ΕΙ ΔΗ ΚΑΛΩΣ: KNOWLEDGE, PESSIMISM, AND FATE
IN
SOPHOCLES’ TRACHINIAE

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ABSTRACT

Michael Keith Penich: Εἰ δὴ καλῶς: Knowledge, Pessimism, and Fate in Sophocles’ Trachiniae
(Under the direction of William H. Race)

This thesis offers a new interpretation of Sophocles’ Trachiniae. The play depicts two models of human knowledge, one which holds that “the whole truth” (πᾶν τὰληθές, 453) cannot be reached until its telos is known, and another according to which “the whole truth” consists of unending patterns. The pattern-based model is represented in the tragedy of Deianeira. Her understanding of the world is imbued with a deep pessimism which sustains and is sustained by the constant recurrence of fear in her life. The confrontation of Deianeira’s pessimistic, pattern-based understanding of the world with the telos-oriented oracle of Zeus constitutes the central crisis of the play. Ultimately, the telos-based model of knowledge is vindicated in Herakles’ fate.

Chapter 1 explores the whole truth motif in the play. Chapter 2 focuses on Deianeira’s pessimism and her pattern-based understanding of the world. Chapter 3 examines the significance of the telos in Herakles’ fate.
to Liliya
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CHAPTER 1
The Whole Truth

Sophocles’ Trachiniae has frequently been regarded as a play about knowledge and, in particular, knowledge that comes too late.¹ Others have approached the play on different terms, focusing on the inevitability of fate and the nature of the relationship between Deianeira and Herakles,² or on the opposition between the civilized oikos and the wild and archaic,³ or on the fulfillment of the plan of Zeus.⁴ The richness of the text allows many angles of approach, and indeed the interwoven nature of the play’s thematic content makes it difficult to treat any of these themes in isolation. As the title of my thesis suggests, I consider knowledge to be the theme most richly developed by the poet on its own and a suitable nexus point for all of the major themes and motifs of the Trachiniae. Knowledge is a broad topic, however, so I will frame my discussion in this chapter around one central aspect of the theme of knowledge: the motif of the “whole truth,” as distinguished from a version of events that is in some crucial way deficient or damaged. This can be seen in the repeated use of phrases such as πᾶσαν ἀλήθειαν (91) and πᾶν τὰληθές (453, 474) and in other uses of πᾶς where there is a question of full or complete

¹ Whitman 1951, 103-121 seems to have been first to highlight “late learning.” See also Easterling 1982, 3; Davies 1991, xix. Lawrence 1978 is the fullest treatment of the theme of knowledge in the play. He gives a thorough overview of the play’s epistemological language and some of the related imagery, but his interpretation is disappointingly limited. His new book’s chapter on the Trachiniae redresses this shortcoming to an extent (2013, 119-134).

² Both themes are advanced by Kamerbeek 1959, 26. McCall 1972 and Kitzinger 2012 focus on the latter, though with different emphases.

³ Especially Segal 1977, 99-158.

⁴ So Davies 1991, xix.
knowledge of a story or situation. The motif is also reinforced by the extremely frequent use of verbs of learning and knowing prefixed with ἐκ- or κατ- to emphasize the fullness of the activity. Such a conceit in the play’s language is amply justified by the plot, in which the characters are constantly speaking or acting on an understanding of their situation that involves a crucial gap, which must subsequently be filled. This applies particularly to Deianeira, whose entire plight, or series of plights, could be conveniently summed up in her own pathetic words from the prologue: σχεδὸν δ’ ἐπίσταμαι (“I almost know,” 43). Yet it is relevant as well to Hyllos and Herakles, both of whom have to learn separately the whole truth about Deianeira’s actions and about their own futures. Careful attention to the way in which each of these three characters experiences ignorance (or what each takes to be knowledge) and the manner of their respective movements toward more complete knowledge provides not only a better understanding of the characters themselves but also of the play as a whole.

The consequences of the knowledge theme for character and drama will be considered in the second and third chapters of the thesis. In this chapter, I will lay the groundwork for that discussion by demonstrating how the thematic concern about knowledge and the whole truth permeates the language and structure of the play. First, I will look at the verbal patterns that comprise the whole truth motif, and in examining the instances of these patterns in their individual contexts, I will briefly explore some of the major concomitant themes that appear: the

5 I will discuss many instances of the whole truth motif in the body of the thesis, but a brief survey here may be useful: upon learning of the oracles about his father, Hyllos vows to learn “the whole truth” (πᾶν τάλθες, 91); the Messenger claims several times to know and be telling the whole truth (πάντ’ ἐπιστήμην, 338; cf. 349, 369); Deianeira demands and Lichas consents to tell “the whole truth” (πᾶν τάλθες, 453, 474; cf. 484); Deianeira says “I will draw out my story to greater length” (μείζον’ ἐκτενῶ λόγον, 679) “so that you may know everything” (οἱ δ’ εἰδῆς ἔπει, 678); the Nurse, on recounting Deianeira’s suicide, tells the chorus “You’ve heard everything” (πᾶντ’ ἀκήκοας, 876); Hyllos tells Herakles he would feel differently about Deianeira “if you were to learn all” (εἰ τὸ πᾶν μάθοις, 1134).

6 E.g. ἐκμαθάμω (2, 143, 196, 337, 450, 583), ἔξοιδη (5, 399, 988), κάτοιδα (87, 418, 439, 813), ἐξεπίσταμαι (624), and ἐκδίδαςκω (934, 1110, 1245).
desirability of knowledge, the necessity of experience and sight, and the authority of Zeus. Then, I will consider the bigger picture, particularly how the structure of the play dramatizes the characters’ movement towards the whole truth. The *Trachiniae* relies to an extraordinary extent on narratives not only of events that take place offstage, but also of events that are chronologically outside of the drama. These narratives are never self-sufficient: they either contain explicitly identified holes that are later filled in, or they may appear complete at first only to be extended, contested, or revised. I will end this chapter with a close analysis of two of these fragmented narratives: one centers on Deianeira and her journey home as bride of Herakles, the other on Herakles’ own return following the sack of Oichalia. This will lead into the second chapter where I focus more narrowly on how these two characters experience the movement towards the whole truth.

**Language, Supporting Themes, and Imagery:**

**A. The Desirability of Knowledge**

The whole truth motif in the *Trachiniae* is enriched by its close association with a number of related themes, especially the relationship of knowledge to pain and pleasure and the necessity of experience and sight for true understanding. Although these thematic concerns are present throughout the play, I will limit my analysis in this section to the first episode only, since it is arguably the most central to the play’s exploration of knowledge and other major themes.

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7 On this, see Jebb 1892, xlvii-xlix.

8 Deianeira explicitly draws attention to a gap in her story when she says she cannot tell how the battle between Herakles and Acheloos was fought, because she was too frightened to watch: καὶ τρόπον μὲν ἄν πόνων | οὐκ ἄν δεινὸν | οὐ γὰρ οἶδ᾽ ἄλλ᾽ ὡστις ἦν | θακών ἄταρβῆς τῆς θέας, δὲ ἄν λέγοι (21-23). The chorus fills in the missing details in the first stasimon at 503-530. An example of a narrative that at first appears complete is Lichas’ report of Herakles’ activities during his long absence (237-290); the Messenger tells a different version of the story (335-382) which Lichas must eventually confirm (472-489).
This rather long episode (141-496) contains the majority of the verbal reflexes of the whole truth motif, i.e. the use of πᾶς in contexts of learning or knowing, as well as many instances of verbs such as ἐκμαθάω (“to learn fully”). Deianeira’s address to the chorus of Trachinian women at the beginning of the episode brings together all of the relevant concepts (141-152):

πεπυσμένη μέν, ὡς ἀπεικάσαι, πάρει
πάθημα τοιμόν· ὡς δ’ ἐγὼ θυμοφθορῶ
μήτ’ ἐκμάθως παθοῦσα, νῦν δ’ ἄπειρος εἴ.
τὸ γὰρ νεάζον ἐν τοιοῖσδε βόσκεται
χώροισιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ νιν ὦ θάλπος θεοῦ,
οὐδ’ ὕμμρος, οὐδὲ πνευμάτων οὐδὲν κλονεῖ,
ἀλλ’ ἡδοναῖς ἄμοχθον ἐξαιρεῖ βίον
ἐς τοῦθ’, ἐως τὶς ἀντί παρθένου γυνὴ
κληθῇ, λάβῃ τ’ ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων μέρος,
ητοῖ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη.
τότ’, ἐν τὸι εἰσίδοιτο, τὴν αὐτοῦ σκοπῶν
πρᾶξιν, κακοῖσιν οἶς ἐγὼ βαρύνομαι.

To make a guess, you are present because you have learned of my misfortune; and may you not learn fully by suffering how I rend my heart, as you are now in fact inexperienced in that. For the young life is nourished in its own places, such that neither the god’s heat, nor heavy rain, nor any manner of wind disturbs it, but rather with pleasures it supports a life without toil until the point when one is called wife instead of maiden and receives her share of anxieties in the night, fearing either for her husband or her children. Then one might perceive with what evils I am burdened, by considering her own condition.

Deianeira begins by making a strong contrast between secondhand acquaintance and firsthand knowledge in response to the chorus’ urging in the *parodos* that she remain hopeful. The chorus may have heard upon inquiry (πεπυσμένη μέν, 141; cf. πυνθάνομαι, 103) about Deianeira’s misfortune, but they cannot yet fully understand it because they have not shared her experience. Deianeira wishes they may not have to (μήτ’ ἐκμάθως παθοῦσα, νῦν δ’ ἄπειρος εἴ, 143), and expounds upon the nature of their inexperience in a metaphorical description of the bliss of youth: the isolation of the “young life” (νεάζον, 144)9 from the “heat of the god” (θάλπος θεοῦ.

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9 The translation of νεάζον as “young life” is suggested by Jebb 1892, ad 144 ff. He renders it “tender plant” in his own translation to make the metaphor explicit.
145), a reference to the sun, suggests that this fortunate but ultimately doomed condition depends on lack of illumination, or ignorance. Furthermore, the “heavy rain” (ὀμβρος, 146) and more broadly the “winds” (πνευμάτων, 146) are suggestive of Zeus in his most concrete interaction with the mortal world. The oblique reference is significant because it is evocative of the broader confrontation in the play between the mortal characters, especially Deianira, and the oracular communications that come from Zeus. By the metaphor of heat, rain, and winds, Deianira expresses both her grounds for rejecting the chorus’ encouragement and her wistful recollection of her own happy maidenhood. The young, she explains, because of their ignorance and inexperience, have only pleasure in their lives (ἡδοναῖς ἀμοχθόν ἐξάρει βίον, 147), while Deianira and those like her who have had the experience of marriage and motherhood feel pain and anguish (θυμοθορᾶ, 142; κακοῖσιν…βαρύνομαι, 152). This passage brings into focus the idea that experience is necessary for knowledge and at the same time raises the question of whether or not knowledge is desirable if it entails pain. I will now discuss how the remaining portion of the first episode continues to explore each of these issues.

Whole truth and the desirability of knowledge become the center of focus in the double messenger scene that follows. The two messengers are Lichas, a herald in the service of Herakles, and the unnamed Messenger who has heard Lichas deliver his news earlier in Malis and has managed to reach Deianira in Trachis before the herald. The latter introduces himself as “the first messenger who will release you from fear” (πρῶτος ἀγγέλων | ὄκνου σε λύσω, 180-181).

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10 As in several other Sophoclean plays, light imagery in general and the sun motif in particular are closely related to the theme of knowledge. See also Lawrence 1978, 288-289 and Holt 1987, *passim*.

11 Deianira effectively isolates herself from the chorus with this speech, not only by contrasting her own suffering with their inexperience, but implicitly also by presenting this pessimistic view of a woman’s life in response to their optimism in the *parodos*, e.g. the chorus’ claim that one of the gods has always preserved Herakles from death so far (119-121), and the implication that Zeus will prevent him from suffering any great misfortune now (139-140).
Deianeira is slow to react: she wants first to know from whom the Messenger got his information (τοῦ...μαθὼν, 187) and why the man himself is still absent (αὐτὸς δὲ πῶς ἄπεστιν, εἶπερ εὐτυχεῖ; 192). Lichas, it turns out, has been held up by his audience at Malis who will not let him go until they have learned all: “for each man, wishing to learn fully as to his longing, would not let [Lichas] go until hearing to his satisfaction” (†τὸ γὰρ ποθοῦν† ἐκαστος ἐκμαθεῖν θέλων | οὐκ ἂν μεθεῖτο, πρὶν καθ’ ἡδονὴν κλέων, 196-197). On hearing this explanation Deianeira finally responds to the news with joy, but her joy is short-lived. When Lichas himself arrives along with visual proof of Herakles’ recent success, Deianeira is skeptical and questions whether the herald “actually brings any joyful news” (χαρῖν εἴ τι καὶ φέρεις, 228). Lichas is eager to assure her that his news does just that. His opening lines are brimming with pleasure at Herakles’ success and at the very act of bringing good news (229-231):

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ἀλλ’ εὖ μὲν ἴγμεθ’, εὖ δὲ προσφοροὺμεθα,
γύναι, κατ’ ἔργου κτῆσιν· ἄνδρα γὰρ καλὸς
πράσσοντ’ ἀνάγκῃ χρηστὰ κερδαίνειν ἔπη.
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Happily have we arrived and happily are we greeted, lady, in accordance with the achievement of the deed; for it is necessary that a man in good fortune should gain kind words.16

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12 This claim to allay fear continues a pattern that is established in the prologue and extends throughout the play, whereby Deianeira is temporarily released from her fears until new information restores or replaces them. The pattern is verbally marked: in the prologue at 6-30 Deianeira tells how Herakles once released her from another fear, only to become the cause of many more (cf. ὀκνον, 7; ἐκλύεται, 21). Deianeira calls Nessos’ potion “delivering” (λυτήριον, 554). In the ironic second stasimon, the chorus sings that Ares “has released” (ἐξέλυσε) Herakles from his toilsome days.

13 Lloyd-Jones 1954, 93-94 argues against the majority that αὐτός refers to Herakles. The idea is worth considering, but I think it unlikely that Deianeira would switch focus so abruptly after the Messenger’s response to her question.

14 For this and other interpretations of the possibly corrupt text, see Easterling 1982, ad loc.

15 Note also the chorus’ remarks upon the arrival of the first messenger: εὐφημίαν νῦν ἰχώ· ἐπεὶ καταστεφή | στείχονθ’ ὀρὸ τιν’ ἄνδρα πρὸς χαράν λόγουν (178-179). Brunck conjectures, a later MS attests, and Lloyd-Jones follows, χάριν for χαράν. The reading of the majority of MSS is stronger, however, and accords better with the episode’s exploration of the desirability of knowledge, that is, whether it is better to know the whole painful truth (cf. 373-374, 457-459) or to remain blissfully ignorant (cf. 141-152, 481-482).

16 “Win good welcome,” as Jebb translates, seems to be the necessary interpretation of χρηστὰ κερδαίνειν ἔπη (231). It may be possible to supply a word like λέγων and translate “profit from telling good news,” but ἄνδρα γὰρ καλὸς |
Lichas concludes his *rhesis* in much the same mood: “In a long tale happily told, this is the most pleasant thing to hear” (τοῦτο γὰρ λόγον | πολλοὶ καλῶς λεχθέντος ἔδιστον κλέιν, 289-290). This replaces the messenger’s conventional tagline to the effect that all has been told, which is postponed until Lichas is forced to admit the whole story (484). The chorus responds to Lichas’ sentiment, congratulating Deianeira on the “manifest delight” (τέρψις ἐμφανής, 291), part of which is present (τὸν μὲν παρόντων, 292), part of which she has learned of from the herald’s speech (tà δὲ πεπυσμένη λόγῳ, 292). This use of πεπυσμένη, especially since it contradicts ἐμφανής in the previous line, recalls the sharp distinction Deianeira previously made between mere acquaintance by hearsay and actual understanding (cf. πεπυσμένη μὲν…μήτ’ ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα, νῦν δ’ ἀπειρος εἶ, 141-143). What Deianeira has only “learned of through speech” cannot be “manifest”: by her own formulation, firsthand experience is necessary for genuine understanding.

Only after admitting Iole into the house is Deianeira informed by the Messenger that she has not yet heard crucial details (ἅ δὲ, 337) of which he is fully knowledgeable (τοὺτων ἔχω γὰρ πάντ’ ἐπιστήμην ἔγώ, 338). A revisionary messenger *rhesis* follows which finally gives Deianeira the whole story (τὸ πᾶν, 369), including the identity and significance of the captive Iole, told previously by Lichas before many witnesses (πολλῶν παρόντων μαρτύρων, 352). The messenger concludes, “If I do not speak to your liking, I’m not pleased, but nevertheless I have spoken out the straight truth” (εἰ δὲ μὴ λέγω φίλα, | οὔχ ἤδομαι, τὸ δ’ ὀρθὸν ἔξείρηχ’ ὀμως, 373-

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πράσσοντ’ (230-231) rather suggests that Lichas, like the chorus, is equating his own arrival with that of Herakles. Nonetheless, κερδαίνειν sounds a note that Deianeira and the audience have heard before, from the first messenger: άπηξ’, ὅπως σοι πρῶτος ἄγγειλας τάδε | πρὸς σοι τι κερδάναιμι καὶ κτώμην χάριν ("I rushed off in order that, by being first to bear these tidings to you, I might gain some profit from you and win favor," 190-191).

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17 E.g. 876 in this play; cf. Aj. 284, Ant. 402. Also in non-messenger *rhesis*: Aj. 480, Phil. 389.
At this point Deianeira has the essential information that Lichas concealed and the drama could have advanced, but instead it lingers on the competing values of whole truth and pleasant lie. After an *agon* between the two messengers, Deianeira confronts Lichas herself and, sensing the herald’s reservations, denies that knowing the truth would be painful to her (453-459):

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ἀλλ’ εἰπὲ πᾶν τἀληθές· ὡς ἐλευθέρο
ψευδεὶ καλεῖσθαι κήρ πρόσεστιν οὐ καλὴ.
....
κεὶ μὲν δέδοικας, οὐ καλὸς ταρβεῖς, ἐπεὶ
tὸ μὴ πυθέσθαι, τούτῳ μ’ ἀλγόνειν ἄν·
tὸ δ’ εἰδέναι τί δεινόν;
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No, speak the whole truth; since to be called a liar attaches to a free man as an ugly disgrace... And if you are afraid, your fear is unfounded; since not to learn, that is what would cause me pain. But what’s the harm in knowing?

