

Heracles and Heroic Disaster

by

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*For my parents, Calvin and Florence Lu,  
who first taught me the importance of the text*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"Disaster" is not a word commonly associated with Heracles, the most popular and victorious hero of ancient Greece. Heracles plays a bewildering variety of roles in Greek culture, but his reputation rests primarily upon his civilizing mission: defeating monsters, punishing villains, imposing order upon the wild. These acts convey obvious benefits to the surrounding human community and earn Heracles a glorious reputation. Yet, despite the centrality of his identity as a culture hero, a persistent strain of mythological tradition documents how he exercises his superhuman skills to harm the innocent, wreaks havoc upon his own family, and lets erotic attachment undermine his heroic missions. These shameful disasters were a frequent subject of media ranging from monumental sculptures to pots to poetry throughout the Greek world, often in direct counterpoint to portrayals of his praiseworthy exploits.

This study explores the treatment of Heracles' violence, lust, and mania in both visual images and literary texts from the sixth through third centuries B.C. These portrayals demonstrate how his tendency towards destructiveness becomes increasingly problematic as he is incorporated further into civic and social life as a positive exemplar. My analysis of Heracles' disasters suggests that this stubborn tradition indicates a recurring anxiety over the violence and excess so salient in his traditions. Heracles thus becomes an ideal figure through



which poets and painters could express doubts about the real costs of heroism, propose new definitions of excellence, and question the righteousness of Zeus himself. By tracing the shifting boundary between heroic benefaction and heroic disaster, my study clarifies the very definition of ancient Greek heroism, while illuminating its limits as well.

## Heracles and His Disasters

I begin by proposing a few definitions that will govern this discussion. I define heroic success as victory in a competition that requires superior strength, technique, or tactics; these components encompass both βία (sheer physical dominance) and μῆτις (mental acuity). Triumph in these competitions must constitute some form of social good: in defeating threatening monsters and lawless humans, for example, a hero physically shields vulnerable people from fear and damage and protects the rule of *nomos*. He advances civilization and imposes order upon the earth. The hero who fights for the winning side in war acquires fame and precious trophies; furthermore, he helps his allies and hurts his enemies. Athletic competitions for honor between peers provide a governing structure for working out rivalries; victory confers bragging rights without requiring the death of the defeated. In each of these cases, because the competition is considered socially valuable, the victor is celebrated in song and poetry. These songs of praise glorify the deeds of the victor and encourage others to emulate him. Epinician poetry, in particular, aims to re-integrate the returning athletic victor into his society.<sup>1</sup> The most successful victor, then, accomplishes multiple goals: he must defeat

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<sup>1</sup> For an assessment of Heracles in Pindar, and how Pindar shapes his Heracles as a representation of his poetics, see M. P. Nieto Hernandez, "Heracles and Pindar," *Mètis* 8, no. 1 (1993): 75–102.

his opponents, bring fame to his family and city, and also manage a socially harmonious homecoming that does not arouse excessive envy of gods or fellow man.<sup>2</sup> The hero, then, is marked by his achievement of socially beneficial victories that are considered broadly significant by others.

I define heroic disaster as the consequences of using heroic strength, technique, or tactics to create destruction and chaos rather than social benefit. Instead of enforcing the customs of human order and civilization, these disasters threaten boundaries, destroy recklessly, and engender instability. These conspicuously negative actions – e.g., the unjustified sacking of a city, the murder of the innocent, the rape of a virgin priestess – are manifestly not to be imitated. Yet, at least in Heracles' case, his disasters continued to serve as the subject of song and art. Heracles' most famous disasters are the maddened murder of his wife Megara and their children and his death at the hands of his second wife Deianeira, who was jealous over his destructive lust for Iole. This study will also consider his unheroic collapse upon the loss of his *erōmenos* Hylas during the Argonauts' expedition, while his use of violence in the service of accomplishing his Labors will be subject to scrutiny as well. These tales of lust and violence occupy a prominent place in his saga, requiring an assessment alongside his positive achievements. Ultimately, my findings will illuminate the reasons why Heracles' failures are never wholly suppressed, but are used instead as vehicles for criticizing heroism and its aims, proposing new definitions of excellence, and questioning Zeus' judgment.

Heracles is not the only hero to fall into heroic disaster. In fact, trouble seems intrinsic to heroism, whether in literature or in cult. On the literary side, Ajax commits suicide after he

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<sup>2</sup> Kurke's study on epinician's mediation of relationships between victor and household, aristocratic community, and polis, has become standard: Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

is humiliated before his peers; Agamemnon, at the triumphant moment of accomplishing his *nostos*, falls at the hands of his unfaithful wife and her lover; Oedipus, despite his intentions, becomes the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother. Few heroes die quietly, surrounded by loving family and friends. Often, the very traits that compel a hero to success also lead to his destruction. For example, Odysseus' proud spirit contributes to the sacking of Troy, but also causes him to taunt the Cyclops, drawing a curse that extends his wandering and ensures the death of his comrades. Achilles' bloodthirsty love for victory impels him to accomplish feats in war; this same impulse directs him to allow Patroclus to enter battle with the Trojans, resulting in the death of his dearest associate.

Cult heroes are often disaster figures as well. There are many types of hero cults, but the cult of athletic heroes is a particularly salient comparison for Heracles, founder of the Olympic Games and patron of the gymnasium. Fontenrose has identified a common narrative pattern to the establishment of these cults: an athlete wins remarkable victories, suffers injury or disappointment, brings destruction upon fellow citizens in revenge, and is in turn punished or rejected. This draws the anger of the athlete after death, causing calamity for the athlete's city, and his violence is appeased only by the god's direction to establish a continuous cult.<sup>3</sup> The power of the cult figure is connected to anger and failure and requires propitiation. Thus the aetiology of these cults is associated directly with heroic disaster.<sup>4</sup>

Heracles' affinities with the disasters of literary and cult heroes are clear. Yet he is a unique figure, distinct in his treatment in both categories. As a recipient of cult worship, Heracles occupies an ambiguous position as *hērōs theos* (Pindar, *Nem.* 3.22), and thus received a

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3 Joseph Fontenrose, "The Hero as Athlete," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 1 (1968): 76–9.

4 For a study of the political aspects of the heroization of athletes, see Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120–57.

hybrid form of ritual worship.<sup>5</sup> His cult was pan-Hellenic, in sharp contrast with worship typically centered at the site of a tomb. More than one region claimed his origin (Thebes, the Argolid), and his resting place had no location (though Mt. Oeta remained associated with his death). Moreover, Heracles occupies a benign, overtly positive cultural role not usually attributed to local heroes. That is, a typical hero cult figure who represents anger and *tisis* is not problematic in the same way as Heracles, whose cult was associated more with deification than revenge. (But this study is not centrally concerned with Heracles' role as a cult hero, as I will address in more detail in the following section.)

Among literary heroes, Heracles' ability to accomplish glorious feats and tendency to be caught up in calamity are extraordinary. He encapsulates in a single career the far extremes of heroic success and heroic disaster. No hero experiences the depths to which Heracles falls when he slaughters his own wife and children in a fit of madness, yet he still goes on to ascend the heights of Olympus to recline with the gods alongside an immortal wife. Moreover, he commands special attention because the sheer ubiquity of his presence – from the stage to coinage to temple sculpture – allows for a close assessment of the spectrum of heroic action.<sup>6</sup>

Heracles' life represents the pinnacle of heroic success. His *kleos* knows no limits, and seemingly neither did his strength. His travels took him beyond the boundaries of the inhabited world, both to the West and the East. The Labors imposed on him by Eurystheus –

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5 For a brief survey of the evidence, see Emma Stafford, *Herakles* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 171–97. She discusses the rituals related to Heracles both at Athens and elsewhere in "Héraklès: encore et toujours le problème du *heros-theos*," *Kernos* 18 (2005): 391–406.

6 For a wide-ranging discussion of the breadth of Heracles' roles, see, e.g., Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972); Stafford, *Herakles*; Mark William Padilla, *The Myths of Herakles in Ancient Greece: Survey and Profile* (University Press of America, 1998). In addition to these studies, the discussions of Heracles in broader mythological studies are useful: see G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 176–212; Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: a Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 374–466.

and Hera – were designed to be impossible, yet each proves conquerable under his strength and commitment. Three of his Labors are so fantastic, requiring journeys beyond the known mortal realm, that Heracles' accomplishment of them signals his transition into godhood; these are Labors to retrieve the Cattle of Geryon, the Apples of the Hesperides, and Cerberus. In addition to his Labors, Heracles earns fame for other significant victories: he aids the gods in their battle with the Giants,<sup>7</sup> punishes criminals like Syleus and Cycnus, and defeats the Centaurs and Amazons. For these reasons, Heracles serves as a symbol of glorious victory, a *kallinikos* hero, and thus becomes in literature and art a figure worthy of emulation. Twelve of Heracles' Labors are displayed on the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, where Heracles supposedly established the Olympic Games in honor of his father, and his image presides over the gymnasium and its training grounds.<sup>8</sup> So strong is his association with victory that Pindar repeatedly returns to him as a subject of both exposition and comparison for his victors. His cult worship reached from Sicily to Thasos and beyond, and his popularity as a figure on vases reveals his ubiquity in private households.

Yet Heracles' incredible willpower and physicality are also conducive to episodes of heroic disaster. Strikingly, his disasters are often presented as closely linked to his successes. Though celebrated for protecting vulnerable travelers, he slaughters his helpless wife and children. His proficiency at sacking cities allows him to repay Laomedon for his treachery at Troy, but also to destroy Oechalia in order to rape Iole, acts which eventually lead to his own death at the hands of Deianeira.<sup>9</sup> Because he travels beyond the *oikoumenē*, he alone can kill

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7 Though no large-scale literary treatment of Heracles' battle with the Giants survives, the event is well-attested in vase paintings. See Frank Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage* (Marburg: Elwert, 1973), 63–7.

8 For a detailed discussion of each metope with drawings, see Frank Brommer, *Heracles: The Twelve Labors of the Hero in Ancient Art and Literature* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1986).

9 For a survey of the disastrous relations between Heracles as the "Superman" and his "women-folk," see D.L. Pike, "Heracles: The Superman and Personal Relationships," *Acta classica* 20 (1977): 73–83.

peaceful Geryon or destroy the peace of the Hesperides' Garden, deeds which can be and are framed as both glorious and problematic. In these negative acts, Heracles harms the undeserving, creates destructive havoc, and brings ruin upon himself.

Thus the correspondence between Heracles' praiseworthy actions and blameworthy calamities is remarkable. With Heracles, it seems, victory itself is suspect or leads to outright calamity. This study will explore Heracles' disasters – a topic that has received scant attention – in relation to the very traits that make him a successful hero. For the stark contrast between his positive accomplishments and negative calamities provokes a persistent anxiety about defining heroism and assessing heroes' lives. Despite his spectacular failures, Heracles is rewarded with a singular fate – he becomes a god alongside the Olympians and is reconciled with his divine antagonist, Hera, the mother of his new wife, Hebe. Heracles thus assumes a status far higher than one already typically accorded to heroes, who receive specific cult worship, particularly at the site of their burial.<sup>10</sup> Yet in literature and poetry, Heracles' exemplarity is suspect: for, as much as he ought to be imitated, he also becomes an example to be avoided.

I argue that it is Heracles' apotheosis in particular that generates the deep anxiety over his failures.<sup>11</sup> For along with the belief in Heracles' divinity came an increasing emphasis on his status as an exemplary figure of heroism. In becoming a god, Heracles achieves the highest

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10 The specific difficulties engendered by Heracles' dual afterlife are addressed in Emily Kratzer, "The Double Herakles: Studies on the Death and Deification of the Hero in Fifth-century Drama" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2010).

11 Nilsson attributes the origin of the divinity of Heracles to cult (Martin P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, vol. 8, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1932), 204–5). For a summary of the evidence for Heracles' apotheosis, with a special focus on lost works, see Philip Holt, "Herakles' Apotheosis in Lost Greek Literature and Art," *L'antiquité classique* 61 (1992): 38–59. For a strange argument that Heracles – "the Glory of Hera" – was originally a title given to the husband of Hera in a remote period before the development of Zeus, see F. Carter Philips, "Heracles," *The Classical World* 71, no. 7 (1978): 431–440.

status and is distinguished from all other heroes of Greek mythology. Adorned with the ultimate prize, Heracles thus establishes himself as the ideal figure for others – ephebes, athletes at the gymnasium, warriors – to emulate. I believe further that his apotheosis is the crucial tradition that allows for the later development of many of Heracles' positive roles.<sup>12</sup> For example, Prodicus presents a philosophical Heracles who refuses immediate pleasures, instead choosing short-term suffering in order to secure long-term reward; Prodicus' decision to use Heracles as the allegorical center of this dilemma is persuasive and explicable only in light of the belief that Heracles *does* achieve the highest reward possible (*Xen. Mem.* 2.1.21-34).<sup>13</sup> Heracles' apotheosis also makes him an ideal figure for his most visible use in the Hellenistic period, when Alexander the Great and his successors assimilated their portraits to Heraclean imagery on widely disseminated coins. The use of Heracles plays up their pride in their military conquests; even more importantly, their appropriation of a deified Heracles supports their claim to ruler cult. Heracles' amazing accomplishments thus shift from providing proof of his divine parentage in Zeus to justifying his eventual reward.

As Heracles' position as role model and moral ideal solidifies, his disasters became more troubling, almost demanding some sort of explanation or rationalization. This strain begins to grow more apparent in the sixth century. Though a myth of Heracles' deification may have circulated earlier, its popularity blossomed in the sixth century, when Heracles' introduction to Olympus began to appear on Athenian cups, vases, and temples, and divine worship was

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12 For a recent discussion of Heracles' defeats of Death, Sleep, and Old Age, and how they contribute to the development of Heracles as an allegorical figure of Virtue, see Emma Stafford, "Vice or Virtue? Herakles and the Art of Allegory," in *Herakles and Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, ed. Hugh Bowden and Louis Rawlings (Swansea [Wales]: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 78–88. Murray claims that once Heracles had been "stamped" with the title "Best of Men," he had to change as "the idea of goodness changed" (Gilbert Murray, "Heracles, 'The Best of Men'," in *Greek Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 123).

13 See Mary Kuntz, "The Prodikeyan 'Choice of Herakles': a Reshaping of Myth," *The Classical Journal* 89, no. 2 (1993): 163–181.

supposedly accorded to him in Attica.<sup>14</sup> Beginning around 560 B.C., Heracles appears frequently on black-figure and red-figure vases, often accompanied by Athena, approaching Zeus on foot or by a chariot.<sup>15</sup> Even more prominent was the poros pediment on the Archaic Acropolis that portrays Zeus and Hera, enthroned, receiving Heracles, who arrives on foot with Athena.<sup>16</sup> This study thus takes its starting point from the sixth century, using the poetry of Stesichorus as the first textual material that reveals a struggle to reconcile Heracles' ultimate success and notorious violence.

This discrepancy between the unique favor shown to Heracles in his ascent to Olympus and his destructive acts generated an enduring anxiety about Heracleian heroism. This study will examine the tension between Heracles' successes and disasters, the anxiety it elicits, and the strategies adopted by Greek poets for resolving that tension. I will approach these subjects with a variety of research questions: what are the narratives of disaster, and for what purpose are they used? How are they treated differently over time, from the sixth century B.C. to the third century B.C.? Heracles' disasters are usually presented in counterpoint to his victories. What are the dynamics of the relation between the two poles of heroic action? How does the case of Heracles apply more widely to heroism in general? And how do these findings shape

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14 The claim that Heracles was first worshiped as a god by the Athenians comes from late sources: Diodorus (4.39) and Pausanias (1.15.3). See also discussion in M. L. West, *Theogony* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 417. Scholars such as Boardman have seen the hand of the Peisistratids in the overwhelming popularity of Heracles in sixth-century Athens. However, Huttner surveys the evidence and argues that Heracles' ubiquity may or may not be attributed directly to the influence of the tyrants; he insists instead that the nature of the relationship between Heracles and the Peisistratids remains impossible to determine (Ulrich Huttner, *Die politische Rolle der Heraklesgestalt im griechischen Herrschertum*, (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997), 25–42).

15 See LIMC V.1 2847–2904, with Boardman's commentary in V.2 p. 131–132.

16 Athens, Acropolis Museum 9. The pediment probably belonged to one of a number of small structures that stood on the sixth century Acropolis. See Brunilde Ridgway, *The Archaic Style in Greek Sculpture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 202–4. A competing interpretation, that Heracles is entering the Underworld in order to capture Cerberus and approaching an enthroned Hades and Persephone, is acknowledged in Jeffrey M. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis: History, Mythology, and Archaeology from the Neolithic Era to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112.



the very meaning of heroism?

## The Literature

These questions, which examine the conflict between heroic success and heroic disaster, direct this study towards the intersection of two venues of scholarship: studies of Heracles and studies of heroism. A brief review of the literature will illuminate my contribution to each.

Literary scholarship on Heracles tends to fall into two types of studies: a small-scale study of Heracles' role in an individual text or a broadly wide-ranging survey of Heracles across multiple genres and even centuries. The overwhelming variety of Heracles' traditions tends to enforce this dichotomy. The standard philological article on Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, for example, can remain a neatly self-enclosed work. Once the focus of a literary study is expanded, however, it is difficult to rein it in: Heracles continues to be a figure of great importance in the Roman period, through Late Antiquity and the Renaissance, and, of course, the modern era. His continuing popularity obscures the point at which "reception" begins.

An early example of a wide-ranging study of Heracles is Schweitzer's 1922 analysis, which examines separately the twelve labors, the physical monuments, and the literary evidence, in comparison with other European sagas.<sup>17</sup> His inquiry is an improvement over the "mythological handbook" style of discussing Heracles, but nevertheless does not offer much in

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<sup>17</sup> Bernhard Schweitzer, *Herakles, Aufsätze zur griechischen Religions- und Sagengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1922).

the way of synthetic analysis. Karl Galinsky's *The Herakles Theme* stood, until very recently, as the standard work on Heracles from the Archaic period to modern times.<sup>18</sup> His sensitive treatment of nearly every aspect of the Heracles cycle remains indispensable. Emma Stafford's new *Herakles* approaches Heracles' life with a similar chronological breadth, organizing each chapter by "theme," like the other volumes in Routledge's "Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World" series.<sup>19</sup> Her text, aimed primarily at students, dutifully presents the earliest literary and artistic sources for her analysis, which covers much the same ground as Galinsky's. However, her attention to post-classical variations of Heracles distinguishes her study and is welcome. Alistair Blanshard's *Hercules: a Heroic Life* revisits the same range of material as Galinsky, but aims directly at a non-specialist audience.<sup>20</sup> These studies reveal the extraordinary multiplicity of Heracles and his traditions, but purposely avoid proposing an argument or thesis that could unite the varied evidence. What they do trace is Heracles' evolution from a figure of terrifying violence to a model of moral endurance. My dissertation will explore this shift and suggest explanations for not only how, but why, it occurs.

The amount of scholarship that investigates Heracles in single episodes or texts is abundant, and this bibliography will be addressed in the individual chapters that follow. Four conferences specifically on Heracles in past 25 years have yielded published compilations of papers, a testimony to European (particularly Francophone) interest in the subject.<sup>21</sup> All four

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18 Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme*. For a similarly all-encompassing look at Heracles in visual images, see Jaimee Uhlenbrock and Karl Galinsky, *Herakles: Passage of the Hero Through 1000 Years of Classical Art* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1986).

19 Stafford, *Herakles*.

20 Alastair Blanshard, *Hercules: a Heroic Life* (London: Granta, 2005).

21 Corinne Bonnet and Colette Jourdain-Annequin, eds., *Héraclès: d'une rive à l'autre de la Méditerranée: bilan et perspectives: actes de la Table Ronde de Rome, Academia Belgica-Ecole française de Rome, 15-16 septembre 1989*, vol. 28, *Etudes de philologie, d'archéologie et d'histoire anciennes* (Bruxelles: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1992); Colette Jourdain-Annequin and Corinne Bonnet, eds., *Héraclès, les femmes et le féminin: Ile rencontre héracléenne: actes du Colloque de Grenoble, Université des sciences sociales (Grenoble II), 22-23 octobre 1992, Ile rencontre héracléenne*

volumes are wide-ranging, addressing Heracles from the perspectives of archaeology, art history, gender studies, cultural studies, etc. Longer in-depth studies of a single text, such as Papadopoulou's on Euripides' *Heracles*, provide an insightful "snapshot" of Heracles' appearance.<sup>22</sup> However, because the focus is limited to one text, the study is unable to address fully the implications of the *refiguration* of Heracles, which requires looking back and looking ahead (see discussion below). A few longer essays seek to place Heracleian heroism within the context of a larger tradition, such as Fuqua's "Heracles, Heroism, and the *Trachiniae*."<sup>23</sup> But again, they treat one disaster within its context, without drawing together and integrating an analysis of Heracles' range of failures, which I argue is necessary for a broader understanding of the outlines of heroic activity.

This dissertation will straddle the divide between the long-range survey and narrowly-focused study of Heracles. The foundation of my research is the fine-grained philological analysis of Heracles' roles in specific texts. By addressing multiple texts written over a span of four centuries, the study will be synthetic in nature, able to trace a specific phenomenon through time and across genres. But because the inquiry is guided by a defined set of questions about heroic disaster and the definition of heroism, the study will stand apart from the broad surveys discussed above. Given the limitations of current research on Heracles, it comes as no surprise that no work has examined Heracles' dark side as an ongoing subject of anxiety over

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(Bruxelles: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1996); Corinne Bonnet, Colette Jourdain-Annequin, and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, eds., *Le Bestiaire d'Héraclès: IIIe Rencontre héracléenne: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Liège et aux Facultés universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix de Namur, du 14 au 16 novembre 1996*, vol. 7, Kernos Supplément (Liège: Centre internationale d'étude de la religion grecque antique, 1998); Hugh Bowden and Louis Rawlings, eds., *Herakles and Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity* (Swansea [Wales]: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005).

22 Thalia Papadopoulou, *Heracles and Euripidean Tragedy*, Cambridge Classical Studies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

23 Charles Fuqua, "Heroism, Heracles, and the *Trachiniae*," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 1–81.

time. Thus, this research offers a significant advancement on the understanding of Heracles as a figure expressing cultural meaning from the Archaic through Hellenistic period.

These questions concerning heroic disaster also situate this dissertation within studies of heroism. My study of heroic success and heroic disaster elucidates the boundaries of Greek heroism because Greek heroism remains poorly understood, despite its popularity as subject for discussion. "Heroism" is a term that is easily tossed about, yet few attempt to define it with any rigor. One of the goals of this study is to give the concept of the hero some "teeth" by grappling with the dark side of heroism, expanding the notion of what heroism can entail or must reject.

In the study of the Greek religion, the term "hero" denotes any figure who receives hero cult worship.<sup>24</sup> The rituals of hero-cult are distinct from the worship of divinities, and are emphatically local; worship of a hero focuses on the geographic area where his tomb resides.<sup>25</sup> Heracles' cult enjoyed wide popularity across all of Greece, helped no doubt by his dual cities of origin (Tiryns and Thebes), extensive travels, and lack of a tomb.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, his function as a cult hero will not be a major focus of this study. For though Heracles as a cult figure was undoubtedly present in the background of his literary presentations, the direct evidence provided by cult itself is scattered.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the questions about heroic disaster that I

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24 See Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes*, especially pp. 60-70, on the different uses of the word *hērōs*, beginning with the Bronze Age. For more on the open-ended nature of the religious cult hero, see C. P. Jones, *New Heroes in Antiquity: From Achilles to Antinoos*, vol. 18, *Revealing Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

25 See Gunnel Ekroth, *The sacrificial rituals of Greek hero-cults in the Archaic to the early Hellenistic periods*, vol. 12, *Kernos Supplément* (Liège: Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque antique, 2002).

26 The place most closely associated with Heracles' death is Mount Oeta. Archaeological evidence on the mountaintop may indicate an old fire cult that became a festival celebrating Heracles' death pyre. See my chapter on Sophocles' *Trachiniae* below, and Margalit Finkelberg, "The Second Stasimon of the 'Trachiniae' and Heracles' Festival on Mount Oeta," *Mnemosyne* 49, no. 2 (1996): 129-143; Carolin Hahnemann, "Mount Oeta Revisited: Sophocles' 'Trachiniai' in Light of the Evidence of Aeschylus' 'Herakleidae,'" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 126 (1999): 67-73.

27 For work on Heracleian cults, see Birgitta Bergquist, *Herakles on Thasos: The Archaeological, Literary and Epigraphic*

pursue are difficult to access through ritual. But the importance of Heracles in heroic and divine cult only underlines the significance of understanding his flaws. Instead, this study will look at heroes as shaped by literature and art. Heroes in literature (non-religious) sometimes remain in intimate relationship with their identities as cult heroes (religious), but though their traditions are often in parallel, they are also not entirely overlapping.

One locus of studies on heroism focuses, unsurprisingly, on the Homeric epics, and on Achilles and Odysseus in particular. They and their peers constitute our earliest evidence for heroes in literature. Yet Nagy can write an entire book about "concepts of the hero in Archaic Greek poetry" without ever explicitly stating how he identifies "the hero."<sup>28</sup> For him, being the subject of Homeric song seems to be qualification enough. And because he views hero-cult and the poems as closely-related, he elides the difference between literature and cult. Others attempt to define the Homeric hero through adherence to a system of values. For example, Schein offers a simple definition of the hero in the *Iliad* – "a warrior who lives and dies in the pursuit of honor and glory" – and goes on to discuss Achilles as the ideal representative.<sup>29</sup> But already by the *Odyssey*, those values seem to have shifted.<sup>30</sup> Odysseus, by contrast, is most renowned for his *polytropos* nature and endurance of endless trials, though his display of martial prowess in his palace lends him the necessary Iliadic credibility.

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*Evidence for His Sanctuary, Status and Cult Reconsidered* (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1973); Lewis Richard Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, Gifford Lectures (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 95–174; Susan Woodford, "Exemplum Virtutis: a Study of Heracles in Athens in the Second Half of the Fifth Century B.C." (Unpublished dissertation, Columbia, 1966), 8–53; Susan Woodford, "Cults of Herakles in Attica," in *Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann*, ed. David Gordon Mitten, John Griffiths Pedley, and Jane Ayer Scott (Mainz: Verlag P. von Zabern, 1971), 211–25.

28 Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). He comes closest in his discussion of how the figure of Homeric epic relate to the Myth of the Five Generations in Hesiod's *Works and Days*; see pp. 151–173.

29 Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 69.

30 See, for example, the reassessment of Achilles, explored in Anthony Edwards, *Achilles in the Odyssey*, vol. 171, *Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* (Königstein: Hain, 1985).

But in defining Homeric heroism through a particular value system, this scholarship does not account for cases in which a hero falls short of those values. Although these studies acknowledge the costs of heroism and moments when heroes acquire notoriety or blame, they nevertheless do not explore how these moments (which seem to affect all such heroes) limit their definition of heroism or shape our evaluation of heroic activities. These weaknesses have a cascading effect. For Homer's epics are so dominant and so little survives of other archaic epics that the study of the "epic hero" tends to conform closely to the Homeric hero. The literary scholarship on Apollonius' *Argonautica* illustrates this phenomenon, much of which is preoccupied with whether Jason manifests the values of the Homeric hero or not.<sup>31</sup>

Another focus of study has been the hero in the genre of tragedy. But here, the terms "tragic hero" become even more vague and undefined. Is the subject someone who is already considered a hero and shows up in the medium of the tragedy? Or is the subject considered a hero only *because* he or she appears in the tragedy (e.g., Electra, Antigone)? Sometimes the term hero seems to be synonymous with protagonist, a phenomenon that tends to manifest itself most frequently in Sophocles studies. The Sophoclean hero, in Knox's formulation, is "a single personality facing the supreme crisis of his life"; through action, he or she – though immoderate or stubborn – inevitably attains a greatness that Aeschylus and Euripides' inventions could never surpass.<sup>32</sup> Knox's hero becomes great through a difficult choice between actions; this formulation seems to follow Aristotle's *Poetics*, which declares tragic "character" (ἦθος) to be "that (utterance) which reveals a (moral) choice" (ἔστιν δὲ ἦθος μὲν τὸ τοιοῦτον ὃ

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31 Apollonius' overt interest in interacting with the Homeric epics certainly invites this comparison, but one suspects that any epic would be measured by Homer's anyway.

32 Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*, vol. 35, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1964), 3.

δηλοῖ τὴν προαίρεσιν, 50b8-9).

This emphasis on choice is limiting, even for the tiny proportion of fifth-century tragedies that have survived. Tellingly, Knox's study does not discuss the *Trachiniae*; for Heracles faces no such choice, nor does Deianeira seem to fit the mold of Knox's austere Sophoclean hero. Rather than identifying a type of hero based on perceptions about each tragedian's global outlook, my discussion of Heracles in Sophocles and Euripides will start from direct observations from the play: the texts identify Heracles as a hero based on his well-known accomplishments and victories; the plays then go on question that definition of heroism by staging acts very different from – but closely related to – those accomplishments. In clarifying each play's treatment of Heracles' individual disasters, the investigation will likewise illuminate each play's definition of heroic success. For Sophocles depicts a Heracles who is successful in his actions but brutally selfish, while Euripides' Heracles instead displays a heroic *aretē* defined by its commitment both to victory and *philia*. These observations, among others, will therefore bring rigor to the definition of the hero by examining how heroic success is measured against heroic failure, and whether and how a hero can be rehabilitated after disaster.

### A Few Words on Methodology

My approach to analyzing Heracles' heroic disasters is flexible and eclectic. No one theoretical orientation guides my analysis as a whole. This is owed in part to the subject of my

study, the treatment of Heracles as a mythological figure. In his classic *On the Nature of Greek Myths*, Kirk asserts, "my own conviction, nevertheless, is that there can be no single and comprehensive theory of myths – except, perhaps the theory that all such theories are necessarily wrong."<sup>33</sup> Kirk attributes the difficulty of applying a single theory to the multifunctionality of myths, a characteristic of myth in general that applies just as strongly to Heracles specifically.

The source material of my study also enjoins an eclectic approach. Because I work with texts and images from various genres and periods, I must also be responsive to the different concerns and aims of each. My commitment to using material evidence alongside poetry, while hardly unusual in studies of mythology, nevertheless requires the employment of multiple types of "reading," whether of an image or a text. This interdisciplinary approach shares an affinity with *Altertumswissenschaft*, the nineteenth-century German approach to scholarship that "embraced all aspects of the ancient world including religion."<sup>34</sup> Because this work traces the handling of Heracles over time, I am conscious of the relevance of shifting historical and cultural contexts for interpreting my sources. My approach is thus influenced in some ways by New Historicism. For example, I assume that the subject matter and presentation of fifth-century tragedy can reflect contemporary social anxieties and civic concerns, as demonstrated by Goldhill.<sup>35</sup> However, I resist the notion that literary texts must reflect a one-to-one correspondence with specific historical events or figures, not least because some of my sources lack precise dates.

Because I examine multiple texts dispersed across multiple centuries, my study is by

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33 Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 38. See his discussion of "Five Monolithic Theories" (pp. 38–68).

34 Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300 to 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 183.

35 Simon Goldhill, "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 58–76.



necessity discontinuous; however, this design permits me to develop a longer perspective on the treatment of Heracleian disaster. I will approach the texts essentially as evidence for the ancient reception of Heracles' traditions. The mythological cycle of Heracles is very old indeed, whether or not Nilsson's assertion of a Mycenaean origin or Burkert's analysis of Heracles as an Indo-European animal-taming figure are plausible.<sup>36</sup> In Segal's Structuralist reading of myth, "the patterns of myth function below the level of full consciousness across all the codes of the social structure."<sup>37</sup> But my interest is less in the origins and generation of the Heracles myths or how they might reflect the deep recesses of the human psyche. Rather, this study is based on depictions of Heracles in literature and art, that is, his mythological traditions as shaped and influenced by artists and poets in the historical period. The broad array of episodes that comprise Heracles' life provides a wealth of mythical material to the interested poet. I argue that every time the poets deliberately choose to represent Heracles' disasters in juxtaposition with his success, they present a specific challenge to heroism; this study documents those cases and explores not only how Heracles' disasters are portrayed, but also why these portrayals persisted. The mythological representation of Heracles could be called "just a story," but this study is founded on the belief that "stories encode values, and our accounts of stories are always value-laden."<sup>38</sup>

Although this dissertation is not a classic reception study, I nevertheless adopt and adapt some of its tools. Hans Robert Jauss, in his 1967 seminal lecture "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," proposes a new theory of *Rezeptionsästhetik*. Following Hans-

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36 Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, 8:187–220; Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, vol. 47, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 78–98.

37 Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*, vol. 26, Martin Classical Lecture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 19.

38 Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*, Roman Literature and Its Contexts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 22.

Georg Gadamer's criticism of historical objectivism, Jauss asserts that "the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works already read."<sup>39</sup> Every reader (viewer, participant) thus comes equipped with a *horizon of expectations*. This horizon shapes the reader's experience, enabling the reader to measure the aesthetic distance between the expectation and the challenge that opposes it. Through this process, a new work, which "at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience," can demand *horizontal change*.<sup>40</sup> Jauss' emphasis is on the continuous, dialogic process of "establishing and altering" horizons:

The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure. The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception.<sup>41</sup>

This theory of the literary experience offers a way of thinking about my study of Heracles. I investigate how each treatment of Heracles operates within its audience's expectations, yet also pushes those boundaries in new directions. For example, Euripides stages Heracles' murder of his family, a well-known tale; but by placing his fit of madness after the completion of his Labors, Euripides defies his audience's horizon of expectations and forces them to consider how even positive heroism can lead to such destruction. My study examines the *refiguration* of Heracles, that is, the process of "selecting and reworking material from a previous or contrasting position" or "the adaptation of a legend or myth by the addition of

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39 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 20.

40 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 25. For a fuller exposition of the dialogicity of the horizon structure, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

41 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 23.

new features."<sup>42</sup> I view the gradual domestication of Heracles between the Archaic and Hellenistic periods as a dialogic process in which Heracles' increasing cultural prominence as a positive force prompts *refigurations* that both question and establish his changing status.<sup>43</sup> As the subject of continuous readaptations, Heracles serves as a suitable subject for this kind of investigation. One of the aims of this study is to shed light on changing notions of Greek heroism, a concept with broad cultural application. Therefore, this dissertation falls into a category of reception studies engaged with larger cultural formations. As Hardwick argues, "Reception studies, therefore, are concerned not only with individual texts and their relationship with one another but also with the broader cultural processes which shape and make up those relationships."<sup>44</sup>

Although my approach is informed by these influences, the actual study itself will not be preoccupied with interpreting ancient material through the terminology of modern literary theory. Instead, I rely on the close reading of texts alongside an examination of the evidence provided by material objects, mainly vase paintings, an important source for the innovations in Heracleian myth. This investigation is centered around the depiction of Heracles' disasters, and how its changes over time reflect shifting social values. It resembles the task attempted on a

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42 As defined in Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies, Greece & Rome*, New Surveys in the Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10, 14.

43 Bernd Effe applies Jauss' theories from "Interaktionsmuster der Identifikation mit dem Helden" (in *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (München: 1977), 212-258) in his article B. Effe, "Der Funktionswandel des Herakles-Mythos in der griechischen Literatur," *Poetica* 12 (1980): 145-66. Effe argues that the audience relates to Heracles in Greek literature through four main modes of identification: *admirativer Identifikation*, *sympathetischer Identifikation*, *kathartische Identifikation*, and *ironischer Identifikation*. These ideas, based on Aristotle's discussions in the *Poetics*, can certainly help articulate the presentation of Heracles in different texts, but I find the division of hero-types to be restricting and schematic, and not necessarily useful for describing the kind of tensions that I argue Heracles embodies.

44 Hardwick, *Reception Studies*, 5. For an argument that classical studies in general should move towards cultural studies, see Simon Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek?: Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). Martindale criticizes Goldhill's view in Charles Martindale, "Thinking Through Reception," in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, ed. Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, *Classical Receptions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 9-12.

smaller scale by Bowersock, who explores the transformation of the "wounded savior" theme in the myths of Philoctetes from Sophocles to Dio and beyond.<sup>45</sup>

These themes and issues will be resumed and explored more thoroughly in the chapters that follow. I am principally concerned with major literary depictions of a few episodes of disaster in Heracles' life, each of which measures Heracles' acts of violence and destruction against his claim to glorious heroism. My first chapter seeks to establish a "trail of havoc" tradition that probes the value of those Labors that are especially associated with Heracles' apotheosis (henceforth, "apotheosis Labors"). In Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*, Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and book four of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, each author deliberately brings out the brutal violence by which Heracles achieves them. Because each of these labors is closely associated with Heracles' immortality, the ambivalence of his victories calls into question Zeus' justice in elevating his son. Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, the subject of my second chapter, dramatizes how the introduction of competitive male rivalry – a required premise for heroic success – into the *oikos* destroys Heracles and his family.

The clearest challenge to the value of Heracleian violence is posed by Euripides' *Heracles*, which presents Heracles' defeat of Lycus in the same epinician terms as his murder of his family. My third chapter explores how Euripides proposes a new definition of *aretē* in order to present a Heracles redeemed in the end. My fourth chapter returns to the *Argonautica*, in which Heracles suffers complete failure and exclusion from the expedition when Hylas disappears. I

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45 G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian*, vol. 58, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 55–76. His study of Philoctetes, part of a larger assessment of the relationship between fiction writing and historical writing in the Second Sophistic, reveals how Sophocles' emphasis on Philoctetes' physical suffering, visible and audible agony, and distasteful wound was found unappealing to later audiences; the changing social and historical contexts in the next centuries, especially in Imperial Rome, required a kind of sanitization of Philoctetes in order to make him an acceptable hero. Bowersock's exploration of Philoctetes thus highlights Roman conceptions of suffering and salvation.

argue that Apollonius first frames Heracles as the ideal model of a hero for Jason, so that his exclusion from the heroic endeavor should signal to Jason the dangers of erotic attachment, a lesson he will ignore in his relationship with Medea. I will investigate how these texts use Heracles' disasters to question his heroism.

### A Prelude: Unproblematic Archaic Violence

The pointed critiques of heroism discussed above stand in contrast to an earlier Archaic tradition, in which Heracles' reckless violence is shown simply as destructive. In these episodes, Heracles is a negative figure of violence, without the conflict that arises from remembering that he must be a hero worthy of divinity. Here I will provide a brief assessment of these sources – the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and images of Heracles' struggle with Apollo for the tripod and murder of Linus – in order to lay a foundation for my study. In the *Iliad*, our earliest literary source, Heracles is portrayed as a powerful but untamable figure and a mortal hero from an older, more distant generation.<sup>46</sup> His exploits are embedded in the mythological background of the poem's events and treated as part of the common history of both gods and mortals.<sup>47</sup> Nestor mentions Heracles in passing as a force of destruction: "Heracles' force

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46 Liapis describes "the prevailing mood" of Heracles' presentation in Homer as "one of disparagement or of pathos" (Vayos Liapis, "Intertextuality as Irony: Heracles in Epic and in Sophocles," *Greece & Rome* 53, no. 1 (2006): 48). Effe argues that the "ambivalent-negative" role of Heracles may reflect his hostile reception among Homer's audience of the "Schicht adliger Grundbesitzer" (Effe, "Der Funktionswandel des Herakles-Mythos in der griechischen Literatur," 148). See also Scodel's argument that the epics treat earlier generations of heroes as physically superior, but less pious: Ruth Scodel, "The Modesty of Homer," in *Oral Performance and Its Context*, ed. C. J. Mackie, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 7–12.

47 For a survey of evidence for Heracles in pre-historic hero cult and its impact on his presentation in Homer, see Claude Baurain, "Héraclès dans l'épopée homérique?," in *Héraclès: d'une rive à l'autre de la Méditerranée: bilan et perspectives: actes de la Table Ronde de Rome*, Academia Belgica-École française de Rome, 15-16 septembre 1989,

afflicted us during years past, and so many of our best died" (ἐλθὼν γάρ ῥ' ἐκάκωσε βίην Ἡρακλεΐην / τῶν προτέρων ἐτέων, κατὰ δ' ἕκταθεν ὅσοι ἄριστοι, 11.690-1). Hector kills a man whose significance lies in being the son of the herald who carried orders from Eurystheus to Heracles (15.638-40). These elliptical references provide little detail or context, implying that the audience is already familiar with these incidents. Likewise, the narrative locates the vantage point of the gods during battle by referring to a heaped-up wall that sheltered Heracles in his flight from the sea monster on the plain of Troy (20.144-8). The poet thus indicates an expectation that his audience could recognize the very spot, as if one generation of Trojans pointed out the legendary landmark to the next (and perhaps they did).

Although Heracles' feats seem well-known, he is nevertheless limited as a role model in the *Iliad*. No Greek hero articulates a desire to imitate him, even though Heracles' oeuvre includes defeating armies and sacking cities. In fact, a generation earlier Heracles has already sacked the same city the Greeks besiege, Troy. There is one exception, however: the only fighter who calls upon this comparison is his own son, Tlepolemus. Tlepolemus uses the example of his father to taunt Sarpedon, a fellow son of Zeus:

ψευδόμενοι δέ σέ φασι Διὸς γόνον αἰγιόχοιο (635)  
εἶναι, ἐπεὶ πολλὸν κείνων ἐπιδύεαι ἀνδρῶν  
οἳ Διὸς ἐξεγένοντο ἐπὶ προτέρων ἀνθρώπων·  
ἀλλ' οἷόν τινά φασι βίην Ἡρακλεΐην  
εἶναι, ἐμὸν πατέρα θρασυμέμονα θυμολέοντα·  
ὅς ποτε δεῦρ' ἐλθὼν ἔνεχ' ἵππων Λαομέδοντος (640)  
ἐξ οἴης σὺν νηυσὶ καὶ ἀνδράσι παυροτέροισιν  
Ἴλίου ἐξαλάπαξε πόλιν, χήρωσε δ' ἀγυιάς·  
σοὶ δὲ κακὸς μὲν θυμὸς, ἀποφθινύθουσι δὲ λαοί. (5.635-43)

They lie when they say you are the son of aegis-bearing Zeus, since you fall far short of those men who were born of Zeus in previous generations. But of a different sort was

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ed. Corinne Bonnet and Colette Jourdain-Annequin, vol. 28, *Études de philologie, d'archéologie et d'histoire anciennes* (Bruxelles: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1992), 67-105.

mighty Heracles, they say, my father – brave in spirit, lionhearted. He once came here for the horses of Laomedon, accompanied by only six ships and a few men, but he sacked the city of Ilium and desolated its streets. But *your* heart is cowardly, and your people are perishing.

Tlepolemus' description of his father emphasizes his distance from the generation of heroes in the Trojan War. In fact, Nestor's first-person recollection of Heracles, discussed above, may do more to indicate Nestor's great age than embellish Heracles' reputation. Tlepolemus' account is redolent of legend: his father sacked the whole city of Troy *almost singlehanded*. Yet the comparison with Heracles, intended to shame Sarpedon because of his shared ancestry as a son of Zeus, reflects badly on Tlepolemus instead. For the young Greek is a member of the much larger fighting force assembled by Agamemnon, an army that unsuccessfully assaults Troy for ten years, before finally overcoming its walls with a guileful trick. Moreover, though Tlepolemus manages to wound Sarpedon severely, Sarpedon kills him.

Before Sarpedon throws the fatal spear, he affirms that Heracles' actions against Laomedon were justified, based on Laomedon's treachery (5.648-51). Yet even in this case of justified violence, Tlepolemus' presence is a reminder of Heracles' darker legacy. For Tlepolemus sails to Troy from Rhodes, the place where he sought refuge after "he suddenly killed his father's dear uncle Licymnius, once a famous warrior, now grown old" (αὐτίκα πατρὸς ἐοῖο φίλον μήτρῳα κατέκτα / ἤδη γηράσκοντα Λικύμνιον ὄζον Ἴρηος, 2.662-3). This sudden, unexplained spat of youthful violence directed against a vulnerable person is not uncommon among heroes, but it is especially suitable for a son of Heracles, whose uncontrolled violence leads him to kill his teacher Linus, and later, fight the gods themselves.

The unbridled violence of Heracles comes into greater focus as a comparandum for Diomedes' unrestrained *aristeia*. After Aphrodite is wounded in battle by Diomedes, Dione

comforts her with the reminder that even more warlike gods have suffered wounds from mortals:

τλῆ δ' Ἥρη, ὅτε μιν κρατερὸς πάϊς Ἀμφιτρύωνος  
δεξιτερὸν κατὰ μαζὸν οἴστῳ τριγλώχινι  
βεβλήκει· τότε καί μιν ἀνήκεστον λάβεν ἄλγος.  
τλῆ δ' Αἴδης ἐν τοῖσι πελώριος ὠκὺν οἴστον, (395)  
εὐτέ μιν ὠτὸς ἀνὴρ υἱὸς Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο  
ἐν Πύλῳ ἐν νεκύεσσι βαλὼν ὀδύνησιν ἔδωκεν·  
αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ πρὸς δῶμα Διὸς καὶ μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον  
κῆρ ἀχέων ὀδύνησι πεπαρμένος· αὐτὰρ οἴστος  
ὦμῳ ἐνι στιβαρῷ ἠλήλατο, κῆδε δὲ θυμόν. (400)  
τῷ δ' ἐπὶ Παιήων ὀδυνήφατα φάρμακα πάσσων  
ἠκέσατ'· οὐ μὲν γάρ τι καταθνητός γε τέτυκτο.  
σχέτλιος ὄβριμοεργὸς ὃς οὐκ ὄθετ' αἴσυλα ῥέζων,  
ὃς τόξοισιν ἔκηδε θεοὺς οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσι. (5.392-404)

But Hera suffered, when the mighty son of Amphitryon struck her right breast with a triple-barbed arrow, and her pain was incurable. Giant Hades also suffered his swift arrow like the rest, when the same man, the son of aegis-bearing Zeus, struck him – at Pylos, among the dead – and gave him over to severe pains. But he went to the home of Zeus on high Olympus, grieved at heart, wracked with pain. The arrow driven into his stout shoulder distressed his spirit. But Paion, applying numbing drugs to it, healed him, for nothing about him was mortal. Reckless, wrong-doing man, who has no regard for his evil-doing, but distresses with his arrows the gods who rule Olympus!

Dione's condemnation of Heracles is absolute: Heracles is merciless (σχέτλιος) in his use of force and heedless of its consequences (οὐκ ὄθετο). Moreover, what he accomplishes is not justified, but instead considered unlawful (ὄβριμοεργός, 5.403). The emphasis here is the wanton, poorly-directed, and ill-considered use of force, captured in the Homeric formula βίη Ἡρακληεΐη.

But Heracles is not the only *theomachos* in this passage; Dione also describes the Giants' assault on Ares (5.385-91). In implicitly aligning the Giants with Heracles, Dione frames Heracles' actions as not only dangerous, but primeval, chaos-inducing, and destabilizing of the order that governs the universe. (This despite the fact that Heracles was celebrated for *helping*



the gods fight off the Giants, an episode acknowledged in *Il.* 14.250-61.)<sup>48</sup> The sheer audacity of Heracles' attack on the Olympian gods is unnerving, for it blurs the boundaries between god and mortal. Dione strives to reinforce the division in describing the healing of Hades' wound as the privilege of the immortals (οὐ μὲν γάρ τι καταθνητός γε τέτυκτο, 5.402). But Heracles' overreaching nevertheless present a real threat, for Dione also emphasizes the severe physical pain Hera and Hades were forced to endure (τλῆ, ἀνήκεστον...ἄλγος, ὀδύνησιν, ὀδυνήφατα). By causing the gods to suffer physical distress, Heracles also brings them low, closer to the mortal level.

Yet despite Heracles' violence and brazenness, he does not appear to experience negative consequences immediately. Instead, the poem marks him as a specially favored, particularly beloved son of Zeus. Athena bitterly complains to Hera about the services she has rendered Heracles:

οὐδέ τι τῶν μέμνηται, ὃ οἱ μάλα πολλάκις υἱὸν  
τειρόμενον σώεσκον ὑπ' Εὐρυσθηῆος ἀέθλων.  
ἦτοι ὃ μὲν κλαίεσκε πρὸς οὐρανόν, αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ Ζεὺς  
τῷ ἐπαλεξήσουσαν ἀπ' οὐρανόθεν προΐαλλεν. (8.362-5)

[Zeus] does not remember how many times I saved his son, burdened by the labors of Eurystheus. Truly Heracles would keep on crying to heaven, and Zeus would send me down from heaven to defend him.

Athena resents the fact that her favor to Zeus has not been reciprocated in the form of protecting the Greeks from Hector's assaults. She is not interested in how her help saved the hero for his own sake; this is no independent relationship between divine helper and mortal, but worthy, partner. Rather, her aid is contingent on Zeus' indulgent sympathy for his son. And Heracles here is a whiner, a weak warrior who depends on Athena to survive. It is only through

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48 See discussion in Richard Janko, *The Iliad: a Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk, vol. 4 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 191-3.

Zeus' paternal benevolence, combined with Athena's powers, that Heracles survives his descent to Hades for Cerberus.

Zeus' protectiveness of his son is further revealed in Hypnos' reluctance to overwhelm Zeus at Hera's request. For Hypnos remembers the consequences of the last time he cooperated with Hera to harass Heracles: Zeus' wrath nearly overwhelmed him.

ἦματι τῷ ὅτε κεῖνος ὑπέρθυμος Διὸς υἱὸς (250)  
ἔπλεεν Ἴλιόθεν Τρώων πόλιν ἔξαλαπάξας,  
ἦτοι ἐγὼ μὲν ἔλεξα Διὸς νόον αἰγιόχοιο  
νήδυμος ἀμφιχυθείς· σὺ δέ οἱ κακὰ μῆσαο θυμῷ  
ὄρσασ' ἀργαλέων ἀνέμων ἐπὶ πόντον ἀήτας,  
καί μιν ἔπειτα Κόωνδ' εὖ ναιομένην ἀπένεικας (255)  
νόσφι φίλων πάντων. ὃ δ' ἐπεγρόμενος χαλέπαινε  
ρίπτάζων κατὰ δῶμα θεοῦς, ἐμὲ δ' ἔξοχα πάντων  
ζήτει. καὶ κέ μ' ἄϊστον ἀπ' αἰθέρος ἔμβαλε πόντῳ,  
εἰ μὴ Νύξ δμητήριρα θεῶν ἐσάωσε καὶ ἀνδρῶν· (14.250-59)

...on the day when that overweening son of Zeus was sailing from Ilium after sacking the Trojan city. Then I sweetly spread over the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus, lulling him to sleep. But you contrived evil for him in your heart, inciting the blasts of harsh winds upon the sea, and then you carried him off to well-settled Kos, far from his all his friends. But Zeus was enraged when he awoke, tossing gods around the house, and looking above all for *me*. And he would have cast me down from heaven to be covered by the sea, if Nyx, tamer of gods and men, had not saved me.

This episode remains vivid in Zeus' mind as well. As soon as he awakens from Hera's trap to aid the Greeks at Troy, he remembers his anger at her former plot and his vengeance: he strung her up before all the gods as a public demonstration of his superiority over her, and personally whisked Heracles back to Argos (15.18-30). Zeus' punishment of his fellow immortals – Hypnos, his own sister-wife Hera – on Heracles' behalf further designates the hero as one worthy of special protection and pity, at least in the eyes of his powerful father. Zeus' fondness for Heracles is further elaborated in Agamemnon's confession of the proverbial power of Atē: so powerful is Atē's influence that she could ruin even Zeus' plans for Heracles at his birth (19.91-

133).

Yet despite the unparalleled status accorded to Heracles in the *Iliad*, he nevertheless experiences the fate of every mortal: death. So striking is the contrast between Heracles' peculiar glory and his common end that Achilles chooses him as an analogy for his own demise:

οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ βίη Ἡρακλῆος φύγε κῆρα,  
ὅς περ φίλτατος ἔσκε Διὶ Κρονίωνι ἄνακτι·  
ἀλλὰ ἐ μοῖρα δάμασσε καὶ ἀργαλέος χόλος Ἥρης.  
ὥς καὶ ἐγών, εἰ δὴ μοι ὁμοίη μοῖρα τέτυκται,  
κείσομ' ἐπεὶ κε θάνω. (19.117-21)

For not even mighty Heracles escaped his doom, although he was most beloved to Lord Zeus, son of Cronus. But Fate, and the harsh anger of Hera, conquered him. So, too, I – if in fact a similar fate has been prepared for me – will lie there, after I am dead.

The epic periphrasis here – βίη Ἡρακλῆος – emphasizes Heracles' vitality and physical strength, even as Achilles expresses no doubt about Heracles' mortality. Heracles, like every other hero, must die.<sup>49</sup> The strong association between Heracles and *biē* in Homer makes him an especially fitting exemplum for Achilles. As Nagy shows, *biē* is closely associated with both (positive) *kleos* and (negative) *hybris*, an ambivalent term that finds its fullest manifestation in Achilles himself.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, in a poem fundamentally concerned with Achilles' choice to die young in exchange for *kleos*, the use of Heracles emphasizes his death as paradigmatic. Heracles too earns eternal *kleos* – as demonstrated in the poem's remembrance of him – at the cost of a life of suffering and a painful death.

Thus, in the *Iliad*, Heracles lives out the same life cycle as other admired heroes: he accomplishes glorious acts through his own might and the help of the gods, and thereby earns

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49 For a detailed investigation of the implications of mortality for the heroes of the *Iliad*, see Schein, *The Mortal Hero*.

50 Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 318–21.

far-flung *kleos*; nevertheless, he must die. Moreover, although he occupies a place of unique prominence in Zeus' heart, he is also distinguished by his unparalleled violence. The poet of the *Iliad*, unlike the other poets examined in this study, does not problematize his βίη. For all of Dione's condemnation, Heracles does not suffer punishment for his egregious attack on the gods – perhaps because at other points in his career, he serves as a crucial ally of the gods against their enemies.<sup>51</sup> I argue that Heracles' brutality can be understood as uncomplicated here because Heracles is likewise limited in his use as a role model. Because the *Iliad* does not advance the claim that he joins the Olympians in the afterlife, and because the poem relegates his *floruit* to a somewhat distant past, his uncontrolled force somehow escapes criticism.

The *Odyssey*, in a passage possibly altered by ancient interpolation, tries to reconcile the competing accounts of Heracles' ultimate fate by having it both ways. In the following section, I argue that the treatment of Heracles in the *Odyssey*, outside of the suspect lines, is, like his portrait in the *Iliad*, negative; the condemnation of Heracles here does not struggle to align his archaic violence with his coming glory. Thus, my analysis supports the position that the troubling lines are, indeed, a later addition to the text.

In the Underworld, Odysseus encounters Heracles at the end of his interaction with a series of illustrious heroes:

τὸν δὲ μέτ' εἰσενόησα βίην Ἡρακληείην,  
 [εἶδωλον· αὐτὸς δὲ μετ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι  
 τέρπεται ἐν θαλίῃς καὶ ἔχει καλλίσφυρον Ἥβην,  
 παῖδα Διὸς μέγαλοιο καὶ Ἥρης χρυσοπεδίλου.]  
 ἀμφὶ δέ μιν κλαγγὴ νεκύων ἦν οἰωνῶν ὥς,  
 πάντοσ' ἀτυζομένων· ὁ δ' ἔρεμνῆ νυκτὶ εἰοικώς,  
 γυμνὸν τόξον ἔχων καὶ ἐπὶ νευρῆφιν οἴστον,  
 δεινὸν παπταίνων, αἰεὶ βαλέοντι εἰοικώς. (11.601-8)

51 For a full discussion of the scattered evidence in poetry and art of Heracles' aid to the gods in their battle with the Giants, see Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 445-54.

Then I recognized the mighty Heracles – his image, that is – for he himself enjoys the festivities among the deathless gods and holds lovely-ankled Hebe, daughter of great Zeus and golden-sandaled Hera. But around him went up a cry of the dead, like birds, fleeing in every direction. But he, like dark night, carrying a naked bow and an arrow on its string, glared about him fiercely, as if always on the verge of shooting.

Odysseus' encounter with Heracles here presents diametrically opposed evaluations of Heracles' fate.<sup>52</sup> Odysseus seems to catch himself, correct himself with the enjambed *eidōlon*. So abrupt and strange is the insertion of Heracles' pleasures on Olympus that the H scholiast claimed that vv. 602-4 were interpolated by Onomacritus in the sixth century.<sup>53</sup> The vision of a genteel Heracles, enjoying the civilized pleasures of communal feasting among the gods – including his nemesis, Hera – is incredible in comparison with the conduct of the *eidōlon* remaining in Hades. The Heracles residing in the Underworld seems more compatible with the *theomachos* of the *Iliad*. This Heracles is constantly threatening; even in the afterlife, he gives baleful glances at everyone who crosses his path, prepared to engage in a fight at any moment. And the shades around him – even though they are *already dead* – are terrified by his potential violence against them.

Just as Achilles maintains that he takes no pleasure in his former glory after his death, Heracles too views his inimitable career in a negative light:

Ζηνὸς μὲν παῖς ἦα Κρονίου, ἀντὰρ οἴζυν

52 For a discussion of the dynamics of Odysseus' interaction with Heracles in context, see Andromache Karanika, "The End of the Nekyia: Odysseus, Heracles, and the Gorgon in the Underworld," *Arethusa* 44, no. 1 (2011): 1–27.

53 Wilhelm Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam* (Oxford: E. Typographeo Academico, 1855), ad 11.604. A brief summary of the reasons for doubt can be found in William Stanford, *The Odyssey* (London: Macmillan, 1947), vols. 1, 403. West contends that "the deification of Heracles is indeed an indication of lateness" and assesses ancient critical opinion of these lines in the *Odyssey* and similar passages in Hesiod's *Theogony* (947–55) and *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 25.26–33 and 229): West, *Theogony*, 417. Heubeck and Hoekstra suggest that lines 602–4 can remain if the poet here attempts a compromise between popular belief and narrative purpose (Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol. 2 (Oxford University Press, 1990), 114). They admit, however, that such a compromise is "illogical." J. T. Hooker, "The Apparition of Heracles in the *Odyssey*," *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 5 (1980): 139–146, argues that the whole episode, including the *eidōlon*, is genuine.

εἶχον ἀπειρεσίην· μάλα γὰρ πολὺ χεῖροσι φωτὶ  
δεδμήμην, ὁ δέ μοι χαλεποὺς ἐπετέλλετ' ἀέθλους,  
καὶ ποτὲ μ' ἐνθάδ' ἔπεμψε κύν' ἄξοντ'· οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἄλλον  
φράζετο τοῦδέ γέ μοι κρατερώτερον εἶναι ἄεθλον.  
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν ἀνένεικα καὶ ἤγαγον ἐξ Ἄϊδαο... (11.620-5)

Even though I was the son of Cronus' son, Zeus, I experienced untold misery. For I served a man far inferior, who imposed harsh labors on me. Once he even sent me to retrieve the Hound, for he did not think any other task could be more difficult for me than this. I dragged him and led him up from Hades.

Heracles' complaint about his life, illustrated by the enormity of his assignation to capture Cerberus, carries greater meaning if he must suffer death like any other mortal and continue an existence of aggression and alertness forever. Heracles himself does not link his successful return from Hades with a symbolic conquest of death; the reward of eternal feasting and pleasure among the gods seems incompatible with his lament. Instead, Heracles' oppressive existence on earth serves as an explanation for his aggression in the Underworld: the same hero who never earns a respite from the evil commands of cowardly Eurystheus continues to live by violence after his death.

Heracles' negative evaluation of his Labors, presented here for the first time in extant literature, will be echoed in later texts that question the value of Heracleian heroism. Heracles' Labors invite contradictory responses: on the one hand, Heracles' exploits are glorious and worthy of celebration. Yet, as is seen in this passage, they are also shameful, in their association with Heracles' servitude to the weaker Eurystheus, and burdensome. As will be seen in greater detail in this study, the suppression of pride in Heracles' accomplishments signals an evaluation of the Labors as exhausting terrors to be suffered needlessly and unjustly. Often, as here, this viewpoint seems to obscure the possibility of apotheosis as a reward. Thus, the heroes whom Odysseus encounters each illustrate the hollowness at the center of martial

victory: Achilles would give up his *kleos* in exchange for living as a serf, Agamemnon meets a horrible fate despite his victory at Troy, and Heracles finds himself an occupant of the same Hades from which he stole its three-headed guardian.

The Heracles of the Underworld, with his fierce glare and taut nerves, is discomfiting. No less troubling is his involvement with Odysseus' bow, a present from Iphitus.<sup>54</sup> The poet recounts how Odysseus receives the bow from Iphitus based on a mutual friendship formed in Messenia. Heracles' role in Iphitus' unfortunate end draws the harsh criticism of the poet:

αἱ δὴ οἱ καὶ ἔπειτα φόνος καὶ μοῖρα γέγοντο  
ἐπεὶ δὴ Διὸς υἷὸν ἀφίκετο καρτερόθυμον,  
φῶθ' Ἡρακλῆα, μεγάλων ἐπίστορα ἔργων,  
ὅς μιν ξεῖνον ἐόντα κατέκτανεν ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,  
σχέτλιος, οὐδὲ θεῶν ὄπιν αἰδέσατ' οὐδὲ τράπεζαν,  
τὴν ἦν οἱ παρέθηκεν· ἔπειτα δὲ πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν,  
ἵππους δ' αὐτὸς ἔχε κρατερώνυχας ἐν μεγάροισι... (21.23-30)

[The mares] then became [Iphitus'] murder and doom, when he arrived at the home of the strong-willed son of Zeus, the man Heracles, experienced in great deeds. He killed him in his house, even though he was a guest-friend. Reckless, he honored neither respect for the gods nor his own table, which he had set before him, and then afterwards slew him. But he kept the strong-hoofed horses in his halls...

Heracles' transgression against hospitality, a theme of utmost importance in the *Odyssey*, establishes him as a negative exemplum here. Heracles' brutality is wanton; the text does not acknowledge any basis for Heracles' hostility against Iphitus or his family, but rather focuses on his lack of respect for convention.<sup>55</sup> That Heracles sets a feast for Iphitus before murdering him recalls Aegisthus' reception of Agamemnon, the epic's chief paradigm of the threat of a failed *nostos*.<sup>56</sup> By presenting Heracles as a representative of the epic's worst inversions of

54 For a detailed analysis of Heracles' appearance in the *Odyssey* and his comparison with Odysseus, see Katherine Crissy, "Herakles, Odysseus, and the Bow: 'Odyssey' 21.11-41," *The Classical Journal* 93, no. 1 (1997): 41-53.

55 See my discussion of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* for another treatment of this episode.

56 Though Odysseus too enacts this "slaughter at the feast" motif in his murder of the suitors, the narrative strenuously justifies his revenge. See Robin Hankey, "'Evil' in the *Odyssey*," in *Owls to Athens: Essays on Classical Culture Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover*, ed. Elizabeth M. Craik (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 89-95.

standard values, the poet also establishes him as a hero unfit for emulation.

The Heracles of the *Odyssey* is at turns glaring and threatening, murderous and uncivilized, and aware that even his greatest achievements represent nothing but a *kakos moros* (11.618). If in fact the disputed lines about Heracles' apotheosis are genuine, then the poet makes no attempt to force his violent hero to conform to the status of a hero worthy of deification by Zeus, the protector of guests. So deep is the gulf between the two visions of Heracles that I must conclude that the description of Heracles' enjoyment of Olympus is most probably a later addition.

However, this tampering with the text provides evidence for the overwhelming importance of Heracles' apotheosis. The *Odyssey's* lack of deification for Heracles is considered an "omission" that requires "correction" in the eyes of a later audience (sixth century, at least in West's estimation). The incompatibility between Heracles' violent excesses and his celebration as a god, demonstrated in the *Odyssey*, thus becomes an unavoidable issue that authors and artists must wrestle with. As it became increasingly difficult to ignore Heracles' happy afterlife, his destructive force likewise merits increasing attention.

Two other episodes of Heracleian violence are frequently represented in the archaic period: Heracles' struggle with Apollo for the tripod at Delphi, and Heracles' murder of his music teacher, Linus. No literary treatment of these events has survived, unfortunately, though a large number of images on vases and cups and temple statuary attest to their popularity.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the dispute over the Delphic tripod was one of the most popular subjects of black figure vase painting.<sup>58</sup> According to Pseudo-Apollodorus (2.6.2-3), Heracles sought an oracle that

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<sup>57</sup> Pindar alludes to a struggle between Heracles and Apollo (*Ol.* 9.43-47); though the exact context is unclear, it seems likely that he refers to this conflict. See also *Ol.* 9.32-33.

<sup>58</sup> For an older assessment of the varying traditions and a full catalogue of images, see Stephen Bleeker Luce,



would tell how to be purified of the pollution incurred by his impious murder of Iphitus.<sup>59</sup>

When the Pythian priestess refused to give him an oracle, Heracles, enraged, seized the tripod and attempted to haul it off and establish his own oracle. Apollo intervened, and while the two sons of Zeus were tussling over the tripod, Zeus separated them with a bolt of lightning.<sup>60</sup>

Heracles receives his oracle, and is purified by being sold into slavery and paying blood-money to Eurytus.

The story is a strange one: Heracles battles an Olympian god, again taking on the role of a dangerous *theomachos*, yet he ultimately gets his way. Though he does not succeed in establishing his own oracle, he receives the information he desperately desires, and remains unpunished for his transgression of the boundary between mortal and god.<sup>61</sup> The images of the episode of the Delphic tripod consistently focus on the moment of greatest transgression – the physical struggle between Heracles and Apollo. Two types predominate, as classified by Boardman: the 'stand-up fight,' an earlier schema in which Apollo and Heracles engage in a tug-of-war with the sacred tripod in the middle, and the 'running fight,' in which Heracles is

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“Studies of the Exploits of Herakles on Vases. II. The Theft of the Delphic Tripod,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 34, no. 3 (1930): 313–333. See also LIMC V.2 2947-3051 and Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage*, 38–46.

