

CAROLIN HAHNEMANN

MOUNT OITA REVISITED: SOPHOKLES' *TRACHINIAI* IN LIGHT OF THE
EVIDENCE OF AISCHYLOS' *HERAKLEIDAI*

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"It has been the fortune of the *Trachiniae* to provoke a singular diversity of judgments." Jebb's words are still true today (*The Plays and Fragments*, V. *The Trach.* [Cambridge 1892] ix); for more than a century a polyphonic chorus of modern critics has tried to fill the silence of the ancients, and yet the play's original context remains a mystery. We know little about the historical situation in which the *Trachiniai* was first performed and the literary and religious background in which its plot develops. It is information of this kind, however, that we must look for in order to anchor the interpretation of a play currently adrift in a sea of diverse opinions. In this paper I reexamine the disputed ending of Sophokles' *Trachiniai* in light of a neglected source of evidence: Aischylos' fragmentary play, the *Herakleidai*.

When chorus and actors finally leave the stage in a funeral procession, the Herakles of the *Trachiniai* expects that his sons will build him a pyre on Mount Oita where he will die and go to Hades (Soph. *Trach.* 1201f.). But, according to one strand of the tradition, Herakles' immolation is the vehicle of an apotheosis.¹ Perhaps, then, Sophokles did not intend his spectators to share Herakles' own pessimistic view of the future; perhaps the poet was inviting the audience to believe that, unbeknownst to himself and his companions, Herakles was entering the road to Olympos. Naturally, such an interpretation presupposes that the Athenian spectators regarded pyre and apotheosis as complimentary parts of the same mythical event. Easterling, for one, warns against such an assumption: "We cannot tell from our extant evidence [...] whether by the date of the first production of *Trachiniae* (whenever that may have been) the story of Heracles' death on the pyre was already associated in people's mind with the well-known story of his apotheosis." "Fortunately," she continues, "this is not the most important question to be answered" (P. Easterling, *Sophocles. Trachiniae* [Cambridge 1982] 10). Nevertheless, it would be good if we could answer it, and I think that we can. An investigation of Aischylos' *Herakleidai* shows that by the date of the first production of the *Trachiniai* (whenever that may have been) pyre and apotheosis had, in fact, become linked.

Before we consider the content of the two tragedies, we must address the problem of their respective dates. The date of the *Trachiniai* is uncertain, but we have one clue. Although attempts to date a play by comparing it to other plays are rarely conclusive, we can be confident that Sophokles wanted the spectators watching Herakles' death at the hands of an unwitting Deianeira to remember Agamemnon lured to his death by Klytaimestra: Sophokles echoes Aischylos' metaphor for the deadly garment.² Hence the *Trachiniai* must have been produced after 458. This *terminus post quem* does not conflict with the popular view that the *Trachiniai* is an early work; Sophokles was to live and compose for another fifty years. The realization that Sophokles did not write the *Trachiniai* during the first decade of his productivity, however, is important because it suggests that the first performance of the *Trachiniai* took place after the death of Aischylos. Consequently, Sophokles' *Trachiniai* was very probably performed later than Aischylos' *Herakleidai*. For the present purpose, this relative chronology will suffice.

The ultimate ordeal for any hero is to struggle against the very powers of death. The myth of Herakles contains traces of various such encounters: he wounds the king of the underworld, overcomes the

* I am grateful to the Classicists at Kenyon College for fostering this paper with their curiosity and to Hugh Lloyd-Jones for fostering it with his expertise.

¹ Following the terminology of earlier discussions of the subject, I use "apotheosis" as a shorthand for Herakles' elevation; for my argument it does not matter whether he was raised to heroic or divine status.