Whereas the Messenger implied a contrast between the whole and correct truth and Lichas’ pleasant tale, Deianeira now aligns the terms differently: ignorance is the painful thing. Her reproach of Lichas is embedded in a moving speech expressing a deep understanding of love’s power and capricious nature: Deianeira objects that she is not a woman “who does not know well the affairs of humankind, that by nature they do not delight always in the same things” (ἥτις οὐ κάτοις τἀνθρώπων, ὅτι χαίρειν πέφυκεν οὐχὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἀεί, 439-440). She then frames the central opposition between knowing the whole truth and the pain of ignorance with the repeated assertion that she does not and cannot blame either Herakles or Iole for what Eros does to them.

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18 Alongside πᾶς (338, 369) the messenger uses the adjective ὀρθὸς (“correct,” 347, 374); the latter adjective does not seem to share the thematic weight of πᾶς elsewhere in the play (but cf. 826). Here it implies that Lichas’ account was not merely incomplete but also incorrect and even falsified.

19 This is a change from her speech to the chorus at 141-152, where her attitude seems to be that ignorance is bliss; but that speech was aimed at rejecting the chorus’ sympathy and encouragement. In this regard Deianeira holds herself to a different standard from others, a character trait that is seen also in her forgiveness of Iole and Herakles in this speech; she will be harsher with herself. See Lawrence 2013, 131. Furthermore, τὸ μὴ πυθέσθαι, τοῦτο μ’ ἀλγόνειν ἄν (458) is a difficult thought: if the reference of the articular infinitive is general, i.e. ‘not-learning’ in general, ‘ignorance,’ the thought would be at best illogical; more likely its meaning is limited to the context, ‘not learning’ the truth about Iole—but in this case the verb πυθέσθαι seems an odd choice. The oddity arises because Deianeira already knows the truth and is really only looking for confirmation now.
Thus assuring Lichas that he can admit the whole truth without an adverse reaction from herself, Deianeira guesses at his possible motives for the lie: either Herakles put him up to it (ἐι μὲν ἐκ κείνου μαθὼν | ψεύδη, 449-450), or Lichas invented it either on Herakles’ behalf or for Deianeira’s sake out of a desire to be kind (εἰ δ’ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ὃδε παιδεύεις, ὅταν | θέλης λέγεσθαι χρηστός, ὄφθηση κακός, 451-452), or else he fears the consequences of telling Deianeira the whole truth (κεί μὲν δέδοικας, 457). Lichas is moved by Deianeira’s humility in the face of Eros (472-474):

Well, dear mistress, since I understand that you, a mortal, think as a mortal should and not without consideration, I will tell you the whole truth and will not hide it.

He admits that the messenger’s version of the story was the true one and confirms that the reason for his deception was fear—fear that he should cause Deianeira pain with the news (δειμαίνων τὸ σὸν | μὴ στέρνον ἀλγύνοιμι τοῖσδε τοῖς λόγοις, 481-482). But now, Lichas repeats, Deianeira knows “the whole story” (πάντ’ ἔπιστασαι λόγον, 484); she should therefore act in accordance with her recent words of compassion “both for [Herakles’] sake and equally your own” (κείνου τε καὶ σὴν ἐξ ἱσον κοινὴν χάριν, 485). With his final affirmation of the whole truth, Lichas actually draws attention to one more piece of information which strikes a note far different from the one with which he entered: “for that man, though best in all other respects with his two hands, is altogether bested by his love for this girl” (ὡς τοῦλλ’ ἐκείνος πάντ’ ἀριστεύων χεροῖν | 472-474).

20 The association of fear with knowledge, or as an obstacle to knowledge, is common in the play and especially for Deianeira’s character (e.g. 22-23, 88-91, 180-181). This subject will be treated in the next chapter.

21 Lichas’ praise of Deianeira for ‘thinking as a mortal should’ is surprising—no one would expect haughtiness from Deianeira. The point in dramatic terms must be to add emphasis to Deianeira’s assertions about Zeus and Eros. The audience might also be meant to remember what Lichas says about Zeus’ punishment of Herakles for the stealthy slaying of Iphitos (275-280). Cf. also θεοὶς δισεμαχοῦντες (492).
τοῦ τῆσδ’ ἔρωτος εἰς ἀπανθ’ ἥσσων ἔφυ, 488-489). The completion of the story, though it needed only a few details, thus entails a complete reversal of Herakles’ apparent fortune.

B. Experience, Sight, and Light

Next I will analyze how the characters in the *Trachiniae* relate their knowledge, whether real or perceived, in terms of experience—especially visual experience—and how light imagery is used to support this theme. In the passage with which I began this section, the “heat of the god” is one element of Deianeira’s metaphor symbolizing the painful experience that her addressees lack (θάλπος θεοῦ, 145). The literal experience which Deianeira claims that she and other married mothers suffer, however, involves “anxieties in the night” (ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων, 149) as a woman “fears for her husband or her children” (πρὸς ἄνδρός ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη, 150). Only a woman with this experience “could then look upon the evils with which I am burdened, by considering her own condition” (τότ’ ἄν τις εἰσίδοιτο, τὴν αὑτὸς σκοπῶν | πρᾶξιν, κακοῖσιν ὃς ἐγὼ βαρύνομαι, 151-152). The complexity and near paradox of this formulation is characteristic of the play’s treatment of experience, sight, and light and their relationship to knowledge. This can be seen in Deianeira’s first joyful response to the Messenger’s initial report of Herakles’ success and imminent arrival. This is her first and last joy in the play and she expresses it in remarkable terms (200-204).

22 ὦ Ζεῦ, τὸν Οἴτης ἄτομον ὃς λειμῶν’ ἔχεις, ἔδωκας ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ σὺν χρόνῳ χαράν.
φωνήσατ’, ὁ γυναῖκες, αἱ τ’ εἰσὶ στέγης
αἱ τ’ ἐκτός αὐλῆς, ὡς ἄελπτον ὄμμ’ ἐμοὶ
φήμης ἀνασχὸν τῆσδε νῦν καρπούμεθα.

O Zeus, you who possess the unmown meadow of Oita, at long last you have granted us joy. Give voice, women, you within the house and you outside the courtyard, seeing that we now enjoy the light of this report which has arisen unexpectedly for me.

22 It is also the only time she orients herself towards light and the sun; she otherwise always frames her experience with reference to night (e.g. 29-30, 149; cf. 175).
The reference to Oita and its connection with Zeus will be reinforced at other key moments in the play (436, 1191), where, as here, the connection suggests Zeus’ control over the entire plot and its ending in particular, a final gap in the mortal characters’ knowledge which is left unfilled at the end of the drama. More striking in the immediate context is the image of the “light that has arisen” (ὄμμα ἀνασχόν), which recalls both Deianeira’s metaphor of the “heat of the god” (θάλπος θεοῦ, 145) and the invocation of Helios in the parodos, in which the chorus prays for the sun “to proclaim” (καρξαι, 97) news of Herakles since the sun is “most masterful in sight” (κρατιστεύων κατ’ ὀμμα, 102). Deianeira’s language suggests that that prayer has been answered, but she disregards her own as well as her messenger’s distance from the actual sight which is meant to bring joy. Deianeira’s joy is based upon a mere report from a messenger who himself has only heard his news at secondhand (κλυών, 189). This sets her knowledge on no firmer a foundation than the “rumors” which Hyllus earlier related to Deianeira (μύθοις, 67; cf. the repeated use of κλύω in that dialogue at 68, 71, 72). The knowledge so gained in that scene, although it had seemed sufficient to Hyllus (cf. 88-89), is then explicitly opposed to “the whole truth” (πᾶσαν…ἀλήθειαν, 91). Deianeira is slow to allow herself to feel joy, but she eventually does so: the terms of her joy, however, hint that even this delayed reaction is overly hasty.

With Deianeira’s joyous prayer marking acceptance of the Messenger’s news, the audience may be surprised at the arrival of Lichas. The chorus and Deianeira note the arrival with a heavy emphasis on sight, an emphasis which goes beyond the typical textual marking of a

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23 Zeus is to the Trach. as Apollo is to the OT. He is repeatedly referred to (not unusually, but with special propriety in this play) as the accomplisher of everything (127-128, 1278), and his name is present alongside nearly every significant utterance or action represented on stage or described in narrative (26, 238, 251, 275, 288, 303, etc.), often in ironic prayer, as at 200, 303, 437.

24 The intervening hyporcheme (a convenient term to distinguish this song from regular stasima, but see Kamerbeek 1959, ad 205-225) might also be mistaken at first for the second stasimon, signaling the next movement of the play. The audience would note the oddity, however, of the first messenger remaining on stage (Davies 1991, ad 199).
character’s entrance (e.g. 179, ὠρὸ only). Then Deianeira greets the herald with anticipation as to whether or not the herald is actually bringing good news (222-228):

ΧΟΡΟΣ:  ἵδε ἵδ’, ὦ φίλα γύναι·
        τάδ’ ἄντιπρωρά δὴ σοι
        βλέπειν πάρεστ’ ἐναργῆ.

ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ:  ὤρὸ, φίλαι γυναῖκες, οὐδὲ μ’ ὁμματος
        φρουράν παρηλθέ, τόνδε μὴ λεύσσειν στόλον·
        χαίρειν δὲ τὸν κήρυκα προύνέπω, χρόνῳ
        πολλῷ φανέντα, χαρτὸν εἰ τι καὶ φέρεις.

CHORUS:  See, see, dear woman! These things are present, face to face with you, manifest to behold!

DEIANEIRA:  I see, dear women, nor did it escape the watch of my eye, so as not to look upon this company. And I publicly bid the herald welcome, who has appeared after a long time, if you actually bring any joyful news.

The train of captive maidens is the first visual evidence of Herakles’ homecoming. The deictic word τάδε (223) connects this sight to the subject of the chorus’ celebration, that is, the imminent arrival of Herakles (cf. δόμος…ὁ μελλόνυμφος, 205-207): for the chorus, the arrival of the war captives amounts to Herakles himself appearing “face to face” (ἄντιπρωρα, 223) and “manifest to behold” (βλέπειν…ἐναργῆ, 224).25 Deianeira is more precise as to what she sees and will not extrapolate: she sees a “company” (στόλον, 226) led by a “herald” (κήρυκα, 227). The preponderance of visual language anticipates Deianeira’s keen attention to the captive maidens later in the episode (298-334), but her use of φρουράν (226) proves to be ironic: for all her sensitivity to the women, the threat posed by one of their group will escape her watch.

In a passage that resonates strongly with her address to the chorus at 141-152, Deianeira responds to the chorus’ claim that her “delight is now manifest” (νῦν…τέρψις ἐμφανῆς κυρεῖ,

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25 This language recalls that used by Deianeira to describe Acheloos, who appeared at one time as a “manifest bull” (ἐναργὴς ταῦρος, 11), another time as a man “with the face of an ox” (βοῦπροφορος, 13).
291) and turns to the new group of maidens—the part of her delight that is “present” (τὸν μὲν παρόντων, 292)—that has appeared before her (293-309):

πῶς δ' οὐκ ἐγὼ χαίρομι' ἂν, ἀνδρός εὐτυχῆ κλώουσα πράξιν τήνδε, πανδίκω φρενὶ; πολλῆ' στ' ἀνάγκη τήδε τούτο συντρέχειν. ὅμως δ' ἔνεστι τοίσιν εὐ δικομένοις ταρβεῖν τὸν εὖ πράσσοντα, μὴ σφαλῇ ποτε. ἐμοὶ γὰρ οίκτος δείνος εἰσέβη, φίλαι, ταύτας ὡράσθησε δυσπότμους ἐπὶ ξένης χώρας ἀοίκους ἀπάτοράς τ' ἀλωμένας ὦ Ζεῦ τροπαῖε, μὴ ποτ' εἰσίδοιμί σε πρὸς τοὺμὸν οὕτω σπέρμα χωρήσαντά ποι, μηδ', εἰ τι δράσεις, τῆσδ' οὐδὲν. οὕτως ἐγὼ δέδοικα τάσδ' ὡρμήσαν. ὦ δυστάλαινα, τίς ποτ' εἶ νεανίδως; ἄνανδρος, ἢ τεκνοῦσσα; πρὸς μὲν γὰρ φύσιν πάντων ἀπειρος τῶνδε, γενναία δὲ τις.

How could I not rejoice when I hear of this successful affair of my husband’s and be wholly right-minded to do so? It’s quite necessary that joy meet this success. Nevertheless it is possible for those who consider well to fear lest the successful man someday falter. I say that because a terrible pity came upon me, friends, when I saw that these ill-fated women are wandering in a foreign land, homeless and fatherless….O Zeus, turner of battle, never may I see you advance anywhere against my offspring in this way, and if you will do it, may you not do it while I at least am still alive. So fearful am I when I see these women. Poor girl, whatever young maiden are you? Husbandless, or a mother? Judging by your appearance you are inexperienced in all these things, and one high-born.

The verb σκοπέω (296) was earlier used of the woman who could understand Deianeira’s plight by examining her own experience (151). Now Deianeira seems to apply the method herself as she expresses her compassion for the captive women. She does not say so, but she must be reminded of her own separation from her childhood home and father following a conquest by Herakles: the reference to Ζεῦ τροπαῖε (303) in particular recalls the presence of Ζεῦς ἀγώνιος (26) at the decisive moment of the battle between Herakles and Acheloos. The emotional responses of extreme pity (οἶκτος δείνος, 298) and fear (δέδοικα, 306) are explicitly tied to the
sight of the captive women, and this is in fact the reason (cf. γάρ, 298) for Deianeira’s reluctance to rejoice at the pleasant news of her husband’s imminent arrival. The mere mute presence of the Oichalian women is more moving to Deianeira than Lichas’ long messenger speech, and her eye seems drawn intuitively to what Lichas most wanted to conceal. She is most affected by the sight of Iole: “I pitied her most of these women when I saw her” (νιν τῶνδε πλείστον ὤκτισά | βλέπομεν’, 312-313). Deianeira is anxious to know whether Iole is a mother and wife or still a maiden (ἄνανδρος, ἡ τεκνοῦσσα; 308). With this question she echoes the thought of her earlier speech, in which she claimed that a woman leads a pleasant life “until she is called a wife instead of a maiden,” at which point worries for husband and children take over her life (148-150). She recognizes that Iole is so far “inexperienced in all this,” just as she stated earlier that the chorus was (πάντων ἄπειρος τῶνδε, 309; cf. νῦν δ’ ἄπειρος εἶ, 143). In that passage Deianeira was expressing her own isolation from the chorus of young maidens, who because of their inexperience could not properly understand her suffering. Here is the reverse: she feels a connection with Iole and she remembers when she herself was still husbandless and inexperienced. When she learns the whole truth about Iole, about how far the connection with her extends, the memories of her own journey as prize of Herakles will not be far off.

Whole Truth in the Structure of the Trachiniae

A. Acheloos and Divine Agency

The first episode of the Trachiniae demonstrates the importance of the whole truth both as a concept with which the characters must grapple and as a motif in the play. In the preceding analysis I have highlighted the verbal foundations of the motif, and at the same time drawn attention to some of the major themes associated with the whole truth and knowledge generally.
Now I will turn to the way these same concerns are reinforced at another level of the drama, with large in its structured presentation of narratives. As each narrative is revisited, a new interpretation of the events in question emerges. One such narrative concerns the wooing and wedding of Deianeira and the fight between Acheloos and Herakles. Deianeira herself begins the story in the prologue, but she is unable to relate the whole story, and in particular how the struggle between her suitors played out (21-23):

καὶ τρόπον μὲν ἂν πόνων
οὐκ ἂν διείποιμ’· οὐ γὰρ οἶδ’· ἀλλ’ ὅστις ἦν
θακών ἀταρβής τῆς θέας, ὅδ’ ἂν λέγοι.

And the manner of their exertions I cannot fully tell; for I don’t know. But whoever was sitting without fear of the sight could speak.

The outcome of the fight, if not the significance and desirability of that outcome, is clear: “Zeus of contests made the end happy, if indeed it was happy” (τέλος δ’ ἐθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς, | εἰ δὴ καλῶς, 26-27).²⁶ The outcome of the battle puts an end to the first of Deianeira’s fears, but is the start of many more. The narrative of this contest is not left incomplete; the missing details are filled in by the chorus in the first stasimon, where they take on an epic perspective of those remote events, first posing the questions as a rhapsode might (503-506):

ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τάνδ’ ἄκοιτιν
ἀμφίγυοι κατέβαν πρὸ γάμων,
τίνες πάμπληκτα παγκόνιτά τ’ ἐξῆλθον ἀγώνων;

But who were the rivals that entered the contest for the marriage, in pursuit of this bride? Who came forth to the contest of battle, full of blows and dust?

They recount the specific details of the fight which Deianeira omitted (517-522), and recall Deianeira’s presence there and her anxiety as to the outcome, perhaps repeating the contrast

²⁶ It makes little difference whether τέλος δ’ is taken as adverbial (‘in the end’, ‘as to the outcome’) or as the object of ἐθηκε καλῶς; cf. Easterling 1982 ad loc.
Deianeira made between herself and one who could tell all the details (523-530; cf. 21-23). The chorus adds one other important detail: “Kypris of the happy marriage bed alone attended as umpire in their midst” (μόνα δ’ εὔλεκτρος ἐν μέσῳ Κύπρις | ῥαβδονόμει ξυνοὐσα, 515-516).

This detail responds closely to Deianeira’s judgment that “Zeus of contests made the end happy” (26). Both Aphrodite and Zeus are represented as deciding the outcome of the contest, with which they are intimately concerned each in their own way: Zeus as the god of contests and Aphrodite as goddess of marriage. The involvement of these divinities (along with Eros) in the events of the play is a recurring point of dispute among the characters, especially in the clashing narratives of the first episode preceding this stasimon: Lichas twice asserts Zeus’ involvement (251, 275) while the Messenger claims that Eros was really responsible (354). Thus the addition of the detail of Aphrodite’s involvement to the story of Herakles and Acheloos’ battle draws an equivalency between Deianeira and Iole, a connection that is highlighted by the juxtaposition of the scene about Iole with the stasimon about Deianeira.

