

THE HERO  
IN SOPHOCLES' TRACHINIAE

by

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# ABSTRACT

The Trachiniae has been seen as something of an anomaly among Sophocles' seven extant plays. It is the only play that is not named for its hero, and critics have argued variously that Deianeira, or Heracles, or both Deianeira and Heracles are the heroes of the play. This thesis seeks to establish Deianeira as the hero of the Trachiniae.

In order to provide an objective model against which both Deianeira and Heracles can be measured, a summary of eight views of the Sophoclean tragic hero, excluding references to the Trachiniae, is presented. Emphasis is given to the heroic model of B. M. W. Knox, who himself, believing that the Trachiniae is not clearly based on the figure of a tragic hero, excludes it from his development of a heroic model.

The models of the Sophoclean hero do apply to the Trachiniae, and Deianeira, not Heracles, is the hero. The lives and deaths of Deianeira and Heracles are interrelated in the closest possible way, but, by looking with a discerning eye, one discovers that Deianeira is the leading dramatic figure. Deianeira fulfills the heroic characteristics, including those presented by Knox, remarkably well. Within the play, Deianeira faces the supreme crisis of her life. Isolated in time and space to a profound degree, she finds the source and greatness of her free and responsible action of trying to recover Heracles' love within herself alone. Even though she acts out of love for Heracles, her dependence on the power of the "charms" of the love-philtre suggests defiance of and withdrawal from Cypris' will and power. By her act, she becomes totally and tragically isolated from men and abandoned by the gods. She destroys Heracles, her one key to the worlds outside and inside herself.

By her love, she destroys what she most loves and her own identity. Like Ajax, she is unwilling to live without that identity, and so, in a quiet display of nobility and strength, sacrifices herself to the same love that made her unwittingly sacrifice Heracles. Throughout the play it is Deianeira's will and strength that cause and suffer the dramatic movement and tension. It is her will to obtain the truth about Iole from Lichas, to send the anointed robe to Heracles, and to die without attempting to receive forgiveness from Hyllus or Heracles. Deianeira's will and fate act upon Heracles. Heracles belongs to her but she does not belong to him and hence it is she who is dramatically independent. The destruction of Heracles is a direct result of an action of her will and is the culmination of her tragedy.

Heracles does not rise to meet his fate but is full of bitterness against the fate that has brought him down at the hands of a woman. Unlike Deianeira, who within the course of the play reaches her end and fulfills her heroic will, Heracles does not meet his final end, death and release from his labors; nor does he hold any control over his destiny. He is helpless and weak in his suffering until he hears Nessus' name, at which time he accepts the inevitability of his fate. Throughout the play he is treated more as a force than a person. Nor is he independent; he is a slave to the metaphorical *vócos* of his passion and its physical manifestations. His catastrophe is the result of his general depravity rather than a single error. He accepts no responsibility for any of his actions and is, in fact, a pawn in the action of the series of events set in motion by Deianeira. His own action is merely in response to Deianeira's and exercises no control over the outcome of the play's events. When he realizes the inevitability of his death, all action has already been taken. Nor is Heracles truly isolated. He is, instead, extremely self-centered

His self-centeredness is at its most obvious during his suffering, which he is not able to endure and so to rise to the stature of a moral hero. He will meet his death without having risen above his own nature; his death will mark the end of his life and sufferings, but nothing more. Heracles does not satisfy many of the characteristics ascribed to other Sophoclean heroes. He could hardly be considered the hero of his scene, let alone of the entire play. In the play's structure, Heracles exists because of Deianeira, whose life and death do have a purpose in the play. In fact, Heracles is the unheroic with which the heroic Deianeira is contrasted.

Heracles does not appear until Deianeira has killed herself for love of him, and the total terror of his self-centered existence is the realization of the full tragedy of her life and death. His appearance at the end of the play and complete lack of interest in her death and innocence consummate her tragedy. One looks at Heracles to see what the object of Deianeira's great love really is.

The play is named for the Chorus instead of for Deianeira. In this respect, the relationship between Deianeira and the Chorus is significant. Deianeira appears to a certain degree to be the leader of the Chorus of Trachinian maidens. The similarity of their status to that of the maiden Deianeira's points to them as universalizing agents of the personal and tragic life of Deianeira, the hero of the Trachiniae.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	v
ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	vi
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
CHAPTER ONE     THE SOPHOCLEAN HERO . . . . .	5
NOTES -- CHAPTER ONE . . . . .	30
CHAPTER TWO     DEIANEIRA . . . . .	39
NOTES -- CHAPTER TWO . . . . .	80
CHAPTER THREE     HERACLES . . . . .	92
NOTES -- CHAPTER THREE . . . . .	123
CHAPTER FOUR     CONCLUSION: DEIANEIRA THE TRACHINIAN . . . . .	130
NOTES -- CHAPTER FOUR . . . . .	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	144

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Summary

The prologue (1-93) of the Trachiniae begins with Deianeira's monologue in which she relates her present situation and how it arose from her past life. She is married to Heracles, who was the victor in a combat with Acheloüs, and she tells of her worries and troubles as his wife. Her anxiety, caused by Heracles' absence of more than a year, is increased by the news of her son, Hyllus, that Heracles, after being in service to a Lydian woman for a year, is about to besiege Eurytus' town in Euboea. Deianeira relates that the oracles have set this expedition as the last of Heracles' toils; he will now either meet death or have a happy life for the rest of his time. Hyllus then leaves to make inquiries about Heracles.

During the parodos (94-140) the chorus of Trachinian maidens sing of the troubles of Heracles and Deianeira; they exhort Deianeira to maintain an expectation of good, because "grief and joy come circling to all" (129). In the first epeisodion (141-496) Deianeira addresses the Chorus, stressing again her unhappy situation and dwelling on the critical character of the present day. The sorrow is swept away in an outburst of joy following the Messenger's announcement of Heracles' victory and anticipated safe return, only to be followed by the approach of a mournful train of captives. Lichas enters with the captives and, in response to Deianeira's questions, tells of Eurytus' shameful treatment of Heracles, Heracles' treacherous murder of Iphitus, and Zeus' behest

that Heracles serve Omphale for a year in atonement for the murder. However, in response to Deianeira's inquiry about the identity of Iole, the captive whom she pities most, Lichas feigns ignorance. Deianeira, not knowing the real state of affairs, welcomes Iole into her house with love and pity. Having been informed by the Messenger that it was Heracles' passion for Iole that caused him to sack Oechalia, Deianeira persuades Lichas to tell the truth by means of a speech in which she admits the supreme power of Eros and recognizes that Heracles suffers from its sickness and has had other women before. After Lichas admits to the truth of Heracles' passion for Iole, Deianeira tells Lichas that she has messages for him to carry and gifts for him to take (ἀντὶ δώρων δῶρα, 494).

The first stasimon (497-530) presents the Chorus celebrating "the victory the Cyprian Goddess always wins" (497), illustrated by the struggle of Heracles and Acheloüs for Deianeira's hand. During the second epeisodion (531-632) Deianeira expresses the impossibility of sharing the same house and marriage with Iole, relates the story of Nessus and why she gathered his blood, and announces that she has anointed a garment with the blood (love philtre) to send to Heracles in the hope of regaining his affections. The Chorus does not dissuade her from her plan, and so she entrusts the garment to Lichas. The second stasimon (632-662), which is filled with happy expectancy, is followed by the fear and misery of Deianeira in the third epeisodion (663-820). Deianeira tells of the self-destruction of the wad of wool with which she has anointed the robe. She fears that the anointed garment will kill Heracles, and, if it does, she insists, she will die with him. The arrival of Hyllus with his denouncement of his mother and his tale of the sufferings of Heracles confirms Deianeira's fears. She leaves

the stage without a word.

The third stasimon (821-862) is a dirge on the events and underlying causes of the tragedy. It is followed by the fourth epeisodion (871-946), during which the Nurse enters from the house and announces Deianeira's suicide and relates Hyllus' realization of Deianeira's innocence. The fourth stasimon (947-970) is a lamentation by the Chorus of the calamities of Deianeira and Heracles.

The entrance of Heracles finally occurs in the exodus (971-1278). His mood is one of rage and centers mainly on his longing for death and for revenge on Deianeira. When Hyllus tells him of Deianeira's death and the circumstances surrounding her gift of the anointed garment, Heracles makes no mention of Deianeira. His consideration is for himself and his own inescapable fate. Heracles discloses the oracles that make clear to him that his end is imminent and then orders Hyllus both to help in the preparations for his cremation and to marry Iole.

## II. Date

No agreement has been reached by scholars on the dating of the Trachiniae. No external data are available and stylometric research has proved inconclusive in the case of Sophocles.<sup>1</sup> Earp's stylistic study suggests that the Trachiniae has an "affinity with the style of the Ajax and Antigone rather than with the later plays."<sup>2</sup> J. C. Kamerbeek feels that, although Earp's study makes a strong case on stylistic grounds, it does not prove an early date. Kamerbeek sees a probable terminus ante quem in the choral song of Euripides' Hippolytus where the story of Iole is referred to. He does not consider Euripides' Alcestis (438 B.C.) as a plausible terminus post quem.<sup>3</sup> The elaboration

of the character of Deianeira perhaps developed into the production of the still more detailed character-study of Electra. The tragic view of life expressed in the Trachiniae is much the same as that in the Oedipus Tyrannus although not so perfectly expressed. These observations taken together with the general structure of the play (the Trachiniae is of the so-called diptych form, which does not occur after the Oedipus Tyrannus) lead Kamerbeek to range the Trachiniae chronologically with the Ajax and the Antigone and "to confess our inability to name a more precise date."<sup>4</sup>

Whitman sides with Kamerbeek, but is slightly more specific. He reaches the conclusion that the Trachiniae was produced some time after, and probably rather soon after, 438 and before the Oedipus Tyrannus.<sup>5</sup>

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SOPHOCLEAN HERO

The unity of the Trachiniae is based on the close interrelation of various mythical elements, on the oracles that bring the working of the gods into contact with the human level and organize the events of the play, and, most important, on the interrelation and interdependence of the two principal figures, Deianeira and Heracles. Deianeira's and Heracles' separate actions, lives, and deaths are inextricably intertwined even though they never come into direct contact with each other during the course of the play. The substance of the play lies in the characters; but which of the two main figures is the hero, or do they both fill this role? This is the question that this study will try to answer.

Before the question of the identity of the hero in Sophocles' Trachiniae can be considered (and perhaps even before such a question can be accurately formulated) the basic nature of a Sophoclean tragic hero must be defined. In order to consider the question more objectively, it will be helpful to determine basic heroic traits and characteristics and to mold these into a model or series of models against which the possible heroes in the Trachiniae can be measured.

To formulate a concept of the Sophoclean hero both directly from the plays and from various works dealing with the subject is a necessary task but one made difficult by the complexities involved and the inherent limitations of the result. G. M. Kirkwood points out two of these limitations.<sup>6</sup> First, generalization from the extant plays does not represent a synthesis made by Sophocles nor is it certain that the view

of life and human character represented by this generalization was something Sophocles specifically endeavored to describe. Second, no one generalization (even if it describes a fact central to Sophoclean thought) is necessarily of central importance for Sophocles' plays. Differences and individuality of character are more important than similarity.

One may hope that by recognizing these limitations one will become less limited by them. Also, it is useful to point out that the purpose of the synthesis of the heroic character in this study is not simply to determine the nature of the Sophoclean hero as an end in itself, but rather to determine the nature of the hero for use as a tool and a test in attempting, in turn, to determine who is the hero in the Trachiniae. The remainder of this chapter contains a summary of eight views of the Sophoclean hero.<sup>7</sup>

## I. Aristotle

Perhaps the best place to begin is with a ready-made "synthesis" of the tragic hero. Aristotle's definition of the various necessary requirements of the tragic hero is one that is external to the plays of Sophocles but has become an integral part of most subsequent considerations of the Sophoclean hero. Since, in Aristotle's view, for the finest form of tragedy the plot must "imitate actions arousing fear and pity" (φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεεινῶν),<sup>8</sup> it must involve "a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity."

(ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ  
μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν  
ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά, τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία, 1453a.)

The hero's fortunes must change from happiness to misery (ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν), and the cause of this "must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part" (μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ δι' ἀμαρτίαν μεγάλην). The plot "should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents" (ἄνευ τοῦ ὁρᾶν οὕτω συνεστάναι τὸν μῦθον ὥστε τὸν ἀκούοντα τὰ πράγματα γινόμενα καὶ φρίττειν καὶ ἐλεεῖν ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων).<sup>9</sup> Aristotle also claims that the poet should seek after tragic deeds done within the family (οἶον ἢ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν ἢ υἱὸς πατέρα ἢ μήτηρ υἱὸν ἢ υἱὸς μητέρα ἀποκτείνει ἢ μέλλῃ ἢ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον δοῦναι). The doer may do the deed "knowingly and consciously" (εἰδότες καὶ γινώσκοντας) or "in ignorance of his relationship, and discover that afterwards" (ἀγνοοῦντας δὲ πράξει τὸ δεινόν, εἴθ' ὕστερον ἀναγνωρίσαι τὴν φιλίαν, 1453b).

Concerning the presentation of characters, he states four qualities at which one should aim. They should be made good (χρηστά), appropriate (τὸ ἀρμότιον), like reality (τὸ ὁμοίον), and consistent and the same throughout (τὸ ὁμαλόν). Another of Aristotle's requirements is that tragedy should be "an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man" (1453b) and that the portrayal of men "quick or slow to anger, or with similar infirmities of character," must reflect that fact. Although they have infirmities of character, they must be represented as good men.

## II. Knox

The modern concept of Greek drama is not without Aristotelian influences, but is not so external to the plays themselves as is his. It takes for granted a single, central character whose action and suffering are the focal point of the play, this character being "the



tragic hero." According to B.M.W. Knox, the dramatic method of presenting the tragic dilemma "in the figure of a single dominating character seems in fact to be an invention of Sophocles."<sup>10</sup> The reasoning and evidence that Knox presents for this assumption is of interest here, because it throws light upon the role of the hero.

Sophocles abandoned the trilogic combination in favor of the single play (so far as we can judge, each of his extant plays is complete in itself as opposed to being part of a thematically connected trilogy), an action closely related to the origin of the tragic hero. Aeschylus in his trilogies had shown "how evil in the long course of things fell within the just and progressive cosmos of Zeus, bringing wisdom with time in the wake of suffering."<sup>11</sup> Sophocles, however, chose to use the single play, by means of which he was able to present "the morality of individual man in the face of irrational evil."<sup>12</sup> Whether it was Sophocles' revolutionary move of abandoning the trilogy that produced the tragic hero, or whether the abandonment was the result of the concept of the hero, the reduction of scope (from three plays to one) made possible the presentation of a tragic dilemma "in terms of a single personality facing the supreme crisis of his life."<sup>13</sup> Sophocles was responsible for both innovations, but his special hallmark is his concentration on the central figure.

In addition to abandoning the trilogy, Sophocles also added the third speaking actor and by these two actions, in a sense, invented tragedy as it is known today--"the confrontation of his destiny by a heroic individual whose freedom of action implies full responsibility."<sup>14</sup> The concentration of the drama on a great crisis of the hero's life demands a single play and a third actor. That this concentration on one central figure was recognized in the ancient world is suggested by the

titles assigned to his plays.<sup>15</sup> The Trachiniae alone of the seven extant tragedies is named after the chorus instead of the central figure, and, according to Knox, "that is the only one of the seven which is not clearly based on the figure of a tragic hero."<sup>16</sup> The characteristics of the heroes in the other six plays, however, Knox develops within a quite comprehensive scheme. A summary of his views follows.

The Sophoclean tragic hero is isolated. The isolation of time and space impose on him the full responsibility of his own action and its consequences and compel him to act in the present without a past to guide him or a future to comfort him. The source of his action, as does the greatness of his action, belongs to the hero alone. This free and responsible action brings the hero through suffering sometimes to victory, but more often causes him to fall and experience defeat before he reaches the final victory. For the hero, suffering and glory are fused into an indissoluble unity.

In refusing to accept his human limitations, the heroic individual renders his action fully autonomous. By defying the gods, who have imposed these limitations, he removes from them any responsibility for his action and its consequences. Nevertheless, despite the hero's self-created isolation, the presence of the gods is always felt in Sophoclean drama. Even though the hero fights against them, one feels that perhaps the gods have more concern and respect for him than for the common man. As Knox says, "the gods too seem to recognize greatness."<sup>17</sup>

In six of the seven extant plays of Sophocles (excluding the Trachiniae), the hero is faced with a choice between two possibilities. He may accept either possible (often certain) disaster or a compromise that, if accepted, will betray the hero's conception of himself, his rights, and his duties. Having decided against the course of compromise,

the hero finds his decision assailed, but nevertheless refuses to yield; he remains true to his physis.<sup>18</sup> Ajax decides to die rather than to submit. Antigone remains loyal to her brother and Electra to her father. Philoctetes refuses to go to Troy. Oedipus Tyrannus insists on knowing the truth about Laius' murder and about himself, and Oedipus Coloneus insists on being buried in Attic soil. It is this resolution of the hero that leads to the dramatic tension of the plays. The resultant effect of this dramatic action on the hero and his situation, Knox thinks, is well described by the image comparing Oedipus as a blind old man to "some sea cape in the North, with the storm waves beating against it from every quarter, πάντοθεν βόρειος ὥς τις ἀκτὰ/ κυματπλήξ χειμερία κλονεῖται. (O.C. 1240-1241).

In the six plays under consideration, the mold in which the hero is cast, the situation in which he is placed, his intransigence, and the formulas of language with which he and his opponents express themselves are all similar. Certain recurrent patterns of character, situation, and language that are characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy follow. The hero's decision and resolve to act are always announced in emphatic, uncompromising terms.<sup>19</sup> The form of attack on his resolve that is most difficult to resist is the emotional appeal of those having claims on his affections, such as Tecmessa's appeals to Ajax (in the name of her love and his son), Chrysothemis' to Electra, Jocasta's to Oedipus Tyrannus, and Polyneices' to Oedipus Coloneus.<sup>20</sup> The usual assault on the hero's will is an appeal to reason (not to emotion).<sup>21</sup> The method of rational argument is persuasion (πείθω, πείθομαι). The hero disobeys by withstanding persuasion (ἀπιστέω).<sup>22</sup> The hero needs to learn, in the eyes of his friends and enemies.<sup>23</sup> The appeals to reason and emotion and the advice to reflect and be persuaded constitute a demand for the hero to yield

(εἴκειν).<sup>24</sup> An appeal to retreat is made to all Sophoclean heroes; heroes, however, do not know how to give in to misfortunes (Ant. 471). The hero refuses to yield, replying to such a demand with the characteristically Sophoclean word εἶν ("leave alone, allow, let"). The hero will not listen (κλύειν, ἀκούειν), thus making it hard to urge surrender on him.<sup>25</sup> The hero does not want to hear.<sup>26</sup> He will not listen, but hears enough to know that he is under attack and reacts swiftly and violently, creating a difficult position for those trying to advise him.<sup>27</sup> All heroes treat advice and objections in the same fierce way--they are all angry heroes, and any attempt made to sway or hinder them provokes their anger.<sup>28</sup> To the people around them this angry, stubborn temper seems "thoughtless, ill-counselled." To the outside world the hero's temper is "mindless, senseless, mad," and the hero seems to be unable to think out the right course of action.<sup>29</sup> The hero can even be described as μῶρος, "foolish." The condemnation of the hero's temper is a moral as well as intellectual one, and to his friends and enemies his mood seems to be one of τόλμη and θράσος, "overboldness, rashness, insolence, audacity." The hero is also described in such terms as ἄγριος, "wild" (like a beast), ὠμός, "raw, savage," σκληρός, "hard" (like metal). One word applied to all the heroes to describe their character and action is δεινός, "strange, dreadful, terrible." The heroes are δεινοί because they lack a sense of proportion and a capacity for moderation. The actions of these heroes, as well as the heroes themselves, are περισσό, "outsized, extraordinary, prodigious." Those confronting them hold a futile hope that these heroic possessors of incorrigible natures will in time realize what is good for them and that the hero can be taught by time to change his stubborn mind and realize the truth.<sup>30</sup> The hero, however, remains unchanged, since time and its imperative of change are exactly

what the Sophoclean hero defies. All-powerful Time, in fact, is the hero's real adversary and to reject it is, in Oedipus' words to Theseus, "to be in love with the impossible." By his refusal to accept human limitations, the hero achieves his true greatness, not by the help and encouragement of the gods, but by his loyalty to his nature in trial, suffering, and death.

In the opinion of the other characters the hero is unreasonable, suicidally bold, impervious to argument, intransigent, angry, and impossible--able to be cured only by time. In the eyes of the hero, however, the opinion of others is irrelevant; he is loyal only to his conception of himself.<sup>31</sup> Antigone justifies her defiance of public opinion and of the polis by her εὐγένεια (claim of noble birth), κλέος (desire for glory), and εὐσέβεια (religious feelings). Electra, Ajax, Oedipus Tyrannus, Oedipus Coloneus, and Philoctetes also experience these same attitudes. Motives may differ, but the mood is the same in all. Driven by θυμός (passion), they are closed to the appeals of reason. They do possess reason but will not listen to it, preferring to obey the commands of their passionate natures that are exasperated by the feeling that they are treated disrespectfully (ἀτίμως) or are, at least, denied τιμή (respect). In such cases their own sense of worth and consideration of what is due to them from others are outraged.<sup>32</sup> Forming an extreme impression of this lack of respect, they feel that the world as well is mocking them,<sup>33</sup> and they turn more firmly into themselves. Resenting those whom they consider responsible for their sufferings, they appeal for vengeance and curse their enemies, although they use no more dreadful curse than that their enemies may experience what they themselves are suffering.<sup>34</sup>

In this way the hero enters into his (previously mentioned) characteristic isolation. He is (or becomes) *μόνος* (alone), and *ἐρῆμος* (abandoned, deserted), not only isolated from men but abandoned by the gods.<sup>35</sup> So total is his isolation that at certain moments he addresses himself to the landscape, which is unchanging and will not betray him.<sup>36</sup> The final result of the hero's isolation from the world of men is his wish for death.<sup>37</sup> By choosing death, he arrives at the logical end of his refusal to compromise. Living in human society is one continuous compromise of subduing one's own will and desires to the requirements of others. In Sophoclean tragedy it would be a betrayal of the hero's physis for him to compromise and still respect himself. To surrender would cause him to lose his identity.<sup>38</sup>

A strong sense of his identity, his individual and independent existence, his difference from others and his resultant uniqueness, and his own worth as an individual, is a marked trait of the hero. This highly developed sense of individuality is significant in determining his action. His decision at a critical moment becomes a matter of choosing between defiance and loss of identity (the latter choice being impossible for him to make). The anger he feels at the world's denial of respect becomes further exasperated, because he feels his sense of worth has been violated. In moments of crisis and abandonment this sense of or belief in himself becomes his only support. Sophoclean heroes are aware of and insist on their uniqueness and sharply differentiated individuality. Philoctetes is a prime example of this; having lived alone brooding on his wrongs for ten years, he is very conscious of his own identity. With their fierce sense of independence, heroes will not submit to being ruled but remain free, finding the choice of slavery over freedom an intolerable one. Having set his own conditions for

existence, the hero is more prepared to leave life than to change and insists on asserting his will to the absolute end of defiance, death.

In his refusal to accept the limitations imposed on humans by mortality and in his resistance to the imperatives of time and circumstance (all things change, but he will not), the hero makes what Knox refers to as "an assumption of divinity." (This is not to say that the heroes ever consciously claim to be gods.) "Only the gods are eternal and unchanging"<sup>39</sup>; and, in the words of Oedipus to Theseus, "everything else is confounded by all-powerful time" (O.C. 609).

Once his decision has been taken, the Sophoclean hero is , according to Knox, immovable,

deaf to appeals and persuasion, to reproof and threat, unterrified by physical violence, even by the ultimate violence of death itself, more stubborn as his isolation increases until he has no one to speak to but the unfeeling landscape, bitter at the disrespect and mockery the world levels at what it regards as a failure, the hero prays for revenge and curses his enemies as he welcomes the death that is the predictable end of his intransigence.<sup>40</sup>

The final point in this list of characteristics is of particular importance in relation to the Sophoclean hero, because only the fact of death can make an action heroic. "Heroism and tragedy are the peculiar province and privilege of mortal men."<sup>41</sup>

The ancient Greek mind seems to have considered passionate self-esteem almost divine, no matter how weakly justified it might have been or to what crimes it led.<sup>42</sup> Nilsson says, in relation to hero-cults, that a hero is not recognized because of his services but because he possesses some special strength, which is not necessarily beneficent.<sup>43</sup>

The attraction that the hero was able to offer to the ancient Greeks was the assurance that some people are capable of superhuman greatness. The hero, by denying the imperatives that others obey in order to live, served as a reminder that a human may at times defy the limits imposed on one's will by fear of public opinion, community-action, or death, refuse to accept humiliation and indifference, impose his will despite the consequences to others and himself.<sup>44</sup> He echoes the Homeric war-hero, because he values his own life as nothing. He will be echoed by Socrates<sup>45</sup>; in great crises of the soul he is loyal to the guiding principle of his life.

### III. Whitman

For C. H. Whitman the Sophoclean hero becomes even more idealized.<sup>46</sup> He believes that Sophocles held a single religious hope, namely, a hope in the ultimate value of man. Likewise, he believes that a single tragic idea underlies the wide differences of Sophocles' plays, and that is "the idea of tragic areté or self-destructive heroism."<sup>47</sup> The true action of every Sophoclean play lies in the behavior and will of the tragic hero, and every Sophoclean tragic hero is an example of areté. His encounters with disasters and trials result from the clash between his areté and the imperfections of other human beings, the traditional gods, and life itself. The indomitable will of the struggling hero, and not the conventional Olympian figures, is the source of true divinity. What many critics take as the hero's faults (here the hero becomes very idealized) are not faults, but signs of his perfection that conflict with the blindness and wrongness of life about him. The chorus and "normal" characters become only a framework to set off by contrast the unique



greatness of the hero.<sup>48</sup> The moral nature of the hero's position must be judged by his own standard, as he reveals it in the play.

With his self-knowledge and supreme areté, the hero has a divinity within himself that is often in opposition to the "gods" of popular belief who Whitman feels are seen either as amoral symbols of the laws of life or as positively unjust.<sup>49</sup> Through his moral action of self-immolation or endurance, the hero combines his own inner divinity with that of the amoral and non-active God, to form the all-embracing realm of universal divinity or Being as a whole.

The Sophoclean hero has a refined and true understanding of himself that allows for the possibility that, although in the mind of others he is a law unto himself, he may be acting in obedience to a true law that remains beyond the vision of others. Whitman believes that the hero himself has real self-knowledge whereas others have only rules of behavior; and therefore, if the Sophoclean dramas teach sophrosyne, the sophrosyne is in the character of the hero, not in the chorus or lesser characters. It may be customary to side with the forces opposing the hero in the belief that they alone are divine; however, although they are usually divine, they are not of necessity morally right.