² *Trach.* 1051f. ≈ Aisch. *Ag.* 1382, 1580, *Cho.* 492; *Trach.* 1057 ≈ *Cho.* 493, 982; cf. T. B. L. Webster, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*" in *Greek Poetry and Life. Essays presented to Gilbert Murray*, Oxford 1936, 177. Eduard Fraenkel (*Aeschylus. Agamemnon* [Oxford 1950] II) adds *Trach.* 538 ≈ *Ag.* 1446 (cf. also *ad* 1382 and *ad* 1580). For a comprehensive study, cf. Stylianos G. Kapsomenos, *Sophokles' Trachinierinnen und ihr Vorbild* (Athens) 1963, 39-114.

hell hound, and obtains the golden apples of immortality.³ But in the course of time the symbolism was forgotten and the feats faded into mere labors, after the completion of which Herakles still ended up in Hades.⁴ Yet, in both Homeric epics the memory of the fetching of Kerberos as the final challenge lives on in the emphasis on its extreme peril; only because of Athena's help does Herakles survive (*Iliad* 8, 364-9; *Od.* 11, 623-6). In Hesiod's *Theogony*, on the other hand, Athena helps Herakles to slay the Hydra (312-18),⁵ whose venom causes the hero's death in the *Catalogue of Women*.⁶ Remarkably, among the fragments of the latter poem we find almost all the constitutive elements that make up the plot of the *Trachiniai*: Herakles has a wife, Deianeira, and a son, Hyllos (F 25, 17ff. Merkelbach-West); Herakles sacks Oichalia to gain Iole (F 26, 31-37; F 229, 1-3); Deianeira sends Herakles a poisoned robe through a herald, Lichas (F 25, 20-23); Herakles accepts it and dies (F 25, 24f.); Herakles is translated to Olympus, where he marries Hebe (F 25, 26-33 ; F 229, 6-13).⁷ We only lack an indication that Herakles' apotheosis occurred on the pyre on Mount Oita.

Nevertheless, at present many scholars believe that the Herakles of the *Trachiniai* is about to be exalted rather than annihilated; even a cursory study of the literature on the subject yields a surprising number of supposed allusions to his impending apotheosis.⁸ Below I provide a list of examples, in the order of their appearance in the play:

- (1) the mention of Mount Oita (200, 436f., 1191f.);⁹
- (2) the mention of the pyre (1193-9);¹⁰
- (3) the ban of mourning (1199f.; A. von Blumenthal, *Sophokles* [Stuttgart 1936], 195);
- (4) Herakles' apostrophe of Hyllos as his "healer" (1208f.);¹¹
- (5) Hyllos' refusal to light the pyre (1214ff.; H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* [Berkeley, LA and London 1971] 127f.);
- (6) Hyllos' statement: "No man foresees the future" (1270);¹²
- (7) the closing line: "...and in all this there is nothing but Zeus" (1278; e. g. Segal [n. 11], 53).

³ H. A. Shapiro suggests that Herakles' wrestling match with Thanatos in the Alkestis myth is a "later and pale variation" on the wounding of Hades (*CW* 77 [1983] 8 and 11f.).

⁴ *Iliad* 18, 117-21; *Od.* 11, 601-27, verses 602ff. have been recognized since antiquity as an interpolation (cf. A. Heubeck, *Omero. Odissea* III [Mondadori 1983] 306).

⁵ Kerberos and the Hesperides are mentioned also, but without reference to Herakles. In the latter case this might be an accident of the textual tradition (cf. M. L. West, *Hesiod. Theogony* [Oxford 1966] 228f.).

⁶ On the other hand, divine aid is a conventional device to express superhuman achievement; Athena also helps Herakles to slay Periklymenos in the *Catalogue* (F 33, 31). In the *Meropis* Athena protects Herakles, kills Asteros, and dresses herself in his skin so that Asteros lives on as Athena's protection (*Suppl. Hell.* F 903 A).

⁷ Cf. *Theog.* 950-55. According to M. L. West the divinity of Herakles is an indication that these passages were composed "after rather than before 600" (*The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* [Oxford 1985] 130 and 169, n. 91); see also J. Schwartz, *Ps. Hesiodica* (Leiden 1960), esp. 487-500 and 628f. On the other hand, R. Janko argued for an early date at Hesiod's lifetime (*Hesiod, Homer and the Hymns* [Cambridge 1982] esp. 200, 221-225). As the poem must have been known to Sophokles either way, the question of date and authorship need not detain us here.