B. Nessos and the Power of the Past

The other narratives are woven even more conspicuously throughout the play, and the gradual unfolding of their details is integral to the advancement of the plot. The Acheloos story’s importance rested in its characterization of Deianeira and especially in the parallel it creates between Deianeira and Iole as helpless prizes caught in the middle of divinely appointed contests. The Nessos story, on the other hand, which in terms of its chronological setting closely

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27 McDevitt’s attempt to defend μάτηρ by interpreting 527-530 as a reference primarily to the present is unconvincing (1982, 245-247). Zieliński’s conjecture θατήρ for μάτηρ of all MSS is possible; Easterling 1982 ad loc. gives two reasonable arguments for it. Yet θατήρ too seems unsuitable if the chorus is assuming an epic posture in this stasimon. The latest attempt at a solution is Hadjistephanou’s emendation to λέγω δὲ μάτην μὲν οἷα φράζω, which he translates, “I speak in vain, such as I am talking about” (1999, 495-496); this is even less appropriate. For other conjectures and interpretations, see Jebb 1892, 194; Kamerbeek 1959 ad loc.; Davies 1991 ad loc.

28 So Kraus 1991, 76 argues that “The characters in the Trachiniae use their stories to organize their experience; they then often use the meaning they have assigned to that experience as the basis for further action.”
follows the Acheloos story, bears critically on the action of the dramatic present. Deianeira first speaks of Nessos in describing to the chorus how she hopes to deliver herself from her jealousy and fear of abandonment (553-558):

\[\text{ἡ δ' ἐξο, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι, λυτήριν ἔχω, φίλαι.}\]

\[\text{ἡν μοι παλαιὸν δῶρον ἀρχαίου ποτὲ θηρός, λέβητι χαλκέῳ κεκρυμμένον, ὃ παῖς ἔτ' οὖσα τοῦ δασυστέρνου παρὰ Νέσσου φθίνοντος ἐκ φονῶν ἀνειλόμην…}\]

How I come to hold a pain that delivers,29 friends, I will tell you. I once had an old gift from an ancient beast, hidden in a bronze urn, which while still a child I took up from shaggy-breasted Nessos, from his blood as he was dying…

The conspicuous collocation of παλαιὸν and ἀρχαίου in 555 links the gift of Nessos and Nessos himself with other “old” things in the play: the proverb (Λόγος ἀρχαῖος, 1), and, more significantly, the oracle-bearing tablet left behind by Herakles (παλαιὰν δέλτον, 157), and that oracle’s source, the oak of Dodona (παλαιὰν φηγόν, 171).30 The age of the gift and of the giver lends an air of mystery to the substance which is compounded by its long concealment, “hidden in a bronze urn” (λέβητι χαλκέῳ κεκρυμμένον, 556) and “locked up well” (ἐγκεκλημένον καλῶς, 579); now it will be brought out, and upon literally coming to light its real significance will appear.31 But Deianeira must make the decision to use the gift while the obscurity remains and “its assurance is like this: the semblance of reliability exists, but I have not yet tried an

29 I agree with the majority of scholars that λυτήριν λύπημα cannot give the appropriate sense; see e.g. Easterling 1982, ad loc.

30 The adjectives and related adverbs (cf. πάλαιν, 1141, 1159, 1165) serve to highlight how an object or utterance from the distant past can intrude on and attain new significance in the present; see Easterling 1982, 4.

31 Lawrence 1978, 298 draws attention to the significance of the concealment and the poison’s reactivity to light: “Deianeira has worked in the obscurity of deceit with a reagent whose properties are obscure and which must remain in the obscurity of physical darkness in order to retain its potency. When exposed to light its properties become clear while, paradoxically, the substance with which it has come into contact disappears…. The already obviously sinister implications of the wool’s disappearance—that Heracles will suffer likewise—are thus greatly augmented in the [sic] light of the theme of knowledge, as a physical obscurity which normally betokens ignorance is clearly a prelude to the supremely tragic knowledge of the play.”
experiment” (οὕτως ἔχει γ’ ἢ πίστις, ὡς τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν | ἔνεστι, πείρα δ’ οὐ προσωμιλησά πω, 590-591). Moreover she requires the secrecy of the chorus, “seeing that in darkness, though you act disgracefully, you never fall into disgrace” (ὡς σκότῳ | κἂν αἰσχρὰ πράσσῃς, οὔποτ’ αἰσχύνη πεσῇ, 596-597). Deianeira realizes her mistake once the poison comes to light, but in order to explain this to the chorus she must tell the whole story about Nessos (678-687):

In order that you may know everything as to how this happened, I will draw out my story to greater length. For I neglected none of the directions with which the centaur beast instructed me beforehand while he suffered with the bitter barb in his side, but I preserved them, like an inscription that is hard to wash out from a bronze tablet: [these were his prescriptions to me and such I did:] he told me to keep this drug in a recess always away from flame and untouched by a warm sunbeam, until I should apply it somewhere, freshly spread.

Here the use of προὐδιδάξατο (and πρόρρητα, if the verse is retained) highlights the efficacy of Nessos’ instructions through time. The next two lines powerfully reinforce this notion and resonate even further with other objects from the past: the bronze tablet of Deianeira’s memory recalls not only the tablet left by Herakles and inscribed with the oracle (δέλτον, 157), but also the bronze urn that concealed the gift (χαλκέω, 556).³² Deianeira now realizes, upon witnessing

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³² The simile may illustrate not only the accuracy of the recollection, but also its inevitability. Even if one were to try to wash out the inscription, the adjective δύσνιπτον suggests, it cannot fail to be read. In the same way, the oracle from Dodona (inscribed on a literal tablet) must inevitably be fulfilled, the gift of Nessos (likewise preserved in bronze) must be used—and it too will be “hard to wash out” in the most literal sense.
the disintegration of the tuft of wool used to apply the poison, the true significance of Nessos’ gift (706-711):

I see that I have accomplished a terrible deed. For what reason, in return for what would the beast while dying have offered me, on whose account he was dying, goodwill? It cannot be; rather it was because he wanted to destroy the one who had struck him that he beguiled me. I gain the understanding of this too late, when it no longer does any good.

The centaur’s words had been unfailingly remembered, but it takes this final “unspeakable portent” (φάτιν | ἄφραστον, 693-694) for Deianeira to understand too late (μεθύστερον, 710) that she has been beguiled. The chorus try to encourage her, but Deianeira rejects their efforts much as she did following their entrance: “The sharer in the evil may not say such things, but one who has no trouble at home,” (τοιαῦτα τὰν λέξειν οὐχ ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ | κοινονός, ἄλλ’ ὁ μηδὲν ἔστ’ οἶκοι βαρύ, 729-730). She resolves to die if her new understanding is confirmed; but, as if to undermine that resolution, she waits, helpless again, for news.

33 The verb, θέλγω, is only otherwise used in extant Sophocles at 354-355 in this play, by the Messenger when he discloses to Deianeira the crucial details about Herakles’ sack of Oichalia: Ἐρως δὲ νῦν | μόνος θεῶν θέλξειν αἰγμάσαι τάδε (‘Love alone of the gods bewitched him to do these spear-works’). Nessos appeals to Deianeira’s erotic jealousy (575-577); parallel forces are moving the pair towards mutual destruction.

34 Cf. her rejection of the chorus’ encouragement at 141-143: “To make a guess, you are present because you have learned of my misfortune; and may you not learn fully by suffering how I rend my heart, as you are now in fact inexperienced in that” (πεπυσμένη μέν, ὡς ἀπεικάσαι, πάρει | πάθημα τούμον | ὡς δ’ ἐγώ θυμοφθορό | μήτ’ ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα, νῦν δ’ ἀπειρος ἐλ). See McCall 1972 on Deianeira’s powerlessness in the play.
C. The Sacrifice at Kenaion

When the news comes, it is the final reiteration of the narrative most persistently revisited in the course of the play, that relating the sack of Oichalia along with Herakles’ subsequent homecoming. The sacrifice at Kenaion emerges as a primary reference point in each version of the story; it figures prominently from almost the first breath of the first messenger of Herakles’ return (180-183):

δέσποινα Δηάνειρα, πρῶτος ἀγγέλων
δῶσω σε λύσω· τὸν γὰρ Ἀλκμήνης τόκον
καὶ ζωντ’ ἐπίστω καὶ κρατοῦντα κάκ μάχης
ἀγουτ’ ἀπαρχὰς θεοῖς τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις.

Mistress Deianeira, I shall be the first of messengers to release you from fear: know that the child of Alkmene is alive and victorious, and from the battle he brings first fruits to the local gods.\(^{36}\)

This messenger has little more to tell, for the moment; when Lichas arrives, he too refers to Herakles’ sacrificial activity, both on Deianeira’s initial questioning (ὁρίζεται | βωμοὺς τέλη τ’ ἔγκαρπα, 237-238) and on closing his rhesis (ἀγνά θύματα | ῥέξῃ, 287-288), adding specifics as to the location (“a headland in Euboia,” 237) and the god (“Kenaian Zeus,” 238, or “ancestral Zeus,” 288). Deianeira makes the sacrifice central to her plan to save her marriage. As she gives Lichas the instructions necessary for her plan’s success, she vividly pictures Herakles in the moment of sacrifice (610-613):

οὕτω γὰρ ηὔγμην, εἴ ποτ’ αὐτὸν ἐς δόμους
ἰδοίμι σωθέντ’ ἢ κλύοιμι, πανδίκως
στελεῖν χτιόνι τόδε, καὶ φανεῖν θεοῖς
θυτῆρα καινῷ καινὸν ἐν πεπλώματι.

For so I had vowed, that, if ever I should see or hear that he had made it safely home, dutifully I would array him in this tunic, and would present him to the gods, a new sacrificer in a new garment.

\(^{36}\) Jebb 1892 ad loc., Kamerbeek 1959 ad loc. make ἀπαρχὰς a reference to the train of captive maidens that will soon appear with the herald Lichas; Easterling 1982 ad loc. connects it with the more extensive theme of the sacrifice at Kenaion. The reference is effectively vague and its significance will develop as the play progresses.
Deianeira’s invention of a false vow is indicative of the dangerous moral territory she has entered, but it also parallels the vow made by Herakles. When Lichas reports that Herakles “is marking out altars and fruitful tributes to Kenaian Zeus” (ὁρίζεται | βωμοὺς τέλη τ’ ἐγκαρπα Κηναίῳ Δί, 237-238), Deianeira asks whether he “presents [the altars and tributes] in accordance with a vow” (ἐὐκταῖα φαίνων, 239) and the herald confirms that he does (cf. εὐχαίζ, 240). Deianeira in turn claims that she had vowed to present Herakles to the gods in the robe (ηὔγμην…φαίνειν, 610-612). The verbal echoes help to suggest a double ironic significance: φαίνω is rarely used of the presentation of offerings (so Jebb 1892, 239n.), so the repetition of the verb in 612, in conjunction with the ominous phrase θυτῆρα καὶνόν (613; see Jebb 1892 ad loc.), creates an awful ambiguity as to whether Deianeira is presenting Herakles to the gods as sacrificer or as sacrificial victim.37 The connection between the two vows is one indication of the convergent movements of Deianeira and Herakles towards a single τέλος—in this case, the literal τέλη to be presented at Kenaion.38

The play’s second stasimon is marred by textual difficulties, but here too reference is made to the sacrifice as the chorus anticipates Herakles’ return. Lloyd-Jones’ edition gives the reading of the codices for the relevant passage in the second antistrophe (655-662):

[strophic text]

37 If the connection between the two vows can be taken further, there may be a hint here of deification: in the earlier passage, Lichas represents Herakles not yet in the act of sacrifice, but “marking out” (or “consecrating,” ὀρίζεται, 237) altars and tributes. The verb is probably a technical term in 237 (see comparanda in Jebb 1892 ad loc.); if the audience is to remember this detail at 610-613, it may be worth noting that ὀρίζει is used at least once (though late—by the poet Meleager) to mean “deify”: ἵλαθ’, ἄναξ, ἵληθ· σὲ γὰρ θεὸν ὀρίζει Δαιμόν (Anth. Pal. 12.158.7).

38 For another clear instance of parallel/convergent movement, see note 33 above.
συγκραθεὶς ἐπὶ προφάσει θηρός.".

May he come, may he come! May the many-oared carriage of his ship not halt until he wins his way to this city, after leaving the island altar where he is reported to be a sacrificer! Whence may he come completely tamed, mingled into union through the beast’s pretext, all-anointed with Persuasion.\(^{39}\)

Despite the mangled text, it is at least clear that the chorus envisions Herakles in the act of sacrifice which has been reported in advance by the two messengers. They say that Herakles “is reported to be a sacrificer” (κλήζεται θυτήρ, 659), recalling Deianeira’s use of the word (θυτήρ, 613) and calling attention by the use of the verb κλήζεται to Herakles’ reported condition as opposed to his actual condition.\(^{40}\) In the corrupt final lines of the stanza, the chorus ironically anticipates the success of Deianeira’s plan (660-662). They are soon corrected. Hyllos appears in the following episode to give the proper messenger’s report of the action so long forecast (749-771):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{εἰ χρή μαθεῖν σε, πάντα δὴ φωνεῖν χρεών.} \\
\text{δόθ’ εἰρπε κλεινὴν Εὐρώτου πέρσας πόλιν,} \\
\text{νίκης ἄγων τροπαία κάκροθινα,} \\
\text{ἀκτῆς τις ἄμφικλυστος Εὐβοίας ἄκρον} \\
\text{Κῆμαυών ἔστιν, ἐνθὰ πατρίῳ Διώ} \\
\text{βομβοὺς ὀρίζει τεμενίαν τε φυλλάδα·} \\
\text{οὔν τά πρῶτ’ ἐσείδον ἁσμενος πόθω.} \\
\text{μέλλοντι δ’ αὐτῷ πολυθύτους τεύχειν σφαγάς} \\
\text{κήρυξ ἀπ’ οἰκον ἱκετ’ οἰκείως Λίχας,} \\
\text{τὸ σὸν φέρον δώριμα, θανάσιμον πέπλον·} \\
\text{ἄν κείνος ἐνδῦς, ὡς σὺ προὔξεφισο,} \\
\text{ταυροκτονεῖ μὲν δόδεκ’ ἐντελεῖς ἔχον} \\
\text{λείας ἀπαρχὴ βοῦς· ἀτάρ τά πάνθ’ ὁμοῦ.}
\end{align*}\]

\(^{39}\) Kamerbeek’s suggestion that πανάμερος derives from ἡμέρα (“tame”) rather than ἡμέρα (with a hyperdoricism due to poet or copyist) gives good sense and a rich irony lacking in Mudge’s emendation πανίμερος. Paley’s proposed συντακτίς could conceivably have led to the intrusion of a gloss, συγκραθεῖς, restores responson, and furthermore vividly suggests the actual effect of the anointed robe on Herakles as well as the intended one. The difficulty of ἐπὶ προφάσει θηρός, which is unmetrical (although this depends on the uncertain reading of 654), has led to a variety of proposals, none of which seems especially attractive. In my translation I take προφάσει (“pretext”) to refer loosely to the robe as the vehicle for Nessos’ presumed love potion, so that the adjective παγχρίστῳ may apply to it; this interpretation is even clearer if Haupt’s conjecture of φάρος for θηρός is correct.

\(^{40}\) Thus the verb strikes the same ominous note as Deianeira’s phrase θυτήρα καυνόν (613). Verbs of naming, celebration, and report frequently prove to be ironic in this play; see chapter 3 of this thesis.
If you must learn, then it’s necessary to say everything. When he had sacked the renowned city of Eurytos and was on his way, bringing the trophies and first fruits of victory—there is a seawashed headland of Euboia, Cape Kenaion, where he was marking out altars and the foliage of a precinct to the ancestral Zeus. There I first looked on him, glad for my longing. And as he was about to accomplish the slaughter of many sacrificial victims, his own herald Lichas reached him from home, bearing your gift, the deadly robe. This he put on, as you enjoined beforehand, and was sacrificing bulls, having twelve unblemished oxen as first fruits of the plunder; but he brought up a hundred mixed livestock all together. And at first the wretched man was praying with gracious mind, rejoicing in the outfit that adorned him. But when the flame of the holy rites began to blaze from the blood and from the resinous oak, sweat rose on his flesh, and the tunic was clinging closely-joined to his sides as if by a carpenter, along every joint; and a convulsive, biting pain in his bones came on. Then a bloody poison like that of a hateful viper began to feast on him.

The *rhesis* begins by situating the crucial event among terms of thematic and narrative importance. Although Hyllos is angry and does not suspect that Deianeira acted unwittingly, he nonetheless feels bound to tell everything (πάντα δὴ φωνεῖν, 749). The details of location and sacral activity vary only slightly from earlier reports, repeating many terms (e.g. ἀκτῆς, πατρῴῳ Δί, βομβοῦς ὀρίζει, ἀπαρχήν; cf. 183, 237-238, 288). The striking compound verb προὐξεφίεσο (759) again lays emphasis on the lapse of time—and therefore implicitly on the gaps in knowledge—not only between Deianeira’s charge of Lichas and the performance of that charge, but also between the charge and her realization that disaster will follow from it. Along with Hyllos’ intended meaning, then, which contains an accusation of premeditation as well as the simple notion of temporal precedence, there is a hint of the ironic meaning “enjoined before
knowing better.” There is additional irony in Hyllos’ description of the first effects of the poisoned robe. The sweat rising on Herakles’ skin is a conventional symptom of erotic passion,\textsuperscript{41} and the verb προσπτύσσομαι is frequently used of affectionate embrace. The robe is presented as a sort of surrogate for Deianeira, manifesting her erotic intentions even as the poison is activated by the flame. This strongly suggests the role of Eros and Aphrodite, recalling their presence along with Zeus in the narratives about the sacking of Oichalia. Here the context is an intended sacrifice to Zeus, and the sacrifice that actually takes place brings about the fulfillment of Zeus’s oracle. With this knowledge, the most complete she will ever attain, Deianeira rushes off in silence. The report of her suicide completes the first movement of the play.\textsuperscript{42}

**Conclusion**

The preceding discussion has shown how the language and structure of the *Trachiniae* develop the important theme of knowledge and the whole truth motif. I discussed in particular how the play dramatizes Deianeira’s movement towards the whole truth. In the play’s first episode, she begins with a terrible sense of foreboding at her complete lack of certainty about Herakles, but is then confronted with reports that rapidly expand on and contradict one another, and ultimately change from good news to bad. I then examined a similar pattern of expansion, revision, and reinterpretation that appears in the play’s many narratives: as each narrative unfolds, a new detail or a new perspective leads to an understanding of events that is more complete and sometimes radically different from what came before. I noted in connection with these analyses a number of subordinate themes and motifs: the desirability of knowledge and

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Sapph. 31.13: †έκαδε† μ’ ἄδρος ψύχος κακχέεται. A metaphorical πῦρ is also present (10).

