# Epinician and tragic worlds: the case of Sophocles' Trachiniae

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Classical scholarship tends to place lyric poetry and tragedy in different categories, and to overlook the close relationship between the two. At first glance, this is hardly surprising. Tragedy is a product of the fifth century and resolutely Athenian, whereas lyric ranges widely in time, place and context.[1] Tragedy focuses on the darker aspects of human experience and teaches via negative *exempla* whereas lyric tends to provide a more positive view of the world and of its mythological heritage. The clearest point of interchange between the two genres is through the tragic chorus, who simultaneously represent a group of characters in the play and a chorus which sings in lyric verse. However, scholarship on the chorus has traditionally focussed on its dramatic and mimetic function, whilst analysis of the odes tends to concentrate on their relationship to the wider themes of the play.[2] Thus, whilst classicists generally agree that tragic and lyric choruses are related, the implications of this observation are rarely noted. This paper aims to break down the separation between the two genres, and to investigate the continuities between tragic song and its ritual cousins. In doing so, I will focus on one particular interface: that between tragedy and epinician poetry, and will explore it by means of a case-study: Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

Lyric poetry is part of tragedy's heritage, but the significance of choral performance in Greek society goes beyond this, and choruses formed a significant part of cultural life and civic education in the fifth century as well as the archaic period.[3] As such,

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* I use Lloyd-Jones and Wilson's OCT for the text of Sophocles; the Teubners Snell-Maehler for that of Pindar and Bacchylides. All translations are my own.

[1] Rhodes 2003 and Carter 2004 play down the importance of Athens and stress the generalisable nature of tragic morality and the presence of an international audience. However, the fact remains that tragedy evolved in Athens and remained an Athenian genre throughout the fifth century: out of the 49 fifth-century tragedians listed in TrGF I, 42 are Athenian; moreover, surviving tragedy presents Athens differently to other *poleis*.

[2] Scholarship on the tragic chorus tends to focus on the chorus' role within the play and relationship to the audience - is it 'ideal spectator'; 'voice of the *polis*'; 'voice of the marginalised group'?: see e.g. Gould 1994; Goldhill 1994; Henrichs 1995; Mastronarde 1999.

[3] See Herington 1985: 103-24 on the musical and metrical continuities between lyric and tragedy. The *locus classicus* for the importance of the chorus in Greek eyes is Pl. *Laws* 654a: οὐκοῦν ὁ μὲν ἀπαίδευτος ἀχόρευτος ἡμῖν ἔσται, τὸν δὲ πεπαιδευμένον ἱκανῶς κεχορευκότα θετέον; ('Shall we say then that the uneducated person can be defined as someone who has not participated in a chorus,

choral lyric is a powerful contemporary cultural force. Its potential influence on tragedy should therefore not be overlooked, for tragedy is a product of the musico-poetic contexts of fifth-century Athenian life as much as the political ones. As products of different political cultures and performance contexts, tragedy and lyric poetry frequently present different outlooks in their moral tone and presentation of myth. When tragedy evokes a lyric genre it therefore simultaneously evokes the cultural assumptions bound up in the genre, and the tragedians can use this for dramatic purposes.

Unlike other lyric forms such as dithyramb, which formed an important part of Athenian musical life, epinician poetry was rarely composed for Athenian victors, and, as far as we know, none of our surviving odes were performed in Athens. This might lead us to question whether an Athenian audience would be familiar with the assumptions and *topoi* of the genre. Nevertheless, our evidence indicates that Athenian poets expected their audiences to be familiar not only with the concept of epinician poetry in general terms but even with specific details. For example, at Aristophanes' *Clouds* 1354-5 Stepsiades requests the performance of a particular epinician ode by Simonides at his symposium: a joke which would hardly work if most of the audience failed to recognise the reference or felt excluded by it. Similarly, *Birds* 924-30 is a parody of a Pindaric fragment (fr. 105a S-M), which again suggests widespread knowledge of the poem. Eupolis fr. 398 K-A claims that Pindar has now ceased to be performed due to the poor taste of the masses, which implies that Pindaric poetry was still performed until recently, and that the older members of Eupolis' audience would be familiar with it and lament its passing. Epinician poetry may not have been publicly performed in Athens, but Athenians were nevertheless familiar with the genre, whether from sympotic performance (as suggested by Strepsiades) or as part of a traditional education.[4] It therefore seems safe to proceed on the assumption that a tragic poet could rely on a fair proportion of his audience recognising and responding to epinician material; this is further confirmed by the prevalence of epinician motifs in tragedy, which presuppose familiarity with epinician style and *topoi* among a mass Athenian audience.

