα, after the requisite summary, Deianeira first retells—indeed, virtually rereads—the centaur's all-important instructions, a narrative uncovering that leads directly to the exposure of the poison itself. She ends by reinterpreting her previous action, making the metonymic connection between the wool and the robe and realizing what lies ahead for her husband.<sup>46</sup> She confirms her certainty that Heracles will die by comparison with yet another story, the *exemplum* of Chiron who, though a god, was harmed by the Hydra's poison

<sup>44</sup> λύω (etc.) occurs at 21, 181, 554, 654, 924, 1171. Kamerbeek ad 654 compares 1169–71; Easterling is more cautious ("the theme of 'release from toils' [cf. 81, 168] is lightly touched on here").

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Heiden 103 on Deianeira's direct quotation of Nessus at 569–77: "even an undistorted transmission may still have important gaps."

<sup>46</sup> Kamerbeek ad 701, Lawrence 298, Hinds (above, note 24) 56.



(714–16). Earlier, in trying to persuade Lichas to tell her the truth, Deianeira had similarly adverted to Heracles' past love affairs that she may have known about only by hearsay.<sup>47</sup> In both cases Deianeira uses past experience to predict the future; it is typical of the *Trachiniae* that this "experience" may be purely verbal.

Deianeira describes her new certainty as learning that comes μεθύτερον (710), "too late." This comparative is used at three other places in the *Trachiniae*, all in the first episode and all by Deianeira: of Heracles' arrival to rescue her (χρόνῳ δ' ἐν ὑστέρωι 18)<sup>48</sup>; of the oracle's prediction that he would either die now (τελευτήν τοῦ βίου...τελεῖν) or live the rest of his life happily (εἰς τό γ' ὕστερον / τὸν λοιπὸν ἤδη βίον εὐαίων' ἔχειν 79–80), and as she encourages Hyllus to get news of his father: χάρει νυν, ὦ παῖ· καὶ γὰρ ὑστέρωι τό γ' εὖ / πράσσειν, ἐπεὶ πύθοιτο, κέρδος ἐμπολῶι (92–93). The future has in fact not been too unkind to Deianeira though she has feared it. It has been the past that she has judged and found to be bad. The future, where there is room for hope, has been relatively positive: Heracles came, albeit late; Heracles might live in peace for the rest of his time; even to one who is late, profit may come. This is not simply wishful thinking on her part. It is when she does not know what has happened and is unable to assign meaning to the present that she is truly afraid; hence her famous question to Lichas, "why is knowledge terrible?" (459). Her desire to define events as over, past a certain limit, is reflected in her repeated use of the comparative form ὕστερος: it is the relationship between the present/future and the past that she spends her energy on. Yet the comparative leaves open the possibility of further comparison, of a swing from good to bad. Deianeira's ultimate modification of ὕστερος to μεθύτερον suggests that a true reading of the past—one that unambiguously augurs death—renders comparison tautologous and opens the way for the superlative ὑστάτη in which there is real closure, not the false closure of her premature interpretations.

Deianeira does not have long to wait to find out that this τέλος has not been καλόν. Hyllus returns, completing the first of several rings described by the play's structure (732–33 ἐπεὶ / πάρεστι μαστήρ πατὴρ ὃς πρὶν ὤχετο). He, too, gives a messenger speech (749–806) in which the opening dialogue (734–48) takes the place of the usual summary. Like his mother, Hyllus refers to speech almost as a concrete thing: [λόγον λέγω] ὃν οὐχ οἶόν τε μὴ τελεσθῆναι (742). Here again, the narrative will take the place of, or rather, *be*, the action.<sup>49</sup> Hyllus' reference to the completion of the λόγος marks the first occurrence of a form of τέλος since the end of Lichas' speech. As the λύσις words in the *Trachiniae* are, with the exception of the last, connected with

<sup>47</sup> As Easterling remarks ad 459–60 his love affairs are "a notorious feature of his myths"; cf. Heiden 74–75.