59 See also the accounts in Pausanias (10.13.8) and Hyginus (*Fab.* 32).

60 A struggle between a son of Zeus and Heracles, interrupted by Zeus' lightning bolt, is replicated in the story of Heracles' defeat of Cycnus, an unjust brigand preying on pilgrims to Delphi. After Heracles slays Cycnus, his father Ares struggles with Heracles for the body, drawing Zeus' intervention, according to Ps.-Apollod. 2.5.11. In the *Shield of Heracles*, however, Heracles succeeds through the advice of Athena in wounding Ares in the thigh (424–66); Ares withdraws in pain, and Heracles strips Cycnus' body in victory. I do not consider this incident a heroic disaster, for in this case of *theomachy*, Heracles' initial conflict with Cycnus is justified: Cycnus' inhospitality incurs the wrath of Apollo. For a recent and extremely thorough documentation of this myth, see Francesca Zardini, *The Myth of Herakles and Kyknos: a study in Greek vase-painting and literature* (Verona: Fiorini, 2009). Shapiro links both the Struggle for the Tripod and the Kyknos incident to the relations between the Peisistratids and Delphi: H. A. Shapiro, “Herakles, Kyknos, and Delphi,” in *Ancient Greek and Related Pottery: Proceedings of the International Vase Symposium in Amsterdam 12–15 April, 1984*, ed. H. A. G. Brijder, Allard Pierson Series (Amsterdam: Allard Pierson Museum, 1984), 271–4. For a different theory, see R. Janko, “The *Shield of Heracles* and the Legend of Cycnus,” *Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 38–59.

61 There is one exception: Plutarch suggests that Heracles brought the tripod to Pheneus (*De sera numinis vindicata*, 12).

carrying the tripod off under his arm, and Apollo tries to grab it.<sup>62</sup> The image is dynamic, and even in the examples in which Heracles appears to have gained possession of the tripod, the outcome of the contest remains in doubt. In that sense, Heracles' struggle with Apollo mirrors another popular subject of archaic vase painting, Heracles' wrestling with the Nemean lion. Nevertheless, their outcomes diverge: Heracles defeats the Nemean lion, but in the fight with Apollo, Heracles cannot win.

This emphasis on the struggle has been interpreted by scholars to symbolize, e.g., the conflict between two competing cults or the First Sacred War.<sup>63</sup> That the contest between Heracles and Apollo may have been used as a mythological parallel for historical events is certainly plausible.<sup>64</sup> Boardman has developed over a series of articles an argument that various depictions of Heracles were manipulated for political purposes in the sixth century, and that these uses account for iconographical changes in those depictions.<sup>65</sup> But even if a specific event stands behind Heracles' image, or a particular historical figure can be charged with revising its iconography, the sheer number of images of Heracles and their continued popularity would seem to indicate that people also enjoyed those images for their own sake. In the case of Heracles and Apollo's contest, then, modern interpreters must still consider what

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62 H. W. Parke and John Boardman, "The Struggle for the Tripod and the First Sacred War," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957): 278–281.

63 See summary in Luce, "Studies of the Exploits of Herakles on Vases. II. The Theft of the Delphic Tripod," 317–8.

64 The prominence of the display of this incident on the east pediment of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi may lend support to a political interpretation (Delphi Archaeological Museum).

65 Parke and Boardman argue that Heracles and Apollo represent the First Sacred War (Parke and Boardman, "The Struggle for the Tripod and the First Sacred War"). Boardman also argues that Heracles' introduction to Olympus served as a symbol for Peisistratus' return to Athens and effected a change from Heracles' approaching Olympus on foot to approaching on a chariot, by Athena's side (John Boardman, "Herakles, Peisistratos and Sons," *Revue Archéologique Paris* 1 (1972): 57–72). Boardman sees a reflection of the Athenian assumption of power over the Lesser Mysteries at Eleusis behind the iconographical shift to a less violent approach in Heracles' capture of Cerberus in the Underworld (John Boardman, "Herakles, Peisistratos and Eleusis," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 95 (1975): 1–12). Boardman addresses objections to his 1957 article with Parke in "Herakles, Delphi and Kleisthenes of Sikyon," *Revue Archéologique Paris* no. 2 (1978): 227–234.

else this image could mean.

I argue that the struggle for the tripod represents Heracles' challenge to authority; not only does he dare to physically assault the god, but he intends to upend the structures by which mortals glimpse the immortal mind by acquiring the Delphic priestess' seat of prophetic power. Heracles attempts to rival a god in a fit of rage, committing an act of unwise hybris. The violence of Heracles' attempted usurpation of Apollo's authority is sudden, and not without parallel to Apollo's own establishment of his oracle. In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, Apollo's killing of the noxious Python is celebrated (300-4, 356-74). But later, Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* reveals that Apollo's triumph was not without controversy. In Euripides' choral ode, the temple servants present what Lloyd-Jones calls "undoubtedly the oldest story, Apollo forcibly dispossessed [Gaia]":<sup>66</sup> they describe how Apollo acquired his prophecies by slaying the Python, while still an infant. This offends Gaia, who had intended to hand over the oracle to Themis; Zeus overrules Gaia, however, and restores Phoebus' power (1234-1282). It is Zeus who ensures Apollo's authority, despite the protestations of other divinities.

Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, in contrast, presents a highly revisionist account of Apollo's obtainment of the oracle. In eliding the brutal slaying of the Python, the Pythia's speech reveals an underlying discomfort with Apollo's violence. In fact, the Pythia frames the peaceful transfer of prophetic power from one deity to the next as characteristic of a proper oracle:

πρῶτον μὲν εὐχῆι τῆιδε πρεσβεύω θεῶν  
τὴν πρωτόμαντιν Γαίαν· ἐκ δὲ τῆς Θέμιν,  
ἢ δὴ τὸ μητρὸς δευτέρα τόδ' ἔζετο  
μαντεῖον, ὡς λόγος τις· ἐν δὲ τῶι τρίτῳ  
λάχει, θελούσης, οὐδὲ πρὸς βίαν τινός,  
Τιτανὶς ἄλλη παῖς Χθονὸς καθέζετο  
Φοίβη, δίδωσιν δ' ἢ γενέθλιον δόσιν

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<sup>66</sup> Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Oresteia* (University of California Press, 1993), 207-8.

Φοίβωι· τὸ Φοίβης δ' ὄνομ' ἔχει παρώνυμον. (1-8)

First in this prayer I privilege the first prophet of the gods, Gaia, and after her, Themis, who was the second to assume this oracular seat of her mother, as the story goes. And in the third appointment, by Themis' wish and by no force, another Titan, daughter of Chthonos, Phoebe, took the seat. And she gives it as a birthday present to Phoebus, who derives his name from hers.

The opening lines of the Pythia's prologue reveal her pride in the smooth succession from one prophet to the next, ensuring continuity of the oracle's function and reputation. The gift of prophecy, it turns out, does not reside in a tripod or in a specific geographic location; Phoebus receives his gift directly from his predecessor before even settling in Delphi (9-19). That Aeschylus felt compelled to reframe the story of Phoebus' acquisition of oracular power as a conciliatory, nonviolent process demonstrates a shift in the evaluation of his action: that is, the forceful seizure of power has become, by the fifth century, more and more a source of anxiety. Thus, Heracles' attempted assumption of the oracle by force too represents an unjust act.

The episode between Apollo and Heracles, then, advertises Heracles' audacity, rather than reinforcing religious morals by depicting the punishment of one who dares to defy the gods. Perhaps his act comes as no surprise: the hero who is capable of contributing meaningful aid to the Olympians in their battle with the Giants will potentially also struggle with those allies. He is extra-human, practically reaching up to Olympus. But the events of the episode close off that possibility: Zeus' intervention, if Pseudo-Apollodorus is to be believed, re-establishes Apollo's power and the sanctity of his oracle. In Euripides' tale of the Delphic oracle, Zeus' nod guarantees Apollo's possession of prophetic powers at the same time as it asserts Zeus' own command over the older generation of chthonic gods. In Heracles' tangle with Apollo, Zeus once again restores order, but this time not in the upstart's favor. Though

Heracles is ultimately granted the knowledge he seeks, it results in the humiliation of his slavery to a foreign woman.

The Heracles of the tripod episode thus resembles the Heracles of the *Iliad*. For in the struggle for the tripod, Heracles oversteps mortal limits in his rage and violence. But because neither Apollo nor Zeus destroys him on the spot, Heracles retains his identity as a hero with special status. This status does not necessarily extend to deification, however, and Zeus exerts his power by reinforcing Heracles' vulnerability to edicts of the gods.<sup>67</sup> The popularity of this image continues through the Classical period, perhaps a testimony to the increasing anxiety over Heracles' dark side.<sup>68</sup>

This reading is difficult to apply to the second example of Heracles' uncontrolled violence that appears on vases: the murder of his music teacher, Linus. Even less of a narrative survives to explicate the violent image of Heracles raising a weapon in anger against Linus, while Linus cowers in terror.<sup>69</sup> The episode appears on a late Archaic, red-figure vase by Douris, which shows a wild-eyed, beardless Heracles about to strike Linus with a stool, while Linus, falling backwards, attempts to defend himself with his lyre; four alarmed fellow students gesture helplessly in alarm.<sup>70</sup> The presence of the other pupils seems to indicate that Linus was conducting his tutoring as usual, before Heracles erupted in fury. Heracles' violence is wholly unjustified: even if Heracles is responding to initial criticism or discipline from his teacher, he

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67 Servitude to humans is not restricted to mortals alone; even Apollo spent a period in servitude to Admetus (see Euripides' *Alcestis*, in which Heracles also plays a prominent role). Yet Admetus allowed Apollo to complete his servitude with dignity, at least in Euripides' version, while Heracles' servitude to Omphale is marked by suspicions of effeminate licentiousness and the adoption of women's actions and roles.

68 See John Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Archaic Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 227.

69 See Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: a Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 379.

70 Munich, Antikensammlungen 2646. See description in Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases*, 139. See more images at LIMC IV.2 Herakles 1667-1673.

clearly overreacts in terms of the scale of his violence. The episode reveals Heracles' inability to control his temper, his physical strength, and his resentful attitude towards established authority.

The murder of Linus, then, serves as a counterpoint to tales of exceptional youth that tend to sprout up around heroes with exceptional adult careers. For Heracles, the most obvious example is his strangling of the twin snakes sent by Hera to kill him while he was still in his infancy.<sup>71</sup> It is both his lack of fear and skillful self-defense that mark his potential, and these traits will stand him in good stead in his later confrontations with treacherous beasts, snaky or not. By contrast, in the story of the death of Linus, Heracles' well-known rage and violence are retrojected into his adolescence, providing a different sort of tale of origins. Here we have a young hero characterized by petulance, ill temper, and overbearing might. These same character-traits will be on full display when he dares to fight the Olympians or sacks the city of Oechalia under dubious circumstances.

Strangely enough, Heracles, despite apparently possessing only lackluster talent, develops in the late Archaic period a particularly musical persona, called by modern scholars Heracles *mousikos*.<sup>72</sup> These images show Heracles serenely accompanying his own singing to the lyre or cithara.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps the appeal of this image lies in the contrast with Heracles' typically strenuous actions; on these cups, Heracles is the "hero at rest," mirroring the leisure of the drinker. For example, on a black figure vessel, the Andocides Painter depicts an adult Heracles

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71 This story, first told in Pindar *Nem.* 1.33-72, became very popular in both literary texts (e.g., Theocritus *Id.*24) and visual images in the Hellenistic period.

72 See discussion of these vases in Charles Dugas, "Héraclès Mousicos," in *Recueil Charles Dugas*, vol. 1, Publications de la Bibliothèque Salomon Reinach (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1960), 115-121. Dugas argues that not all of these images are related to Heracles' apotheosis, but may be related to his earthly career as a hero or his role as an intellectual and philosopher.

73 See *LIMC* IV.2 Herakles 1438-1471.

playing a cithara with one foot resting on a raised platform, while Athena stands nearby; the composition gives the impression that Heracles serenades his patroness.<sup>74</sup> Heracles' music-making portrays him as well-educated, appreciative of the "finer things," hardly a mere thug or arrogant athlete. The contrast between the frustrated young Heracles who kills Linus and the musician taking pleasure in song is difficult to explain. Perhaps the divergent portraits simply reflect the sheer variety of roles that Heracles could play. On the other hand, perhaps (and here I speculate) Heracles *mousikos* represents an intentionally cleaned-up, mature version of the archaic, violent student.<sup>75</sup> This domesticated Heracles – civilized, unthreatening, intellectual – accords better with the Heracles who reclines in continuous feasting beside the gods. The chapters that follow will explore these questions in greater depth.

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74 Munich, *Antikensammlungen 1575*. Boardman comments on the theme at *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 224–5.

75 A fragment of Alexis' much later comedy, *Linus*, survives, in which Linus urges Heracles to select a book from among the great works of literature. Heracles, naturally, selects a cookbook (ὄψαρτυσία). See Kassel-Austin II, *Alexis* 140.

## Chapter 2: Heroic Violence and its Victims: The Ambivalence of Heroic Success

Heracles' Labors are the most celebrated aspect of his legacy; by defeating terrible monsters and imposing justice on criminals, Heracles wins the gratitude of humanity and the glory of a hero. Yet he also creates havoc with his excessive violence and destroys innocent parties. By the sixth century B.C.E., poets began to grapple with the difficulty of reconciling Heracles' tendency towards disaster with his glorious accomplishments. This chapter seeks to document a tradition in Heracleian myth that takes a critical approach to the Labors associated with his apotheosis (which I will call "apotheosis Labors"). In this tradition, the focus falls more on the trail of havoc left in Heracles' wake than on his success. Although this negative interpretation can be applied to other Heracleian exploits, I argue that the apotheosis Labors in particular lend themselves to this treatment because these Labors provide no material benefit to mortals, but only increase the individual glory of the hero.

I will first examine the fragments of Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*, which give voice and depth to Geryon, before Heracles slays him and makes off with his cattle. Then I will show how Aristophanes, in his *Frogs*, uses the destruction Heracles left in his wake after capturing Cerberus to frame Dionysus' own expedition to the Underworld as fruitless. The third section of this chapter will investigate Apollonius' juxtaposition in Book 4 of Heracles' brutality in the



Garden of the Hesperides and provision of life-saving water to his suffering comrades. These episodes could easily be cast in a positive, flattering light as praiseworthy heroic achievements. But each of these texts refuses to praise Heracles' successes, instead interrogating his use of violence in pursuit of victory. The tone used to describe these incidents is ambivalent at best, and each poet's insistence on the negative consequences of Heracles' actions raises important doubts about the purpose of heroism itself.

Each of these conquests falls at the end of Heracles' Labors and is considered to presage Heracles' eventual apotheosis. These Labors are of a type distinct from his earlier endeavors. I divide the Labors into three types; the first two will be shown to have bearing on the interpretation of the third. His earliest Labors generally consist of overcoming a fantastically fierce beast that threatens the local inhabitants. By ridding the countryside of these pests, Heracles establishes an environment where human culture can flourish. According to Burkert's analysis of the origins of the Heracleian myths, Heracles, in fact, first gained his fame as a "master of animals," transferring authority over dangerous animals to mankind; although "Heracles 'civilizes' the earth by destruction," by eliminating Cacus, Diomedes, and Alcioneus as hostile threats, Heracles offers an obvious benefit to humans and thus justifies his violence.<sup>1</sup>

A second type of Labor is impressive for its sheer difficulty and the endurance required to achieve it. Heracles cleans the stables of Augeas by diverting rivers with his own strength alone, a task that would typically take years of coordinated effort by an entire community. He displays his enormous vigor, but benefits only the unscrupulous king. He captures the Ceryneian hind, sacred to Artemis, which, with one exception,<sup>2</sup> is not described as a threat to

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1 Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, vol. 47, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 97.

2 Only Euripides, in the *Heracles*, describes the hind as an animal that damaged farmers' crops (375-9).

humankind; his pursuit, according to Pseudo-Apollodorus (2.5.3), took an entire year. These Labors are celebrated more for their difficulty than for the benefit they offer Heracles' community.

This distinction between deeds of endurance that bring glory to Heracles and actions that bring aid to mankind is made clearly in Pindar's third Olympian Ode. Pindar describes the strange fact that Heracles makes two trips to the distant Hyperboreans.<sup>3</sup> The first, at the behest of Eurystheus (with Zeus' permission), finds Heracles chasing the hind of Artemis from Arcadia to the far north:

τὰν μεθέπων ἴδε καὶ κείναν χθόνα πνοιᾶς ὄπιθεν Βορέα  
ψυχροῦ. τόθι δένδρεα θάμβαινε σταθείς.  
τῶν νιν γλυκὺς ἴμερος ἔσχεν δωδεκάγναμπτον περὶ τέρμα δρόμου  
ἵππων φυτεῦσαι. (31-34)

While pursuing her, he saw also that land beyond the gusts of freezing Boreas. Arrested, he marveled at the trees there. And sweet desire for them possessed him, to plant them around the boundaries of twelve-coursed horse track.

Yet Heracles turns aside from this thought and applies his energy to capturing the hind. It is only later, after the establishment of the Olympic Games in a harshly lit plain, that Heracles remembers the olive tree. His second trip serves as the occasion for him to address the Hyperboreans with persuasive words (πεῖσαις...λόγω, 16):

πιστὰ φρονέων Διὸς αἴτει πανδόκῳ  
ἄλσει σκιαρόν τε φύτευμα ξυνὸν ἀνθρώποις στέφανόν τ' ἀρετᾶν. (17-18)

Trustworthy in intention, he was seeking, for the grove open to all, a shady plant as a boon shared among men, and a crown of excellence.

There is a clear emphasis on the olive tree as a favor shared equally among all people

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3 See Adolf Köhnken, "Mythical Chronology and Thematic Coherence in Pindar's Third Olympian Ode," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 87 (1983): 49-63. For further support of the argument that Heracles travels to the Hyperboreans twice, see Emmet Robbins, "Heracles, the Hyperboreans, and the Hind: Pindar, 'OL.' 3," *Phoenix* 36, no. 4 (1982): 295.

(πανδόςκω, ξυνόν). Equally important is the pacific nature of this acquisition: Heracles obtains the olive trees not by violent uprooting and assault, but through verbal persuasion.<sup>4</sup> By linking Heracles' voluntary kindness to the attendees at Olympia with his pursuit of the hind, Pindar gives the hind's capture a socially positive function within the larger narrative. Thus, Heracles' Labors of endurance are not necessarily negative; in fact, they are positive for Heracles, and, through association, can be considered beneficial to the human community.

The third type of Labor, and the subject of this analysis, is his "apotheosis Labors," including the Cattle of Geryon, the Apples of the Hesperides, and the Capture of Cerberus. Malcolm Davies, among others, has shown that these three Labors "represent variations upon the theme of the hero's attainment of immortality and triumph over death."<sup>5</sup> These Labors provide the maximum benefit to Heracles, but no substantial advantage to anyone else. The retrieval of his quarry proves his individual strength and courage, but does not have any further purpose, whether to protect the vulnerable or civilize the wild. As in the second type of Labor, the apotheosis Labors can be incorporated into positive civilizing acts, such as the rescue of Theseus. Yet apart from these associations, it is in the accomplishment of these very Labors that Heracles is shown as uncivilized, violent, selfish, and out of place. I will argue that these two phenomena are closely intertwined, for heroic violence is only deemed acceptable in the service of some larger community; when in the service of the individual's glory alone, such violence is seen as dangerous, threatening, and distinctly outside the bounds of social civilization.

The texts will each present Heracles in a novel way, through the perspective of his

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4 The peaceful nature of this interaction may be an innovation of Pindar's; see discussion in Robbins, "Heracles, the Hyperboreans, and the Hind," 300.

5 Malcolm Davies, "Stesichorus' Geryoneis and Its Folk-Tale Origins," *Classical Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1988): 279.

"victims." This shift in perspective enables a new evaluation of Heracles' heroism to emerge. For, in the majority of treatments of Heracles' Labors, Heracles is celebrated and his works are worthy of emulation. In these texts, however, each author provides a startlingly different view of Heracles and his deeds. Stesichorus gives voice and depth to Geryon, the victim of Heracles' cattle-rustling. Not only does his mother mourn him, contextualizing him in a network of relationships, but he also articulates for himself the principles of an admirable warrior. When Aristophanes sends Dionysus to the Underworld in the guise of Heracles, Dionysus does not receive the welcome he expected, for Aristophanes reflects Heracles' destructive violence in the god's treatment by the local inhabitants. And the Hesperides of Apollonius – beautiful, merciful, distraught – lament Heracles' successful acquisition of their Apples and his frightening behavior. In each of these episodes, Heracles' victory is colored by a recognition of the means to his victory – savage violence – and the attendant costs so often ignored in other poetic depictions.

### Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*

I begin with the oldest evidence, the fragments of Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*. Although popular, the story has not survived very well. Between Hesiod's *Theogony* (287-294) and Pseudo-Apollodorus (2.5.10), the basic details of the tale can be pieced together: at Eurystheus' command, Heracles travels to Erytheia in the Far West, Geryon's home. After slaying Geryon's herdsman, Eurytion, and his dog, Orthos, Heracles captures his quarry, Geryon's cattle. Menoites, herding nearby the cattle of Hades, reports these events to Geryon, who, in the

course of doing battle against Heracles, is slain. Heracles drives the cattle back to Tiryns, a journey that offers many opportunities for adventure.<sup>6</sup>

It is a terrible loss that the lyric poem did not survive in more than fragments, yet we are fortunate that, in the past fifty years, papyrus scraps, especially from *P. Oxy.* 2617, have provided more lines for interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Many have offered their interpretation and suggestions for reconstructing specific lines; I will focus instead on the characterization of Geryon and Heracles. For Stesichorus, as far as the written record shows, was the first to depict Geryon as a sympathetic figure.<sup>8</sup> Stesichorus described Geryon as monstrous and alien; the scholiast on Hesiod's *Theogony* 287 informs us that "Stesichorus says that he even had six arms and six legs and was winged" (Στησίχορος δὲ καὶ ἕξ χεῖρας ἔχειν φησὶ καὶ ἕξ πόδας καὶ ὑπόπτερον εἶναι, p. 57 Di Gregorio).<sup>9</sup> Yet despite Geryon's bizarre physiology, his concerns and manner are recognizably human. Even more radically, Geryon represents the ideals of the Homeric *agathos*.<sup>10</sup>

I argue that Stesichorus deliberately and overtly makes Geryon a recognizable "good guy." Stesichorus' depiction of a different conflict, one between Heracles and Cycnus, serves as a point of contrast. Richard Janko has shown that Stesichorus modifies the character of the conflict, as expressed in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*.<sup>11</sup> Stesichorus' Cycnus not only

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6 For speculation on Stesichorus' inclusion of adventures in Sicily on Heracles' return, see Erik Sjoqvist, "Herakles in Sicily," *Opusculana Romana* 4 (1962): 118–9.

7 The texts and testimonia have recently been collected and edited by Curtis; I follow his printed text: Paul Curtis, *Stesichorus's Geryoneis*, Mnemosyne Supplements (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

8 If Stesichorus was also the first to invent a phantom Helen at Troy, thereby cleansing the reputation of the "real" Helen, then it is hardly far-fetched to believe that a sympathetic Geryon was his innovation. See *PMG* 192–193.

9 *PMG* 186 = *SLG* 87; Lambertus Di Gregorio, *Scholia vetera in Hesiodi Theogoniam* (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1975).

10 E. Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus' Geryoneis, *SLG* 15 I-II," *Hellenika* 41 (1990): 28.

11 R. Janko, "The Shield of Heracles and the Legend of Cycnus," *The Classical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1986): 38–59.

preys on pilgrims to Delphi; he builds a temple with their skulls, a grisly detail not present in the *Shield*, lurid as it is. Stesichorus contrives to make his Cycnus even more evil, and his Heracles, by contrast, even more pious. Its poor preservation makes interpreting the poem further difficult; however, it is clear that Stesichorus was not averse to enhancing his story with vivid details to make Heracles' victory more morally sound.

Stesichorus' Geryon is far from the kind of criminal who must be stopped and punished, like, for example, Cycnus or Syleus. His very isolation renders him unthreatening to others. Geryon lives in the far West, on the island of Erytheia, beyond the river Oceanus, the boundary of the world known to mortals. Heracles requires a fantastic mode of transportation to overcome the inaccessibility of Erytheia: the golden cup of the Sun.<sup>12</sup> Panyassis and Apollodorus give varying explanations for how Heracles came to borrow the Sun's cup. Panyassis asserts that the sea god Nereus aided Heracles.<sup>13</sup> In Apollodorus' version (2.5.10), an overheated Heracles threatens the Sun by drawing his bow against him; impressed, the Sun offers him the use of his cup. This tale portrays Heracles as the successful bully. Though it was hybriatic for him to threaten the Sun god, his overreaching seems to be rewarded in the offer of the cup.<sup>14</sup> Apollodorus' version thus encapsulates the larger arc of Heracles' apotheosis: his larger-than-life heroism is problematic, but the gods nevertheless elevate him to their own status. How Heracles came into possession of the golden cup in Stesichorus' poem must remain unknown. But Geryon certainly has no such cup, and no evidence survives that indicates that Geryon showed any interest in leaving his home. Thus, Heracles' arrival in Erytheia casts him in the role of disruptor and interloper; instead of imposing order and civilization, he brings

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12 See the vase paintings depicting this episode in *LIMC* Herakles 2551, 2552.

13 See fr. 9 in Alberto Bernabé, ed., *Poetarum epicorum Graecorum*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987).

14 As in the *Iliad*, Heracles dares to fight a god, but does not receive immediate punishment. See Introduction.

only destruction with him.

Though Geryon lives in an isolated location, he is far from an isolated creature. His activities are accompanied by his herdsman, Eurytion, and dog, Orthos. Stesichorus places Geryon in the context of his natal family, giving Geryon's mother, the Oceanid Callirhoe, a tearful and loving speech to her son (SLG S 13 = P.Oxy. 2617, fr. 11). Her appeal – in the reconstruction by Barrett, Page, and others – unmistakably recalls Hecuba's plea to Hector in *Iliad* 22.79-92. Hecuba loosens her robe, and cries, "Hector, my child, respect these (words) and pity me as well, if ever I offered you my soothing breast" ("Ἐκτορ τέκνον ἐμὸν τάδε τ' αἶδεο καὶ μ' ἐλέησον / αὐτήν, εἴ ποτέ τοι λαθικηδέα μαζὸν ἐπέσχον, 82-3). Callirhoe, too, expresses her grief at the possibility of watching her son die, describing herself as "miserable, wretched in childbearing, and suffering unforgettable things" (ἐγὼν [μελέ]α καὶ ἀλασ[τοτόκος κ]αὶ ἄλ[ασ]τᾶ παθοῖσα, 2-3). Callirhoe exposes her breast to Geryon as an assertion of her essential and intimate connection with her child (μαζ[ὸν] ἐ[πέσχεθον, 5). If Callirhoe's speech echoes the logic of Hecuba's, the accompanying gesture demands Geryon's pity on her plight and reminds the warrior that, if he is defeated by his opponent, he will also be abandoning a grief-stricken parent.<sup>15</sup>

Stesichorus thus portrays Callirhoe as an innocent mother who fears for her beloved son. She suffers terribly, and although she has birthed a bizarre creature, she is nevertheless sympathetic in her experience of motherhood; she loves her son and is heartbroken upon contemplating his death.<sup>16</sup> By giving Callirhoe a prominent role in the events leading to Geryon

15 It is worth noting that the breast-baring gesture can be deceptive and manipulative as well, as Aeschylus' Clytemnestra later demonstrates (*Choephoroi* 896-8). Despite the incongruity of Clytemnestra's calling for "a man-killing axe" (ἀνδροκμήτᾳ πέλεκυν, 888) immediately before baring her breast to her son, her gesture nevertheless forces Orestes to hesitate.

16 For the possible identification of a grieving woman as Callirhoe in the vases, see Martin Robertson, "Geryoneis: Stesichorus and the Vase-Painters," *The Classical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1969): 217.

and Heracles' duel, Stesichorus provides a fresh perspective on Geryon: everyone, even a monster, has a mother. The triple-headed man is not universally loathed, feared, or rejected. On the contrary, he is the object of love and regard.

Callirhoe is not the only character who cautions Geryon about fighting Heracles. For in *SLG S 11 = P.Oxy. 2617 frs. 13a + 14 + 15*, Geryon responds to someone, presumably Menoites, who has just informed him about Heracles' violent actions.<sup>17</sup> This fragment represents the so-called "Dilemma of Geryon," who must choose either to confront the cattle-rustling Heracles or to allow him to abscond with the cattle unchallenged. Heracles is no doubt depicted as fearsome in strength and dangerously violent, for the prospect of fighting him causes Geryon to reflect on the likely possibility of death. He poses an alternative question, something along the lines of "if, on the one hand, I am immortal and ageless...if, on the other hand, I must die..." The fragmentary text, as printed in Curtis' relatively conservative edition, reads:

αἱ μὲν γὰρ  
 μαι καὶ ἀγήρ[αος  
 ἐν Ολύμπ[ωι,  
 κρέσσον[  
 λευχέα δ[  
 καὶ τ[  
 κερα[ῖζομένας ἐπιδῆν βόας ἀ-  
 μετέρω[ν ἀπόνοςφιν ἐπαύλων·  
 αἱ δ' ὧ φι[λε χρῆ στυγερόν μ' ἐπὶ γῆ-  
 ρας [ἰκ]έσθαι,  
 ζώ[ει]ν τ' ἐν ἔ[παμερίοις ἀπάνευ-  
 θε [θε]ῶν μακάρω[ν,  
 νῦν μοι πολὺ κἀ[λλιόν ἐστι παθῆν  
 ὅ τι μόρσιμ[ον ἢ θάνατον προφυγῆν  
 καὶ ὄνειδε[α παισὶ φίλοισι  
 καὶ παντὶ γέ[νει καταχευέμεν ἐξ-  
 ὀπίσω Χρυσ[άο[ . . ] . ὀκ[  
 μ]ῆ τοῦτο φ[ί]λον μακά[ρε]σσι θε[ο]ῖ-  
 σι γ]ένοιτο

<sup>17</sup> This is Barrett's reasonable suggestion, which has been duly followed by everyone else.



... ] . [ . ] . κε[ . . ] . [ . ] περι βουσὶν ἐμαῖς  
 ]  
 Ἡρα] κλέος . [ (Il.8-28)

Both of Geryon's parents, Chrysaor and Callirhoe, are immortal, but Geryon, it seems, remains in doubt as to his own status. The first alternative dealing with immortality remains subject to debate.<sup>18</sup> The second alternative seems clear: "if I am not immortal and must die, better to accept my fate and die fighting Heracles than to cast shame upon my family's honor."

Page was first to connect Geryon's deliberation with Sarpedon's speech to Glaucon in *Iliad* 12.332-8:

ὦ πέπον εἰ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμον περὶ τόνδε φυγόντε  
 αἰεὶ δὴ μέλλοιμεν ἀγήρω τ' ἀθανάτω τε  
 ἔσσεσθ', οὔτε κεν αὐτὸς ἐνὶ πρώτοισι μαχοίμην  
 οὔτε κε σὲ στέλλοιμι μάχην ἐς κυδιάνειραν·  
 νῦν δ' ἔμπης γὰρ κῆρες ἐφεστᾶσιν θανάτοιο  
 μυρίαί, ἅς οὐκ ἔστι φυγεῖν βροτὸν οὐδ' ὑπαλύξαι,  
 ἴομεν ἢ ἐ τῷ εὖχος ὀρέξομεν ἢ ἐ τις ἡμῖν.

Old friend, if, by escaping this war, we should become ageless and immortal, neither would I myself fight in the front lines, nor would I ever send you into glory-bringing battle. But now, since uncountable Spirits of Death stand about, whom it is impossible for a mortal to flee or escape, let us go forth, whether we offer glory to another, or he to us.

Unfortunately, too little survives of Stesichorus' fragment to determine the exact alternatives that Geryon ponders. The following discussion treats scholarly suggestions that are purely based on logic, rather than preserved as text; each scholar suggests what he or she believes the text *ought* to say. The first alternative has drawn the most attention, since defining the first alternative clarifies what the second must mean. Page's supplements read:

αἰ μὲν γὰρ[ρ γένος ἀθάνατος πέλο-

18 Frame argues that an association between cattle and immortality is a mythological archetype (D. Frame, *The Origins of Greek NOYΣ* (Harvard University, 1971)). Perhaps it is the case that Geryon is fated to die upon the loss of his cattle.

μαι καὶ ἀγή[ραος ὥστε βίου πεδέχειν  
 ἐν Ὀλύμπ[ωι  
 κρέσσον[ ἐ]  
 λεγχέα δ[ (ll. 8-12)<sup>19</sup>

Page argues that Geryon must debate as follows, "whether I am immortal or not, I must not avoid battle with Heracles. If I am immortal, so much the better; he cannot kill me. If I am not, then I would rather die with honour than survive without." Page's proposal for the first alternative has generated disagreement, however. Using Page's supplements, Barrett argued for a interpretation more like Sarpedon's: "if I am destined to be immortal *if not killed by Herakles*, then better not to fight."<sup>20</sup> Barrett's addition brings greater specificity to Geryon's question, improving upon Page's proposal. But Tsitsibakou-Vasalos argues that Geryon's dilemma ought not to be modeled too closely on Sarpedon's deliberations: Sarpedon's first conditional is unreal; even Sarpedon, the beloved son of Zeus, knows that he must die.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the idea that Geryon's survival of a possible attack by Heracles should determine whether or not Geryon was born an immortal being is a bit far-fetched.<sup>22</sup>

Tsitsibakou-Vasalos instead proposes that Geryon asks "a sincere and vital existential question: Am I mortal?"<sup>23</sup> She suggests, "if I am immortal and ageless, then it is better for me [to fight rather than suffer] ignominious, disgraceful deeds (or prove to be a disgrace myself)" (she uses Page's supplements, but emends ἐλεγχέα to ἐλέγχεα).<sup>24</sup> Though the protasis of each condition is different, both apodoses are identical: "better for me to fight." Tsitsibakou-Vasalos

19 Denys Page, "Stesichorus: The Geryoneis," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93 (1973): 149–50.

20 W. S. Barrett, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis, SLG 11," in *Greek Lyric, Tragedy, and Textual Criticism: Collected Papers*, ed. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28.

21 E. Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis S. 11.5-26: The Dilemma of Geryon," *Hellenika* 42 (1991): 252.

22 Pointed out in Alexandra Rozokoki, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis S 11 SLG: The Dilemma of Geryon," *Wiener Studien* 121 (2008): 67–69. She considers a Geryon ignorant of his nature rather a subject of parody.

23 Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis S. 11.5-26: The Dilemma of Geryon," 253. This is possible, but needs further context to determine more credibly.

24 Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis S. 11.5-26: The Dilemma of Geryon," 254.

emphasizes that Geryon's ignorance about his nature is real, and his brave resolution to fight regardless of his status is thus a free, heroic choice. Rozokoki insists upon the opposite, that Geryon must know that he is mortal; yet by choosing to fight, "Geryon is shown to be even more heroic, as, despite all this, he chooses to endanger himself rather than be shamed."<sup>25</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that Curtis throws up his hands, cautioning "that the original sense of this fragment is probably lost forever."<sup>26</sup> I agree that the fragment cannot be pushed too hard, given that its interpretation rests upon significant supplements, but I believe that the text can still reveal something about Stesichorus' presentation of Geryon's *ethos*. Whether Geryon was aware of his mortal status or not, he clearly arrives at the conclusion that he must battle Heracles, against the advice of his interlocutor. To Geryon, his death is not as significant a consideration as his honor.<sup>27</sup> That Geryon would struggle with going forth to his death is fully understandable, and the concern for his reputation and family honor that leads him to overcome his struggle identifies him with the Homeric *agathoi*.<sup>28</sup> The expression of such sentiments from a three-headed, six-armed, and six-legged man was likely intended to be jarring. Geryon, though *agathos*, is surely not *kalos*.

This line of inquiry must necessarily remain speculative, but it is not far-fetched to suggest that Geryon's concern for his immortality serves as a point of comparison with his opponent, Heracles. After all, Geryon's speech casts him in the role of Sarpedon, a striking choice given that Sarpedon is the beloved son of Zeus, making him more akin to Geryon's opponent, Heracles. In raising and then dismissing the attainment of life ἐν Ὀλύμπ[ωι] (v. 10),

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25 Rozokoki, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis S 11 SLG: The Dilemma of Geryon," 69.

26 Curtis, Stesichorus's Geryoneis, 119.

27 See discussion below on Pindar's fr. 169a.

28 Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus, Geryoneis S. 11.5-26: The Dilemma of Geryon," 259-60.

Geryon also reminds the audience that such a future remains a possibility for Heracles as a consequence of his successful completion of his Labors. Heracles, the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, probably remains unaware that he will become immortal.<sup>29</sup> Geryon chooses to enter battle with Heracles; Heracles, on the other hand, commits an aggressive act against Geryon not out of his own volition. His forced servitude to Eurystheus, usually ascribed to the command of Zeus or Hera, has brought him to distant Erytheia. Geryon fights to protect his reputation, while Heracles engages in order to be cleansed from pollution. Moreover, Geryon is formidable enough of an opponent for the theft of his cattle to be considered a glorious accomplishment. Perhaps Heracles, too, felt dread and fear as he contemplated meeting the owner of the cattle that he stole. The poem thus depicts two men, each uncertain of his fate, fighting to the death. Only at the end of the conflict will it be revealed that Geryon, defeated, is indeed mortal, while Heracles' successful completion of his journey to the far West will herald a future on Olympus.

Stesichorus thus portrays Geryon as a man legitimately fighting to protect his property from unlawful seizure. With Barrett's supplement, Geryon speaks of the possibility of looking upon his cattle being plundered (κερα[ῖζομένας ἐπιδῆν βόας], 14). The use of κερα[ῖζομένας], with its sense of "being ravaged," implies that Heracles is the initiator and wrong-doer, a cattle-raider rather than a civilizer. Cattle-rustling is not necessarily unheroic or unacceptable, as is demonstrated in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.<sup>30</sup> But the way in which Heracles defeats the

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29 As far as I know, we have no evidence from the Archaic period that indicates that Heracles was aware of his eventual apotheosis. In poetry, Sophocles' *Trachiniae* comes closest to revealing what one version of Heracles knew about his death: Heracles is in possession of oracles from Zeus, which he promptly misunderstands (in the line of Sophoclean heroes like Oedipus). The philosophical Heracles, as represented in Prodicus' tale, deliberately chooses a difficult life full of suffering, with the promise of attaining Virtue at the end, but immortality is not considered the main prize.

30 For an anthropological survey of cattle raiding in the Greek heroic tradition, see Peter Walcot, "Cattle Raiding, Heroic Tradition, and Ritual: The Greek Evidence," *History of Religions* 18, no. 4 (1979): 326–351.

rightful owner of the cattle, by murdering his herdsman and dog and then the man himself, sows disorder and chaos.<sup>31</sup> The clarity about who is victim and who is aggressor in this situation can even help modern scholars distinguish between various supplements in the poem.<sup>32</sup>

Yet Geryon's innocence does not protect him from defeat at Heracles' hands. Judging from *P.Oxy.* 2617 fr. 3, the poem emphasizes the influence of higher authorities in the epic duel. In this fragment, Athena appears to engage with Zeus and then Poseidon about the outcome of the conflict. It is unclear whether a council of the gods has just disbanded or the Olympians are collectively observing the fight in action. Athena, Heracles' champion and helper, no doubt advances his cause against Geryon, Poseidon's grandson. Athena speaks first to Zeus, who, as παμβασιλῆα θεῶν (l. 2), holds final authority; perhaps she urges him to favor Heracles or approves of a pronouncement of his impending victory. Her conversation with Poseidon is more obscure, though. Page suggests that Athena gives an exhortation like to "Remembering your promise to Geryon, go ahead and save him if you can; I will make certain that Heracles kills him nevertheless" ([ἄγ' ὑποσχέσιος μεμναμένος ἄ[ν]]|[περ ὑπέστας]]|[Γαρυ]όναν θ[αν]άτου, ll. 6-8).<sup>33</sup> Barrett proposes an addition, [ἄγ' ὑποσχέσιος μεμναμένος ἄ[ν]|περ ὑπέστας]]|[μὴ βούλεο Γαρυ]όναν θ[αν]άτου, with the sense, "remember your promise (to me) and *do not* try to save Geryon from death."<sup>34</sup>

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31 A major part of the successful accomplishment of this Labor is actually getting the cattle of Geryon from Erytheia to Tiryns. So it is ironic that the wild robber Cacus in *Aeneid* VIII, who nabs some of Hercules' cattle, actually imitates Hercules' original action in Erytheia; Virgil's Hercules, meanwhile, is a bastion of order and light.

32 See discussion of *P.Oxy.* 2617 fr. 1.2 in Curtis, Stesichoros's Geryoneis, 106, where Curtis reasons, "As Geryon looks to be legitimate in his defence of the cattle it seems unlikely that the Moirai would be pursuing him for transgression."

33 Page, "Stesichorus," 150.

34 W. S. Barrett, "Stesichoros and the Story of Geryon," in *Greek Lyric, Tragedy, and Textual Criticism: Collected Papers*, ed. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17; Page, "Stesichorus," 150.

Curtis points out a major flaw in both suggestions, though: "Promises in Homer precede fulfilment, not (as possibly here) non-fulfilment."<sup>35</sup> Thus, I am inclined to follow Curtis, who approaches the question from a different angle: "Athena challenges Poseidon to let Geryon confront Herakles: 'Come, let him, being noble, take thought as he fights with (my) man'" ([ὤδ' ὦν ἀγαθὸς μεμναμένος ἀ[ν]δρὶ μαχέσθω]). Curtis' supplement is modeled on *Il.* 19.153, ὤδέ τις ὑμείων μεμνημένος ἀνδρὶ μαχέσθω. One advantage of this interpretation is that it emphasizes Athena's eagerness for the battle, a plausible effect given her presence at the conflict on several vases.<sup>36</sup> Another way in which this supplement squares with the poetic context is its treatment of Geryon as a suitable opponent: he is *agathos*, and he prepares to fight in the mode of a Homeric warrior, not a wild beast who cannot possibly "take thought." Curtis' Athena goes on to warn Poseidon to stay aloof of the fight, to allow the fate of Geryon to unfold without his interference.

The likely introduction of a council of the gods, the will of Zeus, and the vaunting or acquiescence of other Olympian gods implies that the ultimate outcome of the fight between Heracles and Geryon is predetermined. Clearly, legend has already circumscribed the outcome – Heracles must defeat Geryon – but, by making the intervention of the gods explicit within the poem's narrative, Stesichorus gives Geryon, and his deliberations about survival and heroism, even greater *pathos*. Geryon nobly reconciles himself to death at Heracles' hands, if attempting to defend his cattle from the latter will prevent dishonor from staining his family's name (in *P.Oxy.* 2617 fr. 13 + 14 + 15). His assessment draws the pity of the poem's audience, however, because the audience is aware that Geryon goes forth inevitably to his own death. The gods

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<sup>35</sup> Curtis, *Stesichoros's Geryoneis*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., John Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Archaic Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), fig. 26.

ensure that his courage will be to no end and his high-minded sentiments are useless. The appearance of Iris alongside Athena on an Attic red-figure vase, implying that Athena dispatched her to carry advice or an encouraging message to Heracles, lends credibility to this interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

The involvement of the Olympian gods may be paired with the presence of other deities, as well, ones that are swift-flying:

]ν μεν[ ] . ξνες, ώκυπέτα[  
]ν έχοισαι. (P.Oxy. 2617 fr. 1.1-2)

Suggested supplements have included unnamed [δαί]μονες ώκυπέτα[ι]<sup>38</sup> or the Moirai ([δολιό]φρονες ώκυπέτα[ι] | [τόκα Μοῖραι πότμ]ον έχοισαι);<sup>39</sup> more recently, these deities have been equated with the Keres.<sup>40</sup> The presence of the Moirai or Keres would indicate that this fragment belongs to the description of Geryon's death; Irvine goes as far as to argue, based on Iliadic parallels, that Stesichorus may have depicted a *kerostasia* in the poem.<sup>41</sup> Such an idea is plausible and attractive, but not necessary, given Curtis' assertion that "the most obvious choice is Helios's horses" for ώκυπέτα[ι].<sup>42</sup> It is impossible to know with certainty. Whether or not specific spirits associated with death accompanied Geryon in his climactic battle, it is nevertheless clear that Stesichorus emphasizes the influence of higher authorities in the result of Geryon's choice.

37 This cup from Vulci, now lost, is known from drawings. See J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 62, no. 84; Robertson, "Geryoneis," 210, 214.

38 P. Lerza, "Su un frammento della Gerioneide di Stesicoro," *Atene e Roma* 23 (1978): 86–7.

39 Massimo Lazzeri, "Osservazioni su alcuni frammenti della Gerioneide di Stesicoro," *Bollettino dei classici* ser. 3, fasc. 16 (1995): 93–99.

40 James A. D. Irvine, "Keres in Stesichorus' 'Geryoneis': P. Oxy. 2617 fr. 1 (a)-(b) = SLG 21 Reconsidered," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 115 (1997): 38.

41 Irvine, "Keres in Stesichorus' 'Geryoneis,'" 44. For further analysis of the role of *kerostasia* in the *Iliad*, see James V. Morrison, "Kerostasia, The Dictates of Fate, and the Will of Zeus in the *Iliad*," *Arethusa* 30, no. 2 (1997): 276–296.

42 Curtis, *Stesichoros's Geryoneis*, 105.

The last major fragment I will address (*P.Oxy.* 2617 fr. 4 + 5) describes the final battle between Heracles and Geryon. Geryon engages while equipped with a shield (ἄσπίδα, fr. 4.12) and a helmet (ἰπ]πόκομος τρυφάλει', 4.16). Like other archaic vase paintings, a belly amphora of Exekias' Group E (dated to the mid-sixth century) shows Geryon clad also in greaves and brandishing spears.<sup>43</sup> Whether the details of the surviving vase paintings and Stesichorus' poem overlapped exactly, it is not a far leap for Tsitsibakou-Vasalos to describe Geryon as "well-armed like a hoplite."<sup>44</sup> That is, the monster Geryon does not attack with tooth or claw, but is armed in a manner familiar to the average Greek farmer-soldier. By contrast, Heracles fights with the club (ρόπαλον, fr. 31.3) and bow and arrow (οἰ[σ]τρός, fr. 5.10).

The distinction between these two strategies for approaching battle is explicated later by Euripides, in his *Heracles*. The evil tyrant Lycus, who schemes to destroy Heracles' family in his absence, condemns Heracles' reliance on archery as a symbol of his cowardice:

ὁ δ' ἔσχε δόξαν οὐδὲν ὦν εὐψυχίας  
 θηρῶν ἐν αἰχμῇ, τᾶλλα δ' οὐδὲν ἄλκιμος,  
 ὃς οὐποτ' ἀσπίδ' ἔσχε πρὸς λαιᾶ χερὶ  
 οὐδ' ἦλθε λόγχης ἐγγύς, ἀλλὰ τόξ' ἔχων,  
 κάκιστον ὄπλον, τῇ φυγῇ πρόχειρος ἦν.  
 ἀνδρὸς δ' ἔλεγχος οὐχὶ τόξ' εὐψυχίας,  
 ἀλλ' ὃς μένων βλέπει τε κἀντιδέρεται  
 δορὸς ταχεῖαν ἄλοκα τάξιν ἐμβεβώς. (157-164)

And he possessed a reputation for courage, despite being nobody, in battle with beasts, but in all else was hardly brave, who never held a shield on his left arm nor approached the spear. But with his bow, the most cowardly weapon, he was prepared for flight. And archery is not the proof of a man's courage, but [brave is he] who remains, standing fast in the rank, and stares down the swift wound of the spear.

Lycus denigrates archery in comparison with the demands on the hoplite soldier. Amphitryon, in response, mounts an able defense of Heracles' archery by arguing that his skills enable him

43 John Boardman, *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 96. Paris, Louvre F 53.

44 Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus' Geryoneis, SLG 15 I-II," 9.



to protect his *philo*i (including himself). Though Euripides' Lycus will be proven wrong in the play, he nevertheless expresses an attitude that will already have been familiar to Stesichorus' audience. For critical assessments of the value of archery found expression in the earliest of Greek literature. In the *Iliad*, Diomedes denigrates Paris' archery in comparison with his own implements of battle:

τοξότα λωβητῆρ κέρα ἀγλαὲ παρθενοπίπα  
εἰ μὲν δὴ ἀντίβιον σὺν τεύχεσι πειρηθείης,  
οὐκ ἄν τοι χραίσμησι βιὸς καὶ ταρφέες ἰοί·  
νῦν δέ μ' ἐπιγράψας ταρσὸν ποδὸς εὐχέαι αὐτῶς.  
οὐκ ἀλέγω, ὡς εἴ με γυνὴ βάλοι ἢ πάϊς ἄφρων·  
κωφὸν γὰρ βέλος ἀνδρὸς ἀνάλκιδος οὐτιδανοῖο.  
ἦ τ' ἄλλως ὑπ' ἐμεῖο, καὶ εἴ κ' ὀλίγον περ ἐπαύρη,  
ὄξυ βέλος πέλεται, καὶ ἀκήριον αἶψα τίθησι. (11.385-9 2)

You archer, worthless wretch, delighter in hair, girl-ogler! If, in fact, you should make trial of me, face to face, in armor, not, you know, would your bow and swift arrow help you: and now that you have scratched the bottom of my foot, you vaunt so. I do not care, as if a woman or thoughtless child struck me. For the blunt arrow of a weakling is worthless. But in contrast, when I throw the spear, even if it grazes ever so little, it proves sharp, and quickly makes him lifeless.

The *Iliad*'s general characterization of Diomedes as a dependable killing-machine, and of Paris as useless and fearful, serves to justify Diomedes' taunt. Heracles' arrows can hardly be called κωφόν like Paris', especially given that Heracles dips them in the venom of the Hydra (fr. 5.4-6). Nevertheless, this exchange reveals that, in the environment of an epic duel on the battlefield, the man dressed in armor and using weapons like the spear and sword fits the standard model of heroism.

Heracles' club hardly seems more suitable. In the *Iliad*, the club or mace provides little advantage to Areithoos the "Maceman" (τὸν ἐπὶ κλησιν Κορυντήτην, 7.138) in his battle with Nestor. As Kirk observes, his iron club "would be relatively useless in organized battle...since

anyone with a thrusting spear, let alone a throwing-spear, lay out of range."<sup>45</sup> Although the club does not become an attribute of Heracles until after the Homeric poems, it may still serve here as a sign of primitiveness.

Furthermore, the contrast between Heracles' rustic-looking weapons and Geryon's civilized preparations is striking. Geryon's armor is a symbol of society, especially when associated with the communal efforts of hoplite formation. Heracles' get-up, on the other hand, better befits a primitive loner. This depiction of Heracles, which has a long afterlife in Greek poetry, may even have originated with Stesichorus himself. Athenaeus quotes the Peripatetic scholar Megacleides,<sup>46</sup> on Heracles:

τοῦτον οὖν, φησὶν, οἱ νέοι ποιηταὶ κατασκευάζουσιν ἐν ληστοῦ σχήματι μόνον περιπορευόμενον, ξύλον ἔχοντα καὶ λεοντῆν καὶ τόξα· καὶ ταῦτα πλάσαι πρῶτον Στησίχορον τὸν Ἴμεραῖον. (12.512f)

This man [Heracles] then, [Megacleides] says, the recent poets dress up in the form of a robber, wandering about alone, carrying a club and lion skin and bow. And the first to shape him thus was Stesichorus of Himera.

Thus, at least one ancient thinker linked Stesichorus directly to the development of a lonely, wild Heracles.<sup>47</sup> Thus Stesichorus' Heracles comes off as the diametric opposite of his Geryon. For where Geryon is embedded in a network of relationships, Heracles is solitary; where Geryon rises in legitimate defense of own property, Heracles is the bandit; and where Geryon wears standard armor, Heracles fights in garb and with weapons that mark him as alien. Perhaps Stesichorus' audience would have found it striking that Heracles could travel beyond the known boundaries of the inhabited earth, aided by divine transportation, only to

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45 G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: a Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 253.

46 For the collected fragments of Megacleides, see Richard Janko, *Philodemus: On Poems, Book 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138–143.

47 Robertson judges that "the appearance of club and lion-skin in works of art is quite compatible with their being the invention of Stesichorus" ("Geryoneis," 213).

encounter an enemy dressed like their Greek neighbors.

The poet has thus marked his two warriors with opposing traits, and we can now examine the duel itself. The poem seems to offer a detailed, blow-by-blow description of their conflict.<sup>48</sup> The fragments of *P. Oxy.* 2617 frs. 4-5 depict Heracles' elimination of one of Geryon's heads, likely the first.<sup>49</sup> Heracles' attack is marked by the use of deception and strategem, perhaps in imitation of the wily Odysseus.<sup>50</sup> He considers his options (νόωι διέλε[ν], fr. 4.12) and decides that fighting by stealth (λάθραι πολεμε[ῖν], fr. 4.8) is the best approach (πολὺ κέρδιον εἶν, fr. 4.7). Despite Heracles' crude dress, he is nevertheless a canny fighter: he manages to knock Geryon's helmet to the ground (τρυφάλει ἐπὶ ζαπέδωι, fr. 4.16-17), with, Page suggests, a thrown stone.<sup>51</sup>

In the next column, Heracles pierces the unprotected head with an arrow. The arrow that "cleaves his forehead" ([ἐ]νέρε[ι]σε μετώπωι, fr. 5.7) has been smeared with the "venom, the agonies of the man-destroying, speckle-necked Hydra" (χολᾶι | [ὄ]λεσάνορος αἰολοδε[ί]ρου | ὀδύναισιν ὕδρας, fr. 5.4-6). The addition of the poison is a bit of (literal) overkill here, given that the arrow goes straight through Geryon's brain. I suggest that this unnecessary introduction of the Hydra's poison, which Curtis believes to be the first literary allusion to the poisonous blood, is intended to draw out the contrast between Heracles' two types of opponents.<sup>52</sup> Both the Hydra and Geryon are many-headed, alien to humankind. But the

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48 Such a detailed examination befits a poem that has famously been calculated, on the basis of meter and a stichometric letter, to exceed 1300 lines, perhaps even to reach over 1500 lines. See discussion in Curtis, *Stesichoros's Geryoneis*, 23-36.

49 See Robertson, "Geryoneis," for discussion of three vases – one black-figure, two red-figure – that show Geryon in the fight, with one head pierced by an arrow and slumping down.

50 Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, "Stesichorus' Geryoneis, SLG 15 I-II," 23-4.

51 Page, "Stesichorus," 151. Tsitsibakou-Vasalos considers the use of the club, but ultimately agrees with Page ("Stesichorus' Geryoneis, SLG 15 I-II," 10-12).

52 Curtis, *Stesichoros's Geryoneis*, 140.

Hydra's deadly blood also marks it as dangerous to human life; moreover, it frequented Lerna, in the Argolid, posing a much more serious threat to the local inhabitants than the peaceable Geryon of Erytheia. Heracles' defeat of the Hydra improved the lives of the Peloponnesians by eliminating a menacing beast; the question posed by Stesichorus' *Geryoneis* is whether Heracles' accomplishment of this deed was of benefit to anyone beyond Heracles himself.

Stesichorus captures the slumping of Geryon's pierced head in a simile that compares him to a poppy:

ἀπέκλινε δ' ἄρ' αὐχένα Γαρ[υόνας  
ἐπικάρσιον, ὡς ὄκα μ[ά]κω[ν]  
ἄτε καταισχύμοισ' ἀπαλὸν [δέμας  
αἶψ' ἀπὸ φύλλα βαλοῖσα. [ (fr. 5.14-17)

And Geryon tilted his neck at an angle, just as a poppy, when it spoils its delicate body, suddenly dropping its petals...

The contrast between the gory destruction of Geryon's head and the small flower draws attention to its own incongruity.<sup>53</sup> For in an account that emphasizes weapons, blood, strategy, and death, a sudden shift of focus to a fragile blossom may be jarring. Page notes that Stesichorus' simile is based on a Homeric version, on the death of Gorgythion by Teucer's arrow in the *Iliad*.<sup>54</sup>

μήκων δ' ὡς ἐτέρωσε κάρη βάλεν, ἢ τ' ἐνὶ κήπῳ  
καρπῷ βριθομένη νοτίησί τε εἰαρινῆσιν,  
ὡς ἐτέρωσ' ἤμυσε κάρη πῆληκι βαρυνθέν. (8.306-8)

But just as a poppy droops its head, which is weighed down by fruit and spring rains in the garden, so he bowed his head, weighed down by his helmet.

Maingon asserts that "the sudden transition to a peaceful image tends to intensify the horrors

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53 For a further examination of the Homeric resonances of this scene, see Alison Dale Maingon, "Epic Convention in Stesichorus' 'Geryoneis: SLG' S15," *Phoenix* 34, no. 2 (1980): 103-7. Cf. also *Iliad* 14.499.

54 Page, "Stesichorus," 153.

of war" in this Iliadic scene, and perhaps a similar effect is intended here.<sup>55</sup> But Stesichorus' innovations in his adoption of the simile point to a different emphasis. For the Homeric poppy droops its head because it is in its prime; it is laden with fruit, which gathers more water in the rain. The Stesichorean poppy, on the other hand, loses its petals, according to Maingon, "in a storm or at the end of its cycle in late summer."<sup>56</sup>

Both possibilities are plausible, and without further context, it is difficult to determine exactly why the poppy "suddenly" drops its petals. But I propose the latter possibility, that Stesichorus' poppy dies at the end of its season, naturally wilting, losing its petals because it has already been in bloom. This is a fitting end for Geryon, for the poem has emphasized the heavy hand of the Olympians in the resolution of his fight with Heracles. As discussed above, it seems likely that the fate of Geryon was determined by Zeus before the battle begun.

Stesichorus thus presents a "reinterpretazione del mito: Gerione muore al pari dell'eroe troiano [Ettore]" at the hands of Heracles, who "assale guidato dal superiore volere di un dio e prevale sulla forza bruta dell'avversario con le risorse della sua mente astuta e scaltra."<sup>57</sup>

Geryon cannot overcome the rule of fate, and though Heracles successfully kills Geryon and makes off with his cattle, our sympathy is nevertheless drawn to the monstrous creature.

Stesichorus' emphasis on the role of fate or the will of the Olympians is closely intertwined with Heracles' successful defeat of Geryon. Heracles effectively conquers his opponent, but he is the one who can be judged an outlaw and troublemaker. Yet he will not be punished for his encroachment; rather, the hand of fate will ultimately reward him, despite his

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55 Maingon, "Epic Convention in Stesichorus' "Geryoneis," 107.

56 Maingon, "Epic Convention in Stesichorus' "Geryoneis," 106.

57 Bruno Gentili, "Eracle 'omicida giustissimo.' Pisandro, Stesicoro e Pindaro," in *Il Mito greco: atti del Convegno internazionale: (Urbino, 7-12 maggio 1973)*, ed. Bruno Gentili and Giuseppe Paioni (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1977), 301, 303.

poor behavior. Geryon, noble as he is, is sacrificed to Heracles' ascent to Olympus. And Zeus, father of Heracles, superintends the unfolding of these events. Stesichorus thus resists the growing influence of the encomiastic view of Heracles' Labors: that he "earns" his way to Olympus through a life of suffering on behalf of humankind, as in Prodicus' later tale. Stesichorus' Heracles is poised to attain immortality through Zeus' edict, *despite* the violent injustice he doles out during his life.

### Aristophanes' *Frogs*

Aristophanes' *Frogs* begins with a charming conceit: Dionysus, lamenting the lack of good tragic poets, desires to resurrect the recently deceased Euripides and adopts the costume of Heracles to facilitate his journey to the Underworld. Though Dionysus sheds the physical attributes of Heracles mid-way through the play, I propose that Dionysus' imitation of Heracles persists throughout the entirety of the play, affecting even our interpretation of Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus in the *agōn*. In support of this assertion, I will put forth two arguments: first, I posit that the *Frogs*' parody of Heracles' labor to fetch Cerberus contains a pointed and critical evaluation of the exploit. In this way, Aristophanes offers a humorous version of Stesichorus' critique of Heraclean heroism through Geryon's death discussed above. Second, I suggest that Dionysus' imitation of Heracles' career is more all-encompassing than has been previously shown: by defeating the Chorus of Frogs and outlasting his slave Xanthias in a contest of endurance, Dionysus accomplishes comic versions of Heracles' labors. Dionysus' consistent imitation of Heracles' career thus permits us to look at his retrieval of Aeschylus in

the same light as Heracles' retrieval of Cerberus: if Heracles' success can be presented as ambivalent, then perhaps Dionysus' is compromised as well.

The Heracles of the *Frogs* is more complex than the typical comic Heracles. So common was the stereotypical "hungry Heracles" that Aristophanes, in *Peace*, distinguishes his productions from the other poets' by refusing to depict such a character: sings the Chorus, "and he was the first to disdain and drive off those Heracleses, always chomping and starving" (τούς θ' Ἡρακλέας τοὺς μάττοντας καὶ τοὺς πεινῶντας ἐκείνους / ἐξήλασ' ἀτιμώσας πρῶτος, 741-2). One should not take Aristophanes at face value here, though, for he uses a gluttonous and buffoonish Heracles as a running joke in the *Birds*. In this scene, Heracles, Poseidon, and a Triballian god serve as emissaries from the gods, charged with making a settlement with the leaders of Cloudcuckooland (1565-1691). Heracles' initial aggression ("I want to strangle the guy," τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἄγχειν βούλομαι, 1575) is quickly neutralized by the prospect of a feast on roasted fowl. The possibility of a delicious meal outweighs Heracles' consideration of his own mission, his father's kingdom, or his personal inheritance.

The comic emphasis on Heracles' hunger is not limited to Aristophanes.<sup>58</sup> In a fragment of the *Callipides* of Strattis, a fifth-century comic poet, Heracles is thus described: "And right away he seized slices of fish and hot broiled pork-steaks and devoured them all together" (αὐτίκα δ' ἤρπασε τεμάχη / θερμάς τε κάπρου φλογίδας ἔβρυχέ τε πάνθ' ἅμα).<sup>59</sup> His fame as a glutton was known even in Italy: two early fourth-century, red-figure Apulian vessels reveal a hungry Heracles: the first, a bell-krater, depicts him carrying an entire table loaded with food,

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58 Heracles in Greek comedy bears resemblance to Apte's cross-cultural definition of tricksters, who "are primarily preoccupied with satisfying their basal desires and with deriving pleasure" (Mahadev L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 226). The typical comic Heracles seems to lack the trickster's standard trait of cleverness, though.

59 Kassel-Austin, vol. 7, fr. 12; from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, p. 656B.

while an oinochoe shows Heracles dashing away with the head of a sacrificial bull in his hand.<sup>60</sup>

These hungry, dimwitted Heracleses prove useful for comedy's aim of allowing what Dover calls "self-assertion," that is, the common man's "opportunity to assert himself by ridiculing the ruler."<sup>61</sup> Heracles – usually treated as a god in comedy – is stupid and debased; so easily outwitted is he that any mortal of average cleverness can manipulate him by appealing to his lowest instincts. Heracles' enslavement to bodily desires enables the audience to laugh at him, diminishing any threat formerly posed by his heroic violence. As a god, Heracles' attributes of bow and club remain symbols of a heroic past no longer relevant. Now that his struggles, battles, and suffering have reached their conclusion, Heracles can become an embodiment of physical appetites; the drives that accompanied his heroic successes, always larger-than-life, take a more benign turn after the end of his mortal career.

Though the *Frogs* certainly makes use of standard comic tropes about Heracles – his love for food, sexual desires, and ill-manners – this Heracles retains a fuller set of associations with his mythological traditions. For the play proposes from the start to parody not only the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides, but also Heracles as a heroic figure, as depicted in epic and tragedy. Just as Euripides and Aeschylus' lyrics lend themselves to stereotype and ridicule, so does Heracles' history of excessive behavior. This decision allows Aristophanes the opportunity to satirize not only Heracles' bodily preoccupations, but also the extremes of his heroic career. Dionysus' declaration that he intends to follow in Heracles' footsteps to the Underworld initially frames the play's actions as a sham Heracleian labor. My analysis of

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60 Rome, Ragusa Coll. 9; Naples SA 657. See discussion in Rainer Vollkommer, *Herakles in the Art of Classical Greece*, vol. 25, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1988), 76.

61 K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 32.



Stesichorus' *Geryoneis* shows that already in the sixth century, Heracles' violence in the service of his labors was questionable. Aristophanes' innovation here is to exploit this anxiety by applying the comic strategies of parody, caricature, and deflation to Heracles' appearance in the Underworld. The humor in his jokes, then, relies not only on scatological elements and the humiliation of the lofty, but also on a real discomfort with the practice of Heraclean heroism.

