

# THE STRUCTURE OF SOPHOCLES' *TRACHINIAE*: "DIPTYCH" OR "TRILOGY"?

ROBERT L. KANE

THE *TRACHINIAE* HAS OFTEN been classified as a "diptych" because of the conspicuous gap that divides the body of the play from the exodos.<sup>1</sup> Once Deianeira's tragedy has run its course, the ravaged form of Heracles is carried on stage, and thereafter it is he who dominates the action. Not only is the rhythm of the drama such that husband and wife never meet; there is an extended interval during which neither character is present on stage (820–972). At this point the play's structure reveals a deep division, a gap separating the tragedy of Deianeira from the grim portrayal of Heracles *in extremis*.

But while the presence of this gap is undeniable, it should not blind us to the fact that the structure of the *Trachiniae* can be analyzed in more than one way. For example, though the exodos may indeed be viewed as the second panel of a "diptych," it may also be seen as the third segment of an artfully constructed triad. In the following study we will suggest that the *Trachiniae* lends itself to analysis as a composition of three parts no less than as a marriage of two.<sup>2</sup> In particular, we will try to demonstrate: A) that the exodos (surely the drama's most puzzling episode) reproduces a pattern of events enacted twice before, and B) that a comparison of the final scene with its two predecessors might provide the basis for a new interpretation of Heracles' extraordinary actions at the end of the play.

Among those elements that have a threefold embodiment in the *Trachiniae*, none is more conspicuous than the scene of recognition or "awakening."<sup>3</sup> At three different points in the play a seemingly auspicious object

<sup>1</sup>See T. B. L. Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles* (London 1935) 102–104, A. J. A. Waldo, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge 1951) 49–61, and G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1958) 42–54; more recently: A. Machin, *Cohérence et continuité dans le théâtre de Sophocle* (Quebec 1981), Part 4,1: "Les pièces diptyques: les *Trachiniennes* et *Antigone*" (353–376), and T. A. Szlezak, "Zweiteilige Dramenstrukturen bei Sophokles und Euripides," *Poetica* 14 (1982) 3–23, especially 11–14.

<sup>2</sup>A tripartite structure has been identified (1) in the *Philoctetes*: A. F. Garvie, "Deceit, Violence and Persuasion in the *Philoctetes*," *Studi classici in onore di Quintino Cataudella* 1 (Catania 1972) 213–226, and J. U. Schmidt, *Sophokles Philoktet: Eine Strukturanalyse* (Paderborn 1973), *passim*; and (2) even in the *Ajax* (another "diptych"): Leif Bergson, "Der *Aias* des Sophokles als Trilogie: Versuch einer Bilanz," *Hermes* 114 (1986) 36–50.

<sup>3</sup>In Aristotle's examples of *anagnorisis* (*Poetics* chs. 11 and 12) one person is recognized by another; hence the popularity of "recognition" as a rendering of the Greek term. But the Aristotelian concept also embraces "recognition" of facts or circumstances (1452a33–36), and it is in this sense that the term will be used here. Under what conditions does one "recognize"

becomes the focus of a sudden, painful unveiling. In the middle of the long first episode<sup>4</sup> Deianeira learns that the beguiling "slave" she has admitted to her house is in fact Iole, daughter of the Oichalian king, and now the bride (not the "slave") of Heracles. In the next scene<sup>5</sup> the "love-charm" which Deianeira administers to Heracles in the hope of rekindling his love suddenly reveals itself as a deadly, corrosive poison. But the play's most drastic revelation occurs at the center of the exodos: in a flash of enlightenment Heracles sees that the Zeus-given oracle foretelling "release from besetting struggles" (1170–71) did not promise a life of ease (as he had always supposed), but foretold the very death that is about to release him from his "struggles" in the poisoned robe.

These are the awakenings of the *Trachiniae*, and together they add up to three.<sup>6</sup> But to isolate three mental events and identify them as *anagnoriseis* is not to prove that they form a *bona-fide* series. What, then, is the basis for viewing these revelations as a coherent group? In particular, how is it that they invite comparison as members of an epistemological triad, a kind of intellectualized trio or "trilogy"?<sup>7</sup>

---

something other than a person or a familiar object? (The standard translation becomes misleading when applied to these conditions.) We need a term capable of denoting those moments when the subject suddenly awakens to the significance of a situation s/he has not understood before. "Awakening" seems to fit the need best. (I owe this suggestion to Prof. Friedrich Solmsen.)

<sup>4</sup>It is assumed that the astrophic song of 205–224 is not a *stasimon* and thus that lines 141 to 496 constitute the play's first episode: see Kirkwood 90, with n. 49, J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles, Commentaries II: The Trachiniae* (Leiden 1970) 12, 70, n. 4, and C. Fuqua, "Heroism, Heracles and the 'Trachiniae'," *Traditio* 36 (1980) 1–81, at 35, n. 89.

<sup>5</sup>The segments called "Scenes" throughout this study are: the whole first episode (Scene One), the sequence formed by the combination of the next three episodes (531–632, 663–820, and 862–946 [= Scene Two]), and the exodos (Scene Three). These three segments are roughly comparable in length: Scene One = 355 lines, Scene Two = 342 lines, and the exodos = 304.