\textsuperscript{42} So e.g. Lawrence 1978, 300.
ignorance, the necessity of experience and sight for understanding, the influence of the past on
the present, and the roles of Zeus and Aphrodite. In the following chapters, I focus on the
differences in the characters of Deianeira and Herakles, especially their different relationships to
knowledge and responses to the whole truth. I will consider how the characters incorporate these
ideas into their thought and decision-making processes, and how their words and actions further
the thematic development of the play.
CHAPTER 2
Patterns of Pessimism

Deianeira and Herakles each have fundamentally different ways of relating to the mortal world and to the divine realm which is revealed in the way each responds to reports of new information—especially when this information has some bearing on the oracles of Zeus. I will argue in this chapter that Deianeira displays a tendency to think in terms of patterns and cycles which she notices in her life and in the world. Far from being a comfort to her, this tendency fuels her pessimism, as she continually focuses on the anxieties and sufferings of her life to the exclusion of all happiness. Even when the events of the play do give her reasons for joy, she anticipates all the more how happiness may end. This leads her ultimately to actions aimed at halting the cycles she sees in motion. This is a major component of the extreme contrast made between Deianeira and Herakles: whereas Deianeira is ruled by her pessimism in the face of uncertainty, Herakles is in the end guided by his knowledge of fate, a knowledge by virtue of which he is himself able to exert a proactive if not controlling influence on his own τέλος.

Deianeira’s extraordinary pessimism is on full display in her prologue speech (1-48) and is highlighted early on in the play by contrast with the other characters, especially Hyllos (61-93) and the chorus of young Trachinian women (94-179), but it is central also to understanding the whole picture of her character, her actions and inaction.43 Crucially, this pessimism is framed as a tendency to make premature judgments before knowing the whole truth. This can be seen

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43 Many scholars have noted Deianeira’s pessimism in passing, e.g. McCall 1972, 143; Lawrence 1978, 288; Kraus 1991, 81. McCall focuses on Deianeira’s passivity in the play and connects this with her pessimism, but he does not explore the connection and does not consider the relationship of both these characteristics to knowledge.
clearly in the opening lines of the play, in which Deianeira manages to contradict an already pessimistic proverb with a more extreme pessimism of her own (1-5):

> Λόγος μὲν ἔστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανεῖς ὡς οὐκ ἂν αἰών’ ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν θάνη τις, σοῦτ’ εἰ χρηστός σοῦτ’ εἰ τῷ κακός· ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἅιδου μολεῖν, ἔξοιδ’ ἔχουσα δυστυχῆ τε καὶ βαρύν…

There is a saying of men which appeared long ago, that you can’t learn fully the life of mortals, if a person has a good or a bad one, until he dies. But I, even before I go to the house of Hades, I know well that I have an unlucky and a grievous life…

If the old saying has a pessimistic bent, it is only the mitigated pessimism of due caution: it allows for the possibility that a person’s life may be good, but teaches the error of making such a judgment too soon. The cautionary weight of the proverb, however, most naturally applies to those who consider themselves fortunate while they are living.\(^44\) Someone oppressed by misery, as Deianeira is, need not fear vicissitudes, not in the same way that an Oedipus or a Croesus should, at least—even for the miserable, things can always get worse. Yet Deianeira fails to take any lesson from the proverb, whether cautionary or consolatory (cf. 122-140). Instead she claims that the saying has no application for her at all.\(^45\) this implies that her own case is exceptional, which is no doubt what she means to convey, but there is also considerable irony in questioning the knowledge contained in a proverb, which itself speaks to human ignorance, only in order to assert personal knowledge. The claims are not equally valid; the μὲν…δὲ contrast presents far

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\(^{44}\) The proverb is accordingly adduced in the epilogue of the OT (1528-1530), and its imagined origin as the wisdom of Solon imparted to Croesus has this cautionary significance as well (Hdt. 1.32; cf. 3.40). Similar instances of the proverb are noted by Kamerbeek 1959, ad 1, who cites Eur. Andr. 100-102, and by Easterling 1982, ad 1, who refers to Aesch. Ag. 928-929.

\(^{45}\) Rejection of proverbial truth may be a trope—one can easily imagine the utility of such a trope in tragedy—yet I think mostly of counterexamples: Aj. 664-65; cf. 678-83. For examples of the present proverb affirmed rather than denied, see the previous note. Easterling 1982, ad 4-5 notes that Aristotle in his Rhetoric recommends contradicting maxims when it can help one’s cause (1395a20), and that there is a tragic parallel at Aesch. Ag. 750-62. Davies 1991, ad 1ff. adds Eur. Supp. 195-198.
from balanced alternatives: the λόγος is backed by ancient tradition (ἀρχαῖος), generally held to be true by human beings (ἄνθρωπων), and φανείς can mean not only that the proverb “has appeared,” but also that it has actually “become manifest,” as if confirmed by visual experience. Moreover, the proverb is cautiously stated, in that no danger can result from its failure to apply. What evidence does Deianeira have in support of her presumed pessimistic certitude?

Her evidence in fact is not inconsiderable; it fills the remaining 43 lines of the prologue speech. Unlike many other protagonists of tragedy, Deianeira is acutely self-aware. She errs in her rejection of the proverbial ignorance of mortals, but it is not entirely through blindness that she reaches a pessimistic conclusion about her own fortunes: she is perceptive enough to recognize a pattern of fear and suffering in her life, and her real mistake is believing that the pattern is predictive, that it can be extended to the whole of her life from its remote beginning.

Thus in order to back up her claim that her life is definitively “unfortunate and hard to bear,” Deianeira goes all the way back to the event that started off the pattern (6-8):

ἥτις πατρὸς μὲν ἐν δόμοισιν Οἰνέως ναίουσ’ ἔτ’ ἐν Πλευρῶνι νυμφείων ὄκνον ἀλγιστον ἔσχον, εἴ τις Αἰτωλίς γυνή.

I who, while still I lived in the palace of my father Oineus in Pleuron, suffered the most painful fear of marriage any Aitolian woman ever did.

The courtship of the river god Acheloos is the beginning of her long history of suffering through a seemingly endless cycle of fear. Her dread of the river god stems from his monstrosity, the

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46 Kraus 1991, 81 points out that the past experience which Deianeira cites as evidence would, but for her pessimism, most naturally be taken as supporting the validity of the proverb which she claims to refute: “The very rhetoric of her first speech with its alternation of security and worry subverts her attempt to confirm the present either through similarity or by contrast with the past. Deianeira begins this final day of her life by demonstrating an unhappy tendency not to learn from experience.” I would argue that she has learned, but the wrong lesson.

47 ὄκνον is preferable to the variant reading ὄτλον printed by Lloyd-Jones. There is no reason, however, for Deianeira to refer “suffering pertaining to marriage” back to her maidenhood: this belongs rather to the period of her life that follows. See Jebb 1892, Kamerbeek 1959, Easterling 1982 and Davies 1991, ad loc.
effect of which is compounded by his shapeshifting (10-14). Acheloos’s attentions are not only the first traumatic experience of Deianeira’s life, but they will also prove to be in a way characteristic of the experience that follows: Acheloos manifests Deianeira’s anxiety about instability, and symbolizes the kind of change that makes secure knowledge of the future impossible for human beings.48

Deianeira’s prologue speech reveals a pattern in her life, which she herself recognizes, whereby fear is relieved only to be replaced by new fear. Her fear of Acheloos is displaced by gladness at the arrival of Herakles (ἀσμένη δὲ μοι, 18); but the combat of the two suitors immediately brings a new terror (ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ, 24). Because she was “stricken from her senses by fear,” Deianeira is unable to recount the whole story, but she declares that the outcome was happy—only to cast doubt on this judgment in the next line (21-27):

καὶ τρόπον μὲν ἄν πόνων
οὐκ ἄν διείσημ᾽· οὐ γὰρ οἴδ᾽· ἄλλ᾽ ὡστὶς ἦν
θακῶν ἀπαρβῆς τῆς θέας, δὲν ἄν λέγοι.
ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤμην ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ
μὴ μοι τὸ κάλλος ἀλγὸς ἐξεύροι ποτὲ.
τέλος δ᾽ ἐθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς,
eἰ δὴ καλῶς.

And the manner of their exertions I cannot fully tell; for I don’t know. But whoever was sitting without fear of the sight, this one could speak. Not I, for I sat stricken with fear lest my beauty should discover pain for me someday.49 But in the end Zeus, decider of contests, ordained well—if indeed it was well.

Alongside and partially connected to the pattern of gladness and terror is another pattern of oscillation between certainty and doubt. Despite the general uncertainty inherent in human life, Deianeira is confident in her own life’s misery (1-5). Acheloos comes a-courting in an

48 So Kitzinger 2012, 114-115. Lawrence 2013, 120 adds: “Such incarnations can doubtless be interpreted as symbolic projections of a maiden’s fear of male sexuality…”

49 Deianeira has a tendency to express herself, and especially her fears, in terms of unlimited periods of time: cf. in this speech alone ποτὲ (17, 25, 31), ἀεὶ (16, 28, 35).
unpredictable succession of forms (9-17), but Herakles is a known quantity, so to speak; he is famous, after all, and the son of two known parents (ὅ κλεινὸς ἥλθε Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τε παῖς, 19). The details of their battle are lost now, but the outcome was happy—or was it? Deianeira follows up confident assertions with expressions of doubt and vice versa (esp. 26-27 above, 40-42, 43-48). Amid such constant fear and uncertainty her only recourse is prayer (16, 48).

Although Deianeira is aware of the pattern of fear and relief, she heavily emphasizes the fear and regards any intervening happiness as accidental and necessarily short-lived (27-35):

λέχος γὰρ Ἡρακλεῖ κριτὸν
ξυστὰς ἄει τιν’ ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω,
κείνου προκηραίνουσα. νῦς γὰρ εἰσάγει
καὶ νῦς ἀποθεῖ διαδεδεγμένη πόνον.
κἀφύσαμεν δὴ παῖδας, οὓς κεῖνός ποτε,
γῆτος ὑπος ἁρουραν ἐκτοπον λαβὼν,
σπείρων μόνον προσείδε καζίμων ἀπαξ,
τοιοῦτος αἰών εἰς δόμοις τε κάκ δόμων
ἄει τὸν ἄνδρ’ ἔπεμπε λατρεύοντά τῳ.

For since I have been joined to Herakles as his chosen bride, I am always fostering one fear after another in my anxiety for him. For night introduces and the succeeding night drives out suffering. What’s more we produced children, whom he has beheld occasionally, as a farmer, having acquired a distant field, beholds it only once when sowing and once when reaping. Such a life was always sending my husband into and out of the house as he was serving some man.

The repetition and polyptoton in 28-30 and 34 and the neatly balanced phrasing of 33 serve to highlight the circularity of Deianeira’s experience, yet she speaks only in terms of her fear rather than her relief and she focuses on Herakles’ absence by pointing out the extreme rarity of his presence.  

50 This is the characteristic form of her pessimism. She is not incapable of joy, as her response to the Messenger’s first report demonstrates, but she is drawn to any detail that may occasion misgiving and she clings to these details anxiously. In the remaining sections of this

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50 The simile of 32-33 is one of several instances of agricultural imagery and terminology in the play: cf. ἄροτος (“crop season” or “year,” 69, 825); ἄτομον (“unmown,” 200); καρποῦμεθα (“reap the fruit of,” 204). I suggest that this imagery ties in with the play’s thematic concern with patterns and cycles, generally focalized through Deianeira.
chapter I will discuss first how Deianeira’s pessimism is contrasted with the optimism of Hyllos and the chorus, and then I will analyze how it functions in her response to the oracles of Zeus and to the appearance and threat of Iole.

The Optimism of Hyllos and the Chorus

Pray is all the passive Deianeira can do. Even the simple action of sending Hyllos to inquire into Herakles’ whereabouts is not undertaken until the Nurse offers this advice (McCall 1972, 143). Hyllos immediately becomes a foil for his mother. On being told that it is shameful that he does not try to learn where his father is (τὸ μὴ πωθέσθαι ποῦ ἵσχύνην φέρειν, 66), Hyllos objects: “But I know, if one ought in any way to trust the stories, at least” (ἄλλ’ οἶδα, μύθοις γ’ εἰ τι πιστεύειν χρεῶν, 67). The juxtaposition of positive assertion with the proviso that it depends on the reliability of rumors is not unlike Deianeira’s own abrupt shifts between certainty and doubt; yet Deianeira is paralyzed by the constant return of uncertainty, whereas Hyllos’ words betray an almost cavalier confidence. The brief exchange that follows Hyllos’ claim to knowing highlights the vagueness of his information and the obscurity of its source (68-75):

ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: καὶ ποῦ κλῦεις νιν, τέκνον, ἱδρύσθαι χθονός;
ΥΛΟΣ: τὸν μὲν παρελθὼντ’ ἄροτον ἐν μὴκει χρόνου
Λυδῆ γυναικί φασί νιν λάτριν πονεῖν.
ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: πᾶν τοίνυν, εἰ καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔτη, κλύοι τοῖς ἄν.
ΥΛΟΣ: ἄλλ’ ἐξαφεῖται τοῦδε γ’, ὡς ἐγὼ κλύω.
ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: ποὺ δήτα νῦν ζών ἢ θανὼν ἄγγελλεται;
ΥΛΟΣ: Εὐβοῖδα χώραν φασίν, Εὐρυτοῦ πόλιν,
ἐπιστρατεύειν αὐτόν, ἣ μέλλειν ἕτι.

51 The Nurse is aware that this advising role is unexpected if not inappropriate (52-53), and Deianeira acknowledges this graciously (61-63), but if any criticism of herself is implied, she takes no notice. The significance of her addition of αἰσχύνην φέρειν when she explains the Nurse’s advice to Hyllos (66) has been disputed. In my opinion, the repeated remarks on the slave advising the free and the introduction of shame into Deianeira’s address to Hyllos (with which ἡμῖν or ἐμοὶ could be understood just as well as σοὶ) anticipate the anxiety about status and reputation in this play. It would not be like Deianeira’s behavior elsewhere to deflect criticism onto Hyllos, even if she does want to create a sense of urgency and stir Hyllos to action (for this interpretation, see Easterling 1977, 122-123).
DEIANEIRA: And where on earth do you hear that he is, child?
HYLLOS: For the past ploughing year, through the length of time, they say he has been performing service to a Lydian woman.
DEIANEIRA: If he put up with even thus, one might hear anything!
HYLLOS: But he has been released from this at least, as I hear.
DEIANEIRA: Where then is he reported to be now, alive or dead?
HYLLOS: They say that he is marching on the land of Euboia, the city of Eurytos, or yet going to.

In 8 lines, the verb κλύω is used three times (68, 71, 72), the indefinite third-person plural φασί twice (70, 74) and the passive ἀγγέλλεται once (73). Herakles’ present activities are strictly unknown, although Hyllos hears he is either marching on Euboia or intending to (74-75). The information prompts Deianeira to ask Hyllos whether he is aware of “sure oracles concerning this place” (μαντεῖα πιστὰ τῆς χώρας πέρι, 77). Hyllos is ignorant of these (τὸν λόγον γὰρ ἀγνῶ, 78). Although the exchange is dictated in part by the needs of the drama, there is an implication that both mother and son have withheld information from one another for some time. Each has done so with the intention of sparing the other: Deianeira, because of her inclination to endure suffering alone, but Hyllos, on the other hand, because of his own confident optimism: he does not want to rouse his mother’s anxieties over nothing.

Once Hyllos knows that the ending of his father’s life is a possibility, he is moved to act. He explains that he would have done so sooner, had he “known well the tidings of these prophecies” (εἰ δὲ θεσφάτων ἐγὼ | βάξιν κατῄδη τῶνδε, 86-87). Not only did he not know them, “but his accustomed fortune did not allow us to fear for Father before nor to become too frightened” (ἀλλ’ ὁ ξυνήθης πότμος οὐκ εἶα πατρὸς | ἡμᾶς προτορρεῖν οὐδὲ δειμαίνειν ἄγαν, 88-89). The gap between Deianeira’s attitude and that of Hyllos could not be greater: for Deianeira, Herakles seems to be always gone or always leaving (28-35); Hyllos has noted that he always comes back. Deianeira responds to her life with Herakles with constantly recurring fear, fear that

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is proven premature every time he returns; Hyllos had believed the pattern of his father’s fortune excluded the possibility of fear. Now that the oracles make clear the possibility of danger, he will go “to learn the whole truth concerning these things” (πᾶσαν πυθέσθαι τῶνδ’ ἀλήθειαν πέρι, 91).