⁸ No less impressive, however, is the number of scholars who deny all allusions (listed by T. F. Hoey, *Arethusa* 10 [1977] 290f. n. 2, and T. C. W. Stinton, "The scope and limits of allusion in Greek tragedy" in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy. Essays presented to D. J. Conacher* (Calgary 1986) 85 n. 89).

⁹ e. g. Ivan M. Linforth, "The Pyre on Mount Oita in Sophocles' *Trachiniai*", *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 14.7 (1952) 263; G. H. Gellie, *Sophocles. A Reading* (Carlton 1972) 77.

¹⁰ e. g. C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 159f. Hoey (above [n. 8], 280-3) sees a symbol of the apotheosis not just in the pyre as a whole but in every element of its description: the rock, the oak, the olive, and the fire.

¹¹ e. g. G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 67 n. 32; Ch. Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World* (Cambridge, MA, and London 1995) 53. But "healer" serves also as a euphemistic invocation of death (cf. Aisch. *TrGF* III F *255; Soph. *TrGF* IV F 698). —I am surprised at Stinton's (above [n. 8] 74f.) readiness to consider the commonplace praise of youth in Euripides' *Herakles* 643-6 as an allusion to Herakles' future bride Hebe. By the same token, there would have to be an allusion in Deianeira's fear for her marriage (Soph. *Trach.* 547f.: ὀρῶ γὰρ ἥβην τὴν μὲν ἔρπουσαν πρόσω).

¹² e. g. M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie* (Göttingen 1954) 208; Jebb (above, p. 67) 182.

In addition, Segal and Holt have argued that Sophokles' use of imagery reflects the hero's imminent exaltation.¹³

It is certainly possible to weave from these hints and trends a subtext for the *Trachiniai* that would add a glittering thread of ambiguity to the fabric of the plot. But such a procedure is not without peril, as Stinton was right to insist: "How far did the tragic dramatists count on their audience taking the allusions in their plays and filling in for themselves what was not actually stated?" Applying Stinton's yardstick to the passages cited above, a sceptic could dismiss (1), (2), (3), (4), (6), and (7) as allusions of a merely ornamental nature: in each case the text makes richer sense if an apotheosis is imminent, but it makes sense also without it.¹⁴ The only passage that not only invites but requires the reader to supply a piece of external lore in order to make sense of Sophokles' verses is (5), the lighting of the pyre. For it would be absurd for Herakles to stultify his own careful orders regarding the cremation by consenting to release Hyllos from this crucial task if not the same dark instinct that made him choose the mode and location of his death also assured him that the pyre would somehow be lit.¹⁵ Thus the last scene of the *Trachiniai*, like other closing scenes in Sophoklean drama,¹⁶ looks forward to a future event beyond the action of the plot: the tale of Philoktetes lighting the fire in exchange for Herakles' bow.¹⁷ Evidently, Sophokles did count on his audience taking the allusion and filling in for themselves the account of Herakles' immolation. While the poet, however, was in a position to anticipate the imaginative associations of his spectators, we can only seek to retrieve them by taking stock of the different versions about Herakles' end current at the time. To this end, let us turn now to the external evidence.

In the most comprehensive study of the subject, Holt (*JHS* 109 [1989] 74) declares that "an audience that saw Herakles on stage preparing for his cremation would find it very easy to think ahead to his exaltation [since t]hat was the regular sequence of events in the myth". In support of this claim he adduces three sources of evidence: (1) the ancient cult of Herakles on Mount Oita; (2) three passages that presuppose the connection of pyre and apotheosis; (3) a group of vases showing Herakles in a chariot above the pyre.¹⁸ The record is impressive, yet it fails to prove that the apotheosis from Mount Oita had become the "regular sequence of events" when the *Trachiniai* was performed. For it seems doubtful that an Athenian poet would stake the intended reception of his tragedy on a cryptic allusion to a Malian cult, which is the only piece of evidence on Holt's record that definitely predates the *Trachiniai*. How, then, are we to escape from the aporetic verdict that "the external evidence is inexplicit"?¹⁹