Choral criticism convicts Antigone of harshness and stubbornness, Oedipus of rashness of temper, Philoctetes of obstinacy, Ajax of a noble and overweening attitude, and Electra of drawing more trouble on herself than necessary by her constant mourning for Agamemnon.<sup>50</sup> All these faults are essentially the same thing--stubbornness, self-willed independence, authadeia--which keeps the hero from yielding to his fate and makes him talk harshly and proudly. Since, if we trust the chorus, we must believe that Sophocles wrote only about the evil effects of stubbornness, Whitman asks why, if stubbornness is a fault the gods

punish, it is not consistently punished.<sup>51</sup> To rebuke the protagonist for his faults is to imply that one knows what he should have done.<sup>52</sup>

Whitman rejects Aristotle's theory of hamartia, because he believes that the sin-and-punishment formula turns the plays into interpretations of Aristotle, not of Sophocles.<sup>53</sup>

He also rejects Aristotle's view that a play showing the fall of a perfectly just man would be disgusting (Poetics 1452 b36). "Many a play showed the fall of a just man, and the men of the fifth century seem not to have been disgusted at all."<sup>54</sup> Whitman holds Plato's criticism of tragedy to be valid, in its consideration that the good man did not receive his deserts and that tragedy did show the world's injustice.<sup>55</sup> Sophocles was perhaps concerned not with justice, but with divine injustice. Maybe his world was not subject to simple moral rules, but really was tragic. The point that Whitman makes is that Sophocles was religious rather than pious, and therefore the Sophoclean hero "seems to be less under obligation to worship the gods than to fulfill his duty to himself."<sup>56</sup>

#### IV. Bowra and Schadewaldt

Bowra and Schadewaldt both hold views different from Whitman's. Bowra claims that "the central idea of a Sophoclean tragedy is that through suffering a man learns to be modest before the gods."<sup>57</sup> He speaks of the "humiliation" of the hero before the gods as the necessary condition of his "coming to peace" with them and considers that most of the heroes, although far from faultless at the beginning of the play, by the end of the play have had their illusions removed and accept the ways of the gods. Schadewaldt subordinates the Sophoclean hero to the

gods to a slightly lesser extent than Bowra does. He believes that the absolute character of the sufferings of the hero is emphasized by his isolation and the apparent hopelessness of his position. Through his sufferings the hero finds his true self<sup>58</sup> and proves his heroic greatness (this being possible only because his affliction is absolute). Like Bowra, Schadewaldt believes that the crisis of the play changes the hero's hybris into sophrosyne, thus restoring harmony between him and the gods.

Knox counters this view by remarking that,

Sophocles presents us for the first time with what we recognize as a 'tragic hero': one who, unsupported by the gods and in the face of human opposition, makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, his physis, and then blindly, ferociously, heroically maintains that decision even to the point of self-destruction.<sup>59</sup>

When the hero's decision, made without the support of the gods, is carried through to his self-destruction, there seems to be little time, opportunity, or even desire for the hero to exchange his hybris for sophrosyne and to come into harmony with the gods.<sup>60</sup>

#### V. Webster

In the above quotation from Knox there is a mention of physis. Sophocles' development of the hero's physis forms one of T.B.L. Webster's six basic aspects of the Sophoclean hero.<sup>61</sup> According to Webster, the hero is conscious of his birth and, as one who is nobly born, conforms to certain standards of life and action. As a member of a family, he has a duty to be loyal to his parents and a right to expect loyalty from his children; affection is based on these duties, rights, and standards.

Ajax feels he cannot return home without having won as much glory before Troy as had his father, Telamon (καὶ ποῖον ὄμμα πατρὶ δηλώσω φανεῖς Τελαμῶνι, 462), and, in turn, demands the same courage from his son, Eurysaces (ταρβήσῃ γὰρ οὐ, / νεοσφαγῇ που τόνδε προσλεύσσω φόνον, 545-546). Antigone believes that her duty to her brother outweighs her duty to the state, a belief that arouses her strong affection (οὐτοῦ συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν, 523, also 89, 907). Electra likewise has a deep affection for and sense of duty to her deserving relations (father and brother, Agamemnon and Orestes; 1232): νῆπιος ὅς τῶν οἰκτρῶς / οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται, 145-146). Oedipus in the Tyrannus feels the ties of kinship very strongly. He loves and respects his supposed parents in Corinth, Polybus and Merope, so much that he leaves them for the purpose of foiling the oracle (998). He also has affection for Creon, as his brother-in-law (85), Jocasta (772), and his children, especially his daughters (1480). Oedipus in the Coloneus has the same affection for his daughters, which they have won because they fulfill their duty to him (1205-1615). By disregarding this duty, Creon and his sons have earned his hatred (337ff., 418, 1365). Philoctetes is able to form a bond of friendship with Neoptolemus because they both speak the common language of the noble and hold the same ideals (τὴν φύσιν δ' ἔδειξας, 1310). Like Ajax, Philoctetes has a deep affection for his father (πατρί μ' ὥς δεύξης φύλῳ, 492, also 1210).

In Webster's view, frankness, fortitude, and sensitiveness to shame also belong to the aristocratic ideal Sophocles attributes to the hero. Oedipus in the Tyrannus wants Creon's news published to all (ἐς πάντας αὖδα, 93), and Antigone (86) and Electra (1033) scorn concealment of their designs. Ajax regards it as dishonorable to lament in misfortune

πρὸς γὰρ κακοῦ τε καὶ βαρυψύχου γόους/ τοιούσδ' ἀεὶ ποτ' ἀνδρὸς ἐξηγεῖτ'  
 ἔχειν, 319). Electra (354), Philoctetes (535; 733), and Oedipus in the  
 Coloneus (5, 798) with their long-lasting physical and mental afflictions  
 are the most notable examples of fortitude. Electra is a slave in her  
 father's house; Philoctetes is abandoned on a lonely island with a  
 gangrened foot, Oedipus has been driven into exile by his own sons.  
 These various misfortunes affect their respective heroes by making them  
 emotional and unforgetful and unforgiving of those responsible, but  
 they cannot break their heroic fortitude.

Some evils that the hero suffers are too great to bear. Oedipus  
 Tyrannus (ἢ φονεύσατ', 1411) and Philoctetes (φονῆ φονῆ νόος ἦδη, 1208)  
 in the lowest depths of their misery would rather die than live. Ajax,  
 in the realization of his tarnished honor, finds death to be the only  
 cure for his shame (ἀλλά με συνδαίξον 361, οἴμοι γέλωτος, οἶον ὑβρίσθην  
 ἄρα, 367). Antigone prefers to die rather than accept the dishonor of  
 leaving her brother unburied (εἰ δὲ τοῦ χρόνου πρόσθεν θανοῦμαι, κέρδος  
 αὐτ' ἐγὼ λέγω, 461). Electra wants to die because it is intolerable to  
 her that she can not do her duty to her father's memory (ὥς χάρις μὲν,  
 ἣν κτάνη, λύπη δ', ἔαν ζῷ· τοῦ βίου δ' οὐδεὶς πόθος, 821).

The Sophoclean heroes (except Oedipus in the Coloneus) offend in some  
 way against the political ideal of Sophocles that the ruler rules in  
 the interest of his people and that the subject obeys him. Antigone  
 (453) and Electra (617) both rate the duty owed to their kin as higher  
 than that owed to the state. Ajax is not prepared to obey his general  
 Agamemnon (667; 1069). Philoctetes is like Ajax in his hatred of the  
 Atridae and in trying to take justice into his own hands, which he does  
 when he attempts to shoot Odysseus (1299).

Webster next states that, "besides the claims of family and state,

men have a duty to the gods."<sup>62</sup> However, Knox' consideration of the isolation of the hero and his abandonment by (or of) the gods seems to be a truer observation of the hero.<sup>63</sup> At the time of making their decisions, Antigone and Electra may have regarded the honor that they strive to pay to their dead kinsmen as a service to the gods imposed on them by the laws of the gods. During the course of the play, however, our awareness focuses on the actions of Antigone and Electra and their obsessions to carry out their own will. We are not particularly conscious of the possibility that that will is a handmaiden of the gods. One is, in fact, conscious of the absence of the gods from the hero. Of Oedipus, Webster writes, "He only departs from the traditional religion in moments of extreme stress."<sup>64</sup> Perhaps this is the key to the problem, for it seems that his departure from the traditional religion is more important in understanding him than his adherence to it. Both Ajax and Philoctetes have been driven to believe that the gods are malignant. Webster notes that the only place where Ajax reaches true reverence is during the monologue, when he says he is going to purify himself of his stains. It is of interest that this is said during Ajax' "deception" speech. The overriding belief of Ajax is that he is strong enough to stand alone without the advice and help of the gods.

πάτερ, θεοῖς μὲν ἅν ὁ μηδὲν ὦν ὁμοῦ  
κράτος κατακτήσαιτ'. ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ δῖχα  
κείνων πέποιθα τοῦτ' ἐπισπάσειν κλέος (767-769).

As for Philoctetes, Webster claims, rather unconvincingly, that his prayers for vengeance imply that the gods are just (but cf. 446ff.).

Webster is more convincing in his next category. "Sophocles regards the virtue of sophrosyne as second only to piety. His chief characters

are not remarkable for it,"<sup>65</sup> but exhibit arrogance, violence, haste, inflexibility, and folly. Ajax in his arrogance prays that his son may resemble him in everything but fortune (550). Ajax (885), Antigone (471), and Oedipus Tyrannus (371) display fierce spirits; all of them have a strain of cruelty and violence. Ajax (540), Oedipus (73), Electra (169), and Philoctetes (635) are all impatient as well as prompt to take action (Aj. 116; Phil. 1299; Ant. 37; El. 431, 938; O.T. 68, 794, 810, 1058).

Webster's final point is that the vices of arrogance, violence, haste, inflexibility, and folly are closely related to the virtues that the characters possess, such as spirit, energy, firmness, and idealism

## VI. Gellie

G. H. Gellie echoes the view expressed in Webster's final point when he claims that Sophoclean tragic heroes must be great-hearted, courageous, proud, self-contained, and also reflect the pejorative mirror-images of the good attributes by being stubborn, rash, and self-centered.

In Gellie's judgment, "The great Greek tragedies normally take a ready-made state of evil and the protagonist is called upon to deal with it. The nature of things is such that whatever action he takes will be wrong, but he acts and he is destroyed by his action."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, it is the protagonists who carry the themes of their plays and their characters that must accommodate themselves to those themes. Their minds are made up, they are beyond argument, they are committed (and thus, according to Gellie, lack a dimension as personalities), they refuse to admit heart-searching, and they lack appeal. On the contrary, the most

rounded characters are generally the least important persons in the plays. With their reasoned inaction or unwilling action, they serve as counterparts to the protagonist and his heroic action. Weakness, cowardice, and good sense result from unheroic qualities.

## VII. Kirkwood

Such unheroic qualities, according to Kirkwood, are secondary themes in a Sophoclean play, along with the following: fate, divine power and knowledge, human character with its ignorance, shortcomings, and wisdom and magnificence. In Kirkwood's view, heroic qualities are of primary importance. "At the heart of every play of Sophocles there lies the life-giving combination of strong character and revealing situation."<sup>67</sup> Sophoclean drama consists essentially of a series of tests of the central figure, from each of which he emerges newly revealed and with added strength.<sup>68</sup> Two quotations from Kirkwood introduce one of his basic interpretations of the Sophoclean hero. "A Sophoclean tragedy is a serious play in which a person of strong and noble character is confronted with a crucial situation and responds to it in his special way."<sup>69</sup> This crucial situation must involve suffering on the part of the principal character. "Sophoclean tragedy is an action in which admirable character and critical situation are combined; the situation involves religious and moral issues and entails suffering for the leading figure."<sup>70</sup>

All tragic heroes suffer. Of the six heroes under consideration Ajax, Antigone, and Oedipus in the Tyrannus have the most unrelieved suffering, which ends in death or disaster. Whether they are the victims of circumstances, of gods, or of men, or are responsible for their own



fates is unanswerable.<sup>71</sup> It would be a case of oversimplification to attribute to the hero unmixed perfection or to suppose that his suffering is entirely a punishment for his guilt. The inescapable conclusion, according to Kirkwood, is that Sophocles means us to see that neither a malevolent deity nor fate, but the hero himself is to a certain degree responsible for what happens to him. An example is the scene with Creon in Oedipus Tyrannus, which is "a demonstration of the blinding power of Oedipus' impetuosity and self-reliance."<sup>72</sup> Throughout the play there are examples of Oedipus' faults and his magnificence, neither of which should be overlooked.<sup>73</sup> The concern cannot be with the absolute perfection of the hero, nor with the question of his crime and punishment, but with the question of the responsibility of his character for his fate. Even an oracle does not remove responsibility from the hero. In the case of Oedipus, his acts were "not predestined, merely predicted. An essential distinction."<sup>74</sup>

Kirkwood believes that Sophocles is not intent on emphasizing the hero's moral shortcomings, but only that some element of character in each precipitates the catastrophe (e.g., Ajax' violence, Antigone's uncompromising stubbornness). It is just such an imperfection that allows the tragic hero to be brought to life as a human being. He possesses the standard human equipment of emotions and frailties, but more than the standard devotion to an ideal of conduct. Although every Sophoclean tragic hero encompasses much that is heroic in the moral sense, he is still not a hero in the absolute sense. Ajax having set out to murder his fellow chieftains is obviously culpable; Oedipus in the Tyrannus is excessively impetuous and self-reliant; Antigone is hostile and contemptuous in her disobedience of Creon's edict.

Such critics as Bowra and Webster, by overstressing the tragic hero's faults and failing to recognize the essential value of his nobility, suggest that Sophocles wished to show that man should be modest or the gods would punish him. Between that view and the other extreme of the impeccability of the tragic hero (Whitman), Kirkwood suggests a compromise, which he feels is demanded by the plays. "The faults of the tragic heroes are in the closest possible connection with their strength and nobility."<sup>75</sup> The violence of Ajax, rashness of Oedipus, stubbornness of Antigone are partially responsible for their catastrophes, but are a vital part of their great characters as Sophocles presents them, because they could not be the great figures that they are without these characteristics. The impetuosity of Oedipus is coupled with his courageous insistence on truth, which makes him great. The stubbornness of Antigone is linked to her strength of character in her loyalty to her family. The violence of Ajax is part of his firm devotion to soldierly honor. "Without their kind of hamartia they would not have their kind of heroism."<sup>76</sup> Sophocles was not interested in a flawless hero, but in the intricate interdependence of fault and greatness in the hero.

Nevertheless, "tragic fault is not guilt, and tragic suffering is not punishment."<sup>77</sup> The misfortunes that overwhelm the heroes are not morally deserved in terms of their character, although their character does precipitate the suffering. Although the sufferers sometimes ascribe cruelty to the gods, there is no evidence in Sophocles, according to Kirkwood, of the willful infliction of suffering by a deity on a tragic hero.

The Sophoclean tragic hero endures his suffering and rises to the stature of a moral hero because of his devotion to an ideal, which makes

him oblivious to the advice and common sense of his friends, and steadfast against his enemies. Ajax is loyal to the ideal of martial honor; Antigone, of loyalty to her family and "intuitive" religious conviction; Electra, of the devotion to her father; Philoctetes, of the refusal to compromise with dishonesty and the recognition of Neoptolemus' nobility. Kirkwood expresses this kind of devotion to an ideal in terms of "nobility," the character of the εὐγενής, a word used by Sophocles in reference to one "of noble birth" and "of noble nature"; it expresses the essence of heroism. Regardless of the hero's explicit vindication in or after life, the greatness of the εὐγενὴς ἄνθρωπος is recognizable in his person. Kirkwood's use of εὐγενής seems to be related to Knox' emphasis on φύσις; to be εὐγενής is in part a matter of one's own nature. Antigone tells Ismene that by her attitude toward the burial of Polyneices she will show:

εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακῇ

Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus that εὐγενὴς ἢ φύσις (his nature is noble) and he is ἐξ εὐγενῶν (874, descended from those of noble nature).

When applied to the heroic spirit, εὐγενής has both a personal and a moral meaning. The greatness of the hero's devotion to nobility shows that in heroism there exists an enduring value that stands firm in spite of suffering and death.<sup>78</sup> This is made clear by Sophocles' way of contrasting the heroic with the unheroic--Oedipus with Creon, Antigone with Creon and Ismene, Ajax with Odysseus.

## VII. Lesky

The heroes have souls tormented by the fullness of their knowledge of what their present situation means. According to A. Lesky, the result of this is that "in their acts they do not show the calm wisdom of

Odysseus, the very excess of their energy makes them collide with the unforeseeable; it throws their lives into a confusion from which only death can release them."<sup>79</sup> A summary of Lesky's views as applied to individual Sophoclean heroes follows.

For a character such as Ajax, who recognizes that his honor has suffered the deepest humiliation, no escape exists but death. Ajax proclaims in his first speech after having regained his sanity that there is no middle way for him between a great life and a great death.

οὐκ ἂν πριαίμην οὐδενὸς λόγου βροτῶν  
 ὅστις κενάτῃσιν ἐλπίσιν θερμαίνεται.  
 ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι  
 τὸν εὐγενῇ χρή (477-480).

If the words of his deception-speech hold a deeper significance, Lesky believes, it can only be that the hero surveys modes of possible behavior alien to his nature, reconciliation to which are impossible for him. By the end of the play, although he is dead, Ajax has gained his rights and the quarrel is ended. Through his death, Ajax has restored his honor and equilibrium, which his action had disturbed. The Ajax concludes on a note of serenity, the hero's catastrophe having taken place not far beyond the middle of the play; the Antigone finishes with a conflict resolved. In both cases the disturbed world-order regains its equilibrium. Just as the only path open to Ajax is the one irrevocably determined by his character, so it is for Antigone.

In the Antigone the comparison of Antigone and Ismene resulting from their conflict "conjures up the image of the Sophoclean hero, with his uncompromising determination, for whom a readiness to bargain, to calculate and to evade not only act as a foil but may even appear as the temptation that cannot lure him."<sup>80</sup> The result of that determination is

that Ismene turns away from Antigone, leaving her in the loneliness that characterizes the Sophoclean hero.<sup>81</sup> Haemon, Antigone's betrothed, remains in the background of the play. There is no scene in which they appear together on stage, not only because such a scene would be inconsistent with Antigone's loneliness, but also because, according to Lesky, there is "no place for Eros as a subjective experience in Sophoclean tragedy."<sup>82</sup> Therefore, when Haemon eventually speaks out because of his love for Antigone, he does not mention this love.

In the Oedipus Tyrannus the tragic hero stands out against a background of those who yield or avoid a decisive choice. His absolute determination is pitted against an overwhelming power, but the dignity of a great human being remains intact in him even in defeat. The main characteristic of Oedipus (like that of Ajax, Antigone, and Electra) is his superlative energy and unbending resolve in action. It is possible for him to avoid the fate that closes in around him, but he cannot because it would be a feeble compromise made for the sake of token-peace and for mere existence; such an acceptance is the one thing the tragic hero finds impossible. Oedipus becomes a hero because his will is inexorable, even when it leads to destruction. It is unthinkable for him to wish the truth had remained hidden. Great tragic figures take up their fight because their concern is for human dignity, not mere existence. Average persons who want to be secure and stay alive are by their sides as embodiments of temptation. Tecmessa is by the side of Ajax, Ismene by Antigone, Chrysothemis by Electra, and Jocasta by Oedipus.

In Lesky's view, the tragic hero in Sophocles is subjected to terrible tensions. He must rely on his own inner strength, because it alone allows him to take up the fight against "the powers of life."<sup>83</sup> He is depicted by Sophocles as a figure entirely self-sufficient; whatever

he does is prompted entirely by his own will, although the outcome remains outside of his control.

Electra with her awareness of the disgrace of her house and with her demand for revenge is in contrast to the compromising Chrysothemis who, although she knows the meaning of absolute integrity, is incapable of individual action. Chrysothemis' withdrawal after Electra's decision to perform the act of revenge herself, as does Ismene's from Antigone, throws Electra's loneliness into relief. The feelings, thoughts, and plans of Electra, as the main figure in the drama, are the focus of the play's events. The progress of her soul from anguish and despair to liberation is an integral part of the drama.

Lesky quotes two formulas that attempt to find a mid-point between the extreme views of Sophoclean figures as 'types' and 'characters,' to find a compromise between what he dismisses as 'mosaic-type character portraits' and the view that Sophoclean heroes have no characters at all.<sup>84</sup> At this point it will be useful to return to Knox and thus to complete the small circle of opinions on the Sophoclean hero that have been mentioned above. Knox feels that these two formulas do not suffice, that they leave little place for "that irreducible center of particularity, of uniqueness, which in the last analysis...is the only source of the heroic will to defy the world."<sup>85</sup>

It is because of this idea of particularity and uniqueness that, just as no one critic's view can be considered exclusively, a general portrait of the hero as has been presented here cannot be the exclusive guide for the present assessment of the hero in the Trachiniae. Deianeira and Heracles will be considered in relation to themselves and each other, as well as in relation to the models of the Sophoclean hero that have been presented in this chapter.

## NOTES -- CHAPTER ONE

- 1 J. C. Kamerbeek, The Trachiniae, included in The Plays of Sophocles, Part II, (Leiden, 1959) 27-29.
- 2 F. R. Earp, The Style of Sophocles (New York, 1944) 79, 108.
- 3 Contra M. Pohlenz, Erläuterungen<sup>2</sup> (Göttingen, 1954) 86; A. Lesky, Die Tragische Dichtung der Hellenen (Stuttgart, 1956) 119; Cedric H. Whitman, Sophocles, A study of Heroic Humanism (Harvard, 1951) 49.
- 4 Kamerbeek, 29.
- 5 "Only one thing is certain, and that is that the superb mastery of the Oedipus Rex cannot have preceded the experimental Trachiniae. It remains, therefore, that the Trachiniae stands third in the order of extant plays" (Whitman, 49).
- 6 G. M. Kirkwood, A Study of Sophoclean Drama (Ithaca, 1958) 170.
- 7 Those already familiar with these views could proceed directly to chapter two.
- 8 Poetics 1452b. Translations are by Richard McKeon, Introduction to Aristotle (New York, 1947).
- 9 Poetics 1453b. Although this passage does not deal directly with the hero, it may be useful in determining or verifying the hero. For instance, one does not feel pity and horror for Creon or Clytemnestra as one does for Antigone or Electra.
- 10 Bernard M. W. Knox, The Heroic Temper Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy (Berkeley, 1964) 1.

- 11 Whitman, 39.
- 12 Whitman, 39. According to him, "the fate of the individual who did not live for centuries presented a spectacle of suffering within whose sphere evil could be and still was irrational" (p. 39).
- 13 Knox, 3.
- 14 Knox, 7.
- 15 The plays were identifiable by title in the last quarter of the fifth century, as evidenced by their appearance in Aristophanes (e.g., Ra. 53, 1021, 1026; Th. 770, 850).
- 16 Knox, 2. Cf. Knox 2, 44 for a consideration of the different impression created by the titles of Aeschylus' seven extant plays, including The Agamemnon and Prometheus Bound.

Knox' view forms the basis of this chapter. In his ensuing development of characteristics of the Sophoclean hero, Knox blithely ignores the Trachiniae. His mold of the hero will therefore be very useful here for determining an objective measure for the Trachiniae (he is not basing characteristics of the hero on either Deianeira or Heracles). Its usefulness, however, may be tempered when it is applied to the Trachiniae because Knox obviously believes that the Trachiniae does not fit into the "typical-character" mold that he develops. It may be noted, however, that Knox' exclusion of the Trachiniae seems to be based on the assumption that Heracles is the hero. (Page 4: "the Trachiniae makes no reference to the eventual deification of the tortured, poisoned hero....")
- 17 Knox, 7.



18 This seems to be quite in keeping with the idea of the hero's isolation. Being isolated, his determinations and convictions originate not externally, but internally, in his individual nature or physis.

19 For Ajax' expression of his resolve to die see ζητητέα (470), καλῶς τεθνηκέναι (479-480), τεθάφεται (577), εἴμι (654), εἴμ'...ὅποι πορευτέον (690), ἀρκτέον (853).

For Antigone's expression of her resolve to act see θάψω (72), καλόν... θανεῖν (72), κείσομαι (76), πορεύσομαι (81).

For Oedipus Tyrannus' expression of his determination to discover the truth see φανῶ (132), οὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην (1065) ἀρκτέον (628), ἀκουστέον (1170).

For Electra's expression of her affirmation of her loyalty to her father see οὐ λήξω (103), οὐ σχήσω (223), εἴσειμ'...αὐανῶ (817-819), δραστήον (1019).

For Philoctetes expression of his refusal to go to Troy see οὐδέποτε γε (999), οὐδέποτ' οὐδέποτ' (1197), οὐδέποθ' (1392).

For Oedipus Coloneus' expression of his resolve to be free from the Thebans see οὐχ...ἂν ἐξέλθοιμ' (45), οὐκ...μὴ κρατήσωσιν (408).

20 Tecmessa appeals to Ajax (λίσσομαι 368, ἀντιάζω 492, ἱκνοῦμαι 588);

Chrysothemis appeals to Electra (λίσσομαι 428, ἀντιάζω 1009);

Jocasta appeals to Oedipus Tyrannus (λίσσομαι, μὴ δρᾶν τάδε 1064);

Polyneices appeals to Oedipus Coloneus (ἱκετεύομεν 1327).

21 παραινῶ (advice) and νοουθετῶ (admonition) are the words used to describe the attempts made to move the hero.

22 Tecmessa says to Ajax σὺ δ' οὐχὶ πείσῃ; (592). Chrysothemis says exactly the same words to Electra (402). Antigone is referred to as ἀπιστοῦσαν (381).

23 The chorus says to Electra, "If you could learn to benefit from her words"

(μόθους 370). Jocasta tells Oedipus to listen to her and learn (μόθ' 708).

- 24 εἵκειν occurs in all six plays, in the context of an attack on the hero's resolution. Its use to characterize the demand made on the hero is almost exclusively Sophoclean.
- 25 Ajax tells Tecmessa to "Speak to those who would listen to you" (τοῖς ἀκούουσιν 591). Chrysothemis says she "must listen to the powers that be in everything" (ἀκουστέα 340).  
κλύειν, ἀκούειν in Sophocles often have the sense of being subject to authority, or obeying action, something that the heroic nature will not admit.
- 26 Oedipus Tyrannus says, "Who would not be angry listening to such words?" (κλύων 340). Philoctetes would sooner listen to the serpent, his mortal enemy (κλύοιμ' 632), than to Odysseus.
- 27 Ajax tells Tecmessa to get out and calls her a fool. Antigone harshly dismisses Ismene ("Don't fear for me; make a success of your own life" 83). Electra tells Chrysothemis that she hates her for her cowardice (στυγῶ 1027).
- 28 The word ὀργή in the sense of "anger" is frequently used in reference to the heroes.
- 29 Not only is the hero's temper ἄνους and ἄφρων, but most of the heroes themselves are referred to in words that implicitly or explicitly compare them to wild animals.
- 30 Creon at Colonus says to Oedipus, "Not even time, it seems, has grown brains in your head" (οὐδὲ τῷ χρόνῳ 804). Chrysothemis says to Electra,

"You refuse to be taught by the passing of time" (ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδαχθῆναι 330). Ajax begins his "deception-speech" by saying "All things long uncouthed time brings forth from darkness and hides again from light" (ὁ μακρὸς...χρόνος 646).