The chorus responds in the *parodos* to Deianeira’s prologue, and in particular to her assertion that she knows her life is unfortunate and hard to bear. But they also pick up on her emphasis on night and recurring fear (28-30). Their opening words describe the cycle of night and day, but are oriented optimistically towards the Sun, whom they pray may “proclaim” (καρύξαι, 97) news of Herakles. The phrase “glittering night” (αἰόλα νύξ, 94, 132-133) is twice repeated but in both instances the chorus emphasizes the transitoriness of night. The first antistrophe corresponds even more closely to the prologue speech: the chorus has learned (πυνθάνομαι, 103) that Deianeira is “always yearning in her mind” (ποθουμένα γὰρ φρενὶ…ἀεί, 103-104) and can “never put to bed her longing” (οὔποτ’ εὖνάξειν…πόθον, 106-107). Instead she “pines away” on her own “husbandless bed, nursing fear that is mindful of her husband’s journey, anticipating in her misery an evil fate” (εὖμναστὸν ἄνδρὸς δείμα τρέφουσαν ὀδὸν | ἐνθυμίοις εὐνάξαν…ἀεί, 108-111; cf. ἀεί τιν’ ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφο, 28). The next stanza expresses the reasons for Deianeira’s longing and fear, again using imagery that suggests an unending cycle (112-119):

52 See note 49 above.
For as one may see many waves on the broad sea passing and coming on before the untiring south or north wind, so the toilsome Cretan sea of his life, so to speak, sustains the Cadmean man, and again raises him up.\footnote{The passage is one of the most difficult in the \textit{Trachiniae}; see Kamerbeek 1959, ad 112-119; Easterling 1982, ad 112-21; Davies 1991, ad 112ff. Many scholars, following Reiske, read \textit{τρέφει} for \textit{τρέφουσαν} in 117, but \textit{τρέφει} makes a better comparison with the waves of 112-115: as the winds cause and perpetuate the waves, so that they ‘come on and on’ (βάντ’ ἐπιόντα τ’, 115), so the sea of troubles ‘sustains and exalts’ Herakles—where \textit{τρέφει} may convey no more than the locality of the object’s existence; cf. LSJ II.6, where numerous Sophoclean examples are adduced. Here the thought gains in meaning from the contrast with \textit{τρέφουσαν} in 108. The most serious objection to this interpretation is raised by Kamerbeek: ‘we do not expect an even partly favourable view of Heracles’ toils in the words preceding \textit{ἄλλα}’ (1959, ad 112-119). This is logical, but the chorus in this play is rarely logical. The toils of Herakles’ life do not detract from its glory, nor does the glory lessen the danger of the toils; the adversative force of \textit{ἄλλα} refers not to the glory, but to the danger.}

Deianeira responds to the frequent absences necessitated by Herakles’ labors with constant fears that she herself sustains (cf. \textit{τρέφω}, 28; \textit{τρέφουσαν}, 108). In marked contrast, Herakles is sustained by his metaphorical sea of troubles, and even exalted by it (presumably, that is, by each victory upon it). The chorus has a more complete perspective on Herakles’ fortunes, but nonetheless they incline towards hope, for “one of the gods is always protecting him from the house of Hades, so that he does not fail” (\textit{ἄλλα} τις θεόν | αἰὲν ἀναμπλάκητον Ἀτ- | δα σφε δόμων ἔρύκατ, 119-121). Then they explicitly point out the error of Deianeira’s overly assured pessimism (122-131):

\begin{quote}

ὦν ἐπιμεμφομένας αἰ-

δότα μέν, ἀντία δ’ οἴσω.

φαμὶ γὰρ οὖκ ἀποτρύειν

ἐλπίδα τάν ἄγαθάν

χρῆσαι σ’- ἀνάλγητα γὰρ οὖδ’

ὁ πάντα κραίνων βασιλεύς

ἐπέβαλε θνατοῖς Κρονίδας-

ἄλλ.’ ἐπί πήμα καὶ χαρὰ

πάσι κυκλούσιν οίον ἄρ-

κτοι στροφάδες κέλευθοι.

\end{quote}

Since you complain of these things, I shall speak respectfully, though contrarily. So I say that you should not wear out the hope for good: for not even the king who accomplishes all, the son of Kronos, has imposed a painless lot on mortals; rather misery and joy circle round for all, like the revolving paths of the Bear.
Although they do not directly refer to the Solonian proverb, the chorus here explains, by recourse to equally traditional wisdom, why it is generally held to be true: it is impossible to judge a person’s life before he or she dies because everyone experiences both misery and joy—fortunes do not remain constant. As the chorus sees it, this is good news for Deianeira: if she is presently miserable, joy is bound to come—all the more so when it is a question of Herakles’ safe return: “For who has seen Zeus thus inconsiderate for his children?” (ἐπεὶ τίς ὧδε | τέκνοισι Ζῆν’ ἄβουλον εἶδεν; 139-140). Out of the same circumstances from which Deianeira derives fear, the chorus draws hope (125, 136); both responses arise from the essential ignorance that characterizes human experience, yet both seek to claim a degree of certainty.54

Fear of the τέλος

Deianeira’s pessimistic awareness of the cyclical return of fear and pain is in contrast with her misunderstanding of the τέλος of events, especially the τέλος as described by the oracles of Zeus. When Deianeira might reasonably hope that the cycles driven by Herakles’ absences will end, since she knows that Herakles has now completed his labors, instead she fears all the more (36-37):

νῦν δ’ ἡνίκ’ ἄθλων τῶνδ’ ὑπερτελής ἔφυ,
ἐνταῦθα δὴ μάλιστα ταρβήσας ἔχω.

But now, when he has overcome these trials, at this time most of all I have been stricken with fear.

Deianeira’s typical fear is magnified because the nature of the pattern’s ending is unknown and unpredictable: she may be reunited with Herakles forever, but equally she might lose him forever. The τέλος has no pattern but what is spun by fate, or rather, in the Trachiniae, arranged

54 Both claims, furthermore, depend ultimately on Zeus: Deianeira’s on his oracles, the chorus’ on an assumption about his nature. But the oracle is not stated in certain terms, and the assumption will be cast into doubt (1269).
by Zeus.\textsuperscript{55} When Deianeira contemplates the τέλος of the battle for her hand, she feels uncertainty (26-27). Although Herakles is now “beyond the bounds of” his trials (ὑπερτελῆς, 36), Deianeira is more fearful than she had been in the period of his recurring absences (36-37). This seeming paradox produces a rhetorical effect similar to that of her opening lines and finally introduces the most immediate cause of her anxiety: no one knows where Herakles is now (40-41). In the face of this ignorance, Deianeira claims she “almost knows he is suffering some calamity” (σχεδὸν δ’ ἐπίσταμαι τι πῆμα ἔχοντά νῦν, 43). There has been no news for fifteen months (44-45); this reflection leads Deianeira to declare without qualification, “There is indeed some awful calamity” (καστὶν τί δεινὸν πῆμα, 46). The confidence of the assertion combined with the use of the indefinite τι well conveys the paradoxical nature of her pessimism: Deianeira is wholly certain of fears that are grounded in uncertainty. The period of fifteen months must have some significance, a suspicion that seems confirmed by the mention of a “tablet” (δέλτον, 47) which Deianeira regards as evidence in support of her foreboding. It is not proof, however, as it leaves room for frequent prayer that it does not portend what she fears (τοιαύτην ἐμοὶ | δέλτον λιπὼν ἔστειχε· τὴν ἑγὼ θαμά· θεοῖς ἀρῶμαι πημονής ἀτέρ λαβέιν, 46-48). The tablet is to be connected ultimately with oracles pertaining to the end of Herakles’ labors, which Deianeira revisits twice more in the play.

Deianeira accepts the oracles as “sure” (πιστὰ, 77), but their meaning is even less certain for her than rumors are for Hyllos, who questions their reliability but nonetheless feels assured that he knows where his father is, “at least if one ought in any way to trust the stories” (ἄλλ’ οἴδα, μῦθοίς γ´ εἰ τι πιστεύειν χρεών, 67). The rumor reports that a specific event is happening or

\textsuperscript{55} The word μοῖρα meaning ‘fate’ occurs only at line 849 in this play (cf. 163, 1239). No editor so far as I am aware prints it with a capital mu, although some translate as if they did. But Zeus is unquestionably the power in control.
going to happen, but the oracle presents alternatives which seem individually to be mutually
exclusive and together to encompass the whole realm of possibility (79-81):

[The oracles say] that either he must accomplish the end of his life, or, after
sustaining this trial, have a happy life from now for the future.

The oracles promise, one way or another, an end to the cycles of fear and uncertainty described
in the prologue. At the same time, however, the cognate construction τελευτήν τελεῖν (79) recalls
the uncertainty of the τέλος of 26-27 and especially Deianeira’s fear at the moment of Herakles’
overcoming (ὑπερτελής, 36). This formulation of the oracle offers roughly the same alternatives
as the proverb Deianeira rejected: either a happy life or a death that implies misfortune. Either
alternative would bring an end to the pattern that for Deianeira defines her life as “unfortunate
and hard to bear.” Yet the sure oracles offer no certainty: “either we are saved, if he has
preserved his life, or we are ruined with him” (ἢ σεσώμεθα | κείνου βίον σώσαντος, ἢ οἰχόμεσθ’ ἁμα, 83-85).56

Deianeira reiterates the oracle’s contents following the arrival of the chorus. Once again,
tέλος and related terms abound: Deianeira received the oracle when Herakles was leaving on his
“last journey” (ὁδὸν…τὴν τελευταίαν, 155); the oracle states that at the appointed time Herakles
must either die or live the rest of his life without pain, “after escaping the crisis of this time”
(τοῦθ’…τοῦ χρόνου τέλος, 167); one or the other fate is “to be brought to fulfillment”
(ἐκτελευτάσθαι, 170); and now is the time when it must “be accomplished” (τελεσθὴναι, 174).
The oracle is now clearly connected to the tablet mentioned in the prologue, and the relevant
time period is again repeated (44-47; 157-165). It emerges that Deianeira “fears now most of all”

56 I omit line 84, which is deleted by most editors.
(36-37) not merely because of the length of Herakles’ absence, but because his “last departure” broke a pattern: in contrast to any one of many previous occasions (cf. οὕπω πρόσθεν, 154; πρόσθεν οὐκ…ποτέ, 158), Herakles this time made provision for the possibility of his death (160-163), leaving oracles that speak ominously in the language of the τέλος (164-172). That Deianeira refers to the oracle at three separate points effectively dramatizes and includes the audience in the movements from ignorance to knowledge which are central to the play; but it is also effective and psychologically realistic characterization. Deianeira is constantly returning to the source of her anxiety. The anxiety is compounded in this case because, while she tends to see patterns and cycles in her own life and that of others, the τέλος is unpredictable and does not fit into any pattern. For all that Herakles is coming to a crisis, however, Deianeira remains stuck in the position predicted by patterns she herself has described: “while sleeping pleasantly I leap up in fear, friends, afraid that I must remain deprived of the best man of all” (ἡδὲς εὔδουσαν ἐκπηδᾶν ἐμὲ | φόβῳ, φίλαι, ταρβοῦσαν, εἰ μὲ χρή μένειν | πάντων ἀρίστου φωτὸς ἐστερημένην, 175-177).

**Love and Marriage**

Deianeira isolates herself from the chorus by her rejection of their sympathy and optimism. They are unmarried, and the natural pattern of a woman’s life is to live carefree, without knowledge or experience of suffering, “until one is called wife instead of maiden” (ἔος τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνῆ | κληθῇ, 148-149). Deianeira cannot maintain this isolation when she is confronted with women who clearly have suffered; she feels pity for (cf. 243, 298) and identifies with the captive women, whose presence along with Lichas’ speech should confirm her joy in the news of Herakles’ arrival (cf. 223-227, 291-292). The initial joy gives way to fear and pity, for
after all, “it is possible for people who consider well to fear for the successful man, lest he at any time stumble” (ἔνεστι τοῖσιν εὖ σκοπουμένοις | ταρβεῖν τὸν εὖ πράσσοντα, μὴ σφαλῇ ποτε, 296-297). The misgiving is connected to the pitiful sight before her: she so vividly imagines the possibility of her own offspring suffering the same fate that she is moved to pray against it (298-306). But it is Iole she pities most (πλεῖστον ὃκτισσα, 312; cf. 464), and it is Iole she most identifies with. There is a subtle irony in her questioning of Iole: Deianeira asks if she is “husbandless” (ἄνανδρος, 308) and assumes that she is “inexperienced in all this” (πάντων ἀπειρος τὸνδε, 309). The chorus previously described Deianeira’s bed as “husbandless” (ἀνανδρώτοσι, 109-110); the echo connects the two women and invites the audience to consider who is and is not in fact “husbandless” at this point. Deianeira herself explains that she pities Iole most “insofar as she alone knows how to be prudent” (ὁσῳ περ καὶ φρονεῖν οἶδεν μόνη, 313).57

The connection is developed further when Deianeira learns Iole’s true identity. She expresses her forgiveness of both Herakles and Iole on the grounds that they are victims of a universal pattern enforced by Eros (438-444):

οὐ γὰρ γυναικὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐρεῖς κακῆ,  
οὐδ’ ἦτις οὐ κάτοικε τὰνθρώπων, ὅτι  
χαίρειν πέφυκεν οὐχὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἄει.  
Ἕρωτι μὲν νυν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται  
πόκτης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ.  
ὁτοσ γὰρ ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν ὅπως θέλει,  
κάμοι γε: πῶς δ’ οὐ χάτερας οίας γ’ ἐμοῦ;  

For you will not speak the words to a base woman, nor to one who does not know well the affairs of men, that by nature they do not delight always in the same things. So whoever rises against Eros like a boxer with his hands is not sane. For he rules even the gods as he wishes, and me, certainly; and how could he not rule another just like me?

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57 Some understand the statement to mean Iole displays due grief, others that she shows noble restraint (cf. Easterling 1982, ad 313). I think the latter is more likely; Deianeira values her own prudent wisdom highly even as she begins to lose hold of it (cf. ἀλλ’ οὐ γὰρ, ὃσσερ ἐπον, ὅργαιναν καλὸν | γνωάκα νοὸν ἐχουσαν, 552-553), and she is likely to approve the same quality in Iole. The main point is to show Deianeira’s immediate and strong sense of connection with the girl who will turn out to be her romantic rival.
The most important reason why she cannot be angry at Iole is her profound empathy for the girl: “since I pitied her most of all when I beheld her, because her beauty had ruined her life” (ἐπεὶ σφ’ ἐγὼ | ὅκτιρα δὴ μάλιστα προσβλέψασ’, ὅτι | τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βιον διώλεσεν, 463–465).

Deianeira’s focus on Iole’s beauty at first reflects her pity for and identification with the maiden. With the bold personification of the girl’s beauty, Deianeira echoes her words in the prologue, where she recalls her fear as a maiden that her own beauty would bring about (literally, “discover”) pain for her (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἥμην ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ | μή μοι τὸ κάλλος ἄλγος ἔξευροι ποτέ, 24-25). The echo suggests a cycle of which Deianeira is only one part; she herself points out that Iole is only another in a long line of women Herakles has loved (οὐχὶ χατέρας | πλείστας ἀνήρ εἷς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δῆ; 459-460).58

In Deianeira’s next appearance on stage, she explains part of the thought process that has led to her fatal plan. She pitied Iole partially because she saw in her sufferings a resemblance to her own experience, but as she came to appreciate their connection more and more, Deianeira saw the logical conclusion and grew intensely jealous. The bitterness of lines 536-542 are unlike anything else Deianeira ever utters. She is ashamed of her strong reaction, as the following lines show (543-544, 552-553). Nonetheless the intensity of her pain leads her to uncharacteristic action, an attempt to break the cycle that causes her fear (547-551):

58 Lines 461-462 seem to imply that at least some of Herakles’ many ‘weddings’ have taken place during the time of their marriage. Presumably, however, Herakles never brought these other women home. Iole’s case is different from theirs, but Deianeira is eager to demonstrate, to herself as much as to Lichas, that the present case follows an established pattern to which she can appropriately respond.
For I see that youth is advancing on her side, and waning on mine; and the eye turns its step from these things from which it loves to snatch away the bloom. Therefore I fear this, lest Herakles should be called my husband, but be the younger woman’s man.

So Deianaeira thinks of the blood of Nessos, helped along to that memory by her identification with Iole as well as by the threat perceived from her. In her urgency to halt the cycle now underway and to win back Herakles from the younger girl, her judgment suffers (582-593):

ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: κακὰς δὲ τόλμας μὴν ἐπισταίμην ἐγὼ μὴν ἐκμάθοιμι, τὰς τε τολμώσας στυγῶ. φίλτροις δ’ εάν πως τῆνδ’ ὑπερβαλῶμεθα τὴν παῖδα καὶ θέλκροισι τοῖς ἔρ’ Ἡρακλεί, μεμηχάνηται τοῦργον, εἰ τι μὴ δοκῶ πράσσεσιν μάταιον· εἰ δὲ μή, πεπαύσομαι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ: ἄλλ’ εἰ τις ἐστὶ πίστις ἐν τοῖς δρωμένοις, δοκείς παρ’ ἡμῖν κακός· ὡς γὰρ ἐναντίον ίσως τὸ νεκρὸν μέτρον, εἰ δὲ μὴν ἔναντι πολλοῦ μὴν ἔνεστιν, πείρα δ’ ὑπερβαλῶμεθα εἰ γὰρ ἐναντίον ἔνεστι, εἰ δὲ μὴν ἔνεστιν, ἔναντι πολλοῦ μὴν ἔνεστιν.

ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: οὕτως ἔχει γ’ ἡ πίστις, ὡς τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν ἔνεστι, πείρᾳ δ’ οὐ προσωμίλησά πω.

ΧΟΡΟΣ: ἄλλ’ εἰδέναι χρή δρῶσαν· ὡς οὐδ’ εἰ δοκείς ἔχειν, ἔχοις ἄν γνώμα, μὴ πειρωμένη.

DEIANEIRA: May I neither become skilled in evil deeds of daring nor may I learn them fully—and I hate the women who dare them. But if somehow I may overcome this girl by means of love potions and charms on Herakles, the means have been prepared, if I don’t seem in any way to be acting foolishly. Otherwise, I will cease immediately.

CHORUS: Well, if there is any assurance in what you’re doing, you don’t seem to have planned badly in our eyes.

DEIANEIRA: The assurance is like this: the semblance of reliability exists, but I have not yet tried an experiment.

CHORUS: One must know by doing; since you cannot have proof, even if you think you do, unless you hold a trial.

This is the all-important choice in the play, which, if it had been reversed, would have nullified the tragedy—Herakles’ tragedy, at least. The basis for the decision comes down to a clear contrast between what seems to be the case and what experience provides an “assurance” (πίστις, 588, 590) for. On Nessos’ instructions, however, the so-called “potions” (φίλτροις, 584) have been kept it in the dark, hidden from the sun (cf. ἐγκεκλημένον καλὸς, 579; ἄπυρον ἀκτίνος τ’
The potion thus resembles Deianeira’s picture of the youth whose ignorance and experience are symbolized by isolation from the sun’s warmth (cf. θάλπος θεοῦ, 145). In her desperation, Deianeira allows herself to be convinced by the maidens’ whose ignorance she expressed in similar terms to the poison’s obscurity. In so doing she assimilates herself to both, pleading to the chorus that she be “well-concealed by you” (παρ’ ὑμῶν εὐ στεγοίμεθ’, 596) so that she may carry out her plan “in darkness” (σκότω, 596). By her recourse to darkness, she shares the ignorance of the chorus and the malice of Nessos’ poison.