Two further pieces of evidence deserve consideration. On the fragments of a vase dating from 460-50 B. C. Herakles lies prostrate on a pyre which two female figures are extinguishing by pouring water over it.²⁰ The pyre is framed by Athena standing on the left and Philoktetes departing with the bow on

¹³ Segal concludes from his study of animal imagery that "being purged of bestiality ... [t]he hero is now ready for apotheosis. The inward basis for that apotheosis replaces the clear assurance of the actual event" (*YCS* 25 [1977] 140). Philip Holt's esoteric investigation (*Class. Ant.* 6.2 [1987] 205-17) I cannot follow.

¹⁴ For the terminology as well as a lucid exposition of this view, see Stinton (above, n. 8) 67-102; similarly cautious Easterling (above, p. 67), 10f.

¹⁵ W. Schadewaldt, *Die griechische Tragödie* (Frankfurt 1991) 262: "Herakles weiß, wenn er es auch nicht sagt, seine Verbrennung bedeutet, daß er ein Gott wird" goes too far.

¹⁶ Easterling (above, p. 67) 11; cf. Malcolm Davies, *Sophocles, Trachiniae* (Oxford 1991) xxif.

¹⁷ Even Stinton (above [n. 8] 85) admitted that the purpose of the altercation between Herakles and Hyllos about the kindling of the fire could not be reduced to the mere alignment of the story of the *Trachiniai* with received legend. But having ruled out the possibility of a future apotheosis on the grounds that it would diminish the play's tragic effect, he instead proposes a subtle connection of Hyllos' refusal to light the pyre with the role of Herakles' bow in the sack of Troy.

¹⁸ (1) cf. J. Boardman "Herakles in extremis" in *Studien zur Mythologie und Vasenmalerei, K. Schauenburg zum 65. Geburtstag* (Mainz 1986) 129; and "Herakles" in *LIMC* V. 1 (Zürich and München 1990) 132 with bibliography. (2) Euripides' *Herakleidai* 910-16; Sophokles' *Philoktetes* 727ff.; Herod. 7, 198. (3) "Herakles" in *LIMC*, nr. 2916, 2917, 2918 (all dating from 420-380 B. C.).

¹⁹ Davies (above, n. 16) xx; so also Easterling (p. 67) 17f., and Linforth (n. 9) 262.

²⁰ "Herakles" in *LIMC*, nr. 2909; for a detailed description cf. Ch. Clairmont, *AJA* 57 (1953) 85-89.

the right. Despite Herakles' contorted features and his pathetic position, Holt's reading of the scene as "a somber moment at the pyre" is too negative,²¹ since the presence of Athena points to the hero's imminent deification.²² Moreover, the extinguishing of the flames conventionally symbolizes the victim's rescue through the agents of Zeus.²³ Remarkably, Clairmont "strongly believed" that the ethos of the painting was influenced by a literary treatment (*loc. cit.* [n. 20] 89). His belief has been confirmed by the discovery of an entry in the Zavorda manuscript of Photios' lexicon suggesting that the extinguishing of Herakles' pyre formed part of his apotheosis in Aischylos' *Herakleidae* (*TrGF* III F 75a).

Although it has long been noted that Aischylos' *Herakleidae* was likely to contain information about Herakles' end, consultation of its fragments has been sporadic. The reason for this lies in the nature of the evidence; the play hardly seems a reliable point of reference since even its plot is disputed. For decades it was accepted almost as a truism that Aischylos' *Herakleidae* dramatized the plight of Herakles' orphaned children as does Euripides' *Herakleidae*. Then Zielinski published an influential article in which he argued that the plot of the lost play in fact resembled that of the *Trachiniai*.²⁴ His view in turn was modified by the claim that Aischylos' *Herakleidae*, though it treated Herakles' death, did so in the manner not of Sophokles but of Seneca.²⁵ In the face of such uncertainty any reconstruction of the tragedy must be based exclusively on the fragments themselves.