<sup>48</sup> There it refers to Heracles' release of Deianeira from the clutches of a monster, at 710 to Deianeira's delivery of Heracles into the clutches of a monster.

<sup>49</sup> Kamerbeek ad 742. Jebb notes that the λόγος must be complete "since the *thing* [italics mine] has already happened," but Deianeira used almost the same expression of a λόγος that was not yet finished, ὦι (χρόνῳ) τελεσθῆναι χρεῶν (174).

Deianeira, the τέλος words are largely associated with Heracles, and appropriately so, since it is he in whom the play has located its τέλος.<sup>50</sup> Structurally the reemergence of forms of τέλος describes a second ring around the play's central scenes, the narrative uncovering of the meaning of Iole and of the Hydra's blood.

The speech proper begins with the scene-setting ἀκτὴ τις...ἔστιν (752–53), an echo of Lichas' narrative, the third speech in the first half of the Deianeira drama as Hyllus' is the third in the second half.<sup>51</sup> The cross-reference is natural, since Hyllus in effect begins at the latest point in Lichas' story, the sacrificing Heracles (τέλη at 238 is echoed by the epithet ἐντελεῖς at 760).<sup>52</sup> He also ends where Lichas left off, with an announcement of the hero's imminent arrival on stage (805–6). In Hyllus' *rhesis* the marriage story—which Lichas and the Messenger brought up to the point of Heracles' arrival at Cape Cenaeanum—and the potion story coincide. Lichas left carrying the poison-impregnated robe at 632; he arrives at Cape Cenaeanum—in Hyllus' story—at 757. And the λύσις that the Messenger announced at 181, that Deianeira tried to bring about with her λυτήριον charm at 554, and that the chorus proclaimed at 654, turns out not to be a release but a destruction: the punning echo of λύειν in λυμαντήν βίου (793) recalls the chorus' own uncomfortable juxtaposition of ὠλλυτο (652) with ἐξέλυτο (654). The point at which the two story-lines converge is marked simply by Deianeira's silent exit (813–14), itself a reversal of Iole's mute entrance. Deianeira's silence, however, speaks unambiguously:

τί σίγ' ἀφέρπεις; οὐ κάτοισθ' ὀθούνεκα  
 ξυνηγορεῖς σιγῶσα τῷ κατηγόρῳ;

The chorus responds to Hyllus' tale with sudden clear understanding: the fulfillment of the time mentioned in the oracle (τελεόμνηος...ἄροτος 824–25) brings about the fulfillment of the labors (ἀναδοχὰν τελεῖν πόνων 825) which means death (829–30). The chorus seems to have access to information that it should not know, especially the detail of the twelve-year period, but already in the first stasimon the maidens manifested awareness amounting to knowledge of events at which they were not present. Here, having listened to all

<sup>50</sup> See especially M. McCall, "The *Trachiniae*: Structure, Focus, and Heracles," *AJP* 93 (1972) 142–63. τέλος (etc.) occurs at 26, 36, 79 *bis*, 155, 167, 170, 174, 238, 286, 742, 824, 825, 917, 948 (?), 1149, 1171, 1187, 1257, 1263. For a similar connection of a word with a Sophoclean character cf. *Electra*, in which almost all the words for clarity, light, and knowledge are associated with Orestes in the outer framing sections of the play but are absent from Electra's dark center.

<sup>51</sup> For Easterling the echo of Lichas' speech is a reminder that Hyllus has not heard any of the information that has been reported on stage (ad 753–54); this is true, but the chronological dovetailing is crucial for the internal narrative. Other echoes of Lichas are ὀρίζε 754 (Kamerbeek ad loc., cf. 237) and the insistence on an eyewitness account (also recalling the Messenger) at 746–47.