<sup>6</sup>An awakening is experienced as well by the Chorus in the third *stasimon*, 821–830; but while the Chorus' shared enlightenment helps to clarify the causality underlying the action, it does not contribute directly to the action itself, as a genuine *anagnorisis* is bound to do; its content, moreover, is later subsumed into the *anagnorisis* of Heracles in the final scene. It seems best, therefore, to place the Chorus' awakening in a separate category.

<sup>7</sup>While the recognition scenes, as such, do not seem to have been examined in relation to one another, many interpreters have stressed the importance of knowledge and blindness in the *Trachiniae*. First, Karl Reinhardt's book showed that illusion and blindness are central to the tragic situation as Sophocles conceived it: *Sophokles* (Frankfurt 1933), tr. by Hazel and David Harvey (Oxford 1979) 34–63. Later, Hans Diller traced the interaction of human and divine knowledge in each of the extant plays: see *Göttliches und menschliches Wissen bei Sophokles* 1 (Kiel 1950, Kieler Universitätsreden) = *Kleine Schriften* (Munich 1971) 255–271, especially 261–263, on the *Trachiniae*. Other works stressing the intellectual theme are: C. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951) 103–121 ("Late Learning: The *Trachiniae*"); John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (New York 1962) 214–215; Ernst-Richard Schwing, *Die Stellung der Trachinierinnen im Werk des Sophokles* (Göttingen 1962) 31, 109–110; P. E. Easterling, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *BICS* 16 (1969) 68–69 (see

Common characteristics link the revelation-scenes, suggesting that they do indeed constitute a definable "set." For example, all three *anagnoriseis* involve a realization that the purpose of some powerful agent was not what it first seemed. More precisely, the characters find themselves betrayed by either one of two reciprocal misunderstandings: either the appearance of vengeance has blinded them to the impulse of love or, conversely, their preoccupation with love has blinded them to the impulse of vengeance. Thus, at the end of the first scene, the unmasking of Iole coincides with the clarification of Heracles' true motive in sacking Oichalia: he had been driven by love, not by the need to avenge the insults of Eurystus, as Lichas first maintained (255–257). In the next scene, when the portentous wool-fragment shrivels into dust, Deianeira simultaneously perceives the true nature of the centaur's *pharmakon* and his true motive in bestowing it: the drug was an instrument of vengeance (707–710), not a vehicle of love, as Nessus had claimed. Finally, in the exodos, it is revealed that Deianeira (despite convincing appearances to the contrary) had acted on worthy motives in sending her husband the anointed robe: she had been driven by the impulse of love (1138–1139) rather than by a lust for revenge, as Heracles supposed.<sup>8</sup> In sum, though there are variations from scene to scene, the three awakenings of the *Trachiniae* all have this feature in common: an act reveals itself in a new light when either its erotic purpose emerges (belatedly) from behind a mask of vengeance, or its vengeful purpose emerges from behind the mask of *eros*.

Besides sharing this characteristic, the three revelations occur successively within scenes which have as much in common as the revelations themselves. Each awakening is the climax of a recurring dramatic sequence, a stable pattern embracing illusion, *anagnorisis*, and compensatory action. The de-

---

especially 68); R. M. Torrance, "Sophocles: Some Bearings," *HSCP* (1965) 30–34; U. Parlavantza-Friedrich, *Täuschungsszenen in den Tragödien des Sophokles, Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte* 2 (Berlin 1969) 25–31; more recently, S. E. Lawrence, "The Dramatic Epistemology of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Phoenix* 32 (1978) 288–304, and A. Roselli, "Livelli del conoscere nelle *Trachinie* di Sofocle," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* N. 7 (Pisa 1981) 9–37.

<sup>8</sup>In truth, the reversal of perceived motives is here enacted twice over: as Heracles explores the roots of his deadly entrapment, his belief in Deianeira's supposed vendetta is first replaced by the knowledge that she had been trying to recapture his love. But this is only a partial enlightenment, and leads to a new question: if the poison was a mere "love-charm" to Deianeira, by whom had she been deceived, and what were the motives of her deceiver? Almost at once, the charade of Deianeira's love-magic is exposed as the tool of the centaur's (all too genuine) revenge. In the final scene, therefore, the analysis of hidden motives is brought to bear successively on a pair of interacting agents (Deianeira and Nessus), with the result that the succession of opposing forces comes full circle: Deianeira's seeming "vendetta" is effaced by the knowledge of her pathetic bid for love, whereupon her "love-charm" is exposed as a mask for the centaur's real vendetta.

tails of this pattern can be summarized most convincingly in the form of a three-stage sequence, as follows:

1. The central character has received a gift, accompanied by a message claiming to reveal what the gift is and how it should be used. Invariably, this message disguises the true nature of the object it pretends to reveal. (The "gifts" of the three scenes are, respectively, Iole [δῶρον, 494], Nessus' *pharmakon* [δῶρον, 555], and the anointed robe given to Heracles [δῶρημ', 776].)
2. The character absorbs the message, accepts the disguised gift, and then acts, putting the gift to use. Invariably, however, the result of this action is disastrous: as revealed by some shocking metamorphosis, the beguiling object shows itself to be an instrument of destruction. Needless to say, it is at this stage that the awakenings occur: having seen the gift change its aspect, the recipient also sees that s/he has been living under a delusion ever since the "salutary" object came into view.
3. After this bitter awakening, the disillusioned character embarks on a desperate, compensatory work (ἔργον): if it is too late to undo the disaster wrought by the backfiring gift, timely action may at least forestall its most damaging consequences.

Having summarized the pattern, let us briefly outline its three specific manifestations in the *Trachiniae*.