The ancient authors preserve five quotations from the *Herakleidae*, the lengthiest of which comprises ten lines of a choral ode recalling Herakles' voyage to the end of the earth and his encounter with Geryon.²⁶ The verses are of great beauty, but tell us nothing about their dramatic context. Three other fragments could stem from a multitude of dramatic scenarios: a proclamation of imminent hardship, a warning not to utter words of ill omen, and a rare word, ἀμφιμήτορες.²⁷ It is a safe guess that the adjective, "(brothers) born of many mothers", referred to the chorus of Herakles' many sons, from whom the play takes its title. More importantly, though, this rare compound turns out to be the key to the disputed plot of the *Herakleidae* because it enabled Körte to assign another fragment to the play (*APF* 7 [1924] 142). The fourth line of the papyrus *TrGF* III F 73b contains the sequence of letters]μφιμη[. Since the supplement [ἀ]μφιμή[τορες] suits the paleographical and metrical requirements of the verse and, moreover, conforms in grammatical form and sense with the preceding παῖδες, all recent editors include the papyrus among the fragments of Aischylos' *Herakleidae* :

²¹ Holt, *JHS* 109 (1989) 73; K. Tsantsanoglou, *New Fragments of Greek Literature from the Lexicon of Photius*, ΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΕΙΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ 49, 53.

²² So, tentatively, Clairmont (above, n. 20), 89. Strangely, Boardman (n. 18), 128, does not mention Athena. A Leningrad bell-krater from the same period also shows Herakles on the pyre, but unfortunately, "there is no saying whether there was a woman with a hydria or not" (J. D. Beazley, *Etruscan Vase Painting* [Oxford 1947] 104).

²³ For parallels cf. A. B. Cook's section on "pyre-extinguishing rain" (*Zeus* III [Cambridge 1940] 506-24).

²⁴ Th. Zielinski, *Eos* 25 (1921/22), 59-68. His combinations were further developed by S. Srebrny, *Eos* 45 (1951) 41-56; and W. Steffen, *Studia Aeschylea* (Wrocław 1958) 53-65. Cf. also F. Stoessl, *Der Tod des Herakles* (Zürich 1945) 37 and 56f.; F. Jouan, *Les Etudes Classiques* 32 (1964) 7f. For general bibliography cf. S. Radt in *TrGF* III, 190.

²⁵ M. Untersteiner, *Gli Eraclidi e il Filottete di Eschilo* (Florence 1942) 16ff.; Q. Cataudella, *REG* 79 (1966) 49-52; L. Alfonsi, *Aegyptus* 46 (1966) 12.

²⁶ *TrGF* III F 74: ἐκέiθεν ὄρμενος | ὀρθόκερας βοῦς ἤλασεν | ἀπ' ἐσχάτων γαίαις Ὀκεανὸν περάσας | ἐν δέπαι χροσηλάτωι | βοτηράς τ' ἀδίκους κτείνας | δεσπότην τε ἡτριτάτον† | τρία δόρη πάλλοντα χερσίν· | τρία δ' ἴτης κάκη προτείνων, | τρεῖς δ' ἐπιπείων λόφους | ἔστειχ' ἴκος Ἄρει βίαν. A similar encomium of Herakles' feats occurs at Eur. *Her.* 348-435; cf. also *P. Oxy.* 2454.