31 Knox, 28.

32 Philoctetes says that the Atridae threw him ashore ἄτιμον (1028). Ajax says that he perishes ἄτιμος (440). Oedipus Coloneus claims he was expelled from Thebes οὕτως ἄτίμως (428).

33 Philoctetes thinks he is the laughing stock for the Atridae (γελῶσι 258) and for Odysseus (γελῶ μου 1125). Ajax is tormented by the thought of his enemies' laughter at the failure of his attempt on them (οἷμοι γέλωτος 367). Electra likewise is tormented by the thought of her enemies' laughter (γελῶσι 1153). See also Ant. 839, and O.T. 1422.

34 Knox, 32.

35 Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he abandons the gods.

36 Philoctetes speaks to the island (938 and 1081); Ajax addresses his last words to the sun, the light, Athens, and various parts of the Trojan landscape (864); Electra sings her mourning song to the elements (86); Oedipus Tyrannus speaks to Mount Cithairon (1391); Antigone addresses the tomb in the rock (891).

37 Cf. Aj. 361, 387, 394, 479, 684, 822, 854; Electra 821, 822, 1165; Ant. 72, 462, 555; O.T. 832, 1255, 1451; Phil. 749, 796, 800, 1001, 1207.

38 It can also be said of the hero's isolation from the world of men that it is caused at least as much by the hero's abandonment of society as by

society's abandonment of the hero.

<sup>39</sup> Knox, 43.

<sup>40</sup> Knox, 44.

<sup>41</sup> Knox, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Knox 56, 57 in his discussion of the life and hero-cult of Cleomedes.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Nilsson, A History of Greek Religion, 194; as cited by Knox, 175, note 84.

<sup>44</sup> According to Nilsson, the claim of the cult hero is an expression of naked power and strength and has no relation to moral or higher religious ideas.

<sup>45</sup> Pl. Ap. 41b.

<sup>46</sup> Cedric H. Whitman, Sophocles, A Study of Heroic Humanism (Harvard, 1951).

<sup>47</sup> Whitman, 81.

<sup>48</sup> "Attention must be focused not on the chorus, which embodies the framework, but on the hero himself" (Whitman, 16).

<sup>49</sup> This position is contrary to the belief that the gods are just and that whoever (i.e., the hero) crosses certain limits of behavior is guilty of hybris (the opposite of sophrosyne) and is justly doomed, a belief that Whitman considers to be almost wholly untragic, if not wholly untrue. According to Whitman, the conclusion is often reached that the protagonist is guilty of differing with the gods because he differs with the chorus.

- 50 Ant. 471, O.T. 616, Phil. 1045, Aj. 481-484, El. 217-220, also Trach. 121-126. (The chorus is sympathetic to Deianeira, but still rebukes her for her inability to bear her loneliness more hopefully.)
- 51 Antigone is punished, Electra triumphs; Ajax dies, Philoctetes is divinely enlightened; for her gentle resistance Deianeira meets an ignominious fate; the rash, individualistic Oedipus is eventually taken up to heaven (not any more subdued).
- 52 For Oedipus the error occurred when he slew his father and married his mother. He was innocent in that he acted in ignorance; he was wrong in that he did these things.
- 53 Whitman, 37. "The hamartia theory may take many forms, but it always fits the critic better than it fits the play."
- 54 Whitman, 35.
- 55 Rep. 392a13-b6.
- 56 Whitman, 40.
- 57 C. M. Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy (Oxford, 1945) 365.
- 58 It seems more likely that the hero knows himself before his sufferings, and that knowledge allows and even causes the hero to endure his sufferings.
- 59 Knox, 5.
- 60 Whitman (24) criticizes Schadewaldt's position because it incorporates the sin-and-punishment formula and the notion of the tragic flaw.
- 61 T. B. L. Webster, An Introduction to Sophocles (Oxford, 1936). It should

be noted that Webster's use of the word physis is perhaps rather more general than is Knox'.

62 Webster, 63.

63 My purpose here is not to deny a claim like Kirkwood's (10), that Sophocles is concerned with moral and sometimes religious problems, but to point out that the gods are often just that--a problem for the hero. The hero's real duty is to himself and his physis. His duty to the gods can exist only to the degree that the gods are present within him.

64 Webster, 64.

65 Webster, 65.

66 G. H. Gellie, Sophocles: A Reading (Melbourne 1972) 208.

67 Kirkwood, 11.

68 C. R. Post, "The Dramatic Art of Sophocles," HSCP 23 (1912) 71-127.

69 Kirkwood, 10.

70 Kirkwood, 16.

71 It has already been mentioned that Whitman, in his idealized view, believes that the suffering results not from the faults of the hero, but from the incompatibility of his excellence with the world about him.

72 Kirkwood, 172.

73 My question is whether the faults and magnificence of the hero can be separated.

- 74 Bernard Knox, "Sophocles' Oedipus," included in Tragic Themes in Western Literature (New Haven, 1955), edited by Cleanth Brooks, 22.
- 75 Kirkwood, 175.
- 76 Kirkwood, 175.
- 77 Kirkwood, 176.
- 78 Perhaps it stands firm because of suffering and death?
- 79 Albin Lesky, Greek Tragedy, translated by H. A. Frankfort (New York, 1965) 101.
- 80 Lesky, 104.
- 81 "...and all great things in the world," Lesky adds (104).
- 82 Lesky, 104.
- 83 Lesky, 117.
- 84 In relation to Sophoclean characterization he quotes Wilhelm Humbolt, who believes that not the individual but the human being is to appear, and he is distinguished by the simple traits of his character. Lesky also quotes Gerbert Cysarz, who believes that Sophoclean characters have personality, not just interesting individuality, and they hold to the norm instead of the eccentric.
- 85 Knox, 37.

## CHAPTER TWO

## DEIANEIRA

The role of Deianeira, who certainly dominates the first 946 lines of the play, will now be analyzed. Deianeira will be considered in light of the models of the Sophoclean hero that were given in chapter one. In each case the aptness of the model will be discussed and criticized.

## I. Aristotle

Aristotle's "synthesis" requires that the misfortune of the tragic hero be "brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment" and that the hero himself be "of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity."<sup>1</sup> Deianeira's final misfortune appears to be caused totally by her misjudgment in sending the robe anointed with Nessus' "love philtre" to Heracles and not by any κακία or μοχθηρία in her character. Whether μεγάλη δόξα καὶ εὐτυχία are characteristic of Deianeira or not is perhaps not so clear. As the wife of the "best of men," she is entitled to, and is surely seen by others as possessing, "great reputation and prosperity." It is questionable, however, whether she sees herself as having these two blessings; she seems too entangled in her various worries and woes. In her opening monologue, Deianeira voices among her many anxieties:

λέχος γὰρ Ἡρακλεῦ κριτὸν  
 ξυστᾶσ' αἰεί τιν' ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω,  
 κείνου προκηραίνουσα (27-29).



## Chosen as the bride for Heracles

and being joined with him, I continually nurse fear after fear,  
being anxious for him.

Despite the unhappiness of Deianeira's outlook, which begins in the prologue, her role in the play still, in fact, fits into Aristotle's requirement that the hero's fortunes change from happiness to misery. Nowhere is this point more clearly made than in Deianeira's opening lines and the closing lines of the Nurse's speech describing her death. Significantly, these two passages frame Deianeira's appearance as central figure in the play.

Λόγος μὲν ἔστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανεῖς  
ὥς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν  
θάνη τις, οὔτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ' εἴ τῃ κακός  
ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἄλδου μολεῖν,  
ἔξοιδ' ἔχουσα δυστυχῇ τε καὶ βαρύν (1-5).

A saying was disclosed long ago  
that you cannot know a man's lot in life  
before he has died, not whether it is good or bad.  
But even before I've come to Death's house,  
I know well that mine is heavy and sorrowful.  
τοιαῦτα τάνθαδ' ἐστίν. ὥστ' εἴ τις δύο  
ἢ κατὰ πλείους ἡμέρας λογίζεται,  
μάταιός ἐστιν· οὐ γάρ ἐσθ' ἢ γ' αὔριον,  
πρὶν εἴ παρῇ τις τὴν παροῦσαν ἡμέραν (943-946).<sup>2</sup>

This is the way things are within. If anyone  
counts upon two days or even more,  
he is thoughtless. For there can be no tomorrow  
until we have overtaken the day that is with us still.

Deianeira, even in the midst of her initial heavy-heartedness, has yet to learn the true bounds of her final unhappiness. Her initial unhappiness is possible only because she possesses a great joy, Heracles, and because of her love of him. This joy, although it produces her unhappiness, is the source of her life, and, when she claims ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμὸν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς "Αἰδοῦ μολεῖν, ἔξοιδ' ἔχουσα δυστυχῇ τε καὶ βαρύν, she speaks in ignorance of how δυστυχῆς and βαρύς is the fate she has yet to suffer. First, she loses hope in Heracles' love of her, which leads her to the desperate strategy of the love-philtre. Then, by using the philtre, she loses Heracles and all possibility of recovering his love. However, before she "knows her life" and has "come to Death's house," she has heeded the words of the Chorus in the parodos, and these words mitigate somewhat the total pessimism of her opening lines.

ἀνάλγητα γὰρ οὐδ'

ὁ πάντα κραίνων βασιλεὺς

ἐπέβαλε θνατοῖς Κρονίδας

ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πῆμα καὶ χαρὰ

πᾶσι κυκλοῦσιν, οἷον ἄρ-

κτου στροφάδες κέλευθου (126-131).

Not a painless lot  
has the all-accomplishing King,  
the son of Cronos, dispensed for mortal men.  
But grief and joy come circling to all,  
like the turning  
tracks of the Bear.

By the following lines addressed to Hyllus, Deianeira indicates that she is admitting to herself the happiness or possibility of happiness that remains in her life. She sees her life as χρηστός to a degree, instead

of totally κακός.

καὶ γὰρ ὑστέρω, τό γ' εὖ

πράσσειν ἐπεὶ πύθοιτο, κέρδος ἐμπολῶ (92-93).

One may gain advantage

in learning good news, even if one learns it late.

Deianeira, albeit hesitantly (cf. ll, 184, 187, 192), raises herself to a much more positive level of happiness, which does allow for her fortunes to fall, in Aristotle's words, ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν.

ὦ Ζεῦ, τὸν Οὔτης ἄτομον ὅς λειμῶν' ἔχεις,

ἔδωκας ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ σὺν χρόνῳ χαράν.

φωνήσατ', ὦ γυναῖκες, αἵ τ' εἴσω στέγης

αἵ τ' ἐκτὸς αὐλῆς, ὥς ἄελπτον ὄμμ' ἐμοῖ

φῆμης ἀνασχὼν τῆσδε νῦν καρπούμεθα ( 200-204).<sup>3</sup>

O Zeus, you who hold power over the unharvested meadows of Oeta, though it has been long, you have given us joy.

Cry out, O you women who are within the house

and you who are without since now we reap the fruits

of the unhopd for and exalted sunshine of this news.

She also becomes for a short period selective in her acceptance of news, desiring to be told only what will support her happiness.

χαίρειν δὲ τὸν κήρυκα προυννέπω, χρόνῳ

πολλῷ φανέντα, χαρτὸν εἴ τι καὶ φέρεις (227-228).

I proclaim our welcome to the herald, appearing after

a long time--if the news is gladdening.

Aristotle allows that the doers of the tragic deed (i.e., the heroes) in a play may act εἰδóτας καὶ γινώσκοντας or ἀγνοοῦντας δὲ πράξαι τὸ δεινόν, εἴθ' ὕστερον ἀναγνωρίσαι τὴν φιλίαν.<sup>4</sup> Although his example of this is Sophocles' Oedipus, Deianeira and her deed seem to fit this

characteristic as well, since she too is ignorant of the evil deed she is committing. Aristotle also mentions the possibility of a character acting in ignorance making the necessary discovery in time to draw back. Deianeira makes her discovery, only she is not in time to draw back. Deianeira actually is in what Aristotle (1454a) refers to as the better situation, that is, "for the deed to be done in ignorance, and the relationship discovered afterwards." It is better than a meditated deed, "since there is nothing odious in it, and the Discovery will serve to astound us."

## II. Knox

Although Knox does not consider the Trachiniae in establishing his model of the Sophoclean hero, he appears to attribute certain characteristics to his model that do in fact apply to Deianeira. Deianeira certainly is "a single personality facing the supreme crisis of his [her] life"<sup>5</sup> and is "a heroic individual whose action implies full responsibility."<sup>6</sup> Deianeira has suffered the loss of Heracles' love (cf. 544ff.) and takes full responsibility for the use of the love-philtre. She places trust in her confidence (πίστις, 590) when she uses the philtre, and, when she discovers that she has acted wrongly, she takes full responsibility (719-722).

According to Knox, the Sophoclean hero is isolated. Deianeira is isolated and experiences the various types of isolation that he mentions. She is isolated by time and space. There is no past to guide her, because her past and her present are one and the same. In the earliest glimpses we have of her life, when Acheloüs was wooing her, she was so unhappy that she wanted death.

δύστηνος ἀεὶ κατθανεῖν ἐπηυχόμην,

πρὶν τῆσδε κοῦτης ἐμπελασθῆναί ποτε (16-17).

And in my unhappiness I constantly prayed for death

before I should ever approach his [Acheloüs'] marriage bed.

In contrast, consider her statement:

χρόνῳ δ' ἐν ὑστέρῳ μὲν, ἀσμένῃ δέ μοι,

ὁ κλεινὸς ἦλθε Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τε παῖς (18-19).

But, after a time, to my happiness there came

the famous son of Alcmena and Zeus.

However, even this does not indicate a beginning of real and knowledgable time for her. She closes her eyes to the combat between Achelous and Heracles, thus leaving that time as an emptiness. She cannot speak of the manner of their struggles because she does not know them, οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ("I do not know," 22). The beginning of time for Deianeira in her isolation is when τέλος δ' ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς, / εἰ δὲ καλῶς ("Zeus presiding over the contest made the end good--if it has been good," 26-27). Just as Deianeira has no past by which to guide herself, she has no future with which to comfort herself. Time began for her when she gave up her maidenhood<sup>7</sup> and took on the troubles and cares of married life, and she can never return to maidenhood. Her love of Heracles is the cause of her isolation; if she would release that love, she might escape the endless succession of sufferings that plague her. No love, however, exists for her without Heracles.<sup>8</sup>

Deianeira is isolated from Heracles in time (ἀλλ' ἤδη δέκα / μῆνας πρὸς ἄλλους πέντ' ἀκήρυκτος μένει, "but already ten months in addition to five others and still there is no message from him," 44-45) and in space (Heracles is like a γῆτης ὅπως ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον λαβών, "a farmer working a distant field," 32; also κεῖνος δ' ὅπου / βέβηκεν οὐδεὶς οἶδε,

"no one knows where he has gone," 40-41). She is also isolated in space as a result of Heracles' killing of Iphitus: ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχίνοι τῇδ' ἀνάστατοι/ξένῳ παρ' ἀνδρὶ ναίομεν ("we live here in Trachis, a stranger's guests, forced to leave our home," 39-40).<sup>9</sup>

Because of her isolation in time and space, Deianeira, in accordance with Knox' model of the Sophoclean hero, becomes responsible for her own action.<sup>10</sup> The source and greatness of her action belong to herself alone. The free and responsible action of trying to recover Heracles' love does not bring Deianeira through suffering to victory, but causes her to fall and experience defeat before she reaches the final victory. Just as, before the entrance of Iole, the suffering and joy of her love for Heracles were fused, so her suffering and glory become fused as a result of her use of the love-philtre.

ὣν ἐγὼ μεθύτερον,  
 ὅτ' οὐκέτ' ἄρκεῖ, τὴν μάθησιν ἄρνευμαι.  
 μόνη γὰρ αὐτόν, εἴ τι μὴ φευσθήσομαι  
 γνῶμης, ἐγὼ δύστηνος ἐξαποφθερῶ (710-713).

But I

have come to understand later, now when it is of no use.

I alone, unless my fears are fanciful,

I, his unhappy wife, shall utterly destroy him.

Deianeira does not set out consciously or knowingly to kill Heracles; she discovers her action μεθύτερον. A definite sense of finality pervades her realization of what she has done.

οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς μὴ καλοῖς βουλευμασιν  
 οὐδ' ἐλπίς, ἥτις καὶ θράσος τι προξενεῖ (725-726).

Not in bad plans is there any hope

that leaves any place for courage.

She does not even make an attempt to intercept her gift to Heracles, just as she does not attempt later to explain herself to Hyllus. She has destroyed her joy by destroying Heracles and any possibility of receiving love from him, and so, necessarily, the character of her suffering changes. Deianeira, by "sacrificing" Heracles, has destroyed her worries and cares, but she has also destroyed her own raison d'être.

Knox' Sophoclean hero renders his action fully autonomous by refusing to accept his human limitations and by defying the gods, who are guardians of these limits. When Deianeira finds she cannot endure to share her marriage with Iole (τὸ δ' αὖ ξυνοικεῖν τῇδ' ὁμοῦ τίς ἂν γυνὴ / δύνατο, κοινωνοῦσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων; "But to live in the same house with her, sharing the same marriage, what woman could stand that?" 545-546), she refuses to accept her human limitations.

ὁρῶ γὰρ ἥβην τὴν μὲν ἔρπουσαν πρόσω,  
τὴν δὲ φθίνουσαν (547-548).

For I see her youth coming to full bloom  
and mine fading.

Just as Deianeira feared to grow up, she fears to grow old, and she takes a desperate step in order to avert what she fears will be the consequence of her growing old. When she resorts to Nessus' love-philtre in order to regain Heracles' love, she defies her own words.

Ἐρωτὶ μὲν νυν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται  
πόκτης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ (441-442).

How foolish one would be to rise up against

Love and try to trade blows with him, like a boxer.

In a sense, Deianeira seems to be obeying Love ("Ἐρῶς - 441, Κύπρις - 497) as well as defying Love. It is her love of Heracles that compels her to contest Heracles' love of Iole. Perhaps Love is only the referee as was

the case in the battle between Heracles and Achelous:

μόνα δ' εὐλεκτρος ἐν μέσῳ Κύπρις

ῥαβδονόμει ξυνοῦσα (515-516).<sup>11</sup>

Alone, in the middle with them, Cypris, the goddess,  
bringing wedded happiness, sat as umpire.

However, something about the power of the "charms" (the love-philtre) and Deianeira's determination not to be supplanted by Iole seems to suggest more her defiance than her obedience to Cypris' will, even though it is her love of Heracles that causes her to act. Deianeira withdraws herself from the power of Cypris and seeks other means to retain her love.

φύλτροις δ' ἐάν πως τήνδ' ὑπερβαλώμεθα

τὴν παῦδα καὶ θέλκτροισι τοῖς ἐφ' Ἡρακλεῦ,

μεμηχάνηται τοῦργον. (584-586).

But if somehow by these charms,  
these spells used on Heracles, we can surpass  
the girl--well the move is made.

At line 492 she spoke of θεοῖσι δυσμαχοῦντες. Strife against Eros means strife against divine powers in general, against nature, and against Fate itself.<sup>12</sup> It is the very thing that will crush Deianeira (κοῦτοι νόσον γ' ἐπακτὸν ἐξαρούμεθα, / θεοῖσι δυσμαχοῦντες "I shall not choose to take on a strange new disease by fighting in vain against the gods," 491-492).

Knox believes that in six of Sophocles' extant plays<sup>13</sup> the hero is faced with a choice between possible, and often certain, disaster, or a compromise that will betray his conception of himself, his rights, and his duties. The hero decides against compromise, finds his decision assailed, but refuses to yield. His resolution leads to the dramatic



tension of the plays.

This description fits Deianeira. She is faced with what is in essence just such a choice; to try by unknown, untried methods to regain Heracles' love, or to allow Iole to remain in her house and Heracles' feelings for Iole to remain uncontested. The first course may, in Deianeira's eyes, lead to possible disaster from the very beginning of its conception.

οὕτως ἔχει γ' ἡ πίστις, ὥς τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν

ἔνεστι, πέρφα δ' οὐ προσωμύλησά πω (590-591).

I have so much confidence; there seem to be

good prospects, but I have never brought them to the test.

Deianeira takes her decisive step not unaware that some risk is involved. Her desire to see the results demands action (as, to a certain extent, is the case with Oedipus); πολύπλαγκτος ἐλπίς drives her to it.<sup>14</sup>

ἀλλ' αὐτίκ' εἰσόμεσθα... (594).

Well, we shall know soon.

μόνον παρ' ὑμῶν εὖ στεγοῦμεθ' ὥς σκότῳ

κἄν αἰσχρὰ πράσσης οὔ ποτ' αἰσχύνῃ πεσῇ (596-597).

Only, may my secret be well kept by you.

One may do shameful things and never fall into shame.

Even if no other chance of disaster exists, the possibility of the shame of a failed attempt remains.

The second course, compromise, would betray Deianeira's conception of herself, because it is only as the wife of Heracles that she finds her identity. Even when Heracles is away, she defines herself, her rights, and her duties in terms of him. She sees Iole as a threat,

ταῦτ' οὖν φοβοῦμαι μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς

ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ' ἀνὴρ (550-551)

And this is why I am afraid that Heracles may  
be called my husband but the younger woman's man,  
and is not prepared to share the rights and duties of her marriage  
(cf. 545-546) with her.

Deianeira immediately decides against the compromise of passively accepting the state of affairs she predicts in lines 550-551: ἢ δ' ἔχω, φύλαι, / λυτήριον λώφημα, τῇδ' ὑμῖν φράσω ("The way in which I have, dear friends, a solution and a means of relief, I shall tell you exactly," 553-554). Initially, she does not find her decision assailed, and, if it were, line 586 (εἰ δὲ μή, πεπαύσομαι) seems to indicate that she would not refuse to yield.<sup>15</sup> However, this is perhaps due to the peculiar relationship between Deianeira and the Chorus,<sup>16</sup> and it must be noted that they in no way encourage Deianeira, who despite her studied hesitance, displays a certain eagerness to carry out the affair (ἀλλ' αὐτίκ' εἰσόμεσθα, "we shall know soon," 594). Deianeira makes her own decision and carries out her plan with assurance and firmness, as her speech to Lichas indicates (600ff.):

ἀλλ' ἔρπε, καὶ φύλασσε πρῶτα μὲν νόμον,

τὸ μὴ 'κλυθεῖν πομπὸς ὧν περισσὰ δρᾶν (616-617)

Go now, and as a messenger

be sure to keep the rule not to desire to exceed your orders.

The real strength of her resolution becomes apparent after she has discovered the horrible effects of the philtre; she will die with Heracles ταύτῃ σὺν ὁρμῇ ("under the same blow," 720). The disastrous result of her decision not to compromise is now certain, but it has only served to strengthen her resolve not to live without Heracles. Deianeira has prevented Iole from usurping her position (cf. 551) although in doing so has annihilated her own position as Heracles' wife. Deianeira's

silence when her son assails her (749ff.) is clear evidence of the strength of her decision. Her resolution is emphasized even more by the Chorus' question that follows her final departure:

τί σῶγ' ἀφέρπεις; οὐκ ἄτολόν τ' ὀθοῦν καὶ

ξυνηγορεῖς σιγῶσα τῷ κατηγορῶ; (813-814).

Why do you go off in silence? Don't you see  
that by silence you join your accuser?

A few deviations in Deianeira from Knox' model of the Sophoclean hero begin to appear when we consider her role with reference to recurrent patterns of character in situation and language, but striking similarities also appear. The differences seem to result more from the uniqueness of her particular function as hero than from the possibility that she is not in fact the hero.

According to Knox, the Sophoclean hero's decision and resolve to act are always announced in emphatic, uncompromising terms; he cites the use of the verbal adjectives, future tenses, and a tone that allows no argument.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the play Deianeira maintains three distinct but directly related resolves, all of which are advanced and carried out, and all fulfilling to varying degrees Knox' "requirements." She resolves to know the truth about Iole and Heracles, to use Nessus' love-philtre, and to die if she has inadvertently killed Heracles. While examining Deianeira's position with respect to these three resolves, it will be profitable also to pay attention to any attack on her resolve and whether it fits into the categories determined by Knox.<sup>18</sup>

Deianeira's determination to know the truth about Iole begins even before anything has been mentioned about the other's relationship to Heracles. She persistently and emphatically attempts to elicit information from Lichas--ἐξεῖπ' ("speak out," 312), she orders. Lichas'

almost successful method of dissuading her from pursuing the truth is to feign ignorance. His persuasion is silence (συγῇ τοῦμόν ἔργον ἦνυτον, "I performed my task in silence," 319). Since Lichas has blocked her path by silence, Deianeira turns to Iole herself, εἴπ', ὦ τάλαιν' ("do tell us, poor child," 320), she orders, but is again met with silence.

οὐ τάρᾳ τῷ γε πρόσθεν οὐδὲν ἐξ ἔσου  
χρόνῳ δολήσει γλῶσσαν, ἥτις οὐδαμὰ  
προύφηνεν οὔτε μέζον' οὔτ' ἐλάσσονα (322-324).

It will be quite unlike her manner up to now  
if she loosens her tongue, since

she has not said one word yet, neither more nor less.

She cannot act further on her resolve until she learns from the Messenger that Lichas is hiding the facts from her. At this point Deianeira begins her fight against the persuasion of Lichas' silence. She questions him firmly (398, 400) and then begins a speech of persuasion (436ff.) to convince him of her resolve to know the truth. She is emphatic and uncompromising; she does not express herself in as severe terms as, say, Oedipus Tyrannus when confronting Teiresias and later the Herdsman, but she is determined nevertheless.

μή, πρὸς σε τοῦ κατ' ἄκρον Οἰταῖον νάπος  
Διὸς καταστράπτοντος, ἐκκλέψης λόγον (436-437).

By Zeus who flashes lightning over the topmost glen  
of Oeta, I implore you, do not cheat me of the truth!

ἀλλ' εἰπὲ πᾶν τᾶληθές (453).

Tell me the whole truth.

ὅπως δὲ λήσεις, οὐδὲ τοῦτο γίγνεται (455).