SCENE ONE: The play's first "gift" (δῶρον, 494) is an appealing slave, one of the group of captive women taken as spoils from Oichalia [1]; when Deianeira duly admits the captives into her house, this gesture itself prompts the messenger to reveal that one of the "slaves" is her husband's new bride. In retrospect, the image of the "maiden" Iole undergoes a portentous change [2]. After presenting the appearance of a hapless and virginal slave, she is seen at last by Deianeira as a seductive force, a virtual creature of Eros and Aphrodite. The same features which, a moment ago, made the "captive" stand out appealingly from her companions now cause her freshness and sensitivity to be re-experienced in a threatening light.<sup>9</sup> Stricken by the change that has suddenly altered her view of this winsome girl, Deianeira has recourse to compensatory action [3]: she will prepare and send a "return gift" to Heracles in the form of a love-charm, a substance fraught with magic

<sup>9</sup>There is of course no real (metaphysical) change behind this *anagnorisis*, but the appearance of Iole is suddenly seen to make sense in a context wholly different from that in which she was introduced by Lichas. The result is that her beauty, well remembered from her presence on stage, suddenly takes on a new meaning and "aura" in the light of the messenger's true account. As one astute writer has noticed, the concrete visibility of Iole at the center of the scene actually enhances this mysterious effect: Parlavantza-Friedrich speaks aptly of "eine . . . durch das Optische erfassbare Ambivalenz" (above, n. 7, 26).

power to rekindle her husband's affections. (The application of this drug is called an *ergon*: τοῦργον, 586 and ἔργου, 670.)

SCENE TWO: Deianeira's second gift (παλαιὸν δῶρον, 555) is the *pharmakon* she received many years ago from the dying centaur [1].<sup>10</sup> She now puts this gift to use, applying the drug to a robe in accordance with the centaur's instructions.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the "love-charm" is suddenly transformed [2] into a devouring poison. (Of course, no one sees the *pharmakon* undergo a change; rather, its daemonic power is revealed in the transformation of the object it has touched, an innocuous tuft of wool. This event, inconsequential in itself, is portentous because of what it reveals about the

<sup>10</sup>In this *ergon*, Deianeira will use the substance that came to her as a gift from the centaur; by this means, she will attempt to compensate for the painful gift she received in the first episode. But this act (applying the *pharmakon*) will also form the first stage of the pattern in its next incarnation. In this way, the first and second scenes are effectively spliced (indeed, they overlap). But note that Deianeira's "return-gift," including the pregnant message that will accompany it, is mentioned for the first time within the boundaries of scene one (492–495). For a brief discussion of gift exchanges in the *Trachiniae*, see Ruth Scodel, *Sophocles* (Boston 1984, Twayne's World Authors Series) 33–34.

<sup>11</sup>In the abstract, Deianeira's role at the start of Scene Two might be compared to Heracles' role in Scene One. Without perceiving her action as retaliatory, the wife turns the tables on her husband, sending him as a "gift" (δῶρα, 494; δῶρημ', 603; δῶρημ', 776) a dangerous object masked by assuaging words. Heracles is taken in by the words, accepts the gift, and suffers pain, just as Deianeira did at his hands. But this parallel is offset by an important difference: in the first scene, Heracles did not himself plot to conceal Iole's identity. The intrigue was devised by Lichas, who had his own motive for misrepresenting his gift to Deianeira (δῶρον, 494), and expressly absolved his master of any will to deceive (479–483). Insofar as she practices a calculated deception, Deianeira in the second scene resembles the deceiving Lichas (not the brusquely candid Heracles) of the first; by concealing part of the truth from Lichas she now turns the tables on the herald who forbore to tell his mistress everything he knew. But then the parallel (disingenuous Deianeira = disingenuous Lichas) is not exact either; for whereas the deceitful Lichas was himself fully conscious of the truth, the same cannot be said of Deianeira, who knows that the robe contains a drug, but is herself deceived about the drug's true nature and function. (The "love-charm" she carefully hides from Lichas conceals the destructiveness of Nessus' original gift to her [παλαιὸν δῶρον, 555].) Deianeira comes to realize in the second scene that she has become the unwitting instrument of the centaur's guile, just as (in the first) she had succumbed to the guile of Lichas. In the second scene, therefore, Deianeira replays the passive role she played earlier; in short, this is the first scene all over again, but woven into a complex, many-layered fabric.

In other ways too, the second scene is a replay of the first. For example, the first *stasimon* (a sort of "prologue" to the second scene) harks back to the eve of Deianeira's marriage, especially the contest of Heracles and Achelous; but this was also the theme of the real prologue, which supplied the backdrop for Scene One (cf. 6–35 with 503–530, especially 22–25 and 523–525). (On the first *stasimon*, see M. Van der Valk, "Remarques sur Sophocle, *Trachiniennes*, 497–530," *REG* 80 [1967] 113–129; Jones [above, n. 7] 189; Easterling [above, n. 7] 63; G. Gellie, *Sophocles: A Reading* [Melbourne 1972] 64.) At the start of both scenes, Deianeira consults with the Chorus about her prevailing anxiety; and then, in both segments, the opening sequence is followed by a festive ode in which the return of Heracles is heralded with nuptial joy and the music of flutes. (Cf. 205–224 with 632–662, especially 216–217 and 640–642.)