The play opens with Dionysus in a strange costume: in addition to his typical comic garb of a long saffron robe and buskins, he wears Heracles' attributes – a lion skin paired with a giant club.<sup>62</sup> Dionysus' assumption of Heracles' identity immediately invites the audience to compare him to his famous half-brother. The comparison, however, is not in Dionysus' favor. Like a child wearing a parent's over-large clothes in order to project an aura of authority, Dionysus' apparel only emphasizes how ill-suited he is to "play" Heracles as a theatrical role.<sup>63</sup> His attempts to make his capabilities more convincing with external signs only prime him to be deflated. When Dionysus rattles Heracles' door with his club, Heracles calls out, "Who knocked on the door? He came at it like a centaur, whoever...Tell me, what is this?" (τίς τὴν θύραν ἐπάταξεν; ὡς κενταυρικῶς / ἐνήλαθ' ὅστις εἶπέ μοι τουτὶ τί ἦν; 38-9). Upon seeing Dionysus in his ridiculous get-up, Heracles bursts out in uncontrollable laughter: "But I'm not able to scare off the laughter when I see a lion-skin worn over the saffron robe! What is the purpose? Why have the boot and the club joined forces?" (ἀλλ' οὐχ οἷός τ' εἶμ' ἀποσοβῆσαι τὸν γέλων, / ὀρῶν λεοντῆν ἐπὶ κροκωτῶ κειμένην. / τίς ὁ νοῦς; τί κόθορνος καὶ ῥόπαλον ξυνηλθέτην; 45-7). In these lines, Heracles articulates the heart of the joke that will run on for

62 See the lost Apulian bell-krater, formerly in Berlin Staatliche Muessen F3046, reproduced in line drawing in Oliver Taplin, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 46. Taplin argues that the painting of a Herakles-figure at the door accompanied by a slave on donkey is "more probably than not inspired by Aristophanes' *Frogs*" (47).

63 On Dionysus' shifting theatrical roles, see Mark Padilla, "The Heraclean Dionysus: Theatrical and Social Renewal in Aristophanes' *Frogs*," *Arethusa* 25 (1992): 359–384.

the next six hundred lines: the strange juxtaposition of the high-heroic (represented by the club) and the low-comic (represented in the actor's boot). The gap between Dionysus' aspirations to heroism and his absurd and unheroic appearance is the source of the humor, and through the joke, the play establishes its concern with Heracles as an achiever of heroic deeds.

Heracles' opening lines, comparing the intensity of Dionysus' knock to a Centaur's charge, quickly raises an array of associations with his heroic career. The joke shows that Dionysus does not know how to "play a hero," for in announcing his presence the way he imagines Heracles would, he completely overdoes it. Instead of the authoritative knock of a dignified and confident hero, he ends up sounding more like a wild, uncontrollable half-beast. His overcompensation only highlights his inadequacies.

In contrast, by raising the possibility that Centaurs are attacking his house, Heracles immediately reminds the audience of his previous involvement in defeating them. His battle against the Centaurs in Thessaly was one that helped define his reputation for strength and victory. Though not considered among his twelve canonical labors, the Centauromachy is praised by the Chorus in Euripides' *Heracles*:

τάν τ' ὀρεινόμον ἀγρίων  
Κενταύρων ποτὲ γένναν  
ἔστρωσεν τόξοις φονίοις,  
ἐναίρων πτανοῖς βέλεσιν. (364-7)

He once laid low the hill-dwelling race of wild Centaurs with his deadly bow, slaying them with his winged arrows.

Heracles' battle with the Centaurs was associated with his capture of the Erymanthian Boar, and was possibly described in the now lost epics by Peisander and Panyassis.<sup>64</sup> Thus,

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<sup>64</sup> See George Leonard Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 102, 104, for evidence on Peisander, and p. 183 for Panyassis.

Aristophanes establishes at least one pole around which his characterization of Heracles will move: the epic hero. Yet in exaggerating Dionysus' knock, Heracles too may have drawn a laugh. This Heracles has now retired from the life of battles and victories, and perhaps his eagerness to remember his heroic past suggests that he is itching for a little action.

Furthermore, Heracles' battle against the Centaurs is part of the sequence of events that precedes his *katabasis*, Heracles' signal act for the *Frogs*. For Heracles, in essaying to enter the Underworld, required initiation in the rites of Eleusis.<sup>65</sup> He could not be initiated, however, until the pollution of his slaughter of the Centaurs was purified.<sup>66</sup> The significance of the theme of the Eleusinian mysteries and Dionysus' relationship to them have been persuasively explicated by scholars such as Segal, Bowie, and Lada-Richards.<sup>67</sup> I agree that Dionysus reenacts many elements of the Eleusinian rituals in the course of his *katabasis*; I would simply emphasize in addition that Dionysus' ostensible "initiation" is from the beginning in imitation of Heracles, the most famous of initiates.<sup>68</sup> Aristophanes uses Heracles' initial words, then, to draw out the particular associations that will shape his Heracles in the *Frogs*. Not only will the play be concerned with Heracles' heroic achievements, in addition to his comic appetites, it will also be modeled directly on his own path to Hades and back.

But just as soon as Aristophanes characterizes his Heracles as heroic, he also employs

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65 Raymond J. Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom-tradition* (Grüner, 1979), 79–94 argues that the "Eleusinianization" of Heracles in the sixth century and the accompanying absence of the wounding of Hades represents a move away from his archaic reputation for violence.

66 The connections between the defeat of the Centaurs, Heracles' initiation in the Eleusinian rites, and his descent to Hades are attested in Diod. Sic. 4.14.3, 4.25.1; Ps.-Apoll. 2.5.12.

67 Charles Segal, "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the Frogs," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 65 (1961): 207–242; A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual, and Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 228–253; Ismene Lada-Richards, *Initiating Dionysus: Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes' Frogs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). Bowie emphasizes the possible Orphic associations in addition to the Dionysiac.

68 For an earlier discussion of Heracles as Eleusinian initiate and Dionysus as Eleusinian god, see Étienne Lapalus, "Le Dionysos et l'Héraclès des Grenouilles," *Revue des études grecques* 47 (1934): 1–20.

jokes about Heracles' love of food and sex. Dionysus claims he is motivated by a "desire" (πόθος, 53), and "such a longing" (τοιούτος ἕμερος, 59). Surely Heracles was not the only person who interpreted Dionysus' yearning as sexual in nature, given the terms' frequent use in erotic contexts.<sup>69</sup> But Dionysus' desire for Euripides is too powerful to be compared to lust, even Heracles', the famous sexual athlete.<sup>70</sup> Dionysus insists that the only way in which Heracles can comprehend the intensity of his longing is by comparing it to Heracles' appetite, thus introducing the stock comic motif of Heracles' hunger. Dionysus asks, "Have you sometime, in the past, experienced a sudden craving for pea soup?" (ἦδη ποτ' ἐπεθύμησας ἐξαίφνης ἔτνους; 62). Heracles affirms with great enthusiasm, now fully able to relate to Dionysus's urge. While Heracles' lust can be the subject of tragedy (e.g., Sophocles' *Trachiniae* or Euripides' *Auge*), his physical hunger can only be a comic trait. Aristophanes thus takes Heracles from a point of high regard, with the reminder of his defeat of the Centaurs, to a point of low comic relief.

The comic and heroic Heracleses are joined by a new persona: Heracles the literary critic. When Dionysus asserts that all the skillful poets have died, Heracles protests, offering Iophon, Agathon, Xenocles, and Pythangelus as living examples of decent poets. Surprisingly, Heracles, usually a dunce, appears to be quite up-to-date on the latest in the tragic theater. Heracles goes so far as to suggest to Dionysus that he bring up Sophocles instead: "Then will you not lead up Sophocles, since he is superior to Euripides, if you must bring someone back from there?" (εἴτ' οὐ Σοφοκλέα πρότερον ὄντ' Εὐριπίδου / μέλλεις ἀναγαγεῖν, εἴπερ ἐκεῖθεν δεῖ σ' ἄγειν; 76-7). The play, in fact, will confirm Heracles' evaluation, for with the exception of Euripides, who is presented as ambitious and self-absorbed, all the characters, living and dead,

69 The erotic language of Dionysus' wish here perhaps alludes to Orpheus' longing for his dead wife, Eurydice, for whom he also embarked on a journey to the Underworld.

70 To observe the consequences of Heracles' lust and infidelities, see Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

accept the greatness of Sophocles.<sup>71</sup> Heracles' suggestions provide the opportunity for Aristophanes to make jokes about the skill of his contemporaries, and surely that is a large part of the purpose behind this exchange. But I suggest that Aristophanes gives Heracles a measure of critical intelligence to sharpen the competition between Heracles and Dionysus.

Aristophanes uses Heracles to express the "common sense opinion" in counterpoint to Dionysus' declarations about Euripides' poetry. When Dionysus recites mangled lines of Euripides with gusto and approval, Heracles protests, "Surely that is hogwash, even you must agree" (ἢ μὴν κόβαλά γ' ἔστιν, ὡς καὶ σοὶ δοκεῖ, 100). Dionysus' botched delivery is indeed more entertaining than enlightening, and no doubt Heracles' evaluation of the mangling is shared by the audience. So when Dionysus counters Heracles with pure insult alone – "Teach me to dine!" (δειπνεῖν με δίδασκε, 106) – as appropriate as the insult may be, we are left with the strange sense that Heracles' critical opinion is, somehow, the more "proper" one.<sup>72</sup> And for those scholars who see Aeschylus as a "Heraclean" figure, it is fitting that Heracles dismisses Euripides (or at least, Dionysus' memory of Euripides) from the beginning.<sup>73</sup>

With his insult to Heracles, Dionysus attempts to mark out a separate sphere of influence from his half-brother: Dionysus will be the judge of poetry, and Heracles can reign over his own (broad) culinary taste. The remark reveals a spirit of competition between the two sons of Zeus. Their similarities invite comparison: they are both sons of Zeus by mortal

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71 On how this passage reflects a last-minute insertion upon Sophocles' recent death, see Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, vol. 9, *Comedies of Aristophanes* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1996), 20–1.

72 Matt Cohn drew my attention to the fragment of Alexis' *Linus*, in which the citharist Linus tries, in vain, to educate Heracles in great literature (140 Kassel-Austin; see commentary in W. Geoffrey Arnott, *Alexis - the Fragments: a Commentary*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries; 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)). When Heracles could choose between any number of canonical texts before him, he naturally chooses a cookbook (ὄψαρτυσία). This Heracles of Middle Comedy is nothing but a hungry moron; in contrast, Aristophanes' Heracles here seems at least semi-literate.

73 For the clearest formulation of this opinion, see Padilla, "The Heraclean Dionysus: Theatrical and Social Renewal in Aristophanes' *Frogs*."

mothers, recipients of cult worship, and relative latecomers to Olympus. Yet in other ways, they could hardly be more different. Heracles' life of toil and suffering stands in stark contrast to Dionysus' reputation for dissolution and sacred revelry. Even their comic personae differ: Heracles' is primarily preoccupied with food and drink (and women, to a lesser extent), while Dionysus' tends toward drink and sensuality.<sup>74</sup>

But Dionysus' challenge is directed at the epic, heroic version of Heracles, not the comic Heracles of lower appetite. When Heracles first turns away in laughter at the sight of Dionysus, Dionysus optimistically interprets his silence as fear (οὐκ ἐνεθυμήθης; 40). And Heracles, upon learning of Dionysus' destination, does not hesitate to put him down: "Fool! do you mean to tell me that you too will dare to go there?" (ὦ σχέτλιε, τολμήσεις γὰρ ἰέναι καὶ σύ γε; 116). For just as Heracles steps on Dionysus' toes by discriminating among the poets - Dionysus' role in overseeing the dramatic festivals during his cult festival - so Dionysus tries to usurp Heracles' role, as framed in this play, as conqueror of Death. This tension between the heroic Heracles and comic Dionysus will later be reflected in the contrast between the heroic and buffoonish Heracles, as seen from the perspective of the Underworld's inhabitants.

After bickering with Heracles, Dionysus reveals the reason for his arrival on Heracles' doorstep:

ἀλλ' ὦνπερ ἔνεκα τήνδε τὴν σκευὴν ἔχων  
ἦλθον κατὰ σὴν μίμησιν, ἵνα μοι τοὺς ξένους  
τοὺς σοὺς φράσειας, εἰ δεοίμην, οἷσι σὺ  
ἔχρῳ τόθ', ἠνίκ' ἦλθες ἐπὶ τὸν Κέρβερον,  
τούτους φράσον μοι, λιμένας, ἀρτοπώλια,  
πορνεῖ', ἀναπαύλας, ἐκτροπὰς, κρήνας, ὁδοὺς,  
πόλεις, διαίτας, πανδοκευτρίας ὅπου  
κόρεις ὀλίγιστοι. (108-115)

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<sup>74</sup> For a prime example of the stupid and hungry Heracles, see his role as clumsy ambassador in Aristophanes' *Birds* 1565-1693.

But the reason I came in this get-up in imitation of you, was so that you might tell me about your guest-friends, in case I need them, whose reception you enjoyed when you went for Cerberus. Tell me about these, the harbors, bakeries, brothels, inns, forks in the road, springs, streets, cities, accommodations, innkeepers with the fewest bedbugs.

Dionysus treats Heracles like a knowledgeable travel agent, and his places of interest indicate that he intends to enjoy the most pleasant sojourn possible. His assumption that the trip to Hades could be congenial diminishes the difficulty of the attempt; one can almost hear in Dionysus' lines the swagger of a rivalrous brother, "if you could do it, surely it can't be all that hard." Heracles does not at first oblige, offering insincere suggestions for methods of suicide. His subsequent description of the journey is indeed intimidating, with the great lake crossed by Charon's boat, frightening beasts, villains punished in a sea of dung, followed at last by the initiates. The land he remembers is foreign, threatening, and mysterious. Heracles' experience in successfully completing his journey to and from the Underworld thus marks him as strong, skillful, heroic. The enormity of the task that lies ahead for Dionysus casts his flippant questions in an unflattering light.

But this is Aristophanes' comedy, and, ironically, though Heracles' guidance proves to be largely accurate, Dionysus' line of questioning will be vindicated. For Heracles *does* know the innkeepers and the food-purveyors of the Underworld (much to their disadvantage). Dionysus will discover that Heracles' acquaintances from his Underworld days fall sharply into two camps: those who suffered from his violence, and the goddess who remembers him fondly. In that sense, then, Dionysus was surely right to inquire about Heracles' experience with the local economy. And perhaps if he had received a straight answer, he would have anticipated the mixed reception he discovers!

Aristophanes' choice to model Dionysus' quest for Euripides on Heracles' Labor for Cerberus was deliberate. For other mythological precedents were available: Theseus, Perithous, Orpheus, and even Dionysus himself traveled to and returned from the Underworld. While the *katabaseis* of Theseus, Perithous, and Orpheus fail in obtaining their designated quarry, Dionysus at least is successful: Dionysus retrieves his mother, Semele, and introduces her to Olympus.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, Heracles' descent to the Underworld remains the standard narrative of success over death, and, as far as we can tell, Aristophanes ignores Dionysus' own *katabasis*.<sup>76</sup> Aristophanes' Heracles has presented his experience in Hades as terrifying and dreadful; by extension, his victory over the challenge deserves praise and celebration. And the journey to and from the Underworld is a very serious endeavor indeed. In Euripides' *Heracles*, his return from Hades is treated with reverent wonder by his father Amphitryon:

Am. ἤλθες γὰρ ὄντως δώματ' εἰς Ἅιδου, τέκνον;  
 Ηρ. καὶ θῆρά γ' ἐξ φῶς τὸν τρίκρανον ἤγαγον.  
 Am. μάχη κρατήσας ἢ θεᾶς δωρήμασιν;  
 Ηρ. μάχη: τὰ μυστῶν δ' ὄργι' εὐτύχησ' ἰδών. (610-3)

Am.: Did you really go to the house of Hades, son?  
 Her.: I did, and I brought the three-headed beast into the light.  
 Am.: Did you defeat him in a fight, or by the gifts of the goddess?  
 Her.: In a fight; because I observed the rites of the initiates, I succeeded.

Even for a hero as accomplished as Heracles, this return from Hades is difficult to fathom. Euripides follows a long literary tradition of treating Heracles' *katabasis* as a heroic feat. Pindar composed a dithyramb entitled "Heracles' Katabasis or Cerberus" (fr. 70b), and an Archaic, epic *katabasis* of Heracles has been hypothesized as a shared source for a number of authors, from

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75 For a metafictional analysis of the *Frogs*' relationship with Euripides' *Perithous*, see Gregory W. Dobrov, *Figures of Play: Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 133–156. On Dionysus' and Orpheus' journeys to the Underworld, see Clark, *Catabasis*, 95–124.

76 The ancient accounts of this journey are late: Ps.-Apoll. 3.5.3 and Diod. Sic. 4.25.4.



Bacchylides to Virgil.<sup>77</sup> Treated as the last of his canonical Labors, the return from Hades, with Cerberus in tow, symbolizes Heracles' conquering of death. With this superhuman task accomplished, Heracles can ascend to live with the Olympians.

Aristophanes may have drawn some of the details for his *katabasis* from the same source as Bacchylides, Euripides, and Vergil, but his innovation is to shift the focus of his dramatization from Heracles' actions to the consequences of his actions, as Dionysus and Xanthias encounter the victims of Heracles' thefts. In Aristophanes' *Underworld*, Heracles' success is not an isolated phenomenon; his victory entails damage and destruction for the other parties involved. Through the humorous costume-shifting of Dionysus and Xanthias, Aristophanes reveals the double-edged nature of "playing Heracles": when Dionysus most wants to partake in Heracles' success, he must contend with the legacy of Heracles' violence, lack of control, and destruction.<sup>78</sup>

Dionysus discovers Heracles' troubled history once he arrives at the gatekeeper's door. The scene doubles the opening action, when Dionysus knocked on Heracles' door. Dionysus makes a sudden display of courtesy, wondering, "Come now, how am I to knock on the door? How? How do the locals around here knock?" (ἄγε δὴ, τίνα τρόπον τὴν θύραν κόψω; τίνα; / πῶς ἐνθάδ' ἄρα κόπτουσιν οὐπιχώριοι; 461). This pause allows the characters on the stage and the audience to register that Dionysus, by crossing the bottomless lake, has now entered

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77 See Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Heracles at Eleusis," in *Greek Epic, Lyric, and Tragedy: The Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 167–187. Noel Robertson, "Heracles' 'Catabasis,'" *Hermes* 108, no. 3 (1980): 274–300, argues that the epic should be identified with the *Aegimius* by Cercops of Miletus. The epic *Minyas* by Prodicus of Phocaea (Bernabé, *Poetarum epicorum Graecorum*, 1:137–142) described the *katabasis* of Theseus and Pirithous; see Janko, *Philodemus: On Poems, Book 1*, 336, n. 1; M. L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments from the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 268–75.

78 See discussion in Radcliffe Edmonds, "Who in Hell Is Heracles? Dionysos' Disastrous Disguise in Aristophanes' *Frogs*," in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. David Dodds and Christopher Faraone (Routledge, 2003), 190–1.

essentially a foreign land. His question raises the possibility that a completely different set of protocols governs social interactions in the Underworld; he is like the lost Odysseus, exploring a foreign land and its inhabitants.

Xanthias urges him on, though, to imitate Heracles: "Stop wasting time and try the door, in the form and spirit of Heracles!" (οὐ μὴ διατρίψεις, ἀλλὰ γεύσει τῆς θύρας, / καθ' Ἡρακλέα τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὸ λῆμ' ἔχων, 462-3). Xanthias thus recommends that Dionysus internalize his outer disguise and unite his actions with his appearance. As Habash notes, "The theatrical illusion that one playing a role is transformed into the portrayed character through theatrical props and garb is created by the actors. Aristophanes brilliantly puts a spin on this technique by having his own actor fooled, as is the audience, or at least feign belief, and therefore create comedy through the parodying of this technique."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps the reminder also alludes to Heracles' travels; Heracles could approach any door with confidence, for in his far-flung adventures, he successfully defeated the unjust people he encountered.

This brief exchange anticipates much of the underlying humor of the scenes to follow: that the inhabitants of Hades, though so far removed from the living, retain the same customs and habits as contemporary Athenians. This allows Aristophanes to present Heracles' epic accomplishments from a new perspective, that of an ordinary citizen. Even the mythological figures, like the dreaded doorkeeper Aeacus, respond to Dionysus-Heracles with accessible priorities. It is clear that it has never occurred to Dionysus that Heracles, in his victory, would have become *persona non grata* in the house of Hades. The diminution of Heracles' accomplishment is funny, on the principle of "high brought low," but Aristophanes nevertheless makes a serious point about heroism: Heracles' legendary accomplishments are

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79 Martha Habash, "Dionysos' Roles in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" *Mnemosyne* 55, no. 1 (2002): 3.

not necessarily positive.

If comedy provides a social release by depicting chaos and disorder on the stage<sup>80</sup>, then the comic strategy here is to reveal that Heracles' achievements in the past also entailed social disruption. Heracles' heroism has resulted in collateral damage; he may never pay the penalty, and the costs of his actions may fall upon the innocent. The epinician tradition – as far as we can tell – neglects these aspects of Heracles' successes. But in comedy, Aristophanes can exploit this seeming contradiction between glorious victory and destructive consequences by taking Heracles out of the realm of myth and putting him in contact with people like the audience.

Dionysus does not experience the welcome he expects as "Heracles the Strong" (Ἡρακλῆς ὁ καρτερός, 464). His use of the term *karteros* suggests that he intended to intimidate the doorkeeper, traditionally identified as Aeacus, under the assumption that Heracles' victory would have left the populace in fear. But Aeacus does not live in fear of Heracles' return; rather, he has been awaiting his opportunity for revenge. I imagine that, in a modern production of the play, Aeacus' door opens to reveal a "Wanted" sign with an image of Heracles in lion skin with club. As Moorton put it, Dionysus has unwittingly assumed the identity of "a known felon."<sup>81</sup> Aeacus "recognizes" Dionysus in costume and excitedly lambasts him:

ὦ βδελυρὲ κάναίσχυντε καὶ τολμηρὲ σὺ  
καὶ μιαρὲ καὶ παμμίαρε καὶ μιαρώτατε,  
ὄς τὸν κύν' ἡμῶν ἐξέλασας τὸν Κέρβερον  
ἀπῆξας ἄγχων κάποδράς ὄχου λαβῶν,  
ὄν ἐγὼ 'φύλαττον. ἀλλὰ νῦν ἔχει μέσος. (465-70)

You loathsome, shameless, daring man, abominable, totally abominable, most abominable! You drove away my dog, Cerberus, whom I used keep. Throttling him, you dashed away, and when you left, you took him with you in flight. But now I've got you!

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80 See Apte, *Humor and Laughter*, 160–1.

81 Richard F. Moorton, "Rites of Passage in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" *The Classical Journal* 84, no. 4 (1989): 318.

Aeacus goes on to threaten Dionysus with physical harm in a parody of high-falutin' tragic language. Aeacus' memory of Heracles is dominated by the violence with which Heracles subdued Cerberus, accusing him of nearly strangling him.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, he is offended by Heracles' breach of social custom: not only did Heracles assault his dog, but he seized him and ran off with him – without proper compensation.

It turns out that, in Aristophanes' *Underworld*, Heracles is a villain, and Cerberus and his keepers, victims of a crime. Aeacus acts as if Cerberus were merely a beloved sheepdog whom Heracles stole.<sup>83</sup> By diminishing the Hound of Hades to a cherished pet, Aeacus likewise turns Heracles' heroic effort into a petty dogsnapping. Heracles the epic hero suddenly does not look so imposing after all, and his great exploit becomes the act of a disruptive hooligan.

The cowardly Dionysus, fearing the consequences of Heracles' intrusion, persuades his Xanthias to exchange identities with him. Dionysus cajoles him:

ἴθι νυν, ἐπειδὴ ληματίας κἀνδρεῖος εἶ,  
σὺ μὲν γενοῦ ἄγω τὸ ῥόπαλον τουτὶ λαβῶν  
καὶ τὴν λεοντῆν, εἵπερ ἀφοβόσπλαγχνος εἶ.  
ἐγὼ δ' ἔσομαι σοι σκευοφόρος ἐν τῷ μέρει. (494-7)

Come on, since you are high-spirited and courageous, become me by taking this club and lion skin, if you really are fearless. And I in turn will become your luggage boy.

The topsy-turvy world of comedy is on full display, as the god-dressed-as-a-god becomes a slave, and the slave takes on the trappings of a god. Their conversation assumes a correspondence between one's internal qualities and his outward appearance. By offering to become a slave, Dionysus acknowledges his cowardice and insufficiency to "play Heracles."

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82 Centuries later, Vergil's Aeneas and the Sibyl would adopt a more gentle tactic: the fierce Cerberus is overcome by means of a drugged cake.

83 Euripides gives the dog three heads; Hesiod, fifty (*Theogony* 310-12). For a survey of the variations, see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: a Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 413-16.

Dionysus' transformation into a slave, followed by the resumption of his former identity, follows a path that Heracles has already trodden, when he served Omphale after his murder of Iphitus.<sup>84</sup> From the evidence found in vase painting, already by the sixth century Omphale assumed Heracles' attributes; according to Lucian's later account, Heracles wore a saffron gown.<sup>85</sup> In Aristophanes' play, then, as Dionysus takes off the attributes of Heracles and stands in his *krokotos*, he mimics precisely the events in Heracles' life. Aristophanes treats the parallels playfully: Dionysus "becomes" a slave in order to avoid punishment; Heracles became a slave to Omphale as a form of punishment itself. By the Roman period, Heracles' servitude to Omphale is distinctly sexual in nature. But in Aristophanes, by taking on the role of slave, Dionysus is denied sexual opportunity.

This suggestion of Heracles' enslavement to Omphale occurs in the context of the violence of Heracles' assault on Cerberus. Both are examples of heroic disaster: Heracles' murder of the innocent Iphitus contravenes established guest-host relations, and his punishment is the humiliation of slavery;<sup>86</sup> Heracles' assault on Cerberus generates resentment and injury among those who receive him. The difficulty of receiving Heracles as a guest is a stock comic motif, one displayed prominently in Euripides' *Alcestis*. In keeping with the *Frogs*' more complex portrayal of Heracles, this Heracles as a *xenos* has a darker side, one tainted by murder and brutality. Though the audience may enjoy a laugh at Dionysus' reduction of status to a slave's (and Heracles' behind it), there remains an underlying tone of uneasiness.

The fluidity of identity in the play is striking: Dionysus can become Heracles, but so can

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84 Segal calls this "the fullest possible execution of the *mimesis* of Heracles" (Charles Segal, "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the Frogs," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 65 (1961): 213).

85 See Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 439; Segal, "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the Frogs," n. 18, p. 232.

86 See my chapter on Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

Xanthias, while Dionysus can also become a slave. The inhabitants of the Underworld accept Dionysus and Xanthias in Heracles' costume at face value; no one seems to notice what must have been obvious distinctions among the three figures. So prominent is Dionysus' actorly costume that the innkeeper notes that his boots do *not* deceive her into not recognizing "Heracles"! Moreover, Dionysus, in his fear, occasionally longs to be neither Dionysus nor Heracles (298-300); he would prefer to remain nameless than be known to hostile parties in the Underworld. The arbitrariness of identity – that one can try it on, discard it, adopt nothing at all – plays into the *Frogs*' concern with Heracles' identity. For Heracles can be comic and epic, heroic and buffoonish, friend and enemy. So Dionysus and Xanthias display on stage the versatility of the figure of Heracles himself; the alternation between Dionysus-Heracles and Xanthias-Heracles mimics the alternation in the play between heroic Heracles and buffoon Heracles.

For as soon as Xanthias takes on Heracles' identity, it becomes an advantage to him. While Heracles is a rogue deserving of punishment to Aeacus, he is a guest-friend dear to the queen of the Underworld, Persephone.<sup>87</sup> Hence, Persephone's maid issues Xanthias a warm invitation for a feast:

ἡ γὰρ θεός σ' ὡς ἐπύθεθ' ἤκοντ', εὐθέως  
 ἔπεττεν ἄρτους, ἧψε κατερικτῶν χύτρας  
 ἔτνους δὺ' ἢ τρεῖς, βοῦν ἀπηνθράκιζ' ὄλον,  
 πλακοῦντας ὄπτα κολλάβους <τ'>. ἀλλ' εἴσιθι. (504-7)

When the goddess heard that you had arrived, she immediately began baking bread, heating up pots of ground pea-soup – two or three – she was roasting a whole ox and baking flat cakes and rolls. Come in!

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<sup>87</sup> Dover raises the possibility that this private dinner for two may reflect "that in vulgar belief Persephone fancied Herakles," but I do not view this interpretation as necessary (K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 143).

Xanthias demurs, and the maid continues to entice him with offers of poultry, sweetmeats, and sweet wine. Xanthias, apparently not hungry, again refuses, until the maid advertises the presence of a beautiful flute-girl and dancers. Heracles' love for pea-soup was established earlier, in his conversation with Dionysus, and so great is his appetite for women that Persephone has brought in the musical entertainment before the feast has even begun.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the Heracles anticipated by Persephone and his maid is the comic Heracles: he is motivated primarily by hunger and constantly lustful. So generous is the hostess that her spread anticipates the absurdly large appetite of Heracles. Persephone's reception makes no acknowledgement of Heracles' weariness after such a trying journey and places no emphasis on the celebrated skills that enabled his living presence in the halls of Hades.<sup>89</sup> Instead, her invitation reveals the positive side of the comic Heracles; she expects a jovial companion who brings warmth and entertainment to the table.

In his eagerness to enjoy the benefits of Heracles' identity, Dionysus prevails upon Xanthias to exchange identities once more. Yet the change does Dionysus no good; for before he can experience the hospitality of Persephone, they are approached by an innkeeper and her maid, Plathane. It turns out that Dionysus' superficial questions to Heracles about the inns and hostels of the Underworld were more pointed than they initially appeared, since Heracles did indeed patronize the local establishments of Hades. The story that the innkeeper tells provides yet another perspective on Heracles' outsized effort: he bolted down sixteen loaves of bread, twenty portions of meat, garlic, salt-fish, and fresh cheese *with the baskets*, stock, and sausages.

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88 K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, 144.

89 One variation on the myth claims that Persephone offered Cerberus to Heracles as a goodwill gesture because he had been initiated into the Eleusinian rites (see Diodorus Siculus, 4.26.1). Aristophanes clearly does not follow this version, as the audience hears from Aeacus how Heracles obtained Cerberus in combat.

Apparently he was not so busy subduing Cerberus that he did not have time to sate his hunger and thirst.

The innkeeper's complaint emphasizes what the audience already knows: Heracles is a glutton with a huge appetite. Plathane's added detail of Heracles' consuming the baskets right along with the actual food stuff debases him.<sup>90</sup> Even animals can discern between edible and inedible, and Heracles' wholly indiscriminate taste marks him as on the border between human and beast.<sup>91</sup> Yet the occasion on which this event transpired – Heracles' journey to the Underworld – foreshadows his transition from mortal to god. Culture, in the structuralist scheme, serves to create boundaries among animals, mortals, and gods, but Heracles' behavior obscures those borders.<sup>92</sup> Thus, Aristophanes marks Heracles' deification as dangerously transgressive; for it is a bestial hero, one who disregards the restrictions of civilization, who becomes a god.

But at the heart of the innkeeper's lament is not the size of Heracles' hunger, but his antisocial behavior. One of the play's running jokes is the persistence of a monetary economy in the Underworld. A recent corpse refuses to carry Dionysus' luggage for the price he offers; Charon requires two obols as fare for passage across the bottomless lake; and now, the audience finds that Heracles' greatest crime was to dine and dash. The innkeeper and Plathane represent the same values that are held by contemporary marketwomen of Athens. They are incensed that Heracles depleted their stock and damaged their property without appropriate recompense. For, as the innkeeper recounts, "And then, when I began to ask for payment, he

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90 In *TrGF* Ion F29, Heracles consumes the firewood and charcoal during the initial prayer for the meal!

91 Lada-Richards remarks, "...his gulping down the wooden baskets would certainly appear to Greek eyes as the peak of brutishness" (*Initiating Dionysus*, 175).

92 See Segal's formulation in Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*, vol. 26, Martin Classical Lectures (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 13–42.



gave me a fierce look and bellowed...and he drew his sword, like a madman!" (κάπειτ' ἐπειδὴ τάργυριον ἐπραττόμην, / ἔβλεψεν εἷς με δριμύ κάμυκάτό γε...καὶ τὸ ξίφος γ' ἐσπᾶτο, μαίνεσθαι δοκῶν, 561-2, 564).

The innkeeper's description of Heracles pivots to yet another Heracleian identity: the tragic madman. Oddly, neither Dover nor Sommerstein, in their excellent commentaries, mentions the similarities between Heracles' behavior in the inn and Heracles' madness in Euripides' *Heracles*. At Hera's behest, Lyssa casts madness into Heracles' mind, causing him to murder his wife and children. As Lyssa begins to infect his mind, she narrates, "he silently rolls his distorted, fierce-eyed pupils...and bellows fearsomely" (καὶ διαστρόφους ἐλίσσει σῖγα γοργωπὸς κόρας...δεινὰ μυκᾶται δέ, 868-70). The ferocity of Heracles' look and his beast-like roar characterize him out of control – and life-threatening. The innkeeper and her maid certainly had reason to fear this unwelcome guest; it turns out that the gluttonous Heracles can turn at the mere drop of a hat into the raging madman capable of anything, even killing his dearest family.

Aristophanes cannot resist adding a comic touch, though, with the innkeeper noting that when Heracles "rushed out, he took the mattresses with him" (ὁ δ' ὄχετ' ἐξᾶξας γε τὰς ψιάθους λαβῶν, 567). Fortunately, Heracles' destruction here is reparable. Yet what use could Heracles possibly have for mattresses? The point is that he has no purpose in mind: Heracles' violence is wanton, ill-directed, and unjustified. This is precisely what makes Heracles so dangerous: though he often uses his heroism to benefit humankind, he can just as easily injure the harmless. And this is the last word in the play about the "real Heracles," the one who appeared in the flesh in the opening of the play: he deserves punishment for his actions,

instead of praise.

In the final judgment of the *Frogs*, then, Heracles' capture of Cerberus causes more social damage than social benefit. By providing the perspective of the middle-class contemporary Athenian on Heracles' actions, Aristophanes punctures an inflated view of Heraclean heroism. Aeacus' indignant desire for vengeance against the thief of his pet and the innkeeper's outrage at Heracles' barbarity, though light-hearted in nature, nevertheless point out a troubling contradiction in the traditions about Heracles. Though Heracles becomes an increasingly important symbol of social order and benefit in fifth-century Athens, his heroism also entails the violation of social norms. Aeacus – and by extension, Cerberus – are the innocent victims of Heracles' ambush; the landladies just want to run their business. The suppression of reasons for praise of Heracles and the emphasis on reasons for criticism, while part of the comic project of ridiculing prominent figures, nevertheless take advantage of legitimate doubt about this labor: it benefits no one other than Heracles himself, while at the same time inflicts damage upon other parties. At best, it is useless; at worst, it is actively harmful.

In assuming Heracles' identity, Dionysus also lays claim to his heroic legacy. His actions thus can be read as partaking of Heraclean tradition more broadly. I argue that in Dionysus' adventures on his journey to rapture a dead poet, Aristophanes stages a parody of Heracles' labors. Heracles' earliest labors – the defeats of the Nemean Lion and the Lernaean Hydra – established him early in his career as a protector of civilization against the threats lurking in the natural world. The aggression of these beasts, and of others like them, made them a threat

to local inhabitants, and their ferocity made them impossible for mere mortals to conquer. Heracles, by subduing them, made the lives of humans safer and more stable. Amphitryon, in Euripides' *Heracles*, deems this contribution the greatest of Heracles' favors to Greece: "[all Greece] should have come bearing fire, spears, and weapons for these nestlings, in exchange for the cleansing of sea and dry land, the labors of your hand" (ἦν χρῆν νεοσσοῖς τοῖσδε πῦρ λόγχας ὄπλα / φέρουσιν ἐλθεῖν, ποντίων καθαρμάτων / χέρσου τ' ἀμοιβὰς ὧν ἐμόχθησας χερί, 224-6).

Thus, given the significance of Heracles' animal Labors to his reputation, it should be no surprise that Dionysus, too, enters into a competition with the beasts.<sup>93</sup> What should also be expected is that Aristophanes would put a comic twist on the Heracleian animal Labor. Thus Dionysus, in his entrance to the Underworld, finds himself engaging in a battle with a band of singing Frogs.<sup>94</sup> I believe that viewing Dionysus' competition with the Frogs as a parody of a Heracleian Labor clarifies the confusion surrounding the presence of this initial chorus.<sup>95</sup> The animals Heracles confronted were distinctive: the hydra's many heads, the Lion's impenetrable skin, Diomedes' mares' unusual appetite, etc. The Frogs here too are distinctive, for they are hybrid Frog-Swans (βατράχων κύκνων, 207), according to Charon. Charon thus prepares the audience for Frogs that do not croak like their brethren, but are "melodious singers," as swans were assumed to be in antiquity, at least at their death.<sup>96</sup> It is against these strange and unexpected creatures that Dionysus must battle.

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93 Callimachus renders his own version of this parody in the *Aetia* III (fr. 177 Pfeiffer): on his way to fight the Nemean Lion, Heracles encounters Molochus, an impoverished farmer who must wage his own mock-heroic battle against the voracious mice in his house.

94 For frogs as a hostile party in a battle, see the Hellenistic poem, *Batrachomyomachia*, which describes a fight between frogs and mice in an epic style.

95 Confusion well-expressed in the title of Wills' article, "Why are the Frogs in the *Frogs*?"

96 Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, 176.

I suggest that the Frogs are comically reminiscent of the Lernaean Hydra. The contest is heroic in concept, but comic in form. Again in Euripides' *Heracles*, Lycus refers dismissively to the Hydra as "a snake from the marsh" (ὕδραν ἔλειον, 152); the tyrant's aim is to de-heroize Heracles' achievement by belittling the stature of the animal he conquered. Aristophanes' Frogs describe themselves as "children from the marsh, of streams" (λιμναῖα κρηνῶν τέκνα, 211). As Moorton has observed, the Frogs are amphibians; by definition, they are liminal creatures that can cross between land and water, above and below.<sup>97</sup> Heracles fights at the boundaries of civilization and the wild;<sup>98</sup> likewise, Dionysus encounters this conflict as he crosses from upper to lower world. Their competition with Dionysus is purely verbal, a stark departure from Heracles' physical grappling and violent slaying of the Hydra, but it is only appropriate given Dionysus' status as connoisseur of tragic poetry in this play.<sup>99</sup>

The actual material of the contest between Dionysus and the Frogs remains disputed. Wills believes the competition is based on aesthetics, and Dionysus defeats the gurgling Frogs with his massive flatulence;<sup>100</sup> MacDowell and Campbell see the contest as one of persistence;<sup>101</sup> Habash believes that Dionysus triumphs by being loudest.<sup>102</sup> I believe that the subject of the contest is, unfortunately, impossible to determine without performance cues. Perhaps even the original audience was unsure about what exactly silences the Frogs, and they laughed at the sight of Dionysus' distress more than anything. I wonder if the solution could be as simple

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97 Moorton, "Rites of Passage in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" 312.

98 See Charles Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 47–9, 58–9; Vayos Liapis, "Intertextuality as Irony: Heracles in Epic and in Sophocles," *Greece & Rome* 53, no. 1 (2006): 52–4.

99 Dover identifies the species of our Frogs as *Rana ridibunda*, the most populous marsh frog in southern Europe; it is considered harmless (Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, 119).

100 Garry Wills, "Why Are the Frogs in the Frogs?," *Hermes* 97, no. 3 (1969): 306–317.

101 Douglas M. MacDowell, "The Frogs' Chorus," *The Classical Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 3–5; David A. Campbell, "The Frogs in the Frogs," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 104 (1984): 163–165.

102 Habash, "Dionysos' Roles in Aristophanes' 'Frogs'."

as the Frogs singing mainly in a stationary location, so as Dionysus continues to row, he eventually rows past them and leaves them behind, their voices fading into the distance. This scenario likely requires that the Chorus playing the Frogs remain hidden behind the *skene*.<sup>103</sup>

But regardless of whether Dionysus shouts *brekekekex koax koax* more or less quickly, loudly, slowly, or beautifully than the Frogs, the contest remains a very silly affair. Dionysus, still in Heracles' dress, encounters strange animals and defeats them in an unheroic way – he uses neither great strength nor skill nor strategy. Nor do the Frogs appear dangerous. Though they encumber Dionysus with physical discomfort – ass-soreness, primarily – they do not appear to threaten the larger community; at least Charon seems perfectly accustomed to them. Dionysus' "beast Labor" is appropriate for a fat, incompetent, and cowardly kind of hero. Nevertheless, he, like Heracles, is "master of the animals" when he arrives at the other end of the bottomless lake.

Flush from his triumph over the Frogs, Dionysus is raring to confront the challenges of Hades. Dionysus, in imitating Heracles' endeavor, is in effect attempting to write his own epic *katabasis*. He wishes to repeat Heracles' journey – and even surpass it. In a moment of foolish bravado, Dionysus defies the monsters that may lurk ahead:

ἤλαζονεύεθ' ἵνα φοβηθείην ἐγώ,  
εἰδώς με μάχιμον ὄντα, φιλοτιμούμενος.  
οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτω γαῦρόν ἐσθ' ὡς Ἡρακλῆς.  
ἐγὼ δέ γ' εὐξαίμην ἂν ἐντυχεῖν τινι  
λαβεῖν τ' ἀγώνισμ' ἄξιόν τι τῆς ὁδοῦ. (280-4)

[Heracles] was just bragging so that I would be frightened, jealous when he saw that I'm in fighting shape. For nothing is as boastful as Heracles! I could even pray to encounter

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103 For arguments for an unseen Chorus, see Wills, "Why Are the Frogs in the Frogs?"; Richard H. Allison, "Amphibian Ambiguities: Aristophanes and His Frogs," *Greece & Rome* 30, no. 1 (1983): 8–20; W.E. Higgins, "A Passage to Hades: The Frogs of Aristophanes," *Ramus* 6 (1977): 60–81. For arguments for a visible Chorus, see MacDowell, "The Frogs' Chorus"; Campbell, "The Frogs in the Frogs."

something and to achieve some feat worthy of the journey.

Even as he dismisses Heracles for his envy, Dionysus expresses his own desire to be just like Heracles. Aristophanes has demoted Dionysus from god to aspiring hero, allowing his audience to laugh at his humiliation.<sup>104</sup> For just as Dionysus starts to feel confident, the possibility of an encounter with Empusa reveals his cowardice (289-305). He falls into trembling, helpless fear, a clear trait of the Aristophanic "hero."<sup>105</sup>

Dionysus' next imitation of a Heraclean labor occurs in his engagement in a whipping contest with Xanthias. Each must doff his outer garments, so Dionysus removes his Heracles costume. But though the lion skin and club disappear from view, Heracles' heroic legacy continues to dominate the action. Heracles' abilities to endure intolerable strain and put forth unending effort are the basis of his victory in several of his Labors – I categorize this as the second type of Labor above. Dionysus embarks on a contest with Xanthias that adopts a similar principle: he must outlast his opponent by tolerating pain and enduring a difficult challenge.

The whipping contest between Xanthias and Dionysus is also aimed at revealing the competitors' true identities: whoever betrays no feeling of pain under Aeacus' flogging will be considered a god and the truth-teller. For both Xanthias and Heracles begin the contest with their integrity compromised. Xanthias, a simple slave portraying himself as Heracles, is trying to wriggle out of facing the consequences for Heracles' violent abduction of Cerberus.<sup>106</sup> And

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104 For discussion about the disparity between Dionysus' aspirations and actual antics, see Emily Kratzer, "The Double Herakles: Studies on the Death and Deification of the Hero in Fifth-century Drama" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), 28–58.

105 Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, 32.

106 Habash notes, however, that Xanthias plays Heracles better than Dionysus does (Habash, "Dionysos' Roles in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" 4). This direct competition between Dionysus and a slave is remarkable and heralds what Dover calls "a new kind of slave-role"; he attributes this development in large part to the battle of Arginusae in summer 406, when slaves in the fleet received their freedom upon the Athenian victory (Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, 47–50).

Dionysus, who prevailed upon Xanthias to take up his Heracles' costume, is attempting to avoid both paying Heracles' debt to the innkeeper and the beating that befits his assumed status as slave. Neither wants to lay claim to being Heracles any longer, as the legacy of his dog-napping has turned out to be too oppressive. So they transform the question of punishing the thief into one of discerning godhood:

Δι. ἀθάνατος εἶναί φημι, Διόνυσος Διός,  
τοῦτον δὲ δοῦλον.  
Αἰα. ταῦτ' ἀκούεις;  
Ξα. φήμ' ἐγώ.  
καὶ πολὺ γε μᾶλλον ἔστι μαστιγωτέος·  
εἴπερ θεὸς γάρ ἐστιν, οὐκ αἰσθήσεται.  
Δι. τί δῆτ', ἐπειδὴ καὶ σὺ φῆς εἶναι θεός,  
οὐ καὶ σὺ τύπτει τὰς ἴσας πληγὰς ἐμοί; (631-6)

Di.: I declare that I am immortal, Dionysus, the son of Zeus, and this man is a slave.

Aea.: Do you hear this?

Xa.: Yes, I do. And all the more must he be whipped: for if he is, in fact, a god, he won't feel it.

Di. Then why, since you also claim to be a god, are you too not being beaten, stroke-for-stroke with me?

Xanthias and Dionysus both reveal their strategic cleverness in this exchange; both ensure that their "opponent" will experience pain alongside him.

The brief contest that follows allows both parties to entertain the audience with their quick thinking. Xanthias blames his obvious cry of pain on a thorn in his foot; Dionysus converts his bellow of "Apollo!" into the beginning of a poetic verse. After three rounds of whipping, both Xanthias and Dionysus remain equal, having deceived Aeacus, whose judgment proves rather dim.<sup>107</sup> Xanthias, who cleverly initiated the contest by suggesting that Aeacus torture Dionysus, contrives that Dionysus receives a second blow in a row. He helpfully

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<sup>107</sup> If the gatekeeper figure is to be identified as Aeacus, as most of the manuscripts do, then perhaps the joke is that the dread judge of the dead cannot adjudicate a simple whipping contest between two people. See discussion in Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs*, 27-8.

prompts Aeacus, "You aren't doing anything! Here, smack him on the flanks" (οὐδὲν ποιεῖς γάρ· ἀλλὰ τὰς λαγόνας σπόδει, 662). Aeacus takes it one step further, and beats Dionysus directly on his stomach (γαστέρα, 663). Dionysus thus receives one more stripe than Xanthias, yet manages to weave a song from his initial cry to Poseidon. After this significant blunder in administration of the contest, Aeacus declares himself at a loss:

οὔτοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα δύναμαί πω μαθεῖν  
ὁπότερος ὑμῶν ἐστὶ θεός. ἀλλ' εἴσιτον·  
ὁ δεσπότης γὰρ αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς γνώσεται  
χὴ Φερρέφατθ', ἅτ' ὄντε κάκείνω θεῶ. (668-71)

By Demeter, I simply cannot figure out which of you is a god! Go inside: for the master himself and Persephone will discern between you, since they too are both gods.

The parties retire within, and while the Chorus sings, Dionysus is evidently revealed in his true identity to the rulers of the Underworld. Dionysus did not win the contest with Xanthias outright, for Aeacus was forced to appeal to higher authorities. Yet Dionysus *outlasts* Xanthias, despite enduring one more stroke of the whip. Thus Dionysus, even in "unfair play," emerges victorious.

Dionysus' victory in the "endurance Labor" coincides with the revelation of his true self. In his identity as Dionysus, he reprises his cultic role of judging poetic contests, here between Aeschylus and Euripides. Another shift in purpose has occurred: Dionysus came to the Underworld in order to retrieve Euripides, yet he has been roped into judging a contest over who deserves the "chair of Tragedy" (τὸν τραγωδικὸν θρόνον, 769). The shifting nature of Dionysus' goals and the number of distractions along the way resemble Heracles' journeys: for although he traveled with a specific goal to attain, he experienced many adventures along the way, and accomplished other heroic feats that came to be known as the *parerga*. So, too,



Dionysus' travels are full of shifts, feints, and misadventures along the way.

Much ink has been spilled in explicating the meaning underlying the great *agon* of the play, between Euripides and Aeschylus. Many scholars have read the ending of the *Frogs* in a positive, optimistic light. Segal's seminal 1961 article, "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the *Frogs*," argues that Dionysus' choice in the *agon* represents the fullest development of Dionysus' character as a "god of communal solidarity."<sup>108</sup> Padilla similarly sees Dionysus as a figure who, through his interaction with Heracles, comes to revitalize comedy, just as his choice of the Heracleian Aeschylus will revitalize tragedy.<sup>109</sup> Bowie and Lada-Richards read the play, performed in 405 BCE, as a tale of Eleusinian initiation, a series of rites of passage, in which Dionysus is successfully reintegrated into the polis with his choice of Aeschylus.<sup>110</sup> Habash notes that Dionysus makes a poor judge of poetry, but ultimately decides the contest based on the "social role of drama," thus making an argument for Aristophanes himself as the poet who educates and improves the city.<sup>111</sup>

While these interpretations reach a tidy conclusion and provide a soothing narrative for the actions of the play, I am more persuaded by the minority of scholars who take a pessimistic or ironic reading of the play. Whitman, for example, refuses to view Aeschylus' victory as one indicating moral superiority: "No real concern is felt for the justice of either's claims: it is not true that Aeschylus always wrote about wars and Euripides always wrote about sex; Aeschylus' choruses are seldom really obscure, and Euripides' seldom, if ever, trivial."<sup>112</sup> In fact, Euripides'

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108 Segal, "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the *Frogs*," 217.

109 Padilla, "The Heracleian Dionysus: Theatrical and Social Renewal in Aristophanes' *Frogs*," 361.

110 Bowie, *Aristophanes*; Lada-Richards, *Initiating Dionysus*, 216–33.

111 Habash, "Dionysos' Roles in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" 13. The fact that the play was reperformed, likely in 404 (Sommerstein, *Aristophanes Frogs*, 22), lends support to the idea that at least the audience approved of Aristophanes as a city poet.

112 Cedric Hubbell Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, vol. 19, Martin Classical Lectures (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 251.

advice for the city is practical, while Aeschylus' is stuck in the past; Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus is thus an admission that "the great days are over."<sup>113</sup> Heiden focuses on the silence about comedy in the *agōn*, suggesting that "comedy is excluded from the *agōn* because the Athenians have excluded comedy from their deliberations and consistently refused to learn its lessons, either by following demagogues or ineffectually retreating from politics."<sup>114</sup> Heiden shows that both Euripides and Aeschylus are opposed to the comedies of Aristophanes, and that Aristophanes' Aeschylus sounds like an undesirable demagogue; Dionysus' choice merely mocks the Athenians' course. Edmonds, in a political reading, analyzes the difficulties encountered when applying "the metatheatrical identification of Dionysus with the 'Spirit of Comedy,'" as Segal does.<sup>115</sup> More recently, Rosen has explored the unexpectedness of Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus, and explains it by putting the *Frogs* in the context of the tradition of the *Certamen* between Homer and Hesiod; in doing so, he "relieves the Aristophanic Aeschylus and Euripides of the moral burdens they have been forced to bear for so long."<sup>116</sup>

Each of these scholars' insights is based on some evidence in the play that the initiation-reconciliation school of thought does not adequately address, for there is something undeniably fishy about the conclusion to the contest. At the conclusion of the weighing of the lines of poetry, Dionysus declares his confusion: "the men are my friends, and I will not judge between them: for I will not become an enemy to either. The one I consider skilled, but I enjoy the other!" (ἄνδρες φίλοι, κάγώ μὲν αὐτοὺς οὐ κρινῶ. / οὐ γὰρ δι' ἔχθρας οὐδετέρῳ γενήσομαι. / τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι σοφόν, τῷ δ' ἥδομαι, 1411-3).<sup>117</sup> Dionysus presumably

113 Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, 256.

114 Bruce A. Heiden, "Tragedy and Comedy in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes," *Ramus* 20 (1991): 96.

115 Edmonds, "Who in Hell Is Heracles? Dionysos' Disastrous Disguise in Aristophanes' *Frogs*," 183.

116 Ralph M. Rosen, "Aristophanes' 'Frogs' and the 'Contest of Homer and Hesiod,'" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134, no. 2 (2004): 296.

117 Here I follow Dover's text, which prints φίλοι for σοφοί in line 1411. See discussion at Dover, *Aristophanes*:

gestures towards one with each phrase, but so muddled is the competition that it is impossible to determine which poet he designates σοφός and which ἡδύς.

This incomplete verdict concludes the many events comprising the contest devoted to awarding the chair of Tragedy. For all of the pyrotechnics, witticisms, and jokes, the entire endeavor has been for nought, and Dionysus, certainly not the cleverest judge, admits to *aporia*. The contest was nothing more than a pleasant and entertaining diversion. And so the play has come to a crisis: Dionysus appears to have forgotten his original mission to retrieve Euripides; furthermore, he fails to provide the critical expertise that was requested of him by Pluto. He is neither a glorious Heracles, known for his heroic success, nor a successful Dionysus, the god who oversees poetic contests. The contest has thus provided an outlet for the caricature of each poet – and some astute observations about the contrast between Aeschylus and Euripides – but concludes in a stalemate. Dionysus' search for a γόνιμος poet has proven impotent (95).

But Pluto shifts the terms of the decision, from one with implications for hierarchy in his kingdom to one that allows one of the poets to leave:

ΠΛΟΥΤΩΝ. οὐδὲν ἄρα πράξεις ὧνπερ ἦλθες οὐνεκα.  
Δι. ἐὰν δὲ κρίνω;  
Πλ. τὸν ἕτερον λαβὼν ἄπει,  
ὁπότερον ἂν κρίνης, ἴν' ἔλθῃς μὴ μάτην. (1414-6)

Pluto: Then you will accomplish nothing of things for which you came.

Di.: And if I make a choice?

Pl.: Taking whichever one of them you choose, you depart, so that you may not come here in vain.

Pluto's generosity puts the play back on track. He rescues the expedition by reminding Dionysus of his initial intention to bring a dead poet back to life in order to aid the city. After

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*Frogs*, 369.

asking seeking pointedly political opinions from each, Dionysus turns his back on Euripides and chooses Aeschylus to return with him. Yet Dionysus is no more trustworthy a judge in this arena than he was in the contest of literary aesthetics. As Whitman has shown, the ambiguous answers of Euripides "are at least as helpful as those of Aeschylus," while Aeschylus proposes to follow the outdated policies of Themistocles and Pericles, an impossibility in the Athens of 405 B.C.<sup>118</sup> For Whitman, then, Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus reveals the futility of his entire effort to save the city, a "sad truth," indeed.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, Bowie warns us against being "too carried away by the triumphal ending. After all, Aeschylus is dead, and in any case has certain features like his incomprehensibility and his uncertain victory that render his usefulness suspect."<sup>120</sup>

I argue that Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus is essentially arbitrary, and that an ambivalent reading of the end of the *Frogs* is encouraged by how Aristophanes implicitly compares Dionysus' actions with Heracles' labor. For, as I discussed above, Aristophanes depicts Heracles' retrieval of Cerberus as a questionable act of heroism. Although Heracles obtained the three-headed beast and successfully brought him to Eurystheus in Tiryns, he left a wake of violent destruction behind him. His symbolic conquest of death may forecast his later apotheosis, but his dognapping was nevertheless a fruitless task. Aristophanes focuses his depiction of the Labor on its negative consequences, and even the enjoyments of Persephone's feasts reveal him to be a lustful glutton, rather than a triumphant hero.

Even the very act of imitating Heracles may have compromised Dionysus' exploit. In the *agōn*, Aeschylus extols his own characters as inspirations for moral behavior among the

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118 Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, 253–5.

119 Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, 256.

120 Bowie, *Aristophanes*, 252.

citizenry and criticizes Euripides for staging vulgar and contemptible men and women (1020-98). Aeschylus' argument delineates the powerful effects of stage characters: "the moral effect of tragedy, as discussed in *Frogs*, can be manifested in two ways: in the imitation of behaviour presented on stage, and in the adoption of reasoned opinions and doubts voiced or implied by characters on stage."<sup>121</sup> Perhaps this evaluation could be applied to Aristophanes' play as well. The *Frogs* depicts a selfish and offensive Heracles, one whom Dionysus desperately endeavors to emulate. With such a flawed model, it is no wonder that Dionysus' ultimate achievement is blemished as well.

Since Aristophanes inflects his portrayal of Heracles' capture of Cerberus with ambivalence, it should be no surprise that the journey Dionysus has undertaken in explicit imitation of it is also tinged with unease. Heracles is proven to be uncivilized and violent through the perspective of the citizens of the Underworld. Moreover, he takes Cerberus to Eurystheus, and then turns around and returns him to Hades afterwards; his victory proves his own nature, but accomplishes little in practical terms. In the same way, Dionysus' return from the Underworld proves that he is a god, but the actual test of his mettle proves less meaningful. For Dionysus fails to accomplish the task he had announced at the beginning of the play, the ransoming of Euripides, and his return with Aeschylus hardly inspires confidence. His encounter with the Frogs and his endurance competition with Xanthias parody Heracles' labors by downsizing and deheroizing them, but his "capture" of Aeschylus is hardly even parallel to Heracles' action. For Pluto offers Dionysus a simple choice and the ability to take one of the poets with him; Dionysus engages Pluto in a civilized manner, and does not need to struggle or use his strategic thinking and skillful judgment. Furthermore, Aeschylus acquiesces

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<sup>121</sup> Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 185.

in returning to the upper world. Dionysus' success makes for a good show, but he will do little to effect change in the city's course.

### Apollonius' *Argonautica*

Apollonius' *Argonautica* is an epic deeply concerned with the young Jason's education in heroism, as we shall see in Chapter 5. I argue that Heracles serves as a didactic example for Jason throughout the tale, even after Heracles is abandoned by the expedition. In book 4, as Jason, Medea, and the Argonauts attempt their return journey to Iolcus, Apollonius uses Heracles to reveal the paradox at the heart of heroic violence. For while Heracles successfully secures the Apples of the Hesperides and provides life-saving aid to his comrades in the form of a spring, the innocent Hesperides also rightly condemn Heracles as a violent robber who has deprived them of their joy.

Heracles, who was removed from the expedition in book 1, nevertheless proves himself the savior of his comrades in unexpected circumstances. Heracles' final appearance occurs at the climax of the Argonauts' mishaps on their journey home. Lost in the Libyan desert, the Argonauts have miraculously portaged the Argo for twelve days and nights, in search of an inland sea. With great relief, they reach lake Triton and can deposit the ship (4.1391-2). But their exhaustion and dehydration threaten to overwhelm them: "Then rushing like raving dogs, they searched for a spring, for withering thirst came upon them with suffering and agony" (λυσσαλέοις δῆπειτ' ἕκελοι κυσὶν αἰσσοντες / πίδακα μαστεύεσκον, ἐπὶ ξηρῇ γὰρ ἔκειτο / δίψα δυηπαθίη τε καὶ ἄλγεσιν, 4.1393-5). The harsh environment of the north African

desert has reduced the crew to subhuman status: they behave according to instinct in their desperation to meet their bodies' demands. They are broken emotionally, as they demonstrated when they lay down to die upon being stranded at Syrtis (4.1276-1304); now they have reached their physical nadir, as their frenzied thirst turns them into mere beasts.

Fortunately for them, they happen upon a holy plain,

...ὣ ἔνι Λάδων  
εἰσέτι που χθιζὸν παγχρύσεια ῥύετο μῆλα  
χώρῳ ἐν Ἄτλαντος, χθόνιος ὄφις ἀμφὶ δὲ νύμφαι  
Ἑσπερίδες ποίπνουον ἐφίμερον ἀείδουσαι. (1396-9)

on which Ladon, a serpent of the earth, was, until just the day previous, guarding the all-golden apples in the land of Atlas. And nymphs, the Hesperides, used to bustle around it, singing a delightful song.

The scene that Apollonius' narrator describes begins innocuously enough. The narrator introduces the Hesperides and their Golden Apples, establishing that the Garden of Hesperides, often located elsewhere in mythological geography, has been reached by these Greeks.<sup>122</sup> This initial vision is peaceful, even idyllic, as the Hesperides appear to be attending to their normal duties ("bustling") and express themselves through pleasant song. The key to the description, of course, is εἰσέτι..χθιζόν, "until just yesterday," the moment when everything changed.

The audience is primed, no doubt, by the mention of the Golden Apples to think of Heracles, and the narrator fulfills that expectation by continuing:

τῆμος δ' ἤδη κεῖνος ὑφ' Ἡρακλῆι δαΐχθεις  
μήλειον βέβλητο ποτὶ στύπος, οἰόθι δ' ἄκρη  
οὐρῆ ἔτι σκαίρεσκεν, ἀπὸ κρατὸς δὲ κελαινίην  
ἄχρῖς ἐπ' ἄκνηστιν κεῖτ' ἄπνοος ἐν δὲ λιπόντων  
ὔδρης Λερναίης χόλον αἵματι πικρὸν ὀιστῶν,  
μυῖαι πυθομένοισιν ἐφ' ἔλκεσι τερσαίνοντο.  
ἀγχοῦ δ' Ἑσπερίδες, κεφαλαῖς ἔπι χεῖρας ἔχουσαι

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<sup>122</sup> See discussion in Francis Vian, ed., *Argonautiques*, Collection des universités de France (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2002), vol. 3, p. 195.

ἀργυρέας ξανθῆσι, λίγ' ἔστενον. (4.1400-7)

At that time, the snake, slain by Heracles, had fallen at the stump of the apple tree: the tip of its tail alone was still twitching, and from its head as far as the dark spine it lay lifeless. And since the arrows had left the bitter poison of the Lernaean hydra in its blood, flies were shriveling on its rotting wounds. But nearby, the Hesperides were lamenting shrilly, clasping their blonde heads with silvery hands.

The fresh evidence of Heracles' presence is the twitching body of Ladon and the grief of the Hesperides, each an integral aspect of heroism. For Heracles has accomplished a major heroic act: the slaying of the dragon that guards the Apples of the Hesperides. His triumph is presented in retrospect, as a *fait accompli*, with no elaboration of Ladon's ferocity or Heracles' struggle to overcome it. But one can infer that Heracles defeated the reptile by shooting it with arrows laced with the Hydra's poison, a fact which emphasizes that Heracles' victory rests upon his past successes; one of his earliest Labors proves critical to completing his later tasks.<sup>123</sup>

Though the narrative connects the slaying of Ladon with the killing of the Hydra, the nature of the conflicts could not be more different. After gathering the literary sources for the two events, from Hesiod through Pseudo-Apollodorus, and comparing them side-by-side, Gilis and Verbanck-Piérard's conclude that the Hydra "est présentée chez tous les auteurs comme une bête de cauchemar, surnaturelle, un monstre hideux surgi du fond des temps, et de surcroît nuisible pour l'homme et le troupeaux." In direct contrast, the serpent of the Hesperides "n'est pas décrit comme étant un monstre, il est parfois effrayant sans plus"; moreover, "ce serpent a la fonction attitrée de gardien d'un lieu sacré."<sup>124</sup> The distinction

123 This same method of defeating Ladon brought down the Centaur Nessus, when he attempted to rape Heracles' new bride, Deianeira. And the same venom of the Hydra will some day lead to Heracles' own demise, yet his painful death is the mechanism by which he gains immortality. This whole passage points towards Heracles' attainment of the prophesied immortality; perhaps Apollonius' inclusion of the Hydra's poison here alludes to the pyre on Oeta.

124 Annie Verbanck-Piérard and Edith Gilis, "Héraclès, pourfendeur de dragons," in *Le Bestiaire d'Héraclès: IIIe*



between the two beasts emphasizes the difference between heroism that is socially beneficial – protecting men and livestock from the monstrous Hydra – and heroism that is merely self-aggrandizing, i.e., slaying the protector of a sacred space.

Yet the narrator's matter-of-fact description of Heracles' actions here contrasts sharply with Jason's confrontation with a guardian serpent. That Heracles' defeat of Ladon and acquisition of the Golden Apples responds to Jason's unheroic reliance on Medea and her magic in procuring the Golden Fleece has been noticed by others.<sup>125</sup> In fact, Jason expends none of his own energy to tame the giant snake that bars his way to the Golden Fleece. Rather, the burden falls to Medea, who arrests its gaze, enchants it with prayers and song, and puts it to sleep with her drugs (3.123-161). Jason's contribution is to snatch the fleece "at the girl's order" (κούρης κεκλομένης, 3.163). His fainthearted performance is echoed in the subsequent simile, which compares him to a maiden reveling in the play of moonlight on her dress. This simile implies that Jason basks in the glow of the Fleece as if it is as accessible as the moonlight, instead of a hard-won treasure, and his girlish delight reveals his vanity. Heracles, by contrast, has left behind evidence of his power: the rotting carcass of Ladon, whom he overcame alone by his own strength and skill.

But Apollonius immediately juxtaposes Heracles' success with the Hesperides' grief, for the tuneful and peaceful nymphs are now lamenting Heracles' actions. The desperate Argonauts startle them with their approach, but in response to Orpheus' prayer, they reappear and provide welcome information. One of the nymphs, Aegle, offers an eyewitness account of

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*Rencontre héracléenne: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Liège et aux Facultés universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix de Namur, du 14 au 16 novembre 1996*, ed. Corinne Bonnet, Colette Jourdain-Annequin, and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, vol. 7, Kernos Supplément (Liège: Centre internationale d'étude de la religion grecque antique, 1998), 44–7.

<sup>125</sup> E.g., R. L. Hunter, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29.

Heracles' actions, providing the perspective of a party injured by his heroic efforts. She bewails the destruction resulting from Heracles' presence, while recognizing that it now provides a benefit to the suffering men:

ἦ ἄρα δὴ μέγα πάμπαν ἐφ' ὑμετέροισιν ὄνειρα  
δεῦρ' ἔμολεν καμάτοισιν ὁ κύντατος, ὅστις ἀπούρας  
φρουρὸν ὄφιν ζωῆς, παγχρύσεια μῆλα θεάων  
οἴχετ' ἀειράμενος, στυγερὸν δ' ἄχος ἄμμι λέλειπται.  
ἦλυθε γὰρ χθιζὸς τις ἀνήρ ὀλοώτατος ὕβριν  
καὶ δέμας, ὅσσε δέ οἱ βλοσυρῶ ὑπ' ἔλαμπε μετώπῳ,  
νηλῆς· ἀμφὶ δὲ δέρμα πελωρίου ἔστο λέοντος  
ῶμόν, ἀδέψητον· στιβαρὸν δ' ἔχεν ὄζον ἐλαίης  
τόξα τε, τοῖσι πέλωρ τόδ' ἀπέφθισεν ἰοβολήσας. (4.1432-1449)

Truly, indeed, as a wholly great benefit for your toils came here the most shameless man, whoever wrested away the life of the snake, our guardian, and took off with the all-golden apples of the goddesses, but for us remains hateful grief. For yesterday some man, most destructive in temper and strength, came, and his eyes glared from under his bushy brow, pitiless. And he wrapped himself in the raw skin of an enormous lion, untanned: and he had a strong club of olive and a bow, with which he shot and killed this beast.