That you will escape detection is not possible, it cannot  
happen.

καὶ μὲν δέδοικας, οὐ καλῶς ταρβεῖς, ἐπεὶ

...μ' ἀλγύνειεν ἄν (457-458).

Are you afraid of hurting me?

Your fear is senseless.

σοὶ δ' ἐγὼ φράζω κακὸν

πρὸς ἄλλον εἶναι, πρὸς δ' ἔμ' ἀψευδεῖν ἀεὶ (468-469).

To you I have this to say; Though you may be

false with others, never lie to me.

Deianeira refuses to be persuaded by silence and falsehood to give up her search for knowledge of the relationship between Iole and Heracles.

The second resolution, to use the love-philtre, has been mentioned previously in connection with Deianeira's choice of possible disaster rather than compromise; and, to everyone except the Chorus, she announces her resolve in emphatic, uncompromising terms.<sup>19</sup> Note how she follows Lichas' confession of Heracles' love for Iole, which concludes with the following two lines:

ὥς τ᾽ ἅλλ' ἐκεῖνος πάντ' ἀριστεύων χεροῦν

τοῦ τῆσδ' ἔρωτος εἰς ἅπανθ' ἦσσαν ἔφθ (488-489).

Against all else he has won by strength; but by

this love for her he has been completely vanquished.

Deianeira says ἄλλ' ὥδε καὶ φρονοῦμεν ὥστε ταῦτα δρᾶν ("such is my way of thinking, and so shall I act," 490). She means that she will be kind to Iole and show that the words she spoke before she knew the truth "were said in all sincerity" (486-487), but it is conspicuous that her first thought and action deal with the love-philtre (ἄ τ' ἀντὶ δώρων δῶρα χρῆ προσαρμόσαι<sup>20</sup>, "There are gifts in return for the gifts you brought--these too you must take," 494-495).

When she has prepared the robe for Heracles, she tells the Chorus in final terms καὶ πεπεύρανται τάδε ("Now it is all done" 581), and, seeking their reassurance, adds with qualifications μεμηχάνται τοῦργον ("the move is made" 586).<sup>21</sup> The Chorus force Deianeira to make her own decision and thus, in a certain sense, isolate her even from themselves. By making that decision, she removes herself from the possibility of receiving advice from anyone concerning her action or the results of her action. She makes the decision herself, and consequently, in true heroic fashion, accepts the full and exclusive responsibility for that decision. ἀλλ' εἰδέναι χρὴ δρωσαν ("One can only tell from action" 592), the Chorus says, and Deianeira promptly and resolutely puts her plan into action. αὐτίκ' εἰσόμεσθα ("We shall know soon" 594), she tells the Chorus. ἔρπε, καὶ φύλασσε πρῶτα μὲν νόμον ("Go now, and be sure to keep the rule" 616), she orders Lichas, and at 624 she tells him στεῦχους ἀν' ἧδῃ ("You should be going now"). Deianeira hurries Lichas on almost as if she fears that something will force her to reconsider. She is impatient to carry out her decision.

There is no real possibility that Deianeira can be dissuaded from carrying out her resolution, because no one besides the Chorus knows of it. Deianeira herself provides her own (and the strongest) attack on her resolve, but only until the decision has been made. Once it is reached, she is firm in her resolve. Although its course is different from what she imagined or wished, she carries it through to its necessary end--her death.

Deianeira's third resolution is to die, and she announces it in the most emphatic and uncompromising terms of all, silence. One cannot argue and plead against silence. However, as is the case for her second resolution, no one seems to recognize that she has decided to die. When she

realizes the horrible effects produced by the love-philtre, she announces her decision emphatically to the Chorus:

καίτοι δέδοκται,<sup>22</sup> κεύνος εἰ σφαλήσεται,  
ταύτῃ σὺν ὀρμῇ καὶ συνθανεῖν ἅμα (719-720).

And yet I have made a decision: if he falls,

I shall die under the same blow with him.

But they do not comprehend its real significance, because they have not yet admitted the possibility that Heracles' death is inevitable.<sup>23</sup>

Deianeira's isolation is so great that no one knows her resolve except herself; therefore, it is not possible for her to be faced with any attempt to dissuade her from her plan. In a way this indicates the actual strength of her resolve. She has had to form it internally and in complete isolation; she has had no external pressure to cause her to build it up as a defense. Since no one else knows of her resolve, she could easily back down without a loss of pride. Deianeira is faced with a form of attack on her resolve. It is what Knox refers to as the emotional appeal of those having claims on her affections and as the hardest attack to resist. Hyllus' words to her (734ff.), which wish for her death and harshly criticize her, are tragically ironic because he does not really mean them (cf. 935ff., especially 941-942) and because he, in a sense, is ordering her to do what she has already resolved to do. Deianeira stands nobly and silently in the face of Hyllus' accusations. How strong her resolve must be that she does not allow herself even the comfort of excusing herself in the eyes of her son!

Deianeira differs from Knox' heroic model in that she is not an angry hero. Her resolutions are not attacked; she does not receive advice and objections. Therefore, she lacks the necessity of reacting swiftly and violently, and treating advice and objections in a fierce way.<sup>24</sup> Nor is

Deianeira described within the play as μῶρος. We may well criticize her for being foolish and not testing the love-philtre before using it<sup>25</sup> and for lacking foresight as she does with respect to her gift from Nessus; but Deianeira is not censured for these two faults, even by Hyllus and Heracles. The criticism she receives from them is for something she was not in fact guilty of, namely, intentionally causing Heracles' death, and it ceases when they, in turn, discover her innocence of this crime. While their criticism lasts, however, it fulfills the requirement of Knox' model that the condemnation of the heroic temper be moral as well as intellectual.

ὦ μήτηρ, ὡς ἂν ἐκ τριῶν σ' ἐν εἰλόμην,  
 ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι ζῶσαν, ἢ σεσωμένην  
 ἄλλου κεκλησθαι μητέρ', ἢ λῶους φρένας  
 τῶν νῦν παρουσῶν τῶνδ' ἀμεύσασθαι ποθεν (734-737).

Mother! I wish for one of three things for you  
 either that you were no longer living, or safe  
 but someone else's mother, or somehow changed  
 and with a better heart than now.

ὄγκον γὰρ ἄλλως ὀνόματος τί δεῦ τρέφειν  
 μητρῶον, ἥτις μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα δοῖ; (817-818)<sup>26</sup>

For why should she wrongly maintain the lofty name  
 of mother, she who acts in no way like a mother?

Response to Deianeira's suicide fits Knox' scheme more closely. While questioning the Nurse about Deianeira's death, the Chorus ask ἐπεῖδες, ὦ ματαῖα, τάνδ' ὕβριν; ("And, foolish woman, did you see her violent deed?" 888) and καὶ ταῦτ' ἔτλη τις χεῖρ γυναικεῖα κτίσαι; ("How could any woman's hand actually bring this to pass?" 898). Knox says that Sophoclean heroes are δειλοὶ because they lack a sense of



proportion and a capacity for moderation. The Nurse says of Deianeira's suicide δεινῶς γε· πεύσῃ δ', ὥστε μαρτυρεῖν ἐμοῦ ("Yes, it was terrible. You will learn everything, so that you can bear me witness," 899).

According to Knox, the action of the heroes is περισσός. The result of Deianeira's actions (and thus the actions themselves) is περισσός, but it is interesting to note that she advises Lichas to guard against this very danger.

ἀλλ' ἔρπε, καὶ φύλασσε πρῶτα μὲν νόμον,  
τὸ μὴ 'πιθυμεῖν πομπὸς ὧν περισσὰ δρᾶν (616-617).

Go now, and as a messenger

be sure to keep the rule not to desire to exceed your orders.

Knox' Sophoclean hero refuses to be taught by time what is "good" for himself; he defies time and its imperative of change. Deianeira will not change her love and need for Heracles. οὐχὶ χātέρας / πλείστας ἀνὴρ εἷς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δῆ; ("One man and many woman--Heracles has had very many others before," 459-460). But, throughout all this before-time Deianeira has not learned (has not wished to learn) to temper her love of Heracles, as her "constant relay of troubles" testifies.

λέχος γὰρ Ἡρακλεῦ κριτὸν  
ξυστᾶσ' αἰεὶ τιν' ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω,  
κείνου προκηραίνουσα (27-29).

Chosen as the bride for Heracles,  
and being joined with him, I continually nurse fear after  
fear, being anxious for him.

πλὴν ἐμοῦ πικρὰς  
ᾧδῶνας αὐτοῦ προσβαλὼν ἀποίχεται (41-42).

The only sure thing is that he's gone  
and assigned to me a sharp pain for him.

With respect to Iole, Deianeira is able in all honesty to say, κοῦπω τις αὐτῶν ἔκ γ' ἐμοῦ λόγον κακὸν / ἠνέγκατ' οὐδ' ὄνειδος ("Never yet has any one of them earned insults from me, or reproach," 461-462), but she will not endure even a trial-period of sharing Heracles with Iole. She unknowingly welcomes Iole, a πημονὴν λαθραῖον ("secret suffering" 376-377), under her roof, Iole, whose youth is coming to full bloom while hers is fading (547-548). Deianeira has not been taught by the time that has aged her to be less pained by the love of Heracles.

According to Knox, the hero, in the opinion of others, is unreasonable and suicidally bold<sup>27</sup>; however, the opinion of others is irrelevant to the hero, who is loyal only to his conception of himself. Only Heracles and Hyllus have (and only temporarily) an opinion of Deianeira as overbold. Deianeira does seem to view their opinion as irrelevant, since she makes no attempt to explain herself and her actions to either of them. Perhaps her reason is that she knows the damage is done and cannot be undone, perhaps because she realizes the magnitude of their, especially Heracles', feelings.<sup>28</sup> In a certain basic way, however, the opinion of others is important to Deianeira in conjunction with her conception of herself.

ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσιν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν,

ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακῇ πεφουκέναι (721-722)

I could not bear to live and hear myself called evil

I, who wish above all else to be truly good.

οὐσία and δόξα, "true nature" and "reputation," are inextricably mixed up for Deianeira.

Knox believes that the hero's sense of worth and consideration of what is due to him from others is outraged and that, forming an extreme impression of this lack of respect, he feels that the world is mocking him as well. Deianeira's sense of what is due to her from Heracles is

outraged.

τοιαύτῃ Ἡρακλῆς,

ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῶν καγαθὸς καλούμενος,

οἰκούρι' ἀντέπεμψε τοῦ μακροῦ χρόνου (540-542)

This is the housekeeping wage my faithful

and noble Heracles sends home to me

to compensate for his long absence!

In the following two lines (543-544), Deianeira clearly states the singular character of Heracles' faithlessness. Heracles' many passions in themselves are, apparently, no cause of anger for Deianeira. However, to receive Iole into her own home, to share her marriage (546), to share her marriage-bed (540) is an unbelievable and intolerable outrage. She has received from Heracles λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός ("goods that outrage my heart" 538), and these goods that outrage her heart turn her more firmly into herself and also force her to take action.<sup>29</sup> This action is closely related to the next aspect of Knox' heroic model, which is that the hero, resenting those he considers responsible for his sufferings, appeals for vengeance and curses his enemies, wishing nothing worse on them than that they experience what he himself is suffering. Whom does Deianeira consider responsible for her sufferings? She mentions Love, but does not address Cypris or Eros directly and confront them with her blame.<sup>30</sup> One cannot take vengeance on the gods, at most one may perhaps defy them, especially in this case where Cypris and Eros seem to represent a force, albeit divine, rather than actual divinities.<sup>31</sup>

οὗτος [Eros] γὰρ ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν ὅπως θέλει,

κάμοῦ γε πῶς δ' οὐ χάτέρας οὔας γ' ἐμοῦ; (443-444).

For he rules even the gods as he pleases,  
and me--why not another woman like me?

The significance of this passage is not only the implication that Deianeira's act will be performed in revolt against and in submission to Eros, but also Deianeira's implication that she believes Iole to be enamored of Heracles.<sup>32</sup> Even the denial of Iole's responsibility for her sufferings requires Deianeira to admit a certain responsibility on the part of Iole.

κοῦπω τις αὐτῶν ἔκ γ' ἐμοῦ λόγον κακὸν  
ἠνέγκατ' οὐδ' ὄνειδος ἦδε τ' οὐδ' ἄν εἰ  
κάρτ' ἐντακεῖη τῷ φιλεῖν (461-463).

Never yet has any one of them earned insults  
from me, or reproach, not will she, even  
if she is wholly absorbed by her love.

What Deianeira seems to be saying is not that she totally denies the responsibility of other women (especially Iole) whom Heracles has loved, but that she is not going to appeal for vengeance against them and curse them as enemies. Deianeira is not a vengeful person, and, besides, she knows that the workings of Eros will eventually, if not immediately, cause Heracles' other loves to experience sufferings very similar to those she herself endures. Deianeira is able to pity (ἐπεὶ σφ' ἐγὼ / ᾤκτιρα δὴ μάλιστα προσβλέψας<sup>33</sup>), "for I pitied her deeply when I looked upon her" 463-464<sup>33</sup>) even the one she sees as her secret enemy. τίς ἐσδέδεγμαί κημονὴν ὑπόστεγον / λαθραῖον; ("What secret suffering have I welcomed under my roof?" 376-377). Iole, pitiable as she is, represents an immediate and potential threat to Deianeira.<sup>34</sup> Deianeira loses her usual trust in the normal workings of Eros that have always before returned Heracles and his love to her and have kept her the wife of Heracles. She feels she must turn to the charm (κηλητήριον, 575) given to her by Nessus in order

to strengthen wanted love (Heracles' love of her ) and destroy unwanted love (Heracles' love of Iole).<sup>35</sup>

Heracles is also, and perhaps most of all, responsible for Deianeira's suffering. However, Deianeira in her blind, or maybe not so blind, love for him excuses his hurtful actions as being caused by Eros. After all, Eros "rules even the gods" (ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν 443). Deianeira calls no curse down upon Heracles; she only wishes that he may suffer to love her as she loves him.

According to Knox' conception of the Sophoclean hero, after forming an extreme impression of the lack of respect shown toward himself and a resentment against those he considers responsible for his sufferings, the hero enters into his characteristic isolation. He becomes alone and deserted, isolated from men and abandoned by the gods. Deianeira's temporal and spatial isolation in some of its aspects has previously been discussed. Her isolation is total and tragic. Her one key to the world outside herself, and even to the world inside herself, she destroys. By her love she is made to destroy what she most loves<sup>36</sup>; in trying to recover love, she annihilates it. When Deianeira's suspicions of the probable outcome of the gift of the anointed robe for Heracles have been aroused, she begins to cut herself off from her Chorus (663ff. and 723ff.). When her suspicions have been confirmed by Hyllus' report, she completely withdraws into herself and does not speak to Hyllus, the Chorus, or anyone else.<sup>37</sup> She is isolated from men and abandoned by the gods. οὐ μᾶτηρ ἄθεος ("your godless mother" 1039) Heracles later calls Deianeira when addressing Hyllus. She herself must know how ἄθεος she is and that by her action she has caused herself to be abandoned by Heracles, the son of Zeus.<sup>38</sup>

Deianeira also fulfills the two most extreme requirements that Knox applies to the hero in terms of isolation. So total is the hero's isolation that at certain moments he addresses himself to the landscape. The final result of the hero's isolation from the world of men is his wish for death. Deianeira fulfills her wish for death with her suicide.<sup>39</sup> Between the time of her realization of what she has done to Heracles and the time of her death, she addresses no person, but only her landscape, her house and bridal chamber. As the Nurse reports Deianeira's final scene,

αὐτὴ τὸν αὐτῆς δαίμον' ἀγκαλουμένη  
καὶ τὰς ἄπαιδας ἐς τὸ λοιπὸν οἰκίας (910-911)

and she would call aloud to her destiny and to  
her house that would have no children anymore.

ἔλεξεν, ὦ λέχη τε καὶ νυμφεῦ' ἐμέ,  
τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη χαίρεθ', ὡς ἔμ' οὔποτε  
δέξεσθ' ἔτ' ἐν κοίτῃσι ταῦσδ' εὐνάτριαν (920-922).<sup>40</sup>

She said, "O my bed, O my bridal chamber,  
farewell now forever, for never again  
will you receive me as a wife on your couch."

Knox' hero finds in moments of crisis and abandonment that his sense of and belief in himself become his only support. The severe upset of the arrival of Iole drives Deianeira to take measures to re-establish herself as the wife of Heracles. In his resistance to the imperatives of time and circumstance (all things change, but he will not), the hero makes an assumption of divinity, although he never consciously claims to be a god. By her use of the love-philtre, Deianeira displays her refusal to accept the change heralded by the arrival of Iole and unconsciously tries to take on the role of Eros. Deianeira's attempt to maintain the love of

Heracles, the son of Zeus, indicates another unconscious assumption of divinity on her part.

### III. Whitman

Whitman's conception of the Sophoclean hero requires that the behavior and will of the tragic hero represent the true action of each play, that each tragic hero be an example of areté, and that the hero's encounters with disasters and trials result from the clash between his areté and the imperfections of other human beings, the traditional gods, and life itself. Although the forces opposing the hero are usually divine, they are not of necessity morally right.

Deianeira's behavior and will not only represent the true action of the first 946 lines of the Trachiniae, but also cause the action of the last 332 lines. Deianeira's sufferings result from the clash between her areté (her supreme love) and the imperfections of Heracles, Eros, and the life that embodies them. Heracles is semi-divine, Eros is divine, but neither of these forces that oppose Deianeira is morally right.

Whitman considers Deianeira to be the hero of the Trachiniae, and the play itself to be one of "late learning," or tragic knowledge. The knowledge is tragic because, in spite of the effort to discover it in time, it comes too late. Sophocles turned to the theme of late learning to illustrate the irrationality of the world, and two of his heroes suffer the results of their late learning. Deianeira and Oedipus are not too proud to learn; but, having learned too late, they pass away uncomforted and despised.

"None of Sophocles' characters exhibit such sheer intelligence as these two, and none try harder to achieve good ends."

"...Sophocles intended them as examples of high-minded humanity which wills the best and achieves the worst."

"In Deianeira and Oedipus, we are faced with the fullest bitterness of tragedy--evil unmitigated by any sort of victory and resulting directly from the most moral action possible by the protagonist."<sup>41</sup>

According to Whitman, the Trachiniae and the Oedipus Tyrannus depict the fall of guiltless people, which Aristotle said would be revolting (Poetics 13); yet, the plays satisfy, perhaps because of their unmitigated honesty and because we meet the problem of evil pure. Only Whitman's idealized view of the Sophoclean hero allows him to view Deianeira and Oedipus as guiltless. However, he does express a rather less idealized view as well. The heroes of the Trachiniae and the Oedipus Tyrannus, he claims, lose themselves and find no greater selves, although their motivating areté is true. Their heroic willingness to accept destruction is no longer of such universal moral impressiveness; no one hints that Deianeira's death makes her resemble the gods, nor does she think so. "She is at best a very exquisite woman; at worst, a tool of meaningless forces."<sup>42</sup>

Although Whitman is surely right in claiming that Deianeira is the hero of the Trachiniae, his claim that Deianeira is guiltless and that she loses herself and finds no greater self is unconvincing. She is guiltless in that she is unconscious of the evil effects of the love-philtre, but she is guilty because she acts rashly and thoughtlessly. Driven by and attempting to gain control of Love, she is perhaps not so passive as she appears to herself and others. She does not lose herself. If she were to go on living after Heracles' death, she would be lost; but, by sacrificing herself to the same love that made her unwittingly



sacrifice Heracles, she exhibits a previously undisplayed nobleness and strength.

Whitman's development of the theme of late learning in the Trachinae illustrates why he presents Deianeira as fulfilling his requirements of the Sophoclean hero. His argument follows.<sup>43</sup>

All that we see of Deianeira (lines 1-946) is framed by darkness, the dangers of future events, and the frightening impossibility of judging or foreseeing. Beginning with the prologue, the play bends itself to the lonely hopelessness of Deianeira and the lyric emotions of her nature. A complex antecedent history in the form of three oracles exists for this rather simple play. Heracles will either die on an expedition or be victor and live forever free from toils (155-168). Heracles will either die during an attack on Oechalia or thereafter live a blessed life (74-81).<sup>44</sup> Heracles will never be slain by a living hand, but by someone already dead. This oracular material again emphasizes the impossibility of knowing the future. The supposed clarity and helpfulness of the oracles are deliberately confusing. They represent what hindsight or knowledge free from time might know, but what no one in the moment of action could possibly know. Man must act, if he acts at all, from likelihood. Sophocles "makes his characters act on the basis of likelihood, while the fatal dice are loaded hopelessly and irrationally in favor of the most unlikely event."<sup>45</sup> The plot of the Trachiniae, centered in the split between hoped-for likelihood and unknown and unlooked for facts, becomes a long, painful search for truth, with the final discovery bringing overwhelming despair.

The whole structure of the play is a quest to uncover certain truths, a quest that unravels against the "constantly sounded contradictory motif of the uncertainty of knowledge and the impossibility of knowing

anything but what is past."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Deianeira's great scene is not when she sends the robe, or kills herself, but when she finds out from Lichas who the captive princess is and why Heracles has brought her home with him. This unmasking scene is Deianeira's first real action, the first function of her areté. At this point an active and assertive Deianeira begins to weave her own fate.

The characters constantly struggle to do what they say cannot be done. In her opening monologue, Deianeira says life cannot be judged until it is over and then contradicts herself by saying she knows hers is miserable. Her uncertainty rises and falls throughout the play, disappearing with the approach of Heracles and returning with the entrance of the captives. Her uncertainty about Iole leads to her fatal insistence to know "as if knowledge were all-sufficient and had no dangers."<sup>47</sup> Since the desire to know is like the desire to do, it is not surprising that the next occurrence of the theme of knowing is accompanied by an idea of action, Deianeira's plan of the robe.<sup>48</sup> Then follow the revelations; Deianeira, Hyllus, and Heracles all find out too late. Deianeira might have known the robe was poisoned; Hyllus might have guessed Deianeira acted unwittingly; Heracles might have guessed the meaning of the oracle.

However, "of all the broken figures at the end, Deianeira alone is tragic, for her will is the only one involved."<sup>49</sup> She wills good but works evil, thus giving the play a meaning broader than the irrationality of the world. Whitman draws up a list of Deianeira's admirable and model characteristics,<sup>50</sup> which are in accordance with his opinions of certain of her actions. Deianeira has no hamartia unless it is a fault for a woman to contest the case for her husband's love with another woman.<sup>51</sup> Deianeira holds herself free from recrimination, anger, jealousy and Medean violence and acts only on her unquestionable right to retain what

is hers. It is heroic to maintain innocence in a case such as Deianeira's.

A clear contrast exists between the diseased Eros of Heracles and the compassionate universal love that is Deianeira's areté. It is part of her isolation and self-abnegation that no one sets a positive value on her existence. Her excellence is an excellence of love, which throughout she is unwilling to betray. Therefore, in Whitman's eyes, it is, in a way, sophrosyne that urges Deianeira to act and not any form of hamartia, since there could be no worse folly than to yield to a situation that would cause her to betray her love.<sup>52</sup> Deianeira acts where no action is safe; she knows Heracles too well, yet fights for the integrity of her love. She rises to meet the necessity of the tragic tension created between her desire for safety and the necessity for action. Her tragedy is not in her failure, but in the nature of the truth she uncovers.

In the end, Whitman claims, Deianeira is entirely destroyed. Justice is not done for her, and it is impossible to feel that the revelation of what she has done brings her to a true estimate of herself, or that the "self-loathing" that drove her to suicide is a deserved judgment. Whereas Ajax and Antigone sacrifice themselves, Deianeira punishes herself. Nevertheless, her death remains a defense of her areté, because it was love that drove her to self-punishment.

Whitman's picture of Deianeira's end and its significance is not entirely justified. Justice is not done for Deianeira. But does she ever ask for justice? Heracles was unjust to her when he sent Iole home,<sup>53</sup> but, when Deianeira undertakes the use of the charm of the love-philtre, she consciously removes herself from the realm of justice and injustice. After discovering the effects of the philtre, she decides that she will die along with Heracles (720). For her that is the justice her actions have required. She does have a true estimate of herself. The revelation

of what she has done makes her understand not only the full magnitude of her love of Heracles, but also the full magnitude of that love's power; what it cannot have it destroys. Her death does not seem to be self-punishment, but a conscious sacrifice to match her unconscious sacrifice of Heracles.<sup>54</sup> The silence of her end marks the strength she has found in her isolation. She does not negate herself and vanish any more than Oedipus negates himself by discovering who he is. In agreement with Whitman, it can be said that Deianeira's own goodness works her destruction.

H. F. Johansen claims that Deianeira visibly wilts under the burden of self-destructive heroism that Whitman puts on her.<sup>55</sup> Deianeira does not have to be idealized in order to be seen as the hero; the problem is that Whitman seems to neglect and invert some of Deianeira's stronger points in order to draw his idealized portrait of her and to make her comply with his idealized portrait of the Sophoclean hero in general.

#### IV. Bowra and Schadewaldt

Bowra and Schadewaldt believe that the Sophoclean hero through suffering learns to be modest before the gods and that the crisis of the play, by changing the hero's hybris into sophrosyne, restores harmony between him and the gods. This view is criticized in chapter one.<sup>56</sup> Deianeira's position in the play remains true to that criticism, unless one alters the meaning of sophrosyne, as Whitman does. As demonstrated in the discussion of Knox' model of the hero, Deianeira makes her decision without the support of the gods and carries it through to the point of self-destruction. Although she is driven by Eros, she also defies Eros, and actually tries to usurp him by attempting through magical means to quench Heracles' love for Iole and rekindle his love for her. She does not

receive his support.<sup>57</sup> That harmony is never restored between Deianeira and the gods is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that Deianeira is never reunited with Heracles, son of Zeus.

#### V. Webster

Webster's six basic aspects of the Sophoclean hero, insofar as they have been accepted in the model of the hero presented in chapter one, are fulfilled to varying extents by Deianeira. According to Webster, the hero is conscious of his birth and, being nobly born, conforms to certain standards of life and action. Deianeira is conscious not so much of her actual birth as she is of her marriage, which was the beginning of her current life and identity. Except for a general memory of the care-less time of her maidenhood,<sup>58</sup> Deianeira has no real remembrance of her identity before the battle between Achelous and Heracles, after which *καὶ πρὸς μητέρα ἄφαρ βέβαχ'*, / *ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα* ("and then she was gone from her mother, like an abandoned calf," 529-530). Deianeira is conscious of being nobly married, to "the best of men," and it is as a result of this marriage that she conforms to certain standards of life and action. Webster holds that the hero, as a member of a family, has a duty to be loyal to his parents and a right to expect loyalty from his children. Again, this point is best illustrated for Deianeira in terms of her marriage. Her parents and her children, except for Hyllus, are virtually non-existent in the play.<sup>59</sup> However, she has a strong loyalty to both Heracles and her marriage and wishes that loyalty to be returned; she loves Heracles so much that she is unwilling to accept the inevitability of that loyalty not being returned.