"love-charm.") Once again, Deianeira responds to bitter enlightenment by resorting to compensatory action [3]. As soon as her worst fears have been confirmed by Hyllus, she resolves to kill herself in order to avoid the ignominy of being known as Heracles' "sole" slayer (μόνη, 775). Deianeira's suicide is her last *ergon* (933).

SCENE THREE (exodos): Heracles' "gift" (δῶρημα, 758; δῶρημ', 776; τὸ δῶρον Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ πόμπιμον, 872) is the ceremonial robe carried by Lichas from Trachis to Ceneum [1]. Following Deianeira's instructions, Heracles dons the robe and begins to kindle the sacrificial fires. As a result, the poison in the robe is activated by being exposed to heat, and the hero's "vestment" suddenly transforms itself [2] into a deadly, corrosive snare. As before, the transformation wrought by the *pharmakon* is made visible through its effect on a tainted object. Here, however, the "object" undergoing metamorphosis is the hero's own body. (The toxic fabric, clinging to his side "as if glued by a craftsman" [768], causes the poison to reveal itself in the corroded outlines of Heracles' once-heroic form.) Both in Hyllus' description of the aborted sacrifice (765–787) and in the hero's subsequent unveiling on stage (1076–1080), the deterioration of his legendary form is placed squarely before the spectator's mind and eye. Finding his person and reputation incongruously diminished by a woman, Heracles, in keeping with the pattern of earlier scenes, now yearns to compensate for his plight through timely action [3]: to offset shameful defeat, he will salvage honor by slaying the "treacherous" Deianeira, and will enlist his son as an ally in this misguided exploit (see 1064–1070, 1107–1111).<sup>12</sup>

In this last segment, it is clear that, although the three stages of the pattern have already been documented, all but the third have occurred offstage and are thus narrated rather than dramatized.<sup>13</sup> At the third stage, moreover, where the pattern calls for compensatory action, the retributive slaying of Deianeira is never called an *ergon* (with good reason: it is an "act" which can no longer be carried out). Meanwhile, we have arrived only at the threshold

<sup>12</sup>Heracles' initial program of action in the exodos is doubly misdirected: (1) Deianeira has by now placed herself beyond the reach of vengeance, and (2) morally speaking, she had never been guilty in the first place. But the hero's misbegotten thirst for revenge is the product of an equally misconceived "enlightenment." Once the *pharmakon* made itself felt inside the robe (i.e., at the sacrifice in Euboea), Heracles absorbed and reacted to this painful fact under the impression that Deianeira knowingly used the robe as a weapon. In this way a plausible half-truth wrought havoc with his moral judgement. The tragic effect of this misunderstanding is treated sensitively by C. H. Sorum, "Monsters and the Family," *GRBS* 19 (1978) 66–68. On the vulnerability of virtue, the debt it often owes to happenstance, and the importance of all this to tragedy, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1986), esp. 1–21, 278–294.

<sup>13</sup>Note, however, that Heracles' Euboean awakening is recapitulated on stage in the form of his first long *rhesis* (1046–1111), where it coincides with a literal awakening from sleep.

of the truly important events of the exodos: Heracles' great *anagnorisis* and the extraordinary deeds that stem from it. Presumably, the anomalous pattern of the exodos has something to teach us, so it is important to ask exactly how and why the third *anagnorisis* differs from its predecessors. Is the pattern breaking down, or have its familiar elements emerged in an unfamiliar shape?

While on stage, Heracles will indeed experience an awakening [2] and then embark on a fresh course of action designed in part to mitigate the pain of what he has just learned [3]. To this extent, the exodos mirrors the pattern of the first two scenes. But the awakening dramatized in the exodos is unique in this respect: it follows on the heels of a premature, deluded "recognition" whose distortions it serves to correct. At Cenaeum Heracles "awoke" to the realization that his wife had snared him in a deadly robe to pay him back for marrying Iole. Since the hero as yet knew nothing of Nessus or his bogus love-charm, this first, offstage "enlightenment" was thoroughly distorted. So a second awakening is needed to enlarge upon the revelations of the first. It is Hyllus (pressed into service as co-agent in the slaying of Deianeira) who finally tells his father the truth about the *pharmakon*: while Deianeira thought of it as a "love-charm," the real *pharmakeus*, the agent who understood the true nature of his fatal gift, was the vengeful centaur. Liberated by this knowledge, Heracles ceases to be obsessed with the thought of killing his wife, and drops his ill-conceived and untimely vendetta against her.

But merely to think of this pregnant moment is to recall that the unveiling of Nessus is incidental to the wider revelations it inspires. First, as a dead slayer, Nessus provides the solution to an "ancient" oracle which foretold that Heracles would die at the hands of a "dweller in Hades" (1161). Thereupon, the clarification of this older prophecy entails the re-clarification of the "newer" one,<sup>14</sup> which had explicitly foretold the outcome of the Heracleian labors. If the dead Nessus is the hero's fated slayer, then the oracle predicting a "release from struggles" at this time referred to nothing other than Heracles' impending death as a victim of the centaur's ruse (1169–1171). Suddenly, the correction triggered by the last awakening embraces much more than Heracles' recent misadventure in Euboea. The relationship of his