The narrator's earlier, dispassionate account of Heracles' actions hardly resembles the events as focalized through Aegle. This depiction of Heracles' Labor contrasts sharply with the typical images found on late Classical and Hellenistic vases, which depict a calm Heracles in a gentle and relaxed encounter with the Hesperides.<sup>126</sup> One fifth-century alabastron even shows a certain Hesperid plucking the apples for Heracles and gladly offering them to him!<sup>127</sup> With the lamenting Hesperides, Apollonius has changed the entire tenor of the incident. If the free gift of the Apples represents Heracles' welcome among the immortals, then Heracles' forcible theft reveals the dark side of the hero. The Hesperides and the sanctity of their Garden become the

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126 See, e.g., Plates 2716-2726 in *LIMC V*, spanning 500-320 B.C.

127 Nauplia, 136. See Frank Brommer, *Heracles: The Twelve Labors of the Hero in Ancient Art and Literature* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1986), 50-51, Pl. 44; and further discussion in Frank Brommer, "Herakles und die Hesperiden auf Vasenbildern," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 57 (1942): 112-16.

focus as casualties of Heracles' epic success. The model of heroism for Jason has become a patron of highway robbery.<sup>128</sup>

Aegle demonstrates that Heracles' Labor has more than one victim. Ladon here is not a threatening monster, but a beneficial animal that provides protection for the gentle nymphs, in addition to the Apples. The poem offers no condemnation of Ladon's ferocity or nastiness, nor does he endanger human civilization. Ladon's only crime, it seems, was that he stood in Heracles' way. Furthermore, both the loss of the Apples and the death of Ladon are a blow to the Hesperides. The sanctity of their Garden has been violated by Heracles, whom Aegle calls κύντατος, "most shameless" or "most dog-like," an adjective that connects Heracles' wild behavior with the Argonauts' desperate search for water (ἴκελοι κυσίν, 4.1393). Into the Hesperides' peaceful environment have come death and violent theft; the nymphs are left traumatized by their loss.

Though Heracles has successfully routed Ladon, Aegle's portrayal of him is hardly encomiastic. She does not even know his name, referring to him as τις ἀνὴρ, despite the fact that the poem insists upon Heracles' widely known fame. Throughout Book 2, the Argonauts repeatedly encounter evidence of Heracles' past efforts; wherever they go, he seems to have preceded them. He has preceded them here, too, yet his actions are condemned, rather than praised by the local inhabitants. If a requirement of heroism is remembrance in songs that encourage emulation, then Heracles' anonymous acts in Libya fall far short. Moreover, the portrait of Heracles here directly contradicts his civilizing mission elsewhere. His

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128 Susan A. Stephens, "Writing Epic for the Ptolemaic Court," in *Apollonius Rhodius*, ed. Annette Harder, R. F. Regtuit, and G. C. Wakker, *Hellenistica Groningana 4* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 215, calls the intervention of Aegle's perspective "an attack of cultural relativism." But I argue that Apollonius is doing more with the incident, by using it to shape the very definition and expectations for heroism itself.

temperament and physical strength are destructive, rather than productive. In contrast to Orpheus, who offers an eloquent prayer to the Hesperides, Heracles glares wordlessly, eschewing the verbal communication that establishes relationships with strangers. Heracles, in his personal violence and brutality, even becomes assimilated to the Nemean Lion. His trademark lion skin becomes, instead of a symbol of victory over a seemingly untameable beast, a reflection of his animal-like spirit and barbarous habit. For his skin is "raw, untanned" (ὠμόν, ἀδέψητον), which is to say, it has not been modified and shaped by the work of human culture. Instead of bringing order, he sows disorder, a purpose reflected in his dress and manner.

Above all, Heracles carries the bow with which he slaughtered Ladon, enabling him to make off with the Apples. Apollonius thus deliberately chooses to use a version of the myth in which Heracles acquires the Apples himself. The scholiast (L+) notes at 4.1396 that an alternative version appears in Pherecydes, in which Heracles asks Atlas to retrieve the fruit for him.<sup>129</sup> Heracles takes the heavens on his shoulders until Atlas returns, but Atlas has no desire to accept his former burden; Heracles tricks him into taking the weight while he procures a cushion, then promptly returns to Eurystheus with the apples.<sup>130</sup> This version is most prominently represented in the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. By ignoring this variation, Apollonius focuses instead on Heracles' active agency. Though he has been known to use clever strategy, Heracles here relies on violence and battle skills to obtain the Apples. In this sense he is the anti-Jason, who had used sweet talk and promises to Medea to acquire the Golden Fleece.

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<sup>129</sup> See Carl Wendel, *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium vetera* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1999), 315–6 = *FGrH* B<sup>NJ</sup> 3F 16a = Fowler 16-17 (*Early Greek Mythography*).  
<sup>130</sup> Ps.-Apollodorus 2.5.11 follows this version.

But Heracles, in addition to slaying the serpent and stripping the Garden of its Golden Apples, discovers a life-giving stream of freshwater in the unforgiving desert. Aegle delivers the crucial information to the dying Argonauts, yet for her, the primitive and bestial aspects of Heracles' behavior cannot but dominate the account:

ἦλυθεν οὖν καὶ κεῖνος, ἃ τε χθόνα πεζὸς ὀδεύων,  
δίψη καρχαλέος παΐφασσε δὲ τόνδ' ἀνὰ χῶρον,  
ὔδωρ ἐξερέων. τὸ μὲν οὐ ποθι μέλλεν ἰδέσθαι·  
τῆδε δὲ τις πέτρα Τριτωνίδος ἐγγύθι λίμνης·  
τὴν ὄγ' (ἐπιφρασθεῖς, ἢ καὶ θεοῦ ἐννεσίησι)  
λάξ ποδὶ τύψεν ἔνερθε, τὸ δ' ἀθρόον ἔβλυσεν ὔδωρ·  
αὐτὰρ ὄγ', ἄμφω χεῖρε πέδω καὶ στέρνον ἐρείσας,  
ῥωγάδος ἐκ πέτρης πίεν ἄσπετον, ὄφρα βαθεῖαν  
νηδύν, φορβάδι ἴσος ἐπιπροπεσών, ἐκορέσθη. (4.1441-9)

That man also, like anyone traveling this land by foot, came raging with thirst. And he rushed about this land, seeking water, which indeed was not likely to appear anywhere. But here there is a certain rock near the Tritonian lake, which he - himself devised, or else at the suggestions of a god - struck at its base with his foot, and abundant water poured out. Then he, leaning both hands and chest on the ground, drank an enormous amount from the cleft of the rock, until he filled his deep belly, stooping like a grazing beast.

Aegle had likened him to a dog; now his behavior is more like a herd beast, such as an ox.

Again, Heracles does not use the normal implements of polite society, which would perhaps entail drinking the water from a cup or bowl (or hand) dipped from the stream. Rather, he ingests as much water as quickly as possible, in the manner of low beasts, as if untouched by any cultural development. Aegle reveals her disgust even in the description of his "deep belly," here treated as the seat of instinctive desires, disassociated from higher thought or emotion. There is no mediation between Heracles' actions and his environment.

But even Aegle's criticism cannot disguise the special markings of the hero. Although Heracles is subject to the same physical rigors imposed by the environment as the Argonauts,

he manages to save his own life. Aegle attributes his discovery of the stream to either his own observation or a god's suggestion. The first alternative, that Heracles somehow sensed the possibility of extracting freshwater from that particular rock, attributes an almost superhuman ability to ferret out a most rare resource. Aegle therefore must posit the second alternative, that he discovers the proper spot through the guidance of the gods, though one might find it difficult to believe that the gods should rescue a ruthless, violent criminal. He is somehow both animal-like and marked by the favor of the gods. His independence and ability to deliver himself set him apart from all the other men who cross that desert, including the Argonauts.

Aegle's complaint thus raises the difficult matter of reconciling Heracles' brutality with the favor of Zeus, which reaches its culmination in his apotheosis. Yet Aegle herself presents a partial answer to that question, in recognizing that her pain could be considered a great *ὄνειρα* for the lost Argonauts. For the spring Heracles created with his instinctive kick saves the lives of his exhausted comrades and enables them to search out an escape from Libya. The bitter accusations of Aegle seem not to register at all with the Argonauts; instead, when they hear about Heracles and his spring, they "run, rejoicing immediately" to it (θέον αἴψα κεχαρμένοι, 4.1451).

The narrator compares the drinking Argonauts to a swarm of ants or flies, hardly more complimentary than Aegle's reduction of Heracles to a grazing animal. In this simile is a suggestion of the relationship between Heracles and the Argonauts: he is the broad and strong herd beast, while they are merely the insects that buzz about it. In contrast to Aegle's denigration, the Argonauts exalt Heracles for his actions in Libya. An unnamed Argonaut praises Heracles in reverent tones, "Amazing! Even though Heracles was far off, he saved his

companions dying of thirst. If only we might find him on his journey as we go across land!" (ὤ πόποι, ἧ καὶ νόσφιν ἐὼν ἐσάωσεν ἑταίρους / Ἡρακλῆς δίψῃ κεκμηότας. ἀλλὰ μιν εἴ πως / δῆοιμεν στείχοντα δι' ἠπείροιο κιόντες, 4.1458-60). The destruction of Heracles has been converted into the salvation of Heracles, and Jason's leadership remains invisible. Heracles' brutality proves to be a benefit to others, and so his former comrades ignore the negative consequences of his heroism.

Aegle and her fellow Hesperides receive no further mention in the poem. They have served their purpose: on a narrative level, to point the dehydrated Argonauts to lifesaving water, and on a thematic level, to continue refining the definition of Heracleian heroism. The praise accorded to his deeds, as recounted in Books 1 and 2, is here balanced in Book 4 with the perspective of victims of Heracles' violence. Aegle's description is deeply biased, no doubt.<sup>131</sup> But the significance of her interpretation can be found in the contrast with the account offered by the other parties involved. The narrator lays out a relatively simple, matter-of-fact report of Heracles' killing of Ladon and the Hesperides' distress. Aegle gives voice to the innocent bystanders whom Heracles wrongs in his pursuit of the completion of his Labors. And the unnamed Argonaut offers his prayer-like gratitude to the hero who provides safety and salvation to his lost comrades. Apollonius has opened up the possibility of competing narratives for Heracles' heroism: is he a terrifying savage or an Olympus-bound savior? And the reserved tone of the epic narrator – who from the start has endeavored to remember "the famous deeds of ancient men" (παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν / μνήσομαι, 1.1-2) – hardly resolves this conundrum.

The events that follow the quenching of the Argonauts' thirst can perhaps serve to

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131 Donald Norman Levin, "Apollonius' Heracles," *The Classical Journal* 67, no. 1 (1971): 23–24.

guide the audience in its evaluation of this question. Specially-gifted Argonauts attempt to catch up with Heracles, who was present just one day earlier. But even the swiftest and keenest heroes fall far short of finding Heracles. Only Lynceus, endowed with sharp vision, comes the closest: "Lynceus alone thought he saw Heracles, far off from the boundless land, as when someone either sees, or thinks he sees, the moon, obscured, on the day of the new moon" (ἀτὰρ τότε γ' Ἡρακλῆα / μῶνος ἀπειρεσίης τηλοῦ χθονὸς εἶσατο Λυγκεύς / τὼς ἰδέειν, ὥς τίς τε νέης ἐνὶ ἡματι μῆνην / ἢ ἴδεν ἢ ἐδόκησεν ἐπαχλύουσιν ἰδέσθαι, 4.1477-80). Of the moon simile, Feeney says, "[Heracles] is passing out of the world of men, and into the world of the gods. In saving his companions, even in his absence, he has already begun to fulfill the functions of a god."<sup>132</sup> Heracles has eluded the heroes, as he will elude mortality itself.<sup>133</sup> By gathering the Apples of the Hesperides – which, as Beye explains, "show in disguised form an attainment of immortality" – Heracles fulfills Glaucus' prophecy earlier in Book 1.<sup>134</sup>

Even at their closest point, the Argonauts cannot reach Heracles. The growing distance underscores the fact that Heracles did not create the stream deliberately in response to the Argonauts' specific need. Indeed, Aegle's lament serves as an aetiological account for the strange presence of a freshwater stream in the desert; despite her critical and negative tone, her tale details a miraculous event that will profit all "who travel this land by foot" (ἄ τε χθόνα πεζὸς ὀδεύων, 4.1441). Thus, the Argonauts benefit indirectly from Heracles' pursuit of his own safety, just as Ladon's death and the Hesperides' suffering are simply collateral damage

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132 D. C. Feeney, "Following After Hercules, in Virgil and Apollonius," 18 (1986): 97.

133 Kouremenos looks at Homeric similes in the text to argue that the distant Heracles is on the path towards Death and the Underworld; he makes no mention of apotheosis (Theokritos Kouremenos, "Herakles, Jason, and 'Programmatic' Similes in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*," *Rheinisches museum für philologie* 139 (1996): 233-250).

134 Charles Rowan Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, Literary Structures (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 54.



along Heracles' path to victory.

A third encounter between man and serpent occurs immediately after this episode, when Mopsus accidentally steps upon a deadly snake in the desert. The snake bites him, and the "poison immediately began rotting his flesh from within, and putrefying hair was sliding from his skin" (πύθεσκε γὰρ ἔνδοθι σάρκας / ἰὸς ἄφαρ, μυδόωσα δ' ἀπὸ χροὸς ἔρρεε λάχνη, 4.1530-1). The manner of Mopsus' grisly end is a variation on the death of Ladon, whose corpse drew flies to its rotting wounds (4.1405); the venom that ends Mopsus' life is closely related to the ointment Heracles wields as his weapon. Thus, in Book 4, Apollonius models three types of conflict between a hero and a terrible snake: Mopsus represents failure, as he unwittingly brings his own death upon himself with a literal misstep; Jason represents success without heroism, because of his complete reliance on Medea's magic; and Heracles represents heroic success, for he slays the serpent, obtains the Apples, and makes an exit, all while also providing life-giving water to his fellow man.

Apollonius ensures, however, that Heracles' heroic success is qualified. For Aegle demonstrates that Heracles' success, dependent as it is on physical violence, is built upon the suffering of blameless victims: Heracles' gain is another party's loss. The friendly Hesperides have no recourse against the intrusion of the hero, while Heracles has no concern for the community that he enters, acting only to accomplish his own goals. And the hero himself, at the same time as "domesticating" the wilderness with water that sustains human life, behaves like the basest of beasts. By giving Aegle a voice, Apollonius questions Heraclean heroism even as he clearly points toward Heracles' apotheosis. As Apollonius holds Heracles up as a model for Jason and the Argonauts, he reveals that heroism does not come without a cost, though

that cost is often ignored by the heroes themselves.

The notion that heroism, even in victory, entails loss and destruction is deeply embedded throughout the poem. For Jason returns safely to Pagasae, in possession of Medea and the Golden Fleece, with only the loss of a few of his Argonauts. Even if Jason has not developed the characteristics of Heraclean heroism – strength and skill, courage and strategy – he nevertheless has accomplished his quest and becomes the subject of song (as is evidenced by the existence of Apollonius' poem). But his success would be difficult to praise: the Golden Fleece does not win him his throne, but serves merely as the token of an achievement past, not unlike Heracles' Apples. Moreover, Jason's return is not without its victims: Aetes, Apsyrtus, and above all, Medea. Medea sacrifices her father, homeland, natal family, and royal status when she joins Jason to ensure his victory. So powerful is this effacement of her identity that when Euripides stages his *Medea*, he makes her vulnerability as a foreigner in Corinth a substantial factor in her decision to murder her children. Her loss then becomes Jason's loss as well, as he becomes a victim of his own success.

#### Pindar fr. 169a

These poets are not the only ones who lay bare the difficulty in reconciling Heracles' violent robberies with his glorious reputation. Pindar, in a poem that became proverbial within a generation, uses Heracles' Labors of the Cattle of Geryon and Mares of Diomedes (at least) to reflect upon the problem of praising violence. The poem is only partially preserved; the beginning of the fragment (169a Snell) reads:

νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς  
 θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων  
 ἄγει δικαίων τὸ βιαιότατον  
 ὑπερτάτῃ χειρὶ. τεκμαίρομαι  
 ἔργοισιν Ἡρακλέος·  
 ἐπεὶ Γηρυόνα βόας  
 Κυκλώπειον ἐπὶ πρόθυρον Εὐρυσθέος  
 ἀνατεί τε] καὶ ἀπριάτας ἔλασεν.<sup>135</sup> (1-8)

*Nomos*, the king of all, mortals and immortals, leads them in deeming the greatest violence just,<sup>136</sup> with a superior hand. I make my case with the deeds of Heracles, since he drove the cattle of Geryon to the Cyclopean doorstep of Eurystheus [with no fee].

The poor preservation of the papyrus makes the text uncertain, especially regarding line 8.

However, the characterization of Heracles' seizure of Geryon's cattle is of particular interest for this study, so it is fortunate that both Plato and the scholiast to Aelius Aristides offer a paraphrase. Plato describes Heracles as "neither purchasing nor Geryon giving" (οὔτε πριάμενος οὔτε δόντος τοῦ Γηρυόνου, *Gorgias* 484b11); the scholium, on Aristides' *On Rhetoric* 52, states that Heracles "neither asked for nor purchased" the Cattle (οὔτε αἰτήσας οὔτε πριάμενος, Dindorf vol. III, 408). Although later authors can frequently be unreliable sources, these paraphrases likely offer valuable testimony, given their accordance with the secure ἀπριάτας.<sup>137</sup>

Pindar thus emphasizes the crudeness of Heracles' interaction with Geryon. In

135 I print the text as it appears in Herwig Maehler and Bruno Snell, eds., *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig: Teubner, 1989).

136 A minority viewpoint, that δικαίων has a factitive sense – hence, "bringing violence to justice" – has been argued by Carlo Pavese, "The New Heracles Poem of Pindar," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 72 (1968): 47–88. But Pavese neglects to explain the lack of criticism of Geryon and Diomedes' personal violence or the obvious aggression of Heracles against them. Poulheria Kyriakou, "The Violence of Nomos in Pindar Fr. 169a," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, no. 48 (2002): 195–206, argues that the participle means "claiming as its right" or prerogative. *Nomos* thus becomes a "sovereign, amoral power" that uses Heracles' injustice to accomplish its will (Poulheria Kyriakou, "The Violence of Nomos in Pindar Fr. 169a," 200); this is not so different from the "*nomos* as Fate or will of Zeus" camp.

137 On the possibility of deliberate misquotation in Plato, see Marian Demos, "Callicles' Quotation of Pindar in the *Gorgias*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 96 (1994): 85–107; E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 270–2; Dale Grote, "Callicles' Use of Pindar's Νόμος Βασιλεύς: *Gorgias* 484B," *The Classical Journal* 90, no. 1 (1994): 21–31.

Ostwald's analysis, "the fact that the prey was seized and not acquired by way of a regular commercial transaction suggests violence on the part of Heracles over against something ordinarily described as injustice which, in this account was sustained by Geryon."<sup>138</sup> Heracles has rejected the customs developed by civil society for governing this type of interaction, i.e., that Heracles may ask Geryon for the cattle and Geryon willingly grant them, or Heracles offer fitting recompense to Geryon in exchange for the cattle.<sup>139</sup> Instead, Heracles simply murders the owner of the cattle; that physical violence is Heracles' preferred method of "negotiation" positions him outside the bounds of civilization and therefore earns the poet's disapproval.

Fragment 169a goes on to describe Heracles' capture of the Mares of Diomedes in similarly unflattering tones. Diomedes too courageously fights Heracles in defense of his own rightful property: "for [it is better] to die while [possessions] are being carried off than to be a coward" ([κρέσσον γ]ὰρ ἀρπαζομένων τεθνάμεν / [× χρη]μάτων ἢ κακὸν ἔμμεναι, 16-17).<sup>140</sup> Pindar describes in detail the grisly death of a man, perhaps Diomedes or his servant, whom Heracles feeds to his man-eating horses (21-33). Not enough text survives for us to determine whether the man is justly consumed by his own monstrous wards, or whether he too is a victim of Heracleian violence. The fact that Diomedes even keeps man-eating mares ought to give one pause, but the focus (as far as we can tell) is on the monstrosity of the mares, not the brutality of Diomedes himself. Heracles, as the aggressor, is again placed in the wrong.

What, then, is the *nomos* that both rules men and gods and makes Heracles' actions just?

The fragmentary nature of the ode has ensured that the meaning of Pindar's *nomos* remains

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138 Martin Ostwald, "Pindar, Nomos, and Heracles: (Pindar, Frg. 169 [Snell2]+POxy. No. 2450, Frg. 1): Dedicated to Harry Caplan," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 69 (1965): 118.

139 Mythological characters' involvement in a money economy is more often associated with comedy, though, as was discussed in the earlier section on Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

140 The first supplement belongs to Snell; the second to Lobel.

hotly disputed.<sup>141</sup> Most scholars fall into one of two basic camps: Ostwald represents the "custom" category, defining *nomos* as "the traditional attitude of men toward the hero"; he presumes that the reconciliation of right and violence occurs in the lost ending of the poem.<sup>142</sup> Lloyd-Jones espouses the "law" view, that *nomos* is "the law of the universe, and particularly the law of Zeus."<sup>143</sup> Crotty attempts to reconcile the two, arguing that both aspects must be simultaneously present in the term: "*Nomos*, men's esteem or hatred for the heroes, is based not only on human notions of commendable behavior but also on the gods' love for or hostility toward the hero."<sup>144</sup>

Crotty's formulation is appealing because it acknowledges that the gods' favor or hostility to Heracles can and does influence man's opinion, even when the independent and "logical" human evaluation of Heracles is critical. Pindar demonstrates the functioning of this definition of *nomos* in a fragment of a dithyramb (fr. 70b):

– ∪ – – – σὲ δ' ἐγὼ παρά μιν  
αἰνέω μὲν, Γηρυόνα, τὸ δὲ μὴ Δί  
φίλτερον σιγῶμι πάμπαν· – ∪ – –

I, on the one hand, praise you, Geryon, in comparison to [Heracles], but I should keep silence entirely about what is not dear to Zeus.

Here Pindar implies that to (properly) criticize Heracles for his lawless aggression against Geryon would be to argue against the very will of Zeus. Heracles does not usually come in for this sort of treatment from Pindar.<sup>145</sup> Pindar's framing of Heracles' violent Labor thus aligns

141 For a survey of ideas up to 1956, see the thorough study by Marcello Gigante, *Nomos Basileus*, vol. 1, *Ricerche filologiche* (Napoli: Edizioni Glauk, 1956).

142 Ostwald, "Pindar, Nomos, and Heracles," 126.

143 For a neat summary of the opposing camps, see discussion in Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Pindar Fr. 169," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 76 (1972): 55–6. Since then, Grote, "Callicles' Use of Pindar's Νόμος Βασιλεύς," has fallen into the "law" camp.

144 Kevin Crotty, *Song and Action: The Victory Odes of Pindar* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 106. Demos, "Callicles' Quotation of Pindar in the Gorgias," follows Crotty as well.

145 See, e.g., *Nem.* 1.62-9.

with Stesichorus' depiction in his *Geryoneis*.<sup>146</sup> Yet by placing his criticism within a framework of the justification of *nomos*, Pindar's poem acts as an "azione acculturante di Eracle...definendo l'eroe 'omicida giustissimo.'"<sup>147</sup> Heracles has developed from Stesichorus' brutal hunter to one whose violence is somehow justified.

By explicitly silencing his negative appraisal of Heracles in order to please Zeus, Pindar submits his evaluation of Heracles' legacy to Zeus' will. And given Heracles' apotheosis, Zeus' will is clearly to glorify him, whatever his misdeeds were. Furthermore, according to Pindar in his first Nemean ode, Heracles' apotheosis brings glory to Zeus himself: "[Heracles], after welcoming blooming Hebe as his wife and celebrating his marriage beside Zeus, son of Kronos, will praise his holy law" (δεξάμενον / θαλεράν Ἥβαν ἄκοιτιν καὶ γάμον / δαΐσαντα παρ Δὶ Κρονίδα, σεμνὸν αἰνήσειν νόμον, 70-2). Pindar thus reveals that Zeus' choice to deify Heracles, however questionable, remains inevitable and supreme.

This chapter has revealed how Heracles' heroic disasters in his Labors – based on his dubious use of violence – raise doubts about the virtue of his exalted deeds. Stesichorus could have presented Heracles' pursuit of the Cattle of Geryon as a successful journey into fantastic lands that culminates in the righteous slaughter of a fearsome, alien monster. Instead, Stesichorus invites his audience to look past Geryon's frightful appearance and recognize that he adheres to same values as a valorized Homeric hero. In contrast, Heracles, whose return journey from Erytheia provided the opportunity for him to spread Greek culture in other tales,

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146 Ostwald bizarrely insists that "no other Greek author, to the best of my knowledge, ever told the story of Heracles' labors from the standpoint of the hero's victims, to show a less attractive side of what were normally looked upon as glorious exploits" (Ostwald, "Pindar, Nomos, and Heracles," 126).

147 Gentili, "Eracle 'omicida giustissimo.' Pisandro, Stesicoro e Pindaro," 305.

here is unjustified in stealing the Cattle and killing their rightful owner; Pindar blames him for not even offering proper compensation.<sup>148</sup> Aristophanes' parody of a Heraclean labor in the *Frogs* focuses on Heracles' violations of social norms while he was in the Underworld. In probing a point of dissonance between Heracles' heroic accomplishment and the damage he wreaks on bystanders, Aristophanes raises doubts about the praiseworthiness of Heraclean heroism. Thus, Dionysus' emulation of Heracles' career in his own journey to the Underworld can likewise be viewed as a dubious achievement. Apollonius participates in this strain of criticism by allowing a Hesperid, Aegle, to bewail Heracles' acquisition of the Golden Apples. But the perspective of the victimized Hesperides is juxtaposed with the words of praise uttered by the Argonauts, whose lives are saved in the Libyan desert by the spring Heracles created. Apollonius thus reveals the potential for both positive and negative results in the pursuit of heroic activity.

Each of these three labors is associated with Heracles' apotheosis, which was popularly portrayed as a joyous occasion worthy of celebration. But I suspect that the celebration of Heracles' labors and afterlife may even invite a critical approach, as the poets take it upon themselves to remind the audience that heroism cannot be taken lightly. By purposely avoiding praise of Heracles' victories here, these poets show how even heroic success can be deeply ambivalent. That Heracles later receives the ultimate reward, deification, does not erase the injustice of his previous acts; rather, it demands a defense of Zeus' decisions. Yet Zeus' will must remain inscrutable and inevitable.

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<sup>148</sup> The dispute over cattle is not limited to the labor of Geryon: in the *Odyssey*, Heracles is remembered for killing his guest-friend Iphitus and keeping his cattle (see Introduction).

### Chapter 3: Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Heroic Competition and the *Oikos*

Heracles appears far less frequently on the tragic stage than the comic.<sup>1</sup> Yet tragedy, insofar as it often depicts the conflict between the demands of the external world and the demands of the domestic world, is a genre that well serves Heracles and his disasters. This chapter and the next will examine Heracles' treatment in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Heracles*.<sup>2</sup> In these plays, he does not appear as a savior as in the *Philoctetes* or the *Alcestis*. Instead, I will show how Sophocles and Euripides use Heracles to probe the value of heroism. Both plays reveal the intimate connection between Heracles' heroic successes and the devastation he wreaks upon his own *oikos*. But their approaches differ: Sophocles displays the empty moral core of Heraclean heroism through Heracles' misuse of heroic competition, while Euripides, as will be seen in Chapter 4, promotes a new definition of *aretē* in order to present a Heracles who remains morally acceptable in the wake of disaster.

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1 Jebb blames the popularity of the burlesque Heracles and the general difficulty of the legend (R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: Trachiniae*, *Classic Commentaries on Greek & Latin Texts* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), xxi–xxii). In contrast, Conradi attributes this phenomenon to the difficulty of staging Heracles' fights with wild animals and monsters: P. J. J. Conradi, “Herakles in die griekse tragedie” (Dissertation, Utrecht, 1958).

2 These two plays are also compared by Loukas Papadimitropoulos, “Heracles as Tragic Hero,” *The Classical World* 101, no. 2 (2008): 131–138, who argues that the plays show similarities in their conceptions of divine action or determinism and in their structure; and by M. S. Silk, “Heracles and Greek Tragedy,” *Greece & Rome* 32, no. 1 (1985): 1–22, who claims that Heracles' presentation as suffering hero can be attributed to his position between divine and mortal realms. In this, he follows Victor Ehrenberg, “Tragic Heracles,” in *Aspects of the Ancient World* (New York: W. Salloch, 1946), 144–66.



When Heracles makes his long-delayed entrance in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, he arrives in a state of complete failure. The representative of youth and victory is conquered by intense pains; he cannot even walk under his own strength, but relies upon a convoy of foreigners to carry him to his home. Sophocles' emphasis on the physical humiliation of Heracles reflects a deeper critique of the methods and mechanism of Heraclean heroism itself. Here he presents a Heracles whose downfall is linked inextricably with his past heroic actions. By focusing on the final actions of Heracles' life, Sophocles positions his play to deliver a damning evaluation of his legendary career.

I argue in this chapter that Sophocles brings Heracles to failure through the very mechanism of heroism: competition. Heroic success is predicated on competition: by proving himself superior to a worthy adversary through struggle, a hero gains fame and glory. Yet the *Trachiniae* proves that victory hardly guarantees a "good end." Heracles, who remains consistently victorious in open heroic combat, is defeated by decidedly unheroic means: he dons a robe anointed by his own wife with a deadly unguent he himself had acquired. Deianeira, his timid and sheltered wife, becomes the direct agent of Heracles' demise because Heracles has created competition where there ought to be none: in the *oikos*. Heracles' abuse of heroic competition reflects the selfish character of his heroism as a whole. The play actively suppresses the kind of epinician praise that promotes Heracles' victories as beneficial to mankind; instead, the play dramatizes the catastrophic consequences of Heracles' single-minded pursuit of his own insatiable desires. The *Trachiniae* thus offers a stinging criticism of heroism, for while the play never denies that Heracles is a hero, he is a hero "nur auf sich selbst bezogen und in allen seinen Unternehmungen allein von seinem Wollen und Wünschen

bestimmt und nicht im geringsten geneigt und bereit, auf die Lebenskreise, Wünsche und Rechte anderer Rücksicht zu nehmen."<sup>3</sup>

The relationships between characters in the play are dominated by heroic competition, a fitting theme for a play about the hero of epinician poetry.<sup>4</sup> Each competition pits one rival against another in order to acquire a prize. But here, the prize is neither fame nor a precious object of value, but control over another person's affection – sexual or otherwise. The theme is established early in the prologue, when Deianeira recounts the earliest origins of her unhappiness in life: Achelous' courtship while she was still in her father's house. Disturbed by his strange and changeable form, Deianeira is relieved when the great Heracles arrives to seek her hand in marriage as well:

χρόνω δ' ἐν ὑστέρω μὲν, ἀσμένῃ δέ μοι,  
ὁ κλεινὸς ἦλθε Ζηνὸς Ἄλκμήνης τε παῖς·  
ὃς εἰς ἀγῶνα τῷδε συμπεσὼν μάχης  
ἐκλύεταί με. (18-21)

But later, to my great joy, came the famous son of Zeus and Alcmena, who released me by entering into a contest of battle with that man.

Achelous and Heracles are rivals for Deianeira's hand in marriage, and they engage in heroic competition to determine the winner. The relationships between these characters can perhaps best be expressed through visual form:

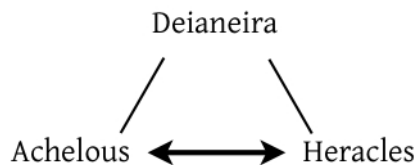


Fig. 3.1: Deianeira-Achelous-Heracles

<sup>3</sup> B. Effe, "Der Funktionswandel des Herakles-Mythos in der griechischen Literatur," *Poetica* 12 (1980): 154.

<sup>4</sup> See L. A. Swift, "Epinician and Tragic Worlds: The Case of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," in *Archaic and Classical Choral Song*, ed. Lucia Athanassaki and Ewen Bowie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 391–414, for the use of epinician tropes in the poem. I focus more on the general handling of Heracles the epinician hero in competition.

Deianeira is placed at the top of the triangle, as she is the focus and desideratum of both Achelous and Heracles. As rivals, Achelous and Heracles compete directly with one another, as indicated by the block arrow. The goal of each rival is to eliminate the other, which results in a collapse of the triangle into a linear relationship:

Deianeira  $\equiv$  Heracles

Fig. 3.2: Deianeira-Heracles

When Heracles acquires Deianeira as his wife, he also acquires full control over her sexuality. Their strong and exclusive bond is here represented by double lines.

By placing this episode so prominently in the prologue, Sophocles establishes the event as the play's model for heroic competition. For although Deianeira was too frightened to observe the contest, and thus cannot provide a detailed narrative (21-24), the contest between Heracles and Achelous was governed by the proper conventions. Both suitors traveled to Oeneus' home as suitors (μνηστήρ, 9, 15); they engaged in open physical combat, overseen by Zeus of the Contest (Ζεὺς ἀγώνιος, 26).

Deianeira's account suggests that her main motivation for desiring a marriage to Heracles was avoiding a marriage to Achelous. Heracles' main motivation for competing to be her husband was her great beauty (μοι τὸ κάλλος, 24). Earlier traditional accounts may have characterized Deianeira as an Amazon-like warrior. In addition to the evidence of her name ("man-slayer"), further evidence for a warlike Deianeira was collected by Jennifer March.<sup>5</sup> Just as a clever Penelope proves a fitting wife for wily Odysseus, a bold-hearted and violent

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer R. March, "Deianeira and Herakles," in *The Creative Poet: Studies on the Treatment of Myths in Greek Poetry*, BICS (London: University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, 1987), 49–59.

Deianeira would seem to suit Heracles. But Sophocles' Deianeira is radically different from Heracles, and he desires her as a partner not in combat, but in bed. Such a situation is hardly unusual, and Heracles is, of course, no stranger to women, though Sophocles makes no mention of Heracles' previous family by Megara or his presumably many dalliances before he becomes Deianeira's husband. At the inception of their marriage, each party seems to abide by conventional expectations: the famous Heracles proves his worth to Deianeira by defeating his rivals in a display of heroic strength; she brings a reputation for physical beauty, and though that beauty must someday fade, she can offer compensation in the form of bearing legitimate children and managing the household with prudence and fidelity.

Deianeira's prologue soon reveals, however, that her marriage has not lived up to her early expectations. Heracles' long absences on heroic missions leave her paralyzed with fear for his physical safety. But his life of heroic exploits has other consequences: the deterioration of his *oikos*. For the demands of heroism require a denial of his roles as husband, father, and protector of the household. Though the hero's neglect of his *oikos* is hardly limited to Heracles, the play goes to great effort to detail its extent in this case. Heracles has availed himself of the opportunity to sire children with Deianeira, but has abdicated his responsibility to raise them. Deianeira's simile is damning: "we bore children, whom he, like a farmer visiting a distant plot, looked at but once to sow and once to reap" (κάφύσαμεν δὴ παῖδας, οὐς κείνός ποτε, / γήτης ὅπως ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον λαβών, / σπείρων μόνον προσεῖδε κάξαμῶν ἅπαξ, 31-33). Deianeira's comparison of herself to an out-of-the-way piece of property emphasizes her sense of isolation; she places herself on the margins. And Heracles takes up the role of a terrible farmer, one whose crop is unlikely to turn out very well: Heracles is an absentee father and husband.

Deianeira suggests a reason for Heracles' poor mastery of the household: he is not free himself, but must leave his home, "enslaved to someone or other" (λατρεύοντά τω, 35). Deianeira refers here to the most famous aspect of Heracles' legacy, the Labors he accomplished for Eurystheus, at Hera's behest.<sup>6</sup> By reducing Heracles' ultimate nemesis, Eurystheus, to the indefinite pronoun τω, Deianeira reveals the extent of her separation from Heracles' heroic efforts and her own disinvestment in his fame. But Heracles' servitude, since it is linked with the accomplishment of his most famous deeds, is a necessary aspect of his heroism. Servitude in Greek myth, as Patrice Rankine has shown, is associated with ritual domination and social death.<sup>7</sup> These circumstances attend Heracles, as well, from the perspective of the *oikos*: though his physical strength is greater than Eurystheus', he nevertheless abandons home and family upon his command. Indeed, Heracles is so far removed socially from his family that Deianeira does not even think to send Hyllus to search for his father. Though this may reflect Deianeira's passivity, it also reveals her hopelessness; many times has he departed and returned without ever communicating his whereabouts, and she expects nothing different now.

Heracles' *oikos* is weakened not only by his absence and neglect, but also by physical displacement. As Deianeira explains,

ἔξ οὗ γὰρ ἔκτα κείνος Ἰφίτου βίαν,  
 ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχῖνι τῆδ' ἀνάστατοι  
 ξένω παρ' ἀνδρὶ ναίομεν, κείνος δ' ὅπου  
 βέβηκεν οὐδεὶς οἶδε. (38-41)

For since Heracles killed strong Iphitus, we have been inhabiting Trachis here with a

6 Though Deianeira is not yet aware of Heracles' servitude to Omphale, the audience may already have the Lydian woman in mind.

7 Patrice Rankine, "Odysseus as Slave: The Ritual of Domination and Social Death in Homeric Society," in *Reading Ancient Slavery*, ed. Richard Alston, Edith Hall, and Laura Proffitt (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), 34–50.

foreign host, exiles, but no one knows where *he* has gone.

The mythological tradition attests that Deianeira's host is Ceyx, yet he also remains unnamed and invisible.<sup>8</sup> For Deianeira's sole focus is on Heracles' actions and their effects on her and the household. The murder of Iphitus will prove to be integral for the unfolding of the play's events, but Deianeira's knowledge of it seems to extend only to its direct impact on the home. Thus, Deianeira finds herself isolated from her husband, dwelling in a foreign land, far from her family by birth or marriage, as a consequence of Heracles' unlawful killing of a guest.<sup>9</sup> In this case, the family's exile and Deianeira's loneliness can be attributed not just to the cost of a heroic life, but specifically to Heracles' lack of self-control.

The prologue thus reveals the dysfunction in Heracles' *oikos* and its relationship to Heracles' heroic endeavors. The opening of the play does little to highlight the benefits of Heracles' heroism; Deianeira appears to take no pleasure in being known as the consort of the "best of men," nor does she enjoy the goods he must have acquired in the course of his victories. In fact, none of the characters in the first portion of the play, before Heracles' whereabouts are proclaimed, celebrates Heracles' heroic reputation or victories. In Euripides' *Heracles*, when Megara and the family are threatened with death in Heracles' absence, the role of celebrating his famous accomplishments falls to the Chorus; even when Heracles is feared dead and his family is persecuted, the Chorus launches into a lengthy and detailed song of victory (348-441). Euripides' Chorus thus provides a counterpoint to the despair of Heracles' family and serves to remind them of the worthiness of Heracles' efforts, though they remove him from home. In the beginning of the *Trachiniae*, however, the Chorus does not take up a

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8 P. E. Easterling, *Trachiniae*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 78.

9 See my earlier discussion of the *Odyssey's* treatment of this crime in the Introduction.

similar perspective; instead, the young women of Trachis reflect upon Deianeira's suffering and encourage her to hope. They base their optimism on the involvement of Zeus: "Since who has known Zeus to be so careless towards his children?" (ἐπεὶ τίς ᾧδε / τέκνοισι Ζῆν' ἄβουλον εἶδεν; 139-40). But the expectations of Sophocles' Chorus will not be fulfilled, and their reasoning only focuses attention on Deianeira's suffering and sets the stage for a critical indictment of Zeus' relationship with his children.

The initial presentation of the news about Heracles, by the messenger and Lichas, characterizes him as the typical victorious hero. The messenger describes him, who had been called a slave, as flourishing physically and in a position of power (ζῶντα...κρατοῦντα, 182). Sophocles shows that, despite his domestic failings, Heracles remains a praiseworthy and admirable (πολύζηλον, 185) hero. The hero of epinician has not lost his status, and moreover, he responds to victory in the proper way: by immediately offering sacrifices to the gods (κάκ μάχης / ἄγοντ' ἀπαρχὰς θεοῖσι τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις, 182-3). Heracles' sacrifice of thanksgiving affords the gods a preeminent position in his victory and serves to re-integrate him ritually into society after killing. At this first announcement, it appears as though Heracles' *nostos* will be like the many that preceded it. The triumphant hero returns "with his victory-bearing power" (σὺν κράτει νικηφόρω, 186) to his household, where he briefly enjoys his marital bed and family before departing on his next quest.

But even in the moment of celebration, Lichas' opaque account of Heracles' whereabouts hardly paints a positive portrait of the hero. He begins *in medias res*, with the event that occupied most of Heracles' absence: his servitude to Omphale.<sup>10</sup> Lichas' account

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<sup>10</sup> The overtly sexual subjugation of Heracles to Omphale seems, based on surviving evidence, to be a development of the Hellenistic and Roman period (see *LIMC V*). The play's association of Heracles' subjection to Desire for Iole with his servitude to Omphale is suggestive, however.

dwells heavily upon the humiliation of Heracles' bondage, calling him "not a free man, but bought" (οὐκ ἐλεύθερος, / ἀλλ' ἐμποληθείς, 249-50). The repetition of *πραθείς* (252) and *πρατόν* (276) highlights two aspects of Heracles' powerlessness: his commodification (unthinkable for a free male, much less a famous hero), and the power of Zeus to control his son's fate. Lichas deepens Heracles' sense of injury in order to make the scale of his response, to sack the city and enslave the family of the man who caused it (255-8), appear appropriate. With Heracles' humiliation identified as the central problem, Lichas can then justify his reaction. Heracles was so distraught over his "disgrace" (ὄνειδος, 254) that he swore an oath to enslave the man responsible with his wife and child (255-8). The target of Heracles' vengeance expands from the individual source, Eurytus, to his entire household, and in fact, his city.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, Lichas pauses to explain why Heracles calls Eurytus "alone the cause of this suffering" (μεταίτιον / μόνον βροτῶν ἔφρασκε τοῦδ' εἶναι πάθους, 260-1). Despite Heracles' status as an ancestral guest friend (ξένον παλαιὸν ὄντα, 263), Eurytus offends him in three ways: Eurytus insults his skills in archery, reviles him for having served as a slave, and casts him out when he is drunk.<sup>12</sup> Eurytus' behavior as host is unacceptable, but one suspects that Heracles was not wholly innocent, either. Heracles was notoriously a troublesome guest; his enormous appetite for food, drink, and sex suited the comic stage well, but one can easily imagine his trying the patience of even the most indulgent host.<sup>13</sup>

However the events unfolded at Oechalia, Heracles' subsequent actions are undoubtedly

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11 Unfortunately, most of the epic *Οἰχαλίας ἄλωσις* has been lost. See discussion in the introduction of Malcolm Davies, *Sophocles: Trachiniae* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xxii-xxvi.

12 Lichas' reference to a "judgment of the bow with his children" (τῶν ὧν τέκνων λείπειτο πρὸς τόξου κρίσιν, 266) alludes to a tradition that Heracles, in pursuit of Iole's hand in marriage from Eurytus, competed in an archery contest with Iole's brothers. When Eurytus denied Heracles despite his victory, Heracles sacked Oechalia. The story falls into the narrative pattern exemplified by when Poseidon sacks Troy after helping to build the walls for Laomedon, but is deprived of payment.

13 See, for example, Heracles in Euripides' *Alcestis*.



culpable. In retaliation for Eurytus' actions, Heracles kills his own guest, Iphitus, the son of Eurytus and brother of Iole, when he arrives in Tiryns while searching for his lost horses.<sup>14</sup> Lichas describes Iphitus as distracted because of his search; Heracles seizes the opportunity to cast him headlong to his death. This is a case of overt heroic failure. Iphitus is a full-grown man, son of a king and physically impressive, as indicated by the Homeric description Ἰφίτου βίαν (37). But Heracles does not engage him in open competition as an adult male of high status; instead, he attacks him by surprise, while Iphitus is unaware and trusting in his status as ξένος. Eurytus' rude affront to Heracles is thus repaid with the murder of his son. Heracles has exacted a revenge far too extreme; his reaction, out of heroic pique, is disproportionate.

So egregious is Heracles' act that Zeus intervenes to punish Heracles and defend the ethics of heroic conflict:

...οὐδ' ἠνέσχετο,  
ὀθούνεκ' αὐτὸν μοῦνον ἀνθρώπων δόλῳ  
ἔκτεινεν. εἰ γὰρ ἐμφανῶς ἠμύνατο,  
Ζεὺς τᾶν συνέγνω ξὺν δίκῃ χειρουμένῳ.  
ὔβριν γὰρ οὐ στέργουσιν οὐδὲ δαίμονες. (276-80)

[Zeus] did not tolerate this, since he killed him, alone of men, by deceit. For if he had avenged himself openly, Zeus would have excused his conquering with justice. For the gods too do not love outrageous violence.

Zeus proves himself *Xenios* by imposing servitude on Heracles, and his services are purchased by Omphale for a year.<sup>15</sup> Thus Lichas accounts for the causes of Heracles' humiliation, and quickly deals with the Oechalians' defeat: "those who were arrogant in evil speech are now inhabitants of Hades, and their city is a slave" (κεῖνοι δ' ὑπερχλίοντες ἐκ γλώσσης κακῆς / αὐτοὶ μὲν Ἄιδου πάντες εἰς οἰκήτορες, / πόλις δὲ δούλη, 281-3). Heracles had threatened to

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<sup>14</sup> See my discussion of the *Odyssey's* use of this incident in the Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> The situation is analogous to Apollo's servitude to Admetus, described in the prologue of Euripides' *Alcestis*.

enslave Eurytus and his family, but his revenge went further: they are now dead. Heracles has won a total victory, and no one has been left behind to exact revenge for the destruction of Oechalia and its ruling family.

But even if Eurytus had acted badly in the first place, Heracles' response is an overreaction. His murder of Iphitus is deplorable, and his sack of Oechalia is treated in the play as a catastrophe, for Deianeira's sympathy for the enslaved women will direct the audience to consider the human cost of Heracles' "revenge." The scope of Heracles' revenge mirrors the outsized strength of his body. But even though Heracles' behavior is unappealing, his victory, in the words of Lichas, is not unheroic.

Lichas thus attempts to frame the arriving train of Oechalian female slaves as the result of a typically heroic Heracleian expedition. They are treated as spoils of victory, a visual statement of Heracles' heroic prowess. Yet Deianeira, whom Heracles treated as a prize of victory in his competitions with Achelous and Nessus, responds to the women with pity and compassion. Deianeira's mind seems to return to the sentiment expressed in the proverb with which she began the play: "no one can evaluate the life of mortals, whether it was good or bad, until he has died" (ὡς οὐκ ἄν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἄν / θάνῃ τις, οὔτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ' εἴ τω κακός, 2-3). For she does not offer a prayer to Zeus *Basileus* (128) or *Olympios* (275), but to Zeus *Tropaios*, the god who oversees the turning tide of battle, a remarkably ambiguous epithet. Her prayer does not seek protection from the whims of fate for herself, however; she already believes that her life is unremittingly negative (4-5). Instead, she asks that Zeus *Tropaios* protect her own children from such an upset of fortunes, at least while she is alive to witness it (303-6). Her request underscores the generational divide between her and the young slaves of

war, including Iole; when she looks upon them, she becomes fearful for her sons and daughters. Perhaps she envisions the possibility that Heracles may one day be defeated by an enemy, and her own children by him become subject to his conqueror. The dramatic irony deepens with her speech, since in fact Heracles has been defeated by Eros, and her children will become fatherless through that defeat.

The messenger contradicts the central claim of Lichas' speech: that Heracles sacked Oechalia out of anger at his enslavement. Rather, Heracles destroyed the city "for the sake of that maiden...and Eros, alone of the gods, beguiled him into performing these feats of arms" (ὡς τῆς κόρης / ταύτης ἔκατι...Ἔρωσ δέ νιν / μόνος θεῶν θέλξειεν αἰχμάσαι τάδε, 352-5). The messenger demotes Heracles' outrage at his bondage in Lydia and Iphitus' unheroic murder to the status of a "thin pretense" (ἔγκλημα μικρόν, 361), and in its place promotes the role of Desire and Iole's beauty.<sup>16</sup> Heracles has sacked the city of Eurytus because "he did not persuade the father to hand over his daughter, in order that he might obtain a secret union" (..οὐκ ἔπειθε τὸν φυτοσπόρον / τὴν παῖδα δοῦναι, κρύφιον ὡς ἔχοι λέχος, 359-60). Heracles the victorious warrior has been transformed, by this new information, into Heracles the rejected, Heracles the love-sick. Heracles sacks Oechalia because he initially failed at achieving his desire.

The revelation of Heracles' lust proves his complete degradation. In his servitude to Eurystheus, Heracles is stung by the weaker man's superiority, but he nevertheless accomplishes praiseworthy feats. In his temporary servitude to Omphale, he is publicly

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16 For a survey of the treatment of Iole in epic and tragedy, see Didier Pralon, "Héraclès-Iole," in *Héraclès, les femmes et le féminin: Ille rencontre héracléenne: actes du Colloque de Grenoble, Université des sciences sociales (Grenoble II), 22-23 octobre 1992*, ed. Colette Jourdain-Annequin and Corinne Bonnet, vol. 31, *Études de philologie, d'archéologie et d'histoire anciennes* (Bruxelles: Turnhout: Institut historique belge de Rome; Diffusion, Brepols Publishers, 1996), 51-76. Pralon argues that the conflicting accounts of Lichas and the messenger represent a transition from epic narrative to tragic enactment (see especially 69-72).

humiliated, but at least fulfills the commands of Zeus. In Heracles' enslavement to Eros, however, there is no advantage; his bondage will be permanent, and calamitous.

The messenger goes on to expose another great failure of Heracles': his deliberate devastation of his own *oikos*. For the messenger warns Deianeira:

καὶ νῦν, ὡς ὄραξ, ἤκει δόμους  
ὡς τούσδε πέμπων οὐκ ἀφροντίστως, γύναι,  
οὐδ' ὥστε δούλην: μηδὲ προσδόκα τόδε·  
οὐδ' εἰκόσ, εἴπερ ἐντεθήρμανται πόθῳ. (365-8)

And now, as you see, he arrives, sending her to this house not carelessly, Lady, and not as a slave. No, do not expect this, nor is it likely, since he has been fired by desire.

Heracles, in sending Iole to his own house as a permanent member, betrays his selfish carelessness about his family and home. The trouble that results from housing wife and concubine under the same roof is proverbial, and Heracles' lack of concern merely confirms his previous neglect of his family. Moreover, as the play shows, this disregard will seal his own doom. When the messenger forces Lichas to confess the truth, that he publicly swore "that [he] was leading that woman home as a wife for Heracles" (δάμαρτ' ἔφασκες Ἡρακλεῖ ταύτην ἄγειν, 428), Deianeira must confront Heracles' entanglement with Eros.

The arrival of a new mistress at the home of an absent warrior deliberately evokes Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, another play that famously stages a hero's disastrous *nostos*.<sup>17</sup> Agamemnon returns to his diseased *oikos* with Cassandra, his concubine and spoil of war, at his side; his unfaithful queen, Clytemnestra, murders them both, with the aid of her lover, Aegisthus. The travails of the house of Atreus serve as the quintessential example of the demands of war and the agency of fate in Greek mythology, two themes of great importance in

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<sup>17</sup> As many have noted, the phrase Ἐρινύων ὑφαντὸν ἀμφίβληστρον (1051-2) alludes to Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1382 (ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον) and 1580 (ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις Ἐρινύων). See Easterling, *Trachiniae*, 206.

the *Trachiniae* as well.

But Sophocles draws a point of stark contrast between Deianeira and Clytemnestra. For Clytemnestra is the most famous example of the faithless wife who betrays her husband while he fights a distant war. She deliberately plots his murder, whether out of pure malevolence, desire for power, or grief over the sacrifice of her daughter, Iphigenia; but there is no ambiguity about her responsibility or intent. In contrast, Sophocles makes Deianeira faithful and sympathetic; she is weak and passive where Clytemnestra is masculine, strong, and aggressive. By emphasizing Deianeira's innocence and love for Heracles, Sophocles places the burden of responsibility for the disaster that follows squarely on Heracles' shoulders. Deianeira has preserved her marital bed for him, despite his lengthy absences, raised his children, and kept his household in order. In sending a concubine to share the same roof as his wedded wife, Heracles does unmitigated violence to his *oikos*.

Heracles' introduction of Iole to his home does more than simply advertise his sexual infidelities or callousness towards his own wife's feelings. The violence he inflicts is specific: he creates rivalry between two women, with his affection as the prize. But competition in relationships, as demonstrated in the initial example with Achelous, ought to exist between heroic men, with a woman as a prize, not vice versa. Moreover, the rivalry between suitors ought to be governed by proper convention. Now, the competitive triangle is inverted:

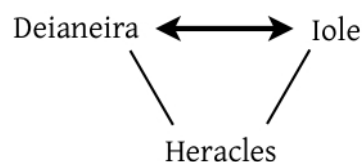


Fig. 3.3: Deianeira-Iole-Heracles

Here, Deianeira competes with a younger woman of royal status for the sexual attention of her own husband.

But in Deianeira's response to the revelation of Iole's identity, Sophocles seems to go out of his way to remove any trace of indignation, resentment, or hatred towards the younger woman. Despite her apparent innocence of the world, she is remarkably understanding about the caprice of desire:

Ἔρωτι μὲν νῦν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται  
πύκτης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ·  
οὗτος γὰρ ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν ὅπως θέλει,  
κάμοῦ γε· πῶς δ' οὐ χιτέρας οἴας γ' ἐμοῦ;  
ὥστ' εἴ τι τῶμῳ τ' ἀνδρὶ τῆδε τῆ νόσω  
ληφθέντι μεμπτός εἰμι, κάρτα μαίνομαι,  
ἢ τῆδε τῆ γυναικὶ τῆ μεταίτια  
τοῦ μηδὲν αἰσχροῦ μηδ' ἐμοὶ κακοῦ τινος. (441-8)

Whoever rises up against Eros, as a boxer to fisticuffs, does not think clearly: for he rules even the gods as he wishes, and me too. How then could he not rule another woman, like myself? I would be entirely mad, therefore, to blame my husband for being seized by this passion, or this woman for being accessory to an action hardly shameful nor an injury even to me.

In Deianeira's view, Eros wields the highest power, and thus, Heracles, who has already been described as subject to Eurystheus and enslaved to Omphale, is revealed as having yet another master. Even Zeus is notorious for his amorous escapades. Yet the play will prove that Deianeira is wrong to assume that Eros rules all; for Eros, and Heracles' predilection for uncontrollable lust, will serve as the means by which Zeus will bring about his plans for Heracles and fulfill his oracles.

Deianeira goes on to argue that she can receive the truth from Lichas because she will not use it to punish Iole. That Heracles has taken other lovers during their marriage is not news to her, nor has she raised objections in the past: "Hasn't Heracles, though one man, in

fact bedded a host of women?" (πλείστας ἀνὴρ εἷς Ἡρακλῆς ἔγημε δὴ, 460). In fact, when Deianeira looks upon Iole, she sees the fate she feared for herself: "her beauty destroyed her life, and the ill-fated girl has unwillingly destroyed and enslaved her fatherland" (τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βίον διώλεσεν, / καὶ γῆν πατρώαν οὐχ ἔκοῦσα δύσμορος / ἔπερσε κάδούλωσεν, 465-8). Just as Deianeira had feared, during the contest between Heracles and Achelous for her marriage, that "my beauty may win for me sorrow at some time" (μή μοι τὸ κάλλος ἄλγος ἐξέυροι ποτέ, 25), Iole's beauty has won her overwhelming grief. The ambiguous value of κάλλος is thus clarified: Heracles' lust can both save a woman (Deianeira, in her terror of Achelous) and destroy one (Iole and her family).

Lichas' revelations about Heracles and Iole bring Deianeira's character into a defining light: unjealous and generous. Yet her position has been completely undermined by Iole's arrival in the household, and the situation is untenable. Deianeira does not respond as Lichas anticipated; he had prevaricated about Iole's identity both to protect the young girl from her wrath and to avoid causing grief to Deianeira (481-3). Callous Heracles does not appear to care one way or the other about Deianeira's discovering Iole's identity and role in the *oikos*; Lichas reports that "Heracles neither ordered me to conceal these facts nor did he ever deny them" (οὐτ' εἶπε κρύπτειν οὐτ' ἀπηρνῆθη ποτέ, 480). Heracles asserts his (corrupt) authority over his house by installing whomever he pleases alongside his wedded wife.

Deianeira recognizes that eliminating her rival will not guarantee Heracles' love or faithfulness to her, for the man who can be overtaken by "terrible desire" (ὁ δεινὸς ἴμερος, 476) is surely susceptible to its power repeatedly. She attempts a different strategy: rather than compete openly with her rival, as heroes do, she seeks to acquire her prize by directly

strengthening her relationship to Heracles. She hopes to create a bond so strong that no triangulation with a female rival will ever be possible again:

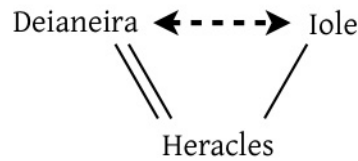


Fig. 3.4: Deianeira-Iole-Heracles, Part II

Her attempt to solidify her connection with Heracles reflects a deeper recognition of her true position in his view: she is past her prime, a middle-aged woman and mother of many children, a wife whose tending of the house can be taken for granted. There is little she can do to remedy the physical differences between her and her rival. She confesses, "I see her youth blossoming, and mine withering: men's eye loves to pluck the bloom of the former, and turn their feet from the latter" (ὄρω γὰρ ἤβην τὴν μὲν ἔρπουσαν πρόσω, / τὴν δὲ φθίνουσαν: ὧν ἀφαρπάζειν φιλεῖ / ὄφθαλμὸς ἄνθος, τῶν δ' ὑπεκτρέπει πόδα, 547-9).

The arrival of Iole and the introduction of competition into the *oikos* prompts the Chorus to describe the clash between Achelous and Heracles. At this moment of perverted competition, the Chorus thus returns to the play's ideal model of heroic competition.<sup>18</sup> The contrast between their treatment of this past competition with that of the present only highlights the dysfunction of Heracles' current actions. The song and dance celebrates the power of Aphrodite, who "carries off victories" (ἐκφέρεται νίκας, 497), like an athletic victor. Yet the substance of the song does not describe Aphrodite's role as competitor, but as umpire or officiant (ῥαβδονόμει, 516). For the principal struggle is the contest of strength between the two heroic males; the dramatic description captures the aural (πάταγος, 518) and visual

<sup>18</sup> On this contest as "an athletic competition," see Swift, "Epinician and Tragic Worlds," 394-7.



(ἀμφίπλεκτοι κλίμακες, 520) tumult of their wrestling. Eros has already possessed both men, and Aphrodite acts to determine the winner. The themes of heroic excellence (defeating a rival in a contest) and susceptibility to Eros (depending on Aphrodite's ultimate judgment) are here closely intertwined. And the prize of victory, Deianeira, is depicted as a helpless victim:

τὸ δ' ἀμφινείκητον ὄμμα νύμφας  
ἐλεινὸν ἀμμένει <τέλος>  
κάπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβακεν,  
ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα. (527-30)

But the face of the eagerly-wooed bride awaits the end, pitifully: and suddenly she is gone from her mother, just like a deserted calf.

Even though the suitor whom she preferred, Heracles, becomes her husband, Deianeira is nevertheless far removed from celebration upon the conclusion of the contest. Though she leaves her natal family for the protection of her husband's, she feels desolate and vulnerable. Thus, the choral ode reminds the audience that competition does not always lead to a joyful conclusion for the prize; even victory can be experienced as suffering. If Deianeira grieved over leaving her family, then Iole must suffer doubly much, for she, one would expect, receives Heracles unwillingly.

Deianeira returns to the stage to lament her compromised position in the house and explain her plan to rectify the situation. Her speech details her perspective on the deep-seated instability in her marriage to Heracles and the household founded upon it. Deianeira's lament does not blame Iole personally for Heracles' actions, but instead focuses on how the younger woman threatens her status in the household. Iole is not simply a virginal, attractive serving girl, but stands to acquire the status of Heracles' actual wife, if not in name, at least in deed:

κόρην γάρ, οἶμαι δ' οὐκέτ', ἀλλ' ἐζευγμένην,  
παραιοδέδεγμαί φόρτον ὥστε νατίλος,

λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός.  
καὶ νῦν δὴ οὔσαι μίμνομεν μιᾶς ὑπὸ  
χλαίνης ὑπαγκάλισμα. (536-40)

For I have taken on a maiden – or dare I say, no maiden, but a married woman – just as a sailor takes on a cargo, as merchandise baneful to my heart. And now the two of us wait under one blanket for an embrace.

Iole has assumed Deianeira's sexual role in the household, as the yoke-mate of Heracles and a partner in his bed. It is unlikely that the male head of the *oikos* would be expected to refrain from molesting the servant girls entirely; for the audience of the *Odyssey*, it is worthy of note that Laertes "never made love to [Eurycleia], but he shunned the anger of his wife" (ἐὐνή δ' οὐ ποτ' ἔμικτο, χόλον δ' ἀλέεινε γυναικός, *Od.* 1.433). But what Deianeira finds so appalling is that Iole will be a permanent concubine, inhabiting the same home: "What woman could stand dwelling together with this girl, sharing in common the same marriage?" (τὸ δ' αὖ ξυνοικεῖν τῆδ' ὁμοῦ τίς ἂν γυνή / δύναιτο, κοινωνοῦσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων, 545-6). And Deianeira fears that the girl who enchants Heracles to such a degree will eventually take her place, "that Heracles may be *called* my husband, but in reality be the younger woman's man" (φοβοῦμαι μὴ πόσις μὲν Ἡρακλῆς / ἐμὸς καλῆται, τῆς νεωτέρας δ' ἀνὴρ, 550-1). But Deianeira's clear-eyed assessment of her status within the household contrasts with her desperate and unrealistic hope that she can effect a change in Heracles.

In her fear of losing her status, Deianeira is not so different from another tragic heroine driven to desperate deeds, Medea. Although the relative order of the composition of the *Trachiniae* and the *Medea* remains undetermined, I argue that Deianeira's choices should be treated with the same respect as Medea's.<sup>19</sup> To claim, as Winnington-Ingram does, that "this is

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19 Christopher Faraone, "Deianeira's Mistake and the Demise of Heracles: Erotic Magic in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Helios* 21 (1994): 115-135, recognizes Deianeira's concern for dynastic status. D. Wender, "The Will of the Beast: Sexual Imagery in the *Trachiniae*," *Ramus* 3, no. 1 (1974): 1, makes a similar observation.

a tragedy of sex," is to limit Deianeira's perception and agency.<sup>20</sup> Both women, living in exile, watch their husbands enter into new relationships with younger women. Medea is physically pushed out of the household and the city, her children effectively made bastards; Deianeira faces a parallel, though more symbolic, threat. Made vulnerable by the choices of their husbands, both women turn to other means in order to protect their own interests. Their responses differ greatly: Medea uses magic to take revenge on oath-breaking Jason, so that he will never enjoy his life after her humiliation; Deianeira resorts to a magical charm to obtain Heracles' exclusive attention. Nevertheless, the women are similar in their efforts to re-assert their status in the face of a dire threat.

The play thus far has presented two competitive triangles; Deianeira now introduces a third: the struggle between Nessus and Heracles in the Evenus river. The tone of her narrative is distant (παλαιόν...ἀρχαίου ποτέ, 555), as though she has suddenly remembered an event long-forgotten. On her bridal journey from her father's house to Heracles', they came to the strong and deep Evenus river; there, the centaur Nessus ferried passengers across the swift current for payment (559-63). While Nessus carries Deianeira, however, he "violates [her] with lustful hands" (ψάυει ματαίαις χερσίν, 565). In response to her cry for help, Heracles springs into heroic action: "and immediately the son of Zeus turned and let loose a feathered arrow, which whizzed through his chest into his lungs" (χὼ Ζηνὸς εὐθὺς παῖς ἐπιστρέψας χεροῖν / ἤκεν κομήτην ἰόν: ἐξ δὲ πλεύμονας / στέρνων διερροίζησεν, 566-8). The description is vivid, depicting Heracles in a heroic light.

From Heracles' perspective, Nessus has set himself up as a rival for Deianeira, by sexually assaulting the virgin (παῖς ἔτ οὔσα, 557) and attempting to usurp Heracles' position as

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<sup>20</sup> R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 75.

her first and only sexual partner. Both men compete for the prize of sexual control over Deianeira, and Heracles engages Nessus in physical combat. This time he defeats his rival not through his wrestling skills, but with his archery. From Heracles' perspective, he has effectively resolved a competitive triangle that closely resembled his competition with Achelous:

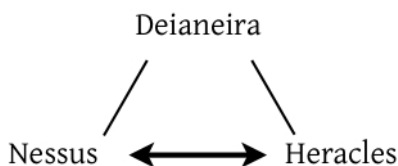


Fig. 3.5: Deianeira-Nessus-Heracles

Heracles, having dispatched Nessus, continues with his bride as before; their triangle has, once again, collapsed into a straight line.