Deianeira is an excellent example of Webster's second heroic aspect, which attributes to the hero frankness, fortitude, and sensitiveness to shame. Deianeira openly confesses her various worries and private troubles to the Chorus, but her frankness is most obvious during her persuasion-speech to Lichas (436ff.). οὐχὶ χᾶτέρας / πλείστας ἀνὴρ εἷς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δῆ; ("one man and many women--has Heracles not had very many others before?" 459-460). She is frank to the Chorus with her feelings about Iole and her inability to cope with the situation (531ff.)<sup>60</sup>; she is frank about her fears before and after sending the anointed robe to Heracles (555ff. and 663ff.); and she is frank in revealing her intention of suicide (720). Two of these cited passages also contain notable examples of Deianeira's sensitiveness to shame. Before sending the robe, she says, ὥς σκότῳ / κἂν αἰσχρὰ πράσσης, οὐποτ' αἰσχύνῃ πεσῇ ("In darkness even if you do shameful things, you will never fall into shame," 596-597). Deianeira will be ashamed if her attempt fails and does not regain Heracles' love for her; but, if nobody discloses the means by which she tried to win back his love, the shame will be for herself alone and she will not fall disgracefully. The second example of Deianeira's sensitiveness to shame also illustrates Webster's view that some evils the hero suffers are too great to bear and lead the hero to prefer to die rather than live. After discovering the effects of the love-philtre, Deianeira announces her decision to the Chorus.

καίτοι δέδοκται, κεύνος εἰ σφαλῆσεται,  
 ταύτῃ σὺν ὀρμῇ καὶ συνθανεῖν ἅμα  
 ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσιν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν,  
 ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι (719-722)  
 And yet I have made a decision: if he falls  
 I shall die under the same blow with him.

I could not bear to live and hear myself called evil

I, who wish above all else to be truly good.

In line 721, Deianeira expresses a point of view that is identical to Ajax' and is the essence of heroic ethics.<sup>61</sup> Deianeira does not consider the possibility that vengeance may be taken on her.

Webster's third aspect of the hero, that he offends in some way against Sophocles' political ideal, does not apply to Deianeira, unless she "offends" against an ideal by being ignorant of it. She is an apolitical creature; in fact, no state actually exists for her. ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχῶνι ἀνάστατοι / ξένῳ παρ' ἀνδρὶ ναίομεν ("we, driven from our home, live here in Trachis, a stranger's guests" 39-40).

The last of Webster's heroic aspects to be considered is the hero's lack of sophrosyne and consequent exhibition of arrogance, violence, haste, inflexibility, or folly. Webster further delineates various forms of haste, such as impatience, suspicion, anger, promptness, and efficiency. Deianeira exhibits all these forms of haste in her sending of the love-philtre to Heracles, including a suggestion of anger. Deianeira is not an angry hero, but there is a touch of reproof evident in her speech announcing her decision to use the love-philtre. In reference to Iole she says,

τοῖάδ' Ἡρακλῆς,

ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῶν ἀγαθὸς καλούμενος,

οἰκούρι' ἀντέπεμψε τοῦ μακροῦ χρόνου (540-542)

This is the housekeeping wage my faithful  
and noble Heracles sends home to me  
to compensate for his long absence!

Webster's comment on this passage is that Deianeira speaks with bitter scorn of Heracles.<sup>62</sup> However, he later states that Deianeira is not

angry with Heracles, but loves him and cannot endure her own position.<sup>63</sup>

Iole, more than Deianeira knows, is "destructive of her wits" (538).

According to Webster, Deianeira's one rash act is done in despair.

Although her motive is pure, she does not stop to think any more than Oedipus did when he killed his father.<sup>64</sup>

## VI. Gellie

According to Gellie, the protagonist is called upon to deal with a ready-made state of evil. Whatever action he takes will be wrong, but he acts and is destroyed by his action. Deianeira must deal with a ready-made state of evil created by Heracles. In contrast to Heracles' unalloyed masculinity, Deianeira, the paragon of femininity, has to make the important decision of the play.<sup>65</sup> If she decides to accept Iole and Heracles' love of Iole passively, she will forfeit her place in Heracles' love (550-551). By taking action and sending the anointed robe to Heracles, however, she destroys Heracles and, thus, is destroyed herself. Gellie himself points out that, until the time of Deianeira's action, the only first-hand facts in the play are descriptions of her feelings. Although he considers Deianeira and Heracles to hold positions of equal prominence in the play, he still makes the statement that at the level of feeling Deianeira alone dominates the play.<sup>66</sup>

## VII. Kirkwood

Deianeira also fulfills Kirkwood's specifications of the Sophoclean hero. She has a strong and noble character and is confronted with a crucial situation, which she responds to in a special way. The relationship between Iole and Heracles involves religious and moral issues and entails suffering for Deianeira. Her suffering is totally unrelieved and ends in



her death. It is impossible to say whether Deianeira is a victim of circumstances, gods, or men, or is responsible for her own fate. She is not perfect, yet her suffering is not entirely a punishment for her guilt. Deianeira's character, like Oedipus', causes the precipitation of the chain of events leading to the deaths of Heracles and Deianeira and, therefore, must bear partial responsibility for Deianeira's fate. In fact, it is Deianeira's unwise trust in a desperate remedy that precipitates the catastrophe of the play, and it is this imperfection in Deianeira's faith in the continued love of Heracles that brings her to life as a human being. Deianeira's love itself is both her fault and her strength and nobility. However, the misfortunes that overwhelm Deianeira are in no way morally deserved in terms of her character. Deianeira is loyal to her ideal of her "noble birth" and "noble character" (προτιμῶ μὴ κακὴν πεφυκέναι, 722; "nobility of character is implied in nobility of birth, but doubtless the former is meant"<sup>67</sup>). Sophocles' way of contrasting the heroic with the unheroic (Oedipus with Creon, Antigone with Creon and Ismene, Ajax with Odysseus) makes clear the enduring value of the hero's nobility. Deianeira has a distinct and emphasized idea of nobility, and, when faced by a crisis, she is guided by that idea. Her "nobility" is her devotion to Heracles, a more mundane and less heroic-seeming nobility than that of Ajax or Antigone, but one expressed and acted in the same way.

Kirkwood himself considers the Trachiniae to be a diptych play<sup>68</sup> with the drama being conveyed in terms of a central contrast between Deianeira and Heracles.<sup>69</sup> A contrast exists between Deianeira and Heracles on human grounds and between Deianeira's human weakness and Heracles' superhuman certainty; in both elements Deianeira is the central figure.<sup>70</sup> Deianeira occupies the dominant position in the action for as great a

proportion of the play as that occupied by Ajax in the Ajax. Nor does Deianeira vanish after her death; she is constantly represented by Hyllus in the final scene (as Ajax is represented by Teucer<sup>71</sup>). Deianeira has a touch of the "sublime quality of heroism"<sup>72</sup> not unlike Ajax'. The characteristics of Deianeira and her nobility include unselfish devotion, graciousness to all, impracticality, timorousness but single-mindedness, and strength in her love for Heracles. However, Kirkwood states that Deianeira is incomplete in the dramatic sense until the picture of Heracles is added.<sup>73</sup> The implications of her fate are made clear only in Heracles' scene, which provides the answer to why Deianeira suffers so cruelly. In trying to interfere with the actions of Heracles she grapples with forces too great for herself.<sup>74</sup> Only for Heracles can the baffling and misleading oracles and the truthful lie of Nessus give a meaning and pattern. Deianeira's involvement in this chain of events leads to destruction because she is not a "child of Zeus." Heracles' status as the son of Zeus is emphasized; and in his superhuman, necessary aspect, Heracles is a force rather than a character. As such a force, he is part of Deianeira's fate.<sup>75</sup> Deianeira represents human uncertainty; Heracles represents fated necessity. The level of the particular leads to the universal, the portrayal of mankind's struggle with the powers beyond its control, and again features Deianeira, this time as the representative of humanity. "The final part of the play does more than present the second half of a very penetrating contrast between Deianeira and Heracles; it fulfills, through the contrast, the tragedy of Deianeira."<sup>76</sup>

## VIII. Lesky

Lesky does not define Heracles as a force, as does Kirkwood, but he does see the workings of a superhuman force. The catastrophe of the play, he claims, originates in "the typically Sophoclean conflict between human desires," which in Deianeira's case are understandable and pure, and "destiny in general as an incomprehensible transcendent power."<sup>77</sup>

According to Lesky, the subject of the Trachiniae is the reversal of human schemes by powers beyond man's comprehension. A sequence of scenes full of tension makes us fully realize the shock Deianeira suffers. In Lesky's view, she hides her feelings from Lichas, just as she would have hidden them from Heracles, and speaks of the overwhelming power of love, which Heracles also must obey. She speaks to the Chorus of her deep sorrow, her only available remedy, and her conviction that she is not doing anything wrong.<sup>78</sup>

Lesky's interest in the hero of the Trachiniae is rather limited; however, certain of the basic heroic characteristics he finds in the other plays of Sophocles can be applied to Deianeira. In her hasty decision to use the love-philtre, Deianeira does not show the calm wisdom of Odysseus. The excess of her energy that allows her to see only approval for her action in the words of the Chorus (588ff.) makes her collide with the unforeseeable. It throws her life into a confusion (663ff.) from which only death can release her.<sup>79</sup> Deianeira's concern is for the human dignity that demands the truth of her marriage to Heracles and not for mere existence, otherwise she could easily enough have accepted Iole. Deianeira's existence, as mentioned earlier, is entirely dependent on Heracles'. But this dependence, which causes her fears, anxieties, and sleepless nights, does not go to the point of slavishness. "Hers is a noble

nature, conscious of its dignity as well as aware of the human condition. She is essentially human. Her act of rashness proceeds from a jealousy she is entitled to feel by virtue of her faithfulness and from her instincts of self-respect and self-preservation."<sup>80</sup>

As is the case for Lesky's Sophoclean hero, Deianeira is subjected to terrible tensions; she must rely on her own inner strength, and whatever she does is prompted by her own will, although she lacks control of its outcome. Deianeira's will and her strength force her to obtain the truth about Iole from Lichas and enable her to hear the news in a calm, controlled manner.<sup>81</sup> It is the will of Deianeira to send the anointed robe to Heracles. It is the "will of the beast" to kill Heracles; but it is Deianeira's will that makes the decision to use Nessus' love-philtre. It is her will to die without attempting to receive the blessings of forgiveness from Hyllus or Heracles.

#### IX. The Will of Deianeira

The question of Deianeira's will is crucial in the context of determining her role as the hero of the Trachiniae. To deny her willful action is to deny that she is capable of heroic action, and not everyone believes that Deianeira's action is purely the reflection of her will.

A. J. Waldock claims that Deianeira does not produce the events, but that other and far more powerful agencies are at work. He holds the opinion that Deianeira did not do anything singular, her action could almost be said to be typical of women,<sup>82</sup> and that Deianeira's act is not sharply individual. The disasters of the play do not come from her character but from the malice of a centaur and from dooms that have been foreordained. The events are produced by magic unguents and come about

in fulfillment of oracles.<sup>83</sup>

Actually, Waldock's view advances no evidence against Deianeira's position as hero. According to Lesky, it is characteristic for the hero to take action although he lacks control of its outcome. In the Trachiniae certain dooms have been "foreordained," and the events do come about in "fulfillment of oracles." In what Sophoclean play is there a sense that the hero's doom has not been foreordained? Whose actions more manifestly fulfill oracles than Oedipus'?

With the arrival of Iole to usurp Deianeira's place in her own home, Deianeira is no longer able to "bend with the wind."<sup>84</sup> Deianeira must say "no" or else cease to exist as a human being. At this point, in the view of K. F. Slater, Deianeira hesistantly, fearfully, and while seeking advice, tries to control the course of her own life. However, because she is still under the influence of another, the Centaur, "the attempt is a total failure." "In seeking to free her own will, she does only the will of the beast."<sup>85</sup> Although Slater denies Deianeira free will in the action of the love-philtre, she does allow Deianeira to recover her own will after the action has been completed. In the silence with which she receives Hyllus' reproaches, Deianeira takes hold of herself at last. She refuses to blame Nessus and refuses all defense. Like Oedipus, she assumes responsibility for what happened through her agency and puts forth no excuse.<sup>86</sup> When Deianeira kills herself, she demonstrates that, if she cannot direct the course of her life to her own ends, she can at least prevent further distortion by exterior forces. "She rises above contingency and the shackled passivity of her female role only in the moment of her death, but then with all the self-assertiveness which her life lacked."<sup>87</sup>

However, to deny Deianeira free will in her decision to use the love-philtre seems to me to be totally wrong. It is Deianeira's decision not Nessus'. As I pointed out earlier, Deianeira's will and Nessus' will are not even the same. Deianeira desires the love of Heracles, Nessus wishes the death of Heracles. In the same way that Oedipus' will is at variance with the will of the divine oracles and hence with his actions, Deianeira's will is at variance with the results of her actions. Free will and responsibility are interdependent. The oracles did not remove responsibility from Oedipus, nor does the oracle (unknown to Deianeira) that Heracles is to die at the hands of someone dead (1159-1161) remove responsibility from Deianeira. Her acts, like Oedipus', were "not predestined, merely predicted. An essential distinction."<sup>88</sup> Not only is it Deianeira who decides to use the unguent, but it is also she who decides to accept the unguent from the centaur in the first place.<sup>89</sup> When she silently draws the necessary connection between the wool's fate and what can be expected to befall Heracles, she recognizes that the misjudgment is hers and that Heracles' fate seems to have been sealed by her hand.<sup>90</sup>

H. A. Mason believes that Deianeira, having decided to use the love-philtre, "while apparently showing wisdom in the face of what the Greeks took to be the primary facts of life, is going to commit tragic hamartia by opposing the white magic of Eros with the black magic of the centaur."<sup>91</sup> The "black magic" belongs to the Centaur; the action belongs to Deianeira. Her action is an immediate one; she does not wait until Heracles' return and then choose a "right" course of action. Hyllus reproaches Deianeira with her rashness; "her rash neglect of θεῖος gives him the right to curse her" (810).<sup>92</sup>

There is no doubt that Deianeira's existence and destiny are bound up with Heracles'. However, it is Deianeira who binds herself to Heracles. Heracles makes no attempt to bind himself to Deianeira and, in fact, attempts to loosen his connections with Deianeira. The feelings and actions of Deianeira cause and suffer the movement of the play.

According to Kamerbeek, the meaning of the play as seen from the point of view of Deianeira could perhaps be summed up as follows:

it demonstrates a noble and faithful woman's fate; shows her struggling against her husband's infidelity and destroyed by a crafty stroke of fate which makes her involuntarily cause his death; so unaccountable is human destiny and such are the gods' inscrutable ways.<sup>93</sup>

However, Kamerbeek feels that this is not a complete picture because it does not account for Heracles' presence. But does Heracles' appearance in the last quarter of the play lessen the role played by Deianeira? It is Deianeira's will and her fate that act upon Heracles. It is true that Deianeira finds her identity in Heracles; this is made clear by Deianeira herself, not by Heracles. Heracles is Deianeira's Heracles, but Deianeira is not Heracles' Deianeira. Therefore, in a sense, it is Deianeira who is dramatically independent. She exercises her will and meets her fate. The destruction of Heracles is a significant part of her fate. In fact, as seen in the play, Heracles' destruction is perhaps more a representation of Deianeira's fate than of Heracles'. It is a direct result of an action of her will (using the love-philtre) and only an indirect result of an action of his will (sending Iole home). During the course of the play, Heracles does not meet his final end, and release from his labors. Deianeira, whose acts of will determine the course of

events in the play, reaches her end and fulfills her heroic will. She kills herself after having destroyed the love of Heracles and the source of her identity. Ajax loses his martial-heroic identity and therefore kills himself rather than live without its glory and with a different identity. Deianeira, realizing she has lost her identity, kills herself rather than live without the glory of her love. That she is unable to live without her true identity is clear evidence of her heroic character.

Deianeira fits well many of the characteristics ascribed to other Sophoclean heroes, and she emerges within the play itself as a free individual whose acts of will determine the course of the play's events. Deianeira is the hero of the Trachiniae.



## NOTES -- CHAPTER TWO

- 1 Poetics 1453a; cf. chapter one, page 6.
- 2 These two sets of lines are illustrations of what Kamerbeek (201) refers to as the "tragic day" concept, which often underlies the action of a tragedy (see also Aj. 131 and 753).
- 3 It is significant that in this passage Deianeira rouses the Chorus; she becomes, in effect, the χορηγός. In lines 225-228 she rejoins the Chorus.  
  
See chapter four for a further development of this relationship between the Chorus and Deianeira.
- 4 Poetics 1453b; cf. page 7.
- 5 Knox, 3; cf. page 8.
- 6 Knox, 7; cf. page 8.
- 7 Cf. 147-152.
- 8 The small measure of joy Deianeira finds in her love of Heracles is firmly joined to her suffering. That meagre amount of joy, in fact, increases the depth of her suffering.
- 9 Gellie (63) points out another indication of Deianeira's isolation, the unsureness of communication. Deianeira is robbed of Heracles' presence and cannot make reliable contact by report. The only thing Deianeira can be certain of is that she knows how she feels.

- 10 She does not accept the Chorus' suggestion that "the anger felt is tempered" for one who errs unwillingly. She replies:

τοιαῦτα δ' ἂν λέξειεν οὐχ ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ  
κοινωνός, ἀλλ' ὃ μηδέν ἐστ' οἴκοι βαρύ (729-730).

- 11 Cypris is presented almost as a force distinct from the other gods.

μέγα τι σθένος ἃ Κύπρις ἐκφέρεται  
νύκτας αἰεὶ.  
καὶ τὰ μὲν θεῶν  
παρέβαν, καὶ ὅπως Κρονίδαν ἀπάτα-  
σεν οὐ λέγω (497-500).

- 12 Cf. Kamerbeek, 161.

- 13 "The exception is of course the Trachiniae" (Knox, 8).

- 14 Cf. Kamerbeek, 137.

- 15 One almost wonders if the Chorus in this passage is playing the role of Deianeira's conscience.

- 16 This point will be developed in chapter four.

- 17 Knox, 10; cf. chapter one, page 10.

- 18 Cf. chapter one, page 10.

- 19 However, she does not announce to anyone else the actual essence of her plan.

- 20 Cf. Kamerbeek, 117. Deianeira has already conceived her fatal plan.

προσαρμόζω makes us think of the peplos, or philtum (cf. 687-ἀρμόσαιμι), or both.

21

φύλτρους δ' εἴν πως τήνδ' ὑπερβαλώμεθα

τὴν παῖδα καὶ θέλκτροισι τοῖς ἐφ' Ἡρακλεῦ (584-585).

This seems to be a part of the condition of μεμηχάνηται τοῦργον as well as the phrase following it, εἴ τι μὴ δοκῶ / πρᾶσσειν μάταιον (586-587).

22

There is no question that δέδοκται is not a term suitable for expressing heroic resolution. Knox (11) uses it as an example of the tone that allows no argument. Electra tells Chrysothemis that her mind is made up, δέδοκται (1049). When Philoctetes is asked whether his mind is made up (οὕτω, δέδοκται 1277), he answers, καὶ πέρα γ' ἔσθ' ἢ λέγω.

23

The Chorus does not even suspect Deianeira's intended suicide. Their lines at 813-814 voice no suspicion of Deianeira's intentions. Even Hyllus' lines (815-820), which wish death on his mother, do not call to mind for them a recollection of Deianeira's earlier words of determination. During their lines at 862ff., the Chorus express no hint of suspicion of the nature of the misfortune within the house. It takes them three lines to confirm that Deianeira is really dead (οὐ δὴ ποθ' ὥς θανοῦσα; 876. τέθνηκεν ἡ τάλαινα; 877. τάλαιν'. ὀλεθρία τύνη τρόπῳ θανεῖν σφε φήσ; 878) and still more lines to realize that Deianeira has killed herself (εἰπέ τῷ μόρῳ, γύναι, ξυντρέχει 880).

24

This is not to say that Deianeira would react in a fierce and angry manner.

25

Actually she does test it, but does not wait to see the results before she sends off the anointed robe to Heracles.

26

Hyllus' imprecations in this speech are tragic both in light of the following scene and also because they are based on an erroneous idea. To Hyllus and Heracles Deianeira's mood temporarily seems to have been

one of excessive boldness and rashness, although Deianeira's intention is not to be bold,

κακὰς δὲ τόλμας μήτ' ἐπισταύμην ἐγὼ

μήτ' ἐκμάθοιμι, τὰς τε τολμώσας στυγῶ (582-583),

although her mention of it perhaps indicates that she fears she is indeed being more bold than she cares to admit to herself.

27 See chapter one, page 12 for a list of additional characteristics.

28 Does Deianeira not seek to comfort and obtain the forgiveness of Heracles because she no longer needs him or because she knows he will not be comforted or give forgiveness? Deianeira wants Heracles' love, not his opinion.

29 Deianeira must feel too that the world is mocking her as well. She knows, thanks to the Messenger, that her situation is common knowledge. While accosting Lichas he said,

πολλοῖσιν ἀστῶν. ἐν μέσῃ Τραχινέων

ἀγορᾷ πολὺς σου ταῦτά γ' εἰσήκουσ' ὄχλος (423-424).

οὐκ ἐπάμοτος λέγων

δάμαρτ' ἔφασκες Ἡρακλεῦ ταύτην ἄγειν; (427-428).

In her typical silent reserve she does not verbally express concern about the opinions of others.

ταῦτ' οὖν φοβοῦμαι μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς

ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ' ἀνὴρ (550-551).

surely expresses more a fear of the actual state of affairs than of the state of affairs being known and talked about.

30 In fact, Deianeira does not mention Cypris by name, and she names Eros only once.

"Ἐρωτι μὲν νυν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται

πύκνης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ (441-442).

Cypris is mentioned only three times in the play, and only by the Chorus (497, 515, 860-862).

- 31 "Kupris and Eros are not gods in this play; they are mere common nouns, 'desire' and 'passion'" (Dorothea Wender, "Sexual Imagery in the Trachiniae," Ramus 3 (1974) 14). Certainly the alternation of references to Love between the two divinities suggests that neither of them is individually defined as a personality. The one reference that overtly refers to either figure as a divinity is made by the Messenger at line 354: "Ἐρως δέ νυν / μόνος θεῶν θέλξειεν αἰχμάσαι τάδε (354-355). Two of the four occurrences of ἔρως represent the common noun. At 443 the Messenger speaks of ὁ τῆσδ' ἔρως φανεῖς. At 489 Lichas says, τοῦ τῆσδ' ἔρωτος εἰς ἅπανθ' ἥσσων ἔφυ.
- 32 Cf. R. C. Jebb, Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Part V The Trachiniae (Cambridge, 1892) 70, 72.
- 33 Deianeira identifies herself with the women Heracles has sent home. To ridicule them would be to ridicule herself.
- 34 See lines 536ff.
- 35 It is interesting that Deianeira took the love-philtre from Nessus in the first place. If she had had complete trust and faith in Heracles (and what new bride does not deserve to have such trust and faith?), why would she have taken the love-philtre?
- 36 Throughout the play Heracles is the only person for whom she expresses love.

- 37 Deianeira's children are, in fact, lost to her (see 817ff. and 911).

This thought together with losing Heracles by her own ἀμαρτία drives Deianeira to her death. "ἄπαρς οὐσία is for her the negation of existence itself" (Kamerbeek, 196). I should place the emphasis more on Deianeira's loss of Heracles. She is dependent on Heracles (although she is forced to be independent since he offers her no support) and on being Heracles' wife. Her existence begins and ends with Heracles. The role of her children is less apparent in the play. Hyllus is the only one of her children whom we meet. Her other children are not even living with her at present, but are at Tiryns (1152) and Thebes (1154).

- 38 Why else would she not live until she could see Heracles and try to comfort him in the agony of his last living moments?

Perhaps the greatest and most tragic illustration of Deianeira's isolation and abandonment occurs after her death when, following Hyllus' expression of her innocence in fulfilling the "will of the beast," Heracles forgets her.

- 39 Knox speaks of the hero's death as the logical end of the hero's refusal to compromise. Living in human society is one continuous compromise of subduing one's own will and desires to the requirements of others.

Deianeira's will and desires are the love of Heracles, and the case of Iole shows her that she no longer is able to cope with Heracles' requirements for other women.

- 40 Another line from the Nurse's speech illustrates a certain aspect of Deianeira's character:

καθέξεται' ἐν μέσσοισιν εὐνατηρούς (918).

Both Deianeira and Antigone need a man. Deianeira, to a certain extent,

has one; therefore, she can just desire his place. Antigone has none; therefore, she must fill his place. Deianeira's character is then necessarily less masculine, but not necessarily less heroic.

- 41 Whitman, 106. Still, is there not a sense of victory, even amidst the horror and suffering, for Oedipus, in his possession of the truth, and for Deianeira, in the finality of her death?
- 42 Whitman, 106.
- 43 He cites the following references to learning too late and the uncertainty of knowledge: 669, 694, 710, 934, 1118, 1171.
- 44 Only the gods live free from toil and have blessed lives forever.
- 45 Whitman, 110.
- 46 Whitman, 110.
- 47 Whitman, 111.
- 48 The Chorus at 592 say "you must do it to find out" (δρῶσα). δρῶσα is always associated with a decisive or fatal action (cf. Whitman, 112 and 265, note 23).
- 49 Whitman, 112.
- 50 E.g., Deianeira possesses the paradoxical quality of yielding strength; she is not weak, but has an intelligent and heroic submissiveness; she has a restrained, heroic grandeur; she is all love; she preserves dignity amid humiliations, by profound sympathy; she is compassionate, intelligent and gentle; the supremacy of her gentleness is a kind of areté. Whitman does not recognize any less than admirable characteristics in Deianeira.

- 51 Is Deianeira not transgressing or defying Eros? The point is that in her speech to Lichas (436ff.) Deianeira denies the possibility of her contesting the case for Heracles' love with another woman.
- 52 In addition to his inversion of the word "sophrosyne" and the resulting interpretation, Whitman (114-115) denies any pride on the part of Deianeira. Contrary to Bowra (125-128), who feels that in her recourse to magic Deianeira ceases to be a good wife and demonstrates unexpected and deplorable pride, Whitman states that recourse to magic is not prideful, and that in the act of using the philtre Deianeira swallows the last of her pride. To deny Deianeira a sense of pride seems to require one also to deny her a sense of her own identity and a reason for her action. Deianeira has a strong internal sense of pride, a pride in her love and in her identity as the wife of Heracles. However, to call her pride unexpected and deplorable is to misunderstand Deianeira and her tragedy.
- 53 Cf. Deianeira's speech 531ff.
- 54 Cf. Herbert Musurillo, "Fortune's Wheel: The Symbolism of Sophocles' Women of Trachis," TAPA 92 (1961) 372-383.  
 "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'" (Musurillo, 380). Likewise, earlier Deianeira's modesty and her youthful beauty were both sacrificed to Heracles" (Musurillo, 377).
- 55 H. F. Johansen, "Sophocles 1939-1959," Lustrum 7 (1962), 161.
- 56 Cf. chapter one, page 17.