<sup>14</sup>Whereas the older prophecy has not been heard before now, the "younger" one is by no means new to the drama, having accompanied and helped to shape the action since the prologue. Current interpretations seem to reflect a consensus that, despite shifting clauses and time-frames, there is in truth only one oracle in the play (not counting the "Nessus Oracle," said to be "older" than the prophecy from Dodona, 1165). See W. Kranz, "Aufbau und Gehalt der Trachinierinnen des Sophokles," *Sokrates, Zeitschrift für das Gymnasialwesen* 17 (1921) 34–39; Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*<sup>2</sup> (Göttingen 1954) 205; E. Bächli, *Die künstlerische Funktion von Orakelsprüchen, Weissagungen, Träumen, usw. in der griechischen Tragödie* (Winterthur 1954) 44–45; E.-R. Schwinge (above, n. 7) 95–103 (B.5 "Die dramatische Verwendung der Orakel") and A. Machin (above, n. 1) 152–162 ("Un cas particulier: les oracles dans les Trachiniennes").

onstage enlightenment to his earlier awakening in Cenaean (a skewed discovery, obviously in need of revision) is mirrored in its relationship to each of the play's two previous revelations as well.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, so broad is the area over which the last *anagnorisis* casts its transforming light that the hero (who always thought he would "fare well," 1171) sees the meaning of his whole career suddenly changed in retrospect.

As a clarification of two old prophecies, Heracles' final awakening entails an implicit re-interpretation of his laborious past, starting from that point (twelve years ago) when the newer oracle was pronounced at Dodona. Heracles sees that the prophecy relating to his labors, though it appeared to fulfil itself earlier in Euboea,<sup>16</sup> is instead coming to fulfilment now; that the pivot of his fate was not, after all, his own attack on Oichalia, but the success of Nessus' revenge; that his imminent death in the robe will not forestall his "release from struggles," because it was destined to be this release; and finally that these things did not happen by accident, but were "meant" to happen exactly as they have fallen out in the story.<sup>17</sup> The name "Nessus," pronounced in passing by Hyllus, has triggered a revelatory chain-reaction at the end of which Heracles grasps the oracles in a new sense, while the events of the recent past, viewed in the light of the oracles' clarification, appear suddenly charged with new meaning. This retrospective transformation, which causes the whole drama to be seen in an altered light, is the intellectual matrix of Heracles' extraordinary deeds in the exodos. Let us now turn our attention to these puzzling deeds.

First the awakening, then the *ergon*. This rhythm, already well established in the drama, achieves its ultimate realization in the exodos. To begin with, let us recall that this is not the hero's first recourse to action in the final scene. Just as his true awakening on stage replaced a preliminary, miscon-

<sup>15</sup>I.e., to the twin awakenings of Deianeira. Each of Deianeira's two false deliverances presupposed that Heracles, for his part, would be "delivered" into an untroubled existence in Trachis. When she thought she had singlehandedly wrecked this bright future, Deianeira made haste to kill herself. But the truth disclosed to Heracles in the final scene carries the implication that her initial assumptions were as groundless as his, and that by misconceiving his "deliverance" she misconceived her own as well. Heracles' comprehensive awakening belatedly undercuts the basis of her tragic despair by showing (even more tragically) that the future she thought she ruined had never been in the cards to begin with.

<sup>16</sup>In its initial version (79–81), the Dodona-oracle ties Heracles' decisive ordeal to a specific location (Euboea, 79). This seems to back up the characters' assumption that the hero's fate was to be decided by the outcome of his battle in Oichalia. But they are as mistaken about the exact setting of his fateful struggle as they are about its substance. In truth, the fateful Euboean struggle descends upon Heracles not at Oichalia but at Cenaean (likewise in Euboea), while the "release" he thought to solemnize by his victory-sacrifice awaits him on the pyre of Mt Oeta.

<sup>17</sup>It is not just that Heracles' hope of earthly bliss has been suddenly negated (in fact, this hope had already vanished in the smoke of his failed victory-sacrifice). Rather, Heracles recognizes at the last minute that his hopeful expectations, based as they were on an inevitable misreading of "Rest from Toils," have been groundless from the start.



ceived "awakening" in Euboea (recapitulated on stage in the hero's long *rhesis*), the *erga* which now flow from his enlightenment are themselves replacements for an earlier "work," desired but (perforce) never carried out. That is, if his awakening cleared away the mental residue left over from his belief in Deianeira's "treachery," it now propels him toward actions that completely override his earlier impulse to kill her. But we have also observed that, in his last *anagnorisis*, the hero's eyes were opened to a great deal more than the specific facts which had eluded him at Cenaeum. In addition, Heracles' awakening superseded the revelations experienced earlier by Deianeira, not by nullifying the facts she had seen so clearly, but by exposing the wider, grimmer context in which these facts reveal their true significance. The point is that a similar effect can now be seen in the case of Heracles' climactic Trachinian deeds: they redeem a great deal more than the misguided energy that made him want to punish Deianeira. In short, if Heracles' last awakening is retrospective, his ensuing *erga* are literally retroactive; for (whether or not their agent sees them in these terms) the hero's climactic deeds, viewed in relation to their failed Euboean forerunners, are not new *erga* at all, but the same *erga* reshaped and redirected toward a new *telos*.

The play's last *ergon* is really a composite of two "works" (designated by the singular in 1157, τοῦργον). The first work (ἔργον, 1187) will consist in the building of the pyre and in the hero's self-immolation, a multiple task to be performed by Hyllus and Heracles acting together as "allies" (1175). The second (and more problematical)<sup>18</sup> of the two acts will consist in the marrying of Iole (see 1250, ἔργον), and here the agent is to be Hyllus alone, acting as his father's heir and stand-in. Since we are dealing with a composite, bipartite *ergon* the question raised by this twofold "labor" should itself be posed in double form: besides trying to fathom the inspiration for both acts, we must try to understand why there are two.