Yet this heroic action is not as "clean" as Heracles' combat with Achelous (see Fig. 1). Achelous, fearsome and strange as he is, is a worthy opponent for Heracles; he presents himself openly as his rival, and their contest for Deianeira is properly conducted. And though Achelous' physical attributes can represent the threat of unleashed male sexuality, he is nevertheless able to be contained.<sup>21</sup> Nessus, on the other hand, attempts to molest Deianeira on the sly, in violation of the "contract" between porter and passenger: Deianeira makes explicit that the Centaur "ferried mortals in his arms for payment" (βροτοὺς / μισθοῦ ἴπ' ὄρευε χερσίν, 559-60). There is nothing open or heroic about Nessus' assault, unsurprisingly in this case of lust for a married woman. Heracles' response is fully justified; he kills the beast who would rape his wife, and in doing so, reasserts not only the authority of custom, but also his own heroic prowess. Yet unlike Achelous, who removes himself from the picture upon his defeat, Nessus will not concede to Heracles, even in the throes of death. Without Aphrodite as referee

<sup>21</sup> See Wender, "The Will of the Beast: Sexual Imagery in the Trachiniae," 4-5.

of a lover's contest, there is also no official to declare when the contest is over.

Nessus offers to Deianeira a "gift," accompanied by persuasive words:

...παῖ γέροντος Οἰνέως,  
τοσόνδ' ὀνήσει τῶν ἐμῶν, ἐὰν πίθη,  
πορθμῶν, ὀθούνεχ' ὑστάτην σ' ἔπεμψ' ἐγώ:  
ἐὰν γὰρ ἀμφίθρεπτον αἶμα τῶν ἐμῶν  
σφαγῶν ἐνέγκῃ χερσίν, ἧ μελαγχόλους  
ἔβραψεν ἰοὺς θρέμμα Λερναίας ὕδρας,  
ἔσται φρενός σοι τοῦτο κηλητήριον  
τῆς Ἡρακλείας, ὥστε μήτιν' εἰσιδῶν  
στέρξει γυναῖκα κεῖνος ἀντὶ σοῦ πλέον. (569-77)

"Child of aged Oeneus, you will benefit so much from my services, if you obey me, since you are the last of my passengers. For if you take away the clotted blood from my wounds in your hands, where the the Lernaean Hydra dyed the arrows poisonous, you will have a charm for Heracles' heart, so that he will never look upon and love another woman more than you."<sup>22</sup>

The bestial centaur offers a token that requires great courage to accept: Deianeira must reach into the bloody wound of her would-be rapist and take for herself a portion of gore.<sup>23</sup>

Deianeira, gullible and naïve, believes his oddly sentimental lies and follows his instructions.

Her obedience reflects a deeper insecurity, though: even from the very beginning of their marriage, Deianeira suspected that she would have need for a powerful, almost certainly dangerous, charm to hold on to her husband, whose affection and respect for her could not be trusted.<sup>24</sup> Her mortal beauty succeeded in drawing him as a husband, but such beauty cannot last. Bereft of her paternal family, vulnerable now to the predations of the outside world, she is entirely reliant on Heracles for physical, financial, and social protection. Both her fear of

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22 Lines 573-4 pose a notorious textual problem. See Easterling's discussion (*Trachiniae*, 144-5); I follow her second interpretation and take μελαγχόλους as proleptic, though the phrase remains difficult.

23 It is notable that, though Nessus instructs Deianeira to touch his blood with her (presumably bare) hands, the poison of the Hydra does not seem to affect her.

24 Faraone argues that Deianeira already knew that the "charm" was a dangerous poison, and her mistake is in underestimating the power of this particular poison (Faraone, "Deianeira's Mistake and the Demise of Heracles: Erotic Magic in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," 115-23).

abandonment and her need for his loyalty drive her to believe Nessus' words.

The ultimate fear for Deianeira comes in Nessus' final words to her, "love another...*more than (instead of) you*" (ἀντὶ σοῦ πλέον, 577). The doubled conjunction here is redundant, perhaps reflecting the magnitude of Deianeira's secret fear. No doubt Heracles' reputation as a womanizer preceded him, and Deianeira does indeed overlook his many transgressions during their marriage. She tolerates Heracles' taking women *in addition to* her, but not *in replacement of* her. Her deepest fear has come to fruition with Iole's arrival in the home, and she therefore remembers Nessus' charm and decides to employ it.

What Deianeira does not realize is that she is playing exactly into Nessus' long-term strategy for revenge over Heracles. Sophocles depicts Heracles in this play as a genuine hero who also neglects his *oikos* spectacularly; the concurrence of the two suggests that abuse of the *oikos* is, in fact, an innate characteristic of heroism. After all, to become a hero worthy of praise and song, one must leave home and accomplish difficult, time-consuming deeds of greatness. As is demonstrated in the choice of Achilles, to live to old age with a happy and peaceful family life is antithetical to acquiring *kleos*. Moreover, just as Heracles is a supremely successful hero in glorious deeds, he is also supremely inadequate when it comes to taking care of his household. Nessus fails to overcome Heracles in terms of heroic combat; his lust overwhelms him to such a degree that he foolishly attempts to violate the new bride of Greece's greatest hero, and he meets nearly instant death. But Nessus is clever enough to take advantage of the other areas of weakness that Heracles' heroism creates; and so he threads his attack on Heracles through the *oikos*.

Nessus plays on Deianeira's insecurity with great effectiveness. For Deianeira stores the

poison, a symbol of her fear of losing Heracles to another woman, in the inner sanctum (ἐν μυχοῖς, 686); she kept it secret, "closely locked up in the house" (δόμοις γὰρ ἦν..ἐγκεκλιμένον καλῶς, 578-9), during the course of their entire marriage. Heracles and Deianeira's house was corrupt from its very start. A comparison to Odysseus' household in the *Odyssey* is instructive here.<sup>25</sup> The epic depicts in great detail the suffering of Odysseus' *oikos* in his absence during the war: his son Telemachus watches their wealth disappear into the guts of the suitors who plague his faithful wife, Penelope; even his servants and the productivity of his land suffer decline. Yet the marital bed, constructed by Odysseus' own hands and literally rooted in the center of the household, remains an undefiled symbol of their marriage; despite the deterioration of the household, the uncorrupted inner sanctum reflects an inner strength of Odysseus and Penelope's union. That strength will prove critical to Odysseus' successful *nostos* and resumption of power. In contrast, Sophocles reveals that a dangerous poison lies within Heracles and Deianeira's physical household, a weakness that will be reflected externally in the actions of the play.

In a piece of typically Sophoclean irony, Deianeira sends Lichas with the poisoned robe, saying in farewell, "for, truly, you know well how things fare in the house" (καὶ γὰρ ἐξεπίστασαι / τά γ' ἐν δόμοισιν ὡς ἔχοντα τυγχάνει, 624-5). And Lichas responds, "I know and will proclaim: secure" (ἐπίσταμαί τε καὶ φράσω σεσωσμένα, 626). The dysfunction and corruption of the household are reflected in the intervening choral ode. For though the Chorus awaits Heracles' return as victor, they do not celebrate his successful arrival in the expected epinician tone. They are very cautiously optimistic, but also anxious. The Chorus acknowledges that "the son

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25 For a longer comparative analysis of the two texts, see John Davidson, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and the *Odyssey*," *Athenaeum* 91, no. 2 (2003): 517-523, itself an elaboration on Robert Fowler, "Three Places of the *Trachiniae*," in *Sophocles Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 161-5.

of Zeus and Alcmene rushes home, in possession of the spoils of every excellence" (ὁ γὰρ Διὸς Ἀλκμήνας κόρος / σοῦται πάσας ἀρετᾶς / λάφυρ' ἔχων ἐπ' οἴκους, 644-6), and they call upon the flute and the lyre for "divine music" (642-3).

But, significantly, the Chorus does not turn Heracles' heroic feats (the destruction of a city and the people who insulted him) into praiseworthy accomplishments through poetry. The suppression of epinician in the song appears overt and deliberate. For one possible strategy for coping with Heracleian violence was to cast his deeds as beneficial acts for the community, as will be seen in my discussion of Euripides' *Heracles* in Chapter 4.<sup>26</sup> But this choral song originates in a perspective dominated by domestic concerns: the Chorus remembers his absence and Deianeira's suffering, from which she is released by "Ares, stung to madness" ("Ἄρης οἰστρηθείς, 653). The final evaluation of his sack of Oechalia and capture of Iole remains to be formulated, and so the Chorus urges Heracles to arrive quickly, transformed by the love charm (655-9). In the Chorus' view, Heracles' *nostos* will only be successful under the condition that Persuasion and desire have changed him (660-2, though textually difficult). The ode thus reveals that Heracles' heroism, viewed from the perspective of the *oikos*, is subject to evaluation and re-evaluation.

This echoes the project of the entire play, which subjects Heracles' heroism, and the manner of his death, to a critical eye. In this sense, the *Trachiniae* resembles another play of Sophocles', the *Ajax*. For the *Ajax* stages the great conflict between Teucer and the sons of Atreus over the heroic status of Ajax, newly dead by his own hand. The Atreidae insist that Ajax's body remain unburied, a fitting punishment for a traitor who attempted to assassinate

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<sup>26</sup> See Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 170-94.



the leaders of the Greek expedition; in contrast, Teucer defends his half-brother by relying on his displays of heroic valor - his defense of the ships from Hector's attack, his single-champion fight with Hector - and attacking the Atreidae's own claim to superiority. Odysseus arrives belatedly to referee the dispute. In a surprising turn, Odysseus, whose deep enmity towards Ajax was established in the opening of the play, defends Ajax and insists on a proper burial. Odysseus, in fact, overrules Agamemnon and assists Teucer, because Ajax was γενναῖος (1355) and because of his ἀρετή (1357). Thus, the play can be read as argument for overlooking Ajax's great fall at the end of his career as an aberration, and privileging his heroic service over his shameful end. This argument takes place in the army's camp, however, a far cry from the domestic scene of the *Trachiniae*.<sup>27</sup> The *Trachiniae*, because it focalizes its perspective through the household, will show how closely related Heracles' frightening death is to his legendary accomplishments.

The terrible end of Heracles' life begins to unfold with Deianeira's reemergence from the house. The play consists of a number of doublets, and her speech of tragic recognition fits into this pattern, anticipating the tragic recognition by Heracles later in the play.<sup>28</sup> Her speech, in revealing the deep penetration of Nessus into the household, assimilates her mind and body to the household. First, Deianeira describes her memory as a tablet written upon by Nessus: "I preserved [Nessus' instructions], like an inscription impossible to wash from a bronze tablet" (ἀλλ' ἐσωζόμην / χαλκῆς ὅπως δύσνιπτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν, 682-3).<sup>29</sup> Nessus' words are as

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27 The relationship between Ajax and Tecmessa is likewise very different from Heracles and Deianeira. Despite the harshness of Ajax's spirit, they still share a warm affection (W.B. Stanford, ed., *Sophocles: Ajax* (London: Macmillan, 1963), xxvii-xxxiii).

28 Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*, vol. 26, Martin Classical Lecture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 88-90.

29 Laurel Bowman, "Prophecy and Authority in the 'Trachiniai,'" *The American Journal of Philology* 120, no. 3 (1999): 335-350, among others, sees sexual imagery in Nessus' inscribing of the virgin.

memorable as the prophecy written on an actual tablet that Heracles left behind (46-7).<sup>30</sup> Nessus' words lie deep in Deianeira's mind, just as his potion is embedded in her home: she "kept the drug in the inner recesses" (ἐν μυχοῖς σῶζειν, 686), an area intended to be secured from the dangers of the outside world. The implement that she uses to apply the ointment, a tuft of wool, came from a sheep from the household's flock (σπάσσα κτησίου βοτοῦ λάχνην, 690). She anoints the robe "in the rooms within the house, in secret" (κατ' οἶκον ἐν δόμοις κρυφῆ, 689). By emphasizing that all of these actions emanate from a "safe" and well-known source, Deianeira isolates the supposed love charm as the variable that causes the strange and frightening chemical reaction she observes.<sup>31</sup>

Once Deianeira recognizes the dangerous nature of Nessus' ointment, she suddenly comes to a full understanding of her situation: that Nessus never intended to help her, that his love charm consists of the Hydra's poison, and that Heracles inevitably will die from the robe she sent him. She might have expected that her love potion would weaken Heracles' self-control, by increasing his desire.<sup>32</sup> But the extremely destructive strength of the potion, now demonstrated on the tuft, stirs her alarm; it is clear to her that the larger amount on the robe will not have a merely mild effect, and that she will become Heracles' destroyer (ἐξαποφθερῶ, 713).

Furthermore, in recalling the story of Cheiron's painful death, Deianeira reviews another instance of the accidental application of the Hydra's venom: "for I know that the

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30 Bowman argues that one of Deianeira's mistakes was to ascribe the authority that belongs only to Zeus to Nessus' pronouncements.

31 Her reasoning demonstrates a scientific bent: Deianeira reasons from her observations and arrives accurately at conclusions that reflect the audience's knowledge of reality. This must be balanced against her poor decision-making, as explored in Edith Hall, "Deianeira Deliberates: Precipitate Decision-making and Trachiniae," in *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, ed. Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69–96.

32 Faraone, "Deianeira's Mistake and the Demise of Heracles: Erotic Magic in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," 126.

arrow that struck [Nessus] harmed even a god, Cheiron, and destroys every beast it touches" (τὸν γὰρ βαλόντ' ἄτρακτον οἶδα καὶ θεὸν / Χείρωνα πημῆναντα, χῶνπερ ἄν θίγη, / φθείρει τὰ πάντα κνώδαλα, 714-6). Here Deianeira assimilates herself to Heracles, who never intended to harm the wise Centaur, and Heracles is an innocent victim like Cheiron. But the comparison serves only to highlight the differences between the two situations. As described by Ps.-Apollodorus (2.5.4), Cheiron is collateral damage in Heracles' battle with other wine-mad Centaurs; the pain of the immortal Cheiron is so unbearable that Zeus allows him to give up his immortality and die. In contrast, the entire action of the *Trachiniae* thus far has been to explain that the poisoned robe was no accident, but a desperate attempt by Deianeira, in response to Heracles' installation of Iole in their home, to save her marriage and her status. Moreover, the Hydra's venom is the mechanism that relieves Cheiron of his immortality, and in calling him a θεός, Deianeira raises the question for the *Trachiniae*'s audience of whether and how Heracles achieves apotheosis after he dons the robe, a process that reverses Cheiron's change of status.

Thus, we see that Nessus' strategy has been to attack Heracles *through* the *oikos*, by taking advantage of Heracles' weak relationship with his wife. Heracles, who anticipates only open and physical combat, is therefore caught unawares by Nessus' unheroic attack. He thought that he had eliminated Nessus from the competitive triangle, but in fact, Nessus remains a rival through the presence of the Hydra's venom and Deianeira's insecurities. The play demonstrates that Nessus was unable to overcome Heracles by his own strength; rather, it took Heracles' creating an inverse competitive triangle within his own house for him to prove effective. Thus, the arrow that signifies competition begins with Nessus, passes through Deianeira, and ends with Heracles.

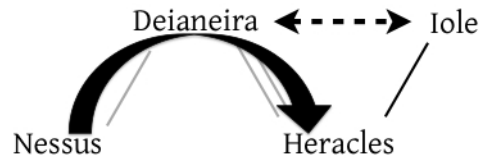


Fig. 3.6: Deianeira-Iole-Nessus-Heracles

It is only through the combination of these two triangles, shown in Figs. 4 and 5, that Heracles finds himself defeated. The hero who can conquer every man and beast through his strength and skill becomes vulnerable because his enemy utilizes unheroic methods to exploit his weakness, his flimsy *oikos*. Not only did Heracles fail to realize that he had not fully eliminated Nessus' threat to his wife, but he also triggered Nessus' weapon against him by jeopardizing his wife's status within the household.

Deianeira's worst fears are confirmed when Hyllus returns from Cape Ceneae to report on the consequences of her gift. The severity of the crisis is revealed in Hyllus' initial denunciation of his mother:

ὦ μητέρα, ὡς ἂν ἐκ τριῶν σ' ἐν εἰλόμην,  
 ἢ μηκέτ' εἶναι ζῶσαν, ἢ σεσωσμένην  
 ἄλλου κεκληθῆσθαι μητέρ', ἢ λώους φρένας  
 τῶν νῦν παρουσῶν τῶνδ' ἀμείψασθαί ποθεν. (734-7)

Mother, how I would choose one of three fates for you: that you no longer live, or if still alive, that you were called someone else's mother, or that better intentions were exchanged for your current ones!

Hyllus, in wishing that his mother were dead, or not his, or different, rejects their relationship. He even calls *Dikē* and an *Erinyes* upon her head, the most damning curse possible (808-9), and denies her the very name of "Mother" (817-8). By denying his connection with his mother,

Hyllus distances Deianeira even further from a position of authority within the house. For, if bearing legitimate children to Heracles as heirs was one of her main wifely duties, and her connection to those legitimate children is severed, then Deianeira finds herself being undermined in yet another way.<sup>33</sup> Deserted by her natal family, abandoned by Heracles, and rejected by her child, Deianeira is truly alone.

Hyllus' eyewitness account of Heracles' agonies reinforces the play's earlier connection between successful heroism and weakness in the *oikos*. For the play juxtaposes the collapse of the household with Heracles' appearance, at least in Hyllus' initial observation, as the standard victor. Heracles delineates a sacred space for an altar in preparation for sacrifices to his father, Zeus (752-6). He seems to be thriving, proving a sight for sore eyes to the anxious Hyllus (755). But Heracles' tasks are interrupted by the arrival of Lichas, here described as "his own" (οἰκεῖος) and "from home" (ἀπ' οἴκων, 757). The emphasis on the familiar and familial origins of the messenger and his gift belies the dangerous nature of the gift itself. For Heracles expected to continue to undermine his wife and his family without facing repercussions. He at first rejoices in his fine garb, until the deadly poison is "activated" by the heat of the sun and the flames of sacrifice. Heracles' weapon, used for his own purposes so many times, has finally been turned on him; the victorious hero experiences the same terrible pains that led Nessus and Cheiron to their deaths. Heracles has become a victim.<sup>34</sup>

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33 In Euripides' *Medea*, Medea offers one reason why a man might take a new marriage: "For if you were still childless, it would be excusable for you to crave another marriage" (εἰ γὰρ ἦσθ' ἄπαις ἔτι, / συγγνώστ' ἄν ἦν σοι τοῦδ' ἐρασθῆναι λέχους, 490-1).

34 He is a victim of the Hydra's poison, but also framed as a victim of a perverted sacrifice. See Claude Calame, "Héraclès, animal et victime sacrificielle dans les Trachiniennes de Sophocle?," in *Le Bestiaire d'Héraclès: IIIe Rencontre héracléenne: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Liège et aux Facultés universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix de Namur, du 14 au 16 novembre 1996*, ed. Corinne Bonnet, Colette Jourdain-Annequin, and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, vol. 7, Kernos Supplément (Liège: Centre internationale d'étude de la religion grecque antique, 1998), 197-215.

Heracles' response to his agony reveals his attitude toward his family and household.

He proverbially shoots the messenger, casting the innocent Lichas to his death in a particularly gruesome way:

μάρψας ποδός νιν, ἄρθρον ἧ λυγίζεται,  
ρίπτει πρὸς ἀμφίκλυστον ἐκ πόντου πέτραν·  
κόμης δὲ λευκὸν μυελὸν ἐκραίνει, μέσου  
κρατὸς διασπαρέντος αἵματός θ' ὁμοῦ. (779-83)

Catching him by the foot, where the ankle twists, Heracles casts him onto a rock washed by the sea: and he made the white brain ooze from his hair, after his skull was scattered amongst the blood.

Hyllus dwells upon Lichas' blamelessness (τὸν δυσδαίμονα / Λίχαν, τὸν οὐδὲν αἴτιον τοῦ σοῦ κακοῦ...ὁ δ' οὐδὲν εἰδὼς δύσμορος, 772-5). Lichas tells the truth, that Deianeira alone was responsible for the robe, but Heracles takes his anger out on him anyway. Lichas' death resembles the unheroic murder of Iphitus, whom Heracles also tossed from the high walls of Tiryns. Sophocles draws attention to the connection with a verbal reminiscence: Iphitus' death is ὁ ῥιπτὸς Ἰφίτου μόρος (357); Lichas, whom Heracles ῥίπτει, is δύσμορος (780, 775). Heracles' murder of Iphitus was condemned by Zeus as an unacceptable use of violence, and the allusion implies that Heracles' attack on Lichas is similarly deplorable. Heracles made both men, whether a guest or a servant in his own household, victims of his wrath; yet both are blameless.

Heracles curses his "poorly-mated marriage with wretched you and the alliance of Oeneus" (τὸ δυσπάρεινον λέκτρον ἐνδατούμενος / σοῦ τῆς ταλαίνης καὶ τὸν Οἰνέως γάμον, 791-2). Heracles dwells upon the contractual nature of his relationship with Deianeira; in mentioning her father, Heracles returns to the inception of their marriage, that is, his first thought is of the *other* marital alliances he could have made instead, which would have been

more profitable to him.<sup>35</sup> His anger only reveals his hypocrisy, though: for if he truly thinks he deserves a better "deal" from Oeneus, then perhaps he should not have invalidated his own end of the transaction by displacing his legitimate wife with a concubine.

In the midst of his torture, Heracles recognizes his son's face among an army of mercenaries. Though he must be grateful that a family member is present to help him, he expresses no relief; his first utterance to his son is a reminder of the depth of a son's obligation to his father: "Son, approach, do not shun my trouble, not even if you must die together with me" (ὦ παῖ, πρόσελθε, μὴ φύγῃς τοῦμὸν κακόν, / μηδ' εἴ σε χρὴ θανόντι συνθανεῖν ἐμοί, 797-8). Heracles finally realizes the value of his children. For though Heracles was not even aware that Hyllus had come to Cape Ceneae to find him, he now finds him useful: when every bystander is too terrified to come near the wild and violent man, Heracles can order his own son to obey. Hyllus, by all accounts a dutiful son, complies, and enables Heracles to avoid the shame of public collapse and the fear of dying on the island of Euboea, far from home.

The Chorus responds to Hyllus' revelations with a sudden burst of understanding.<sup>36</sup> The Chorus puts together the pieces of the puzzle for the audience: the blessed relief from toils that had been promised to Heracles is nothing other than death, death which is inevitable because he has been enveloped by the Hydra's poison.<sup>37</sup> The Chorus emphasizes Nessus' *modus operandi*: he works through guile (δολοποιὸς ἀνάγκα...δολόμυθα...δολίαν καὶ μεγάλην ἄταν, 832-850).

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35 Heracles instinctively sees, in his connection to Deianeira, a relationship with her father. See the discussion of these dynamics in terms of homosocial relationships in Victoria Wohl, *Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 17-29; Kirk Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 36-59.

36 Segal resolves the ostensibly conflicting accounts provided by various prophecies in Charles Segal, "The Oracles of Sophocles' 'Trachiniae': Convergence or Confusion?," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 100 (2000): 151-171.

37 For a close reading of the entire ode, see Stephen Esposito, "The Third Stasimon of Sophocles' 'Trachiniae'," *The Classical World* 91, no. 1 (1997): 21-38.

Heracles' murder of Iphitus established that Zeus disapproves of attack "by a trick" (δόλω, 277); that Nessus defeats Heracles by using an unheroic method thus draws out the similarity between the two.<sup>38</sup> And both experience an agonized death caused by the Hydra's poison.

But Nessus' use of deception also relieves Deianeira of the burden of intent to cause Heracles' death. Misled by the Centaur, Deianeira acts only with the desire to ward off the "great ruin of a new marriage rushing upon her house" (μεγάλαν προσορῶσα δόμοισι / βλάβαν νέων αἰσίου- / σαν γάμων, 842-4). The issue of Deianeira's intent is crucial to the play's evaluation of her character; although she possessed the various bits of information necessary to understand the substance of Nessus' charm, she nevertheless is innocent of Heracles' murder.<sup>39</sup> And thus the responsibility for Heracles' failure must rest, at least in large part, elsewhere. The Chorus lays the blame not only on the horrifying νόσος, but also on the spearhead that won Iole (synecdoche for Heracles' success in warfare) and Aphrodite (associated with Heracles' uncontrollable lust). The spearhead thus comes to represent the violence that Heracles has committed against Oechalia, and against his own house.<sup>40</sup> Once again, the play draws together Heracles' successful heroism with a weakness for lust, a combination that results in a terrible *nosos*.<sup>41</sup>

The news of Deianeira's suicide vindicates her innocence. (One can hardly imagine the victorious Clytemnestra killing herself in shame after plotting against and slaying her own

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38 For Heracles as a quasi-bestial creature, see Charles Segal, "Sophocles' Trachiniae: Myth, Poetry, and Heroic Values," *Yale Classical Studies* 25 (1977): 109.

39 Edwin Carawan, "Deianira's Guilt," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 130 (2000): 189-237, argues, contrary to the *communis opinio*, that Deianeira is "burdened with guilty knowledge," and though she did not *intend* to kill Heracles, she would be considered guilty in a legal context.

40 Compare the language of Iole's capture (ἰὼ κελαινὰ λόγχα προμάχου δορός, 856) with the language of Deianeira's destruction (τίς θυμός, ἢ τίνες νόσοι, / τάνδ' αἰχμᾶ βέλεος κακοῦ / ξθνεῖλε, 882-4).

41 On the similarity between Heracles' disease and his inherent lust, see Penelope Biggs, "The Disease Theme in Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*," *Classical Philology* 61, no. 4 (1966): 228.



husband.) Denounced by husband and son, Deianeira shows that her main concern is to bid her household farewell: "it is the *oikos* and the life she led there that she mourns."<sup>42</sup> Her actions are a rebuke to Heracles' neglect; she acquits herself as the proper mistress of a home. First, she reveals a deep respect for what it represents: "falling before the altars, she wailed that they would be empty" (βρυχᾶτο μὲν βωμοῖσι προσπίπτουσ' ὅτι / γένοιτ' ἔρημοι, 904-5). The collapse of the *oikos*, with the deaths of both father (presumably) and mother, is symbolized in the bare and cold domestic altar. Without proper and consistent sacrifices to the gods, the house cannot maintain its social and ritual relationships with the outside world. She also displays intimate familiarity with the useful items that constitute the physical apparatus of a home: "she lamented whatever household object she touched, which she, poor wretch, previously used to employ" (κλαῖε δ' ὀργάνων ὅτου / ψαύσειεν οἷς ἐχρήτο δειλαία πάρος, 905-6). Not just a good steward of moveable goods, Deianeira also values the people who serve the house: "if she glimpsed the form of one of her dear servants, she wept upon the sight" (εἶ του φίλων βλέψειεν οἰκετῶν δέμας, / ἔκλαιεν ἢ δύστηνος εἰσορωμένη, 908-9).

Finally, Deianeira progresses to the marriage bed, the symbol of her sexual bond with Heracles and the central locus of their marriage within the house. At this spot she mourns the loss of her status: "Never again will you receive me in these covers still as his wife!" (ὥς ἔμ' οὔποτε / δέξεσθ' ἔτ' ἐν κοίταισι ταῖσδ' εὐνάτριαν, 921-2). Deianeira does not yet know for a fact that Heracles is dead, but Hyllus' disavowment of her, in addition to her shame at her misdeeds, convinces her that her position in the home is permanently destroyed. Heracles has violated the sanctity of their bed by sending Iole to Trachis; Deianeira makes the pollution visible with her own blood and body. She commits suicide in a private place, but the way she

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42 Carawan, "Deianira's Guilt," 218.

kills herself is a public statement: the weapon that ends her life, the masculine and heroic sword, stands in for Heraclean violence, both in function, because it is undoubtedly Heracles' sword, and as a phallic symbol.<sup>43</sup>

When Heracles arrives on stage, he terrifies the Chorus with his cries of pain, but his suffering is real and demands the audience's pity. His entrance is accompanied not by a triumphant song celebrating his *nostos*, but by his own agonized shouts. The contrast should be startling: Heracles' achievement in sacking Oechalia could be framed as a victory, as we assume it was in the Archaic epic of Creophylus of Samos; yet here there is not a word of praise for Heracles' exploit, only lament.<sup>44</sup> He is hardly recognizable: too weak to walk, he is borne on a litter by foreigners; his clothing lies in tatters; sleep is considered his beneficial balm, not mere respite between actions.<sup>45</sup> If the audience finds Heracles' appearance disconcerting, Heracles himself feels equally disoriented. When he awakens, he asks the questions made familiar by Odysseus on a foreign shore: "Where on earth am I? Among whom of mortals do I lie?" (ποῖ γὰρ ἤκω; παρὰ τοῖσι βροτῶν / κεῖμαι, 983-4). Heracles does not recognize Trachis; perhaps he had expected to be brought by Hyllus to Thebes or Tiryns. Those cities are far from his current location, though, and it is unclear whether Heracles understands why he cannot return to Tiryns: his family is in exile because of his murder of Iphitus.

Heracles, who has dominated the narratives told by others, finally gains the opportunity to speak for himself. Heracles' first words are a rebuke against Zeus, signaling the

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43 Wender, "The Will of the Beast: Sexual Imagery in the Trachiniae," 13.

44 See discussion in George Leonard Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 105-6.

45 Many have seen a feminized Heracles in this scene. Loraux asserts: "Herakles suffers like a woman before resolving to die like a man" (Nicole Loraux, "Herakles: The Super-Male and the Feminine," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 28).

play's narrowing focus on Zeus' wisdom and justice. He complains against his father for allowing him to suffer so greatly, despite his sacrifices. Moreover, the persistence of his pains, when Zeus is capable of relieving them, testifies to Zeus' complete abandonment of his son. Though Sophocles' intent to foreshadow Heracles' apotheosis remains a subject of debate, it is clear that Heracles himself has little notion that he may attain immortality. Hyllus, able neither to heal his father nor to comply with his request to kill him, helplessly attributes the whole situation to Zeus: "such is the allotment of Zeus" (τοιαῦτα νέμει Ζεὺς, 1022).

Heracles expresses an acute sense of injustice at the discrepancy between his beneficial acts, which deserve reward, and the terrible experience he is currently undergoing. In his view, he is subject to an unfair exchange. Although he has offered fitting sacrifices to Zeus on Mount Ceneae, Zeus allows him to fall into ruin before the altars (993-5). Because Zeus does not appear to alleviate his pain, Heracles turns to the men nearby and begs them to put him out of his misery:

...πόθεν ἔστ', ὦ  
πάντων Ἑλλάνων ἀδικώτατοι ἄνδρες, οὓς δὴ  
πολλὰ μὲν ἐν πόντῳ κατὰ τε θρῆνα πάντα καθαίρων  
ὠλεκόμαν ὁ τάλας, καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ τῷδε νοσοῦντι  
οὐ πῦρ, οὐκ ἔγχος τις ὀνήσιμον οὐκ ἐπιτρέψει; (1010-14)

Where are you from, most unrighteous men of all Greeks, whom I purged of all pests on land and sea, and wore myself out, the wretch? And now that I am ailing, will no one turn fire or a beneficial sword on me?

Heracles has profited all men on earth with his civilizing work; now he demands that whoever approaches him kill him as an act of mercy. Heracles very clearly expresses what he desires: he wants someone to kill him. But no one approaches him, held back either by fear or scruple. Thus, Heracles is left utterly vulnerable: not only is he physically incapable of defending

himself or warding off enemies, he has lost his will to survive. Heracles has always been a very *physical* hero, most renowned for his unmatched strength, the power of his body. Now, the personification of youth and victory craves nothing but freedom from a broken, burdensome body. In Segal's terms, "Heracles is defined solely in terms of his great physique. That ruined, his loss is total."<sup>46</sup>

Heracles goes on to deliver a great monologue that laments his humiliation at Deianeira's hands. Euripides' *Heracles*, too, presents a broken Heracles who delivers a great monologue that laments his destroyed life (1255-1310). But, in contrast to the *Trachiniae*, Euripides' play has investigated Heracles' Labors in detail. The choral odes treat his Labors individually and employ epinician techniques to praise his accomplishments. But after he falls into disgrace, Heracles reframes the deeds glorified earlier by the Chorus as thankless, terrifying, and ultimately worthless acts, now seen in the light of the shameful murder of his family.<sup>47</sup> This radical shift in perspective reveals the tenuousness of heroic success: for Heracles' disaster entails exile, pollution, and social exclusion, punishments that nullify any enjoyment of the benefits of fame for Heracles. Euripides' play thus defines heroic success as a social act, one that benefits not only the community at large, but the hero himself.

In the *Trachiniae*, however, Heracles' speech is focused on himself as an individual victor. For the first time, the names of Eurystheus and Hera are mentioned, but only in passing (1048-9). That these two nemeses of Heracles have not been a factor in the evaluation of Heracles and his actions thus far attests to the play's seeming unconcern with the motivation behind Heracles' achievements; the *Trachiniae* likewise seems less interested in the advantages

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<sup>46</sup> Segal, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Myth, Poetry, and Heroic Values," 115.

<sup>47</sup> See my discussion in Chapter Four.

of Heracles' heroic acts.<sup>48</sup> The perspective on Heracles' life is subjected to a form of reverse-telescoping: the events of his final days loom large, nearly crowding out the litany of heroic successes that form the foundation for his fame.

Up until this point in the play, Heracles' legendary deeds have been presented merely as "errands that require his absence from the home and Deianeira." Sophocles thus paints a provocative picture of Heracleian heroism: when the actual deeds themselves are removed, all that is left are Deianeira's loneliness, broken relationships, and Heracles' huge ego. Rather, Sophocles' depiction of Heracles' works reveals the essential isolation of heroism and the destruction such isolation inevitably wreaks upon human connection. This Heracles makes no mention of Iolaus, Theseus, or other male comrade. He stands alone, desolate of both friends and family. And thus his painful demise, which reaches him through the wreckage of his *oikos*, is a natural extension of his life of heroism.

Heracles' perspective on his own life of heroic labor comes to the fore in his monologue. Even in his final opportunity to lionize his past accomplishments, he minimizes them in order to amplify his current suffering. Eurystheus and Hera figure in his thoughts only inasmuch as their plots against him were not as heinous as Deianeira's. He describes his major efforts on behalf of the gods and humankind only to elevate the humiliation he experiences at the hands of his wife:

κού ταῦτα λόγῃ πεδιάς, οὔθ' ὁ γηγενῆς  
στρατὸς Γιγάντων οὔτε θήρειος βία,  
οὔθ' Ἑλλάς οὔτ' ἄγλωσσοσ οὔθ' ὄσῃν ἐγὼ  
γαῖαν καθαίρων ἰκόμην, ἔδρασέ πω:  
γυνὴ δέ, θῆλυς φῦσα κούκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν,  
μόνη με δὴ καθεῖλε φασγάνου δίχα. (1058-63)

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48 Indeed, the play's actions reveal how "many of his adventures were caused entirely by his own character," not the imposition of the gods (Ehrenberg, "Tragic Heracles," 153).

Not the spear of the battlefield, nor the earth-born army of Giants, nor the violence of beasts, not Greece nor a foreign place, nor any land I visited to tame, has ever done these things: but a *woman*, born female and lacking manly strength, she alone, in fact, has destroyed me, without a sword.

Heracles identifies several instances when he could have achieved a heroic death: falling in battle against men or Giants, killed in the struggle with a dangerous animal, succumbing to one of the threats he sought to eliminate for civilization. He prevailed in every past incident, though, proving his strength and courage through his success. Heracles laments that he is felled by an unheroic opponent, a woman, whom he could never consider a worthy adversary. This reveals Heracles' myopia: he hardly recognized Deianeira at all during the course of their marriage. In fact, his real grief stems from having fallen in unheroic competition. He does not yet understand that his defeat is the result of his own misunderstanding of heroic competition. For in introducing male rivalry and competition to his *oikos*, he created a perversion of competition, one that ultimately brought him down.

If Euripides' *Heracles* celebrated the end result of Heracles' actions, the benefit and protection of others, Sophocles' *Heracles* focuses on the genesis of his famous deeds, his physical brawn. His catalogue is less about the achievements themselves than what was required to achieve them:

...ὦ χέρες χέρες,  
ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν', ὦ φίλοι βραχίονες·  
ὕμεις δὲ κείνοι δὴ καθέσταθ', οἳ ποτε  
Νεμέας ἔνοικον, βουκόλων ἀλάστορα  
λέοντ', ἄπλατον θρέμμα κάπροσήγορον,  
βία κατειργάσασθε, Λερναίαν θ' ὕδραν,  
διφυῆ τ' ἄμικτον ἵποβάμονα στρατὸν  
θηρῶν, ὑβριστὴν ἄνομον, ὑπέροχον βίαν,  
Ἐρυμάνθιον τε θῆρα, τόν θ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς  
Ἄιδου τρίκρανον σκύλακ', ἀπρόσμαχον τέρας,

δεινῆς Ἐχίδνης θρέμμα, τόν τε χρυσέων  
δράκοντα μήλων φύλακ' ἐπ' ἐσχάτοις τόποις.  
ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην,  
κούδεις τροπαῖ' ἔστησε τῶν ἐμῶν χερῶν. (1089-1102)

My hands, back, and chest! Dear arms, yes, you are those famous arms, which once defeated the beast of Nemea by force, a destroyer of herds, a lion, a terrible and unapproachable monster – and the Lernaean hydra, and the savage army of double-natured, hooped beasts, insolent and lawless, overbearing in force, and the Erymanthian creature, and the three-headed pup of the land of Hades, an unapproachable monster, the offspring of the fearsome Echidna, and the dragon-guard of the Golden Apples at the edge of the earth. I have tasted a thousand other toils, and no one erected a trophy over my hands.

Represented in Heracles' speech are many of the canonical Labors represented on the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The focus is on Heracles' physicality, appropriate for a man destroyed by a physical disease.<sup>49</sup> But in emphasizing his body as the source of his strength to accomplish amazing feats, Heracles shifts the focus away from other aspects of his heroism: clever strategy, unflinching courage, the desire to benefit others. Heracles' heroism here has been distilled into its material essence, in Heracles' flesh. Heracles views his failure as primarily a physical one, that someone (his feminine wife) has brought him to a point of bodily collapse:

νῦν δ' ὧδ' ἀναρθρος καὶ κατερρακωμένος  
τυφλῆς ὑπ' ἄτης ἐκπεπόρημαι τάλας,  
ὁ τῆς ἀρίστης μητρὸς ὠνομασμένος,  
ὁ τοῦ κατ' ἄστρα Ζηνὸς αὐδηθεὶς γόνος. (1103-6)

But now, jointless and torn into rags, I am undone by blind ruin, miserable, I, who have been named the son of the best mother, called the son of Zeus among the stars.

His point is not "I have done so many good things; I do not deserve to have this bad thing happen to me." Rather, "I was so strong; now I am so weak, and this humiliates me." Sophocles thus reveals how Heracles' heroism is conceived solely as acts that display physical superiority

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49 Bruce A. Heiden, *Tragic Rhetoric: An Interpretation of Sophocles' Trachiniae* (P. Lang, 1989), 141, calls Heracles' attention to his body "vanity."

over other strong opponents.

But it is also the work of Sophocles' play to show that Heracles' physical failure is a manifestation of an inner, moral failure. Sophocles has already demonstrated Heracles' fatal treatment of his family and household. And even in his collapse, Heracles continues to display the same traits that led to his downfall. For just as he introduced competition into his relationship with Deianeira by lusting after Iole, he also introduces competition with Deianeira into his relationship with Hyllus. Heracles, who had never before viewed Deianeira as a rival, now feels compelled to challenge her: he demands that Hyllus declare his allegiance to his father alone and repudiate his mother. And just as he took no thought for his *oikos* before sending Iole home, he now shows no concern that his competition will tear apart his family.

ὦ παῖ, γενοῦ μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος γεγώς,  
καὶ μὴ τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα πρεσβεύσης πλέον.  
δός μοι χεροῖν σαῖν αὐτὸς ἐξ οἴκου λαβῶν  
ἐς χεῖρα τὴν τεκοῦσαν, ὡς εἶδῶ σάφα  
εἰ τοῦμὸν ἀλγεῖς μᾶλλον ἢ κείνης ὀρῶν  
λωβητὸν εἶδος ἐν δίκῃ κακούμενον. (1064-8)

Son, become my true-born son, and do not honor your mother's name more (than mine). Take your mother from the house and hand her over to me yourself, so that I might know clearly whether it pains you more to look upon my outraged body or hers, justly injured.

Heracles' tone is cruel. He co-opts Hyllus for his plan of revenge against his wife, and views his compliance as a test of his very paternity. This despite the fact that Heracles as a father had been compared by Deianeira to a distant farmer, neglectful of his crop (31-3); Heracles now expects the cooperation of his son, without having committed properly to the role and responsibilities of that paternity.

Moreover, Heracles requires that Hyllus *enjoy* participating in his mother's punishment.



But Hyllus has already displayed his loyalty to Heracles when he confronted Deianeira earlier, by rejecting her as mother in defense of his father (734-820). What Heracles seeks is *too much* satisfaction, just as his response to Eurytus' rejection is to sack the entire city, kill the royal family, and turn Iole into a sham-wife. His will to victory is insane, obliterating any concern for others involved in the situation.

Thus, though Heracles and Deianeira are both parents to Hyllus, Heracles attempts to eliminate his rival and take the role of sole progenitor; Hyllus' affection and allegiance are the prize. In this way, Heracles will be able to declare a double victory over his wife: he intends to inflict the same physical tortures on her, despite his weakness, and destroy her mother's heart, by lording Hyllus' disavowal over her. He proclaims:

ἀλλ' εὖ γέ τοι τόδ' ἴστε, κἄν τὸ μηδὲν ὦ  
κἄν μηδὲν ἔρπω, τήν γε δράσασαν τάδε  
χειρώσομαι κάκ τῶνδε· προσμόλοι μόνον,  
ἴν' ἐκδιδαχθῆ πασιν ἀγγέλλειν ὅτι  
καὶ ζῶν κακούς γε καὶ θανῶν ἐτισάμην. (1107-11)

But know this well: even if I am nothing, even if I cannot move, I will subdue the woman who did this to me, even in my current state: may she only approach, so that she may be taught to proclaim to all that I, both living and dead, make the guilty pay!

Heracles, even as he recognizes that he will die, refuses to let his enemy enjoy a long triumph. The declaration of his intent to kill Deianeira, even θανῶν, places him in parallel to Nessus: just as Nessus planted the seeds in Deianeira's mind that would ultimately destroy Heracles as he lay dying, so Heracles intends to destroy Deianeira despite his physical incapacitation. But Heracles' vaunting over her self-slain body becomes a parody of his heroism, a true revelation of the emptiness of his strength. For just when he calls upon the last reserves of his legendary strength, he no longer needs it. Deianeira does not need to be taught the meaning of honor;

her shame has already driven her to her death.

But in a rare ray of light in this play, Hyllus refuses to continue his family's cycle of dysfunctional competition. He neither supports his father nor rebels against him; instead, he relies on the expression of truth. Hyllus wisely employs a softened approach towards his father, engaging him on his own terms:

ἐπεὶ παρέσχεσ ἀντιφωνῆσαι, πάτερ,  
σιγὴν παρασχῶν κλυθί μου, νοσῶν ὄμως:  
αἰτήσομαι γὰρ σ' ὧν δίκαια τυγχάνειν.  
δός μοι σεαυτόν, μὴ τοσοῦτον ὡς δάκνη  
θυμῷ δύσοργος· οὐ γὰρ ἂν γνοίης ἐν οἷς  
χαίρειν προθυμεῖ κὰν ὄτοις ἀλγεῖς μάτην. (1114-19)

Since you paused for an answer, Father, providing silence, hear me, though you are ill: for I seek what is just to obtain. Give yourself to me, not as angry as you are now bitten in your spirit. For you could not understand in what circumstances you are mistakenly eager to triumph and where you are mistakenly resentful.

Hyllus treats Heracles with respect, waiting patiently for Heracles' tirade to run its course; he knows better than to interrupt his maddened father. He further acknowledges both his father's physical pain (νοσῶν, 1115) and his mental anguish (δάκνη / θυμῷ). His speech is elaborately delicate, interpreting his father's intentions more as "mistaken, vain" than "wrong-headed, unjust." Hyllus' rhetorical skill reflects his maturation.<sup>50</sup> But it also reflects the kind of change produced by a character who has at last acquired full knowledge. Hyllus has discovered the meaning behind his mother's actions and the solution to his father's fate and can thus act with deliberate wisdom, while Heracles is the only figure on stage who does not yet understand the origins of his fatal robe and the meaning of his life's oracles.

Hyllus defends his mother, much to Heracles' disbelief, and asserts the basis for her

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50 See Dora Pozzi, "Hyllus' Coming of Age in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," in *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece: Literature, Religion, Society*, ed. Mark Padilla, vol. 43, no. 1, Bucknell Review (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 29-41.

innocence, providing the final perspective on Deianeira's work.<sup>51</sup> He excuses her, first, because she never planned to injure Heracles so grievously: "she erred, though with the best intentions" (ἤμαρτε χρηστὰ μωμένη, 1136); and second, because her efforts to ward off her husband's new alliance were legitimate: "for she thought she was applying a charm for your love, when she saw the (new) marriage of the house, but she failed utterly" (στέργημα γὰρ δοκοῦσα προσβαλεῖν σέθεν / ἀπήμπλαχ', ὡς προσεῖδε τοὺς ἔνδον γάμους, 1138-9). Once Hyllus names the source of Deianeira's charm, Heracles too reaches a point of enlightenment. Hyllus succinctly lays out the entire backstory: "The Centaur Nessus long ago persuaded her to excite your desire with this potion" (Νέσσος πάλαι Κένταυρος ἐξέπεισέ νιν / τοιῶδε φίλτρῳ τὸν σὸν ἐκμῆναι πόθον, 1039-40). Upon hearing this, Heracles immediately pivots from his threats of vengeance on Deianeira to the dispensation of his legacy, for he recognizes that he is dying, and dying in accordance with previous prophecy. Thus, the final words concerning Deianeira exonerate her and reveal that her deeds were integral to the fulfillment of Heracles' prophecies. She has died, heartbroken and disgraced, but in the service of Zeus' will.

Heracles' newfound understanding may shift his attention, but it cannot change his past treatment of the *oikos*. He immediately calls his family to attend him as witness to his final transmission of knowledge:

κάλει τὸ πᾶν μοι σπέρμα σῶν ὀμαιμόνων,  
 κάλει δὲ τὴν τάλαιναν Ἀλκμήνην, Διὸς  
 μάτην ἄκοιτιν, ὡς τελευταίαν ἐμοῦ  
 φήμην πύθησθε θεσφάτων ὅσ' οἶδ' ἐγώ. (1147-50)

Call all of my offspring to me, and call suffering Alcmena, Zeus' bedmate in vain, so that you all may hear my final statement about the prophecies I know.

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51 Hyllus acquits Deianeira under the rules of the "sympathetic *oikos*," as opposed to the rules of the polis, agora, or assembly. See Carawan, "Deianira's Guilt," 220-9.

This moment of grand solemnity – Heracles' recognition of his impending death – is immediately undercut by the reality of his scattered *oikos*. For the assembly he envisions, of his mother, his descendants, and those most closely interested in his life and death, is simply unattainable. It falls to Hyllus to explain to his father why his command cannot be fulfilled:

ἀλλ' οὔτε μήτηρ ἐνθάδ', ἀλλ' ἐπακτία  
Τίρυνθι συμβέβηκεν ὥστ' ἔχειν ἔδραν.  
παίδων δὲ τοὺς μὲν ξυλλαβοῦσ' αὐτὴ τρέφει,  
τοὺς δ' ἂν τὸ Θήβης ἄστρῳ ναίοντας μάθοις. (1151-4)

But your mother is not here; it happens that she keeps her home in Tiryns, by the sea. But she has taken some your children with her and raises them there. The others, you will learn, inhabit the city of Thebes.

Heracles is still clueless about his family, which leads to this rather embarrassing moment. For just as he prepares to reveal the cosmic harmony between the prophecies he received and their fulfillment, he finds his intended audience unavailable. Easterling suggests that this exchange emphasizes the significance of the moment without the distraction of introducing new family members to the stage.<sup>52</sup> But I argue that Sophocles does more than just heighten the moment here; he uses this exchange to depict Heracles' persistent ignorance of the functioning of his *oikos*. And Heracles' mistaken assumption that his family is ready at his beck-and-call at the moment that he shows interest in them, just as he called Hyllus to help him on Ceneum, demonstrates his egoism.

Heracles' neglect of his *oikos* is, as I have argued in detail, a major contributing factor to his downfall. Furthermore, this particular reference to Tiryns and Thebes also reminds the audience of the two locations where Heracles can no longer reside, due to his heroic failures. For in Thebes, he murdered his wife Megara and his children; in order to be purified, he went

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<sup>52</sup> Easterling, *Trachiniae*, 217.

into exile and accomplished his celebrated Labors for Eurystheus and Hera.<sup>53</sup> And in Tiryns, as the play has shown, Heracles murdered his ancestral guest-friend, Iphitus, which prompted his entire family to be exiled to Trachis. Yet these two loci of his legendary tales are the places where he *ought* to be when he dies. Thus, this exchange highlights not only Heracles' exclusion from domestic knowledge, but also his heroic failures of both violence and lust.

Heracles shares yet more oracular pronouncements about his fate, this time, the words of Zeus combined with a prophecy from the Selloi of Dodona. The final pieces of the puzzle fall into place for him, as Zeus had promised that Heracles would die at the hand of another already dead; Nessus' posthumous attack on Heracles succeeded through Deianeira. And the oracle of the Selloi predicted Heracles' death at the current moment, now fulfilled. Segal is right to argue that the *Trachiniae's* oracles "converge"; the audience was unlikely to have been distracted by their minor differences.<sup>54</sup> The multiplicity of oracles lend a sense of overdetermination to the events of the play: Zeus foresaw the outcome of Heracles' marriage to Deianeira from the beginning, and all of her domestic suffering and Heracles' current physical agony ultimately serve his purposes.

After Heracles finishes explaining the oracles, he never again looks back on his past. The play turns instead towards the future. Heracles extracts an oath of obedience from the reluctant Hyllus by framing his compliance as his highest duty: "but (you must) agree to cooperate, observing the best of laws, obeying your father" (ἀλλ' αὐτὸν εἰκαθόντα συμπράσσειν, νόμον / κάλλιστον ἐξευρόντα, πειθαρχεῖν πατρί, 1177-8). By specifying "father"

53 As far as the surviving record allows, Euripides' depiction of Heracles murdering his family *after* finishing his Labors is a unique innovation.

54 Segal, "The Oracles of Sophocles' 'Trachiniae'." The gap between men's understanding of differing oracles and the gods' intention to bring them to fruition in the same action only emphasizes the remoteness and overwhelming power of the gods: Ernst-Richard Schwinge, *Die Stellung der Trachinierinnen im Werk des Sophokles*, vol. 1, Hypomnemata (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 101-3.

instead of "parents" (as in Aesch. *Supp.* 707-9)<sup>55</sup>, Heracles privileges his authority over Deianeira's – a moot point, given that Deianeira is already dead. Nevertheless, Heracles' strong-arming of his son fits into his past pattern of trying to destroy Deianeira's status as a rival parent with a claim of loyalty on Hyllus.

Heracles' aggressive stance towards his son becomes more pronounced as their conversation continues. When Heracles demands that Hyllus build a pyre for him on Mount Oeta and set it alight, Hyllus is rightly appalled. Sophocles gives no indication of Heracles' reasoning for the command, such as another oracle or previous instruction from Zeus. Hyllus refuses to become his father's murderer; the poor young man has already taken responsibility for his mother's death earlier in the day (932-3). Hyllus only accepts after Heracles has threatened to curse him from the underworld and suggests disowning him (1200-5). Just as Heracles undermined Deianeira's identity in the household, so he now puts Hyllus' identity in jeopardy as well. Heracles relents on the one point: Hyllus must build a pyre, but need not light it himself.<sup>56</sup>

Heracles' instructions, and their modification, raise a number of questions about the play's depiction of Heracles' ultimate fate: is Sophocles implying that Heracles will be deified? Or is Sophocles deliberately excluding mention of that particular branch of Heracleian mythology? Does Heracles himself expect to go to Hades or Olympus? Scholars such as Holt and Hahnemann have established that, by the time of Sophocles, Athenian audiences were familiar with the tradition of Heracles' apotheosis, and thus could well have expected that the

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<sup>55</sup> Easterling, *Trachiniae*, 220.

<sup>56</sup> Varying traditions allowed Philoctetes or his father Poeas to kindle the flame. See Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, vol. 41, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 127–8.

*Trachiniae* might represent that story.<sup>57</sup> The fact that Sophocles does not make the apotheosis explicit, though, could suggest that the playwright purposely suppressed its occurrence.<sup>58</sup>

Heracles makes a second request of Hyllus, one even more repulsive: he must take Iole, whose presence in the household has precipitated its collapse, as his own bride. Heracles bases his order on the demands of heroic status: "let no other mortal take her, who has lain by my side, except you. You yourself, son, join your bed to hers" (μηδ' ἄλλος ἀνδρῶν τοῖς ἐμοῖς πλευροῖς ὁμοῦ / κλιθεῖσαν αὐτὴν ἀντὶ σοῦ λάβῃ ποτέ, / ἄλλ' αὐτός, ὦ παῖ, τοῦτο κήδευσον λέχος, 1225-7). Heracles has thus demanded two horrifying transgressions of his son: kill his father, and then marry his "mother," like Oedipus.<sup>59</sup> Heracles again bullies Hyllus into agreeing, first by threatening to rescind his gratitude for Hyllus' acquiescence to build him a pyre (1228-9), second by again raising the prospect of a posthumous curse. Whether Heracles specifies that Iole must be Hyllus' wife or concubine is not of great importance here.<sup>60</sup> What is striking is that Heracles acts to limit Iole's sexuality after his death, an atypical concern for a dying hero.<sup>61</sup> Sophocles thus uses Heracles' insane demands to draw attention to the mis-match between Hyllus and Iole, a pairing demanded by the mythological tradition. Strangely, Iole

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57 Carolin Hahnemann, "Mount Oita Revisited: Sophokles' 'Trachiniai' in Light of the Evidence of Aischylos' 'Herakleidae'," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 126 (1999): 67-73; Philip Holt, "The End of the Trachiniai and the Fate of Herakles," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109 (1989): 69-80. See also Margalit Finkelberg, "The Second Stasimon of the 'Trachiniae' and Heracles' Festival on Mount Oeta," *Mnemosyne* 49, no. 2, (1996): 129-143.

58 T. C. W. Stinton, "The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy," in *Collected Papers on Greek Tragedy* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1990), 454-492, denies that Sophocles alludes to the tradition of apotheosis; he builds his argument on P. E. Easterling, "The End of the Trachiniae," *ICS* 6 (1981): 56-74, who suggests the play incorporates an ironic allusion to apotheosis.

59 Richard Janko suggested this formulation to me.

60 J. Kenneth MacKinnon, "Heracles' Intention in His Second Request of Hyllus: Trach. 1216-51," *The Classical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1971): 33-41, argues that Iole is only intended as a concubine here. Charles P. Segal, "Bride or Concubine? Iole and Heracles' Motives in the Trachiniae," *ICS* 19 (1994): 59-64, disagrees, seeing her as wife of full status.

61 Ruth Scodel suggests the comparison to Ajax and Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax*: Ajax sees to it that Teucer takes responsibility for his concubine's physical and financial protection, but he does not forbid a future remarriage.

never bears children to Heracles, though he usually impregnates every woman with whom he has intercourse, while it is her children by Hyllus that command mythological attention.

I will advance a new angle on these old debates: I argue that Sophocles dimly forecasts Heracles' apotheosis through a dramaturgical method. For Heracles, in wrenching the play into shape so that it aligns with major traditions, takes on the role of a *deus ex machina*, while still "playing" a living character on the stage. This point marks his transition from mortal hero, dying on the stage, to a god who possesses knowledge of the future. At the point in the play when Heracles reveals his final oracles and the entire plot becomes coherent to all involved, the play is positioned to end. Heracles' final instructions thus ensure that the actions of the play ultimately conform to the demands of the mythological tradition.<sup>62</sup> By employing a protracted back-and-forth between Heracles and Hyllus about the pyre, Sophocles raises the possibility that Heracles could die in the "wrong" location – Trachis, of all places, a city full of strangers and lacking significance to Heracles. Before Heracles makes Hyllus swear obedience, it is unclear how Heracles would make it to Mount Oeta, the "proper" site for his expiration. Heracles imposes his will on Hyllus, through the mechanism of a forced oath; Hyllus' pain makes clear that the pyre is not a natural, organic outcome of the play's actions. Heracles' enforcement of his own mysterious will recalls his role in a later play of Sophocles', the *Philoctetes*. Heracles actually appears as a *deus ex machina* and overrules the decision that Neoptolemus and Philoctetes spent the whole play deliberating, compelling them to obey him because of his special knowledge of their fate. In the same way, the *Trachiniae*'s Heracles can be

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<sup>62</sup> I am not asserting that Sophocles was *compelled* to allude to Heracles' apotheosis; as discussed above, earlier tradition indicates that Heracles simply became an inhabitant of the underworld, and that tradition was certainly available to Sophocles and his audience. But I do believe that, in insisting on a pyre on Mount Oeta, Sophocles draws attention to and allows for the possibility of apotheosis, thus choosing to privilege the more recent legend.



seen as anticipating this role in his coercion of Hyllus into fulfilling the requirements of Zeus' will.

Likewise, the marriage of Hyllus and Iole is a major aspect of Heracles' myths, for their descendants become the Heracleidae, who base their ancestral claim to the rule of the Peloponnese on Heracles' roots in the area.<sup>63</sup> Yet Hyllus' aversion to marrying his father's concubine, who is the source of destruction to both of his parents, represents the "normal" human reaction to such a demand. Hyllus' sense of grief is rightly offended by the suggestion of cohabiting with the young woman: "who could choose these things, unless infected by fiends? Better for me to die, father, than to dwell together with my greatest enemy" (τίς ταῦτ' ἄν, ὅστις μὴ 'ξ ἀλαστόρων νοσοῖ, / ἔλοιτο; κρεῖσσον κάμ' ἐγώ, ὦ πάτερ, θανεῖν / ἢ τοῖσιν ἐχθίστοισι συνναίειν ὁμοῦ, 1235-7). Moreover, Heracles' demand flies in the face of established custom. In fact, in mythological society, it was expressly forbidden for a son to have sexual relations with his father's concubine. For example, in *Iliad* 9, Phoenix must go into exile because he has slept with his father's concubine, at his mother's request:

φεύγων νείκεα πατρὸς Ἀμύντορος Ὀρμενίδαο,  
ὅς μοι παλλακίδος περιχώσατο καλλικόμοιο,  
τὴν αὐτὸς φιλέεσκεν, ἀτιμάζεσκε δ' ἄκοιτιν  
μητέρ' ἐμήν: ἦ δ' αἰὲν ἐμὲ λισσέσκετο γούνων  
παλλακίδι προμιγῆναι, ἴν' ἐχθήρειε γέροντα.  
τῇ πιθόμην καὶ ἔρεξα: πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς αὐτίκ' οἴσθεις  
πολλὰ κατηρᾶτο, στυγεράς δ' ἐπεκέκλετ' Ἐρινῦς,  
μὴ ποτε γούνασιν οἷσιν ἐφέσσεσθαι φίλον υἱὸν  
ἐξ ἐμέθεν γεγαῶτα: θεοὶ δ' ἐτέλειον ἐπαρὰς  
Ζεὺς τε καταχθόνιος καὶ ἐπαινὴ Περσεφόνηια. (448-57)

...fleeing the quarrel with my father, Amyntor, son of Ormenus, who was wrathful towards me on account of his beautiful concubine, whom he dearly loved, but he was dishonoring his wedded wife, my mother: and she was constantly begging me by my

<sup>63</sup> See Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67-107, on the political significance of claims to ancestry from Heracles, especially in the Argolid.

knees to sleep with the girl myself, so that she would despise the old man. I obeyed her and did it. And my father, soon aware, cursed me repeatedly, calling upon the hateful Furies as witness. He prayed that I would never father a dear son and set him upon my knees; and the gods fulfilled his curse – Zeus of the underworld and dreadful Penelope.

Phoenix's story makes clear that his father's concubine is off-limits; whatever the effects of Phoenix's sexual prowess on the young woman, the result of his action is to insult his father by claiming his sexual partner for himself. Amyntor calls upon the Furies, "because they are the guardians of the natural order and punish those whose unnatural acts (whether speech by a horse or disrespect for parents) have breached it."<sup>64</sup> Phoenix' infertility serves as a sign and reminder of his father's curse.

Thus, the play draws attention to the multiple reasons for both Hyllus and the audience to find Heracles' request repulsive. And in response to Hyllus' resistance, Heracles becomes even more dominating. His violent mis-matching of Hyllus to Iole is not so different from Apollo's commands, when the god appears at the conclusion of Euripides' *Orestes* and orders Orestes to marry Hermione. In Euripides' play, Orestes views his cousin with nothing but enmity and takes advantage of her vulnerability for his own purposes. This wild play threatens to run off the rails by the end: Orestes takes Hermione hostage and confronts Menelaus from the roof of the palace, holding his sword to Hermione's throat and threatening to burn down the house. Apollo's *deus ex machina* appearance interrupts this ludicrous scene, and he resolves it simply: "Orestes, against whose neck you hold your sword, Hermione, it is your destiny to marry" (ἐφ' ἧς δ' ἔχεις, Ὀρέστα, φάσγανον δέρη, / γῆμαι πέπρωταί σ' Ἑρμιόνην, 1654-5). Orestes responds promptly, and seemingly, happily: "Look, I am releasing Hermione from slaughter and approve our marriage, whenever her father gives her" (ἰδού, μεθήμ' Ἑρμιόνην ἀπὸ σφαγῆς, /

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64 J. B. Hainsworth, *The Iliad: a Commentary*, ed. G. S. Kirk, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 122.

καὶ λέκτρ' ἐπήνεσ', ἠνίκ' ἄν διδῶ πατήρ, 1671-2). The entire scene, including Apollo's interruption and Orestes' abrupt change of heart, smacks of parody; perhaps Euripides even had in mind scenes like ours in the *Trachiniae*.

Thus, Heracles' dual demands require that Hyllus act contrary to his human feeling. Heracles, even in his dying breaths, continues to be "violent, harsh, inflexible, and demanding, not because he is a brute, but because he is a hero."<sup>65</sup> Thus, his odious acts are in part a reflection of Heracles' innate and heroic distance from normal people, and in part a reflection of his transition to deity.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, in demanding that his son suffer in order to fulfill his will, Heracles imitates his own father, Zeus.<sup>67</sup> For Heracles, too, is subject to the inscrutable will of his father.

The resemblance between Zeus and Heracles, father and son, creates a bleak and pessimistic portrait of deity. The name of Zeus, combined with a variety of epithets, is featured prominently in this play.<sup>68</sup> The constant reference to the king of the gods as Heracles' father points towards his agency in the actions of the play.<sup>69</sup> The final words of the play, whether spoken by the Chorus or Hyllus,<sup>70</sup> lay full responsibility on Zeus:

λείπου μηδὲ σύ, παρθέν', ἀπ' οἴκων,  
μεγάλους μὲν ἰδοῦσα νέους θανάτους,  
πολλὰ δὲ πήματα καὶ καινοπαθῆ,  
κούδεν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεύς.

65 Charles Fuqua, "Heroism, Heracles, and the Trachiniae," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 69.

66 Segal, "Sophocles' Trachiniae: Myth, Poetry, and Heroic Values," 138–41.

67 In Segal's words, "Heracles' failure toward his own house is only a lesser reflection of Zeus's failure toward his" (Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 26:81).

68 See vv. 19, 26, 128, 139, 200, 238, 251, 275, 287, 303, 437, 751, 826, 959, 995, 1002, 1022, 1041, 1048, 1086, 1106, 1149, 1159, 1185, 1188, 1191, 1278.

69 Jon D. Mikalson, "Zeus the Father and Heracles the Son in Tragedy," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 116 (1986): 89–98, argues that in Euripides' Heracles, Zeus mainly appears in the role of Sōtēr, whereas in the Trachiniae, Sophocles introduces a wide range of Zeuses.

70 See discussion in P. E. Easterling, *Trachiniae*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 231–2.

Do not be left, maiden, at the house, either, for you have seen terrible recent deaths, and many trials and unheard-of sufferings. And there is nothing in them that is not Zeus.

Thus, Sophocles shows that Zeus' justice is effective, though not necessarily human.<sup>71</sup>

Heracles has been framed throughout as a totally unappealing hero, and though he is far from being a figure one would want to emulate, he nevertheless receives his reward, an afterlife as a god. His heroism is entirely self-centered and based solely in the triumph of his physical power over others. I have defined heroic success as victory in worthy competitions that offer some benefit to a hero's community. The action of Sophocles' play demonstrates the consequences when victory is achieved, but without any advantage to others: though Heracles successfully sacks Oechalia and carries off his prize, his exploit causes nothing but chaos and destruction. Moreover, because Heracles' understanding of heroism is focused on his own physical strength, he makes no distinction between proper and improper heroic competition. This blindness leads him to create competition for his affection between women in his own *oikos*, a choice that will ultimately destroy him.