- 57 If she ever thought the philtre was Eros and represented his support, she was deceived by him no less than Ajax was deceived by Athena.

58

ἄμοχθον ἐξαίρει βίον  
 ἐς τοῦθ', ἕως τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνῇ  
 κληθῇ. (147-149),

Deianeira tells her Chorus of maidens.

- 59 We know indirectly that Deianeira does love her children and suffer worries on their account. Addressing the Chorus, she speaks of a maiden entering marriage and understanding through her own experience the troubles with which Deianeira is weighed down.

ἦτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη (150).

60

ταῦτ' οὖν φοβοῦμαι μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς  
 ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ' ἀνὴρ. (550-551).

- 61 Cf. Kamerbeek, 161.

- 62 T. B. L. Webster, "Sophocles' Trachiniae," Greek Poetry and Life: Essays for Gilbert Murray (Oxford, 1936) 170.

- 63 Webster "Sophocles' Trachiniae," 172.

64

ἀλλ' οὐ γάρ, ὥσπερ εἶπον, ὀργαίνειν καλὸν  
 γυναῖκα νοῦν ἔχουσιν (552-553).

Deianeira's λυπήριον λώφημα (554) might not be an exhibition of rage, but it is Deianeira's substitute for rage (an emotion foreign to her character). It is certainly not an example of νοῦν ἔχων. Perhaps this

passage is evidence of Deianeira's transgression of sophrosyne.

- 65 Gellie, 214, 215.
- 66 Gellie, 57.
- 67 Kamerbeek, 161.
- 68 Kirkwood, 291.
- 69 Diptych is a deliberate form, not a failure of form; Kirkwood, 46.
- 70 G. M. Kirkwood, "The Dramatic Unity of Sophocles' Trachiniae," TAPA 72 (1941) 203, 205. In A Study of Sophoclean Drama, 118, he takes this point even further and places the main emphasis of the central contrast not on the more-than-human reach of Heracles' nature, but on the human qualities of Deianeira.
- 71 Gilbert Norwood, Greek Tragedy (London, 1920) 158.
- 72 Kirkwood, A Study of Sophoclean Drama, 50.
- 73 I suggest that on the non-dramatic level Deianeira adds this picture herself. One gets the feeling that the Heracles she loves exists only in her mind.
- 74 Charles Segal, "The Hydra's Nursling: Image and Action in the Trachiniae," L'Antiquité Classique 44 (1975) 617.
- 75 Kirkwood, "The Dramatic Unity of Sophocles' Trachiniae," 211.
- 76 Kirkwood, A Study in Sophoclean Drama, 50-51.
- 77 Lesky, 110.

- 78 Deianeira hardly appears to be convinced, as Lesky claims, that she is not doing anything wrong.
- 79 Lesky observes in the Ajax and the Antigone that the consequently disturbed world-order regains its equilibrium by the end of the play. Perhaps the prospective union of Hyllus and Iole is representative of a return to equilibrium in the Trachiniae. Just as Iole replaced Deianeira sexually, Hyllus replaces Heracles.
- 80 Kamerbeek, 25.
- 81 See Kamerbeek 109-110 for a treatment of Deianeira's confrontation with Lichas.
- 82 Is not Ajax' action in the Ajax then "almost typical" of a Homeric war hero, and would it be said that he did nothing "singular"? Musurillo (383) views Deianeira as the eternal woman in whom the forces of Cypris are physically expressed.
- 83 A. J. A. Waldock, Sophocles the Dramatist (Cambridge, 1951) 101-102.
- 84 Cf. H. A. Mason "'The Women of Trachis'," Arion 2 (1963) 115.  
Deianeira alone in the play dwells on the number of occasions when Heracles has been "infected" by love. However, the play is constructed to give primary stress to the fact that in the case of Iole Deianeira is faced with a final, lasting rival.
- 85 Kathleen Field Slater, "Some Suggestions for Staging the Trachiniae," Arion N.S. 3 (1976), 60.
- 86 Assumption of responsibility is a clear indication of Deianeira's

heroic nature and her role as hero in the action of the play.

Heracles never assumes any responsibility for the play's catastrophic events, even though it was his action in sending Iole to Deianeira that set off the chain of events.

87 Slater, 60.

88 Knox, "Sophocles' Oedipus," Tragic Themes in Ancient Literature, 22.

89 Kamerbeek (155) believes ὅτ' ἦν ἐργαστέον (688) is "very suggestive of Deianeira's inner compulsion to act as she did."

90 In the words of the Chorus (841-846) the tragedy of Deianeira's guiltless guilt is compressed.

91 Mason, 115.

92 Kamerbeek, 175.

93 Kamerbeek, 25.

## CHAPTER THREE

## HERACLES

Heracles appears in the Trachiniae in lines 947-1278.<sup>1</sup> One view of this last quarter of the play claims that it treats Deianeira only in a negative sense, since her existence is shown to be bound up with Heracles'.<sup>2</sup> The latter portion of the play, however, deals with Deianeira in a "negative sense" only to the extent that she is not present.<sup>3</sup> Heracles is treated more as a force than as a person. Sophocles has not done anything to humanize his barbarous violence, immense appetites, and the superhuman dimensions that he displays as a figure of saga. "His superlative masculinity and force, moving on a non-human level, form a polar contrast with Deianeira's very human womanliness and dependence."<sup>4</sup> A great deal of stress can be laid on the predestined character of Heracles' fate by the constant mention throughout the play of the oracles. Because oracles are not mentioned where Deianeira is concerned, it has been claimed that this "confirms our feeling that her existence and destiny are bound up with Heracles'".<sup>5</sup> But it is because her existence and destiny are bound up with Heracles' that the oracles do pertain to Deianeira. In fact, the significance of the oracles seems to have a greater influence on Deianeira's actions than on Heracles'. Heracles does not rise to meet his fate. He is, in fact, full of bitterness against the fate that has brought him down at the hands of a woman. Seeing himself trapped in a painful, demeaning, meaningless end, he is outraged at his helplessness. Deianeira discovers courage and strength in the face of her fate; Heracles discovers weakness.  $\nu\upsilon\nu\ \delta'\ \epsilon\kappa$

τοιοῦτου θῆλος ηὔρημαι τάλας ("Now I, once such a man, in my misery am discovered a woman," 1075). Possessed by the bestiality that the robe soaked in the Centaur's blood symbolizes, he is at the mercy of his pain; he is unable to set his will against it.<sup>6</sup>

Jebb also creates problems for himself and the play, by wishing Heracles to perform a role that is not his.

The Deianeira of the Trachiniae is dramatically effective in the very highest degree,--in a manner almost unique; the Heracles of the Trachiniae, though grandly conceived, falls short of being perfectly effective; and he does so, because he has to follow Deianeira.<sup>7</sup>

Jebb believes that the catastrophe of the play turns on the poisoned robe, which is to be the death of Heracles. He claims that the artistic unity of the tragedy demands that Heracles, the "hero himself," ought to be the principal object of interest throughout.

Perhaps, then, he should look elsewhere for the play's unity. For Heracles truly to dominate the scene, it would require that "the pathos of this unique being should not have to compete with the deepest pathos of humanity...For, in such a competition, the purely human interest, if fully developed by a great master, could not but prove the stronger, as being, in its essence, more tragic."<sup>8</sup> This statement seems to assign the role of the play's tragic hero to Deianeira. Jebb, however, is unwilling to accept the assignment. According to him, the only way to secure paramount effectiveness for Heracles would be to place Deianeira more in the background by making her a less noble figure, qualifying her graces of character with less attractive features, and to bring out in the fullest and most powerful manner everything sublime and pathetic in "the great hero's destiny."<sup>9</sup> That this has not been done, Jebb feels,

is the one serious defect of the Trachiniae.

It seems unlikely that Sophocles would have written such a conspicuous "defect" into the play. Heracles' "paramount effectiveness" is not found in the role of the hero any more than Odysseus' is in the Ajax. Two aspects of Heracles in the Trachiniae will now be considered: his position relative to the concept of hero, and the place he holds in the action of the play as a whole, Heracles, like Deianeira will be measured against the heroic models given in chapter one.

### I. Aristotle

Heracles does not fit very well into Aristotle's synthesis of the tragic hero. Whether or not his misfortune results from an error of judgment on his part is a moot point. Certainly, by sending Iole home to Deianeira, he causes the sequence of events that lead to his catastrophe; but there is no indication that his action is the result of a decision or any effort of judgment on his part. In fact, he appears to act with complete thoughtlessness. Being a slave to the  $\nu\acute{o}\sigma\omicron\varsigma$  of his passion, he causes his misfortune by qualities of vice and depravity, which Aristotle viewed as anti-heroic. The disease he suffers from the poisoned robe represents an intensification of the lust inherent in his nature. Its meaning matches the "half-beast" imagery of the play, since "from victory over bull-god and centaur to hideous death in the poisoned robe is all too short a step."<sup>10</sup> Three times Deianeira speaks of Heracles' passion for Iole as a  $\nu\acute{o}\sigma\omicron\varsigma$ <sup>11</sup>; and he will suffer a real, physical  $\nu\acute{o}\sigma\omicron\varsigma$  as a direct result of this metaphorical  $\nu\acute{o}\sigma\omicron\varsigma$ , his love for Iole, and Deianeira's love for him "It is not she [Iole] who is the slave, contrary to all appearances; the slave, we now see clearly, is Heracles."<sup>12</sup> Heracles'

disease produces a mental derangement (τόδ' ἀκήλητον/ μανίας ἄνθος, "this unassuageable bloom of madness" 998-999). As his love of Iole has led him before to kill innocent Oechalians, the fury of his disease causes him, in a blind rage, to kill the innocent Lichas. The disease of his last hours stands for the "destructive power of the force that has held him in thrall throughout his life"<sup>13</sup>; throughout, he is not in control of the ability to exercise his own independent will. It is not an error of judgment but κακία καὶ μοχθηρία that bring him down. The naming of Nessus as his murderer sets the cause of his death far back in time, turns it away from the human agent and back to Heracles' own divine, though bestial, nature.

Heracles' catastrophe, therefore, is more a result of depravity than some single error. His moral violence leads to his destruction through Deianeira and by Zeus; his conspicuous fault (not error) causes the venom to be used against himself; if he had remained loyal to Deianeira, she would never have given it a thought. Sophocles, for his own evident purpose, has made the conduct of Heracles deplorable by making Heracles demand Iole for himself.<sup>14</sup> According to Kitto, Sophocles did not invent Heracles' final "inexorable command" to Hyllus in order to bring about the marriage of Hyllus and Iole; he invented Hyllus' passionate resistance in order to make Heracles inexorable. Heracles behaves toward Hyllus in the same way as he has behaved on the summit of Cernaëum, toward Deianeira when he thoughtlessly sent Iole home to supplant her, toward Oechalia when he destroyed so many people in order to win Iole, and toward Iphitus and Lichas. Zeus punished Heracles for his act of violence in killing Iphitus, and Heracles vowed to enslave Eurytus and his family in return for what in fact was a punishment inflicted by Zeus. Much more is accomplished than the enslavement of Eurytus' family, which leads



Kitto to raise the following question: "In what spirit will Zeus receive Heracles' thank offering for his total destruction of a city?"<sup>15</sup>

Waldock, however, maintains that, although Heracles admittedly has faults, he is still the "best of men" in theory as well as in many points of reality and that Sophocles does not seriously resist this idea. He believes that the virtues of Heracles still form part of the drama. Heracles is caught in some unfortunate moments, but one is not allowed to forget what he is and has been. "He himself feels the irony of his plight, that he who has helped so many should now be so helpless himself."<sup>16</sup> He does see the irony of his plight. Heracles is the only one to relate even a partial catalogue of his labors; in many ways those labors are external to the play itself. His physical strength is his only virtue, and during the course of the play it is never displayed as a virtue, but as a destructive, passionate, bestial force that finally overmasters its own master through an act of will of his loving wife. Waldock claims one is not allowed to forget what Heracles is and has been. But those very "unfortunate moments" Waldock wishes to deny reveal what Heracles is. What he has been is pictured very clearly in the scene described by Deianeira and the Chorus of his battle with Acheloüs. Heracles brought deliverance from the more obvious horror. But was it really "deliverance," or was the battle one of monster against monster, both raging in lust (ἰέμενοι λεχέων) for prizes too gentle and innocent for either? "The 'love' that infects the naturally lecherous is not tragically interesting. It is only when the good (such as Phaedra) are infected that tragedy can arise."<sup>17</sup> The "best of men," the demi-god Heracles, is notoriously infected. It is the love that "infects" that leads to tragedy in the Trachiniae.

Despite his faults, is Heracles one of those ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχίᾳ ? Certain passages do bring out an apparently favorable reputation of Heracles the demi-god, often referred to as the son of Zeus and Alcmena.

Deianeira: ὁ κλεινὸς ἦλθε Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τε παῖς (19).

The famous Heracles, son of Alcmena and Zeus.

Deianeira: εἴ με χρὴ μένειν

πάντων ἀρίστου φωτὸς ἐστερημένην (176-177).

...that I may have to live

deprived of the best of all men

Messenger: τάχ' ἐς δόμους σοὺς τὸν πολύζηλον πόσιν.

ἥξειν, φανέντα σὺν κράτει νικηφόρῳ (185-186).

Soon there shall come to your halls that much envied man,  
your husband, appearing in his conquering might.

Chorus: <τίνες> ἀμφίγυοι κατέβαν πρὸ γάμων...; (504).

Who were the valiant contenders in courtship?

Deianeira: ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῶν κάγαθὸς καλούμενος (541).

My Heracles, called faithful and noble.

Chorus: ὁ γὰρ Διὸς Ἀλκμήνας κόρος

σοῦται πάσας ἀρετᾶς

λάφυρ' ἔχων ἐπ' οἴκους (644-646).

The son of Zeus and Alcmena

hastens to his home

bearing spoils of all valor.

Hyllus: πάντων ἀριστον ἄνδρα τῶν ἐπὶ χθονὶ (811).

the best of all men on earth

Chorus: ἀγακλειτὸν (854).

the renowned one

Chorus: τὸν Ζηνὸς ἄλκιμον γόνον (956).

Zeus' strong son

Chorus: ἄνακτος, οἷαις οἷος ὧν ἐλαύνεται (1045).

The king, so great a man, is driven by such suffering.

Heracles: ὁ τῆς ἀρίστης μητρὸς ὠνομασμένος,

ὁ τοῦ κατ' ἄστρο Ζηνὸς αὐδηθεὶς γόνος (1105-1106).<sup>18</sup>

I who have been called the son of the noblest mother,  
I who have claimed to be the offspring of Zeus in the  
heavens.

Chorus: ὦ τλῆμον Ἑλλάς, πένθος οἶον εἰσορῶ

ἔξουσιν, ἀνδρὸς τοῦδε γ' εἰ σφαλήσεται (1112-1113).

O unhappy Greece, I behold how great

a mourning you shall have if you lose this man.

With the exception of line 541, which is sarcastic (lines 644-646 are bitterly ironic), the references can all be understood as allusions to Heracles' physical strength. Waldock claims that the sentiment expressed by Hyllus in line 811, when he accuses his mother of having slain the best man in the world, whose like they shall not see again, is the constant theme of the play; that is "that Heracles is worth the tears and the anxiety and the yearning, and we must accept it as seriously meant."<sup>19</sup> Sophocles, Waldock believes, was not sarcastic every time he wrote the "best of men."

The characters who call Heracles the "best of men" are not sarcastic, but this provides no assurance that Sophocles was not. Certainly, to Deianeira (177) Heracles is the "best of men," because he is her husband, the one she loves. To Hyllus (811) he is the best of men, because he is his father and because of his tremendous physical strength. It is not at

all certain, however, that Heracles is worth the tears, anxiety, and yearning; in fact, the theme is not that he is worth the tears, but that he is not worth them. Perhaps, if he did not indulge in self-pity to such a great extent, he would be a more sympathetic figure. It is only through Deianeira and her loss that Heracles becomes worthy of mourning. Although the epithets attribute an apparently favorable reputation to Heracles, they are not illuminating in terms of his character, and he is certainly not described as having any moral qualities.

Aristotle requires that the tragic hero be "of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity" and that the hero's fortunes must change ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν as a result of some great error on his part. Reference to the prosperity that might be expected to accompany Heracles' incompletely defined reputation is almost completely lacking. He has spent a year in the service of a Lydian woman while his family has been living in exile. His fortunes do not change from happiness to misery. His only moments of brief happiness and prosperity are deceptive, and are related by hearsay after he has fallen to greater depths of misery. The band of slave women he sends home are perhaps representative of his prosperity, and they do cause Deianeira hesitantly to recognize his success.<sup>20</sup>

πῶς δ' οὐκ ἐγὼ χαίροισ' ἄν, ἀνδρὸς εὐτυχῇ  
 κλύουσα πρᾶξιν τήνδε, πανδύκῳ φρενὺ;  
 πολλή 'στ' ἀνάγκη τῇδε τοῦτο συντρέχειν.  
 ὅπως δ' ἔνεστι τοῦσιν εὖ σκοπούμενοις  
 ταρβεῖν τὸν εὖ πράσσοντα, μὴ σφαλῇ<sup>21</sup> ποτε (293-297).

Yes, I should have every right to rejoice  
 when I hear the news of my husband's prosperous success.  
 Surely my joy must keep pace with his good fortune.

Still, it is in the nature of those contemplating the situation well to fear for the man who prospers so, lest he fall.

There is, however, no direct reference to Heracles' prosperity and no indication at all that he considers himself to be enjoying prosperity. Hyllus relates Heracles' brief moment of deceptive prosperity and prospective happiness between the time when he clothes himself in the deadly robe and the time when he completes the sacrificial slaughter (759ff.). This is the moment of the oracle's fulfillment. Deianeira speaks of it before its realization:

ὥς ἢ τελευτὴν τοῦ βίου μέλλει τελεῦν,  
ἢ τοῦτον ἄρας ἄθλον ἐς τό γ' ὕστερον  
τὸν λοιπὸν ἤδη βίοτον εὐαίων' ἔχειν (79-81).

That either he would come to the end of his life or have by now, and for the rest of his time a happy life, once he had accomplished this task.

Heracles speaks of it in the moment of realization:

ἢ μοι χρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι καὶ παρόντι νῦν  
ἔφασκε μόχθων τῶν ἐφεστώτων ἐμοῖ  
λύσιν τελεῦσθαι κἀδόκουν πράξειν καλῶς (1169-1171).

which told me that, at this living and present time, release from all the toils imposed on me would be complete. And I thought that then I should be happy.

Heracles cannot pass from a state of happiness to one of misery. He is in fact, in a state of misery, hoping for release from his toils and the attainment of happiness. His condition changes only from misery to misery; the oracle meant nothing other than, as Heracles says, τὸ δ' ἦν ἄρ'

οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν θανεῖν ἐμέ ("But it meant nothing other than that I would die then," 1172).

Nor does Heracles satisfy Aristotle's requirement that tragic heroes perform their tragic deeds εἰδότες καὶ γιγνώσκοντας or ἀγνοῦντας δὲ πρᾶξαι τὸ δεινόν, εἴθ' ὕστερον ἀναγνωρίσαι τὴν φιλίαν.<sup>22</sup> He does not recognize any of his actions as tragic. He neither regrets nor even understands his action of sending Iole home to supplant Deianeira, and he carries this lack of regret and understanding to the ultimate extreme when he orders Hyllus to marry Iole and does not respond in any way to Hyllus' accusation that she is the cause of Deianeira's death and Heracles' condition.

## II. Knox

Knox' two general statements that the Sophoclean hero is "a single personality facing the supreme crisis of his life" and is "a heroic individual whose freedom of action implies full responsibility" do not fully apply to Heracles. The crisis he faces is not the act of sending Iole home to Deianeira, that is Deianeira's crisis. It is not a turning point or critical situation for Heracles; he does it without any recognition or thought of its possible significance or effects. No other course is considered, and Heracles never expresses any regrets at having taken the action he did take. The supreme crisis Heracles faces is his impending death, but this too does not seem to be the crisis of the play.<sup>23</sup> It is the decision facing Deianeira when she has full knowledge of Iole that is the crisis of the play; Heracles' death is neither turning point nor critical situation, but the culmination of Deianeira's tragic decision. When Heracles realizes the inevitability of his death, all

action has already been taken. He has no control over the final outcome of events other than his two commands to Hyllus. He is a pawn in the action of the series of events set in motion by Deianeira. Heracles is able to exercise freedom of action, however controlled it may be by passion (Eros), up to the time when he hears that Nessus was responsible for providing the "love-philtre." Heracles, however, in no way accepts full responsibility for his actions, preferring to blame others. He kills Lichas, because Lichas brought the robe; he wants to kill Deianeira, because she sent the robe; he speaks bitterly of and to Zeus, even blaming him for his suffering (οὐραν μ' ἄρ' ἔδου λώβαν, οὐραν "What an object of outrage you have made me," 996), because Zeus is allowing his death. He does not consider that his nature and actions may have been even partially responsible for his present suffering. When he realizes the part Nessus has played in the disaster and how it is in accordance with the oracle, all possibility of freedom of action and responsibility is removed. οἴμοι, φρονῶ δὲ συμφορᾶς ἔν' ἔσταμεν ("Ah! now I realize the doom that is upon me," 1145), Heracles says, and the rest of his actions are in response to his understanding of the oracle and seemingly in accordance with some sort of divine command. Waldock's opinion is that Heracles sees the pattern of his life clearly to the end; "and from now on his preoccupation is (so to say) to play out his divinely appointed role."<sup>24</sup>

According to Knox and others, the Sophoclean tragic hero is isolated. Although many indications point to his isolation, Heracles does not convincingly satisfy requirements for the various types of isolation that Knox mentions. During his prior life and while in the grips of the poisoned robe, Heracles' isolation is on two levels. On the one hand, he is separated from humanity by being above it as the son of Zeus; a superhuman

in strength, he will die the victim of a fate foretold by his father (1159). On the other hand, he is separated from humanity by being below mankind, on the level of beasts. His pain is savagely physical, but it is Zeus who occurs to him as the logical healer (1002). The heroic feats he mentions (1092ff.) in his battles with monsters are also combinations of the bestial and divine.

P. Biggs, too, emphasizes that Heracles is alone. In his normal state he is remote from humanity; it does not occur to other characters to apply their human terms to him.<sup>25</sup> In his diseased state, his suffering is incomparable, and his agonies can only be greater than his own labors (854, 1090ff.). The extreme degree of his isolation is symbolized by the effect of certain symptoms of his disease, bringing him finally to helplessness and forcing the groanless man (*ἀστέφαντος* 1074) to cry out. As a sufferer, Heracles is cut off completely from his environment; he has a morbid sensitivity of touch, and his first words are an inquiry to determine where he is and who the people around him are (983ff.). Because his intense pain turns all his concentration inward and thereby intensifies itself, his awareness is not for externals.

V. Ehrenberg comments that the tragedy of Heracles is that of his own nature and his own actions. "Its very core is his greatness which makes him believe that he is entirely independent, a law unto himself."<sup>26</sup>

E. M. Waith believes that Heracles' disregard for others is "a striking feature of his isolation and of his stature."<sup>27</sup> Waith considers Heracles to be supremely great and not at all self-centered or untragic.

P. E. Easterling, while still believing Heracles to be supremely great and not untragic, does state that he is a "supremely self-centred hero."<sup>28</sup> Kitto sees Heracles' greatness as a result of his self-centeredness.



"Heracles is one who can do heroic things partly because he can sacrifice everything to himself. He has never a thought for another; he is entirely self-centred, ruthless to enemies, acquisitive, possibly affectionate (1147) but entirely selfish towards his family, unfeeling to his wife, transient with other women, and a very great man."<sup>29</sup>

But is the equation of isolation and self-centeredness justified? Is the Heracles depicted within the play really "a very great man"? Oedipus with all his self-awareness is driven to action by thoughts of others, his supposed parents in Corinth and the plague-infested citizens of Thebes. He recognizes a law of moral right and wrong existing outside himself. Ajax, with his sense of self-awareness and desire for personal honor and glory, still remains driven by and accountable to an external ideal of martial honor and glory. There is a difference between true isolation and mere self-centeredness. Heracles has no ideal other than himself and outside himself to guide him. He seems not so much isolated as terribly self-centered.

According to Knox, the hero's isolation in time and space imposes on him the full responsibility of his own action and its consequences and compels him to act without a past to guide him or a future to comfort him. Heracles, however, as has been previously discussed, does not accept full responsibility for his action, nor is it entirely clear that he is isolated in time and space. He seems to accept the torture of the poisoned robe as another labor and, in that sense, does have a past to guide him.

ὦ πολλὰ δὴ καὶ θερμὰ καὶ λόγῳ κακὰ  
καὶ χερσὶ καὶ νώτοισι μοχθήσας ἐγώ  
κοῦπω τοιοῦτον οὔτ' ἄκουτις ἢ Διὸς  
προύθηκεν οὔθ' ὁ στυγνὸς Εὐρύσθεὺς ἐμοῖ

οἷον τόδ' ἡ δολῶπις Οἰνέως κόρη  
 καθήφεν ὤμοις τοῖς ἐμοῖς Ἑρινύων  
 ὕφαντόν ἀμφίβληστρον, ᾧ διόλλυμαι (1046-1052).

Many are the toils for these hands, this back,  
 that I have had, hot and grievous even to tell of.  
 But neither the wife of Zeus nor hateful Eurystheus  
 has ever appointed me to such a task as this  
 that the artful-looking daughter of Oineus has fastened  
 upon my shoulders, a woven, encircling net  
 of the Furies, by which I am utterly destroyed.

At lines 1085ff. and 1092ff. he specifically mentions various of his previous labors in connection with his present and greatest labor.

ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην  
 κοῦδεῖς τροπαῦ' ἔστησε τῶν ἐμῶν χερῶν (1101-1102).

and I have had my taste of ten thousand other toils,  
 and no one has set trophies of victory over my hands.

Perhaps Heracles' only isolation is that previously he has always inflicted suffering and has never before been the one to receive it.<sup>30</sup>

There is no question that the present is a crucial time for Heracles;

ἦ μοι χρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι καὶ παρόντι νῦν  
 ἔφασκε μόχθων τῶν ἐφεστώτων ἐμοῖ  
 λῦσιν τελεῦσθαι (1169-1171).

which told me that, at this living and present time,  
 release from all the toils imposed on me would be complete.