<sup>52</sup> This is the same sort of ironic sacrificial language that Aeschylus exploits to such effect in the *Agamemnon*. It is just at the moment that Heracles becomes himself τέλειος and offers bulls to Zeus that he is attacked by the bull-like victim Nessus via the robe; he will become beast-like in his agony. Cf. Segal 68–73 and F. I. Zeitlin, "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–508.

the stories, they can make the easy deduction about what the oracle means; the detail of twelve years is simply another piece of information to which their increasing knowledge of what must happen gives them access.<sup>53</sup>

The final story in the Deianeira drama (899–942) is told by the Nurse who was present at the first. Her *rhesis*, which takes as its starting point Deianeira's entrance into the house (900), ends with her death. It finishes the marriage story and the potion story (insofar as Deianeira is concerned in it) and ties together the themes of release and of ending. The narrative is preceded by a summary (874–75): βέβηκε Δηιάνειρα τὴν πανυστάτην / ὁδῶν ἀπασῶν ἐξ ἀκινήτου ποδός. Πανυστάτην, a rare word, recalls ὑστάτην (571) used of Deianeira as Nessus' last freight.<sup>54</sup> Deianeira's involvement in the world of unpredictable series of events is over, and the Nurse ratifies that finality after the fact with a tautologous form of the superlative. The *topos* of the last journey of death specifically recalls both the wedding journey (βέβακεν 529) and Heracles' τελευταία ὁδός (155), tying her fate and his closely together—she departs as he returns from that journey, but both roads end in death. The metaphorical link is echoed physically in the staging. Sophocles could have chosen to end the play by displaying Deianeira's body; instead, the body actually exposed is that of Heracles who is, of course, played by the same actor who took Deianeira's part.<sup>55</sup> We expect a body and we get one, but not the one we expect. The doubling reinforces the irony of the spouses' profound separation and their union despite that separation; in addition, by defeating—or rather, modifying—the audience's theatrical expectation the *Trachiniae* again draws attention to its own dramatic mechanics.<sup>56</sup>

As she begins the formal narrative account of Deianeira's death the Nurse appeals to the chorus in terms that recall the opening of Deianeira's second speech: πύσσι δ' ὥστε μαρτυρεῖν ἐμοί (899). At 141 Deianeira told the

<sup>53</sup> W. Kranz, "Aufbau und Gehalt der Trachinierinnen des Sophokles," *Sokrates* N. F. 9 (1921) 36 plausibly suggests that the chorus has this information about the oracle simply by dramatic convention: "der Chor kennt sie, obwohl niemand sie ihm mitteilen konnte, eben weil er Chor ist..." Burton (above, note 33) 66 implies that here, too, the chorus might know about the oracle's wording from having heard other stories in Heracles' saga.

<sup>54</sup> Outside Euripides there are only a handful of occurrences of πανύστατος before the fourth century: Hom. *Il.* 23.532, 547, *Od.* 9.452; Soph. *Ai.* 858 (*del.* Campe et al.), *Tr.* 874; Aristoph. (quoting tragedy) *Ach.* 1184; Eur. *Alc.* 164, 207 (*del.* Valckenaer), *Med.* 1041, *Hec.* 411, 611, *Her.* 457, 513, *Or.* 1010, 1021. All the tragic examples with the exception of *Or.* 1010 refer to death.

<sup>55</sup> Kitto<sup>1</sup> 293; on the distribution of actors see Easterling 1–2. No one seems to have seen the formal parallelism.

<sup>56</sup> On Deianeira and Heracles see (e.g.) Easterling 1–2. Euripides uses the same tactic in his *Heracles*, exposing the corpses of Megara and her children rather than that of the tyrant Lycus whom Heracles entered the palace to kill (C. Ruck, "Duality and the Madness of Herakles," *Arethusa* 9 [1976] 58–59 and W. E. Higgins, "Deciphering Time in the *Herakles* of Euripides," *QUCC* 47 [1984] 100). The metatheatricality of that section of the *Heracles* is especially marked: the messenger speech that intervenes between Heracles' entrance into the palace and the display of the bodies describes a scene of mimesis inside the σκηνή (931–1008), while the play itself is thrown into structural turmoil by two *deae ex machina* in an unparalleled interruption at 815 shortly after Heracles disappears.