Conclusion

Deianeira’s final moments onstage and the Nurse’s report of her suicide are full of indications that the drama has come full circle; in a way, Deianeira’s own position has not changed at all. Her last line repeats the question that tormented her in the beginning: “Where did you approach and stand beside the man?” (ποῦ δ’ ἐμπελάζεις τάνδρι καὶ παρίστασαι; 747). A variation on the proverb with which Deianeira began the play occurs at the end of the Nurse’s account of Deianeira’s death (943-946):

ὥστ’ εἴ τις δύο ἢ κάπι πλείους ἡμέρας λογίζεται, μάταιος ἔστιν· οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ’ ἥ γ’ αὔριον πρὶν εὖ πάθη τις τὴν παροῦσαν ἡμέραν.

Therefore if anyone counts on two days or even more, he is foolish; for tomorrow does not exist until one gets safely through the present day.

The theme of ignorance and uncertainty responds directly to Deianeira’s opening lines. As a response to her suicide, however, these words are facile and oddly inappropriate: Deianeira has counted on nothing other than the misery of her life, and this misery, for all that it seemed to be lifted once or twice in the course of the play, has now been definitively settled. The nurse is not
speaking about Deianeira anymore; instead she retreats from the individual misfortune and infers a lesson for herself and for the play’s audience, both internal and external, and the applicability of the lesson to Deianeira herself is left remarkably ambiguous. The use of the γνώμη gains in significance from its conventional use at the end of several tragedies; here it functions formally to signal the end of Deianeira’s portion of the drama, as others have pointed out.

Deianeira’s pessimism is connected with a tendency to see cycles and patterns. These include both patterns within her own life, such as Herakles’ coming and going, and her recurring fears in the night. Yet she also notices larger patterns in life: the stages of womanhood, the fickleness of the god Eros and the eros of a man’s eye. Her awareness of such patterns leads her to anticipate pain and suffering even when she has reason for joy. It is this pessimistic anticipation which leads to the painful knowledge of Iole’s identity. With this knowledge, the whole truth about Herakles’ return which she was initially denied, she paradoxically resorts to an action which she cannot know the consequences of, since she lacks the guarantee of experience. She hopes to end a cycle that perpetuates her misery and unwittingly accomplishes a τέλος she cannot understand. I argue that the cycle and the τέλος are both aspects of the poet’s exploration of knowledge, representing two competing ways of understanding the world. Deianeira’s reliance on cycles to predict the future is counter to an understanding of the τέλος, which is always unpredictable. In the final section of my thesis, I focus on the role of fate in the play, the τέλος ordained by Zeus.

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59 Easterling 1982 ad loc. understands the echo differently, arguing that it shows “how wrong [Deianeira] was when she claimed to know already the full extent of her misfortunes. The action of the play has demonstrated that there was indeed worse to come.” Deianeira claims nothing about the extent or severity of her misfortune, however, but rather that misfortune is the sum or essence of her life—its pattern.

60 E.g. Kraus 1991, 94.
CHAPTER 3
The τέλος of Fate

The key moment of recognition for Deianeira is the “unspeakable portent” (φάτιν | ἄφραστον, 693-694) of the disintegrating tuft of wool. She recognizes what the portent means for Herakles and connects the poison’s effect to Nessos’ will for vengeance, but this is the most complete knowledge she will ever attain. She gives no indication that she understands her role in fulfilling the oracle that was ostensibly the immediate cause of her anxiety at the beginning of the play. It is left to the chorus to express this understanding after her final exit (821-830):

See, maidens, how suddenly the oracular word of the prophecy spoken long ago has come upon us, which announced that, whenever the twelfth ploughing year with full complement of months should come to an end, it would end the succession of toils for Zeus’ very own son. And these things are sailing successfully and without fail to their destination. For how can one who does not see the light yet at any time have toilsome servitude, after dying?

By the time this interpretation of the oracle becomes possible, Deianeira is no longer concerned about prophecies: she only recognizes that she has become responsible for Herakles’ death and
thus ended the patterns of fear and uncertainty in her life with misfortune.\textsuperscript{61} The chorus is more inclined to think of Herakles as the son of Zeus, which was one of the grounds of their optimistic expectation of Herakles’ safe return (cf. ἐπεὶ τίς ὧδε | τέκνοισι Ζῆν’ ἄβουλον εἶδεν; 139-140). Their conception of Herakles’ relationship to the divine is affronted by his apparently evil fate. Deianeira’s suicide is a temporary distraction from this issue, but it takes center stage in the final portion of the play.

Hyllos and Herakles must learn separately about the role of Nessos in the poisoning of the robe. Although Hyllos sets out in search of his father with the oracle in mind, he also does not mention or apparently even think of it upon returning onstage with news of Herakles’ ruin. In his mind, Deianeira is solely responsible for his father’s death (739-747):

\begin{quote}
YΛΛΟΣ: τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν σὸν ἱσθι, τὸν δ’ ἐμὸν λέγω πατέρα, κατακτεῖνασα τῇδ’ ἐν ἡμέρα.
ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: οἴμοι, τίν’ ἐξήνεγκας, ὦ τέκνοισι, λόγον;
YΛΛΟΣ: ὃν ὦχο ὡν τε μὴ τελεσθήναι· τὸ γὰρ φανθὲν τίς ἂν δύναιτ’ <ἀν> ἀγένητον ποεῖν;
ΔΗΙΑΝΕΙΡΑ: πῶς εἶπας, ὦ παῖ; τοῦ παρ’ ἀνθρώπων μαθὼν ἄζηλον οὕτως ἔργον εἰργάσθαι με φής;
YΛΛΟΣ: αὐτὸς βαρεῖαν ξυμφορὰν ἐν ὄμμασι πατρὸς δεδορκὼς κοὐ κατὰ γλῶσσαν κλυών.
HYLLOS: Know that you have killed your husband, I mean my father, on this day.
DEIANEIRA: Alas, what speech have you uttered, child?
HYLLOS: One which cannot be unfulfilled—for who could undo the thing that has come to light?
DEIANEIRA: What do you mean, child? From what man did you learn and so say that I have done so miserable a deed?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{61} For Deianeira, the oracle is embodied in the tablet left behind by Herakles and has significance for her only as it bears on his absence. Deianeira’s fear about the oracle rests upon her predisposition to fear during Herakles’ absence. Every time she refers to the oracle the verb λείπω is used with Herakles as subject (47, 76, 157). After the news of Herakles’ arrival comes, she never mentions the oracle again. In contrast, when the chorus is finally able to interpret its real meaning, they endow “the word” (τοὔπος, 822) of the oracle with corporeal form, imagining its explication and fulfillment as an “intermingling” or “communion” (cf. προσέμειξεν, 821). The personification prepares the way for Herakles’ imminent arrival. Likewise their assertion that “These things [i.e. the things foretold] are sailing into port successfully and without fail” (καὶ τάδ’ ὀρθῶς | ἔμπεδα κατουρίζει, 826-827) reminds the audience of the chorus’ prayer in the previous stasimon that Herakles’ ship would not stop until he reached the city.
HYLLOS: I myself saw my father’s grievous misfortune with my own eyes—and did not hear it by word of mouth.

Words related to τέλος are used almost exclusively of or in the context of oracles in this play; in this instance the verb τελεσθῆναι is used with a strong litotes to affirm Hyllos’ accusation of murder. This λόγον (741), for which Deianeira requires an explanation, replaces the λόγον (78) which was in fact the oracle that Hyllos claimed ignorance of. His attitude of absolute confidence now in contrast to his casual uncertainty in the prologue is underscored by his heavy emphasis on visual language (φανθέν, 743; ἐν ὄμμασιν, 746; δεδορκώς, 747; note also τῇδ’ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ, 740) and by the bitter asseveration “and not having heard by word of mouth” (κοὐ κατὰ γλῶσσαν κλυῶν, 747), which recalls his earlier reliance on hearsay for knowledge of his father (cf. φασὶ and forms of κλύω at 67-75). So certain is Hyllos of his mother’s guilt that he curses her in the strongest possible terms (807-812):

τοιαῦτα, μῆτερ, πατρὶ βουλεύσασ’ ἐμῷ καὶ δρῶσ’ ἐλήφθης, ὧν σε ποίνιμος Δίκη τείσαιτ’ Ἐρινύς τ’. εἰ θέμις δ’, ἐπεύχομαι· θέμις δ’, ἐπεί μοι τὴν θέμιν σὺ προὔβαλες, πάντων ἄριστον ἄνδρα τῶν ἐπὶ χθονὶ κτείνασ’, ὁποῖον οὐκ ὄψη ποτὲ.

Such, mother, are the plots against my father and the deeds you have been caught doing, for which may avenging Dike and Erinys make you pay. And if it is right, I add my prayer; and it is right, since you gave the right to me when you killed the best man of all those upon the earth, whose like you will never see again.

I understand εἰ θέμις δ’ as an implicit acknowledgement of the gravity of the curse: there is no real uncertainty in it, only a pause at the notion of cursing his closest kin. There is also a neat reversal of Deianeira’s striking expression of doubt in the prologue (τέλος δ’ ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς, | εἰ δὴ καλῶς, 26-27): she moves from affirmation to a strong doubt, whereas Hyllos now moves from slight hesitation to strong and even doubled affirmation. His final words to Deianeira recall and confirm her own ultimate fear, “that I must remain deprived of the best man
of all” (φόβῳ, φίλαι, ταρβοῦσαν, εἰ μὲ χρῆ μένειν | πάντων ἀρίστου φωτός ἐστερημένην, 176-177). The emphasis on the permanence of her actions similarly responds to her anxieties.

As Deianeira learns “too late” (μεθύστερον, 710) about the centaur’s malicious intent, when she can no longer reverse her actions, so does Hyllos learn that his accusation and curse were premature given the agency of the centaur (932-935):

Her son, when he saw, began to lament; for he recognized, miserable one, that he had secured this deed in his anger, after he learned too late from those in the house that she had done these things unwittingly, at the instigation of the beast.

Both moments of recognition, Deianeira’s and Hyllos’, occur within the house. Deianeira’s recognition is primarily of her own responsibility for Herakles’ death, as she never pleads innocence of intent. For Hyllos, on the other hand, the knowledge of Nessos’ role absolves his mother of guilt. Herakles must come to the same knowledge separately and onstage. Before Hyllos can impart that knowledge, however, Herakles dominates the stage with his self-lament for over 100 lines (983-1111). This creates a strong contrast with Deianeira, who begins the play passively waiting for news, and once it begins to arrive she is bombarded with reports, elaborations, contradictions, retractions and confirmations that she has no control over. In his lament Herakles oscillates between inarticulate cries of pain and accounts of his past heroics, coming intermittently to the incongruous cause of his present misfortune. He desires vengeance, first wishing that Deianeira might suffer like for like through some unspecified agency: “May I look on her having fallen in the same way, in the same way as she has destroyed me” (τὰν ὅδ’ ἐπίδοιμι πεσοῦσαν | αὕτως, ὅδ’ αὕτως, ὃς μ’ ὠλεσεν, 1037-1040). He seems to measure the severity of her crime by the extent of his reversal, and as he dwells on this, the need to take
vengeance himself grows. Yet he is powerless to act: to punish Deianeira he depends on the pity and aid of Hyllos, or, even more pathetically, on the willing submission of Deianeira herself (1107-1111):

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ἀλλ’ εὖ γέ τοι τόδ’ ἵστε, κἂν τὸ μηδὲν ὃ,
κἂν μηδὲν ἔρπω, τὴν γε δράσασαν τάδε
χειρώσωμαι κάκ’ τόνδε. προσμύλοι μόνον,
ἵν’ ἐκδιδαχθῇ πᾶσιν ἀγγέλλειν ὅτι
καὶ ζῶν κακοὺς γε καὶ θανῶν ἐτεισάμην.
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Yet know this very well—although I am a non-entity, although I take not a step, even in these circumstances I will worst the woman who did this. Only let her come to me, so that she may learn fully to proclaim to all that both in life and in death I made the wicked pay.

When Hyllos finally gets a chance to speak, it takes 15 lines of dialogue for him to convey anything about Deianeira to Herakles and another 10 before he communicates the whole story (τὸ πᾶν, 1134). The first revelation, that Deianeira is dead, is regarded by Herakles much as Deianeira regarded the sight of the disintegrating wool, namely, as a portent: “It is a portent, I say, you have prophesied in evil words” (τέρας τοι διὰ κακῶν ἔθέσπισας, 1131). Herakles meets the second revelation, that Deianeira acted unwittingly because of the deception of Nessos, initially with lamentation (1143-1146):

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ιοῦ ιοῦ δόστενος, οἴχομαι τάλας.
ὁλοι’ ὁλωλά, φέγγος οὐκέτ’ ἔστι μοι.
οἶμοι, φρονώ δὴ ἐξειμορφάς ἵν’ ἔσταμεν.
ἲθ’, ὦ τέκνον· πατήρ γὰρ οὐκέτ’ ἔστι σοι.
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62 Hyllos cannot respond to, much less act on, the series of imperatives and prohibitions at 1064-1069 (γενοῦ, μὴ...προσβείσθης, δὸς). When three imperatives pile up at 1070, their uselessness is apparent: ἵθ’, ὦ τέκνον; τόλμησον· οὐκτέρν τὲ με. The demand for pity should be understood not as a simple desire for compassion, but as a final pathetic request for compliance.

63 Unlike Deianeira’s φάτιν (693), however, Herakles’ expression seems to convey only surprise and disbelief. It may be worth considering why the knowledge of Deianeira’s death does not trigger Herakles’ recollection of the oracle that he will die at the hands of someone dead, as the mention of Nessos does. Apparently, when Herakles still thinks of Deianeira as his murderer, his outrage is too great to make such a connection; the role of Nessos is a better sign of fate’s hand, insasmuch as it extends across a greater gap in time, but it is also distinctly more palatable to Herakles: he can tolerate a death contrived by a long-dead centaur, but not by a recently living woman.

48
Oh, oh! wretched! miserable! I’m done for. I’ve perished, I’ve perished; the light is no longer for me. Alas, I understand in what misfortune I stand. Go, child; for your father is no more.

These are Herakles’ final outbursts in the play, and their character is quite different from the spasmodic cries of pain that preceded. They are cries of understanding, whereas the earlier cries came in the midst of a humiliating struggle to comprehend his incongruous fate. Now certain of his coming death, Herakles bids Hyllos summon the rest of the family “so that you all may learn from me the ultimate message of all the oracles I know” (ὡς τελευταίαν ἐμοῦ | φήμην πύθησθε θεσφάτων ὅς’ ὁδ’ ἐγώ, 1149-1150).

The role of Nessos in Herakles’ ruin came as a painful shock to both Deianeira and Hyllos, but to Herakles it is a relief, as in his mind it both undoes the shame of death at a woman’s hands and confirms the ultimate control of Zeus, which he had begun to doubt.

Beyond this point, he does not reproach Zeus either expressly or by implication; on the contrary, he directs all his attention to completing the will of Zeus. This requires first of all that he explain Zeus’ oracles to Hyllos (1157-1163):

σὺ δ’ οὖν ἄκουε τούργον· ἐξήκεις δ’ ἵνα
φανεῖς ὤψιος ὅπως ἄν ἀνήρ ἐμός καλή.
ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἦν πρόφαντον ἐκ πατρός πάλαι,
πρὸς τὸν πνεόντων μηδενὸς θανεῖν ποτε,
 ἄλλ’ ὀστίς Ἁιδοὺ φθίμενος οἰκίτωρ πέλοι.
οδ’ οὖν ὁ θῆρ Κένταυρος, ὡς τὸ θεῖον ἦν
πρόφαντον, οὔτω ζωντά μ’ ἐκτεινεν θανών.

64 Concerning the summons of the family, Easterling writes, “The dramatic point of this exchange is to bring out the solemnity of the moment: Herakles knows that this is his last hour and wishes to give his family his final injunctions. However, the actual appearance onstage of further members of the family would be distracting....So Soph. gives Hyllus a few lines (1151-4) which dispose of them” (1982, ad 1147-56). The meaning of τελευταίαν φήμην has been disputed. Jebb understands “my last (dying) utterance of them” (1892, ad loc.); Kamerbeek accepts the scholiast’s interpretation (1959, ad loc.): τὴν περὶ τῆς τελευτής μου φήμην. The former is preferable, but ambiguity is possible.

65 His disillusionment is clear especially from his bitter words at 993-999 (whether these are addressed to Zeus himself or his altars) and 1103-1106; at 1149 μάτην ἄκοιτι expresses compassion (the only trace of this emotion in Herakles) for Alkmene’s imminent bereavement, not, as before, pity for himself. I think Jebb accurately interprets Herakles’ response to his sudden understanding of the oracles: “Heracles wishes to gather his family around him at a solemn farewell,—to convince them, by the θέσφατα, that he is in the hand of Zeus” (1892, ad 1147ff.; italics mine).
Well then, you listen to the matter. You have reached a point where you will show what sort of man you are to be called my son. For it was foretold to me from my father long ago that I would one day die at the hands of none of the living, but of one who was dead and a dweller in Hades. So this beast, the Centaur, has killed me just as the divine prophecy said, while I live and he is dead.

This first oracle was presented “long ago” (πάλαι, 1159) and it seems at least implied that the prophetic knowledge passed directly from father (ἐκ πατρός, 1159) to son, without any intermediary diviner. Herakles has seemingly withheld the knowledge until this moment, as Deianeira has shown no sign of knowing it. However it is brought out at this point primarily to show Herakles’ understanding that his destiny is being fulfilled exactly as Zeus his father had told him it would be. The knowledge of Nessos’ role in recent events dignifies Herakles’ impending death and renders it palatable to him, as it proves his relationship to Zeus and provides a suitably monstrous agent for his murder, allowing him to ignore the painful and humiliating circumstance of a woman carrying it out.

The other oracle, surprisingly called “new” (καινά, 1165), which was referred to three times by Deianeira and once more by the chorus, is secondary to Herakles (1164-1173):

υμαντεῖα καίνα, τοὺς πάλαι ξυνήγορα,  ἃ τῶν ὅρειόν καὶ χαμαίκουτάν ἐγὼ  ἡμοὶ χρόνῳ τῷ ἔφοβότων ἐμοὶ  ἔφασκε μόχθων· κἀδὸν πράξειν ἐμέ·

I will reveal new oracles that come out the same as these, agreeing with the old ones, which when I entered the grove of the Selloi, mountain-dwellers who sleep

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66 It is thus a gap in the whole truth which is never filled for Deianeira; the late disclosure of a prophecy not previously mentioned in the play complements the theme of knowledge, but the audience is not meant to wonder about Deianeira’s ignorance of it. In the end, she had forgotten even the oracle she was thoroughly familiar with in the face of her anxiety about Iole; awareness of the oracle Herakles now relates would not have changed anything.
on the ground, I copied out from my father’s many-tongued oak, which said that at the time that is living and now at hand my release from the labors that were set over me would be accomplished; and I supposed [it meant] that I would fare well. But it turns out that it meant nothing other than that I would die. For labor does not come to the dead.