Clearly, the meaning of these actions somehow reflects the changed reality projected by the newly transparent oracles.<sup>19</sup> But before tracing its effect

<sup>18</sup>On the persistence of this problem, see J. K. MacKinnon, "Heracles' Intention in his Second Request of Hyllus," *CQ* NS 21 (1971) 33–41, and D. Seale, *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles* (Chicago and London 1982) 214, n. 47. Tradition traced the descent of the Heraclidae to the union of Hyllus and Iole, and this may well be relevant to the exodos (see below, n. 25); but it should be noted that the mere existence of this tradition leaves the esthetic question unresolved: does the marriage of Hyllus have roots within the *Trachiniae*, or is it an unassimilated appendage? The latter position was long ago defended with great incisiveness by Ivan Linforth ("The Pyre on Mount Oeta in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Univ. Cal. Publ. in Class. Philol.* 14 [1952] 255–267). It is essentially the challenge implied by Linforth's arguments that this article seeks to address.

<sup>19</sup>That the *erga* flow directly from the clarification of the oracles is readily proved: Heracles is prepared to act the minute he understands the prophecies; indeed, it is precisely because he needs to enlist Hyllus' aid in performing new *erga* that he bothers to communicate his vision of the oracles at all (see 1157–1158).

on Heracles' behavior, let us first recall what this new reality replaces. Gone for good is the dream that the hero would be "released from toils" into a life of guaranteed felicity (in Trachis); and gone as well is the illusion that the Oichalian victory had now brought this visionary life into being. These beliefs were the fond premise of everything the characters did in the body of the play, even when the oracle itself was least in evidence. In particular, Heracles, by acting on this premise, initiated a *pair* of epic fiascoes, one revealed in the first scene, the other in the second. With high hopes, he sent Iole to Trachis as the initial step in what should have become his new marriage; then, to celebrate his "salvation," he dedicated a new *temenos* to Zeus and therein tried to kindle a victory-sacrifice.<sup>20</sup> But both these acts, in keeping with their shaky existential foundation (both, i.e., a mistaken view of the oracle), emerged as pitifully truncated gestures in their own right; at Cenaeum, the fires of the hero's sacrifice never touched their chosen victims, but turned instead to attack the fatefully-robed celebrant; on stage, the early arrival of Iole, by kindling the spark that would make the "sacrifice" misfire, caused the hero's marriage to be abandoned before it bore any fruit.<sup>21</sup> Conceived and launched in blindness, the hero's deeds in each of the first two scenes have emerged as suspended or abandoned "works," a legacy of human failure.

But would nothing further come of these ruined gestures? On the face of it, it seems improbable that both the misplaced marriage and the aborted sacrifice could somehow be reconstituted before the drama's end. Yet the revival of these acts (in a transformed shape) is exactly what the hero accomplishes in the second half of the exodos. In effect, Heracles re-inaugurates the two abortive *erga* of the first and second scenes, after detaching them from the humanly gratifying ends toward which they were originally aimed. If they seem almost unrecognizable in their new guise, it is because they have now been adapted to that other end, the grim catastrophe toward which the story has been covertly moving from the start. On the one hand, a victory-sacrifice will be played out as a ritualized self-immolation; on the other, the wedding of a hero will be reinstated as a distasteful marriage he imposes on his son. But though both *erga* have undergone a radical change of form, though they have become "gratifying" to their author in a thoroughly paradoxical sense, these acts are nevertheless revived in such a way as to recover their thwarted *telos*, becoming what they were always meant to be, but could not have been before: a perfected sacrifice, a fruitful marriage.

Whereas in the temporal dimension the deeds of the exodos are extended

<sup>20</sup>For a somewhat different approach to the significance of marriage and sacrifice in play, see Charles P. Segal, "Marriage et sacrifice dans les *Trachiniennes* de Sophocle," *AntCl* 44 (1975) 50-73.

<sup>21</sup>The successful poisoning of Heracles, to which Iole herself made an indispensable contribution, guaranteed that the bridegroom would never enter the bridal house.

beyond the body of the play, in metaphysical terms they are less an extension of the drama than a transformation of its existing elements. Just as Heracles is on the point of succumbing to the centaur's vendetta, his behavior reverts to the pattern it had begun to assume when the poison first attacked him. (In the interim, his mind has been distracted by Deianeira's seeming ambush and by his own impulse to slay her in return; before that, the hero had been making preparations for an elaborate sacrifice, after sending Iole to Trachis as his *damar* [428].) No sooner are his illusions dispelled in the exodos than Heracles' activity returns to the channels from which it had been diverted at Cenaeum: arranging a sacrifice to coincide with the end of his labors and establishing Iole as *damar* in Trachis. These, the central acts of the drama, having first been (mis)conceived along "epic" lines, are finally enacted in a tragic shape and atmosphere.<sup>22</sup>

What is the exact relationship of these acts, as reconstituted in the exodos, to their orphaned predecessors? If the Euboean fires veered away from their intended victim to strike the priest himself, Heracles will re-inaugurate the sacrifice in such a way that priest and victim are made one. At a single stroke, an act begun in the past is metamorphosed in response to the sudden clarification of its fated context. In this transfigured shape the deed will be enacted under fresh auspices in such a way as to regain its elusive *telos*. To be precise: the sacrifice will be offered to the same god and celebrated by the same priest (even garbed in the same "vestments"); but the unwilling victim of the Euboean fires will now become the target of deliberate ceremonial violence; and, this time, the ceremony will not backfire.