²⁷ *TrGF* III F 75: οὐ γάρ τι μείζον ἄλλο τοῦδε πείσομαι.—F 77: ἐπιγλωσσῶ. The form of the verb suggests that it occurred in a prohibitive, as it does at Aisch. *Cho.* 1045.—Hesych. α 4065 Latte: ἀμφιμήτορες· οἱ ἐκ πολλῶν (ἐξ ἄλλων Buresch) μητέρων γεγονότες ἀδελφοί. Αἰσχύλος Ἡρακλεΐδαι cf. Sud. 174 7a Adler: ἀμφιμήτωρ· ὁ ἑτερομήτωρ. Αἰσχύλος. I do not share Alan H. Sommerstein's doubt regarding the reliability of the grammarians' explanation of the word (*CQ* 37 [1987] 498ff.).

2 Ll.-J. 3 Srebny 4 beginning Ll.-J., end Körte 5 Ll.-J. 6 beginning Nisbet, end Latte

According to the restoration, Herakles reports his agony as an event of the past. This choice of grammatical tense corresponds to the form of the speech in calm trimeters which convey a remoteness that would hardly befit a hero writhing with pain. Furthermore, the graphic description of the effects of the poison on his body seems especially appropriate if we assume that at the moment when the speech is delivered Herakles' body had ceased to be disfigured. Therefore the inference is probable that Herakles gave his account retrospectively after the apotheosis. The aforementioned entry in the Photios manuscript from the Zaborda monastery supports this view (*TrGF* 3 F 75a):³⁴

κάξιονήθην κούδὲν ἦν προωτέρω

αἰονάω is a medical term for the external application of liquid to the patient's skin; the treatment is generally connected with internal or external purification. The compound ἐξαιονάω constitutes a *hapax legomenon*, paraphrased as "shower" or "bathe" by the lexicographers.³⁵ Since the natural antidote to fire is water, it is reasonable to assume that the singeing effect of both the poisoned robe and the flames of the pyre was finally cured by some supernatural liquid.³⁶ Like the vase-painters, Aischylos seems to have used a sudden shower to symbolize Herakles' deification though, unlike the vase-painters, he did not have to explain this miracle: the inscrutable passive voice κάξιονήθην only hints at the mystery.³⁷ Thus F 75a constitutes a plausible continuation of F 73b; both seem to come from a speech in which Herakles recalled his final suffering and ultimate salvation.³⁸ I can think of only one possible scenario for such a speech: an epiphany.³⁹ But in a dramatization of Herakles' last hours there is no place for an epiphany. Since the hero's cremation cannot be shown on stage, such a play must end with the departure of Herakles' sons for Mount Oita. Once they have left, however, the play is over; Herakles cannot return to deliver an account of his apotheosis over the empty orchestra. Consequently, we must reject the view that Aischylos' *Herakleidae* treated Herakles' downfall, whether in the manner of Sophokles or of Seneca,⁴⁰ and return to the model of Euripides' *Herakleidae*.

The reception of the *Herakleidae* in Athens yields a natural occasion for an epiphany of Herakles. The deictic reference to the *Herakleidae* as παῖδες οἶδε (4) makes it certain that the speech cannot have been addressed to them. Instead Herakles could have appeared to the Athenian king to entrust to him the care of his sons and, perhaps, grant a special boon;⁴¹ in this context Herakles' identification of his sons as "these children of many mothers" (4) becomes a meaningful gesture of introduction.⁴² Furthermore, an epiphany would contribute to a sense of closure for the tragedy by resolving the ubiquitous problem of Herakles' divine descent (cf. Soph. *Trach.* 137ff. *et passim*). Even though the *Herakleidae* have al-

³⁴ My argument depends on the first word alone, as I have doubts about the authenticity of the rest of the verse. But this issue of textual criticism must await the systematic publication of the entire manuscript.

³⁵ The relation between αἰονάω and ἐξαιονάω is the same as the relation between λούω and ἐκλούω (ἐκ-: "completely, utterly"). While the simple form may occasionally be extended to refer to the whole body (e. g. αἰονάω: *Hippokr.* 6, 118, 7; λούω: *Hippokr.* 2, 454, 22), the compound always does (ἐκλούω: *Hippokr.* 2, 454, 16, 19; 8, 478, 9).