maidens that although they had heard (πεπυσμένη) of her trouble they had not experienced it themselves; now they will hear of her final trouble in such a vivid way as to be themselves able to corroborate the Nurse's eyewitness account (896–97). Deianeira used a metaphor to being the chorus closer to understanding her situation; the Nurse will use a word-picture to give them the same status as the assembled Trachinians who could witness to Lichas' duplicity (352, 371–73, 422). In both cases, however, the witnessing is to words rather than to actual sights: again the λόγος signs. But even the Nurse does not see the suicide itself, only the results (930–31).<sup>57</sup> Her position is thereby analogous to the audience's who cannot see the suicide because of the barrier of the σκηνή and so rely on the Nurse to show it to them. Her failure to watch the act, unlike theirs, is deliberate, even illogical (see Easterling ad loc.), and can be compared to Deianeira's looking away from the monsters at 22–25. This time, however, there will be no choral narrative to fill the gap, and Deianeira dies in narrative silence.<sup>58</sup>

Deianeira's death has been much commented on. It suffices here to point out that with it the ring of her life is closed: she began stricken with fear (24), after which Heracles released her (21) and Zeus made an end (26); she now makes her own end (ἐτέλεσε 917, of her domestic farewells, is the first time since line 26 that τέλος has been used of Deianeira) by releasing her dress (λύει 924) and striking herself in the side (πεπληγμένην 931). The last two terms are each used literally here for the first time, as if Deianeira's death, by putting an end to the endless series of revisions of which her life has consisted, also converts—if only for a moment—metaphor into reality. It is no accident that this literalization of metaphor coincides with the solving of the riddling expression λύσις / τέλος πόνων: the decipherment of oracular riddles, too, often depends on reading literally rather than metaphorically.<sup>59</sup>

The Nurse's final comment (943–46), which echoes Deianeira's first words, not only brings the ring of her tragedy to a close but also pronounces judgment on the *Trachiniae*, whose action thus appears formally finished. Sophocles has written a drama with a plausible ending, a drama that elegantly folds in on itself, that is an illustration of its opening γνώμη, and most importantly, one that several characters, especially the leading lady, repeatedly try to bring to an end. The meaning of Heracles' absence, of Iole, of the robe, of the Hydra's blood, of Deianeira's action, even of the oracle to Heracles, have apparently been correctly read, and it might seem that all that remains is the mourning after the catastrophe. Yet the *Trachiniae* is still waiting for Heracles, whose entrance has been thrice announced and whose bier Hyllus is even now preparing (901–2). There is no possibility that the play is actually over. Moreover, it will turn

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence 295; Heiden 67, 128–29.

<sup>58</sup> On the relationship between the screening effect of the σκηνή and of language see R. Padel, "Making Space Speak" in *Nothing to do with Dionysus?*, edd. J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin (Princeton 1990), 343–45.

<sup>59</sup> Or vice versa, as in the case of the wooden walls. On Deianeira's death cf. also Heiden 130: "Her suicide does not destroy this world so much as protect it from change....Deianeira's suicide only puts into action the rhetoric of her opening speech, where she controlled the instability of her life by fashioning it into a unity that she defended against even the idea of a future (1–5)."

out that the audience—and some of the characters—have not been given all the information necessary to evaluate the play's *πρῶξις*.

### Final stories

After he is carried on stage, Heracles' first coherent utterance is a long lament that incorporates narrative elements, particularly in lines 1046–63 and 1090–1106.<sup>60</sup> In both sections he contrasts his past deeds with present reality just as Deianeira did (γυνὴ δέ 1062, νῦν δέ 1103; cf. νῦν δέ 1075); in both he retells his labors, his own myth that he believes has now been made void.<sup>61</sup> But this story is unlike the others in the *Trachiniae* in that it has no coherent narrative sequence. The past mingles indiscriminately with the present which in turn cancels the past. There is no orderly temporal progression as in the internal narrative of the Deianeira drama, nor is there any chronological relation to those earlier narratives; the labors are not set in a sequence, nor is what is now happening to Heracles explicitly linked to the previous sequence.<sup>62</sup> There is no longer any sense in which the past can explain the present; indeed, there is a total break between precedent and reality. Like Deianeira, Heracles thinks that he knows his story's end, but unlike her he refuses the past as a model for the present either as explanation or as comparandum.<sup>63</sup> For both spouses the endpoint of a series is a place of anxiety, but while Deianeira tried prematurely to assign an ends to parts of her experience and thus escape the repetitive misery of her life, for Heracles the predictable series of labors was reassuring and safe; it is the end that is unreadable and frightening.