The “new” oracle is important for Herakles mainly because it agrees with and confirms the older oracle. His father’s involvement is again noted (cf. πατρῷας, 1168) but is in this case more distant: Herakles copied the oracle from the “many-tongued oak” (πολυγλώσσου δρυός, 1168), presumably as it was interpreted by the Selloi. In this passage Herakles suggests that he had previously regarded the oracle as unproblematic, but from Deianeira’s account of what she read on the tablet it appears that he had already at that time envisioned the possibility of his death.

Much has been written about the variations in the oracle’s formulation.67 I think the best explanation is that Herakles has in the course of the last fifteen months formed a notion that he “would fare well” (πράξειν καλῶς, 1171). Until learning of the first oracle, Hyllos had held a similar view (ἀλλ’ ὁ ξυνήθης πότμος οὐκ εἶα πατρὸς | ἡμᾶς προταρβεῖν οὐδὲ δειμαίνειν ἄγαν, 88-89), and so had the chorus (ἐπεὶ τίς ὁδὲ | τέκνοισι Ζήν’ ἄβουλον εἶδεν; 139-140); only Deianeira feels strongly that Herakles may die, and only she relates the oracle as an either-or statement. The chorus and Herakles both speak as if there were no disjunction and refer only to the alternative that had seemed positive in Deianeira’s version of the oracle. They each realize that the meaning of “release from labors” (ἀναδοχὰν τελεῖν πόνων, 825; μόχθων…λύσιν, 1170-1171) was ambiguous, in a show of settling up that is only necessary because these characters ignore the straightforward alternatives originally presented. According to Deianeira, the oracles

67 E.g. Segal 2000, 151-171. Segal takes issue with the differing periods of time in Deianeira’s version of the oracle (44-45, 164-165) and the chorus’ (825). I think Jebb’s explanation of the discrepancy is correct: “Twelve years before this time, the oracle at Dodona had told Heracles that, at the end of twelve years (824), he should have rest. Fifteen months before this time, Heracles had given Deianeira the δέλτος on which he had written down that oracle (1167). He had then told her that, if he did not return at the end of fifteen months, she might assume that he was dead (164 ff.)” (1892, ad 44 f.).
said that Herakles would either live without toils or he would die: clearly he is going to die, so there is no need to interpret “without toils” as a riddle. The discrepancy should not be pressed too far. For Deianeira, the oracle accentuates the anxiety and uncertainty which is already hers; the other characters focus on the relationship between Zeus the father and Herakles the son. The chorus assumes that this relationship will be an advantage to Herakles, but their sense of this relationship is violated by the misfortune they witness, and so it is natural that they present the oracle as ambiguous and even deceptive rather than as offering clear alternatives. Likewise Herakles had become sure of his father’s favor, perhaps in his elation following the sack of Oichalia, and so when it seems to be suddenly taken away he is plunged into self-pity and doubt. The confluence of oracles reassures him, however, that his father’s plan is still in motion. Herakles therefore frames the oracle not as an alternative statement but as a single ambiguous prediction because it elevates his death from its disgraceful circumstances and integrates his fate into a divine plan that must be fulfilled.

**Responsibility and Blame**

The issue of responsibility is central to the understanding of events at which each character arrives in the *Trachiniae*. Once he has learned of the role of Nessos, Herakles effectively denies Deianeira the responsibility for his own demise by complete omission, but this denial is motivated by a need to re-assert his own identity and worth rather than by any concern for justice.⁶⁸ Deianeira, on the other hand, accepts her own guilt despite the unwitting nature of

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⁶⁸ Lawrence 2013 sees this movement not as re-assertion but as “self-redefinition” (122): since Herakles in this play is “all but identified with his wonderful body” (119), the wasting of that body by the poisoned robe means that he must define himself by something other than physical prowess. He chooses bravery, “but the only bravery now open to him consists of silent, uncomplaining endurance—a quality associated with some of the more humiliating labours of the myth tradition” (124-125).
her actions, but she refuses to blame Herakles for his role in leading her to those actions. Yet despite either character’s belief as to where or with whom the responsibility lies, the play makes it clear that both characters share responsibility, each for their own fate as well as for the other’s. Deianeira would not have had a reason to charm Herakles if he had not sent Iole home, and she would not have been able to poison him if he had not slain Nessos with the hydra’s blood. A set of verbal parallels well illustrates the convergence of the two characters’ actions on a single outcome. The Messenger tells Deianeira it was Eros that “charmed” (θέλξειεν, 355) Herakles to sack Oichalia; Deianeira later realizes that the centaur “charmed” (ἔθελγε, 710) her in order to get revenge on Herakles. Herakles had vowed to present his sacrifice at Kenaion (cf. εὐκταῖα φαίνων… εὐχαίς, 239-240); Deianeira claims to have made her own vow to present Herakles to the gods in a special robe (ηὐγμην…φανέν, 610-612). Hyllos relates how Herakles initially rejoiced in this “outfit” (στολῇ, 764; cf. στελεῖν χιτῶνι τῷ δε, 612); Deianeira had sent it in response to a different kind of “outfit” (στόλον, 226; στόλῳ, 496) sent home by Herakles.

The interconnectedness of these actions is situated within a broader multiplicity of agents, including not only Herakles and Deianeira but also Eurytos, Iole, Lichas and Nessos as well as the divinities Aphrodite, Eros and Zeus. The characters in the play are never able to grasp this larger picture fully; ironically, they display a marked tendency to assert that there is a single responsible party. Lichas reports that Herakles himself claimed that Eurytos “alone of mortals

69 See Lawrence 2013, 130-133.

70 So Seale 1982, 205: “Heracles’ fate is to be viewed as the direct outcome of his passion for Iole and Deianeira’s passion for him.” See also Lawrence 2013, 125: “all the hostile forces ranged against [Herakles] have been empowered by his own lust and violence.”

71 The list is not exhaustive. Among the more prominent parallels are those involving the words δῶρον and δώρημα (e.g. 494, 776), νόσος (e.g. 491, 544), εὐνάζο (106, 1041, 1242).

72 To take only the instances where this is emphasized by the adjective μόνος: Herakles says that Eurytos alone of mortals is responsible for his year of servitude (261); the Messenger says that Eros alone of gods is responsible for
shared responsibility” for his year of servitude to the Lydian queen Omphale (τόνδε γὰρ μεταίτιον | μόνον βροτῶν ἔφασκε τοῦδ’ εἶναι πάθους, 260-261). Herakles here elides the role of Zeus in the affair, a gap that is filled in by Lichas in his own voice: “No ill will should attend the telling, lady, of a thing [i.e. Herakles’ enslavement] which Zeus is plainly the doer of” (τῷ λόγῳ δ’ οὔ χρῆ φθόνον, | γύναι, προσέιναι, Ζεὺς ὀτον πράκτωρ φανῇ, 250-251). Despite this “special pleading,” as Easterling calls it (1982, ad 250-1), the major burden of culpability rests on Herakles himself for his murder of the innocent Iphitos, which prompts Zeus’ punishment (274-280):

Because he grew wrathful on account of this deed, the king, Olympian Zeus, father of all, sent him forth as chattel, and did not hold back, because [Iphitos] alone of men did he kill by stealth. If he had avenged himself openly, Zeus certainly would have pardoned him because he conquered with justice. For neither do the gods love hybris.

Lichas’ account is apparently accurate, as far as it goes: the murder of Iphitos and the servitude to Omphale are established facts, and there is no reason to suspect that Eurytos did not insult Herakles as the herald describes (262-269). But it is not the whole truth (cf. πάντ’ ἐπιστήμην, 338; τὸ πᾶν, 369).

his sacking Oichalia (355); Deianeira fears that she alone will destroy Herakles (712); Lichas tells Herakles that the robe is Deianeira’s gift alone (775); Herakles laments that a woman alone has ruined him (1063); and Hyllos objects that Iole alone is responsible for his mother’s death and his father’s present suffering (1233).

73 At the play’s beginning Deianeira is already aware of the murder of Iphitos (38); Hyllos has heard rumors of the year of servitude to Omphale (69-70). Lawrence argues that the story of Iphitos’ murder functions dramatically as “a moral lesson for Deianeira, a warning against the ὕβρις of secret action…this vital lesson is lost on Deianeira” (1978, 293).
The Messenger’s correction of Lichas’ account addresses only the matter of motivation; the murder of Iphitos and the year of slavery did take place, but they were not the primary causes of Herakles’ actions (352-355):

[接轨于雅典娜的传说] that that man killed Eurytos and took Oichalia with its high battlements for the sake of this girl, and that Eros alone of the gods charmed him to do these spear-works.

In both accounts there is one human (aside from Herakles) and one divinity with a share of responsibility. The alternation between Zeus and either Eros or Aphrodite plays out a number of times in the play, and not only with reference to the sack of Oichalia. In Deianeira’s narrative of the battle between Herakles and Acheloos, Zeus is represented as deciding the outcome (τέλος δ’ ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος καλῶς, 26); when the chorus revisits the story, “Kypris alone” is umpire of the fight (μόνα δ’ εὐλεκτρος ἐν μέσῳ Κύπρις | ῥαβδονόμει ξυνοῦσα, 515-516). The human cause in this instance is Deianeira herself, the prize “contested on both sides” (ἀμφινεικῆ, 104; ἀμφινείκητον, 527). The parallel is central to Deianeira’s identification with Iole. To her the role of Zeus in her life and in human affairs generally is acknowledged, but mysterious and liable to doubt.74 The power of Eros, on the other hand, she readily understands (441-448):

…”Ερωτι μέν νυν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται
πῦκτης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ.
οὗτος γὰρ ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν ὅπως θέλει,
κάμοι γε: πῶς δ’ οὐ χάτερας οἴας γ’ ἐμοῦ;
ὡς’ εἰ τι τῷ μοῦ γ’ ἀνδρὶ τῇ δή τῇ νόσῳ
λησθέντι μεμπτός εἰμι, κάρτα μαίνομαι,”

74 She acknowledges Zeus in the Acheloos narrative (26), but doubts whether Zeus’ end was happy (27); she expresses thanks to Zeus following the first report of Herakles’ arrival (200); when Lichas and the captive maidens arrive, her thanks give way to fear that Zeus may similarly ruin her family and prays to avert this (303-305). She invokes Zeus again just before asserting the power of Eros over the other gods (436-437), a topos which the chorus picks up in the following stasimon (497-502).
So whoever rises against Eros like a boxer with his hands is not sane. For he rules even the gods as he wishes, and me, certainly; and how could he not rule another just like me? Therefore surely I am mad if in any way I blame my husband when he is seized by this sickness, or this woman, who shares responsibility in what is not at all shameful, nor any harm to me.

The complexity of the issues of responsibility and blame is carefully developed in this exchange with Lichas. Eros, according to Deianeira, has ultimate power over gods and men; the god may also be characterized as inducing a sickness (νόσο, 445; cf. 544). The compelling force of Eros absolves both Herakles and Iole of Deianeira’s blame, at least so long as she is in her right mind (εἴ…μεμπτός ἐίμι, κάρτα μαίνομαι, 445-446). Yet though she cannot be blamed, Iole is still a “sharer of responsibility” (μεταιτίᾳ, 447). These arguments appeal at least ostensibly to reason, but Deianeira reiterates her forgiveness in more emotional terms almost immediately (459-467):

οὐχὶ χάτέρας
πλείστας ἀνὴρ εἷς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δή;
κοὐπω τις αὐτῶν ἐκ γʹ ἐμοῦ λόγον κακὸν
ἡνέγκατ’ οὐδ’ ὀνειδος’ ἥδε τ’ οὐδ’ ἂν εἰ
κάρτ’ ἐντακεῖ ἡ τῷ φιλεῖν, ἐπεὶ σφ’ ἐγὼ
ἀκτίρα δὴ μάλιστα προσβλέψα’, ὅτι
τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βίον διώλεσεν,
καὶ γῆν πατρῴαν οὐχ ἑκοῦσα δύσμορος
ἐπερσε κάδούλωσεν.

Has not one man, Herakles, wed very many other women too? And never has any one of them sustained an evil word or reproach from me, at least; and neither would this girl, even if Herakles were utterly absorbed in his love, since I pitied her most of all when I beheld her, because her beauty had ruined her life, and the land of her fathers she has unwillingly, ill-fated one, sacked and enslaved.

Not only is Iole not to blame in Deianeira’s eyes, but her case is not even extraordinary enough in Herakles’ history that it warrants special anger. But even if Herakles were to become “utterly absorbed in his love” (κάρτ’ ἐντακεῖ ἡ τῷ φιλεῖν, 463), which would be extraordinary, Deianeira could still not blame Iole for that because of her own intense pity for Iole’s plight, a pity which is
all the stronger because Iole’s fate bears striking resemblances to her own. Yet despite Deianeira’s insistence that she pities and does not blame the girl, she continues to emphasize Iole’s responsibility by making her (and her beauty; τὸ κάλλος, 465) the subject of verbs that properly belong to Herakles to Iole (cf. διώλεσεν, 465; ἔπερσε κάδούλωσεν, 467). In Deianeira’s formulation, Eros and the object of eros are assimilated, and she completely accepts the power of this force to rule and to destroy.

Deianeira has seen that power before and will see it again: inside the house, eros comes upon her, too. The tone of her speech at the beginning of the next episode is drastically different from any other word she utters in the play, and contrasts especially with the high-minded understanding she claimed just before. This is the only point in the play at which she displays any bitterness towards either Herakles or Iole, or any character, for that matter (536-546):

κόρην γάρ, οἶμαι δ’ οὐκέτ’, ἀλλ’ ἐξευγμένην,
pareosédégeumai, φόρτων ὡςτε ναυτίλος,
λοβητὸν ἐκπόλεμα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός.
καὶ νῦν δ’ ἄδικα μίνυμομεν μίας ὑπὸ
χλαίνης ὑπαγκάλισμα. τοιάδ’ Ἡρακλῆς, (540)
ὁ πιστὸς ἦμιν κάγαθος καλούμενος,
οἰκουρ’ ἄντεπεμφε τοῦ μακροῦ χρόνου.
ἔγω δὲ θυμοῦσθαι μὲν οὐκ ἐπισταμαι
νοσοῦντι κείνῳ πολλά τῇ θυίῳ τῇ νόσῳ,
tὸ δ’ αὐτοίς ἄν νηπικεῖν τῇ τῇ τῇ ἄν γυνῇ (545)
δύνατο, κοινωνοῦσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων;

75 There is some dispute as to whether Herakles or Iole should be understood as the subject of ἐντακείη (463). Jebb prefers Iole (1892, ad loc.), as does Easterling tentatively (1982, ad loc.), though both admit that either is grammatically possible. Kamerbeek makes Herakles the subject in light of the significance of melting verbs for Herakles later in the play, e.g. at 833, 836 (1959, ad loc.). Lloyd-Jones also favors Herakles: “D. cares not whether Iole loves Heracles but whether Heracles loves Iole” (1983, 172); Davies 1991, ad loc. follows suit. The choice is an extremely difficult one, but I think the dynamics of this episode and the beginning of the next argue for taking Herakles as subject. The Messenger says that Iole and Eros are the real reasons for the sack of Oichalia, but Deianeira still believes that Herakles has acted under the influence of a strong but ultimately fleeting desire—something she knows is not atypical of him. Now she imagines that, even if Herakles’ passion were a more permanent love—here her use of the word φιλεῖν, whereas the two messengers only use ἔρως, πόθος and ἱμερος, is significant—her pity for Iole would still be too great for anger. Envisioning this scenario, however, is precisely what leads her to take action. With her next lines she invites Lichas back inside to receive “gifts in exchange for gifts” (ἀντὶ δῶρων δῶρα, 494), and when she comes onstage again she describes in detail how she expects Iole’s relationship with Herakles to rival and replace her own. Again, she does not speak of Iole’s feelings—just as she does not speak of her own—but rather of what Iole will be to Herakles.
For I have taken in with the others a maiden—or I think, no longer a maiden, but a bride—just as a seaman takes on cargo, a freight that outrages my sense. And now we, two of us, wait under one blanket to be the object of his embrace. Such has Herakles, the one called true to me and good, sent ahead as my reward for keeping his house the long while. I do not know how to be angry at him, who is often stricken by this disease, but on the other hand, to live together with this girl—what woman could do it, sharing the same marriage?

Deianeira immediately denies and simultaneously rationalizes her feelings of bitterness and jealousy. She admits a feeling of outrage (λωβητόν, 538), but still claims she cannot be angry with Herakles, his responsibility again being mitigated by “sickness” (νοσοῦντι...τῇ δὲ νόσῳ, 544). Still, a shared marriage is unacceptable; she understands how this will naturally play out: “one woman’s youthful beauty advances, another’s fades” (ἡβην τὴν μὲν ἕρπουσαν πρόσω, τὴν δὲ φθίνουσαν, 547-548). Deianeira is so keen to rationalize her jealousy and anger because she recognizes these feelings and is determined to rise above them, “for, as I said, it is not noble for a woman with sense to be angry” (ἀλλ’ οὐ γάρ, ὥσπερ εἶπον, ὀργαίνειν καλὸν | γυναῖκα νοὸν ἔχουσαν, 552-553). She becomes angry despite herself, but she believes that she has a means to overcome this uncharacteristic anger and relieve her anxiety in the potion of Nessos.

In the first account of the sack of Oichalia, Lichas claimed that Zeus was partly, albeit indirectly responsible (cf. Ζεὺς ὁτοῦ πράκτωρ φανῇ, 251); in the second account and in Lichas’ retraction speech, Eros is revealed to have been the primary instigator. In the second half of the play, the reverse of this movement takes place. Upon learning of the events at Kenaion, the chorus claims that the responsibility for Herakles’ misfortune belongs to Aphrodite: “The attendant Kypris, unspeaking, has been manifestly revealed as the doer of these things” (ὑ ὁ δ’ ὀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἀναιδὸς φανερὰ | τῶνδ’ ἐφάνη πράκτωρ, 860-861).