As for the second *ergon*, the plot again resolves its impasse by means of a deft substitution. There will be a marriage after all, involving the same bride, consummated in the same house, and extending Heracles' line through Iole just as surely as if the hero had married her himself. Only the generation of the bridegroom will change: the bride whose beauty helped destroy a father and a mother will give life to a posterity through the son.

Is the spectator meant to foresee, beyond the pyre of Mt Oeta, the out-

<sup>22</sup>As a sacrifice and marriage, the hero's new works reproduce the theme of his earlier actions, but transpose this theme from a major to a minor key. The motives for his acting, e.g., have become severely negative: on the pyre of Mt Oeta the hero's pain and sickness will be "healed" (that is, cut short) by purifying fire (1206–1209); as the wife of Hyllus, Heracles' hard-won bride will be in no danger of falling to an unworthy successor (1224–1226). Charles P. Segal, who also notes the connection between the rites at Cenaeum and those of Mt Oeta (see *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* [Cambridge 1981] 101), has written very thoughtfully of the contrast between epic and tragic heroism at the end of the *Trachiniae*: see "Sophocles' 'Trachiniae': Myth, Poetry, Heroic Values," *YCS* 25 (1977) 99–158, at 157–158, and "Eroismo tragico nelle 'Trachinie' di Sofocle," *Dioniso* 45 (1971–74) 107–119. But Segal's handling of the tragic Heracles is somewhat blunted by his own contention (elsewhere) that the hero has advance knowledge of the pyre's curative role (*Tragedy and Civilization* 99: "secret knowledge . . ." and "mysterious knowledge . . ."). Cf. V. Ehrenberg, "Tragic Heracles," in *Aspects of the Ancient World* (New York 1946) 144–166.

lines of Heracles' impending apotheosis? The theory we have proposed might be extended to embrace the view that Heracles' coming deification has indeed left its mark on the design of the *Trachiniae*.<sup>23</sup> For if it is true that the twin *erga* of the exodos emerge as replacements for the two failed acts portrayed at the drama's center, it is also true that this corrective process acquires a deeper meaning when seen against the background of the hero's posthumous destiny. It may be theorized that Heracles was not after all mistaken in anticipating, on the strength of the oracle's promise, that the termination of his labors would coincide with the beginning of an untroubled life. On the contrary: in orienting itself toward such a goal his ambition was prophetically on target; it is just that, of necessity, he was looking for its realization within the wrong time-frame and on much too narrow a scale.<sup>24</sup> As it is, Heracles' destiny will realize itself in two simultaneous and parallel extensions, one Olympian and one earthly, each depending on one of the two *erga* commissioned in the final scene: from the blazing pyre Heracles himself will be elevated to the plane of effortless, ever-youthful divinity; and from the marriage of Iole and Hyllus will spring the Heraclidae, in whose collective person the events of the drama will become tied to known history.<sup>25</sup> These, the twin foundation-acts of the Heracleian future, are here

<sup>23</sup>The author has already committed himself to the view that the Dodona-oracle embodies an intimation of Heracles' extraordinary afterlife (see *Hoia an Genoito: A Study of the Oracles in Sophocles' Trachiniae and Ajax* [diss., Princeton University, Princeton 1969]), and remains convinced that the meaning of the prophecy discloses itself most fully to those who read its terms within the broadest possible perspective (see next note). Prof. Segal has conveniently summed up the arguments in favor of bringing Heracles' apotheosis to bear on the interpretation of the *Trachiniae* at *Tragedy and Civilization* . . . 99–100. For a careful statement of the opposing view, see T. C. W. Stinton, "The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy," in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays Presented to D. J. Conacher* (Calgary 1986).

<sup>24</sup>On this hypothesis, Heracles will achieve on a transcendent level the very rewards he strove in vain to achieve in the world. In order to do this, however, he must first turn his back decisively on the delusive vision of earthly happiness which drew him on through the course of his conventional labors. It is just this volitional about-face which informs the substance of his final "labors" in the *Trachiniae*, accounting for their unprecedented grimness and austerity. In the background, meanwhile, the ambiguous Dodona-oracle has orchestrated the entire sequence of labors from start to finish, allowing itself to be understood first in one sense, then in another. But the language of this prophecy always left open the possibility that its fulfilment might coincide with a *telos* lying far beyond Trachis. If, e.g., the prophecy foretold that Heracles would "live happily ever after" (τὸν λοιπὸν ἤδη βίον εὐαίων' ἔχειν, 81; τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη ζῆν ἀλυπήτῳ βίῳ, 167), Heracles naturally took this to mean that he would live untroubled for the rest of his life, whereas the oracle's "ever after" meant, quite simply, *forever*. To extend the hypothesis still further, it might conceivably be suggested that Iole's nubile youth (ἥβην, 547) is likewise destined to have a hypostatized Olympian counterpart in the personified form of Youth itself (Hebe, the deified hero's unaging bride). To imagine the plot extended in these ways is to see that Heracles' Olympian future may cast a kind of negative reflection back over the central events of the drama.