When Heracles finally allows Hyllus to tell what has happened his *λόγος* (1135) is condensed into two couplets (1138–39, 1141–42), the second of which again evokes the distant past (πάλα 1141) and gives all the explanation Heracles needs: the poison on the robe came from Nessus. The name has the effect commonly found when the meaning of an oracle at last is clear, and Deianeira is dismissed because Heracles knows the correct referent of the word “killer.”<sup>64</sup> Not only the name of Nessus, but the whole first part of the play—

<sup>60</sup> For the structure of the whole speech see Easterling's notes.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. R. L. Kane, “The Structure of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: ‘Diptych’ or ‘Trilogy’?,” *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 205, “As a clarification of two old prophecies, Heracles' final awakening entails an implicit re-interpretation of his laborious past.” This reinterpretation is *explicit* in his lament and is underscored by his disorderly retelling of the labors.

<sup>62</sup> Part of the effect of the lament is to show the dehumanizing pain Heracles is suffering, and his language is correspondingly disrupted (Segal 93, Machin 274, 277). But tragic characters in deadly pain, either mental or physical, *can* tell coherent stories (e.g., Polymestor at Eur. *Hec.* 1132–82).

<sup>63</sup> His refusal of other models for his own present pain does however directly echo the introductory priamelis used by Deianeira, the Messenger, and the Chorus (Race [above, note 18] 92–3).

<sup>64</sup> Reinhardt 60; one could add to the examples quoted by Easterling *ad loc.* the oracle to Oedipus which depends on the meaning of the words μήτηρ and πάτηρ, as this one does on the identity of the “Αἰδου...οἰκῆτορ (1161). Heracles' dismissal of Deianeira has bothered many critics (Kitto<sup>3</sup> 294–95, Whitman 119, Machin 274, Garner [above, note 34] 109), but explanations such as Kamerbeek's *ad* 1145, that the hero's failure to apologize to Deianeira is “the poet's deliberate

the story of how Deianeira came to kill Heracles—now functions like an oracle, and once it has been correctly deciphered Heracles concentrates not on the mistaken interpretation (a woman deceitfully attacked him out of jealousy) but on the right one (Zeus' prophecy has been fulfilled).

Once he has the new information that his son has provided Heracles tells his own story (1159–73), the shortest in the play and the one whose interpretation is least ambiguous. Again there is no real chronological or narrative coherence with previous stories. Heracles simply reports the discrete giving of two oracles. He repeats, and can now decipher, an ancient prophecy from Zeus that foretold that he would die at the hands of one already dead (1160–61); he can also now read the oracle from Dodona that has been haunting the play. It is the congruence of the two that is important, as it was the congruence of place and time that reminded Deianeira of the prophecies her husband left behind.

The past is once again relevant for Heracles; indeed, it is all-important. He repeats Hyllus' *πάλαι* twice in describing the oracles from Zeus (1159, 1165). The oracle about Nessus, mentioned here for the first time (without detail of time or place), may be the oldest old thing in the play—Heracles reports it before the one from the Selloi—though perhaps not older than the *ἀρχαῖος λόγος* under whose sign the entire *πρᾶξις* is played out. For the first time there is an unmistakeable correspondence between past and present, even more unshakeable than the convergence of time and place at the beginning. Twice in his brief speech Heracles points to the confluence (1165, 1174) and twice demands that Hyllus himself prove equal to the past, that is, equal to his father (1157–58, 1175–78). With the coming together of the two oracles a fixed meaning can be assigned to each, which in at least one case involves an explicit revision of an earlier reading: *κἀδόκουν πράξειν καλῶς* (1171). By rigorously excluding from discussion all details that do not pertain to his own story, Heracles forces the plot to a halt, and a *dénouement* is reached (*λύσιν τελεῖσθαι* 1171).<sup>65</sup>