Yet Heracles is not the only figure destroyed in the *Trachiniae*. The play depicts in detail the suffering of Deianeira, whom the play ultimately exonerates, and displays the effects of the broken household on a son, Hyllus. Yet their innocent sorrows have meaning only in so far as they advance the predetermined plans of Zeus: the family is nothing but collateral damage in the path of Heracles' ascent to Olympus. By condemning Heracles' heroism and its devastating effects on those near (his family) and far (Oechalia) at the same time as foreshadowing his

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<sup>71</sup> I ought to acknowledge Lloyd-Jones' chapter on Sophocles in *The Justice of Zeus* (104-128), which also concludes that the end of the *Trachiniae* develops a notion of divine justice; but his insistence that a modern audience can divine Sophocles' personal opinion on the justice of the gods is rather outdated.

eternal reward, Sophocles stresses the seeming arbitrariness of the gods. For though the play begins with a statement of the uncertainty of mortal fate (1-3), it ends with an assertion of Zeus' rule.<sup>72</sup> Heracles does not receive what he deserves. Yet Sophocles' insistence upon the priority of Zeus' will imposes the highest form of order upon the seeming chaos of earthly events. Thus, in the world of the *Trachiniae*, Zeus' will is inescapable, but not praiseworthy – just like Heraclean heroism, which is denied epic glorification in the play, yet still leads to apotheosis.

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<sup>72</sup> Versnel offers a thorough discussion of divine justice versus divine arbitrariness, and "the persistent and pervasive *lack of consistency* in expressions concerning divine causation of good and evil in archaic and early classical literature" in H. S. Versnel, *Coping With the Gods* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 162.

## Chapter 4: The Persistence of Heroic *Aretē* in Euripides' *Heracles*

Euripides' *Heracles* offers a direct challenge to the value of Heraclean heroism, but in a manner markedly different from the approach of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. In the *Trachiniae*, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Sophocles shows how Heracles' hollow heroism leads to the destruction of his physical body and his household; despite his failures, Heracles nevertheless appears poised for apotheosis, a juxtaposition that calls into question the very justice of Zeus. In contrast, Euripides presents a Heracles who embodies all the ideals of heroic success, yet falls into complete disaster when he turns his heroic skills and weapons against the innocent. But Euripides redeems the broken and suicidal Heracles through his commitment to the same heroism espoused earlier. The rehabilitation of Heracles is made possible only through a very specific formulation of heroic *aretē*, however, one which incorporates both victory and friendship. Euripides thus uses Heracles as a vehicle for exploring how heroism can be made acceptable to his fifth-century audience.

This chapter will approach the *Heracles* as a play in three parts. The first part is concerned with the opening suppliant drama and ends with Heracles' successful revenge against Lycus (814); the second begins with the arrival of Iris and Lyssa (815) and ends with Heracles asleep after the massacre (1088); the third runs from Heracles' awakening (1089) to

the conclusion. Though I have divided the play into three sections for the purposes of my study, I argue that the action remains a unified whole through Euripides' treatment of heroic *aretē*. While an older generation of scholars once attacked the *Heracles* as a fractured tragedy (most memorable is Swinburne's condemnation, "a grotesque abortion"),<sup>1</sup> many have now recognized the essential unity of the play.<sup>2</sup>

My concern with Euripides' definition of heroic *aretē* in the play engages a long scholarly dialogue about the themes of the *Heracles*. Several of these studies examine the role that *philia* and *aretē* in the play.<sup>3</sup> Chalk's seminal 1962 article subsumes Sheppard's earlier analysis of wealth, strength, and *philia* under the heading of *aretē*, declaring, "The ἀρετή question is more than a theme. It is the play: the inexplicable overthrow by Hera of the conventional ἀρετή of Herakles followed by his recovery of a further ἀρετή prompt and (tragically) answer precisely this question."<sup>4</sup> Chalk goes on to argue, like Arrowsmith and Wilamowitz before him, that Heracles demonstrates a *new* form of courage in choosing life over suicide in the conclusion of the play.<sup>5</sup> Several others have followed Chalk's lead, emphasizing

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1 Quoted in Arthur Woollgar Verrall, *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides: Andromache, Helen, Heracles, Orestes* (University Press, 1905), 136.

2 Among others: William Arrowsmith, "The Conversion of Herakles: An Essay in Euripidean Tragic Structure" (Dissertation, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1954); D. J. Conacher, "Theme, Plot, and Technique in the 'Heracles' of Euripides," *Phoenix* 9, no. 4 (1955): 139–152.; J. C. Kamerbeek, "Unity and Meaning of Euripides' 'Heracles,'" *Mnemosyne* 19, no. 1 (1966): 1–16.; Thalia Papadopoulou, *Heracles and Euripidean tragedy*, Cambridge classical studies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); M. S. Silk, "Heracles and Greek Tragedy," *Greece & Rome* 32, no. 1 (1985): 1–22.

3 See Helena Foley's succinct summary of scholarly opinions on the play's structure in *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 200–204.

4 J. T. Sheppard, "The Formal Beauty of the Hercules Furens," *The Classical Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1916): 72–79.; H. H. O. Chalk, "Arete and Bia in Euripides' Herakles," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82 (1962): 9. More recently, Papadopoulou agrees that "the question of Heracles' prowess...is problematized throughout the play" (Papadopoulou, *Heracles and Euripidean Tragedy*, 137.

5 Arrowsmith, "The Conversion of Herakles: An Essay in Euripidean Tragic Structure," 14; Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides Herakles*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1895), 127–8. Wilamowitz's argument, now discredited, is based on his conception of Heracles as a "Dorian hero," who, after suffering an attack of megalomania (128), is left passive (109–11) and in need of Athenian rescue in the person of Theseus.

that Heracles' rejection of suicide entails a repudiation of an out-dated system of heroism embraced by the first action of the play.<sup>6</sup> But Adkins rejects the presence of new *aretē* in the play, asserting that Euripides fails to redefine *aretē* "explicitly and at length," and accusing Heracles of displaying "no ἀρετή at all" in the last part of the play.<sup>7</sup>

Adkins' contrarian reading is unjustifiably narrow and seems to miss the point of the play altogether. Yet I agree with him on one point: Euripides does not promulgate a new-fangled notion of excellence in the last third of the play. Instead, I argue that Euripides presents a definition of heroic *aretē* that remains consistent throughout the entire play. This definition is based on two components: the excellence of the *philos* and the excellence of the *kallinikos*. The interplay of these two virtues and Heracles' representation of them dominate all three parts of the play, and it is Heracles' devotion to this same *aretē* that saves his life in the end.

*Philia*, or friendship, is the relationship that exists between *philoī*, a term that in tragedy can include blood relatives, spouses, community members, *xenoi*, and suppliants.<sup>8</sup> While the relationship between *philoī* can be characterized by affection and goodwill, its basis is rooted in a reciprocal relationship based on favors (χάρις), the action "to help friends and harm enemies."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, *philia* is only one aspect of his excellence, and Heracles' worth as a

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6 See, e.g., Jacqueline de Romilly, "Le refus du suicide dans l'Héraclès d'Euripide," *Archaïognosia* 1 (1980): 1–10; David Furley, "Euripides on the Sanity of Herakles," in *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster*, ed. J. H. Betts, J. T. Hooker, and J. R. Green, vol. 1 (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1986), 102–13; Shirley A. Barlow, "Sophocles' Ajax and Euripides' Heracles," *Ramus* 10 (1981): 112–128.

7 Arthur W. H. Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' Hecuba and Hercules Furens," *The Classical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1966): 218–9.

8 Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Murder Among Friends: Violations of Philia in Greek Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

9 Seth Schein, "Philia in Euripides' Medea," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. Mark Griffith and Donald Mastronarde (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 58. The role of *philia* in Euripides' works has generated significant discussion: Belfiore, *Murder Among Friends*; Barry Goldfarb, "The Conflict of Obligations in Euripides' 'Alcestis'," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 32, no. 2 (1992): 109–126; J. Johnson, "Compassion and Friendship in Euripides' Herakles," *Classical Bulletin* 78, no. 2 (2002): 115–



*philos* to his kin is a source of anxiety throughout the play. For Heraclean heroism, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, does not necessarily include significant awareness of or commitment to *philoï*. Complementary to the notion of *philia* is Heracles' significance as "the paragon of Greek male ἀρετή," based on his legendary deeds of courage, his feats of strength demonstrated in the famous Labors, athletic games, and battles.<sup>10</sup> These victories earn Heracles the epithet *kallinikos*, a term associated with his status as a hero of athletes and "the patron of war and athletic contests."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in his role as Heracles καλλίνικος, Heracles serves as the victor *par excellence* in epinician poetry. As Pindar famously remarked in Nemean 1, "I willingly hold on to Heracles among the mighty summits of glorious excellence" (ἐγὼ δ' Ἡρ / ακλέος ἀντέχομαι προφρόνως / ἐν κορυφαῖς ἀρετᾶν μεγάλαις, 31-33).

Heracles the Victor is inseparable from his identity as an epinician hero, and the *Heracles* is a tragedy very much interested in the conventions and diction of epinician and encomiastic poetry.<sup>12</sup> After all, its choral odes could almost serve as independent epinician songs: the first eulogistic, the second celebrating Heracles' timely return as savior, and the third praising his victory over Lycus.<sup>13</sup> But Euripides' innovation is to extend the influence of

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129; Marianne McDonald, "Iphigenia's 'Philia': Motivation in Euripides 'Iphigenia at Aulis,'" *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* 34, no. 1 (1990): 69–84; Schein, "Philia in Euripides' Medea"; Seth L. Schein, "ΦΙΛΙΑ in Euripides' Alcestis," *Mètis* 3, no. 1 (1988): 179–206; Ruth Scodel, "Ἀδμήτου Λόγος and the Alcestis," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83 (1979): 51–62; S.F. Scully, "Φιλία and Χάρις in Euripidean Tragedy" (Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1973).

10 Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' Hecuba and Hercules Furens," 212.

11 Lewis Richard Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, Gifford Lectures (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 148.

12 Perhaps Euripides' composition of an epinician song for Alcibiades indicates a deeper interest in the genre (Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*). Interest in the role of epinician in tragedy has grown recently; see C. Carey, "The Victory Ode in the Theatre," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplements* (2010); D. Steiner, "The Immeasures of Praise: The Epinician Celebration of Agamemnon's Return," *Hermes* 138, no. 1 (2010): 22–37; Laura Swift, *The Hidden Chorus: Echoes of Genre in Tragic Lyric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

13 Helena Foley has explicated how the first half of the play presents Heracles as an "epinician hero" in *Ritual Irony*, 177–188. However, in claiming that he "becomes in the peripety an altogether inappropriate subject for praise" (187), she refrains from following the complex treatment of epinician through the entire play.

epinician beyond the choral songs, into the depiction of Heracles defeated by the gods and his own strength.<sup>14</sup> By imposing epinician language and imagery on the shameful, Euripides interrogates Heracles' heroic reputation. This chapter will therefore investigate the play's concern for Heracles' *aretē* as *philos* and *kallinikos*, the value of his heroism, and the efficacy of praise poetry.

## Part I: *Aretē* Questioned and Confirmed

Amphitryon's prologue establishes the play's concern with Heracles' heroic identity and the *philia* that defines his relationship with Thebes. Amphitryon introduces his son as "that famous Heracles" (ὁ κλεινὸς Ἡρακλῆς, 12), giving emphasis to his pan-Hellenic reputation.<sup>15</sup> Amphitryon provides the setting for the opening of the play: Heracles has not returned from his final labor for Eurystheus, the capture of Cerberus from Hades, while his family in Thebes is under the threat of death by the new tyrant, Lycus. Already in the first speech, the language of Heracles' heroic identity comes to the fore: he has toiled (ἐξεμόχθησεν) over many labors (τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους πόνους, 22); the use of the terms μοχθέω and πόνος in the context of Heracles' famed Labors will persist throughout the play.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the altar where the family takes refuge magnifies his "gloriously conquering spear" (καλλινίκου δορός, 49), introducing the appellation *kallinikos* in association with Heracles' success as a warrior and fighter.

Just as Amphitryon's prologue establishes Heracles as a hero with a history of glorious

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14 For a perceptive analysis of the epinician themes throughout the *Heracles*, see Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 121–156.

15 The pan-Hellenic character of Heracles' fame belies Wilamowitz's emphasis on Heracles as a Dorian figure: see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides Herakles*, 128; Godfrey W. Bond, *Heracles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), xxxii; Papadopoulou, *Heracles and Euripidean Tragedy*, 83.

16 See 355, 356, 388, 427, 575, 578–81, 698, 725, 830, 937, 1190, 1197, 1251, 1270, 1275, 1279, 1353, 1369, 1410, 1411.

victories, it also defines Heracles as a proper *philos* to his father and community. Euripides has reversed the traditional order of the murder of Heracles' family and the penance of enslavement to Eurystheus; accordingly, Amphitryon explains, Heracles performs the Labors for Eurystheus in order to enable Amphitryon's return to Mycenae from the exile imposed after he killed Electryon (15-17). This is no easy feat (μισθὸν μέγαν, 19), but Heracles exerts himself in honor of his father, to "lighten [his] misfortune" (συμφορὰς δὲ τὰς ἐμὰς / ἐξευμαρίζων, 17). Euripides thus establishes from the beginning that "Herakles follows the traditional code of the hero: help friends and harm enemies."<sup>17</sup> This Euripidean innovation allows Heracles to be presented not only as a *philos* to his father, but as a particularly filial son. This quality will receive greater attention in part III of the play, which examines Heracles' relationship with his mortal father and Olympian father.

Heracles' benefactions extend even beyond the circle of his immediate family. His Labors for Eurystheus provide a safer environment for all mankind by "clearing the earth" of uncivilized threats (ἐξημερῶσαι γαῖαν, 20). Moreover, he is also celebrated for the enemies he conquers in war. The Thebans are indebted to Heracles for his defense of the city against the Minyans of Orchomenos, its main rival city (Μινύας κρατήσας, 50).<sup>18</sup> For this aid, his fellow townsmen owe him a reciprocal favor, which, in this case, is the protection of his family. Instead, the Thebans have abandoned them to Lycus, and the family sits as suppliants at an altar that glorifies his very victory for the Thebans. Amphitryon laments the state of his friends: some are unreliable in his time of need (οὐ σαφεῖς ὄρω φίλους, 55), while those who are loyal are unable to help (ἀδύνατοι προσωφελεῖν, 56). Amphitryon closes his speech with a

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17 Karelisa Hartigan, "Euripidean Madness: Herakles and Orestes," *Greece & Rome* 34, no. 2 (1987): 127.

18 Bond, *Heracles*, 74.

proverbial observation; the family's ill-luck (δυσπραξία, 57) serves as the "most truthful proof of friends" (φίλων ἔλεγχον ἀψευδέστατον, 59).

Though Amphitryon's speech has established Heracles' status as both hero and friend, his absence nevertheless calls into question both aspects of his *aretē*. Megara's response to Amphitryon underscores the way his absence affects her trust in her husband's heroic character. Pressed on both sides by a hopeless situation and the plaintive questions of her innocent children, she is forced to invent lies: "I put them off with stories, making up fiction" (διαφέρω / λόγοισι μυθεύουσα, 76-7). That Megara, the wife of the great man himself, resorts to telling false stories about him raises doubts about the traditional accounts of his glorious deeds.<sup>19</sup> Even Amphitryon encourages her yarns, urging her to "take away [the children's] tears and soothe them with stories, even if you conceal wretched fraud in the tales" (ἀλλ' ἠσύχαζε καὶ δακρυρρόους τέκνων / πηγὰς ἀφαίρει καὶ παρευκίλει λόγοις, / κλέπτουσα μύθοις ἀθλίους κλοπὰς ὅμως, 98-100). If Amphitryon and Megara collude in speaking fanciful tales about Heracles, even if for the sake of the children, then Heracles' previous record of victory is vulnerable to skepticism, a skepticism made explicit later by Lycus.

Megara's hopelessness suggests another significant question about Heracles' heroism: what good are his strength and courage if he allows his own family to be killed by a coward? His personal glory has only made his children a target for the usurper (40-43), and Heracles the savior does not appear to save his closest relations from death. In juxtaposing these two speeches, Euripides makes evident the tensions between Heracles' domestic and heroic responsibilities. While he may be making the earth safer for mankind (20), he abandons his

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19 Griffiths connects the play's interest in child figures to Cerberus, arguing that Hera is avenging Cerberus' theft when causing Heracles to murder his children: E. M. Griffiths, "Euripides' 'Herakles' and the Pursuit of Immortality," *Mnemosyne* 55, no. 6 (2002): 641-656.

family in their hour of greatest need. Euripides raises the possibility that his Heracles will be like Sophocles', a negligent husband and father whose life of heroism undermines his *oikos*. As the moment of execution comes nearer, this tension grows ever more pressing.

The Chorus' parodos intervenes, and, as the group of Theban elders hobbles on stage, they offer their sympathies to the royal household. Their loyalty is obvious, but in referring to themselves as "an aged singer of laments" (ἠηλέμων γέρων ἄοι- / δός, v. 110-111), the Chorus reveal their weakness: these are the true but useless friends Amphitryon described earlier.<sup>20</sup> Their grief for the family adds further uncertainty to Heracles' state: Amphitryon, ever hopeful, describes Heracles as a mere visitor to Hades, on an errand to accomplish his last Labor (τὸ λoίσθιον, 23). The Chorus, on the other hand, more ominously calls him "the husband in the halls of Hades" (τὸν <έν> Ἀΐδα δόμοις / πόσιν, 117-8), a description that easily characterizes someone who has died. Heracles' lengthy absence not only undermines his personal glory and status as *philos*, but even whether he lives.

The tyrant Lycus swaggers onto the stage and cements his role as villain by questioning the worth of Heracles' famous deeds. Where the family and friends of Heracles expressed their anxiety about his *aretē* in hushed tones, Lycus initiates a direct assault on Heracles' status as καλλίνικος. Heracles did not go to Hades on an errand, nor is he simply "in the halls" of Hades, as the Chorus put it; according to Lycus, he is certainly dead, already lying in Hades like a corpse (παρ' Ἀΐδη...κείμενον, 145).<sup>21</sup> Lycus labels Heracles' claims to be sired by Zeus mere "empty boasts" (κόμπους κενούς, 148).<sup>22</sup> He effectively shifts what had formerly been

20 Hose considers this Chorus "untypical" for Euripides, for rather than offering the "normal" point of view on the action, the weak and aged Chorus mainly sympathizes and *understands* ("der Chor des 'Hercules' versteht," Martin Hose, *Studien zum Chor bei Euripides, Teil 1*, vol. 10, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1990), 92.

21 Bond, *Heracles*, 103.

22 The question of Heracles' double paternity runs throughout the play. In part III, a bitter Heracles even

considered fact (Heracles' status as *aristos anēr*) into a debatable claim: "you were called wife of the best man" (σὺ δ' ὡς ἀρίστου φωτὸς ἐκλήθης δάμαρ, 150, my emphasis). The well-known deeds of famous Heracles are easily diminished; the Lernaean hydra is but a marsh snake, and Heracles defeated the Nemean lion by capturing it in nets, not with his bare hands (152-154). Lycus mocks the family with the language of competition: "you are contending with *these* [arguments]?" (τοῖσδ' ἐξαγωνίζεσθε, 155).

Lycus aims his verbal attack squarely at Heracles' reputation: "he held a reputation for courage (though being a nothing after all) in fighting beasts, but was not brave in any other respect" (ὁ δ' ἔσχε δόξαν οὐδὲν ὦν εὐψυχίας / θηρῶν ἐν αἰχμῆι, τᾶλλα δ' οὐδὲν ἄλκιμος, 157-8). At the heart of Lycus' radical reevaluation of Heracles' glorious courage is a debate over the role of the archer.<sup>23</sup> Although the club is frequently depicted as Heracles' weapon of choice, here the bow serves as the symbol of his earth-taming exploits and of his value as a hero.<sup>24</sup> Lycus flatly denies that the bow is "proof of the courage of a man" (ἄνδρὸς δ' ἔλεγχος οὐχὶ τόξ' εὐψυχίας, 162), and instead elevates the courage of the ordinary hoplite, who must maintain his position in the battle line in the face of great danger (163-4). Lycus' praise is for the man who joins and maintains a community of soldiers, not for the individual actor, always prepared to run away (τῆ φυγῆ πρόχειρος ἦν, 161). Lycus' speech thus demonstrates the vulnerability of Heracles' legacy; for just as his deeds can be praised by Chorus, they can also be denigrated and insulted by his enemies. Heracles' status as *kallinikos* is thus made contestable.

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considers Amphytrion as his true father instead of Zeus (1263-5).

23 Some scholars have linked this debate to the presence or absence of Athenian archers during the battles at Pylos and Delium in 425/4 (see Bond, 109). This is unprovable, and my argument will show that this is also unnecessary.

24 Cohen argues that in the fifth century, the bow became associated with the barbarian Persian army; as a result, Heracles wields a club instead on the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia: Beth Cohen, "From Bowman to Clubman: Herakles and Olympia," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (1994): 695-715.

Amphitryon will not permit Heracles to be slandered (κακῶς γάρ σ' οὐκ ἐατέον κλύειν, 173), emphasizing the necessity of protecting Heracles' reputation. He refutes the charge of cowardice (δειλίαν, 175) and endeavors to prove that his son is, indeed, the ἀνὴρ ἄριστος (183). Amphitryon cites two major battles as evidence of Heracles' courage: his battle against the Giants, as an ally of the Olympian gods, and his conflict with the Centaurs. In Amphitryon's description of Heracles' victory song and dance is an allusion to his cult epithet: "he celebrated the glorious victory [over the Giants] with the gods" (τὸν καλλίνικον μετὰ θεῶν ἐκώμασεν, 180). And this emphasis on the gods – as witnesses, allies and beneficiaries, fellow revelers – elevates Heracles beyond the mortal plane.

Amphitryon goes on to refute Lycus' argument that bravery consists of standing up to the enemy. He provides several scenarios in which the mobility and resources of archery prove most advantageous. Yet he is careful to put his defense of the bow in the proper context: the bow is an instrument in the hands of a well-aiming, skilled warrior (ὅσοι δὲ τόξοις χεῖρ' ἔχουσιν εὖστοχον, 195). Amphitryon takes special notice of the skill of a fighter's hand, and Heracles himself will develop the motif of his hand as a *locus* of power.<sup>25</sup> Such skill must be applied to the proper use, however, and the archer is able to take advantage of "the most prudent thing in battle, harming his enemies while preserving his own body" (ἐν μάχῃ / σοφὸν μάλιστα, δρῶντα πολεμίους κακῶς / σώζειν τὸ σῶμα, 201-3). This is another expression of the *aretē* of *philia*: the archer is therefore perfectly capable of benefiting his *philos* (himself) and harming his enemies.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Amphitryon's argument insists on Heracles' dual *aretē*, in his display of glory in battle and his *philia* as an archer.

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25 Heracles will frame both the completion of his labors (938) and the murder of his family (1139) as the work of his hand.

26 For the self as "a person's closest *philos*," see Belfiore on Sophocles' Ajax in *Murder Among Friends*, 101–116.

Amphitryon turns his attention from Lycus, and instead reproaches Thebes and Greece for their ingratitude for Heracles' previous help (λόγους ὄνειδιστῆρας ἐνδατούμενος, 218). Just as the battles against the Giants and the Centaurs testify to Heracles' valor, his defense of the city of Thebes proves his *philia*. Heracles did more than merely assist the city: he *alone* defended the city and routed the Minyans' attack (Μινύαις ὃς εἶς ἅπασι διὰ μάχης μολῶν, 220).<sup>27</sup> Because of his actions, Thebes remains a free city (221). Amphitryon blames greater Greece for taking the worst attitude (κακίστην λαμβάνων, 223) towards his son: in exchange for his clearing of both sea and land, they ought to "bear fire, spears, and weapons for these nestlings" (νεοσσοῖς τοῖσδε πῦρ λόγχας ὄπλα / φέρουσιν ἐλθεῖν, 224-5). The idealized relationship Amphitryon describes illustrates the "instrumental notion of *φιλία*: a φίλος was someone who could and did help you to gain some advantage, profit, or power, as well as one to whom you could and did give similar assistance."<sup>28</sup>

Yet both Thebes and greater Greece fail in responding to Heracles' *charis* with a fitting and timely response (οὔτε Θηβαίων πόλις / οὔθ' Ἑλλάς ἀρκεῖ, 227-8). Amphitryon's speech fails to effect the beneficial actions he desperately needs; the only reciprocation it receives is Lycus' resolve to punish them: "I will harm you in return for your speech" (ἐγὼ δὲ δράσω σ' ἀντὶ τῶν λόγων κακῶς, 239). The Chorus of loyal *philo*i join Amphitryon in bemoaning Thebes' inaction (252-7). They agree with Amphitryon's assessment that Heracles the Benefactor does not receive what he deserves (ὁ δ' ὠφελήσας ἀξίων οὐ τυγχάνει, 265) and express their determination to act as proper *philo*i: "Am I meddling by helping my dead friends, when they most need friends?" (κἄπειτα πράσσω πόλλ' ἐγὼ φίλους ἐμοῦς / θανόντας εὖ δρῶν, οὔ φίλων

<sup>27</sup> Upon his return, Heracles will also express disbelief that the Thebans did not consider themselves obligated to save Heracles' family, despite Heracles' victory against the Minyans (559-61).

<sup>28</sup> Schein, "ΦΙΛΙΑ in Euripides' *Alcestis*," 184.



μάλιστα δει, 266-7). Nevertheless, their physical weakness prevents them from protecting Heracles' family, and the family must create their own plan.

Megara, while praising the *philia* of the Chorus, adopts a pragmatic attitude to the family's situation. In contrast to Amphitryon, Megara, like Lycus, believes Heracles is dead: "Do you really think your son will return from under the earth? And who of the dead has returned again from Hades?" (ἤξειν νομίζεις παῖδα σὸν γαίης ὑπο; / καὶ τίς θανόντων ἦλθεν ἐξ Ἄιδου πάλιν; 296-7). Megara has given up hope of rescue and accepts that they must die (ἐπειδὴ δεῖ θανεῖν, 284). Although she is skeptical that Heracles can overcome Hades, she nevertheless retains a confident belief in his heroism, proclaiming that her "husband, even unwitnessed, is glorious" (οὐμὸς δ' ἀμαρτύρητος εὐκλεῆς πόσις, 290). With such a statement, she gently rebukes Amphitryon's earlier call to the gods and locales of Heracles' deeds as witnesses of his prowess (174ff.).<sup>29</sup>

In her insistence on Heracles' heroic valor, Megara argues for a deep belief in Heracles' *aretē*, despite his absence. Megara's faith in Heracles counters the war of words between Amphitryon and Lycus. Her speech marks her as a wife particularly fitting for Heracles. Just as Heracles toiled at his Labors (ἐξεμόχθησεν πόνους, 23), so Megara toiled at women's task: the bearing of children (ἀμόχθησα, 281). And if Heracles' glory indeed persists, then the family must act in accordance with it: Megara proposes that the family face death head-on and not die ignobly:

τούσδε παῖδας οὐκ ἂν ἐκσῶσαι θέλοι  
δόξαν κακὴν λαβόντας· οἱ γὰρ εὐγενεῖς  
κάμνουσι τοῖς αἰσχροῖσι τῶν τέκνων ὑπερ. (291-3)

he would not want to save these children, if they have a cowardly reputation. For well-

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<sup>29</sup> Bond, *Heracles*, 106.

born parents are afflicted by the disgraces of their children.

In her insistence on courageous action, she serves as a "surrogate for the absent Herakles."<sup>30</sup> She reiterates the importance of protecting Heracles' noble reputation as she ushers her children off stage: "others rule his property, but his name is still ours" (οὗ τῆς οὐσίας / ἄλλοι κρατοῦσι, τὸ δ' ὄνομ' ἔσθ' ἡμῶν ἔτι, 337-8).<sup>31</sup> Megara goes beyond defending Heracles' *doxa*; so confident is her belief that she puts it into practice, choosing to leave the altar and endure death.

Amphitryon, persuaded by Megara, rounds out his accusations against Thebes and Greece by blaming one last party, Zeus, Heracles' father: "you are in reality less a friend than you seemed" (σὺ δ' ἦσθ' ἄρ' ἦσσον ἢ 'δόκεις εἶναι φίλος, 341). Zeus, who has received the favor from Amphitryon of sharing Alcmene's bed, has not provided a reciprocal response of saving his *philo*i (σώιζειν δὲ τοὺς σοὺς οὐκ ἐπίστασαι φίλους, 346). Thus, the king of the gods, proven to be a false *philos*, cannot excel in *aretē*. Indeed, Amphitryon, who understands *philia*, can claim that he surpasses even the mighty Zeus in *aretē* (ἀρετῆι σε νικῶ θνητὸς ὦν θεὸν μέγαν, 342).

The first choral ode is extensive (at 93 lines) and complex. The tone is set by the first word, αἴλινον, which "clearly means 'lament' here," according to Bond.<sup>32</sup> The ode is, in fact, a *thrēnos* for the perished Heracles, but one which balances mourning with celebration, even taking on the form of a hymn (ὕμνησαι, 355).<sup>33</sup> Just as the Chorus equivocates on the issues of

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30 Ann N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 247.

31 Where Burnett sees a materialist, a woman of "active unfaith," I see a positive depiction of a desperate woman driven by ideals of honor and glory that directly parallel Heracles'. See Anne Pippin Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 160-3. Burnett tries to find cohesion in the play by casting the murder of Megara and her children in Part II as the inevitable outcome of impiety in Part I. However, for the full effect of the gods' immortality to take hold, the murdered family and Heracles himself must be innocent.

32 Bond, *Heracles*, 150.

33 See discussion in Bond, *Heracles*, 146. Hose agrees that this stasimon represents a mix of genres (Martin Hose, *Studien zum Chor bei Euripides, Teil 2*, vol. 20, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1991), 121.

Heracles' ambiguous paternity (εἴτε Διός...εἴτ' Ἀμφιτρύωνος, 353-4), so the song serves as both a tribute to a dead man and a hymn to a larger-than-life hero. That an *encomium* to Heracles should appear in this play should come as no surprise: encomiastic and epinician literature traditionally held up the hero as an example of excellence for mortals to imitate.

The generic overtones of the first strophe are strong. Formulae, such as ὕμνησαι θέλω (355-6), establish the eulogistic tone; the Chorus' indecision over Heracles' parentage (εἴτε Διός νιν εἶπω / εἴτ' Ἀμφιτρύωνος ἴνιν, 353-4) is "a common trope of encomiastic poetry"; and the postponement of Heracles' name is reminiscent of cult song.<sup>34</sup> The Chorus liken their song to a crown for his Labors (στεφάνωμα μό- / χθων, 355-6), like a prize after the most prestigious of athletic competitions, the Panhellenic games.<sup>35</sup> The syntax and imagery "are firmly Pindaric in inspiration."<sup>36</sup> The Chorus remain unmoved by the earlier debate over Heracles' excellence and confidently endorse his heroic reputation, which brings even posthumous glory: "the courageous deeds of noble labors are an honor for the dead" (γενναίων δ' ἀρεταὶ πόνων / τοῖς θανοῦσιν ἄγαλμα, 357-8). His γενναῖοι πόνοι serve as the subject for the praise that follows, an enumeration of twelve of his Labors: the Nemean lion, the battle with the Centaurs, the Hind of Artemis, the Mares of Diomedes, Cycnus, the Apples of the Hesperides, Atlas, the Girdle of Hippolyta, the Lernaean Hydra, Geryon, and finally Cerberus (359-429).

This selection from Heracles' legendary exploits helps define his role as Heracles καλλίνικος. Though this array of anecdotes does not correlate exactly with the depiction of Heracles' Labors on the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, the likely basis for the later canon, each of

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34 Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*, 255. See Bond, *Heracles*, 153, for the eulogistic overtones and Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 124-129, for the epinician themes of the first strophe.

35 Pindar is fond of envisioning song as a precious object (Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 105). Cf. *Ol.* 11.13-14, *Nem.* 7.77-79.

36 Carey, "The Victory Ode in the Theatre," 17.

these stories would have already been familiar. Euripides displays the various facets of Heracles' victorious conquests in this ode: there are the animal labors, which clear the earth of dangers to man from the world of beasts (lion, hind, mares, hydra). There is the punishment of monsters and evildoers - Cycnus, Geryon; Heracles imposes order upon corrupt customs. Lastly, there are the labors associated with conquering death and achieving an afterlife.<sup>37</sup> His Labors lead him beyond the Peloponnese to the very ends of the known world, from the far west of the Garden of the Hesperides to the far east of the Amazons, making him a hero for all of Greece, and the known world.

The form of the ode is that of a proper epinician. As Swift remarks, "[h]is *aretē*, expressed through his physical achievement, is a source of celebration, and leads him to be commemorated in song."<sup>38</sup> The ode further establishes, in a context of disputed δόξα, a vocabulary of praise specific to Heracles, a set of images and terms that the play will return to in part II. The Chorus describes the efforts that Heracles went to while "laboring for the king of Mycenae" (Μυκηναίῳ πονῶν τυράννῳ, 388). They extol the "bloody bow" (τόξοις φονίοις, 367) and "winged arrows" (πτανοῖς βέλεσιν, 367) that lay low the Centaurs, Cycnus (392), the Lernaean hydra (422), and Geryon (423); their praise serves as a rebuke to Lycus' accusations about the bow. In order to tame the man-eating mares of Diomedes, he climbs on a chariot (τεθρίπων τ' ἐπέβα, 380), marking himself as a most excellent charioteer. The Chorus make note of the hand of Heracles, singing that he "plucks with his hand the gold fruit" of the Hesperides (χρύσεον...χερὶ καρπὸν ἀμέρξων, 396-7); at the home of Atlas, he "drives his hands"

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37 Although the play conspicuously makes no mention of the tradition of Heracles' apotheosis, the theme of the defeat of death is of obvious concern in the play (see the second stasimon, esp. 655-672, and Iris' motivation in 838-842).

38 Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 129.

(ἐλαύνει χέρας, 404) to uphold the weight of heaven, a sure sign of his manliness (εὐανορία, 407). As a counterbalance to previous doubts of Heracles' prowess, physical proof of his expedition to the Amazons can be seen at Mycenae, where "the famous spoils" of Hippolyta are kept (τὰ κλεινὰ...λάφυρα καὶ / σώζεται Μυκῆναις, 416-8).

Heracles the *philos* makes his presence known in this ode as well. Heracles, proving himself *philos* to the gods, honors (ἀγάλλει, 379) Artemis with the Golden Hind. Heracles' favor to mortals in clearing the land and sea (20, 225-6) receives praise again, specifically for "establishing calm seas for mortal oars" (θνατοῖς / γαλανείας τιθεὶς ἔρετροῖς, 401-2). The Chorus liken his other famous deeds to *dromoi*, or races (425), an important allusion to the athletic component of Heracles καλλίνικος. Now departed on the last of his Labors (πόνων τελευτάν, 427), Heracles leaves his household deserted of friends (ἔρημοι φίλων, 430), when they need him most. Hose is surprised by the ode's single-minded focus on Heracles and his achievements: where a song lamenting the impending sacrifice of the Heracleidae might be expected, the Chorus instead sings mainly of Heracles' successes;<sup>39</sup> but the subject of the ode only reinforces the play's preoccupation with Heraclean heroism, for its greatness here serves to justify the family's resolution to die honorably.

In the touching scene that follows, Megara addresses each of her three children and reminisces about the inheritance Heracles had allotted to each (462-475). Along with a kingdom, each son would have inherited one of Heracles' famous weapons: the skin of the Nemean lion, his club, and the bow. These instruments are established as a crucial part of Heracles' legacy, for with them he accomplished the heroic deeds that earned him his fame.<sup>40</sup>

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39 Hose, *Studien zum Chor bei Euripides, Teil 2*, 20:122.

40 For the hereditary nature of achievement and reputation, see Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise*, 35-61.

Implied in the passing on of the weapons is the expectation that his sons, in imitation of their father, will continue to bring glory to their family. This family tradition is now being broken; Megara describes it as a fall from "hopeful expectation" (δόξης εὐέλπιδος, 461), revealing how both senses of *doxa* - reputation and belief - are shaken by Heracles' absence.

Yet even here, a dark note undermines what appears to be a straightforward reminder of what Heracles has accomplished. Megara addresses her third son, to whom Heracles "promised to give Oechalia, which he sacked once with far-shooting arrows" (σοὶ δ' ἦν ἔπερσε τοῖς ἐκηβόλοις ποτὲ / τόξοισι δώσειν Οἰχαλίαν ὑπέσχετο, 472-3). The capture of Oechalia was no simple triumph, and the audience would have remembered that Heracles' attack on Oechalia was traditionally associated with two shameful episodes: the murder of guest-friend Iphitus and Heracles' lust for Iole, which would eventually lead to his tortured death at the hands of jealous Deianeira.<sup>41</sup> Although Euripides' placement of the murder of Heracles' children after the Labors demonstrates the malleability of Heracles' life story, the audience nevertheless would be reminded that Heracles' legacy was always mixed. Amphitryon underscores this doubt in his farewell to the Chorus: "I do not know any man for whom great wealth and reputation are secure" (ὁ δ' ὄλβος ὁ μέγας ἢ τε δόξ' οὐκ οἶδ' ὅτῳ / βέβαιός ἐστι, 511-2).

With such an ominous observation in the air, Heracles the Savior arrives at last. He enters into an atmosphere thick with both belief and doubt in his *aretē* as friend and glorious victor. But his actions and language upon return will confirm for his *philoī* that their faith was true and their skepticism unwarranted. Heracles immediately notices and is dismayed at the disorder of the household. Megara's greeting emphasizes both her affection for her husband (ὦ

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<sup>41</sup> See Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, 531) and his obligatory *philia* towards his family, "Were you saved to come to the aid of your *philo*i in the nick of time?" (ἔσώθης εἰς ἀκμὴν ἐλθῶν φίλοις; 532). As Megara reveals the extent of their disaster, Heracles expresses disbelief at the false *philia* of the Thebans:

Ηρ. οὕτω δ' ἀπόντες ἐσπανίζομεν φίλων;  
Με. φίλοι γάρ εἰσιν ἀνδρὶ δυστυχεῖ τίνες;  
Ηρ. μάχας δὲ Μινυῶν ἄς ἔτλην ἀπέπτυσαν;  
Με. ἄφιλον, ἴν' αὐθὶς σοι λέγω, τὸ δυστυχές. (558-562)

Her.: Was I so lacking in *philo*i while I was away?  
Meg.: Who are the *philo*i to an unfortunate man?  
Her.: And they disdained the battles against the Minyans which I endured?  
Meg.: Poor luck is friendless, I say again.

Heracles' return, however, removes the need for these other *philo*i. In his first significant speech in the play, Heracles resolves to defend his family, and in doing so, reaffirms his heroic character with confidence and bravado (563-582).<sup>42</sup> Heracles orders his family to discard their funeral clothes, for he has come to their rescue. The series of first person future indicative verbs declare the reality of his intention (κατασκάψω, 567; ῥίψω, 568; χειρώσομαι, 570; ἐμπλήσω, 572) and the hero's ability to accomplish his goals. He calls his vengeance against Lycus "the work of my hand" (τῆς ἐμῆς ἔργον χερός, 565), a phrase that proudly lays claim to the deed and marks it as another one of his "labors." He will punish the cowardly Thebans with his "gloriously conquering weapon" (τῶι καλλινίκωι τῶιδε ὄπλωι, 570), probably his club, the attribute of a victorious hero.<sup>43</sup> He eagerly takes responsibility for protecting his wife, children, and father (574-5), recognizing that the ties of *philia* demand he use his

42 Where Wilamowitz saw the seed of madness and heroic bombast in this speech, I see a fully justified response to Lycus' brutal villainy. Indeed, as Chalk puts it, to look for signs of emerging insanity earlier in the play is to "dilute the responsibility of Hera and so blur the point of the play" ("Arete and Bia in Euripides' Herakles," 15). Heracles' madness is externally imposed; the appearance of Iris and Lyssa and their conversation make this explicit. For the external nature of his insanity, see Hartigan, "Euripidean Madness."

43 Bond, *Heracles*, 208.

warrior's skills to defend his close relatives and spouse. With the trouble in his domestic sphere made clear, Heracles releases his former adventures: "farewell, Labors!" (χαιρόντων πόννοι, 575). Bond's translation takes it even further: "I disown my labors," as though he "must for shame give up his title καλλίνικος."<sup>44</sup>

Heracles is far from renouncing his reputation and epithet here, however. Rather, he seeks to prove his worth in a new arena: Heracles the wanderer has returned home, bringing his confidence and strength to his closest *philo*i. His deep concern for his own reputation is clear: if he wants to remain known as "gloriously conquering Heracles" (Ἡρακλῆς / ὁ καλλίνικος, 581-2), he must "exert [himself] over the death" of his children (ἐκπονήσω θάνατον, 581).<sup>45</sup> Thus, Heracles frames the defense of his family as yet another element in his legend, a further extension of his status as Heracles καλλίνικος. Euripides thus presents a Heracles diametrically opposed to the Heracles of the *Trachiniae*: Euripides' Heracles prizes his children above all, characterizing this as a common human trait: "man's affairs are all alike: both the rich and the poor love their children" (πάντα τάνθρώπων ἴσα / φιλοῦσι παῖδας οἱ τ' ἀμείνονες βροτῶν / οἱ τ' οὐδὲν ὄντες, 633-5). Far from the bestial, untamed hero of the wild, this Heracles is thoroughly domesticated, gladly submitting himself to the bonds of family and *oikos*.

Just as protecting his family confirms his heroism, it also reaffirms his *aretē* as *philos*. Amphytrion notes approvingly of Heracles' intent: "it is just like you, son, to be a friend to your friends, and to hate your enemies" (πρὸς σοῦ μὲν, ὦ παῖ, τοῖς φίλοις <τ'> εἶναι φίλον / τά τ' ἐχθρὰ μισεῖν, 585-6). This very traditional formulation of *philia*, applied to Heracles, banishes

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<sup>44</sup> Bond, *Heracles*, 209.

<sup>45</sup> Here I follow Bond, who argues that "labour to avert" is contrary to Euripidean usage (Bond, *Heracles*, 210).



any previous doubts about his devotion to his *philoī*. Amphitryon's curious querying about Heracles' long absence further establishes his heroic credentials: Heracles indeed captured and retrieved the terrifying Cerberus (610-11), successfully completing what had been called his final Labor (23, 427). Furthermore, he continues to demonstrate his *philia* by rescuing Theseus from the Underworld, a benefaction that has made the young man "joyful" (ἄσμενος, 621).

The second choral ode celebrates Heracles' return and the apparent change in the family's fortune from disaster to salvation. Although they do not speak the name of Heracles until the third stanza, the song nevertheless serves as fitting praise for the hero. The Chorus seem to begin by expressing regret for their own lost youth. Because youth is associated with physical strength, their desire for youth implies "that it is physical *aretē* and athletic success which they set above all other qualities."<sup>46</sup> Yet the topic of youth is particularly appropriate in a song of praise for Heracles, however, for he is the "personification of *neotās*," which is "in agonistic contexts a common prerequisite or concomitant of *arete*."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the Chorus wish that a second youth could serve as a "clear stamp of excellence" (φανερόν χαρακτήρ' ἀρετᾶς, 659) of a man's good character, while the evil would only enjoy a single youth. Though dramatically they do not know it yet, their wish will of course be fulfilled in the person of Heracles: for traditionally, upon his apotheosis and reception on Olympus, he will marry Hebe, the goddess of youth. Though the Chorus present their wish in the form of a contrafactual conditional sentence, the sentiment thus reaffirms Heracles' *aretē* for the audience, in a subtle note of optimism and confidence.

The Chorus further elaborate on its desire for youth in terms of athletic competition;

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46 Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 130.

47 Hugh Parry, "The Second Stasimon of Euripides' Heracles (637-700)," *American Journal of Philology* 86, no. 4 (1965): 365-6. Parry's article remains the definitive study of epinician language in the second stasimon.

they visualize this "second youth" (δίδυμον ἥβαν, 657) as "doubled racecourses" (δισσοὺς διαύλους, 662). Bond explicates this image as a race of four κῶλα: from Hades (the start) to the light (the turning post) and back to Hades, then repeated again.<sup>48</sup> In this metaphorical framework, Heracles, who has just captured Cerberus in Hades and returned to the light, is running the third κῶλον of his life. That is to say, he has already achieved the longed-for second youth, and fulfills the wish of the Chorus.<sup>49</sup> In obtaining this second youth and proving clearly his *aretē*, Heracles acquires the glory of an athletic victor.

Despite the Chorus' grouching about the difficulty of discerning true virtue, Heracles emerges as a clear example of a man of excellence by their standards. In the next stanza, the Chorus responds by committing to celebrate him in song: "still I sing the glorious victory song of Heracles" (ἔτι τὰν Ἡρακλέους / καλλίνικον αἰείδω, 680-681).<sup>50</sup> The Chorus make good on their intent in the fourth and final stanza, offering a paean to Heracles in traditionally encomiastic terms.<sup>51</sup> The Chorus celebrate three aspects of the hero: his divine lineage (Διὸς ὁ παῖς, 696), his *aretē* that surpasses his birth (τᾶς δ' εὐγενίας / πλέον ὑπερβάλλων <ἀρεταῖ><sup>52</sup>, 696-7), and the peace he has established through the destruction of fearsome beasts (698-700). Each of these responds to doubts or accusations raised earlier: Amphitryon's remonstrations with Zeus (339-347); Lycus' accusations about the cowardly nature of the bow (157-164); and Lycus' denigration of Heracles' beast Labors (151-155). Heracles' effort in his Labors does not go unrecognized: he has toiled (μοχθήσας, 698) for the benefit of mankind, and the reward for

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48 Bond, *Heracles*, 233-4.

49 For a spatial analysis of this metaphor, see Emily Kratzer, "The Double Herakles: Studies on the Death and Deification of the Hero in Fifth-century Drama" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), 59-93.

50 Here, the substantive καλλίνικον is paired with a feminine definite article; in 180, the masculine article appears.

51 Parry, "The Second Stasimon of Euripides' Heracles (637-700)," 373.

52 suppl. Nauck.

his efforts is the hymn of praise.

The hymnic tone of the ode seems, to some, foreboding.<sup>53</sup> Parry notes "the absence of the frequent Pindaric warning that mortal victors are *not* gods" and argues that Heracles is elevated "to so dangerous a height that his fall becomes almost inevitable."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the problems of praise are real; as epinician poets themselves are well aware, excessive praise can generate *phthonos*, instead of joy, in the hearts of men.<sup>55</sup> Related to the problem of integrating the victor into the community is the task of keeping the subject in proper relation to the gods. Swift notes the lack of a "watch out motif," and concludes, "Thus it is the lack of moderation in the praise directed at Heracles which leads to his ruin."<sup>56</sup> The dangerous balance required is demonstrated in the emotional responses of Heracles' family, who, desperately in need of a savior, believed that "Heracles was wholly mortal and yet (here is the danger) they began to treat this 'mortal' as if he were a god."<sup>57</sup> Euripides thus uses the tropes of epinician poetry to emphasize the instability in Heracles' social position throughout the play, as focalized through the fluctuating evaluation of his *aretē*.

But to claim that over-praise of Heracles commits the play to his downfall is to go too far. These arguments seek to identify a transgression on the part of Heracles or his family in order to justify his descent into madness. But Heracles' madness is explicitly externally imposed. Moreover, the play's emphasis is on his suffering, and "all that is essential to the

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53 In Desch's psychological (and idiosyncratic) reading, the celebrations of the first two stasima reveal the unreasonable mental stress that the heroic life and the Chorus' high expectations must have placed on Heracles; part II thus dramatizes the consequences of Heracles' mental breakdown (Waltraut Desch, "Der 'Herakles' des Euripides und die Götter," *Philologus* 130, no. 1 (1986): 13–4).

54 Parry, "The Second Stasimon of Euripides' Heracles (637-700)," 364.

55 See Pindar's *Pyth.* 1.81–84 on the importance of brevity in praise. For a study of the poetics of envy, see Glenn Most, "Epinician Envy," in *Envy, Spite and Jealousy: The Rivalrous Emotions in Ancient Greece*, ed. David Konstan and N. K. Rutter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 123–142.

56 Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 148–9.

57 Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived*, 178.

theme of the play is that the suffering should have no meaning except to indicate the vindictiveness (in the case of Hera) and the criminal negligence (in the case of father Zeus) of the gods of myth.<sup>58</sup> The song does lack epinician's standard warning, but, as Carey argues, "what tragedy extracts is for the most part the celebratory dimension," and we need not expect an actual Pindaric ode here.<sup>59</sup>

The trap for Lycus is laid in the subsequent scene, and as he disappears into Heracles' house to meet his doom, he urges his henchmen to get on with the task, "in order that I may look gladly on repose from labors" (ὡς ἂν σχολὴν λεύσσωμεν ἄσμενοι πόνων, 725). Lycus, in framing the elimination of his rival's family in terms of a *ponos*, foreshadows Heracles' own speech. For, ironically, it is Heracles who, intending to murder the children of Eurystheus, will accomplish the death of his family; he too will call it a *ponos* (1279). No one, including the audience, could predict this disaster, though, and Amphitryon savors the impending victory, "he will be caught in sword-bearing snares of nets" (βρόχοισι δ' ἀρκύων κεκλήισεται / ξιφηφόροισι, 729-30). This hunting metaphor, in which Heracles is the clever hunter pursuing his prey, is especially suited to this particular ambush. For Heracles, the audience has just recently been reminded in the second stasimon, successfully captured and removed many fearsome beasts -- the Nemean lion, the Golden Hind, and the Hydra. Likewise, Lycus, the usurper and tyrant, represents a threat to civilized society: an interloper from Euboea now holds the throne of Thebes (26-34), having manipulated the discontent into civil war (588-594). Heracles' assault on Lycus directly fits into his past pattern of defending society.

The Chorus gleefully anticipate Lycus' death, and upon hearing his death cries from

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58 Conacher, "Theme, Plot, and Technique in the 'Heracles' of Euripides," 144.

59 Carey, "The Victory Ode in the Theatre," 15.

within the house, they launch into a celebratory ode. The third stasimon rejoices in a world in which the wrong has been made right and order has been restored. In fact, full confidence is required here – in the justice of the gods – in order for the peripeteia to have its full effect. The ruin of the unjust tyrant proves that "there are gods, who care for men," the Chorus' positive theodicy and a rebuke of the hopeless skepticism expressed earlier by Amphitryon and Megara.<sup>60</sup> The joyful song follows the conventions of epinician: the Chorus commands the personified landscape to praise Heracles, an example of "the encomiastic use of geography," a Pindaric convention.<sup>61</sup> The point is to celebrate the local landmarks and deities of the victor, who is finally named directly, as the personified landscape and Nymphs join to sing of the "gloriously won contest of Heracles" (τὸν Ἡρακλέους / καλλίνικον ἀγῶνα, 787-789).<sup>62</sup> The language of athletic victory is applied to Heracles' work within the house, the slaughter of the unjust king Lycus.

The idea of athletic competition arises again in the final stanza of the ode, connecting the revelation of the gods' justice to Heracles' revenge:

ἄ νῦν ἐσορῶντι φαίνει  
 ξιφηφόρων ἐς ἀγῶνων  
 ἄμιλλαν εἰ τὸ δίκαιον  
 θεοῖς ἔτ' ἀρέσκει. (811-814)

[Lycus' mean birth] now reveals to anyone watching the struggle of sword-bearing contests whether justice still pleases the gods.

With the use of the term *agōn*, the Chorus assimilates the viewer of Heracles' battle against Lycus to both the audience at athletic games (a physical competition between athletes) and the audience of a theatrical performance (a prestige competition between producers). Although

<sup>60</sup> Bond, *Heracles*, 267.

<sup>61</sup> Bond, *Heracles*, 272.

<sup>62</sup> On epinician's use of local places and mythology, see Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 131–3.

the Chorus confidently proclaims a positive theodicy, the more tentative εἰ invites the audience to observe the events to come as a proof of the justice of the gods.

The tone of the song is under debate: does the Chorus' celebration elevate Heracles beyond proper boundaries, or is their relief and joy justified? As was noted above, praise poets self-consciously restrained their celebration to appropriate boundaries. Sheppard warns, "This excessive adulation is the prelude to the fall of the hero,"<sup>63</sup> yet Bond protests that in fact "there is good reason for rejoicing."<sup>64</sup> Where Foley sees a song that "reaches a pitch of hysterical optimism," on the verge of chaos and out of control, I see a legitimate release of tension that takes the form of song and dance – appropriate to a play interested in epinician.<sup>65</sup> For the concerns about Heracles' heroism and the value of his excellence have been resolved and his heroic identity is reaffirmed. Those who argue that their elation is disproportionate prove insensitive to the extremity of Megara and Amphitryon's situation in the opening. Just because modern critics consider the first action "melodramatic" does not mean that its original audience did not take suppliant scenes seriously.<sup>66</sup> As Heracles himself notices, Heracles' family was truly on the "knife's edge" of danger (ὦδ' ἔβητ' ἐπὶ ξυροῦ, 630), a point that seems to be lost on some modern critics. Moreover, the song hardly ignores the gods: the Chorus specifically glorifies the Muses, the Graces, Dionysus, and Apollo, deities invested in the power of music.

With his return and his successful revenge against Lycus, Heracles can claim once more the position of ἀνὴρ ἀριστός. He has proven himself *philos* to his family by saving them from

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63 Sheppard, "The Formal Beauty of the Hercules Furens," 77.

64 Bond, *Heracles*, 263–4.

65 Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 185.

66 Chalk provides motivation for its "melodramatic" nature, in "Arete and Bia in Euripides' Herakles," 17–18.

death (helping friends) and eagerly undertaking vengeance against Lycus, their persecutor (harming an enemy). He also reaffirms his heroic *aretē* by physically defeating his opponent. As the Chorus rejoice, "Time has revealed the shining strength of Heracles" (λαμπρὰν δ' ἔδειξ' ὁ χρόνος / τὰν Ἡρακλέος ἀλκάν, 805-6). His prowess as a warrior and his loyalty to his friends, re-established after his return, establish him as a proper symbol of *aretē*.

## Part II: The Failure of *Aretē*

The transition to the second action of the play, Heracles' murder of his family, is signaled by the Chorus' cries of fear, ἔα ἔα. It is deliberately abrupt and jarring. Yet even in the depiction of this most shameful episode of Heracles' life, the concern for epinician and Heracles' glory remains prominent. For in the twin aspects of *aretē*, *philia* and heroic victory, Heracles utterly fails during his madness: he murders his *philtatoi*, who had depended on him for protection, violates the code that governs suppliance, and uses his renowned physical valor against the wrong victims. And to emphasize the depth of his fall, Heracles "is represented in the language of the text as a perversion of the hero of encomiastic poetry."<sup>67</sup>

The Chorus' restored confidence in the gods is immediately contradicted by the unusual mid-play epiphany of Lyssa and Iris, Hera's lackeys. The severe juxtaposition of joy with terror emphasizes "the amorality of the gods," for the "Olympians are without rational motives, completely unaware of the demands of human reason."<sup>68</sup> The intervention of Hera, through Iris and Lyssa, defies rationalization: this epiphany demonstrates that "selbst die

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<sup>67</sup> Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 176.

<sup>68</sup> Chalk, "Arete and Bia in Euripides' Herakles," 15.

grössten Helden, die keine Schuld auf sich geladen haben, sind vor dem irrationalen Zugriff der Götter nicht sicher."<sup>69</sup> The disordered nature of Hera's justice is reflected in the very language of the subsequent speeches, in which epinician themes describe disturbing and blameworthy actions.<sup>70</sup> Iris orders Lyssa to make Heracles "ferry across the river of death his crown of beautiful children" (πορεύσας δι' Ἀχερούσιον πόρον / τὸν καλλίπαιδα στέφανον, 838-9). Iris likens the sons of Heracles to a crown, the prize of the most prestigious games, and the most valuable prize of a father. But the actions of Heracles will dash this crown from his head and bring shame to his name instead of glory.

Lyssa bravely protests that Heracles is not a proper object of her madness, for he is famous among mortals and gods (849-50). She goes on to explain the origins of his fame: for men, he has "tamed the uncrossable land and the wild sea" (ἄβατον δὲ χώραν καὶ θάλασσαν ἄγριαν / ἐξημερώσας, 851-2); for the gods, he "alone upheld honors falling at the hands of unholy men" (ἀνέστησεν μόνος / τιμὰς πιτνούσας ἀνοσίων ἀνδρῶν ὑπο, 852-3). Lyssa's defense aptly summarizes the foundation of Heracles' *aretē*: the benefactions of his Labors, in addition to his piety towards the gods. Lyssa is thus made to articulate the audience's complaint, as well: Heracles has been depicted thus far as the embodiment of heroic success, in all of its glory, not only for Heracles as an individual, but for his family and community at large. The whole point of the conversation between Lyssa and Iris is that there is "keinen Kausalzusammenhang" between Heracles' success and Heracles' failure: the blame rests solely on the will of Hera.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the use of the crane physically manifests the intrusion of the

69 Christian Wildberg, *Hyperesie und Epiphany: ein versuch über die Bedeutung der Götter in den Dramen des Euripides*, Zetemata (München: Beck, 2002), 170. So striking is the lack of justification for Lyssa's intervention that Wildberg must classify the epiphany in the *Heracles* apart from the other Euripidean dramas. See *Ibid.*, 127, n. 41; 170-1.

70 See Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 143-7, on athletic imagery in the messenger speech.

71 Jana Bartosiewiczova, "Zum Herakles des Euripides: ein Beitrag zur Interpretation," *Graecolatina et Orientalia* 19-



gods; this externality frustrates "attempts to detect a psychological or character-based origin for Heracles' madness."<sup>72</sup> There is no divine justice here.

Lyssa is bullied by Iris into fulfilling Hera's commands. But the madness she inflicts closely resembles his previously-established heroic activities. His excellence at athletics is reflected in Lyssa's intention to "run races into Heracles' heart" (στάδια δραμοῦμαι στέρνον εἰς Ἡρακλέους, 863). Heracles responds fittingly as the madness takes over, and "tosses his head at the start of the race" (τινάσσει κρᾶτα βαλβίδων ἄπο, 867). The image of Heracles as a runner links his insanity to the events held at athletic contests. Once Lyssa departs with Iris, the Chorus provides the reaction to the sounds of grief coming from within the house. Amphitryon's cries of alarm reveal the devastation inside: "he hunts down a chase of children" (κυναγετεῖ τέκνων διωγμόν, 896), a bizarre jumbling of the proper categories, in which an activity for the wild (hunting) occurs in the domestic space of the house, and children are treated as prey. The imagery of Heracles as huntsman (κυνηγέτη, 860) is "grotesque and effective," grotesque in the sense that it transposes the role of Heracles as huntsman of fearsome beasts onto the role of domestic father; effective in the sense that it befits a hero famous for his hunting exploits, as seen above in discussion of vv. 720-30.<sup>73</sup>

The arriving messenger immediately delivers the heartbreaking news: "The children are dead" (τεθνᾶσι παῖδες, 913). Heracles has eliminated his own heirs, the recipients and prime beneficiaries of his κλέος. This bald statement serves only as a prelude to the harrowing description that follows, of exactly *how* the children and their mother, were killed. It is here in

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20 (1987-1988): 4. So baffling is Heracles' madness that Bartosiewiczova compares the play to "das moderne absurde Drama" (4).

72 Donald J. Mastrorarde, *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168.

73 Bond, *Heracles*, 302.

the messenger's speech that Euripides most clearly exploits the diction and imagery of epinician to heighten the sense of Heracles' fall. The shocking association of praise poetry with such terrible deeds highlights Heracles' improper application of heroic activity – the very things that brought Heracles his fame, when introduced into the house, create only destruction and woe. For even at his point of greatest distance from reality, Heracles nevertheless acts in a way that is oddly familiar, and the "mad Heracles repeats patterns of behaviour known from his heroic past."<sup>74</sup> The heroic feats displayed in Part I are reprised: Euripides has made "the god-imposed crime of madness...like Herakles' own willed acts of violence."<sup>75</sup> I thus insist both that Heracles' madness is externally imposed by Hera, and that this madness shares strong affinities with the practice of heroism, which relies on violence and death.<sup>76</sup>

The messenger sets the scene by describing the family in the middle of a ritual sacrifice, to purify Heracles and the home after the death of Lycus.<sup>77</sup> As Lyssa's madness takes root in Heracles' body and he begins to evince symptoms of insanity, the messenger reports, Heracles "was no longer himself" (ὁ δ' οὐκέθ' αὐτός ἦν, 931). Yet this description, like Heracles' hallucinations, is deceptive: for as much as Heracles uncharacteristically targets his *philoï*, he acts very much in line with the violent heroism for which he was praised earlier in the play. Throughout the speech, twisted fragments of the καλλίνικος hero emerge again and again.

As delusions overtake Heracles' mind, he decides to put off the purificatory sacrifice until he has killed Eurystheus, the commander of his Labors, so as not to create "double the

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74 Papadopoulou, *Heracles and Euripidean Tragedy*, 70.

75 Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived*, 171, n. 20.

76 Brooke Holmes' analysis of Heracles' medical symptoms reaches a similar conclusion: Brooke Holmes, "Euripides' Heracles in the Flesh," *Classical Antiquity* 27, no. 2 (2008): 231–281.

77 For an analysis of the importance of the disordered sacrifice here, see Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 147–175.

labor" (πόνους διπλούς, 937) for himself. By applying the term *ponos* to the rituals necessary after any killing, Heracles in his first maddened words draws his murder of Lycus and the imagined revenge against Eurystheus into the realm of his legendary Labors. We have already seen Heracles describe his defense of his family as another kind of Labor (ἐκπονήσω, 581). He again describes his reliance on his strong hand, "Arranging these affairs well is the work of my one hand" (ἔργον μιᾶς μοι χειρός, 938), an obvious echo of 565, when Heracles proclaims the defense of his home and destruction of Lycus "now the work of my hand" (νῦν γὰρ τῆς ἐμῆς ἔργον χερός). Thus, Heracles establishes the murder of Eurystheus as an extension of his work in taking vengeance on Lycus, itself a new kind of Labor attached to the legendary ones.

Yet this "new Labor" of vengeance against Eurystheus is only a parody of his famous heroic *aretē*. As Heracles prepares his weapons for the journey to Mycenae, the audience witnesses an imaginary journey to the Peloponnese, an inversion of the encomiastic use of geography displayed in the previous choral ode. Heracles' plan to destroy the Cyclopean walls of Mycenae with levers and picks is reminiscent of his Labor at the Stables of Augeas: the action of levering the foundations of the famous walls (μοχλοῦς δικέλλας...Κυκλώπων βάθρα, 944) is not so far off from that of digging a large trench.<sup>78</sup>

Heracles, believing that he has mounted a chariot, whips the empty air (948-9); he mimics his taming of Diomedes' mares as charioteer (380). The itinerary he purports to establish imitates his previous well-known journeys on his Labors: he pauses for feasts among friends and pursues athletic competitions in the midst of his assignments.<sup>79</sup> His servants,

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78 Frank Brommer, *Heracles: The Twelve Labors of the Hero in Ancient Art and Literature* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1986), 30, describes Heracles, in the metope on the Temple of Zeus at Olympia that represents this labor, as grasping a stick, perhaps the handle of a shovel or hoe. Ashmole calls it a "crowbar" (Bernard Ashmole and Nikolaos Yalouris, *Olympia: The Sculptures of the Temple of Zeus* (London: Phaidon, 1967), 29).

79 For example, see Euripides' dramatization of Heracles as *xenos* in the *Alcestis* (especially 477-506), and Pindar's account of the foundation of the Olympic Games in *Olympian* 10.

bewildered by his behavior, can only stare as Heracles "moved up and down the palace" (ὁ δ' εἶρπ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω κατὰ στέγας, 953), transforming his own home into an imaginary map of Greece. Upon reaching the banqueting hall, he declares that he has reached the city of Megara. He engages in a parody of *xenia*: as though received by a proper host, he reclines (on the floor) and enjoys a feast (prepared by and for himself) (κλιθεὶς ἐς οὔδας ὡς ἔχει σκευάζεται / θοίνην, 955-6). There is a touch of humor here, given the stock depiction of Heracles as a hungry glutton on the comic stage; however, the familiarity of the comic character of Heracles, set in this inappropriate context, only deepens the sense of dread building through the speech.<sup>80</sup>

After a brief respite, he arrives mentally at the Isthmus, where he pauses to compete in "fantasy athletics."<sup>81</sup> That he should find an athletic festival in his delusions should come as no surprise: surely his "participation" in these games recalls to mind his establishment of the Olympic Games after his task for King Augeas, just recently alluded to in 944. The messenger pays special attention to the details of Heracles' bizarre behavior: he strips naked and wrestles against an invisible opponent (γυμνὸν σῶμα θεὶς πορπαμάτων / πρὸς οὐδέν' ἡμιλλᾶτο, 959-60). Heracles' hallucinations do not end with his competition in the event; he also performs the role of herald. For, "having commanded a hearing, he proclaimed himself gloriously victorious to no one at all" (κάκηρύσσετο / αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτοῦ καλλίνικος οὐδενός, / ἀκοήν ὑπειπών, 960-2). Heracles here awards himself the cult epithet *kallinikos*, used in worship and praise so many times in this play. He is aping his *aretē* of glorious victory at the very moment when his heroic skills lead him to his greatest defeat at the hands of Hera. The juxtaposition is both pointed and painful.

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80 See, e.g., Aristophanes' *Birds*, especially 1565-1693.

81 Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 144.