³⁶ In a hellenistic parallel scarcity of water causes the trees to shed their bark (Lykophron *Alex.* 1421-5).

³⁷ Tsantsanoglou (above [n. 21] 53) had no right to translate κάξιονήθην "[a]nd then Nymphs came and poured water over me." Nevertheless, it is possible that the vase was influenced by Aischylos or that both have a common source.

³⁸ The possibility of a retrospective speech delivered by the deified Herakles has been considered (and approved) by a number of scholars who do not seem to be aware of the existence of F 75a.

³⁹ Longinus knew of an Aischylean play containing an epiphany of Dionysos (*TrGF* III F *58).

⁴⁰ If my reconstruction of the plot is correct, it follows that neither the adespota *TrGF* II F 126 nor *P. Oxy.* 2454 belong to this play.

⁴¹ As does Oidipous in Soph. *O. K.* 1629-37. It is noteworthy that Aischylos repeatedly pictures Athens as a location where the oppressed find sanctuary and succor; cf. Orestes in the *Eumenides* and Adrastos in the *Eleusinioi*.

⁴² Steffen's (above [n. 24] 62f.) suggestion that Herakles is conversing from the bier with Alkmene, who has accidentally happened upon the *Herakleidae* en route to Mount Oita, conflicts with the phrasing of the speech as well as with the conventions of tragic stagecraft.

ready found a physical refuge at Athens, without certain knowledge about their father's fate they would remain, in a sense, homeless wanderers.⁴³

At long last, we can now return to the end of Sophokles' *Trachiniai*. From the argument presented above it follows that we have both literary and artistic evidence to the effect that the stories of Herakles' cremation and apotheosis had become linked before the *Trachiniai* was produced. Consequently, we have not only the right but the duty to read the tragedy with our ears open to corresponding allusions;⁴⁴ if Sophokles had wanted to depart from this version of the myth, he would have had to avoid any reference that the spectator was likely to associate with the apotheosis (cf. Holt [n. 21] 70). That such a dramatic treatment of the myth without any hint of the apotheosis was indeed possible is clear from Euripides' *Herakles*; here Herakles dies of old age in Athens, far from the flames of Mount Oeta (1329-33).⁴⁵ But Sophokles gives a different version of Herakles' story. Admittedly, we will search in vain for a "solemn messenger speech, describing what happened on Mount Oeta, [to] assure us that he did indeed go in peace" (H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis* [Berkeley 1966] 155; cf. 170). Sophokles chose a finer brush than this for the bright strokes in his depiction of Herakles' end: the first rays of Herakles' future splendor are visible only for the spectators gathered on the stone benches of the theater, not for the chorus and the characters on stage. This treatment certainly does not conflict with the nature of tragedy (Stinton [n. 8] 67); how could the anticipation of Herakles' apotheosis in the *Trachiniai* have driven fear and pity from the spectators' hearts? In the *Philoktetes* and in the *Oidipous at Kolonos* not only the audience but even the characters on stage are aware of a brighter future in store for the protagonists, and yet these plays are tragedies. Perhaps some scholars have been skeptical of a deified Herakles in Sophokles because there is none in Homer and Sophokles has long since been regarded as "altogether Homeric." But, on the other hand, does it not seem odd to impute a doubt about the hero's divinity to a man who, on the same authority, is believed to have founded a cult of Herakles in Athens (Vita *TrGF* IV T A 12)?

Gambier, Ohio

Carolin Hahnemann

⁴³ Compare the persistence with which Oidipous, despite his external comfort at Thebes, inquires about the identity of his parents (Soph. *O. T.* 1076-85). In his *Herakleidai* (854-7) Euripides resolves the issue by having Herakles and Hebe appear symbolically as stars rather than in person.

⁴⁴ This does not mean that I accept as valid all "allusions" that have been proposed.

⁴⁵ Euripides' revision of the myth has grave political implications, robbing the royal clans on the Peloponnesos of their divine ancestry and in their stead declaring the Athenians heirs of Herakles (Eur. *Her.* 1402).