The play itself appears to ratify this *λύσις*. As with the earlier Deianeira drama there are formal devices with which Sophocles signals closure: the close of the ring opened by the first prediction of Heracles' return, the final prophecy and lament, the imminent death of the hero; finally, *τέλος* words begin to accumulate (1171, 1187, 1252, 1256 [with *ὑστάτη*], 1257, 1263). The end is all fulfillment. As the play draws to a close Heracles imposes silence on himself as Deianeira did on herself at the end of her story, and the procession leaves for Mount Oeta and the pyre.

Still, the play's solution of its knotted plot has seemed unsatisfactory to many. Sophocles does not mention the Oetaean apotheosis, yet Heracles'

indication that she does not mean anything to him" concentrate on the emotional aspect to the exclusion of the structural and, it seems to me, miss the point. For a sensible reading of the dismissal in thematic terms see C. E. Sorum, "Monsters and the Family: the Exodos of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *GRBS* 19 (1978) 67 with note 16.

<sup>65</sup> Heiden 144 remarks that at 1143–74 Heracles "apparently casts the action of the *Trachiniae* into its definitive narrative shape." On a similar critical dovetailing of two riddling utterances (Oedipus' curse and the oracle to Laius) see F. I. Zeitlin, *Under the Sign of the Shield* (Rome 1982) 17–20.

insistence on the pyre that Hyllus must build draws attention to that version, even as his brutal demand that Hyllus marry Iole makes us aware that Heracles will continue to live through his descendants, the Heracleidae. By stressing the locus of the pyre but not the myth familiarly associated with it, Sophocles as author does what his characters have done over and over again: he leaves out a significant detail.<sup>66</sup>

Those who believe that the end of the *Trachiniae* alludes to the apotheosis usually cite line 1270 (τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ' οὐδεὶς ἐφορᾷ) to support their claim.<sup>67</sup> But in a play that so obsessively tries to eliminate uncertainty Hyllus' words may be no more than a reflex of his mother's anxieties. More telling is Heracles' insistence on the pyre, which as in other Sophoclean endings uses the audience's mythological knowledge to allude to a future outside the drama.<sup>68</sup> And the rhythms of the *Trachiniae*, the repeated insistence on a fixed ending that is then overturned, offer confirmation that this ending, too, may be open. Each τέλος, including Deianeira's death, has undergone reinterpretation; there is no reason to think that Zeus' dispensation as the characters understand it is final.

This open-ended reading finds support in another scene in the exodos where there is a similar allusion to other parts of Heracles' saga. At 1147–50 the hero, knowing that he will die, asks Hyllus to assemble all his family including his other children and his mother. Hyllus answers that they are not here: Alcmene is at Tiryns taking care of some of the children, while others are at Thebes (1151–54). Easterling (ad loc.) thinks this detail is added to emphasize the solemnity of the occasion: Heracles wishes to make a death-bed statement. But why make the request only to have it refused on the grounds that these people are not here?<sup>69</sup> And why have Hyllus explain that some of the children are in Thebes, a place otherwise connected with Heracles in this play only in passing (116, 510–11)?

Jebb notes (ad 1151ff.) that Sophocles here alludes to other parts of Heracles' myth and explains that Alcmene and some children had returned to Tiryns after the whole family had been exiled (38–40). His comment on τὸ

<sup>66</sup> So also Heiden 159.

<sup>67</sup> Arguing for a reference: Segal 99–100, YCS 138ff., 157; Winnington-Ingram 215 note 33; Scodel 40, Heiden 156–57 (both with reservations) Garner (above, note 34) 110. Easterling in a characteristically thoughtful discussion (8–11) agrees that an allusion is felt by the audience, but “whether this is leading to a good or a bad end is not made clear, and Heracles himself shows no signs of understanding it” (10). Against, Reinhardt 63, Kitto<sup>3</sup> 294, Whitman 120, Machin 477n. 288.