He does not, however, seem to consider himself isolated within the time and space of his end. It is of no great concern to him that he is cut off from his family, except for Hyllus. He has evidently been habitually

inattentive to them. He asks Hyllus to call together all his other children and his mother Alcmena (1147-1149), not having paid enough attention to them to know, or at least remember, that some of his children are in Thebes and the others and his mother are at Tiryns. Upon hearing Hyllus' report of their whereabouts, he displays a conspicuous lack of response. Making no further mention of his other relations, he proceeds to turn his whole attention on Hyllus. His connection with Hyllus is probably the strongest evidence against his isolation. He is able to and does command Hyllus to carry out certain tasks related to his death by burning on a pyre.<sup>31</sup> Heracles does not experience the total isolation of Deianeira that causes her to kill herself. That Heracles has such a clear picture of how his end is to come, even though this play contains no evidence or thought of his apotheosis, denies his isolation in time with no future to comfort him. His future, as known from the oracle, comforts him by releasing him from his pathetic, womanly suffering. His order to Hyllus to marry Iole and his self-determined assurance that the order will be carried out provide him with still another connection with the future.

The foremost difficulty in fitting Heracles to Knox' model of the Sophoclean hero is that he does not perform an action that he recognizes as critical and causative. His suffering has been made inevitable by Deianeira's initial decision and action. His own action is merely in response to Deianeira's and exercises no control over the outcome of the play's events. Knox' requirements that the source of the hero's action as well as the greatness of the action belong to the hero alone cannot apply to Heracles, nor does a free and responsible action bring Heracles through suffering to victory or cause him to fall and experience defeat before he reaches his final victory. The action Heracles takes during "his" portion of the play is the result of the play's action and not the cause of

it. No heroic action brings Heracles through suffering. He cannot endure suffering; although he has inflicted it on others, he cannot bear it himself. For Heracles suffering and glory are not bound into an indissoluble unity as they are for Knox' Sophoclean hero. Heracles hates his suffering because it makes him weak and woman-like (1071, 1075); it is a humiliation, not a glory. His only final victory will be to make an end of his suffering, παῦλά τοι κακῶν/ αὕτη, τελευτὴ τοῦδε τάνδρ' ὅς ὑστάτη ("The respite from suffering is this--my final end," 1255-1256). His last two speeches (1252-1256 and 1259-1263) indicate that he finds no glory in suffering,<sup>32</sup> his victory will be none other than his own defeat.

Knox' hero renders his action fully autonomous by refusing to accept his human limitation. Heracles cannot satisfy this point, not only because of the problem of his action, or rather non-action, but also because of his position as the son of Zeus. He is not clearly and necessarily bound by human limitations. It is Knox' view that by defying the gods, who are guardians of these limits, the hero removes from them responsibility for his action and its consequences. Heracles, however, in his position beyond human limitations,<sup>33</sup> maintains his unmitigated refusal of acceptance of responsibility. He may have defied Zeus by such deeds as killing Iphitus and sacking Oechalia, but in his childish willfulness he will not admit to himself that he has done wrong. Heracles addresses his first speech to Zeus, ὦ Ζεῦ / ποῦ γὰρ ἤκω; ("O Zeus, what land have I come to?" 983-984). In his second speech (983ff.), he accuses Zeus of being responsible for his suffering.

οἷαν μ' ἄρ' ἔθου λώβαν, οἷαν (996).

What an object of outrage you have made me!

τίς γὰρ αἰιδός, τίς ὁ χειροτέχνης  
 ἱατορίας, ὃς τήνδ' αἶτην  
 χωρὶς Ζηνὸς κατακλήσει; (1000-1002)

Is there any enchanter,  
 any craftsman surgeon who can  
 exorcise this curse, but Zeus?

Even after hearing from Hyllus (1138-1139) that Deianeira had good intentions and had anointed the robe with what she thought was a στέργημα, a love charm, ὡς προσεῖδε τοὺς ἔνδον γάμους ("when she saw that marriage in her house" 1139), Heracles never considers that he might be responsible for what has happened. He merely asks which Trachinian druggist provided the charm. Having learned that Nessus was the source, he again does not accept his own responsibility<sup>34</sup>; instead, he accepts the inevitability of the oracle.

Nor is Heracles' shirking of responsibility restricted to the end of his life and the end of the play. During his speech, Lichas, having told of Heracles' enslavement to Iole (οὐκ ἐλεύθερος, / ἀλλ' ἐμποληθεὺς, "he was not free but a bought as a slave" 249-250), twice stresses Heracles' own admission of the shameful bondage (ὥς φησ' αὐτός, "as he himself declares" 249, ὥς αὐτός λέγει, "as he says himself" 253). However, it is Zeus who is labeled as the author of the deed (Ζεὺς ὅτου πράκτωρ φανῇ "Zeus appears to be the executer of the work" 251; ὁ τῶν ἀπάντων Ζεὺς πατὴρ' Ὀλύμπιος, "he who is the father of all, Zeus Olympian" 275). As Easterling mentions, one may feel that it is a gross shifting of responsibility to call Zeus πράκτωρ and therefore excuse Heracles. Perhaps Heracles' behavior ought to be seen in the same way as any religious authority. An act of impiety has been committed, and a penalty must be paid before the doer can be ἄγνός (cf. line 258) again.

In Easterling's view, the appellation Ζεὺς πρῶκτωρ is "patently ironical."<sup>35</sup>

It is Knox' view that, despite the hero's self-created isolation, the presence of the gods is always felt and, even though the hero fights against them, one feels the gods may have more concern and respect for him than for the common man. Heracles, in his self-centered isolation, is always aware of his sonship from Zeus. He never consciously fights against the gods. His passive yielding to Eros is manifest, and, in his delusion and self-centeredness, he does not consider that his actions may not be approved by Zeus. Respect of the gods for Heracles is not very apparent in the Trachiniae. Zeus' punishment of Heracles for his immoral actions, killing Iphitus (ἔργου δ' ἕκατι τοῦδε μηνίσας ἄναξ, "But the king was angry on account of this act of his," 274) and sacking the city of Eurytus, is certainly not inflicted out of respect for some nobility on Heracles' part. It is an interesting question that the Chorus ask: ἐπεὶ τίς ὧδε / τέκνοισι Ζῆν' ἄβουλον εἶδεν; "When has anyone seen Zeus so careless of his children?" 139-140).

Knox' hero is faced with either possible disaster or a compromise, the acceptance of which will betray the hero's conception of himself, his rights, and duties. Heracles is faced with no choice, but with an unchosen disaster that does, indeed, betray his conception of himself (θῆλος ηὐρηματὶ τάλας "In my misery I am discovered a woman," 1075) and what he considers to be his rights as the son of Zeus (θαῦμ' ἄν πόρρωθεν ἰδοῦμην "Even to see him from afar would be a wonder!" 1003). The resolution of the hero against the course of compromise, according to Knox, leads to the dramatic tension of Sophocles' plays. Heracles' only determined resolution is formed after hearing of Nessus' role in supplying the "love philtre," at a point (1141-1142) rather late in the play to be responsible for leading to the play's dramatic tension. It is

true that throughout the play Heracles remains true to his physis of extraordinary and willful physical strength and power. But, because he does not make any conscious, critical decision or take any such action, his role, as has been mentioned previously, seems to be of a force rather than of a heroic character.

The significance of Heracles' fulfillment of certain of Knox' characteristic recurrent patterns of character in situation and action is nullified by his lack of critical decision and action. The Heracles in the Trachiniae, the Heracles who, having come from Thebes τόξα καὶ λόγχας ῥόπαλόν τε τινάσσων ("brandishing his bow, his spears and club" 512), conquered the river god Acheloüs and later killed the centaur Nessus, exhibits conduct that could be described as "wild," "raw and savage," and "hard." The Heracles who actually appears in the play, filled with desire for revenge on Deianeira, exhibits these traits to an even greater degree.<sup>36</sup> Although his decision to act by killing Deianeira is not a critical decision within the play and is a decision that he completely forgets after hearing Nessus' name, he expresses it in the fiery temper characteristic of Knox' "angry" Sophoclean hero. Even before he enters, the Chorus focus attention on his arrival by saying that they have heard he is approaching, ἄσπετόν τι θαῦμα ("an unspeakable wonder" 961). Hyllus' words, addressed to his father, give a full picture of the rage and fury of Heracles.

δός μοι σεαυτόν, μὴ τοσοῦτον ὥς δάκνη  
θυμῷ δύσσοργος. οὐ γὰρ ἂν γνοίης ἐν οὔτ'  
χαίρειν προθυμῇ κὰν ὅτοις ἀλγεῖς μάτην (1117-1119).

Give me yourself without this grim anger that stings you  
to such passion. Otherwise you cannot learn how mistaken  
is the pleasure your passion craves, the pain it feels.

κἄν σοῦ στραφεῖη θυμός, εἰ τὸ πᾶν μάθους (1134).

Even your passion would turn aside if you knew all.

Like Knox' Sophoclean hero, Heracles does not want to hear. At first, he does allow Hyllus to speak.

ἐπεὶ παρέσχεσ ἀντιφωνῆσαι, πάτερ,

σιγὴν παρασχὼν κλυθὲ μου νοσῶν ὅμως (1114-1115).

Father, since you allow me to speak to you now,

hold your silence and listen to me, though you are sick.

He is unwilling, however, to listen to anything that will disturb his

resolution.<sup>37</sup> When Hyllus mentions his mother, Heracles' rage and defenses rise and he refuses to listen.

Heracles: ὦ παγκάκιστε, καὶ παρεμνήσω γὰρ αὖ

τῆς πατροφόντου μητρός, ὥς κλύειν ἐμέ;

Hyllus: ἔχει γὰρ οὕτως ὥστε μὴ σιγαῖν πρέπειν.

Heracles: οὐ δῆτα τοῦς γε πρόσθεν ἡμαρτημένοις (1124-1127).

You malignant curse, will you again make mention  
of the murderess of your father--and in my hearing?

Her state is such that it is not fitting to keep silent.

No, no silence for the crime she has committed!

Contrary to Knox' Sophoclean hero, Heracles not only finally listens

(λέγ', εὐλαβοῦ δε μὴ φανῆς κακὸς γεγώς "Speak, but have a care. Do  
not disgrace yourself," 1129), but also, having heard, surrenders his

fury. He is enough unlike the "angry," "strange," and "terrible" hero  
at this point that Hyllus feels assured enough to join sides with him.<sup>38</sup>

ἡμεῖς δ' ὅσοι πάρεσμεν, εἴ τι χρή, πάτερ,

πράσσειν, κλύοντες ἐξυπηρετήσομεν (1155-1156).

But we who are here--if there is anything,

Father, we must do, we shall listen and assist you to the  
utmost.



Whereas Heracles' former physical feats were deeds "outsized, extraordinary, prodigious," as he realizes his impending death, he forces "outsized, extraordinary, prodigious" deeds on Hyllus with unreasonable violence.<sup>39</sup> οὐα μ' ἐργασαι ("What have you done to me?" 1203), Hyllus says, to be met by Heracles' harsh words, ὅποτα δραστέ' ἐστίν ("What must be done," 1204). It again remains clear that, despite all the fury and raging pseudo-heroism that Heracles finally displays, he is, in effect, the actual culmination of the play and not the one effecting the play's culmination.

Knox requires that the hero remain unchanged, in defiance of time and its imperative of change. Heracles does change. When he understands the significance of the oracle, he accepts his limit in time (χρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι καὶ παρόντι νῦν, "at this living and present time" 1169) and accepts death.<sup>40</sup>

There is no question that Heracles fulfills Knox' requirement that the hero be loyal only to his conception of himself; self-centered Heracles is loyal to nothing else. Knox' heroes justify their positions by their εὐγένεια, κλέος, and εὐσέβεια. In justifying his position, Heracles comes very close, even for a demi-god, to what Knox refers to as an "assumption of divinity." In response to Hyllus' inquiry ἀλλ' ἐκλεδαχθῶ δῆτα δυσσεβεῖν, πάτερ; "But have I learned impiety, Father?" (1245), he replies, οὐ δυσσέβεια, τοῦμόν εἰ τέρφεις κέαρ "it is no impiety if you give my heart pleasure," (1246). In his commands to Hyllus Heracles fulfills the following of Knox' heroic requirements: he is driven by θυμός and closed to the appeals of reason, he is exasperated by the feeling that he is being denied respect, his sense of what is due to him from his son is outraged, and he appeals for vengeance on Hyllus if he remains disobedient. Because, however, Hyllus does obey in the end,

Heracles is released from the heroic feelings mentioned above. He is relieved from the possibility of a final isolation, and he goes to his death neither μόνος nor ἐρῆμος.

Heracles does possess a strong sense of his identity, his individual and independent existence, his difference from others and his resultant uniqueness, and his own worth as an individual, all of which Knox cites as traits of the hero. Heracles fails to fulfill these traits as required by Knox in two significant ways. First, he does not face a decision at a critical moment, which becomes a matter of choosing between defiance and loss of identity. Second, even with what seems to be his fierce sense of independence, he does submit to being ruled; he does not remain free, but is a slave to his passions and his body.<sup>41</sup>

This apparent fault in Heracles' independence introduces the final point to be considered of Knox' model of the Sophoclean tragic hero. According to Knox, the hero, having set his own conditions for existence, is more prepared to leave life than to change and will assert his will to the absolute end of defiance, death. The final result of the hero's isolation from the world of men is supposedly his wish for death; by choosing death, he arrives at the logical end of his refusal to compromise. Heracles does wish for death<sup>42</sup> after he has been locked in the grips of the anointed robe, because he cannot bear the physical pain and disfigurement. He cannot choose death, because his death is inevitable no matter what action he takes. In a way, he is driven to his end by his refusal to compromise. His refusal to abandon his passions and to love only Deianeira has caused her to assert her will, and her love and will cause his death. Living in human society is one continuous compromise of subduing one's own will and desires to the requirements

of others. Heracles' death results from his lack of consideration for the requirements of others.

Heracles oscillates between the two worlds of mythology and reality, in the former as the son of Zeus, accomplishing all by his might, in the latter as a pathetic mortal with a pain-racked body. It is the latter Heracles who dies; his apotheosis is entirely suppressed in the Trachiniae. As H. A. Mason remarks, it is inconceivable that Sophocles could have given so many oracles prophesying Heracles' fate without hint of further meaning than death as the end of his labors without the understanding that Heracles' mythological sequel is irrelevant to the Trachiniae.<sup>43</sup> Heracles is the son of Zeus, but the "rest from labor" Zeus promised him is death and death alone. Knox believes that only the fact of death can make an action heroic, and Heracles cannot be denied position as the hero of the play on the ground that he does not meet a mortal death.

R. C. Jebb feels that Heracles' death completes the Homeric conception of Heracles in the play. "And this is in perfect harmony with the general tone of the Trachiniae. The spirit in which the legend of Heracles is treated in this play is essentially the epic spirit."<sup>44</sup> Slater believes that in his moment of death he will assert mastery over his life.<sup>45</sup> But Heracles does not actually meet his death within the limits of the play, and within the play he is seen not as master, but servant. As Biggs comments, his might is always at the service of someone or something beyond his control. Even in the description of his heroism, the element of servitude is stressed; his heroic exploits are service. Zeus leaves Heracles no claim to dignity, not even the honor of the decision of death.

## III. Whitman

Since Whitman's conception of the Sophoclean hero is very idealized and the Heracles of the Trachiniae is not, it is inevitable that Heracles will not conform well to his heroic model.<sup>46</sup> This model requires that the behavior and will of the tragic hero represent the true action of the play. As has been discussed previously, it is the behavior and will of Deianeira and not of Heracles that cause and represent the action of the play. Heracles is a slave to forces and is not an independent agent. Therefore, his action in the play represents those forces, while Deianeira's action and acts of free will in conflict with them represent the true action of the play. Whitman's model requires that each tragic hero be an example of areté and that the hero's encounters with disasters and trials result from the clash between his areté and the imperfections of other human beings, the traditional gods, and life itself. Waith believes in Heracles' areté. "His self absorption is a concomitant of the primitive areté which makes obligations to others secondary to the hero's devotion to his own integrity."<sup>47</sup> Waith also says of Heracles, "His injuries to others and his infringements of society's moral codes are incidental to a career whose end is an undiluted tragedy for society."<sup>48</sup> However, the Trachiniae does not depict Heracles' death as a tragedy for society. The Heracles of the play is the husband of Deianeira and his labors are mentioned in an incidental fashion as an illustration of his strength and not as an illustration of trials suffered for society. Whitman believes that the final picture of Heracles, with his abysmal selfishness and furious ravings, is consistent with the picture of a man consumed by disease. Heracles is interested solely in himself, unshaken by self-doubt or hesitation in his passions. He is not an example of areté, and the disasters and trials he

encounters during the play are a result of the clash between his imperfections and the areté of other human beings (notably Deianeira's), the traditional gods, and life itself.

According to Whitman, the indomitable will of the struggling hero, and not the conventional Olympian figures, is the source of true divinity. Heracles lacks an indomitable will, as is clearly seen in his womanly reaction to his suffering. His only divinity is as the son of Zeus, and he feels alienated even from that during his suffering. It does not seem likely that Heracles' faults of passion and bestiality, like the faults of Whitman's heroic model, are really signs of his perfection that conflict with the blindness and wrongness of life about him. Heracles does not have the real self-knowledge of Whitman's model and, although he at first appears to be a law unto himself, his destruction brings even that into question. Whitman's hero's stubbornness and self-willed independence keep him from yielding to his fate. Heracles yields instantly to his fate when he hears Nessus' name and recognizes the significance of the oracle. His is not a tragedy of "late learning," because, having learned, he never considers the possibility of having done anything differently. Whitman's Sophoclean hero "seems to be less under the obligation to worship the gods than to fulfill his duty to himself."<sup>49</sup> Other than his pleasure, does Heracles have a duty to himself?

#### IV. Webster

Webster's six basic aspects of the Sophoclean hero, insofar as they have been accepted in the model of the hero presented in chapter one, are fulfilled only to a small extent by Heracles. According to Webster, the hero is conscious of his birth, and, as one who is nobly born, conforms

to certain standards of life and action. Heracles is conscious of his sonship from Zeus; perhaps he feels that as a demi-god he does not have to conform to standards of life and action. Webster believes that the hero has a duty to be loyal to his parents and a right to expect loyalty from his children. Heracles is not loyal to Zeus but demands loyalty from his son Hyllus.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between father and son, the fatherhood of Heracles and the fatherhood of Zeus, is an ironic one. Heracles is unaware of the inherent inconsistency when he justifies the terrible demands he makes of Hyllus to build the pyre and marry Iole by appealing to the "finest of all laws, obedience to one's father" (1177-1178, cf. 1244). Heracles threatens to disown Hyllus, assuming that to be his son is something of which to be proud (1204-1205). He betrays no trace of consideration for Hyllus' feelings, only for his own; it is not an impiety to marry Iole, οὐ δυσσέβεια, τοῦμὸν εἰ τέρψεται κέαρ ("It is no impiety if you give my heart pleasure" 1246). Easterling takes Heracles' demands of Hyllus "to be not so much a further indictment of Heracles for hubris, but proof in action of the complete misjudgment that Heracles has made about life; just as he came triumphantly to Cenaeum to sacrifice so now it never occurs to him that he has ever been other than an ideal son."<sup>51</sup>

Webster's second heroic aspect attributes frankness, fortitude, and sensitiveness to shame to the hero. Webster notes that Heracles takes no pains to hide his mistress from his wife and that on the only occasion on which he used guile against a foe (Iphitus) he paid heavily for it. He is ashamed of being killed by a woman (1062) and it is this shame as well as justice that enters into Heracles' desire for vengeance. His shame, however, does not stop him from his womanly cries, and he necessarily is further ashamed that his sufferings have broken down his fortitude (1071).

He has fallen short of his own ideal of heroism, and he fails to satisfy Webster's conception of the hero as one whose fortitude cannot be broken by misfortunes.

In accordance with another of Webster's aspects of the hero, Heracles is not remarkable for his sophrosyne. He exhibits arrogance, violence, haste, inflexibility, and folly and has a strain of cruelty and violence. Heracles, however, fails to fulfill the last of Webster's heroic aspects because his vices are not closely connected with the virtues of spirit, energy, firmness, and idealism. Sophocles has taken the heroic figure of Heracles, accepted by certain traditional standards as ἀριστος ἀνδρῶν, but has emphasized the utter savagery and brutality of those standards.<sup>52</sup> The son of Zeus is not above human standards, but below them, as Murray's questions and answer about the Heracles who is borne on stage while sleeping reveal. "Is there really some greatness, some generosity, behind the ravenous lust and fury which is all that others have seen in him? Is there something in the Son of Zeus, the ἀριστος ἀνδρῶν, which when we come near it we can recognize as divine? Quite the reverse."<sup>53</sup> Webster allows that the hero may fall short of standards, but that he himself is usually conscious of his shortcomings. Heracles, in his self-centered arrogance, is never conscious of any of his shortcomings.

There is a striking contrast between the loudly suffering Heracles and the silently suffering Deianeira. The Heracles of this play lives in a self-chosen world of physical competition, violence, and pain; he has no discrimination at the level of reason and justice. He takes physical revenge for physical pain on the nearest available object and summons Hyllus to help "even though you must die with me." Heracles' feelings seem to stop at the outer surface of his own skin, making it difficult for anyone to suffer with him.<sup>54</sup>

## V. Gellie

In Gellie's judgment, the protagonist is called upon to deal with a ready-made state of evil. Whatever action he takes will be wrong, but he acts and is destroyed by his action. Heracles is not called upon to deal with a ready-made state of evil. By sending Iole home to supplant Deianeira, he creates a state of evil for his wife. He himself must deal only with the result of what Deianeira is called upon to deal with.<sup>55</sup> At that point, there is no choice of action open to him, and whatever he does cannot alter the inevitability of his death.

In his chapter on the Trachiniae, Gellie makes some unwarranted and incorrect comments about the action of the play. According to Gellie, there is not much certainty of anything until Heracles comes on the scene. Heracles is the only one who is "where the action is,"<sup>56</sup> and his home in Trachis has to depend on memories of long ago and reports from far away for information. The play has to work by remote control through reactions to actions and decisions taken at a distance. The mainspring of Deianeira's anxieties is that she can never know anything for certain.

Heracles may be "where the action is," but he is not where the action of the play is. The play does not depend on actions and decisions taken at a distance, because the real action of the play is the act and the result of Deianeira's decisions, especially her decision to use the love-philtre. Gellie himself later remarks that the real action of the play has its foundations in Deianeira's heart.<sup>57</sup>



## VI. Kirkwood

Heracles does not satisfactorily fulfill Kirkwood's heroic requirements for the same basic reasons as have been discussed above. Heracles is not responsible for "the life-giving combination of strong character and revealing situation"<sup>58</sup> that Kirkwood feels is at the heart of every Sophoclean play. He does not undergo a series of tests from which he emerges newly revealed and with added strength, but barges his way through the play at the same unenlightened and bestial level.<sup>59</sup> He is not what one could easily call an admirable character, and he is not confronted with a critical situation. Again, Heracles does not accept his own responsibility for his fate. Unlike Oedipus, whose acts were "not predestined, merely predicted," Heracles, after understanding the meaning of the oracle, accepts his death as predicted and predestined.

There is a quality of brutality and capricious violence in his reported deeds, his drunkenness (268), his murder of Iphitus (169-273) and the innocent Lichas (779-782), and his indifference to his son's welfare in demanding help for himself (797-798). This impression is strengthened when Heracles appears, by his unbridled hatred of Deianeira and his boundless self-praise and self-pity. He is both impressive and grotesque.

Heracles possesses more than what Kirkwood refers to as the standard human equipment of emotions and frailties without even the standard of heroic and redeeming devotion to an ideal of conduct. His faults cannot be in the closest possible connection with his strength and nobility, because he is lacking in all but physical strength. According to Kirkwood, "tragic fault is not guilt, and tragic suffering is not punishment,"<sup>60</sup> and the hero does not precipitate his own suffering. If Heracles has a

tragic fault, it is his inability to rise above his bestial nature. His suffering as a result of this fault appears in many ways to be a punishment, even though Heracles does not recognize it as such.

Kirkwood's Sophoclean tragic hero endures his suffering and rises to the stature of a moral hero. Heracles does not endure his suffering at all until he recognizes the truth of the oracle. During his suffering, his self-centeredness and bestial nature are at their most obvious. According to Kirkwood, the greatness of the hero's devotion to nobility shows that in heroism there exists an enduring value that stands firm in spite of suffering and death, which is made clear by Sophocles' way of contrasting the heroic with the unheroic. Heracles' only form of heroism lies in his physical strength, which does not endure. (ὦ χέρες χέρες, / ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν', ὦ φύλοι βραχίονες, / ὑμεῖς ἐμείνοι δὴ καθέσταθ' "O my hands, my hands, O my back and chest, O my poor arms, you that are in such a state" 1089-1091). In fact, Heracles is the unheroic with which Deianeira is contrasted.

## VII. Lesky

According to Lesky, when great tragic figures take up their fight, their concern is human dignity, not mere existence. For what human dignity does Heracles fight? And, what is he more concerned about than his own self-centered existence?

Heracles kills the innocent Lichas, boasts of being the savior of Hellas, yearns to take vengeance on Deianeira, and distorts the meaning of his labors to the extent of seeing Deianeira as one of the monsters he slew (1110-1111). Sophocles has turned the Heracles of the usual legend who did miraculous deeds and thus became the benefactor of mankind into

almost the opposite, "a man who follows his own nature and desires without restraint, commits outrageous misdeeds, and thus becomes a danger and a menace to other people."<sup>61</sup> The overwhelming force of the entirely self-centered Heracles who is unable "to give himself" to anyone else (cf. 1117) and is "entirely lacking in self-knowledge and therefore unable to realise that he has brought misery upon himself"<sup>62</sup> is most manifest during his final commands to Hyllus. Heracles will meet his death without having risen above his own nature; his death will mark the end of his life and his sufferings, but nothing more.

It is Deianeira whose life and death have a purpose in the play. Heracles could hardly be considered the hero of his scene, let alone the hero of the entire play.<sup>63</sup> Deianeira exists because of and finds her identity in Heracles, but in the play's structure Heracles exists because of Deianeira. Heracles does not satisfy many of the characteristics ascribed to other Sophoclean heroes, and he does not emerge within the play as a free individual whose acts of will determine the course of the play's events. Heracles is not the hero of the Trachiniae.