76 Deianeira’s behavior

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76 For a good explication of these lines, see Easterling 1982, ad loc.
immediately before she commits suicide seems to suggest that for her, too, her misfortune belongs to *eros* rather than fate (912-922):

Suddenly I saw her rush into the chamber of Herakles. And, with my face covered to hide it, I kept watch. Then I saw the woman cast blankets on the bed of Herakles. When she had finished this, she leapt up and sat down in the middle of the bed, and she let hot streams of tears break forth and said, “O my bed and bridal chamber, goodbye now forever, since you will never again receive me as a bedmate on this bed of marriage.”

Just as Deianeira regarded Iole as having some responsibility in the destruction of her own life, she holds herself responsible for ruining her own and commits suicide not in despair alone but also in shame. She had already prepared herself to accept the responsibility: “I have resolved, if that man falls, that I too with the same impetus shall die along with him” καίτοι δέδοκται, κεῖνος εἰ σφαλήσεται, | ταύτῃ σὺν ὀρμή κάμε συνθανέειν ἄμα, 719-720). So Deianeira blames herself, as do Hyllos and Herakles initially. After the chorus proclaims Aphrodite as the “doer” (πράκτωρ, 861), however, neither Eros nor Aphrodite is ever mentioned again in the play. Once Hyllos reveals to Herakles the role of Nessos, Deianeira too all but disappears from consideration: she is mentioned only once more, when Hyllos objects to his father’s demand that he marry Iole, the women “who alone shares responsibility in my mother’s death” (ἦ μοι μητρὶ μὲν θανεῖν μόνη | μεταίτιος, 1233-1234). Hyllos allows himself to be convinced by his father, however, and he acknowledges that one power has been behind everything: κούδὲν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεὺς (1278).
Herakles’ Last Requests: Name and Authority

Herakles is first introduced in the play as “the famous son of Zeus and Alkmene” (ὁ κλεινός…Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τε παῖς, 19). This method of naming Herakles will prove significant as the drama explores the tensions involved in reconciling his human and superhuman traits and in determining whether he is to be saved by his divinity or doomed by his mortality. The fame of Herakles is of principal importance in reconciling the two poles, and the concept is central both to the other characters’ understanding of him in his absence and to Herakles’ understanding of himself. His character is defined by fame, and so the very silence about him is a major factor in Deianeira’s extreme anxiety at the play’s beginning (cf. ἀκήρυκτος, 45). The Nurse suggests to Deianeira that Hyllos should go in search of his father, “if he allotted any concern to his father, to his being thought to fare well” (εἰ πατρὸς | νέμοι τιν’ ὄραν τοῦ καλὸς πρᾶσσειν δοκεῖν, 56-57). News of Herakles has in fact reached Hyllos, apparently in the form of rumors that circulate about famous men; although he is aware of their questionable reliability, Hyllos is inclined to be satisfied with such “stories” (cf. ἀλλ’ οἶδα, μύθοις γ’ εἰ τι πιστεύειν χρεὼν, 67). But the first story he relates shows that Herakles has hardly been “thought to fare well”; on the contrary, “they say he has been performing service to a Lydian woman” (Λυδῇ γυναικὶ φασί νιν λάτριν πονεῖν, 70). Hyllos can still claim without absurdity, however, that his father’s “accustomed fortune” (ὁ ξυνήθης πότμος, 88) ruled out the possibility of serious concern, because this is the accepted paradox of Herakles’ life: the famous son of Zeus performs his heroic deeds in the capacity of a slave.78

77 Herakles is referred to twice more as the son of Alkmene (97, 181), once more as the son of both Zeus and Alkmene (644). The two parents are also significantly juxtaposed at 1105-1106 and 1148-1149.

78 Deianeira has already prepared the audience to consider this perspective on Herakles’ labors: τοιοῦτος αἰών εἰς δόμοις τε κάκ δόμον | ἀei τὸν ἄνδρ’ ἐπεμπέλ πατρεῖοντα τοῦ (34-35). The subsequent emphasis on the status of the Nurse as a slave who advises the free with speech worthy of the free (cf. 52-53, 61-63) serves to highlight the similar contrast in Herakles’ life.
Deianeira has her own concern with name and reputation, a concern that typically involves terms of relationship. What a person “is called” can reflect a drastic change in life, as it does for a woman who lives a painless life “until one is called wife instead of maiden and receives her share of anxieties in the night, fearing either for her husband or her children” (ἐως τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνὴ | κληθη, λάβῃ τ’ ἐν νυκτί φροντίδοιν μέρος, | ἦτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη, 148-150). This generalization takes on special significance with the arrival of Iole, whose name at first eludes Deianeira despite her insistent questioning (242, 307-321). When she addresses Iole directly, she wants to know immediately after her simple identity (τίς ποτ’ εἶ νεανίδων; 307) whether she is “husbandless, or a mother” (ἄνανδρος, ἢ τεκνοῦσα, 308). She soon learns that the girl is not “nameless” (ἀνώνυμος, 377), but “she was called Iole, once the daughter of Eurytos as regards her descent” (πατρὸς μὲν οὖσα γένεσιν Εὐρύτου ποτὲ | Ἴολη ἱκαλεῖτο, 380-381). In the agon that follows this revelation, Lichas is forced to admit to “Deianeira, daughter of Oineus and wife of Herakles” (Δηάνειραν, Οἰνέως | κόρην, δάμαρτά θ’ Ἡρακλέους, 405-406) that he has brought “Iole, offspring of Eurytos” (Ἰόλην…Εὐρύτου σποράν, 420) as “a wife to Herakles” (δάμαρτ(α)…Ἡρακλεῖ, 428). Deianeira is forced to confront the fact that Herakles, “whom I called loyal and good” (ὁ πιστὸς ἡμῖν κάγαθός καλοῦμενος, 541), has sent home not merely a maiden (κόρην, 536), but one “wedded” (ἐζευγμένην, 536) to him. Iole may be regarded as no more than a concubine, but this is no comfort to Deianeira, who fears “lest Herakles be called my spouse, but the younger woman’s man” (μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς | ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ’ ἀνήρ, 550-551).

79 Some editors print daggers around ποτὲ and others posit a lacuna after this line, but without good reason; see Davies 1991, ad loc. The ποτὲ may also be taken to suggest that Iole is no longer known as the daughter of her father, but as a bride.

80 Kamerbeek is correct to take ἡμῖν primarily with the adjectives and then the participle (1959, ad loc.); Davies, following a point made by Fraenkel, strangely argues that it must go with ἄντέξεψε in the next line (1991, ad loc.).
Driven by this fear, Deianeira resorts to the expedient of Nessos’ love potion, which is questionable with regard both to its effects and to the morality of its secret use. Deianeira is aware that the action she purports may be regarded as a “deed of wicked daring” (cf. κακὰς δὲ τὸλμας, 582) and hastily asserts her distaste (στυγῶ, 583) for such actions and for “the women who dare them” (τὰς τε τολμώσας, 583). Her distaste may be sincere, but as her identity as wife is threatened, other aspects of her character give way. She allows herself to be reassured of a course of action which she admits holds no “guarantee” (πίστις, 588), but only the semblance of one (ὁὕτως ἔχει γ’ ἡ πίστις, ὡς τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν | ἔνεστι, πείρᾳ δ’ οὐ προσωμίλησά πω, 590-591).

Deianeira has the support of the chorus, but her conscience is far from clear. As a woman who values prudence and nobility, the slip in character is painful, but admissible if she can maintain her reputation: “seeing that in darkness, though you act disgracefully, you never fall into disgrace” (ὡς σκότῳ | κἂν αἰσχρὰ πράσσῃς, οὔποτ’ αἰσχύνῃ πεσῇ, 596-597). Deianeira’s anxiety forces her to behavior she admits is shameful, but she distinguishes between what she does under constraint and what her true nature demands, just as she forgives Herakles for his “sickness” (νόσῳ, 445) and Iole for the work of Eros (cf. Ἐρωτι, 441). When Deianeira realizes her husband will be destroyed and along with him her reputation, she can no longer forgive herself. Therefore she vows to die with Herakles, “for to live with an evil reputation cannot be endured by a woman who esteems herself to be not evil by nature” (ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσαν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν, | ἥτις προτίμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι, 721-722). Deianeira’s fortunes and her moral worth are tied to her identity as the wife of Herakles. In the end the threat to her wifehood is responsible for her own unwitting destruction of all three aspects of her character.\footnote{In destroying her husband she loses also the identity of mother, as Hyllos asserts before learning that she acted unwittingly (cf. 734-737, 817-818).}
Herakles finally arrives on stage asleep on a bier, in stark contrast to the figure of heroic action depicted throughout the play’s many narratives. When he wakes, he struggles not only with the pain caused by the poisoned robe but also with the mental torment of having been laid low, as he thinks, by a woman. In particular he tries to comprehend how he, the hero of the twelve labors (of which he names five, 1089-1100; cf. 1011-1013), could experience such a reversal (1101-1106):

\[
\text{ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην,}
\text{κούδεῖς τροπαί’ ἐστησε τῶν ἐμὸν χερὸν.}
\text{νῦν δ’ ὁδ’ ἀναρθρος καὶ κατερρακωμένος}
\text{τυφλῆς ὑπ’ ἄτης ἐκπεπόρθημαι τάλας,}
\text{ὁ τῆς ἀρίστης μητρὸς ὁνομασμένος,}
\text{ὁ τοῦ κατ’ ἄστρα Ζηνὸς αὐδηθεὶς γόνος.}
\]

And I tasted of countless other toils, and no one set up trophies over my might. But now, thus disjointed and torn to shreds, I have been utterly sacked by an unseen ruin to my misery, I who am named son of the noblest mother, who was called the offspring of Zeus among the stars.

Herakles’ fate is not incongruous with his past exploits only, but also with his parentage. “The famous son of Zeus and Alkmene” (ὁ κλεινὸς…Ζηνὸς Ἀλκμήνης τε παῖς, 19) now imagines for the first time the loss or negation of his fame: the sacker of Oichalia, among other cities, is himself now “sacked,” and the nobility of his parents seems to have been a meaningless point of identity. Herakles is anxious to prove that something of his former strength remains, but the only way he can conceive of doing this is by punishing Deianeira, something he is helpless to accomplish on his own. When he ultimately learns that his killer was not Deianeira but Nessos, he is reconciled to his fate and thereby to his father, who had foretold everything to him.

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82 McCall 1972, 157-158.

83 The physical spasms are connected to the mental torment of shame: after the shame is removed, the spasms cease.

84 αὐδηθείς may be aorist for perfect, but a true aorist is fitting as Herakles sees his past glory nullified.
accurately after all. Assured of this, Herakles now focuses his attention on his legacy and the identity of his son. The final movement of the play follows a pattern whereby Herakles asserts his paternal authority by invoking the requirements of filial piety, and Hyllos, who initially resists, submits after an essentially linguistic modification has been made to the father’s request.

This appears most clearly after Herakles gives his instructions for his funeral pyre (1200-1209):

**HERAKLES:**  ἀλλ’ ἀστένακτος καδάκρυτος, εἴπερ εἰ τοῦδ’ ἀνδρός, ἑρξον· εἰ δὲ μή, μενῶ σ’ ἐγὼ καὶ νέρθεν ὄν ἀραίος εἰσαεί βαρύς.

**HYLLOS:**  οἴμοι, πάτερ, τί εἶπας; οἷά μ’ εἴργασαι.

**HERAKLES:**  ὅποια δραστέ’ ἐστίν· εἰ δὲ μή, πατρὸς ἄλλου γενοῦ του μηδ’ ἐμὸς κληθής ἐτὶ.

**HYLLOS:**  οἴμοι μάλ’ αὖθις, οἷά μ’ ἐκκαλῇ, πάτερ, φονέα γενέσθαι καὶ παλαμναῖον σέθεν.

**HERAKLES:**  οὐ δῆτ’ ἐγὼ’, ἀλλ’ ὧν ἔχω παιώνιον καὶ μοῦνον ἰατῆρα τῶν ἐμῶν κακῶν.

**HERAKLES:**  Rather do it without moaning and without tears, if indeed you are my son. And if you do not, I will wait for you, bringing a troublesome curse forever even from the world below.

**HYLLOS:**  Alas, father, what did you say? How you have treated me!

**HERAKLES:**  [I have said] what must be done; if you don’t, become another father’s son and no longer be called mine.

**HYLLOS:**  Alas, really, again! What you are calling on me to do, father!—to become your accursed murderer.

**HERAKLES:**  Not this, indeed, but the healer and one physician of the sufferings I have.

Herakles requires not only obedience but also a certain standard of conduct from any true son of his. This treatment of his son is indeed one distinctive feature of Herakles’ character, but it need not be understood as dehumanizing. Herakles’ insistence that Hyllos prove himself a true son, even when it is painful to do so, arises at least in part from his realization that he will soon die: he—and not the aetiologizing poet only—has his legacy in mind. Hyllos, for his part, is paralyzed at the prospect of causing his father’s death, but he can live with healing his sufferings.
The pattern is repeated when Herakles asks, and then commands, that Hyllos take Iole as his wife.

Herakles is frequently referred to in the play as the “best” or “noblest of all men.” Deianeira fears that she “must remain deprived of the best man of all” (εἰ μὲ χρὴ μένειν | πάντων ἀρίστου φωτὸς ἐστερημένην, 176-177); just before her death, Hyllos curses her and claims his curse must be just because Deianeira has “killed the best man of all those upon the earth, whose like you will not see again” (811-812). In an interesting variation on this motif, Lichas admits that “that man, though best in all other respects with his two hands, is altogether inferior to his love for this girl” (ὡς τάλλα’ ἐκείνος πάντ’ ἀριστεύων χεροῖν | τοῦ τήσδ’ ἐρωτος εἰς ἀπανθ’ ἥσσων ἔφυ, 488-489). The thought makes explicit the paradox of Herakles’ life which is a central concern of the play and especially the ending. Herakles is the best of men, the son of the noblest father possible, yet he is presented with considerable frequency as being held in subjection to various powers—and particularly powers that are women or have some association with women. 85 These periods of subjection are mitigated insofar as the labors turn out to be the foundation for his fame; the slavery to Omphale results in another great exploit. Moreover, Zeus’ involvement lessens the shame. As Lichas had said, “No ill will should attend the telling, lady, of a thing which Zeus is plainly the doer of” (τῷ λόγῳ δ’ οὐ χρῆ φθόνον, | γόναι, προσέναι, Ζεὺς ὁτου πράκτωρ φανῇ, 250-251). Death at the hands of Deianeira cannot be reconciled in the same way; Aphrodite’s agency is no more acceptable (cf. ἀ δ’ ἀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἀναυδός φανερὰ | τῶν’ ἐφάνη πράκτωρ, 860-861). When Nessos is revealed as the murderer by intent and the oracles are understood, however, the supremacy of Zeus as the controller of Herakles’ fate is restored. In the same movement Herakles is reconciled to his fate, and he makes his last requests:

that he be burned alive in a pyre on Mount Oita, and that Hyllos take his own intended mate, Iole, as his own bride. I think there is more than an aetiology at stake in these requests. Herakles is “the best of all men” except for his unfortunate habit of being overcome by *eros* and subjected to women. In the final moments of his life, he overcomes this mortal failing by exercising his control over the object of his *eros*, and subjecting her to his legacy—symbolically, he is prepared for apotheosis. Once he is assured of Hyllos’ obedience, Herakles is ready for the pyre: “This truly is rest from evils, the final end of this man!” (παῦλα τοι κακῶν | ἀϋτη, τελευτὴ τοῦδε τάνδρος ὑστάτη, 1255-1256). Hyllos does not understand these requests, but will carry them out; he asks his helpers to “recognize the great cruelty of the gods in the deeds being done, the gods who sire children and are called fathers, yet look on at such sufferings” (μεγάλην δὲ θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην | εἰδότες ἔργων τῶν πρασσομένων, | οἳ φύσαντες καὶ κληξόμενοι | πατέρες τοιαῦτ’ ἐφορῶσι πάθη, 1266-1269). Hyllos (in my opinion) speaks the final lines of the play to the chorus leader (1275-1278):

λείπου μηδὲ σὺ, παρθέν’, ἐπ’ οἴκων, μεγάλους μὲν ιδοῦσα νέους θανάτους, πολλὰ δὲ πήματα καὶ καινοπαθῆ, κοὐδὲν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεὺς.

Even you, maiden, do not be left in the house, since you have seen great new deaths, and many calamities never suffered before, and there is none of these things that is not Zeus.

The “great new deaths” are both Deianeira’s and Herakles’, but I think especially the latter’s. It has not happened yet, but for Hyllos and Herakles himself, it may as well be done. The adjectives νέους and καινοπαθῆ bear an irony similar to one already seen in the play, when Deianeira vowed to “present [Herakles] to the gods, a new sacrificer in a new garment” (φανεῖν θεοῖς | θυτῆρα καινὸ καινὸν ἐν πεπλώματι, 612-613). Now, no less than at Kenaion, Herakles will be presented to the gods in a new way.
Conclusion

There are two different models for human knowledge represented in the *Trachiniae*. One is exemplified by Deianeira, who notices patterns and cycles in her life and in the world around her and uses her knowledge of these to interpret her experience. She accepts the determinative power of prophecy, but the oracle she knows is a reflection of her own mind: it presents alternative predictions that at least seem to be mutually exclusive and thus only increase her uncertainty. Moreover, the very language of prophecy is foreign to Deianeira and fuels her pessimistic fear that the τέλος promised by Zeus’ oracle will be for ill rather than good. Hyllos and the chorus also adhere to the pattern-based model of knowledge, but in contrast to Deianeira their optimism leads them to draw confidence from the patterns they observe. Their knowledge is tempered also by their belief that the gods care and provide for their children. Herakles’ suffering seems to violate this expectation and it initiates a second crisis in the play. Herakles confronts the crisis with rage and self-pity as he attempts to understand how he could suffer a fate so incongruous with his history of heroism. Ultimately, the knowledge of Nessos’ agency behind Deianeira’s actions allows Herakles to understand the oracles of Zeus and to accept his fate as part of a divine plan. For Hyllos, the crisis is insurmountable; he witnesses his father’s sudden understanding but does not participate in it. As Herakles is carried off to his pyre, Hyllos presents the alternative model for knowledge, anticipated by the proverb with which Deianeira opened the play, but now necessitated by Herakles’ fate: no mortal looks on the future. Patterns are useless for predicting, much less understanding, a τέλος determined by divine apathy or whim—as Hyllos regards it—or by divine plan. So have the events of the play shown: the sufferings and deaths have been new and unexpected, and behind them there is nothing but Zeus.
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