<sup>68</sup> On other plays see Easterling 11, Roberts (above, note 1) 165 note 14, and her “Sophoclean Endings: Another Story,” *Arethusa* 21 (1988) 177–96.

<sup>69</sup> Easterling's answer, that the extra characters would be distracting, does not explain the awkwardness of the exchange. Sorum (above, note 64) sees the summoning as an indication that the “transformed Heracles” wishes to heal his family, but does not comment on the dramatic awkwardness. Machin's explanation (277), that the exchange demonstrates Heracles' loss of reason in his pain, is much less plausible. Sophocles again draws attention to a slightly awkward dramatic situation that would otherwise pass unnoticed at 189 when the Messenger reminds Deianeira that Lichas should have brought the news. Here, the family's absence would probably never have occurred to anyone without this exchange. On the technique, which is particularly Euripidean, see the recent discussion of Scodel (above, note 17).

Θήβης ἄστρ (1154), however, is less satisfactory.<sup>70</sup> Thebes is not just Heracles' birthplace, it is also the site of his most horrible deed, the murders of Megara and her children, an event that in the standard version of his saga precedes the labors.<sup>71</sup> If Sophocles has made this moment deliberately awkward in order to allude to other parts of the myth, there is even more reason to think that by repeatedly mentioning Mount Oeta the playwright is inviting us to think of a variant version of Heracles' death. The play's narrative as a whole thus recapitulates the movement described by the narratives within it, ultimately refusing closure.

There are few more familiar *topoi* in tragedy than that one should count no one happy before death. But the particular expression it is given in the *Trachiniae*, the use of stories—τὰ κλέα ἀνδρῶν—to revise the story of Heracles ὁ κλεινός (19), is both unusual and appropriate. A fragment of Archilochus preserved in Dio Chrysostom (60.1, 286 West) suggests that Sophocles may have drawn on tradition in couching his play in these terms. People criticized the *Trachiniae*, Dio says, because of the implausibility of having Heracles kill Nessus while the centaur and Deianeira were still in the middle of the river. They also criticized Archilochus:

φασὶ γὰρ οἱ μὲν τὸν Ἀρχίλοχον ληρεῖν ποιοῦντα τὴν  
Δηϊάνειραν ἐν τῷ βιάζεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ Κενταύρου πρὸς τὸν  
Ἡρακλέα ραψωιδῶσαν, ἀναμνησκουσάν τῆς τοῦ Ἀχελώιου  
μνηστείας καὶ τῶν τότε γενομένων, ὥστε πολλὴν σχολὴν εἶναι  
τῷ Νεσσῶι ὅτι ἐβούλετο πρᾶξαι.

Archilochus' character, like Sophocles', uses a narrative about the past to motivate and justify action in the present; even more remarkably, her narration is leisurely, recalling both the courtship of Achelous and all that happened then at almost ludicrous length.<sup>72</sup> Deianeira, as it seems, has always been a storyteller.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> "Thebes, the birthplace of Herakles...was a place where some of his children might well find friends...the logographer Pherecydes...related that, after the death of Eurysthenes, Thebes became the home of the Heracleidae."

<sup>71</sup> He would thus have come from Thebes to court Deianeira (cf. 510–11 Βακχίας ἄπο...Θήβας). In his *Heracles* Euripides takes him to Athens after the murders, but he has changed the order of events (G. W. Bond ed., *Euripides: Heracles* [Oxford 1981] xxviii–xxx). Another less plausible allusion in the *Trachiniae* to Heracles' Theban madness is discussed by Heiden 29–30 (on 33, Heracles "reaping" his children).

<sup>72</sup> ραψωιδίζω can simply mean "declaim" (Dem. 14.12), but here it seems clearly to have its more common meaning "recite a long story/poem" (Diog. Laert. 9.18)—at the very least, "go on at length" (*Anth. Gr.* 9.369.2).

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