The tension increases as Heracles mentally arrives in Mycenae, at the palace of Eurystheus. In fear, Amphitryon reaches out and touches "his mighty hand" (θιγῶν κραταιᾶς χειρὸς, 964), an attempt by his human father to reach him through the source of his power. Heracles recognizes it as a gesture of supplication (πατέρα προταρβοῦνθ' ἰκέσιον ψαύειν χειρὸς / ὠθεῖ, 968-9) and thrusts him away. In refusing the supplication of his father, Heracles also refuses the *philia* relationship that binds the *agathos* who accepts a *hiketēs*.<sup>82</sup> The violation of this convention is a stunning reversal for the hero praised earlier for his *philia*. Heracles instead prepares his bow and arrows, as though to kill Eurystheus' children. As he begins the attack, the maddened Heracles enacts the same crime that Lycus intended: to eliminate the threat posed by an enemy's sons. This unsettling likeness between villain and hero reveals that Heracles is "affected by the very βία that possessed Lycus," uncovering "what actions good and bad alike have in common – violence."<sup>83</sup> Once again, as discussed in Chapter 2, the heroic use of violence is questioned because of the damage it can inflict on the innocent.

Indeed, the violence that Heracles inflicts upon his family is not unfamiliar to him. He hunts his children with bow and arrows, like birds, an analogy the messenger makes explicit (ἄλλος δὲ βωμὸν ὄρνις ὡς ἔπηξ' ὑπο, 974). The analogy recalls Megara's despair in Part I, when she compares herself to a mother bird who nestles her young under her wing (ὑπὸ πτεροῖς / σῶζω νεοσσοῦς ὄρνις ὡς ὑφειμένους, 71-72); Amphitryon uses the comparison again to heighten the Thebans' betrayal in not protecting "these nestlings" (χρῆν νεοσσοῖς τοῖσδε πῦρ λόγχας ὄπλα / φέρουσαν ἐλθεῖν, 224-225). The repetition adds emphasis to the family's protectiveness of their vulnerable children, a natural paternal feeling bizarrely missing in

82 Arthur W. H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century*, Ancient Culture and Society (New York: Norton, 1972), 17.

83 Chalk, "Arete and Bia in Euripides' Herakles," 16.

Heracles' maddened state.

Heracles' prowess as an archer has already been extolled by the Chorus, and his success now is in no doubt. The Chorus, in its eulogistic praise of Heracles, specifically connected his archery skills to his conquest of the Centaurs (366-7), Cycnus (392), and Geryon (422).<sup>84</sup> His actions here recall yet another Labor, though one not mentioned in the first stasimon, the Labor of the Stymphalian Birds. Though in the earliest testimony, Heracles defeated the destructive birds by frightening them away, an Attic black figure lekythos in Vienna depicts Heracles shooting arrows into the flying birds, with two already wounded.<sup>85</sup> Heracles likewise flushes his children from their hiding places (ἐξελίσσων παῖδα κίονος κύκλω, 977), and then targets them with his arrows. But where his Labor to remove the Stymphalian Birds was a heroic struggle against a troublesome enemy, Heracles softens the analogy and makes it pathetic. As his son lies dying, Heracles crows, "This nestling, one of Eurystheus', dead, has fallen and paid back his father's hatred of me" (Εἷς μὲν νεοσσὸς ὄδε θανὼν Εὐρύσθεώς / ἔχθραν πατρῶαν ἐκτίνων πέπτωκέ μοι, 982-3). By likening his own children to nestlings, Heracles increases the unheroic and aberrant nature of his killings.

Having dispatched one child with his arrows, Heracles searches for the next victim. This son approaches Heracles in the full suppliant pose, kneeling and grasping his father's chin (φθάνει δ' ὁ τλήμων γόνασι προσπεσὼν πατρός / καὶ πρὸς γένειον χεῖρα καὶ δέρην βαλῶν, 986-7). He begs for mercy and affectionately appeals to the *philia* between fathers and children, addressing Heracles as "dearest father" (ὦ φίλτατε πάτερ, 983). Heracles, just earlier proven a loyal *philos*, completely ignores his obligation to spare the kneeling suppliant and protect his

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<sup>84</sup> Papadopoulou explains the inappropriateness of the use of the bow within Thebes, since "the bow belongs to the wild world of the labours" (*Heracles and Euripidean Tragedy*, 146-7).

<sup>85</sup> Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 1841, reproduced in Brommer, *Heracles*, 27, fig. 7.

heirs, his *philtatoi*. Heracles fails in *philia*, but succeeds as a warrior: because his suppliant son is too close to shoot, he clubs him on the head. Just as Lycus' villainy is deepened by his determination to kill Heracles' suppliant family, so Heracles' actual murder of his suppliant family heightens the inversion of the *philia* relationship.<sup>86</sup>

Heracles completes his shame by pursuing his last son and Megara, who have taken refuge in the house and locked the doors. Heracles is undeterred, and tears apart the doors to reach them. His actions remind the messenger of his earlier threat to uproot and overturn the Cyclopean walls of Mycenae (943-946), and the messenger sees the threat symbolically fulfilled as Heracles attacks his own house: "he, as though at the Cyclopean walls themselves, digs, levers up the door flaps and breaks down the door posts" (ὁ δ' ὡς ἐπ' αὐτοῖς δὴ Κυκλωπίοισιν ὤν / σκάπτει μοχλεύει θύρετρα κάκβαλῶν σταθμά, 998-9). Here, Heracles actually reenacts the earlier allusion made to his Labor for Augeas. The messenger describes Heracles' attack, "he laid them low with a single missile" (ἐνὶ κατέστρωσεν βέλει, 1000), in diction that specifically parallels the Chorus' praise for Heracles' battle against the Centaurs (ἔστρωσεν τόξοις φονίοις, 366).

Finally, one Olympian deity, Athena, materializes to bring a halt to the carnage instigated by another Olympian, Hera. She appears as a "phantom" (εἰκῶν, 1002), but nevertheless wields her favored weapon, the spear (κραδαίνουσ' ἔγχος, 1003). She appears, then, as she is pictured on three of the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, standing alert with her spear in aid of her favorite. Here she actively intervenes, knocking Heracles into a coma to spare him the *miasma* of patricide.<sup>87</sup> The goddess who presided over his legendary

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<sup>86</sup> Belfiore, *Murder Among Friends*, 127.

<sup>87</sup> Her actions prompt the question: why is murdering one's wife and children permissible, but one's father, beyond the pale? Here Euripides perhaps trades on the characterization of Athena in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (see

exploits then disappears, leaving the hero to grapple with the consequences of his actions on his own.

Heracles the *philos*, so tender with his children and protective of his family, in his madness destroys his nearest relatives. And the heroic valor that empowered Heracles to conquer beasts and complete seemingly impossible Labors only serves to bring him to utter ruin. The play demonstrates that "his *aretē* does not guarantee correct behavior, nor does it protect against evil."<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the epinician language that praised his heroism similarly proves fruitless; as Swift remarks, "whereas the traditional values of *epinikion* celebrate physical *aretē* as a morally praiseworthy quality, *Heracles* uses the same language to undermine this value system."<sup>89</sup> The perversion of epinician tropes throughout Part II displays epinician's vulnerability to the flaws of its subject. For the man praised for his *aretē* can, at the inscrutable turn of a god's will, bring lasting disgrace upon himself, his family, and his city. Heracles' fall "silences this poetry of praise, for if the gods are irrational and unjust and the hero cannot be celebrated, choral poetry loses its function."<sup>90</sup> Concomitant with the failure of Heracles' *aretē* then lies the failure of epinician, the poetic genre that had held Heracles up as its preeminent model.

### Part III: Restoration through *Aretē*

As Heracles is revealed to the Chorus on stage, in a coma and bound to a broken column from his own ruined home, his collapse is made clear. As has been noted before, for the rest of

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especially 734-743), where the motherless and virginal Athena prioritizes paternity over every other family relationship.

88 Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 145.

89 Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 144.

90 Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 150.



the play, the word *aretē* is conspicuously absent.<sup>91</sup> This has led some scholars to believe that Heracles' traditional *aretē* is discarded, along with his victor's confidence.<sup>92</sup> My argument will prove, however, that it is the same heroic *aretē*, which has been questioned, confirmed, and undermined, that ultimately restores Heracles to life.

The reckoning over Heracles' horrific actions finally arrives, and the characters onstage struggle to fit the murders into the framework of the world that they have known and of Heracles' identity before the madness. Just as Heracles' heroic past expressed itself constantly in the messenger's speech, so his legendary reputation hangs over the subsequent scenes; the language and imagery of the third action continue the exploration begun in the first two parts. When Amphitryon emerges from the house to hush the Chorus, the Chorus express their pity for Amphitryon, the children, and "the gloriously conquering head," a striking synecdoche for describing the bound and comatose hero (τὸ καλλίνικον κάρα, 1046). The rest of the play will be devoted to exploring whether Heracles must renounce his title ὁ καλλίνικος, and whether, having thus been "stripped of his glory" by his own ghastly actions, he can retain any claim to his heroic past.<sup>93</sup>

Heracles awakens in confusion, and wonders aloud whether he has arrived again in Hades, "having just come on the return race of Eurystheus from Hades" (Εὐρυσθέως δίαυλον ἔξ Ἄιδου μολών, 1102). Heracles picks up the same metaphor of the journey to and from Hades as a *diaulos* that the Chorus used to describe the longed-for second youth (655-68). As discussed

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91 Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' Hecuba and Hercules Furens," 214.

92 Wilamowitz asserted that Heracles, passive and broken, must rely on the friendship of Theseus (Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides Herakles*, 109-11). Chalk disagrees, arguing that Heracles embraces a broader definition of *aretē* – one embodied by Megara in part I – which includes the active endurance of whatever happens (Chalk, "Arete and Bia in Euripides' Herakles," 9-10). Arrowsmith likewise observes a "conversion" in the character of Heracles towards a new courage to live despite dependence on others (Arrowsmith, "The Conversion of Herakles: An Essay in Euripidean Tragic Structure," 140-88).

93 Burnett, *Catastrophe survived*, 179.

above, the Chorus' wish confirmed the *aretē* of Heracles; here, the *diaulos* serves as a reminder of Heracles' Labors. Heracles cannot anticipate what will be revealed to him, the terrible deeds he is capable of. Indeed, that his mind finds explanation in the familiar challenges of the past comes as no surprise.

As Amphytrion reveals the corpses of the children to Heracles, he tries to express the attack in terms he will understand: "you waged a war that is no war against your children" (ἀπόλεμον, ὦ παῖ, πόλεμον ἔσπευσας τέκνοις, 1133). Heracles, who has waged true war against the Giants, Centaurs, and Amazons, cannot comprehend an *apolemon polemon*; indeed, Theseus will be confused upon glimpsing the slain children, for it was an accepted notion that "children do not face the spear" (οὐ γὰρ δορός γε παῖδες ἴστανται πέλας, 1176). As Heracles digests the news about his children, he asks further if he has also murdered his wife. Amphytrion adopts Heracles' boastful words about the strength of his hand, "all these things are the work of your one hand" (μιᾶς ἅπαντα χειρὸς ἔργα σῆς τάδε, 1139). This deliberate echo of Heracles' own swagger in 565 and 938 helps lay the responsibility for the murders directly on Heracles' shoulders.

Heracles immediately decides to take his own life, now that he has become "the murderer of my dearest children" (τῶν φιλτάτων μοι γενόμενος παίδων φονεύς, 1147). He considers suicide the proper heroic response to the "ill-fame which now awaits" (δύσκειαν ἢ μένει, 1153), a true reversal from his introduction in the Prologue as ὁ κλεινὸς Ἡρακλῆς (12). Even now, he conceives of suicide in athletic terms, as "striking a sword into the heart" (φάσανον πρὸς ἦπαρ ἑξακοντίσας, 1149), where the verb *exakontizō* has strong overtones of the javelin throw.<sup>94</sup>

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94 The basic verb ἀκοντίζω was used to describe hurling a javelin as early as *Iliad* 14.402. The compound verb is

These deliberations are interrupted by the arrival of Theseus, whose appearance serves as a living reminder of Heracles' *aretē* of both *philia* and glorious victory. Heracles recognizes him when he enters the stage as both friend and kinsman (συγγενῆς φίλος τ' ἐμός, 1154), but it is his role as *philos* that will prove instrumental in saving Heracles. Having heard the news of Lycus' usurpation, he brings an Athenian army with him to defend Heracles' rule. This is not unmotivated benevolence; Theseus explicitly reciprocates the favor Heracles bestowed on him in Hades: "I come to pay back in exchange the favors which Heracles began, when he saved me from the underworld" (τίνων δ' ἀμοιβὰς ὧν ὑπῆρξεν Ἡρακλῆς / σώσας με νέρθεν ἦλθον, 1170). His emphasis is on their *exchange* of beneficial acts. Thus, Theseus' arrival is a direct consequence of Heracles' past virtuous efforts; Heracles' initial *charis* is what drew Theseus to Thebes. Their relationship is dynamic and continuing, as seen in the verb ὑπάρχω, "to begin."

Theseus' arrival, then, is not motivated by a generous, new-fangled friendship, but rather, follows the traditional code of *philia*, as Amphytrion expressed it earlier (πρὸς σοῦ μὲν, ὦ παῖ, τοῖς φίλοις <τ'> εἶναι φίλον / τά τ' ἐχθρὰ μισεῖν, 585-6). Where the Thebans, who owed Heracles for his victory over the Minyans, have failed Heracles and his family, Theseus "manifests traditional ἀρετή magnificently."<sup>95</sup> In this way, he serves as a parallel figure to Heracles, who first initiated the chain of reciprocal benefactions. Just as Heracles delayed his return from the Underworld in order to free Theseus, using his superhuman strength to aid him, Theseus now offers the aid of his (personal) hand and his (political) allies (χειρὸς ὑμᾶς τῆς ἐμῆς ἢ συμμάχων, 1171).<sup>96</sup>

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frequent in Euripides (s.v., *LSJ*).

<sup>95</sup> Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' Hecuba and Hercules Furens," 218.

<sup>96</sup> Mette argues that Euripides' lost *Perithous* preceded our *Heracles* in Hans Joachim Mette, "Perithoos-Theseus-Herakles bei Euripides," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 50 (1983): 13–19.

Euripides consistently frames Heracles' disaster in terms of his past heroic victories. When Amphitryon explains the situation to the bewildered Theseus, he metaphorically describes the murder weapon as "the dippings of the hundred-headed hydra" (ἑκατογκεφάλου βαφαῖς ὕδρας, 1188). This choice of words directly associates the murder of Heracles' family with Heracles' other famous killings. Theseus enhances the connection to the Labors by calling the corpses "this contest of Hera" (Ἥρας ὄδ' ἄγων, 1186), a pointed characterization, as Heracles is accustomed to *agōnes* of a very different type.<sup>97</sup> The humiliation of Heracles is deepened by a reminder of his past importance. Once a warrior (ἀσπιστάς) who killed Giants alongside the gods, he is now much-belabored (πολύπονός, 1190-2): the hero who successfully completed Eurystheus' Labors (πόννοι, 575) is now mastered by toil. The *kallinikos* son of Zeus is now *dysdaimōn*, the most laboring and wandering of all mortals (οὐκ ἂν εἰδείης ἕτερον / πολυμοχθότερον πολυπλαγκτότερόν τε θνατῶν, 1195-7).

Heracles is ashamed to reveal his face before Theseus' "friendship based on kin" (φιλίαν ὁμόφυλον, 1200), but Theseus believes that *philia* compels him to do more than bring military aid; he must share in the very sufferings that Heracles now experiences. The reciprocity is explicit: "Herakles had saved Theseus' life; consequently, Theseus is willing to risk his life for Herakles, as if the lease on life granted by Herakles has given him a debt that he now gladly will repay."<sup>98</sup> With Heracles on the verge of suicide, his friends and family must struggle with him for his life. Amphitryon supplicates him in language "unquestionably that of wrestling."<sup>99</sup> He calls Theseus "a counterbalancing weight" (βάρος ἀντίπαλον) that "contends"

<sup>97</sup> Heracles later returns to Theseus' analogy of the murder to a contest, calling the corpses "this contest of my children" (τόνδ' ἄγων' ἐμῶν τέκνων, 1229). The Chorus agree with the attribution of disaster to Hera's jealousy, calling the murders again "this contest" (ἄγων ὄδε, 1311).

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, "Compassion and Friendship in Euripides' Herakles," 116-7.

<sup>99</sup> Bond, *Heracles*, 371.

(συναμιλλᾶται, 1205) with Heracles' despair. Once again, as in his contests with terrible beasts, Heracles is engaged in a wrestling match for his life. Amphitryon adds to Theseus' request for uncovering, begging Heracles in terms that appeal to his old successes: "restrain your spirit of a wild lion, with which you are driven into a bloody, unholy course" (κατά- / σχεθε λέοντος ἀγρίου θυμόν, ᾧ / δρόμον ἐπὶ φόνιον ἀνόσιον ἐξάγηι, 1210-12). The most famous wild lion, of course, is the Nemean lion, whose skin served as Heracles' peculiar armor; through the murders, Heracles has internalized the spirit of the pelt he wears on his back.

In requesting that Heracles unveil himself, Theseus declares his philosophy on *philia*: "I hate the goodwill of friends that grows feeble, and the man who wishes to have enjoyment of the fine circumstances but refuses to sail with unfortunate friends" (χάριν δὲ γηράσκουσιν ἐχθαίρω φίλων / καὶ τῶν καλῶν μὲν ὅστις ἀπολαύειν θέλει, / συμπλεῖν δὲ τοῖς φίλοισι δυστυχοῦσιν οὔ, 1223-1225).<sup>100</sup> At the heart of his definition is the behavior of a *philos* when his friends fall into ill-fortune. Theseus thus demonstrates the most traditional form of *philia* which depends "not only on sentiments and intentions but on deeds: what counts is what one does for a friend, for that is the surest evidence of devotion."<sup>101</sup> He stands in direct contrast to the Thebans, who abandoned Heracles' family in his absence. Indeed, when Megara explained the family's dire situation to Heracles, he asked in disbelief, "Did I so lack friends while I was away?" (οὔτω δ' ἀπόντες ἐσπανίζομεν φίλων; 559). Megara's response is all too knowing: "Who are friends to a man in hardship?" (φίλοι γὰρ εἰσιν ἀνδρὶ δυστυχεῖ τίνας; 560).

Heracles responds to Theseus' reasoning and unveils himself, "Since I helped you, I do not refuse you" (εὔδράσας δέ σ' οὐκ ἀναίνομαι, 1235). Thus, Heracles draws a direct connection

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<sup>100</sup>Note the denigration of "aging" friendship, which implicitly values its opposite, a friendship that stays youthful, as Heracles (the personification of *neotas*) does.

<sup>101</sup>David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56.

between the powerful *philia* that unveils his face and his generous heroism of the past. He can trust Theseus, because Theseus' sympathy towards Heracles has a solid foundation: his earlier salvation begets goodwill and concrete *charites* in response. For Heracles' rescue of Theseus ensured his return to the land of the living, in a way, its own form of "unveiling": through Heracles, Theseus could again see the light. Theseus, too, understands that his presence is fulfilling an obligation incurred in the Underworld: "And I, being well treated then (by you), pity you now" (ἐγὼ δὲ πάσχων εὖ τότε οἰκτίρω σε νῦν, 1236).<sup>102</sup>

Theseus saves Heracles' life by dissuading him from suicide, and he accomplishes this by appealing to Heracles' heroic past. Theseus dismisses Heracles' desire for suicide as "the speech of a mere ordinary man" (ἐπιτυχόντος ἀνθρώπου λόγους, 1248), and "deliberately gives Heracles a heroic title, πολύτλας, to prevent him from acting as ὁ ἐπιτύχων."<sup>103</sup> Finally, Theseus resorts to reminding Heracles of his heroic reputation as a great benefactor and friend to mortals (εὐεργέτης βροτοῖσι καὶ μέγας φίλος, 1252). His speech appeals "almost to the *duty* of heroism incumbent on such a famous hero."<sup>104</sup> By casting suicide in a shameful and cowardly light, Theseus hopes to provoke Heracles *kallinikos* to reject it.

Heracles rejects his former identifications, however, and his attitude is that of one wholly defeated by, instead of triumphant over, his responsibilities. In the speech that follows, Heracles gives a mortal's perspective on his life as a hero. The very things for which he was glorified earlier are now reasons for despair. He responds to Amphitryon's earlier wrestling metaphor, essentially accepting Theseus as a verbal opponent, "Listen now, so that I may

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102 See discussion in Johnson, "Compassion and Friendship in Euripides' Herakles," 118, on compassion as a reciprocal response to beneficial action.

103 Bond, *Heracles*, 380.

104 Conacher, "Theme, Plot, and Technique in the 'Heracles' of Euripides," 149.

contend against your advice with my arguments" (ἄκουε δὴ νυν, ὡς ἀμιλληθῶ λόγοις / πρὸς νοουθετήσεις σάς, 1255-6). He reviews the flaws in his ancestry and laments Hera's enmity against him, demonstrated from his infancy. But he reserves his greatest disgust and weariness for his Labors:

...μόχθους οὐς ἔτλην τί δεῖ λέγειν;  
ποίους ποτ' ἢ λέοντας ἢ τρισωμάτων  
Τυφῶνας ἢ Γίγαντας ἢ τετρασκελῆ  
κενταυροπληθῆ πόλεμον οὐκ ἐξήνυσσα;  
τήν τ' ἀμφίκρανον καὶ παλιμβλαστῆ κύνα  
ὑδραν φονεύσας μυρίων τ' ἄλλων πόνων  
διήλθον ἀγέλας κὰς νεκρούς ἀφικόμην,  
Ἄιδου πυλωρὸν κύνα τρίκρανον ἐς φάος  
ὅπως πορεύσαιμ' ἐντολαῖς Εὐρυσθέως. (1270-8)

...Why must I discuss the labors I endured? What lions or triple-bodied Typhons or Giants or war with four-legged Centaurs did I not dispatch? After I killed the hydra, a beast with heads budding again all around, I went through herds of a thousand other labors until I arrived among the dead, in order that I might bring the gate-guarding, triple-headed dog of Hades to the light, on Eurystheus' orders.

Heracles' own recounting of his Labors stands in stark contrast to the hymnic tone of the Chorus' first stasimon about his deeds. In the ode, "colourful and lush detail detracts from emotive weight creating a leisurely and relaxed atmosphere."<sup>105</sup> Barlow argues that Euripides creates "a glossy ornamental romantic atmosphere" in contrast to the messenger speech,<sup>106</sup> I argue instead that the Chorus' praise of Heracles' deeds is meant to stand in juxtaposition with Heracles' own assessment of his toils. Indeed, the lack of horror, pain, and moral weight that Barlow criticizes in the ode is more than amply supplied here, and in the voice of the one who suffered it all. Heracles emphasizes the chronological length of his toils -- from before his conception until that very day; the sheer number of labors (μυρίων ἄλλων πόνων); and the

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105 Shirley A. Barlow, "Structure and Dramatic Realism in Euripides' 'Heracles'," *Greece & Rome* 29, no. 2 (1982): 118.  
106 Barlow, "Structure and Dramatic Realism," 119.

monstrosity of the beasts he battled (τρισωμάτων, ἀμφίκρανον, τρίκρανον). Where the Chorus saw deeds worthy of praise and glory, Heracles only sees a useless life worthy of lament (βίον γ' ἀχρεῖον ἀνόσιον, 1302). And indeed, when the socially beneficial aspects of Heracles' heroism are suppressed, his actions lose their value. Epinician's failure becomes explicit when even the subject of praise rejects his accomplishments.

Heracles has expressed a vision of his life that is nothing but difficult trial upon life-threatening challenge. From his perspective, his murder of the family is his final labor, the coping stone on a house about to collapse (τὸν λοίσθιον δὲ τόνδ' ἔτλην τάλας πόνον, / παιδοκτονήσας δῶμα θριγκῶσαι κακοῖς, 1279-1280). If Heracles sees his famous deeds as nothing but a burden, then this last deed, accomplished with his heroic skills, is the worst of all. Heracles' suicidal despair is urged on by fantasies of the life to come, one marked by *dyskleia*, the worst fate for a hero once *kallinikos*. In exile, he will be recognized and mocked (ὑποβλεπόμεθ' ὡς ἐγνωσμένοι, 1287); his pan-Hellenic reputation for benefactions will be replaced by one fact, that he killed his wife and children (1289-90). He imagines that the earth, sea, and river will reject him (1295-98), realms that he tamed and made safe for men. It is the indignity of all this that is too much for this *meGas philos* to men, and according to the traditional heroic code, suicide is his only recourse.

Finally, Heracles criticizes Hera for selfishly destroying him for her own gain; once himself κλεινός (12), he now sarcastically calls her "celebrated" (κλεινή, 1303). She has reduced the "best man of Greece" and "innocent benefactor of Greece" to nothing (ἄνδρ' Ἑλλάδος τὸν πρῶτον, 1306; τοὺς εὐεργέτας / Ἑλλάδος ἀπώλεσ' οὐδεν' ὄντας αἰτίους, 1309-10). His earlier greatness increases the magnitude of her triumph, and Heracles, now destroyed,



indeed serves as the "glory of Hera."

But Theseus disagrees that Heracles has no options beside suicide. He recognizes that Heracles must be exiled from Thebes, but offers instead a new home: Athens.<sup>107</sup> In Athens, however, Heracles will acquire more than just a hospitable home. Theseus offers compensation for the heroic status and honor Heracles has lost. Megara, friendless and abandoned by her own city, observed, "they say the faces of hosts look fondly upon exiled friends for one day alone" (ὡς τὰ ξένων πρόσωπα φεύγουσιν φίλοις / ἔν ἡμαρ ἡδὺ βλέμμ' ἔχειν φασὶν μόνον, 305-6). Theseus disproves the proverb with his generous *philia*.

After purifying him from his pollution, Theseus promises to share his personal wealth, "houses and a portion of my possessions" (δόμους τε δώσω χρημάτων τ' ἐμῶν μέρος, 1325). He will also hand over prizes the Athenian citizenry gave him for his heroic deeds against the Minotaur (ἃ δ' ἐκ πολιτῶν δῶρα, 1326). These gifts ensure that shameful poverty would not accompany Heracles in exile. In addition to these moveable goods, Theseus offers to rename the plots of land (τεμένη, 1329) called Theseia after Heracles; in the future, they will be Heracleia (σέθεν τὸ λοιπὸν ἐκ βροτῶν κεκλήσεται / ζῶντος, 1330-1). Though Heracles must give up his own properties and land, he will receive eponymous territory in Attica. Heracles' heroism will continue to be recognized, even after his death: "the whole city of Athens will honor you with sacrifices and stone memorials" (θυσίαισι λαΐνοισί τ' ἐξογκώμασιν / τίμιον ἀνάξει πᾶσ' Ἀθηναίων πόλις, 1332-3).<sup>108</sup> Thus, though exiled, Heracles will be restored at least

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107 In Heracles' exile, we see another demonstration of the failure of epinician. For if Leslie Kurke is correct in formulating the ultimate goal of epinician as "the successful integration of the athlete into a harmonious community," then the poetic genre fails utterly here (*The Traffic in Praise*, 7). Heracles overturns his own *oikos* and is exiled from his city, prevented from burying his own sons, never to see his father alive again. That he finds refuge in Athens has less to do with the triumph of a victorious return than it does with the positive representation of Athenian values in this play. See Angeliki Tzanetou, *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

108 In the establishment of hero cult, Swift sees an aetiology for epinician in general, a genre that connects the

in part to his heroic stature, receiving wealth and honors while living, and sacrifices when dead. With these status markers, Heracles will not have to endure the shameful, disgraced life he had been imagining for himself.

Theseus does not conceive of his offers, generous as they are, as a mere favor. As always, his benefaction receives a reciprocal *charis* from the *philos*. By receiving Heracles, Athens will gain like a victor a "noble crown" (καλὸς γὰρ ἄστοις στέφανος, 1334). And in providing for a defeated Heracles, Theseus sees the fulfillment of his prior obligation: "And I will repay to you this favor for my salvation" (κἀγὼ χάριν σοι τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας / τήνδ' ἀντιδώσω, 1336-7). When Theseus was in desperate straits, Heracles benefitted him; now, when Heracles is in need of friends (1337), Theseus can provide a worthy recompense.

Heracles remains unmoved by Theseus' offer to restore him to the glories of heroic status. He dismisses these honors as secondary, subordinate to his sorrows (πάρεργα < > τάδ' ἔστ' ἐμῶν κακῶν, 1340).<sup>109</sup> Although Heracles does not accept Theseus' theology, he chooses to endure the life he has created, out of fear that he might incur the charge of cowardice in suicide (μὴ δειλίαν ὄφλω τιν' ἐκλιπῶν φάος, 1348). Ultimately, it is in consideration for his heroic *aretē* that Heracles decides to live with his guilt. This decision to live represents "Heracles' final victory."<sup>110</sup> Although he does not choose life in order to maintain the pleasures of heroic status that are offered by Theseus, he nevertheless flees the disrepute associated with the loss of that stature. Despite his dishonor, he must prove himself capable of facing the

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praise of an exceptional person with posthumous cult (*The Hidden Chorus*, 155).

109 The term *parerga* recalls, of course, the heroic deeds Heracles accomplished while pursuing the canonical Labors ordered by Eurystheus (a categorization that probably occurred with the late mythographers). The rescue of Theseus, in fact, might be termed a *parergon*: Heracles' main goal in Hades was the capture of Cerberus, but he delayed his return in order to release Theseus, as well (619). Thus, in denigrating the honors Theseus offers, Heracles also rejects the positive associations of his legendary exploits and glorious reputation.

110 Conacher, "Theme, Plot, and Technique in the 'Heracles' of Euripides," 150.

enemy (1350), and for this reason, he decides to keep his bow and arrow, the murder weapons of his family (1382-4). He can no longer enjoy the celebration of his *aretē* of glorious victory, but he must also reject any further diminution of his status as a brave aristocrat.

This is not to say that Heracles is not thoroughly humbled. Theseus must help him to a standing position, offering, "Give your hand to your helper and friend" (δίδου δὲ χεῖρ' ὑπηρέτη φίλωι, 1403); in extending his hand, Theseus helps define the *philos*: one who actively helps a friend in need. The mighty hand of Heracles, which provided the power to accomplish famous deeds, now grasps the aid of another. And the language of *philia* dominates their conversation: Heracles instructs his father, "one must have this sort of man as a friend" (τοιόνδ' ἄνδρα χρὴ κτᾶσθαι φίλον, (1404). Their relationship is not all comfort, however. When Heracles, overcome with grief, weeps, Theseus chides him with a reminder of his brave Labors (πόνων, 1410) and accuses him of being no longer "the famous Heracles" (ὁ κλεινὸς Ἡρακλῆς οὐκ εἶ νοσῶν, 1414). Heracles retorts that this trial is his worst (1411), and repays the favor by reminding Theseus of the time when he too was weak and broken (1415-16). Heracles, though crushed, begins rising back to his status as a noble man with freedom of speech.

Ultimately, it is the twin *aretai* of friendship and heroic victory that redeem Heracles. Theseus offers a new life in Athens, which Heracles accepts with a heavy heart. Heracles' first aim upon leaving Thebes, however, is to escort Cerberus to Argos (1386-8), and he requests Theseus' aid in this task. Far from indicating Heracles' weakness, this request "shows Heracles' willingness to undertake his heroic labor once again and it provides an opportunity for further solidifying the *philia* between the two heroes by providing them with a joint task."<sup>111</sup> Thus, Foley claims erroneously that "Euripides deliberately juxtaposes incompatible literary traditions

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<sup>111</sup> Johnson, "Compassion and Friendship in Euripides' Herakles," 124.

about the hero to create a discontinuous character."<sup>112</sup> Indeed, this extension of glorious victory, as represented by the tamed Cerberus, and *philia* with Theseus only emphasizes the continuity in Heracles' character.

Euripides thus presents a Heracles who retains his heroic *aretē*, even after inconceivable disaster has laid him low. Though the play shows how Heracles' devastating murder of his wife and children is closely related to his other heroic achievements, his *aretē* enables him to recover. This solution to Heracleian disaster requires the formulation of a two-pronged definition of *aretē*, one which relies on very traditional notions of excellence – *philia* and glorious victory. Though this Heracles preserves his status, he nevertheless is required to give up something in return: his apotheosis. For when Theseus invites Heracles to Athens, he offers only hero cult, not divine worship; after death, Heracles would receive sacrifices at his tomb, like other "standard" heroes (1331-3). Furthermore, in dismissing the exploits of Olympians as mere "wretched tales of poets" (ἄοιδῶν οἷδε δύστηνοι λόγοι, 1346), Heracles also rejects any intimation that he would (or would want to) join them. It is emphatically not through divine will that Heracles is rescued and heads to Athens. As Hose puts it, "Die Integration des Herakles in die Polis kann nur unter dem Eindruck einer Katastrophe geschehen, die keinerlei metaphysischen Trost erlaubt."<sup>113</sup>

Thus, Euripides' play provides a very different sort of criticism of the gods from Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. Where the *Trachiniae* reveals the injustice of Zeus by presenting a blameworthy Heracles who may yet ascend to Olympus, Euripides' Heracles holds the gods responsible for the innocent hero's suffering, while eliminating the possibility that he may

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112 Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 192; Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 133–6.

113 Martin Hose, *Euripides: der Dichter der Leidenschaften* (München: Beck, 2008), 114. For his broader view of the play as transforming Heracles from an aristocratic into a democratic hero, see Hose, *Euripides*, 101–14.

receive the ultimate reward of deification. These divergent approaches demonstrate the difficulty of reconciling Heracles' apotheosis with his disasters. For even when Euripides reforms the morally bankrupt heroism of Sophocles' Heracles, his own Heracles cannot receive a transcending compensation. Heracles and his disasters thus serve as vehicles for exploring both the successes and failures of heroism, but above all, the justice of the gods.

## Chapter 5: Heroic Failure and Erotic Attachment in Apollonius' *Argonautica*

The Heracles of Apollonius' *Argonautica* represents a rather different hero from the one encountered in tragedy. He is neither the selfish and lustful Heracles of the *Trachiniae*, nor the thoroughly domesticated family man of Euripides' *Heracles*. Instead, Apollonius uses Heracles to demonstrate the positive aspects of heroism: he displays tact, strategic thinking, and martial skill, contributing victories against the enemies of the epic quest. This Heracles is marked neither by wanton violence nor by insatiable lust. Nevertheless, he experiences a heroic failure so dramatic that he is permanently excluded from the titular heroic endeavor at the end of Book 1. Heracles' sudden expulsion from the mission (though not entirely from the poem) upon his loss of Hylas demands an explanation. I argue that Apollonius employs Heracles for a didactic purpose in the poem. He first presents Heracles as a positive role model of beneficial heroism for the youthful Jason; equally meaningful is Heracles' disaster due to his erotic devotion to Hylas.<sup>1</sup> Even when envisioned as a proper pederast, Heracles is excessive in his passions, and his attachment to Hylas ultimately interferes with his success as a hero.

Heracles' susceptibility to erotic over-attachment marks him as a fitting character for Apollonius' *Argonautica*, an epic that recounts Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece and his entanglement with Medea through the tension between heroism and love. The mythological

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<sup>1</sup> For the origin and development of the story of Hylas, see Kenneth Mauerhofer, *Der Hylas-Mythos in der antiken Literatur*, vol. 208, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde (München: K.G. Saur, 2004).

tradition varies regarding Heracles' inclusion in the expedition, so his assertive presence and subsequent ejection are the products of Apollonius' deliberate choice.<sup>2</sup> Though Heracles never arrives with the expedition at Colchis, I show that he plays a pivotal role in the poem and is deeply embedded in its themes and concerns. Through Heracles, Apollonius explores both the demands of heroism and the pitfalls of love.

### The Definition of a Hero

The *Argonautica's* interest in the definition of heroism has been well-established. The narrative traces Jason's maturation through a heroic quest, from the departure from his parents, through a series of deadly trials, to his successful return home with both princess and prize. Apollonius' Jason does not always conform to the model of heroism displayed in epic or tragedy, and this discomfort has led some modern scholars to call him a new kind of hero for a new Hellenistic age, a romantic hero.<sup>3</sup> But I insist that we must accept the Jason Apollonius created, one who is fearful, hapless, and, frankly, generally unheroic.<sup>4</sup> Jason is articulate, persuasive, and sexually appealing, but he cannot accomplish the capture of the Golden Fleece

2 See Aristotle *Pol.* 3.1284a22-5, *Apollod.* 1.9.19, where the Argo refuses to allow Heracles to board because of his great weight. Herodorus (*FGrH* BNJ 31 F 41a) says in the fifth century BCE that Heracles was enslaved to Omphale during the expedition.

3 See Charles Rowan Beye, "Jason as Love-hero in Apollonios' Argonautika," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 10 (1969): 31-55; James Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts: The Redefinition of the Epic Hero in Book 1 of Apollonius's Argonautica*, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); G. Zanker, "The Love Theme in Apollonius Rhodius' Argonautica," *Wiener Studien* 13 (1979): 52-73. Pietsch sees many positive traits of heroism in Jason, particularly in his political astuteness: Christian Pietsch, *Die Argonautika des Apollonios von Rhodos: Untersuchungen zum Problem der einheitlichen Konzeption des Inhalts*, *Hermes* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1999), 122-37.

4 Jason has already been sharply criticized, e.g., in J.F. Carspecken, "Apollonius Rhodius and the Homeric Epic," *Yale Classical Studies* 13 (1952): 33-143; Adolf Köhnken, "Der Status Jasons: Besonderheiten der Darstellungstechnik in den Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios," in *Apollonius Rhodius*, ed. R. F. Regtuit and G. C. Wakker, *Hellenistica Groningana* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000), 55-68; Gilbert Lawall, "Apollonius' Argonautica: Jason as Anti-Hero," *Yale Classical Studies* 19 (1966): 119-69. Lawall's division of the Argonauts into four types (brawn, skill, valor, piety) is convenient, but hardly definitive.

and a safe *nostos* through courageous action, clever strategy, or martial prowess.<sup>5</sup> Jason's lack of heroic stature is cast in an even less flattering light by the direct comparison to Heracles throughout Book I of the poem.

I argue that Apollonius provides an essentially positive portrait of Heracles.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Apollonius must first establish Heracles as a positive model of heroism, so that his failure through Eros at the end of Book I will be all the more effective. Yet many scholars, in searching for a justification for his removal from the expedition, have censured Heracles for behavior that is inappropriate in some way: Heracles is too bestial.<sup>7</sup> Or too archaic for a Hellenistic epic.<sup>8</sup> Or too independent for a collective band.<sup>9</sup> These arguments dismiss Heracles too quickly; his didactic function persists through both his heroic achievements and erotic failure. I will show that Apollonius removes Heracles because he cannot handle both the demands of love and heroism, a concern at the heart of the epic. But before Heracles can stand as a symbol of the real dangers of love, his heroism must be persuasive.

The actions of Heracles in Book 1 explicitly establish Heracles as the hero *par excellence* of the epic, and by contrast, undermine Jason's attempts to be recognized as an equally

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5 Theodore M. Klein, "Apollonius' Jason: Hero and Scoundrel," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 13, no. 1, New Series (January 1, 1983): 115-126, tries to have it both ways, arguing that "Jason is as much a hero as a villain" and as such, represents the Skeptic School. Klein does not carry his argument very far, however.

6 This may be a reflection of the Ptolemies' public adoption of Heracles as ancestor and model. For an assessment of the poem as a whole in its historical context, see Anatole Mori, *The Politics of Apollonius Rhodius' Argonautica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Ulrich Huttner, *Die politische Rolle der Heraklesgestalt im griechischen Herrschertum* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997), 124-145, addresses Heracles' role in the self-representation of the Ptolemies, though he is chiefly preoccupied with the work of Theocritus, rather than Apollonius.

7 Lawall, "Apollonius' Argonautica: Jason as Anti-Hero," criticizes Heracles for relying too much on "primitive brute force." Yet all the Argonauts ever want is for this brute strength to be on their side; Apollonius makes clear that Heracles' aid would have been invaluable in Colchis (3.1232-4).

8 Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), 108-12.

9 "He is a figure of fundamental isolation," in D. C. Feeney, "Following after Hercules, in Virgil and Apollonius," *Proceedings of the Virgil Society* 18 (1986): 61; "...Heracles, a hero of notoriously solitary and idiosyncratic virtue," in R. L. Hunter, "'Short on Heroics': Jason in the Argonautica," *The Classical Quarterly* 38, no. 2, New Series (January 1, 1988): 442.



respected leader.<sup>10</sup> The Catalogue of Heroes reveals Heracles' influence and importance among a most illustrious group of men. Among the heroes from Attica, the narrator notes that Theseus, whom "an unseen bond held under the land of Taenarum, where he followed Perithoos on a foolish journey," could not join the group (Ταιναρίην αἰδηλος ὑπὸ χθόνα δεσμὸς ἔρυκε, / Πειρίθω ἐσπόμενον κεινὴν ὁδόν, 1.102-3). The absence of the famous Theseus, a hero of the proper age and stature to join the expedition, must be explained.<sup>11</sup> As Apollonius' audience would have been aware, the captured Theseus awaits Heracles, who will free him while in Hades to seize Cerberus.<sup>12</sup> Even before Heracles is named in the poem, Theseus' predicament highlights the importance of his Labors, which will take him not only across the known world, but to the Underworld as well.<sup>13</sup> These events have not yet occurred; the allusion thus offers a preview of Heracles' future endeavors with an eye towards his defeat of death, symbolically accomplished by his successful return from Hades.

In his individual entry in the catalogue, Heracles appears *in medias res* during the Labor of the Erymanthian Boar. Upon hearing of the heroes' mustering, Heracles interrupts his own mission to join Jason. After his spontaneous decision, Heracles puts down the giant trussed boar at the edge of Mycenae proper, as if for safe-keeping while he undertakes a journey of

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10 Köhnken also interprets Heracles as a powerful role model ("Identifikationsfigur") for Jason and the Argonauts, though his analysis provides no rationale for his departure from the expedition: Adolf Köhnken, "Herakles und Orpheus als mythische Referenzfiguren ('Identifikations-' bzw. 'Integrationsfigur') im hellenistischen Epos," in *Literarische Konstituierung von Identifikationsfiguren in der Antike*, ed. Barbara Aland, Johannes Hahn, and Christian Ronning, vol. 16, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 20–2.

11 Clare notes that the reader is required to supply the reason for Theseus' journey, i.e., the abduction of Persephone, which sets up a parallel between Jason and Theseus (R. J. Clare, *The path of the Argo: language, imagery, and narrative in the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius*, Cambridge classical studies (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 84–5).

12 Euripides relies on the *philia* between Theseus and Heracles, originating in this rescue, to resolve the action in the *Heracles*. See Chapter 4.

13 Green notes the mythic parallels between Theseus and Jason (Peter Green, *The Argonautika*, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 203–4). The comparison only strengthens Heracles' position relative to the younger Theseus and Jason.

undetermined length to Colchis (1.128-9). The boar is fierce, and its capture gives Heracles the authority that comes with heroic experience. Furthermore, the description of Heracles depositing the boar from his back surely recalls the vase paintings of Heracles presenting the Erymanthian Boar to Eurystheus as he cowers in a pithos, a motif popular also in monumental art, as seen on the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.<sup>14</sup> The audience, therefore, will have had a distinct image in mind of the end point of this labor; the fact that Apollonius' Heracles does not complete the labor adds to the idea that Heracles leaves his own heroic work in suspense to join the Argonauts.

In his introduction, Jason, in sharp contrast, is not characterized by his accomplishments. His introduction is almost comically understated: he loses a sandal while crossing the Anaurus (1.10-11). The narrator offers no background of his royal lineage, piety towards Hera, or fair reasons for confronting Pelias; nor is Jason associated with the construction of the Argo, built by Argus with the aid of Athena. Before the Catalogue of Heroes begins, Jason remains a blank slate.

Heracles joins the expedition "by his own will, contrary to the intent of Eurystheus" (ἦ ἰότητι παρὲκ νόον Εὐρυσθηῖος, 1.130). Here the narrator emphasizes the strength of Heracles' mind, in addition to his physical brawn. Although Heracles must serve the whims of Eurystheus, he proves himself to be slave to no one. When Heracles makes a decision, he successfully acts upon it. Jason, however, is frequently beset by helplessness. On the eve of the departure from Pagasae, Jason sits alone, "helpless, at a loss" (ἀμήχανος, 1.460), a term that

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14 Frank Brommer, *Heracles: The Twelve Labors of the Hero in Ancient Art and Literature* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1986), 19–20; Frank Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage* (Marburg: Elwert, 1973), 47–9. Brommer instructs us not to interpret this image humorously.

will come to characterize him at points when bold decision-making or action is required.<sup>15</sup>

Heracles does not arrive in Iolcus alone, but is accompanied by young Hylas: "And with him Hylas went, his noble attendant in the prime of youth, as a bearer of arrows and guard of his bow" (σὺν καὶ οἱ Ὑλας κίεν, ἔσθλός ὀπάων / πρωθήβης, ἰῶν τε φορεὺς φύλακός τε βιοῖο, 1.131-2). In these final lines of Heracles' introduction in the Catalogue, the narrator emphasizes Heracles' companion and the trust that undergirds their relationship, given that Hylas maintains Heracles' famed weapons. Although the passage lacks an explicit confirmation of an erotic relationship between the two, as in Theocritus' *Idyll* 13, the term πρωθήβης indicates the initiation of Hylas' sexual maturity, a point of desirability in a pederastic relationship.<sup>16</sup> No other hero in the Catalogue comes with an *erōmenos* mentioned by name, and this emphasis here foreshadows Hylas' later significance to Heracles' fate. The point is that Heracles is clearly *not* solitary: he is introduced in the context of an intimate relationship, one governed by convention and marked by mutual trust.<sup>17</sup>

Heracles' heroic reputation is so dominating as to warrant mention in other heroes' Catalogue entries. The narrator praises the excellence of the youthful Meleager, "I do not think any other man superior to him would have come - except, of course, Heracles - if he, remaining there, had been raised for only one more year among the Aetolians" (τοῦ δ' οὐ τίς ὑπέρτερον ἄλλον οἶω / νόσφιν γ' Ἡρακλῆος ἐπελθέμεν, εἴ κ' ἔτι μούνον / αὐθι μένων λυκάβαντα

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15 See 1.1286, at the loss of Heracles; 2.410, upon hearing Phineus' prophecy; 2.885, in need of a helmsman; 3.336, in Argus' characterization of him to Aeetes; 3.423, 432, upon hearing Aeetes' challenge; 4.1318, in the speech of the Libyan heroines.

16 Much ink has been spilled over the priority of Theocritus' *Id.*13 versus Apollonius' *Argonautica*. I believe that it is impossible to determine the issue with any certainty and will structure my argument so as not to rely on its outcome.

17 Scholars who criticize Heracles for being a loner in the midst of a collaborative group (e.g., Beye, "self-sufficient and alone," *Epic and romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, Literary structures (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 53) seem to miss the presence of Hylas entirely.

μετετράφη Αἰτωλοῖσιν, 1.196-98). Heracles represents the upper limit of heroism, the strength which no other hero could match, much less surpass. The enclitic γε, "of course, to be sure, no doubt," in line 1.197 lends a self-conscious tone to the pronouncement, as if the narrator realizes he must limit his praise of Meleager's hypothetical maturation to a reasonable outcome, to avoid the anticipated protests of his audience. Through this parenthetical remark, the narrator establishes the indisputable superiority of Heracles.

Apollonius sets Heracles and Jason in direct comparison to one another in the assembly at Pagasae. Jason's first action among the assembled heroes is to call for an election of the leader. He humbly submits:

ἀλλὰ φίλοι, ξυνὸς γὰρ ἐς Ἑλλάδα νόστος ὀπίσσω,  
ξυναὶ δ' ἅμμι πέλονται ἐς Αἰήταο κέλευθοι,  
τούνεκα νῦν τὸν ἄριστον ἀφειδήσαντες ἔλεσθε  
ὄρχαμον ἡμείων, ὃ κεν τὰ ἕκαστα μέλοιτο,  
νείκεα συνθεσίας τε μετὰ ξείνοισι βαλέσθαι. (1.336-40)

"But, my friends, for common is our return back to Hellas, and common to us is the journey to Aetes' land, therefore now without restraint choose the best man as our leader, who ought to care for every detail, to settle quarrels and make treaties with foreigners."

Jason defines ὁ ἄριστος as a diplomatic man, one who keeps the peace among the heroes and with outsiders. Clauss accepts Jason's definition of the best leader, and, judging him by that standard, pronounces Jason "best of the Argonauts."<sup>18</sup> Clauss is too credulous, however, and the insufficiency of Jason's definition is quickly revealed in the Argonauts' response to his speech. For the heroes immediately turn to Heracles and unanimously elect him their leader: "But the young men looked at bold Heracles, sitting in their midst, and with one shout all were enjoining him to command" (πάπτηναν δὲ νέοι θρασὺν Ἡρακλῆα / ἤμενον ἐν μέσσοισι, μῆ δέ ἐ

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18 See especially *The best of the Argonauts*, 57-87.

πάντες αὐτῆ / σημαίνειν ἐπέτελλον, 1.341-3). To the Argonauts, the identity of the best man is obvious; the repeated imperfect ἐπέτελλον, "kept on enjoining," shows that the Argonauts do not even consider Jason for the position, and thus are not concerned about embarrassing him by repeatedly seeking another.<sup>19</sup> The collective decision of the Argonauts points to a more traditional definition of heroism, one marked by heroic accomplishment, courage, and strength, not by skillful negotiation.

Jason clearly wanted to be chosen, and the crew's decision constitutes Jason's first crisis of leadership. He is fortunate that Heracles is more than a mindless figure of brawn.<sup>20</sup> For Heracles responds with great tact and diplomacy:

...ὁ δ' αὐτόθεν ἔνθα περ ἦστο  
δεξιτερὴν ἀνὰ χεῖρα τανύσσατο, φώνησέν τε·  
"Μή τις ἐμοὶ τόδε κῦδος ὀπαζέτω· οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε (345)  
πείσομαι, ὧς δὲ καὶ ἄλλον ἀναστήσεσθαι ἐρύξω.  
αὐτὸς ὅτις ξυνάγειρε καὶ ἀρχεῦοι ὀμάδοιο."  
Ἦ ῥα μέγα φρονέων· ἐπὶ δ' ἦνεον ὡς ἐκέλευεν  
Ἡρακλῆς. ἀνὰ δ' αὐτὸς ἀρήιος ὄρνυτ' Ἴησων  
γηθόσυνος... (1.343-350)

But he, from the place where he sat, stretched out his right hand and said, "Let no one grant this honor to me: for I will not agree, just as I will restrain another from rising. Let he who gathered us also lead the throng." Thus he spoke proudly, and they approved of Heracles' command. And warlike Jason himself leapt up, delighted...

The tone of Heracles' response has been subject to debate: Vian simply notes that Heracles' hand gesture may indicate a desire to speak or emphasize his refusal, and his sitting is contrary

19 See John K. Newman, "The Golden Fleece, Imperial Dream," in *Brill's Companion to Apollonius Rhodius*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 433, for the suggestion that the acclamation of Heracles serves to flatter the Ptolemies.

20 That Heracles would decline the role of leader should not be taken for granted. A Hellenistic prose *Argonautica* by Dionysius Scytobrachion, summarized in Diod. Sic. 4.40-56, tells of a journey directed by Heracles throughout and unconcerned with Eros. See Peter Green, "These Fragments Have I Shored Against My Ruins": Apollonios Rhodios and the Social Revalidation of Myth for a New Age," in *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography*, ed. Paul Cartledge, Peter Garnsey, and Erich S. Gruen, vol. 26, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 59-62, which follows Jeffrey S. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982).

to custom.<sup>21</sup> Beye takes a negative view, calling Heracles "immensely condescending and arrogant" in his refusal to stand.<sup>22</sup> But Heracles explains why he remains in his seat: to stand would be to challenge Jason for the leadership position and acknowledge the crew's choice. So Heracles refuses to stand and likewise refuses to allow anyone else to stand (ἀναστήσεσθαι ἐρύξω), until Jason himself rises as leader.<sup>23</sup> The moment Jason arises is the moment that he assumes command, and he immediately issues his first order, a sacrifice to Apollo.

The incident only reinforces Heracles' authority over Jason's.<sup>24</sup> Jason gives his crew the authority to choose a leader, and they invest that authority in Heracles. At this moment, "for the Argonauts, for the narrator, and for the reader -- a rare instance of accord among these parties -- Heracles is the best man."<sup>25</sup> Heracles, graciously and delicately, makes up his own mind and uses his stature to anoint Jason as leader.<sup>26</sup> Heracles' decision restores order to the poem, which had threatened to run off the rails at the moment of Heracles' acclamation.

"Warlike" Jason (an ironic use of the epithet?) busies himself with a proper departure as the narrative moves on, but the expedition has already gotten off to a shaky start for him: his own assembled crew prefer the heroic and experienced Heracles to him, and he leads the Argonauts

21 Francis Vian, ed., *Argonautiques*, Collection des universités de France (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 66, n. 1.

22 Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, 83.

23 The Iliadic resonances of the scene are explored by Clauss, who argues that an inversion of the Homeric model in *Il.* 19.74-77 results in reconciliation and Jason's restoration to honor (Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts*, 64-5). Clare draws a different conclusion from the Homeric allusions, that the encounter is "self-consciously equivocal" (R. J. Clare, *The path of the Argo: language, imagery, and narrative in the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius*, Cambridge classical studies (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46-7).

24 Fränkel argues that Jason's assumption of leadership is obvious and inevitable (Hermann Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios* (München: Beck, 1968), 68). Scytobrachion's account, in which Heracles leads the expedition, provides a counter-example, however. And even if Apollonius felt responsible to the demands of the dominant mythological tradition, he did not have to construct the episode in such a way as to emphasize the power and popularity of Heracles alongside Jason's also-ran status.

25 Mary Margolies DeForest, *Apollonius' Argonautica: a Callimachean Epic*, vol. 142, Mnemosyne Supplementum (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 54.

26 Beye detects humor in Heracles' nomination of Jason, calling it "the perfect ironic revelation of his own authority and Jason's lack of it" (*Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, 31). This is not the only occasion in which Apollonius invites us to smile at Heracles (see my discussion of the oar-breaking incident).

only by the consent of Heracles.

Apollonius confirms these doubts about Jason's heroism in the episode of the Earthborn giants. The Argonauts are hospitably received by young king Cyzicus and the Doliones, a people who lived at peace with "outrageous and wild" Earthborn men (ὕβρισταί τε καὶ ἄγριοι, 1.942), monsters endowed with six arms. While a party climbs Mount Dindymum to scope out the sea route, the Earthborn giants attack the Argo and threaten the entire expedition: "But the Earthborn men, rushing from the other side of the mountain, began to block off the mouth of Chytus with countless rocks beneath, as though trapping a sea beast within" (Γηγενέες δ' ἐτέρωθεν ἀπ' οὐρεος αἰζαντες / φράξαν ἀπειρεσίησι Χυτοῦ στόμα νειόθι πέτρης, / πόντιον οἶά τε θῆρα λοχώμενοι ἔνδον ἐόντα, 1.989-991). These are a fantastical enemy with alarmingly un-human aspect, and the comparison to a trapped sea animal emphasizes the vulnerability of the Argo.

Fortunately for Jason and his quest, Heracles, the tamer of beasts and famous civilizer, is prepared to protect the ship:

ἀλλὰ γὰρ αὖθι λέλειπτο σὺν ἀνδράσιν ὀπλοτέροισιν  
Ἡρακλῆς, ὃς δὴ σφι παλίντονον αἶψα τανύσσας  
τόξον, ἐπασσυτέρους πέλασε χθονί. τοὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ  
πέτρας ἀμφιρρῶγας ἀερτάζοντες ἔβαλλον·  
δὴ γὰρ που καὶ κεῖνα θεὰ τρέφεν αἰνὰ πέλωρα  
Ἥρη, Ζηνὸς ἄκοιτις, ἀέθλιον Ἡρακλῆι. (1.992-97)

But with the younger men had been left Heracles, who, immediately stretching his backward-bending bow, brought them to the earth, one after another, while they themselves were lifting and throwing jagged rocks. For no doubt, the goddess Hera, bedmate of Zeus, was nurturing even those dread monsters as a labor for Heracles.

This conflict marks the first time weapons are drawn in the poem, yet the tone is remarkably easy. While the giants labor to lift and hurl heavy boulders, Heracles uses his fame at archery to

kill them "one after another." The giants remain anonymous and indistinguishable; Heracles hardly breaks a sweat. Although the other Argonauts join Heracles in the fight, the focus is squarely on the hero, as is evidenced by the narrator's aside about Hera.<sup>27</sup> The giants surely fit in the same category as the multi-headed Hydra or triple-bodied Geryon, and therefore can be considered another "Labor" (ἀέθλιον) of punishment from Hera. But the comparison is unconvincing: Heracles dispatches his enemy too easily, and there is no sense of struggle or toil to the "Labor."

The casualness with which Heracles accomplishes a proper heroic deed casts shame upon Jason's mock-heroic deed on just the following night. The Argonauts continue on their journey, but confused by contrary winds and darkness, return to the Doliones' land and attack their friends. Jason slays a man for the first time in the tumult, his friend and foil, Cyzicus (1.1030-36). This is a tragic act that fulfills the "common narrative pattern of Killing the Double."<sup>28</sup> Jason's initiation into combat is an unsuccessful one. And although the other Argonauts, including Heracles, also kill in error, here the emphasis is on Jason, the leader of the group. Jason had defined the best leader as one who can manage relations with friendly and hostile foreigners; his confusion of hostile for friendly here underscores his failure of leadership (1.340). Apollonius uses the episode as an opportunity both to lament the ineluctability of Cyzicus' fate and to explain the aetiology of the local rites for Rhea. Nevertheless, Jason has completely botched his first attempt at heroic combat, a point sharpened by its contrast with Heracles' confidence and ease. Especially here in Book 1, Jason's youth and inexperience serve him poorly.

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<sup>27</sup> Clare, *The Path of the Argo*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> Simon Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice: Essays on Poetics and Greek Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 317.



Even after Heracles physically leaves the Argonauts at the end of Book 1, his presence and influence persist. And despite Heracles' collapse over Hylas, the Argonauts, by expressing frequent and open regret for his loss, continue to treat him as their model. Apollonius directs the Argonauts on a path that traces Heracles' far-flung travels and Labors; even in these mysterious lands, Heracles precedes them.<sup>29</sup> Apollonius thus shifts his use of Heracles from a direct comparison with Jason to a didactic example of the demands of heroism.

After the Argonauts leave Heracles behind, their relationship with the hero is dominated by regret. In their despair over abandoning him, the Argonauts reaffirm his significance to their confidence. Without Heracles, the Argonauts soon run into trouble with the natives. But Polydeuces defeats the arrogant king Amycus in a boxing match, and the Argonauts go on to defeat the Bebrycians easily. Even though the Argonauts are victorious, they nevertheless long for Heracles, and speak of him wistfully in the midst of victory. An unnamed Argonaut imagines a contrafactual scenario,

Φράζεσθ' ὅττι κεν ἦσιν ἀναλκείησιν ἔρεξαν,  
εἴ πως Ἡρακλῆα θεὸς καὶ δεῦρο κόμισσεν.  
ἦτοι μὲν γὰρ ἐγὼ κείνου παρεόντος ἔολπα  
οὐδ' ἂν πυγμαχίη κρινθήμεναι· ἀλλ' ὅτε θεσμούς  
ἦλυθεν ἔξερέων, αὐτοῖς ἄφαρ οἷς ἀγόρευεν  
θεσμοῖσιν ῥοπάλω μιν ἀγνοορίης λελαθέσθαι.  
ναὶ μὲν ἀκήδεστον γαίῃ ἐνὶ τόνγε λιπόντες  
πόντον ἐπέπλωμεν, μάλα δ' ἡμέων αὐτὸς ἕκαστος  
εἴσεται οὐλομένην ἄτην ἀπάνευθεν ἐόντος. (2.145-153)

"Consider what they would have done in their cowardice, if somehow a god conveyed Heracles even here. For indeed, I expect that, had he been present, there would have been no boxing contest. But when [Amycus] came to proclaim his customs, with his club he immediately would have made him forget his arrogance along with those customs he proclaimed. Yes, carelessly we left him on land when we sailed the sea, and too well

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<sup>29</sup> Feeney, "Following after Hercules, in Virgil and Apollonius," thoroughly explores this theme.

each one of us will know destructive ruin, since he is far away."

To this Argonaut, Heracles represents both strength (through his club) and justice (in his defeat of wrongful θεσμοί). The Argonauts prove themselves perfectly capable of disposing of Amycus and the Bebrycians, but they cannot replace the comfort that Heracles' presence provides. Perhaps it is also a sense of guilt that prompts this expression of regret; heroes on an epic journey ought not to act "carelessly" (ἀκήδεστον). Glaucus' prophecy (1.1315-25) reveals to the Argonauts that Zeus has other plans for Heracles, but it clearly does not assuage their fears for their own safety. Thus, it is of little comfort when the narrator interjects the reassurance, "but all these things had been accomplished by the plans of Zeus" (τὰ δὲ πάντα Διὸς βουλῆσι τέτυκτο, 2.154). For while Heracles may be on his way to apotheosis, the success of the Argonauts remains very much in jeopardy.

The Argonauts later discover that they have subdued the Bebrycians in direct imitation of Heracles, for which King Lycus welcomes them in gratitude. But when Lycus discovers that they have lost Heracles, he joins them in loud regret,

ἽΩ φίλοι, οἴου φωτὸς ἀποπλαγχθέντες ἀρωγῆς  
πείρετ' ἐς Αἰήτην τόσσον πλόον. εὖ γὰρ ἐγὼ μιν (775)  
Δασκύλου ἐν μεγάροισι καταυτόθι πατρὸς ἐμεῖο  
οἶδ' ἐσιδὼν, ὅτε δεῦρο δι' Ἀσίδος ἠπειροῖο  
πεζὸς ἔβη, ζωστήρα φιλοπτολέμοιο κομίζων  
Ἴππολύτης ἐμὲ δ' εὗρε νέον χνοάοντα παρειάς.  
ἔνθα δ' ἐπὶ Πριόλαο κασιγνήτοιο θανόντος (780)  
ἡμετέρου Μυσοῖσιν ὑπ' ἀνδράσιν, ὄντινα λαός  
οἰκτίστοις ἐλέγοισιν ὀδύρεται ἐξέτι κείνου,  
ἀθλεύων, Τιτίην ἀπεκαίνυτο πυγμαχέοντα  
καρτερόν, ὃς πάντεσσι μετέπρεπεν ἠιθέοισιν  
εἶδος τ' ἠδὲ βίην, χαμάδις δέ οἱ ἤλασ' ὀδόντας. (785)  
αὐτὰρ ὁμοῦ Μυσοῖσιν ἐμῶ ὑπὸ πατρὶ δάμασσαν  
Μύγδονας... (2.774-786)

"Friends, what a man, whose help you lost while attempting so great a voyage to

Aetes! For well I know him, since I saw him right here in the halls of my father Dascylus, when he came here by foot through the Asian mainland, carrying off the girdle of war-loving Hippolyte. He found me recently bearded. But when our brother Priolas was killed by Mysians, whom the people still mourn with most pitiful laments, Heracles competed and defeated in boxing strong Titias, who outshone all the youths in appearance and strength, and dashed his teeth to the ground. Then, with the Mysians, he tamed the Mygdones under my father's rule, who inhabit the lands adjoining ours..."

Lycus establishes the traits that a proper wandering hero evinces, and Heracles emerges as the model of a traditional hero. First, Heracles is engaged in a larger quest, here, seeking the girdle of Hippolyte. He is an excellent athlete and participates in the local games of his hosts (following in the tradition of Odysseus); in defeating the local champion, Heracles proves himself a world-class athlete. Heracles is not just a loafing guest, however. While in the region, he conquers the enemies of his friends; he applies his strength to elevating just and "civilized" people over their presumably unjust enemies. When the Argonauts subdue the Bebrycians, they are extending the work that Heracles began. Lycus' lament proves prescient, for when the Argonauts confront battle-ready Aetes, they do indeed prove inadequate. The narrative explicitly states their need for Heracles: "not one of the heroes could have withstood [Aetes' spear], since they left Heracles far behind, who alone could have faced it in the fight" (...τὸ μὲν οὐδέ τις ἄλλος ὑπέστη / ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων, ὅτε κάλλιπον Ἑρακλῆα / τῆλε παρέξ, ὃ κεν οἶος ἐναντίβιον πτολέμιξεν, 3.1232-4). In the laments of Lycus and the Argonauts is a foreshadowing of Jason's capitulation to his weakness: lacking in heroic valor, he turns to erotic manipulation as his means to victory.

After they leave Lycus, the Argonauts lose two members of their crew, Idmon to a wild boar, and Tiphys to illness. The Argonauts do not handle these setbacks with much composure. In fact, their mourning threatens the completion of their mission. Upon Idmon's death, "they

then ceased to care about the voyage, and remained in distress about the funeral for the corpse. For three whole days they grieved," ("Ἐνθα δὲ ναυτιλίας μὲν ἐρητύοντο μέλεσθαι, / ἀμφὶ δὲ κηδείῃ νέκυος μένον ἀσχαλόωντες, / ἤματα δὲ τρία πάντα γόων, 2.835-7). Idmon had prophesied his own death at the initiation of the voyage (1.440-447), but the manner of his death nevertheless caught his comrades by surprise. They manage to bury him and celebrate his life with games and offerings.

The Argonauts had hardly buried Idmon before they must deal with the death of their helmsman, Tiphys. Their despair over Tiphys' death runs even deeper:

ἄτλητον δ' ὄλοῦ ἐπὶ πήματι κῆδος ἔλοντο·  
δὴν ἄρ', ἐπεὶ καὶ τόνδε παρασχεδὸν ἐκτερέϊξαν  
αὐτοῦ ἀμηχανίῃσιν ἄλός προπάροιθε πεσόντες,  
ἐντυπὰς εὐκῆλως εἰλυμένοι οὔτε τι σίτου  
μνώνοντ' οὔτε ποτοῖο· κατήμυσαν δ' ἀχέεσσι  
θυμόν, ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλὸν ἀπ' ἐλπίδος ἔπλετο νόστος. (2.858-863)

Unbearable anxiety over this destructive calamity they suffered. Then for a long time, after they buried also this man nearby, they fell in helplessness by the sea, wrapped tightly, silent, unaware of food or drink: their hearts drooped with cares, since their homecoming was turning out very far from expectation.