<sup>25</sup>For the siring of the Heraclidae and play's "historical" aftermath in general, see P. E. Easterling, "The End of the *Trachiniae*," *ICS* 6 (1981) 56–74, and C. P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* . . . 103.

enacted in a believable human setting by actors who know nothing of their long-term consequences (1270); appropriately enough, however, the crucial deeds emerge within this context as the very acts through which Heracles ratifies his late-dawning realization that Zeus never meant him to enjoy earthly happiness.

But if the end of the play exposes the story to a transcendent dimension, it does so for the spectator alone: as far as Heracles knows, the only alternative to felicity in the world is descent to Hades (1202), and the hero's final deeds would lack their distinctive moral gravity if he knew otherwise. That is perhaps the point. In the *Trachiniae* tragic knowledge and action, like death itself, are not the alternative to heroic fulfilment, but its necessary seedbed or crucible.<sup>26</sup> The hero for whom Rest-from-Toils finally means "nothing but" death (1172) nevertheless goes to the blazing pyre as if it were the goal he had been seeking all along, the satisfaction of his lifelong desire. In building the pyre Hyllus will be granting the hero a boon or "grace" (χάριν, 1252), in marrying Iole, a "small grace added to the great one" (χάριν βραχέαν πρὸς μακροῖς ἄλλοις, 1217). He will thereby give "pleasure" to his father's heart (τέρψει κέαρ, 1246), and on the burning pyre, Heracles will complete an unwanted *ergon* "as if it brought joy" (ὡς ἐπὶ χαρτον, 1262). This language, too, may be inadvertently prophetic; but to the speaker himself it is pure gallows-irony, expressed through clenched teeth (1261). For Heracles comes to his final labors precisely by way of renouncing (or sublimating) the hedonistic motivation that has hitherto reconciled him to a life of struggle. Having abandoned the will to final ease, he actively embraces "numberless and unparalleled pains" (πολλὰ δὲ πῆματα καὶ καινοπαθῆ, 1277) without foreseeing any compensation at all. His last *ergon* is therefore "against his will" (ἀεκούσιον, 1263) to an even greater degree than its painful predecessors; but the hero will embrace it all the same, "as if it were a source of pleasure" (1262: without, that is, echoing the complaints of poor, bewildered Hyllus [1266–1269]). As a result, the hero's "laboring," detached from its earthly motive, purged of all but the most elementary self-interest, entails this consequence at last: the same acts which make the hero's immortalization physically possible also guarantee that he deserves it.

This judgement is primarily an implication of the exodos, for it is here that Heracles begins to negotiate the difficult passage from human to divine status. And yet the dimensions of the tragic heroism which he thereby attains are reflected organically in the design of the whole drama. In particular, their measure is taken by the structural feature noted above (i.e., by the way in which the *erga* of the first and second scenes are found, in retrospect,

<sup>26</sup>The characters at first feel moved to frame the oracle's promise in the form of alternatives (79–81, 164–170): at the appointed time Heracles will either die or commence a new and better life. The uniqueness of Heracles as a hero is summed up in the fact that for him alone *both* alternatives come true and do so in such a way that each is finally seen to involve the other.

to have been a blind rehearsal for those of the third). Since the positive side of this reduplication is lost on Heracles, it is only in the most bitterly ironic sense that his final "pleasures" could be said to replace, in his own eyes, the marriage and inaugural sacrifice he tried to enact in the first two scenes. But this irony has a dramatic purpose and was surely meant to be felt. For the sympathetic spectator it is a means of perceiving how steeply the hero's earthly fortunes have declined in a day, and yet how "stoically" he enacts what are to him the terminal consequences of his life's disillusion.

The foregoing analysis cannot claim to offer more than a partial solution to the riddles of the exodos. On the matter of structure, however, we hope to have established these points: first, the bipartition of the *Trachiniae* should be viewed in the context of the *three* parts upon which its "diptych"-structure has been superimposed; second, though we should not stop looking for parallelism and contrast in the fates of Heracles and Deianeira, comparative study might henceforth stand to gain from this observation: Heracles' role does not recapitulate the whole sweep of his wife's unhappy story, but re-enacts (with illuminating differences) each of two parallel segments into which her tragedy is evenly divided.

Finally, we suggest that if the *Trachiniae*'s structure can fairly be said to describe an AAB-pattern (or, better still, a design expressed by the formula: A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>), it is no accident that its organization mirrors that of the single trilogy which survives intact from antiquity.<sup>27</sup>

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS  
MIAMI UNIVERSITY  
OXFORD, OHIO 45056

<sup>27</sup>Nothing can be said with confidence about the form of any trilogy except the *Oresteia*. (For a fresh survey of the evidence, see T. Gantz, "The Aeschylean Tetralogy: Prolegomena," *CJ* 74 [1979] 289–304, and "The Aeschylean Tetralogy: Attested and Conjectured Groups," *AJP* 101 [1980] 133–164.) On the AAB-pattern in trilogic design, see C. J. Herington, "Aeschylus: The Last Phase," *Arion* 4 (1965) 387–403; that such a pattern underlies the distribution of themes in the *Oresteia* is a consistent implication of C. W. MacLeod's luminous treatment of the trilogy: "Politics and the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 102 (1982) 124–144 = *Collected Essays* (Oxford 1983) 20–40.

Thanks are due to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the year-long grant under which these ideas were first developed. The author is also grateful for the comments of Professors Friedrich Solmsen and Bernard M. W. Knox, who read an earlier version of this paper.