## NOTES -- CHAPTER THREE

- 1 Heracles does not speak until line 983.
- 2 Kamerbeek, 25.
- 3 Although cf. Slater (59, also 62), who believes Deianeira's body is visible during the final scene. "The telos of her tragedy is revealed visually, the arkhe evoked by the words."
- 4 Kamerbeek, 26.
- 5 Kamerbeek, 26.
- 6 Cf. Slater, 63. Deianeira, on the contrary, sets her will against the anguish and pain that Heracles has caused her by sending Iole to her. She walks away in silence from Hyllus' painful words, hides her lamentations in proud seclusion and dispatches herself with courage.
- 7 Jebb, xxxvii.
- 8 Jebb, xxxviii.
- 9 Jebb, xxxviii.
- 10 Penelope Biggs, "The Disease Theme in Sophocles' Ajax, Philoctetes, and Trachiniae," CPh 61 (1966) 228.
- 11 ὥστ' εἴ τι τῶμψ' ἄνδρ' ἐστὶν τῇδε τῇ νόσῳ  
ληφθέντι μεμπτός εἰμι, κάρτα μάνομαι (445-446).

κοῦτοι νόσον γ' ἐπακτὸν ἐξαρούμεθα,

θεοῖσι δυσμαχοῦντες (491-492)

ἐγὼ δὲ θυμοῦσθαι μὲν οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι

νοσοῦντι κείνῳ πολλὰ τῇδε τῇ νόσῳ (543-544).

And, belying Lichas (235), Heracles does not return "unburdened by disease."

- 12 P. E. Easterling, "Sophocles, Trachiniae," BICS15 (1968) 62.

Perhaps the point of the stress on slavery is "to make us wonder if

Heracles the enslaver was not after all a slave himself" (Easterling, 61).

- 13 Biggs, 230.

- 14 Instead of for Hyllus. Cf. H. D. F. Kitto, Poiesis Structure and Thought, Sather Classical Lectures Vol. 36 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966) 170.

- 15 Kitto, Poiesis, 166.

- 16 Waldock, 86.

- 17 H. A. Mason, "The Women of Trachis (Part II)," Arion 2 (1963) 114.

- 18 This citation reveals Heracles' notion of how he is considered by others.

Kamerbeek's note on the two lines is: "In my opinion the aor. partic.

[αὐδηθεὶς], contrasting with the perf. partic. ὀνομασμένος, suggests

how estranged he feels from his sonship to Zeus" (228-229).

The reputation he wants to maintain for himself is that of his physical strength, as is evident in the following lines:

ἀλλ' εὔ γέ τοι τόδ' ἔσται, κἂν τὸ μηδὲν ᾧ

κἂν μηδὲν ἔρπῳ, τήν γε δράσασαν τάδε

χειρῶσμαι καὶ τῶνδε. προσμόλοι μόνον,

ἔν' ἐκδιδαχθῇ πᾶσιν ἀγγέλλειν ὅτι

καὶ ζῶν κακοὺς γε καὶ θανόντων ἐτελοσάμην (1107-1111).

- 19 Waldock, 85.
- 20 Ironically, these slave women, who are representative of his prosperity and hope for happiness, lead to his final destruction..
- 21 σφάλλω in the passive means "to fail, be tripped up; to be deceived."  
Heracles is both tripped up and deceived.
- 22 Poetics 1453b.
- 23 Heracles does not even have the honor of the decision of his own death.
- 24 Waldock, 88.
- 25 It seems, however, that Deianeira does apply, or at least tries to apply, human-defining terms to Heracles.
- 26 Victor Ehrenberg, "Tragic Heracles," DUJ 4 (1943) 53.
- 27 E. M. Waith, The Herculean Hero (London, 1962) 24.
- 28 Easterling, 66. Albeit, Heracles is suffering in the extremes of pain.
- 29 Kitto, Greek Tragedy, 294.
- 30 Heracles isolates himself from the past to a small and selective extent by refusing to be guided by what he must know of Deianeira's loving actions of the past. He refuses to understand Hyllus' vindication of Deianeira, and justifies the refusal by his disease (1120-1121).
- 31 Heracles cannot destroy his suffering's real source, but must depend on others to build and light the pyre.

- 32 Perhaps because he is incapable of finding purpose or meaning in his suffering.
- 33 A position he holds either by right of his status as a demi-god or as a result of his own defiance of human limitations. Since in the play he is not granted privilèges as the son of Zeus other than the epithet itself, perhaps the latter is the more likely circumstance. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Heracles does see himself as clearly the son of Zeus.
- 34 Heracles was, after all, the one who slew Nessus.
- 35 Easterling, 61. Two points may be made here. First, as has already been mentioned, one ought perhaps to be surprised that Heracles sees fit to sacrifice to Zeus as though his behavior in sacking Oechalia has been what Zeus would desire. Second, Heracles has been behaving as if Zeus was his champion in sacking the city, although it was actually Eros (354-355). Heracles, bewitched by his passions, wanted a κρύφιον λέχος.
- 36 In his final speech Heracles addresses his soul with a word characteristically used to describe Sophoclean heroes, ὦ ψυχὴ σκληρὰ (1260).
- 37 One almost feels that Heracles does not want to hear of Deianeira because he lacks conviction for and a sense of rightness about what he has resolved to do. He does not refuse to listen because his mind has been irrevocably made up, but because it has not. He does not want the disturbance of having actually to think about something his rage and passion have decided for him.
- 38 This union with Hyllus is evidence against Heracles' isolation.

- 39 According to Kamerbeek (243) this unreasonable violence is reminiscent of Oedipus', Ajax', and Creon's and displays a certain aspect of the typically Sophoclean hero.
- 40 Perhaps, though, he sees his death as a release from time and its imperatives of change?
- 41 It might be said that Heracles remains independent in giving free rein to his passions and by refusing to be held back by Deianeira or the opinion of others; but is it really freedom to be driven to destroy an entire city for the sake of passion? Also, Heracles' lack of self-restraint in his self-pity and suffering of his physical pain clearly indicate that he is a slave to his body.
- 42 He never considers killing himself.
- 43 Mason, 119.
- 44 Jebb, xxxv.
- Webster believes that to Deianeira and Hyllus Heracles is the "best of all men" in the Homeric sense; he is a champion, mighty warrior, and has a sensitive honor like Ajax.
- 45 Slater, 64.
- 46 Also, in forming his model, Whitman has considered Deianeira to be the hero of the Trachiniae.
- 47 Waith, 24.
- 48 Waith, 26.
- 49 Whitman, 40.



- 50 Also, Heracles is not loyal to his wife, but demands loyalty from her. After the news about Nessus' poison (1142), Heracles seizes on the mention of Nessus and forgets Deianeira. His nature is inflexible, and he is filled with resentment at his sufferings. Webster believes that Iole has taken the place of Deianeira in Heracles' affections and that, even if Deianeira were alive, he would never have forgiven her.
- 51 Easterling, 67.
- 52 And he "has shown us the whole miserable story through the eyes of one woman, and presumably the one who suffered most" (Murray, "Heracles, 'The Best of Men'," Greek Studies (Oxford, 1946) 113).
- 53 Murray, 120.
- Richmond Lattimore, Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy (Ann Arbor, 1964) 60 writes: "This Heracles is called by the persons of the play in all sincerity 'the greatest of men'....But the greatness and good achievements of Heracles are 'given'; they are what 'everybody knows'; and the person comes out barely sufficient and credible as the hero who commanded the love of Deianeira and the affection of Hyllus."
- 54 Cf. Gellie, 68.
- 55 Heracles is not even aware of the difficult decision with which Deianeira had to wrestle. He is not interested in her intentions, only in her act.
- 56 Cf. Gellie, 56.
- 57 Cf. Gellie, 61.
- 58 Kirkwood, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Kirkwood (118) remarks that Heracles is part of the mighty sweep of events by which Deianeira is overwhelmed.

<sup>60</sup> Kirkwood, 176.

<sup>61</sup> Ehrenberg, 56.

<sup>62</sup> Ehrenberg, 57.

<sup>63</sup> It is Whitman's view that his long final scene is one of planned cruelty, presented in order that Deianeira, who is alone throughout, may still remain alone and unloved.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## CONCLUSION: DEIANEIRA THE TRACHINIAN

The Deianeira of Sophocles' Trachiniae has been called "perhaps one of the greatest characters in all of ancient literature"<sup>1</sup>; and to the extent that she is great, it is both in spite of and because of Heracles. Heracles acts both as a force, which thrusts Deianeira into her position as hero, and as a tool of her heroic action. It has been said of Heracles that, even "if he is not in the ordinary sense of the word a sympathetic character, he inspires in the other characters extraordinary love and loyalty, and becomes almost an object of veneration,"<sup>2</sup> and that "Heracles is established for us as a man of men, a man who, whatever his failings, has qualities that can command infinite devotion from a woman."<sup>3</sup> Each statement totally violates the spirit of the play. Heracles is not "an object of veneration," and he does not actively "command infinite devotion from a woman." It is Deianeira and her love that play the active and living roles in the play.

Heracles is not characterized or made noble and heroic by Deianeira's love. His sphere, which is monstrous, violent, and destructive, is one apart from her human, loving, and creative sphere, although she does use an instrument of his sphere in her ultimate attempt to recover his love. In contrast to Heracles, Deianeira is made noble and heroic in her own love, because in her infinite warmth of heart she is able to love a creature so undeserving of her love. Heracles does not appear, in the total terror of his self-centered existence, until Deianeira has killed herself for love of him, and then the full tragedy of her love

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and death is realized.

Musurillo comes close to understanding the significance of Deianeira's tragic role in the course of his discussion of why it is incorrect to call the Trachiniae a diptych play. "Heracles is present all through the first part, just as Deianeira 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."<sup>4</sup> Her suicide is wasteful because it is committed as a result of her love for one who is unworthy of and uninterested in that love. Heracles' disregard for Deianeira, his brutality and complete selfishness, are in stark contrast to her devotion to him, her gentleness and generosity.<sup>5</sup> His extreme self-centeredness withdraws him from the possibility of being a truly tragic or heroic figure. Throughout the play he is present only as a force and never as an independent agent. By his thoughtlessness and failure to consider the feelings of others in sending Iole home to supplant Deianeira, he drives Deianeira to action and then becomes the tool of that action. He is not an independent agent, but is held by disease and slavery. Hyllus relates that Heracles was in service to a Lydian woman (70). Lichas repeats the Omphale-story, saying that Heracles was οὐκ ἐλεύθερος (not free, 248) and tells how Heracles treacherously threw Iphitus off a cliff because he called him a free man's slave (δοῦλος ἀνδρὸς ὡς ἐλευθέρου, 267). He is not really the enslaver of Iole, but is himself enslaved by her. His enslavement by Iole and Eros (441, 443) is closely related to his suffering from disease (ὥστ' εἴ τι τῶμῳ τ' ἀνδρὶ τῇδε τῇ νόσῳ / ληφθέντι μεμπτός εἰμι, κάρτα μαίνομαι, "I should be altogether mad to throw blame upon my

husband, because he suffers from this sickness" 445-446). When Heracles finally appears in person in the play, the destructive power of various forces have made him what he is. Musurillo submits that the destructive power's effect must be seen and felt in the "racked and feeble body of the once majestic hero."<sup>6</sup> Heracles may have once been majestic, but not once during the play is he presented as majestic. There is no hopeful contrast between a sick and healthy Heracles; he is seen only in his death throes.<sup>7</sup> The Heracles of the Trachiniae, unlike the ἀριστος ἀνδρῶν of conventional tradition, is "something monstrous, something which cannot be called 'good'."<sup>8</sup>

T. F. Hoey believes that the Trachiniae is the tragedy of the House of Heracles.<sup>9</sup> The two essential parts of the house are Deianeira and Heracles, who are also, according to Hoey, the two protagonists of the play. They fail to achieve union; the action of the play fails, as he puts it, "to achieve home."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the house itself never comes together, and this broken house is the chief image of the play. "The play is about disunity."<sup>11</sup> In Hoey's view, Deianeira is at home in a physical sense, but is displaced in her soul and therefore is as much a wanderer as Heracles is. Her journeys, like Oedipus', tend along the wandering ways of thought. As the Nurse says, her final journey is achieved without her moving a foot. Deianeira's departure, except for the transitional section (863-970), coincides with the arrival of Heracles. The two heroes fail to find each other.

Hoey's view is an interesting one, but contains a major flaw. If the play is about the failure "to achieve home," Deianeira alone can be the hero. The tragedy of a broken house is a tragedy only for her.<sup>12</sup> Heracles never has a house or desire for home. The only time he wants to be with Deianeira is when he wants to kill her. He regrets her death

only because he was not able to cause it. A broken house is no tragedy for him.

Heracles' appearance at the end of the play consummates the tragedy of Deianeira. Heracles' complete lack of interest in her death and innocence, and the dramatic illustration of his character, are the culmination of her tragic life.<sup>13</sup> One looks at Heracles for what he is, what the object of Deianeira's great love really is, and there one sees the tragedy.

Kamerbeek makes the following attempt to sum up the play:

a ruthless, superhuman hero's predestined fate is brought about by the very ruthlessness of his disloyalty towards his wife; his wife trying to win back his love by magic is the involuntary cause of his ruin and her own. Not even the son of Zeus can escape from the will of the gods but has to bow before the inevitable δαίμων of his being. Dangerous and incongruous is an ordinary mortal's union with a superhuman demigod.<sup>14</sup>

Kamerbeek has summarized the tragedy of Dianeira through the character of Heracles, and only his last sentence comes close to correcting that inversion.

It is Deianeira's action that sets the play in motion; it is Deianeira who learns, and it is Deianeira who accepts responsibility. ὣν ἐγὼ μεθύστερον, / ὅτ' οὐκέτ' ἄρκεῖ, τὴν μάθησιν ἄρσυσμα ("But I have come to understand later, now when it is of no use" 710-711). These words of Deianeira sum up her tragic situation of late learning. However, even in her prior naïveté, she was never so ignorant as Heracles remains to the end. According to Kamerbeek, his speech beginning at line 1046 develops into a demonstration of smitten greatness and also demonstrates

the ignorance of man as the true cause of his fate. Heracles' craving for revenge, which is uttered again at the end of his speech, is due to false assumptions. He displays no hint of any former greatness, nor does he recognize that his ignorance has caused his fate. He never considers himself responsible for any of his sufferings, and, strikingly, is not considered by others to be capable of responsibility. Lichas tacitly seems to agree that Eurytus was responsible for Heracles' year of service to Omphale. τόνδε γὰρ μεταίτιον / μόνον βροτῶν ἔφασκε τοῦδ' εἶναι πάθους ("who alone of mortals shared the responsibility, he claimed, for what he had suffered." 260-261).<sup>15</sup> Eros, not Heracles, is responsible for the fact that Heracles sends Iole home.<sup>16</sup> After the catastrophes of the play have taken their course, Hyllus does not lay any blame directly on Heracles, but finds Iole to be μεταίτιος. ἥ μοι μητρὶ μὲν θανεῖν μόνη / μεταίτιος, σοὶ δ' αὔθις ὡς ἔχεις ἔχειν ("she alone shares the blame for my mother's death and your condition" 1233-1234).

The Trachiniae is the only one of Sophocles' seven extant plays that is not named for the play's hero; instead, it takes its title from the Chorus.<sup>17</sup> An examination of the relationship between Deianeira and the Trachinian maidens will strengthen, in my view, the belief that Deianeira is the hero of the Trachinae.

A key passage to an understanding of the relationship between Deianeira and the Chorus occurs between lines 200 and 224, where Deianeira becomes in effect the χορηγός. She rouses the Chorus to a pitch of rejoicing and celebration φωνήσατ', ὧ γυναῖκες, αὖ τ' εἴσω στέγης / αὖ τ' ἐκτὸς αὐλῆς ("Cry out, O you women who are within the house and you who are without" 202-203). And having led the Chorus to their outburst of joy, she rejoins it, in character as well as speech,



ὄρῳ, φύλαι γυναῖκες, οὐδέ μ' ὄμματος  
 φρουρὰν παρήλθε, τόνδε μὴ λεύσσειν στόλον  
 χαίρειν δὲ τὸν κήρυκα προυννέπω, χρόνῳ  
 πολλῷ φανέντα, χαρτὸν εἴ τι καὶ φέρεις (225-228).

I do see the procession that comes nearer, dear women.

The sight did not slip past the guard of my eyes.

I proclaim our welcome to the herald, appearing after  
 a long time--if the news he brings is gladdening.

During the parodos (94-140), the Chorus reply to Deianeira's opening speech, notably echoing, on an optimistic note, her mention of the tragic-day theme. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πῆμα καὶ χαρὰ / πᾶσι κυκλοῦσιν, ὅσον ἄρ- / κτου στροφάδες κέλευθου ("But grief and joy came circling to all like the turning tracks of the Bear" 129-130). They tell her to have good hope, since no evil lasts and since Zeus is not thoughtless of his children. They provide the cheerful converse of Deianeira's "count no man happy till he dies," implying the sentiment "count no man miserable while he lives." They resume the themes introduced by Deianeira in the prologue. After appealing to the Sun to tell where Heracles is, they expressly think of Deianeira's anxieties. Deianeira's description of her lonely, sleepless nights is recalled by the Chorus's mention of the Sun being brought forth and put to sleep (κατευνάζειν) by gleaming night (945), by their comparison of her to a pathetic bird who cannot put to sleep (εὐνάζειν) the πόθος of her eyes (105ff.), and by actual mention of her being worn out "on her troubled, husbandless bed" (109-110).

However, the Chorus' attempt to cheer Deianeira is inadequate. Deianeira's first speech has already illustrated that she has good reason to be anxious, and their words are reminders of her lonely anxiety. Deianeira meets their gentle reproof of her pessimistic outlook (ὧν

ἐπιμεμφομένα σ' αἰ- / δοῖα μὲν, ἀντία δ' οὔσω "Therefore, reproving  
you respectfully, I shall advance an opposing view" 122-123) with  
a speech that introduces the Trachinian maidens to the play.

πεπυσμένη μὲν, ὥς ἀπεικάζσαι, πάρει  
πάθημα τούμὸν ὥς δ' ἐγὼ θυμοφθορῶ  
μήτ' ἐκμάθους παθοῦσα, νῦν δ' ἄπειρος εἶ (141-143).

You are here, I suppose, because you have heard  
of my suffering. May you never learn  
by your own suffering how I break my heart.

You are now without experience.

They are, as D. Wender characterizes them, "Appealing, sympathetic, inexperienced, foolish virgins."<sup>18</sup> They may be on equal footing with Deianeira<sup>19</sup>, but their innocence and inexperience places Deianeira in the natural position as their leader. Deianeira's experience allows her to judge better than a chorus of unmarried girls. She draws an elaborate contrast between παρθένος and γυνή (144-150), which represents the distinction between herself and the Chorus. The Chorus are παρθένοι who are to be educated by the play and to serve as its background.

A close and sympathetic relationship develops between Deianeira and the Chorus. Hearing of Heracles' imminent return, the Chorus point out to Deianeira that she has good reason for joy (291-292). Deianeira agrees that she has good reason to rejoice, although she fears a reversal of success when she sees the poor prisoners, who were once free, now enslaved (293-305). The Chorus' words here and at lines 383-384 express thoughts that are in agreement with Deianeira's feelings and perhaps represent expressions of her own unspoken thoughts. She does see herself as separate from others and linked with the Chorus. πότερον ἐκείνους δῆτα δεῦρ' αὖτις πάλιν / καλῶμεν, ἢ 'μοὶ ταῦσδ' ἑ τ' ἐξελεπεῖν θέλεις; ("Should

we call the others back again, or do you wish to speak only to me and to my friends here?" 342-343). A mutual dependence develops between Deianeira and the Chorus. After hearing the Messenger's story about Iole, Deianeira asks the Chorus what she should do and tells them that their advice is not unreasonable (οὐκ ἀπὸ γνώμης 389). They support Deianeira, in her attempt to get the truth from Lichas, and order him to obey her (470-471).<sup>20</sup>

During the first stasimon (497-530), the Chorus echo Deianeira's opening speech and in doing so become almost an alter ego for Deianeira. It is almost as if Deianeira is looking at her experiences from the point of view of a third person and relating them again. Certainly, there is a kinship between the present position of the Trachinian maidens and the young maiden Deianeira.

In her indecision about using the love-philtre, Deianeira is forced to maintain her position of leadership with the Chorus because of their unwillingness to commit themselves in giving advice.

φύλτροις δ' ἔάν πως τήνδ' ὑπερβαλόμεθα  
τὴν παῦδα καὶ θέλητροισι τοῦς ἐφ' Ἡρακλεῦ (584-585).

But if somehow by these claims,

these spells used on Heracles, we can surpass the girl....

Both Deianeira and the Chorus to a certain extent are involved in the action, but it is Deianeira who takes the initiative and responsibility (εἴ τι μὴ δοκῶ / πράσσειν μάταιον εἰ δὲ μή, πεπαύσομαι "unless I seem to be acting rashly. If so, I shall stop" 586-587). Again, the words of the Chorus (588-589; 592-593) could easily represent Deianeira's own thoughts; she could be questioning her own conscience.

Having heard from Hyllus the effect of Nessus' love-philtre on Heracles, the Chorus react in a fashion true to their leader, the hero

of the play. They lament Heracles' suffering, because his suffering and death are and will be tragic for Deianeira. Throughout the play, they, as well as Deianeira, lack husbands. Being maidens they cannot experience Deianeira's suffering, but they can understand her tragedy. They realize the extent of her tragedy still more fully when told of her death.<sup>21</sup>

Following the Nurse's report of the manner of Deianeira's death, the Chorus do not know which disaster to lament first, Deianeira's or Heracles', nor which disaster is the more final ( πότερα πρότερον ἐπιστένω, / πότερα τέλεα περαιτέρω , "which do I lament first? which is the more final disaster?" 947-948). Both disasters are part of the tragedy of their leader, Deianeira. Heracles was loved by Deianeira and therefore they mourn him, but they also fear the sight of him in his suffering (μὴ ταρβαλέα θάνοιμι , "That I may not die of fright" 957). He was not and is not their hero, and they see him only through the eyes of Deianeira. They speak only four lines during Heracles' portion of the play. They shudder at his misfortunes (1044-1045), which have driven him to want to kill Deianeira. And, after another statement of his desperate desire to punish Deianeira, they make an ambiguous remark about the great mourning Hellas will endure if she loses Heracles (1112-1113).

When Deianeira is still present, the Trachiniae are a link between the young Deianeira and the old Deianeira.<sup>22</sup> They are the confidantes of her innermost feelings, the extension of her emotions and visions of the past, and in their description of the wrestling contest they offer prophetic hindsight. When Heracles enters, they serve as a link with the earlier scenes of the play.

In a sense, the young girls of the chorus stand for the Deianeira that used to be, "echoing her longings, her enthusiasms, and trepidations."<sup>23</sup> In a sense, the whole drama is a lesson for them of what to expect from

marriage and life. They are full of hope, good ideas, and trust in the gods. They think life is cyclical, and Deianeira's fortunes will improve. They think Zeus takes care of his own. They think there is no harm in trying positive action (the love-philtre) to improve one's situation. They are wrong on every count. They are right in the midst of Deianeira's tragedy without actually being a part of it or bearing responsibility for it. The similarity, however, of their status to that of the maiden Deianeira's points to them as a universalizing force of the play. The Trachiniae universalize the very personal life of Deianeira, the hero of the Trachiniae.

## NOTES -- CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 Musurillo, 382.
- 2 Waith, 26.
- 3 Waldock, 84.
- 4 Musurillo, 374.
- 5 Both Deianeira and Heracles apostrophize what is dearest to them. In her final words Deianeira addresses her life with Heracles, her bed and bridal chamber (290). Heracles addresses his physical attributes, his hands, back, breast, and arms (1089-1090).
- 6 Musurillo, 374.
- 7 Cf. Biggs, 227.
- 8 Murray, 125. Murray believes that paracharaxis is at work on the Heracles of the Trachiniae and that Sophocles' change is nearer the original than the Heracles of the 'Suidas', in which the primitive strong man is turned into a Stoic saint. "Sophocles studies the saga, tests it, and finds it evil, and shows how the false ideal which it represents really works in human life" (Murray, 125).
- 9 Thomas F. Hoey, Presentational Imagery in the Trachiniae of Sophocles, resumé in HSCP 68 (1964) 417-419.  
Thomas F. Hoey, "The Trachiniae and the Unity of Hero," Arethusa 3 (1970) 1-22.

- 10 Hoey, Presentational Imagery, 417.
- 11 Hoey, "The Unity of the Hero," 19.
- 12 Deianeira tries not to admit that her home is broken; in fact, she does not admit it until she decides to use the love-philtre. She cannot live in a broken house. She has woven her fate so completely into Heracles' that the oracle concerning Heracles' happiness also applies to her own (ἢ οὐχόμεισθ' ἅμα; 85).
- 13 Contra H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study (London, 1939) 292. Kitto believes that Heracles is not brought in to consummate the tragedy of Deianeira; she disappears. He considers that Heracles' complete lack of interest in Deianeira's death and innocence is the culmination of her tragic life, but more immediately is an illustration of what Heracles is. I feel that the culmination of her tragedy is the illustration of what Heracles is.
- 14 Kamerbeek, 26.
- 15 Zeus was αὔτιος; Eurytus alone of mortals was μεταύτιος.
- 16 It can be inferred that Iole is μεταύτιος, although she is guilty of nothing shameful. ἢ τῇδε τῇ γυναικί, τῇ μεταύτιᾳ / τοῦ μηδὲν αἰσχροῦ μηδ' ἐμοῦ κακοῦ τέλος (447-448).
- 17 Kirkwood ("The Dramatic Role of the Chorus in Sophocles," Phoenix 8 (1954) 7) claims that it has never been suggested that any Sophoclean chorus is the protagonist of its play. S. M. Adams, however, does speculate that "the drama may be named for the women of the chorus because it is they who really make the fatal decision" (S. M. Adams, Sophocles the

Playwright (Toronto, 1957) 110). I disagree; the Chorus do not make the fatal decision and, in fact, do not give Deianeira any positive encouragement.

18 Wender, 6. Their youth and virginity are referred to in lines 143, 211, 821, 871, and 1275.

19 Herbert Pierrepont Houghton ("Deianeira in the Trachiniae of Sophocles," Pallas 2 (1964) 88) notes that the Chorus address Deianeira as ἄνασσα (136, 291) and not as δέσποινα, the form of address that is used by the Nurse.

20 By obeying Deianeira, he will gain their thanks.

πιθοῦ λεγούσῃ χρηστὰ, κοῦ μέμψῃ χρόνῳ  
γυναικὶ τῇδε, καὶ ἐμοῦ κτήσῃ χάριν (470-471).

21 Their discovery of Deianeira's death through the Nurse is a moment of emotional tension for the Chorus. There is only one short kommos (878-895) in the play, and this is it. According to Kirkwood ("The Dramatic Role of the Chorus in Sophocles"), its purpose is the basic purpose of kommoi, to indicate and emphasize a heightening of emotion.

22 They also provide a link between Deianeira and Iole.

23 Musurillo, 377.

Deianeira tells of when she herself was a shy, inexperienced maiden following Heracles across the river on Nessus' back. "Trustful and still unused to the treachery of men, she screams at the lustful monster's touch" (Musurillo, 377).



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