Without their helmsman, the Argonauts appear to give themselves over wholly to depression, and it is only the interference of Hera that gets them moving again. Here the whole crew mirrors Jason's personal weakness of ἀμηχανία; when a misfortune befalls their quest, they do not cope, improvise, regroup. Yet eventually Ancaeus and Peleus stir the Argonauts to action again, and despite Jason's reluctance, the expedition continues. And the narrative quickly provides a lesson from Heracles, in his battle with the Amazons, that demonstrates that heroism can still thrive, despite the loss of comrades.

In direct juxtaposition with the deaths of Idmon and Tiphys, two incidents concerning

Heracles' Labor with the Amazons occur, in which Heracles loses his comrades, one to death, and three to abandonment. Both the narrator's knowledge and the events of the poem provide reassurance to the Argonauts that their expedition can survive their losses. As the Argonauts sail,

Ἔνθεν δὲ Σθενέλου τάφον ἔδρακον Ἀκτορίδαο,  
ὅς ῥά τ' Ἀμαζονίδων πολυθαρσέος ἐκ πολέμοιο  
ἄψ ἀνίων (δὴ γὰρ συνανήλυθεν Ἡρακλῆϊ)  
βλήμενος ἰῶ κείθεν, ἐπ' ἀγχιάλου θάνεν ἀκτῆς. (2.911-14)

then they saw the tomb of Sthenelus, son of Actor, who, while returning from the valiant war against the Amazons (for, in fact, he accompanied Heracles), struck by an arrow there, died on the shore by the sea.

Sthenelus' shade in full battle regalia emerges from Hades to observe the Argonauts sail past, an extraordinary apparition, for the slain hero longs to look upon "men of similar character" (ὁμήθεας ἄνδρας, 2.917). Even if the Argonauts do not have access to this knowledge about the landmarks they pass, their encounter with living Greeks provides the same message. For just two days later, the Argonauts approach the Halys river, where they discover three Greek men, the sons of Deimachus, who "were living there, ever since straying away from Heracles" (τῆμος ἔθ' Ἡρακλῆος ἀποπλαγχθέντες ἔναιον, 2.957). These companions of Heracles illustrate another casualty of heroic expeditions: the ones who wander away and are left behind.<sup>30</sup> They eagerly join with the Argonauts, for "they did not wish to remain in that place any longer" (οὐδ' ἔτι μιμνάζειν θέλον ἔμπεδον, 2.960).

By placing these episodes directly after the deaths of Idmon and Typhus, the narrative seeks to console Jason and the Argonauts with the example of Heracles' exploits. The Argonauts, who were wretched at the demise of their comrades, must learn that loss is part of

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<sup>30</sup> See Vian, *Argonautiques*, vol. 1, p. 280–1, for the mythological background of the sons of Deimachus.

the nature of heroic endeavors. For the lives of Sthenelus and the sons of Deimachus show the cost of heroic endeavors: sometimes comrades do not make it home. But an untimely death does not rob a man of his heroic status: even as a shade, Sthenelus appears as a warrior, "just as he went into the fight" (οἴος πόλεμονδ' ἔεν, 2.919), crowned with an impressive helmet. In addition, the sons of Deimachus, though separated from Heracles, nevertheless find their own way back to heroic status -- by joining the Argonauts' quest. The discovery of the lost sons of Deimachus surely calls to mind another hero lost from a quest, Heracles himself.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Argonauts were devastated -- and rightly so -- when they abandoned Heracles, which led to a fierce quarrel (1.1282-1309). The difference between Heracles and the sons of Deimachus, however, is that Heracles independently reestablishes his heroism by continuing his Labors, where the sons of Deimachus merely hitch a ride with another group.

Heracles goes on to reveal to the Argonauts in a concrete way the importance of sharp, strategic thinking. This example demonstrates his balance between the use of strength and the use of wits. The Argonauts, directed by the prophecies of Phineus, draw close to the island of Ares, but are repelled by the sharp feathers of the local birds. Amphidamas has a suggestion for the stymied group, and refers to his previous experiences with Heracles:

οὐδὲ γὰρ Ἡρακλῆης, ὁπότε ἦλυθεν Ἀρκαδίηνδε,  
 πλωάδας ὄρνιθας Στυμφαλίδος ἔσθενε λίμνης  
 ὤσασθαι τόξοισι (τὸ μὲν τ' ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ὄπωπα)  
 ἀλλ' ὄγε χαλκείην πλαταγὴν ἐνὶ χερσὶ τινάσσων  
 δούπει ἐπὶ σκοπιῆς περιμήκεος, αἱ δ' ἐφέβοντο  
 τηλοῦ ἀτυζηλῶ ὑπὸ δείματι κεκληγυῖαι.  
 τῷ καὶ νῦν τοίην τιν' ἐπιφραζώμεθα μῆτιν... (2.1052-58)

"For not even Heracles, when he came to Arcadia, was capable of driving off the birds floating on the Stymphalian lake with his bow (I myself saw it): but he, shaking a bronze

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31 Clare views the Argonauts' rescue of the trio as "expiation of their previous misdemeanor" (Clare, *The path of the Argo*, 101-2).

rattle in his hand, made a racket on a high rock, and they fled far off, screaming in frightful terror. Therefore, let us now also consider some such strategy..."

In his Labor of the Stymphalian Birds, Heracles recognizes the limits of his force. Even he, with his unparalleled archery, could not defeat the noxious birds. Heracles instead hatches a clever plan to rid the lake of the birds: frighten them away. The Argonauts overtly model their own strategy on Heracles', and through the principle of μῆτις, successfully land on the island of Ares and meet the sons of Phrixus, an encounter crucial for their ultimate goal.

Books 1 and 2 of the *Argonautica* thus present a remarkably positive version of Heraclean heroism. Heracles projects valuable leadership skills, which he puts to use in support of Jason; his skills in battle protect the Argonauts when they are under attack; and his lengthy heroic résumé provides guidance for the Argonauts when they are lost without him. Because Apollonius paints such a glowing picture of Heracles, his heroic failure over Hylas and exclusion from the rest of the Argonautic expedition are all the more stunning.<sup>32</sup> Apollonius amplifies Heracles' fall in order to communicate the importance of the lesson his disaster imparts: that erotic attachment cannot serve the purposes of genuine heroism.

### The Danger of Erotic Attachment

Although Jason proves unheroic and weak in comparison to Heracles, he nevertheless demonstrates potential in another arena: love. But Apollonius does not treat love, desire, and

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<sup>32</sup> Contra Pietsch, *Die Argonautika des Apollonios von Rhodos*, 133–7, which argues that Heracles occupies a middle ground in the tradition by being present but not dominating Jason. Where Pietsch sees moderation in Heracles' role, I see dramatic contrasts that call attention to themselves.

their consequences as equal to heroic excellence.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Eros is depicted, with increasing emphasis through the course of the poem, as a dangerous and corrosive force that undermines heroism. It is true that, in the short term, Eros, through Medea, enables Jason to acquire the Golden Fleece and return safely to Hellas. Nevertheless, Jason remains a remarkably passive and unheroic figure throughout, and the well-known afterlife of Jason and Medea's marital relationship casts a consistent pall over their (her?) blossoming romance.

Apollonius gradually reveals the deeply problematic nature of Eros. Book 1 establishes Jason's susceptibility to erotic attachment and Eros' deleterious effect on heroism. Jason's first sexual encounter in the poem occurs on the island of Lemnos. This is not just any romantic interlude, however; Apollonius frames Jason's dalliance with Hypsipyle as a full-blown erotic crisis. There has been much commentary on the richly embroidered cape he wears to meet the queen,<sup>34</sup> but the weapon he equips himself with is equally important: he carries a spear that, significantly, he received from Atalanta.

...ὃ ρ' Ἀταλάντη  
 Μαινάλῳ ἔν ποτέ οἱ ξεινήιον ἐγγυάλιξε,  
 πρόφρων ἄντομένη, πέρι γὰρ μενέαινεν ἔπεσθαι  
 τὴν ὁδόν· ἀλλ', ὅσον αὐτὸς ἐκῶν, ἀπερήτυε κούρην,  
 δεῖσε γὰρ ἀργαλέας ἔριδας φιλότῆτος ἔκητι. (1.769-773)

...Atalanta put it in his right hand on Mainalus as a guest-gift, when she earnestly met him. For she longed to follow their journey. But he himself purposely restrained the young woman, and he feared bitter strifes on account of love.

33 Beye goes so far as to call Jason's sexuality his "ἀρετή" (Beye, "Jason as Love-hero in Apollonios' Argonautika," 43). But the whole thrust of the poem points to the disastrous effects of love, and his relations with Medea are duplicitous. Jason's ability to manipulate his attractiveness can hardly be associated with ἀρετή.

34 See, e.g., for Homeric resonances in the cloak, R. L. Hunter, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 52–59. Lawall analyzes each scene as a didactic message from Athena (Lawall, "Apollonius' Argonautica: Jason as Anti-Hero," 154–8). For Shapiro, the embroidered garment represents contemporary Alexandria and its aesthetics (H. A. Shapiro, "Jason's Cloak," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 110 (1980): 263–286). See Anthony Bulloch, "Jason's Cloak," *Hermes* 134, no. 1 (2006): 58, n. 21, for a relatively recent discussion of the bibliography on the subject and an argument that the cloak patterns itself on the Homeric Catalogue of Women.



In refusing the aid and ambition of Atalanta, Jason reveals an awareness of the difficulties that sexual attraction can introduce in a group of heroes. As a leader concerned with keeping the peace (νείκεα...βάλεσθαι, 1.340), and perhaps because he himself feels attracted to Atalanta, Jason is particularly sensitive to the potential for disharmony, jealousy, and competition among men who must cooperate in order to be successful. By barring Atalanta from joining the Argonauts, Jason avoids a potential erotic crisis.

Though Jason realizes that φιλότης can prove a distraction for his crew, he nevertheless cannot avoid its pull on himself. Hypsipyle's warm welcome to her bed distorts Jason's priorities. The young man who was eager to lead a famous group of heroes on a dangerous but glorious quest suddenly seems none too impatient to leave the comfort of Lemnos and the easy availability of sexual satisfaction. The failure of the leader is reflected in the collective distraction of the Argonauts, as they disperse from the group into the homes of individual Lemnian women. The Argonauts do not realize, or care to realize, that they are pawns in a greater plan, masterminded by the Lemnian women and the gods, to repopulate the island.<sup>35</sup> For the goddess Aphrodite "aroused sweet desire as a favor to clever Hephaestus, in order that pure Lemnos may again be inhabited thereafter with men" (Κύπρις γὰρ ἐπὶ γλυκὺν ἕμερον ὤρσεν, / Ἥφαιστοιο χάριν πολυμήτιος, ὄφρα κεν αὖτις / ναίηται μετόπισθεν ἀκήρατος ἀνδράσι Λῆμνος, 1.850-2). The trusting Argonauts are fortunate that Aphrodite's intentions are not more sinister, and this episode is the narrative's first indication that Aphrodite's interventions induce crises in the heroic quest.

Jason may encounter Hypsipyle as "a sexual hero," but the narrative quickly deflates his

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<sup>35</sup> DeForest notes that "the episode reverses the stereotypical male victory over a woman in bed" (DeForest, *Apollonius' Argonautica*, 56).

success.<sup>36</sup> Jason is not criticized for becoming sexually involved with a woman during the journey – many Greek heroes, including Heracles, leave behind sons with native women during their quests. The problem is that Jason allows Eros to distract him from his true purpose, the acquisition of the Golden Fleece, less than a week after the departure from Pagasae.<sup>37</sup> With Hypsipyle's offer of the throne to Jason, the narrative opens up an alternative ending, one which obviates the need for a heroic quest. The kingdom-less Jason would acquire a royal bride and a rich kingdom. This is more than just sex: this is erotic attachment.

In an unexpected twist, the rebuke to Jason's lingering comes from Heracles, perhaps the hero least-known for sexual continence.<sup>38</sup> Heracles had not joined the Argonauts in their lovemaking, of his own accord (αὐτὸς ἐκῶν), but had remained with the ship and a few chosen companions (διακριθέντες ἐταῖροι, 1.856).<sup>39</sup> In his rebuke, Heracles demonstrates that "to give in to the women's desires for male domestic companionship would be to betray the male role and to forsake the quest."<sup>40</sup> Heracles' intervention identifies the proper priorities of a hero, and thereby sets the narrative back on its proper track:

Ἄμβολιή δ' εἰς ἡμᾶρ ἀεὶ ἐξ ἡματός ἦεν  
ναυτιλίας. δηρὸν δ' ἂν ἐλίνυον αὐθι μένοντες,  
εἰ μὴ ἀολλίσσας ἐτάρους ἀπάνευθε γυναικῶν  
Ἡρακλῆς τοίοισιν ἐνιπτάζων μετέειπεν·

36 Beye, "Jason as Love-hero in Apollonios' Argonautika," 44.

37 See Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts*, 129–137, for Apollonius' references to Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa – the women who would deflect Odysseus from his return to Ithaca – in the Lemnian sojourn. More recently, Anthony Bulloch, "Jason's Cloak," *Hermes* 134, no. 1 (2006): 44–68, explores the resonances with Nausicaa in depth.

38 Feeney comments on Heracles in the Lemnian episode, "the remarkable thing about the picture of Heracles in the first book is Apollonius' fixed concentration on the Heracles of the philosophers, the exponent of φρόνησις and σωφροσύνη" (Ibid., 54).

39 In his denial of bodily pleasure, Vian sees the Heracles idealized by the philosophers, especially by Prodicus (Vian and Delage, *Argonautiques*, 259). Fränkel notes the contrast between Apollonius' Stoic Heracles and the traditional savage (Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios*, 115). See further Anthos Ardizzoni, *L'Eracle "semnós" nel poema di Apollonio* (Catania: Studio Editoriale Moderno, 1937) on temperant, austere, and wise Heracles; Goldhill, *The poet's voice*, 314–5.

40 Edward V. George, "Poet and Characters in Apollonius Rhodius' Lemnian Episode," *Hermes* 100, no. 1 (1972): 60.

“Δαιμόνιοι, πάτρης ἐμφύλιον αἶμ’ ἀποέργει (865)  
 ἡμέας, ἧε γάμων ἐπιδευέες ἐνθάδ’ ἔβημεν  
 κείθεν, ὄνοσσάμενοι πολιήτιδας, αὐθι δ’ ἔαδεν  
 ναίοντας λιπαρὴν ἄροσιν Λήμνοιο ταμέσθαι;  
 οὐ μάλ’ ἐυκλειεῖς γε σὺν ὀθνεῖησι γυναιξίν  
 ἐσόμεθ’ ὧδ’ ἐπὶ δηρὸν ἐελμένοι, οὐδὲ τὸ κῶας (870)  
 αὐτόματον δώσει τις ἐλεῖν θεὸς εὐξαμένοισιν.  
 ἴομεν αὐτίς ἕκαστοι ἐπὶ σφεά· τὸν δ’ ἐνὶ λέκτροις  
 Ὑψιπύλης εἰᾶτε πανήμερον, εἰσόκε Λῆμνον  
 παισὶν ἐπανδρώση, μεγάλη τέ ἐ βάζις ἔχησιν. (1.861-74)

From day to day, there was a delay of the voyage, and they would have remained and idled there for a long time, had Heracles not gathered his comrades away from the women and reproached them, saying, "Strange men, does spilled kindred blood keep us away from our country? Or did we come here from there in need of marriages, scorning our native women? Does it please us to inhabit and till the rich land of Lemnos? Not indeed will we become famous, shut in with foreign women for a long time, nor will some god seize the fleece of its own will and give it to us in answer to our prayers. Let us each go about our own affairs. And let that man spend all day in Hypsipyle's bed, until he fills Lemnos with his boys, and a great reputation comes to him!"

Heracles chafes at the delay in the expedition; perhaps because he has put off his own Labors to join Jason, he feels a sense of urgency that young Jason lacks.<sup>41</sup> He identifies legitimate reasons for settling down in Lemnos – permanent exile, or a lack of suitable women and land at home – none of which apply to the Argonauts. Instead, Heracles turns to the imperatives of heroism that should inspire their departure: the acquisition of glory, the prize of the Fleece, and reputation.<sup>42</sup> He emphasizes the need for active effort; to obtain the Fleece, they have to go *and get it*. Heracles' experience of toil through his Labors, emphasized in his introduction in the Catalogue, shines through here, providing confirmation of the Argonauts' initial choice of him

41 Adamietz draws attention to the imbalance of power between the righteous Heracles and the chastened Jason in this scene; in Valerius Flaccus' version, by contrast, Jason and Heracles are more like friends. In particular, Apollonius' Heracles emphasizes the importance of glory to the heroic effort: Joachim Adamietz, "Jason und Hercules in den Epen des Apollonios Rhodios und Valerius Flaccus," *Antike und Abendland* 16, no. 1 (1970): 32.

42 Vian (*Argonautiques*, 91, n. 2) and Clauss (*The Best of the Argonauts*, 136–140) note the allusions to Thersites' accusations of Agamemnon. But the narrative proves the difference between Heracles and Thersites: Thersites immediately receives punishment at the end of Odysseus' staff, where a thoroughly chastened crew acts in obedience to Heracles' rebuke.

as their leader.

Heracles' speech is effective: without a word of rebuttal, the crew shamefacedly prepare to depart immediately (1.875-78). Their immediate compliance demonstrates the accuracy of Heracles' words. With the others stirred to depart, Jason bids goodbye to Hypsipyle and "boarded the ship first" (καὶ ἔβαιν' ἐπὶ νῆα παροίτατος, 1.910). Jason, through the stern reprimand of Heracles, avoids a permanent liaison with Hypsipyle and returns to the pursuit of his heroic quest. Though the episode ends with no harm done on either side, an essential aspect of Jason's character has been revealed: he is susceptible to erotic attachment, and this attachment interferes with his growth as a hero.<sup>43</sup>

Apollonius' Heracles is in control of his sexual urges, and he demonstrates this discipline once more in Book 2. Far from being a brute, Heracles demonstrates restraint and foresight in his Labor of Hippolyte's Girdle. During their outbound journey, the Argonauts

γνάμψαν Ἀμαζονίδων ἕκαθεν λιμενήοχον ἄκρην,  
ἔνθα ποτὲ προμολοῦσαν Ἀρητιάδα Μελανίπην  
ἦρωσ Ἡρακλῆς ἐλοχίσατο, καὶ οἱ ἄποινα  
Ἴππολύτη ζωστήρα παναίολον ἐγγυάλιζεν  
ἀμφὶ κασιγνήτης, ὃ δ' ἀπήμονα πέμψεν ὀπίσσω. (2.963-969)

...rounded from afar the harbor-enclosing headland of the Amazons, where once the hero Heracles ambushed Melanippe, daughter of Ares, as she went forth, and as a ransom, Hippolyte gave to him her colorful girdle for her sister, and he sent her back, unharmed.

The narrator points out how, in his battle for Hippolyte's girdle, Heracles shows himself to be the same hero who challenged Jason on Lemnos. The girdle is an intimate garment, and in order to procure it, one might imagine Heracles resorting to sexual violence (especially if one were the sort to accuse Heracles of being an insensate brute). The threat of sexual violence is

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43 For Hypsipyle and Ariadne as a foreshadowing of Medea, see Simon Goldhill, *The poet's voice: essays on poetics and Greek literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 301-309.

averted here, though. Heracles instead relies on strategy: he ambushes Hippolyte's sister, calculating that their close kinship would render Hippolyte amenable to his demands. He is correct, of course. More importantly, he proves true to his word. Melanippe returns to her sister unharmed; Heracles has refrained from asserting his physical power over her, and her sister. The account of this Labor continues the depiction of a temperate Heracles.

Heracles' restraint is not absolute, however, as the Hylas episode reveals. In the lead up to this decisive episode, Heracles demonstrates his overwhelming strength. Because the winds are calm, the Argonauts engage in a rowing competition: "Then rivalry roused each man of the heroes, to see who would give up last" ("Ἐνθ' ἔρις ἄνδρα ἕκαστον ἀριστήων ὀρόθουνεν, / ὅστις ἀπολλήξειε πανύστατος, 1.1153-4). Unsurprisingly, Heracles outlasts them all, and with his own strength, propels the entire boat; the hero most concerned with contests conquers in this *eris*. The narrator's emphasis is on the over-sized nature of Heracles' abilities: "then, Heracles swiftly drew along by the force of his hands the exhausted crew, and the joined timbers of the ship shook" (αὐτὰρ ὁ τούσγε / πασσυδίη μογέοντας ἐφέλκετο κάρτεϊ χειρῶν / Ἡρακλῆς, ἐτίνασσε δ' ἀρηρότα δούρατα νηός, 1.1161-3). Heracles encompasses in one man the capabilities of scores of "ordinary" heroes. And his central location on the boat reflects his centrality to the poem thus far: just as he alone propels the Argo, he has also been a driving force of the epic's plot.

However, as this entire study has shown, Heracles struggles with containing his strength. Where, in other texts, Heracles' excessive ability finds an outlet in overweening violence, in Apollonius, it is played for a joke. Heracles' vigorous rowing is too much even for his oar, which gives up its ghost,

δὴ τότε, ἀνοχλίζων τετρηχότος οἴδατος ὀλκούς,  
μεσσοθεν ἄξεν ἔρετμόν· ἀτὰρ τρύφος ἄλλο μὲν αὐτός  
ἄμφω χερσὶν ἔχων πέσε δόχμιος, ἄλλο δὲ πόντος  
κλύζε παλιρροθίοισι φέρων. ἀνὰ δ' ἔζετο σιγῇ  
παπταίνων, χεῖρες γὰρ ἀήθεσον ἠρεμέουσαι. (1.1167-71)

then in fact, while heaving up furrows out of a rough wave,<sup>44</sup> he broke his oar from the middle: but he, holding one fragment in both hands, fell sideways, while the sea, bearing the other on its receding waves, washed it away. In silence, Heracles looked around and sat up, for his hands were unaccustomed to rest.

That Heracles' strength overcomes even his own tools makes him a dangerous man. But Apollonius turns an episode that could demonstrate the dangerous side of heroic violence into a comic situation. This Heracles, tossed on his side by his own momentum, then confused by his idleness, is quieted, not enraged, by the failure of his oar. Previous scholars have seen the breaking of the oar as a symbol that Heracles does not belong with the expedition: he is too hulking, too uncivilized, too much.<sup>45</sup> But I argue that the episode actually demonstrates a significant domestication of Heracles. His strength may be super-sized, but his temper is not; he remains Heracles, but deliberately purged of the dark violence that harms the innocent.

Apollonius presents this picture of a reformed Heracles just before Heracles suffers a dramatic heroic failure that leads to his abandonment by Jason and the crew. By repressing the unstable, fearsome aspects of Heracles' strength, Apollonius makes Heracles' breakdown over the loss of his *erōmenos*, Hylas, all the more striking. The fact that Heracles is erotically involved with Hylas is crucial to interpreting this episode and its significance to the poem as whole. For just as Heracles was raised as a role model for Jason in his successes, he is treated as a negative

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44 Some (e.g., DeForest, *Apollonius' Argonautica*, 61) have interpreted the participle τετρηχότος as indicating that the wind has returned, raising rough waves, and that Heracles' efforts are no longer necessary. A simpler explanation may be that the participle is proleptic, and that the vigor of Heracles' rowing *creates* a roughness in the sea.

45 E.g., Green calls Heracles "musclebound and mindless...an embarrassment and an anachronism" (Green, *The Argonautika*, 25:228).

example of warning in his failure. In this way, Heracles and his exit serve as an important early signpost of the problematic nature of Love, a central theme throughout the poem.

The breaking of his oar leads Heracles to seek out materials for a new one on Cius, setting in motion a series of events that culminate in his abandonment. Apollonius' depiction of Heracles emphasizes his traditional heroism. Equipped with his characteristic bow, club, and lion skin, he strategically chooses the most fitting tree for a new oar, one with few branches and the proper ratio of height to width (1.1190-1195). He needs no axe to bring down this pine, but relies solely on his own physical strength:

τὴν δ' ὄγε, χαλκοβαρεῖ ῥοπάλῳ δαπέδοιο τινάξας  
νειόθεν, ἀμφοτέρησι περὶ στύπος ἔλλαβε χερσίν  
ἠνορέη πίσυνος, ἐν δὲ πλατὺν ὦμον ἔρεισεν  
εὖ διαβάς· πεδόθεν δὲ βαθύρριζόν περ ἐοῦσαν  
προσφῶς ἐξήειρε σὺν αὐτοῖς ἔχμασι γαίης. (1.1196-1200)

he, after loosening [the pine] from the ground with his heavily bronzed club, grasped the trunk at its base with both hands, trusting in his manly strength. Taking a wide stance, he leaned his broad shoulder against it. And although it was deep-rooted in the ground, Heracles clung to and lifted it out with the very clods of earth still on.

The description of Heracles' ability to singlehandedly uproot a mature tree is remarkably simple. Heracles braces himself properly (one imagines the stance of an Olympic weight-lifter) and relies on "his manly strength," as localized in his hands, shoulder, and feet. He accomplishes a feat that requires the force of nature, as seen in the subsequent simile (1.1201-4). He may have broken his oar, but he goes about replacing it with a quiet competence paired with dominating force, his extraordinary ἠνορέη.

While Heracles is fetching his tree, Hylas leaves the safety of the group of Argonauts to search for water, as usual. Raised up and trained by Heracles from infancy, Hylas plays well the part of the helpful and responsible squire (1.1209-11). The narrator explains in a digression

how Hylas came into Heracles' company, conflating two separate incidents recounted in Callimachus' *Aetia*.<sup>46</sup> In one, Heracles seizes and gobbles the ox of a Lindian peasant; in another, Heracles defeats Theiodamas and the Dryopians, when Theiodamas unjustly refuses food to Heracles' starving son, Hyllus, and takes Hylas away with him.<sup>47</sup>

Apollonius' version provides a mixed picture of Heracles' motives. On the one hand, Heracles "slew pitilessly" (ἔπεφνεν / νηλειῶς, 1.1213-4) Theiodamas, who is called δῖος (1.1213); there is no mention of Theiodamas' refusal of a child in need to justify Heracles' violent act. Moreover, Heracles appears to be the aggressor: "he commanded him to hand over a plow ox against his will" (ὁ τόν γε / βοῦν ἀρότην ἦνωγε παρασχέμεν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα, 1.1216-7). But Heracles' actions were not entirely unwarranted: "for he desired to create a baneful reason for war against the Dryopians, because they lived entirely heedless of justice" (ἴετο γὰρ πρόφασιν πολέμου Δρυόπεσσι βαλέσθαι / λευγαλήν, ἐπεὶ οὔ τι δίκης ἀλέγοντες ἔναιον, 1.1218-9). So difficult is the contrast that Fränkel posits a lacuna after οὐκ ἐθέλοντα (1217), in which some explanation for Heracles' attack must be provided.<sup>48</sup>

Heracles' murder of Theiodamas is troubling, especially in a context in which Heracles is a positive representative of heroism. But Green goes too far when he claims that Apollonius here puts Heracles in "the worst possible light" so that his exit will "not...appear an unmitigated disaster."<sup>49</sup> For Heracles' actions to impose order on unjust peoples is part of his role as civilizer and "upholder of δίκη against barbarism," later wholly positively appraised at 2.786-795.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, Heracles performs a service that is recognizably good. Though he

46 For a discussion of the influences reflected in this account of the Hylas story, see Vian, *Argonautiques*, vols. 1, 38-49.

47 Callimachus, fr. 22-23, and 24-25 (Pfeiffer).

48 Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios*, 144-5; this suggestion is not accepted by Vian et al.

49 Green, *The Argonautika*, 229.

50 Feeney, "Following After Hercules, in Virgil and Apollonius," 56.



accomplishes a heroic deed against the Dryopians, he does so by means of unfortunate violence. This violence claims innocent victims, here, *dios* Theiodamas. In illuminating the fact that heroic action may entail collateral damage, this episode foreshadows Heracles' appearance in Book 4, in the Garden of the Hesperides. As was discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Apollonius depicts how Heracles' seizure of the Apples of the Hesperides – glorious, associated with apotheosis – can nevertheless be considered destructive and grievous by others.

The narrator's strange and obscure explanation may serve another purpose: to question whether the ends of heroism justify its means. Heracles provides a social benefit in punishing the Dryopians, but his methods are suspect here. As Apollonius points his narrative to the moment when Heracles is ejected from the expedition, he also begins to show Jason how Heracles can serve as a negative example. For Jason's heroism falls into the trap of expediency, and the poem will show how his ends (claiming the Golden Fleece) do not, in fact, justify his means (manipulation of Medea's love).

As Hylas approaches the spring and its gathering of nymphs, the narrative adopts a romantic tone. The focus shifts from war and necessity - concerns of men - to beauty and atmosphere, concerns of the erotic realm. Here Apollonius applies a "painterly style" to render his descriptions "like tableaux vivants."<sup>51</sup> The description of Hylas, as focalized through the perspective of a water nymph, reveals his sexual allure and erotic potential:<sup>52</sup>

...τὸν δὲ σχεδὸν εἰσενόησεν  
κάλλει καὶ γλυκερῆσιν ἔρευθόμενον χαρίτεσσι,  
πρὸς γὰρ οἱ διχόμενις ἀπ' αἰθέρος ἀγάζουσα  
βάλλε σεληναίῃ τῆς δὲ φρένας ἔπτοίησεν

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51 Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, 30.

52 Hylas appeals to both sexes. I agree with Zanker, "It is pointless to differentiate between paederastic and heterosexual love here...Love is seen to have the same effect whatever the form it takes" (G. Zanker, "The love theme in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*," *Wiener Studien* 13 (1979): 56, n. 12).

Κύπρις, ἀμηχανίη δὲ μόλις συναγείρατο θυμόν. (1.1228-33)

And [the nymph] perceived him nearby, blushing with beauty and sweet charms, for on him the full moon cast its light, shining from the sky. And Cypris excited her senses, and she could scarcely gather her thoughts in helplessness.

Although the sexual relationship between Heracles and Hylas is never made explicit in the *Argonautica*, as it is in Theocritus (ἦρατο παιδός, *Id.* 13.6), this emphasis on Hylas' as a sexual object is surely indicative of Heracles' interest in him as well.<sup>53</sup> Aphrodite, that herald of bad things to come, influences the nymph in a distinctly negative way: the nymph loses both her rational faculties (φρένας) and her physical awareness (θυμόν), leaving her "helpless" (ἀμηχανίη), the same state for which Jason is so frequently criticized.

Despite her disarrayed mental state, this nymph still acts: she abducts Hylas, by catching him off guard while dipping his pitcher:

αὐτὰρ ὄγ' ὡς τὰ πρῶτα ῥόω ἔνι κάλπιν ἔρεισε  
λέχρις ἐπιχριμφθείς, περὶ δ' ἄσπετον ἔβραχεν ὕδωρ  
χαλκὸν ἐς ἠχήεντα φορεύμενον, αὐτίκα δ' ἤγε  
λαιὸν μὲν καθύπερθεν ἐπ' αὐχένος ἄνθετο πῆχυν,  
κύσσαι ἐπιθύουσα τέρεν στόμα, δεξιτερῇ δὲ  
ἀγκῶν' ἔσπασε χειρὶ μέση δ' ἐνὶ κάββαλε δίνη. (1.1234-9)

Just as he leaned sideways and dipped the pitcher in the stream, and the abundant water clanged as it was borne into the ringing bronze, immediately she wrapped her left arm from below over his neck, eager to kiss his soft mouth, while with her right hand she drew his elbow and plunged him into the middle of the swirl.

Her grip on the boy is evocative of an erotic wrestling match; the terms of the match are uneven, however, and Hylas is easily conquered. Contrary to the customary progression of romance, here the woman falls in love under Aphrodite's influence, aggressively assaults the

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53 F. McGready, "Heracles' Love for Hylas," *Corolla Londiniensis* 3 (1983): 79-80, supports H. White, *Studies in Theocritus and Other Hellenistic Poets* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1979), 63ff., in refuting Gow's assertion that Apollonius blunders by omitting "any tender relation between Heracles and Hylas" (Andrew S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 231-2.

unwary object of her affection, and pulls him into her world, never to be seen or heard from again.<sup>54</sup>

If this anonymous nymph has defeated Hylas in the arena of love, she has also defeated Heracles even more soundly. For his duty as *erastēs* is to raise his *erōmenos* into proper aristocratic manhood; part of this, naturally, is physical protection from outside threats, but more importantly, the lover typically jealously guards his beloved's sexual favors for himself. Heracles is so distant from his beloved at the point of his abduction that he does not even hear his cry. It is Polyphemus who perceives Hylas' cry for help. Fearing wild animals or hostile attackers, Polyphemus searches for him,

...ἤύτε τις θήρ  
ἄγριος, ὃν ῥά τε γῆρυς ἀπόπροθεν ἴκετο μῆλων,  
λιμῶ δ' αἰθόμενος μετανίσσεται, οὐδ' ἐπέκυρσε  
ποίμνησιν, πρὸ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἐνὶ σταθμοῖσι νομῆες  
ἔλσαν· ὁ δὲ στενάχων βρέμει ἄσπετον, ὄφρα κάμησιν. (1.1243-7)

like some wild animal, which from afar hears the voice of flocks, and pursues it, burning with hunger, but it does not reach the flocks, for the shepherds have shut them in pens. And he, groaning, roars unceasingly, until he wearies.

In this strange simile, Polyphemus is the dangerous, threatening beast, and the nymph, the protective and watchful shepherds.<sup>55</sup> Yet the comparison captures well the urgency with which Polyphemus seeks out the lost boy, as if driven by a physical instinct as strong as hunger.

In his search, Polyphemus encounters Heracles and delivers the terrible news. Heracles' response confirms his erotic attachment to Hylas:

τῶ δ' αἰόντι κατὰ κροτάφων ἄλις ἰδρώς  
κήκιεν, ἂν δὲ κελαϊνὸν ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοις ζέεν αἶμα.

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54 Clauss sees in the nymph-Hylas relationship, a foreshadowing of Medea-Jason (Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts*, 193).

55 In some accounts, Polyphemus himself was the lover of Hylas: Euphorion fr. 76 (Powell), Socrates *FGrHist* 310 F 15.

χώμενος δ' ἐλάτην χαμάδις βάλεν, ἐς δὲ κέλευθον  
 τὴν θέεν ἧ πόδες αὐτοὶ ὑπέκφερον αἴσσοντα.  
 ὥς δ' ὅτε τίς τε μύωπι τετυμμένος ἔσσυτο ταῦρος  
 πίσεά τε προλιπῶν καὶ ἐλεσπίδας, οὐδὲ νομήων  
 οὐδ' ἀγέλης ὄθεται, πρήσσει δ' ὁδὸν ἄλλοτ' ἄπαυστος,  
 ἄλλοτε δ' ἰστάμενος καὶ ἀνά πλατὺν ἀυχέν' ἀείρων  
 ἴησιν μύκημα, κακῶ βεβολημένος οἴστρω—  
 ὧς ὄγε μαιμῶων ὅτε μὲν θοὰ γούνατ' ἔπαλλεν (1270)  
 συνεχέως, ὅτε δ' αὐτε μεταλλήγων καμάτοιο  
 τῆλε διαπρύσιον μεγάλη βοάσκεν αὐτῆ.

When [Heracles] heard it, abundant sweat gushed down his temples, and dark blood boiled in his gut. Angered, he threw the pine tree to the ground and ran down the path on which his feet bore him as he darted forth. Just as when some bull, stung by a gadfly, rushes forth, leaving meadows and marshlands, and takes heed neither of herdsman nor herd, but at one time presses on without stopping, and at another time standing and lifting his thick neck, lets out a roar, stung by a vicious fly - thus did he, maddened, sometimes move his swift knees continuously, and sometimes, ceasing from labor, shout piercingly far off with a great cry.

Heracles' intense physical reaction to the news reflects the emotions of a thwarted, abandoned lover.<sup>56</sup> The loss of his *erōmenos* sparks a full-scale meltdown, one that is characterized by unheroic collapse. The abundance of sweat and blood is roused not by combat, but by outraged jealousy. The pine tree that he had gathered for the productive purpose of fashioning a new oar is now superfluous, only an impediment to the expression of his outrage. Just like Polyphemus, Heracles is compared to an angered animal.<sup>57</sup> But where Polyphemus as wolf at least pursues its prey, Heracles as bull is an unfocused mess. As the bull is heedless of both his own kind and his herdsman, Heracles, the master hunter who tracks the Erymanthian Boar or the Ceryneian Hind through the wilderness, takes no note of his environment.<sup>58</sup> He does not

56 Phinney finds humor in this episode, calling Heracles' reaction "laughable contortions," but no one, including myself, follows him on this point (Edward Phinney, "Narrative Unity in the Argonautica, the Medea-Jason Romance," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967): 327-341).

57 For comments on the symptoms of erotic fury in the bull simile, see Christiane Reitz, *Zur Gleichnisteknik des Apollonios von Rhodos* (P. Lang, 1996), 32ff. Levin misses the mark when he declares that Heracles "displays no proclivities towards eroticism whatsoever" (Levin, "Apollonius' Heracles," 25; see also Beye, *Epic and romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, 47).

58 See William G. Thalmann, *Apollonius of Rhodes and the Spaces of Hellenism* (New York: Oxford University Press,

contrive a strategic plan to search for the lost boy, but races willy-nilly about. The same hero who efficiently and effectively uprooted the pine tree here runs aimlessly, stopping to bellow in fury, which accomplishes nothing concrete. His cry is not a call to Hylas, in hope that Hylas may hear and respond: he is merely emoting.

In this scene, Apollonius gives the audience a picture of the Heracles they fear. His impulses are completely unrestrained; his prodigious strength is not applied to any positive force, but is allowed to find its outlet wherever it chances. But the circumstances of this collapse are highly specific: the victorious hero has been brought low by the loss of his beloved. The ascetic Heracles of the Lemnian episode is shown to be a hypocrite; for, while Heracles can recognize the negative effect of erotic attachment on Jason and the Argonauts, he was ignorant of his own passion for Hylas. Although Heracles has perfected many heroic skills that would be useful for seeking Hylas, his devoted attachment to Hylas renders him helpless, ἀμήχανος. His love has caused Heracles to collapse, "to the dereliction of his vaunted heroism and self-mastery."<sup>59</sup> The power of Eros has made Heracles a failure.

To emphasize the heroic failure of Heracles, Apollonius writes him out of the narrative. In an improbable and implausible turn of events, the Argonauts depart Cius without Heracles, Hylas, and Polyphemus. That the Argonauts could somehow not notice the absence of Heracles is boggling: he is their natural leader (1.341-3); he occupies the central bench of the ship, by appointment, not lot (1.397); under his ponderous weight, the entire Argo sinks (1.531-3). I argue that the abandonment of Heracles is not meant to be realistic. Apollonius has shown how Heracles' love for Hylas has de-heroized him, made him unfit for a heroic expedition.<sup>60</sup> And

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2011), 47–9, for an analysis of the "spatial confusion" of this episode.

59 Zanker, "The Love Theme in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*," 56.

60 My argument provides a more robust explanation for Heracles' presence and exit from the poem. DeForest,

once Heracles is left behind, he is *gone*. No matter how near the regretful Argonauts draw, their separation is permanent.<sup>61</sup> The divorce of Heracles from the quest illustrates in bold, physical terms the danger that erotic attachment poses to heroism. Just as Heracles has served as an example of heroism for Jason to emulate throughout Book 1, in his failure, he serves as a warning, too, for Jason to heed.

The loss of Heracles is only one incident in a series that illustrates Apollonius' overtly negative portrait of Eros. In the short term, Jason's sexual charms paired with the aid of Aphrodite (as prophesied by Phineus at 2.423-44) pave the way for his victory. For he successfully carries off the Golden Fleece, along with the daughter of Aeetes, and returns safely to Iolchus. Yet the means by which he accomplishes his legendary feats are distinctly unheroic: reliance on the magical spells of a besotted young woman. Poor Medea never had a chance; Hera, Aphrodite, and the arrows of Eros all ensure that Medea is compelled to betray her family and partner with an uninspiring, cowardly (yet oh-so-handsome) stranger.<sup>62</sup>

The tone of Apollonius' treatment of Eros in the final two books of the epic prove its threatening nature. While Eros may temporarily help Jason, but his benefits to Medea are slim. The arrow Eros lodges in Medea's heart is called *πολύστονον*, "grievous" (3.279). The narrator

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*Apollonius' Argonautica*, 68, and David Wray, "Apollonius' Masterplot: Narrative Strategy in *Argonautica* I," in *Apollonius Rhodius*, ed. Annette Harder, R. F. Regtuit, and G. C. Wakker, *Hellenistica Groningana* 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 262-3, claim that Heracles is present in the poem merely to waste time in between Labors. Clare argues a common assertion, that "Heracles was lost to the Argo expedition in the first and last place because the itinerary of his labours may not be subsumed within the parameters of the Argo quest" (Clare, *The Path of the Argo*, 104). It is true that Heracles suspends and then resumes his labors, but this perspective neglects to take into account the *mechanism* by which Heracles was lost. And Feeney, among others, argues that Heracles must depart because he would accomplish Jason's task too easily (Feeney, "Following after Hercules, in Virgil and Apollonius," 61; Green, *The Argonautika*, 347). They are not wrong about Heracles' abilities, but surely there is more to his departure than that.

61 This is in contrast to Theocritus' account, in which Heracles travels by foot to rejoin the Argonauts in Colchis (*Id.* 13.74-5).

62 Note that Hera's motivations for preserving Jason are first, to punish Pelias for his disrespect, and then secondly, to reward Jason for his piety at the Anaurus (3.64-75). But it is Medea who becomes Hera's instrument of vengeance, not Jason, upon their return to Iolchus.

compares a kindled flame that consumes the starting twigs to the effects of Eros' dart: "thus, wrapped below her heart, a destructive love secretly blazed" (τοῖος ὑπὸ κραδίῃ εἰλυμένος αἶθετο λάθρη / οὖλος ἔρωσ, 3.296-7). The Moon, herself well-acquainted with the suffering of Eros, recognizes that "a grievous god gave Jason to be a miserable calamity" to Medea (δῶκε δ' ἀνιηρόν τοι Ἰήσωνα πῆμα γενέσθαι / δαίμων ἀλγινόεις, 4.63-4).

But Eros in the *Argonautica* is not negative just because he brings ruin upon Medea – he is negative because he prevents Jason from becoming a hero. The narrative confronts this tension in a quarrel between Jason and Idas over seeking Medea's help. Idas angrily confronts Jason,

ἽΩ πόποι, ἧ ῥα γυναιξὶν ὁμόστολοι ἐνθάδ' ἔβημεν,  
οἱ Κύπριν καλέουσιν ἐπίρροθον ἄμμι πέλεσθαι,  
οὐκέτ' Ἐνυαλίῳ μέγα σθένος, ἐς δὲ πελείας (560)  
καὶ κίρκους λεύσσοντες ἐρητύονται ἀέθλων.  
ἔρρετε, μηδ' ὕμιν πολεμῆια ἔργα μέλοιτο,  
παρθενικὰς δὲ λιτῆσιν ἀνάλκιδας ἠπεροπεύειν." (3.558-63)

"What? Surely as attendants to women we came here, who call upon Cypris to be our rescuer, no longer upon the great strength of Enyalios. But looking to doves and hawks, you keep away from trials. Go on, may deeds of war not concern you, but seducing weak maidens with prayers!"

Idas' outburst wins no prizes for collegiality or eloquence.<sup>63</sup> But the narrator confirms that he is, to some extent, correct: "but then no one spoke a word in opposition to him" (οὐδ' ἄρα τίς οἱ ἐναντίον ἔκφατο μῦθον, 3.565). Jason may have no choice, however; without Heracles, he cannot hope to meet Aetes' challenge, and he and his crew know it.

The gods have prepared Medea for Jason's use through Eros, and he does not hesitate to take advantage of the confluence of events. Through Medea's instructions and potions, Jason

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63 Vian calls Idas "caricature du héros épique" here and compares his rebuke to Heracles' in 1.865-84 (Vian and Delage, *Argonautiques*, vol. 2, 127).

yokes the fire-breathing bulls and defeats the earthborn men in a remarkably anti-climactic *aristeia* (3.1246-1407). Köhnken has shown how Apollonius' Jason, against the background of Pindar's narrative in *Pyth.* 4, is weak and dependent on Medea here; moreover, his immediately diminishing role in the poem gives his actions in the *aristeia* the impression of playing a mere "Gastrolle" in the plot.<sup>64</sup> Manipulative Jason welcomes Medea to the Argo only after she pledges to secure the Golden Fleece for him, and he finally grasps the Fleece after she has put the dragon to sleep (4.83-182). Medea is clearly in charge of the whole endeavor ("as the girl commanded," κούρης κεκλομένης, 4.163). Medea's resourcefulness fills the vacuum of Jason's unheroic weakness, and he never evolves into the kind of hero exemplified by Heracles. Indeed, he proclaims to his crew that Medea is "the glorious helper of all Achaea and yourselves" (Ἀχαιίδος οἷά τε πάσης / αὐτῶν θ' ὑμείων ἐσθλὴν ἐπαρωγὸν ἐοῦσαν, 4.195-6). The epic that promised to be a coming-of-age tale for the youthful Jason has turned into a story of expediency.

Jason uses Medea's affection, and the skills that come along with it, as a form of proxy weapon, as the opening of Book III emphasizes: "Jason carried off the fleece by means of Medea's love" (ἀνήγαγε κῶας Ἰήσων / Μηδείης ὑπ' ἔρωτι, 3.2-3). As Köhnken has shown, the focus on Medea's *eros* in Book III's proem foreshadows Jason's complete exclusion from the proem of Book IV, a progression that mirrors his exclusion from the heroic narrative as well.<sup>65</sup> Jason's error is to assume that he can somehow manage Eros, as if it were a tool that he can bring out and then discard at will. While this approach was successful in his sojourn on Lemnos, Heracles' heroic collapse proves that erotic attachment can just as easily become an

<sup>64</sup> Köhnken, "Der Status Jasons: Besonderheiten der Darstellungstechnik in den Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios," 67.

<sup>65</sup> Köhnken, "Der Status Jasons," 60-2.



immoveable force that blocks the path to heroic success, rather than open the way. By the time Jason has fled with Medea and the Fleece and must confront her brother and the Colchian army, his choices are extremely limited, and equally despicable.

Up until this point, Jason achieves what he desires through Medea's erotic attachment to him. But his erotic involvement with her directs him to dangerous and impious actions. For when Apsyrtus and his fleet confront the Argonauts, Jason has the opportunity to cut ties with Medea. The Argonauts decide that the Fleece is rightfully theirs, but in the disputable case of Medea, they agree "to entrust her to Leto's daughter apart from the crew, until someone of the law-abiding kings could judge whether she must return to the house of her father or follow the heroes to Hellas" (παρθέσθαι κούρη Λητώϊδι νόσφιν ὀμίλου, / εἰσόκε τις δικάσῃσι θεμιστούχων βασιλῆων / εἴτε μιν εἰς πατρὸς χρεῖῶ δόμον αὐτίς ἰκάνειν / εἴτε μεθ' Ἑλλάδα γαῖαν ἀριστήεσσι ἔπεσθαι, 4.345-9).<sup>66</sup> This is emphatically not the outcome Jason had sworn to Medea in Colchis. When Medea senses Jason's hesitation to commit to her, she upbraids him; by calling upon *δίκη* and *θέμις* (4.372-3), she is able to convince Jason, clearly alarmed (*ὑποδδείσας*, 4.394) at her fury, to honor his earlier agreements.<sup>67</sup> Out of fear, Jason abides by his oath, yet in doing so, he commits to an impious and polluting murder.

Jason deepens his attachment to Medea by conspiring with her to murder her brother, Apsyrtus. There is nothing heroic about the killing of Apsyrtus; it is based on treachery and deceit, defiles a sacred space, and requires expiation.<sup>68</sup> Yet the text suggests an alternative: that

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66 Vian (vol. 3, 161-2) defends line 348a, a doublet of 2.1186. I follow Fränkel, who deletes it (*Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios*, 479) because Medea does not address a third possibility in her remonstrations with Jason.

67 This is not the only place where Apollonius' Medea recalls the Euripidean version. See J. H. Barkhuizen, "The Psychological Characterization of Medea in Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 3, 744-824," *Acta Classica* 22 (1979): 33-48; Jerry Clack, "The Medea Similes of Apollonius Rhodius," *The Classical Journal* 68, no. 4 (1973): 310-315; Phinney, "Narrative Unity in the *Argonautica*, the Medea-Jason Romance."

68 So aberrant is Jason's murder of Apsyrtus that it blurs the boundaries between barbarian and non-barbarian,

Jason model himself after another hero, Theseus, the great abandoner. To lure Apsyrtus to his death, Jason and Medea

...καὶ πολλὰ πόρον ξεινία δῶρα (422)  
οἷς μετὰ καὶ πέπλον δόσαν ἱερὸν Ὑψιπυλείης  
πορφύρεον...  
τοῦ δὲ καὶ ἀμβροσίη ὀσμὴ πέλεν ἐξέτι κείνου (430)  
ἐξ οὗ ἄναξ αὐτὸς Νυσηῖος ἐγκατέλεκτο  
ἀκροχάλιξ οἴνω καὶ νέκταρι, καλὰ μεμαρπῶς  
στήθεα παρθενικῆς Μινωίδος, ἣν ποτε Θησεύς  
Κνωσσόθεν ἐσπομένην Δίῃ ἔνι κάλλιπε νήσω. (4.422-4, 430-4)

also sent many guest-gifts, among which they gave even a purple sacred robe of Hypsipyle...its ambrosial fragrance still remained from that time, when the Nysean lord himself lay upon it, drunk on wine and nectar, while grasping the beautiful bosom of the maiden daughter of Minos, whom Theseus had abandoned on the island of Dia, though she had followed him from Cnossus.

Apollonius proposes two models here: first, the cloak reminds the reader of Hypsipyle. Jason became distracted from his mission by his erotic attachment to her, but Heracles' intervention results in the proper action: Jason gets up, takes a pile of royal gifts, and leaves her behind. The second model is equally explicit. Jason could simply abandon Medea and sail off, as Theseus treated Ariadne, after she betrayed her father Minos by helping the young, handsome hero slay the Minotaur. The cloak commemorates Ariadne's "happy ending"; despite Theseus' callous behavior and Ariadne's distress, she becomes the bride of a god and occupies a place in the heavens.<sup>69</sup> Theseus is still a cad, but the text does not say so, and instead encourages one to focus on the positive outcome of the abandonment.

This cloak is not the first occasion that the narrative holds Theseus and Ariadne up as a

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Greek and other (Susan A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Hellenistic Culture and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 195).

<sup>69</sup> This confluence of Hypsipyle, Ariadne, and Medea is not accidental. Goldhill traces their shared family tree, an indication of their "continuing history of (erotic) disaster" (Goldhill, *The poet's voice*, 302-3).

model.<sup>70</sup> Jason himself spoke – misleadingly – of Ariadne to Medea in their first encounter. He encourages the young maiden to help him by proposing her relative as an example:

δή ποτε καὶ Θησῆα κακῶν ὑπελύσατ' ἀέθλων  
παρθενικὴ Μινωὶς εὐφρονέουσ' Ἀριάδνη,  
ἦν ῥά τε Πασιφάη κούρη τέκεν Ἥελίοιο.  
ἀλλ' ἢ μὲν καὶ νηός, ἐπεὶ χόλον εὗνασε Μίνως,  
σὺν τῷ ἐφεζομένη πάτρην λίπε· τὴν δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ  
ἀθάνατοι φίλαντο, μέσῳ δέ οἱ αἰθέρι τέκμωρ  
ἀστερόεις στέφανος, τόν τε κλείουσ' Ἀριάδνης,  
πάννυχος οὐρανίοις ἐνελίσσεται εἰδώλοισιν·  
ὧς καὶ σοὶ θεόθεν χάρις ἔσσεται, εἴ κε σαώσεις  
τόσσον ἀριστῆων ἀνδρῶν στόλον. (3.997-1007)

"In fact, benevolent Ariadne, the maiden daughter of Minos, once freed even Theseus from terrible trials, she whom Pasiphae, daughter of Helios, bore. But when Minos soothed his anger, she even boarded his ship with him and left her fatherland. And even the immortals themselves loved her, and a starry crown, her sign in the middle of the sky, which they call Ariadne's, turns all night long in the heavenly constellations. So also you will have favor from the gods, if you save so great a force of heroes."

Jason "massages" his version of the story, implying that Minos at some point approved of Ariadne's liaison with Theseus. Even more cleverly (and dishonestly), he elides the events between Ariadne's departure on Theseus' ship and her loving reception by the "gods": Ariadne becomes Dionysus' beloved only because Theseus first abandoned her, in defiance of his original oaths. Medea is fascinated by the precedent set by her relative (3.1074-6), but Jason evades her questions.

These two explicit references to Theseus and Ariadne reveal that, while Jason knows how to use their model to manipulate Medea, he does not know how to apply it to himself. For Theseus' case demonstrates that a hero who relies on the aid of a woman, provided through the betrayal of her family, will find himself penned in by unacceptable choices. Ariadne's

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70 Bulloch, "Jason's Cloak," argues that in the Lemnian episode, Athena's cloak points to Ariadne, and therefore, we must read Ariadne and her betrayal behind Hypsipyle and Jason's encounter.

"happy ending" hardly excuses Theseus' dishonorable behavior. Apollonius' climactic condemnation of Eros follows the description of Dionysus' cloak and precedes the murder of

Apsyrtus:

Σχέτλι' Ἔρωσ, μέγα πῆμα, μέγα στύγος ἀνθρώποισιν,  
ἐκ σέθεν οὐλόμεναί τ' ἔριδες στοναχαί τε γόοι τε,  
ἄλγεά τ' ἄλλ' ἐπὶ τοῖσιν ἀπείρονα τετρήχασιν·  
δυσμενέων ἐπὶ παισὶ κορύσσειο δαῖμον ἀερθεῖς  
οἷος Μηδείη στυγερὴν φρεσὶν ἔμβαλες ἄτην. (4.445-9)

Cruel Love, great calamity, great abomination to men, from you are destructive strifes and wailing and lamentation, and other countless griefs upon these. Raise and arm yourself, o god, against the children of enemies, just as you cast hateful ruin into the mind of Medea.

With this apostrophe, the narrator reveals that Love is "the direct cause of an appalling murder."<sup>71</sup> Eros harms not only Medea, or her ambushed brother Apsyrtus, but ultimately Jason's heroism.<sup>72</sup> Jason's murder of Cyzicus is unheroic because of his incompetence; Jason's murder of Apsyrtus is unheroic because it is obviously cowardly and polluted (δολοκτασία, 4.479). Jason never regains any sort of moral high ground in the rest of the epic.<sup>73</sup>

After Jason and Medea's treacherous elimination of Apsyrtus, they arrive at the land of the Hylleans. This provides the opportunity for the narrator to explain the birth of Hyllus, the son of Heracles and a local water nymph, Melite: "for [Heracles] arrived at the halls of Nausithous and Macris, nurse of Dionysus, in order to purge himself of the deadly murder of his children" (ὁ γὰρ οἰκία Ναυσιθόοιο / Μάκριν τ' εἰσαφίκανε, Διωνύσοιο τιθήνην, / νιψόμενος παίδων ὄλοὸν φόνον, 4.539-41). Hyllus himself has grown up, migrated to a different land, and

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71 Zanker, "The Love Theme in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*," 66.

72 Jackson errs when he claims that "just as Theseus' action did not affect his status as a hero so Jason's stature remains unaffected by his attitude to Medea" (Steven Jackson, "Apollonius' Jason: Human Being in an Epic Scenario," *Greece & Rome* 39, no. 2, Second Series (1992): 158).

73 After Jason enters into marriage, the strongest attachment of all, to Medea, Green notes "the blank where Jason should be...is arresting and deliberate" (Green, *The Argonautika*, 337).

been killed; the murder of Heracles' children thus occurred almost a full generation before his current exploits. Yet Heracles has not escaped the infamy associated with such a terrible deed. The narrative remembers this ugly incident, and moreover, revives it in the context of expiation. Heracles paves the way again for Jason: Jason has just committed an impious act, and this mention of Heracles' cleansing points Jason towards his next assignment - Jason and Medea must seek out Circe for expiation. Once again, Jason has missed the point; it takes the voice of the Argo herself to direct him there. Yet there remains a distinction between the actions for which Heracles and Jason must atone: Heracles murdered his family in a fit of madness, brought upon him by the jealousy and vengeance of Hera. Jason, on the other hand, is driven to his impious murder by conscious involvement with Medea.

The narrative frames the death of Apsyrtus as the terrifying result of Eros. But the consequences of Jason's attachment to Medea continue far beyond the end of Apollonius' epic, the return to Iolchus. And Apollonius' readers are acutely aware of the mythological afterlife of Jason and Medea's marriage. Jason never reclaims his father's throne; as an unemployed would-be hero in Corinth, he finally attempts to sever his attachment to Medea.<sup>74</sup> But his action comes too late. Euripides' Medea turns to infanticide to retain her power over Jason, and in the destruction of his lineage, ensures that he suffers a hero's worst fate. Even his death, struck by a piece of the rotting Argo, is profoundly unheroic.<sup>75</sup> In the long run, Jason's alliance with Eros does not, in fact, earn him the laurels of a hero. Jason would have been wise to heed Heracles' outsized erotic devotion to Hylas, and his consequent heroic failure.

In this poem, Heracles serves as both a model of success and a model of failure.

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<sup>74</sup> Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> As famously predicted by Euripides' Medea (1386-8).

Apollonius makes clear the cause of his failure: it is not a vague notion of his outdatedness, or a hypothesized over-reliance on brute force. Rather, Heracles' love for Hylas reveals the danger that Eros itself poses to the heroic endeavor. Heracles' tendency towards excess manifests itself here in erotic attachment; even when domesticated and adhering to social norms, Heracles, it seems, cannot do anything on a normal scale. The Heracles of the *Trachiniae* and the Heracles of the *Argonautica* could hardly be more different. Nevertheless, both refigurations of Heracles demonstrate how a prioritization of erotic control can doom his heroic life.

Yet even as Heracles provides a model of failure in the *Argonautica*, he himself is a failure as a model. Jason's success in obtaining the Fleece and returning home with it never translates into true heroism. The education afforded by Heracles' example is ineffective, and Jason's failed coming of age demonstrates how difficult it is for a non-hero to develop into a hero. Even Heracles, a true symbol of heroic success in the poem, is vulnerable to disaster. Though Heracles goes on to accomplish other exploits, he can never partake in the Argonauts' conquest. This failure, at least, is permanent. Apollonius' *Argonautica* thus proves a strange epic poem: though it recounts the tale of a triumphant heroic quest, its structure and characters serve only to raise doubts about the nature of heroism itself.

## Conclusion

This dissertation set out to explore what the treatment of Heracles' disasters could teach us about the meaning of ancient Greek heroism. Through a close examination of a range of texts over several centuries, the study has traced how Heracles' career is used to define heroic success and heroic disaster. Heracles' acts of destruction, violence, rage, and lust, have illuminated the range of heroic actions: there are heroic acts that garner individual *kleos*. Then there are heroic acts that benefit those connected to the hero in some way, whether they are blood relatives, members of the same polis or tribe, or fellow humans. The greatest heroic acts are those that fulfill both of these aspects: the hero gains glory for accomplishing a difficult and dangerous deed that brings positive advantages to his *philoï*. Heracles achieves these kinds of acts many times, earning praise, a glorious reputation, and a position as athletic, martial, and moral exemplar.

Yet the very qualities that enable these heroic successes can also be turned towards disaster and failure. And here Heracles is equally outstanding. In our earliest evidence, the Homeric epics, Heracles is characterized equally by his strength and his savagery. The same Heracles who defeats the Centaurs seems equally likely to murder a guest-friend; his disasters are never far from his successes. But as his significance as a role model grew in the Archaic and early Classical periods, poets, philosophers, artists, and politicians helped Heracles leave his

disturbing and dangerous past behind him. Linked to his expanding influence was his unique elevation in the afterlife: deification, residence on Olympus with the blessed gods, and a new wife in Hebe. A focus on Heracles' heroic successes leads to one narrative: that Heracles suffers for the benefit of all mankind, enduring and overcoming the greatest hardships, and so earns the greatest reward. But a focus on Heracles' heroic disasters yields a different narrative, one far less inspiring: that Heracles receives immortality through the inscrutable, unmoveable will of Zeus, *despite* his failures. This study has examined in detail the shape of these narratives and found that Heracles' disasters not only draw criticism to the heroic endeavor, but implicate Zeus himself.

In Chapter 2, I document a "trail of havoc" tradition that forms a counter-narrative to the accomplishment of the Labors associated with Heracles' apotheosis. In Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*, Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and Book 4 of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, each author deliberately brings out the brutal violence on which Heracles' successful achievements depend. Though exemplary, these Labors produce no obvious benefit for the human community, calling into question the very purpose of heroism. In the fragmentary lyric poem, *Geryoneis*, Stesichorus portrays Geryon as a noble and blameless victim of Heracles' aggressive cattle-raid. Though Geryon is physically monstrous, his adherence to the Homeric code of heroism casts shame upon Heracles' actions.

In the *Frogs*, Aristophanes deflates Heracles' capture of Cerberus by focusing on the mayhem and antisocial destruction he left in his wake in the Underworld. Aristophanes goes on to mock Heracles' heroic legacy by sending Dionysus on a parody of a Heraclean career: Dionysus conquers beasts (Frog-Swans), triumphs in a feat of endurance (Xanthias' whipping



contest), and retrieves his quarry (Aeschylus) from the Underworld. But the play's mixed portrayal of Heracles' Labor of Cerberus invites a similarly ambivalent evaluation of Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus as a self-aggrandizing act of little benefit to his community. In Book 4 of the *Argonautica*, Apollonius portrays Heracles' acquisition of the Apples of the Hesperides not as a glorious heroic conquest, but as a cruel and savage theft. By giving the beautiful, grieving Hesperides a voice, Apollonius reveals the discord between the steep costs of heroic violence and the salvation it offers to his comrades. For Heracles, upon exiting the Garden, creates a life-giving spring that saves the Argonauts in their most dire moment.

Chapter 3 investigates the chaos Heracles causes by introducing his heroic world into an inappropriate context, the home. Sophocles' *Trachiniae* juxtaposes the promise of a triumphant *nostos* with Heracles' actual return in the painful throes of death. Heracles comes to physical defeat because he imports competitive rivalry (a prerequisite for heroic success) into his own household: following an act of wanton destruction – the sack of Oechalia – Heracles sends a new lust-object, Iole, to share Deianeira's roof. Heracles' action is a perversion of open, male competition for a woman's sexual affection. Deianeira's insecurity reflects Heracles' chronic neglect of the *oikos* in favor of his glorious exploits, an overlooked cost of heroic pursuits. Deianeira attempts to reassert her wifely status through distinctly feminine means, Nessus' love potion, thus catching Heracles by surprise. Heracles' impending death allows for an assessment of his legacy, but the suppression of epinician praise marks him as unworthy of apotheosis. Yet in his monstrous coercion of Hyllus, he takes on the status of a *deus ex machina*, foreshadowing his deification and raising doubts about the justice of Zeus.

In Chapter 4, I show how the clearest challenge to the value of Heracleian violence is

posed by Euripides' *Heracles*, which frames Heracles' defeat of his craven enemy Lycus in the identical epinician terms as the murder of his wife and children. Yet even as the play critiques the efficacy of praise poetry as a genre, it nevertheless insists upon the persistent excellence of Heracles. I argue that the play formulates a specifically two-pronged definition of heroic *aretē*: the status of the glorious victor, as encompassed in the epithet *kallinikos*, and traditional *philia*. Heracles demonstrates his *aretē* in saving his family in the first half of the play; it is this same *aretē* that redeems him and saves his life, when Theseus arrives to repay his earlier favor and Heracles rises to defend his status. Thus, by integrating Heracles' propensity for unrestrained violence into a coherent and admirable figure, Euripides finds a way to make the hero acceptable to a fifth-century audience.

In my final chapter, I return to Apollonius' *Argonautica*. In book 1, Heracles is excluded from the communal expedition when his *erōmenos*, Hylas, is stolen by a nymph. Heracles, imagined no longer as a rapist but as a devoted pederast, exercises none of his famous strategies or hunting skills, but instead rages impotently. Heracles' erotic attachment to Hylas causes his heroic collapse, a stunning upset in a poem that consistently presents him as a positive model of heroism for the callow Jason. Heracles' heroic failure thus serves as a warning about the dangers of eroticism to Jason, who will promptly ignore it in uniting his fate with Medea's. Jason's mistake is to believe that *eros* is a tool that can be wielded at will, despite Heracles' demonstration that *eros* is an uncontrollable force that threatens heroism. Though he eventually obtains a successful *nostos*, Jason's reliance on Medea's magical powers impedes his ability to become a full hero in his own right.

Ultimately, this study has revealed the significance of social impact to the evaluation of

heroic action. The provocative treatment of Heracles' apotheosis Labors probes the value of heroism by focusing on the victims of Heracles' successes. On the Athenian tragic stage, Heracles' acts are judged against not only his victories, but also his commitment to helping friends and harming enemies. This emphasis on the communal demands on a hero, though, only points out the eternal tension implicit in heroism: heroism is not a communal effort. Heroic success requires an individual to distinguish himself by defeating all others and achieving victory. And the set of traits and skills required for victory inevitably pose a threat to social order. Heracles, who achieves the ultimate victory over mortality, remains unique in his accomplishments, thus ensuring that he also remains unique in his disasters.

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