In order to explore this aspect of tragedy we do best to begin with an example, and so this article will examine Sophocles' use of epinician material in *Trachiniae*. Whilst we find epinician language in various tragedies, *Trachiniae* is of particular interest for two reasons. Firstly, as I shall demonstrate, the themes of the play are inherently linked to the themes associated with epinician poetry, and as such the genre is used in a way which is interpretatively significant. Thus, Sophocles makes use of epinician language in order to evoke and explore ideas about heroism and individual prowess which are central to the play. Secondly, as we shall see, Heracles himself is a figure

familiar to the audience from both genres, because of his associations with the origins of *epinikion*. The Heracles of *Trachiniae* is a tragic figure, but he is characterised as such by means of epinician imagery; juxtaposing these two genres therefore provokes the audience to compare the roles that Heracles has in each of them.[5]

The first part of this paper will therefore investigate the epinician language of *Trachiniae*, and in particular the first stasimon with its clustering of athletic imagery. I will then discuss Heracles' presentation in surviving *epinikia*, and outline some important discontinuities from his characterisation in the play. Finally, I will explore how analysing the epinician language of *Trachiniae* can feed into our interpretation of some of the play's key themes, and hence what we stand to gain as critics by engaging with tragedy's use of lyric material.

# I: Epinician language in *Trachiniae*

## *Epinikion* in the first stasimon

The turning-point of *Trachiniae* comes when Deianeira, having persuaded Lichas to tell her the truth about Iole, decides to take action to win back her husband's love. As Deianeira and Lichas retire indoors, and before she returns to announce her new plan, the Chorus sing an ode to Aphrodite, warning of her terrible power (497-530). This is a device found elsewhere in tragedy: for example, the Chorus of *Hippolytus* sing an ode to Eros at the critical moment when the Nurse goes off-stage to speak to Hippolytus (525-64), while in *Antigone*, the ode to Eros comes immediately after the scene between Creon and Haemon (781-805), foreshadowing the future tragedy of Haemon's suicide. However, while the ode in *Trachiniae* may be functionally similar to these other examples, the way that the Chorus praise Aphrodite is significantly different. Whereas Eros in *Hippolytus* or *Antigone* is praised in the manner appropriate for a god, focusing on his powers and deeds, the *Trachiniae* ode tells the story of Heracles' battle to win Deianeira's hand in marriage. As various scholars have noted, this struggle is presented neither as a love-match nor as a military endeavour, but as an athletic competition, and it is moreover described in language reminiscent of epinician poetry.[6]

In principle the presentation of the love-contest as an athletic competition should not be particularly surprising or unusual, for linking marital and athletic contests is a conventional motif in Greek myth (the race for Atalanta, for example, or Pelops' chariot race). What is striking about the first stasimon is not the presence of athletic

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[5] The most extensive study on Heracles' varying presentation in Greek literature is Galinsky 1972: see 23-38 for his views on the epinician Heracles, and 46-52 on *Trachiniae*.
[6] Cf. Easterling 1982 on 497-530; Carey forthcoming. Burton 1980 notes (55) that certain stylistic features of the ode are reminiscent of *epinikion*, but does not develop this point in relation to the ode's athletic content.

imagery *per se*, but the way it is deployed and its wider significance in the play. I give the ode in full, which runs as follows:

μέγα τι σθένος ἁ Κύπρις· ἐκφέρεται νίκας ἀεί.
καὶ τὰ μὲν θεῶν
παρέβαν, καὶ ὅπως Κρονίδαν ἀπάτασεν οὐ λέγω
οὐδὲ τὸν ἔννυχον Ἅιδαν,
ἢ Ποσειδάωνα τινάκτορα γαίας·
ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τάνδ’ ἄρ’ ἄκοιτιν
<τίνες> ἀμφίγυοι κατέβαν πρὸ γάμων,
τίνες πάμπληκτα παγκόνιτά τ’ ἐξ-
ῆλθον ἄεθλ’ ἀγώνων;

ὁ μὲν ἦν ποταμοῦ σθένος, ὑψίκερω τετραόρου
φάσμα ταύρου,
Ἀχελῷος ἀπ’ Οἰνιαδᾶν, ὁ δὲ Βακχίας ἄπο
ἦλθε παλίντονα Θήβας
τόξα καὶ λόγχας ῥόπαλόν τε τινάσσων,
 παῖς Διός· οἳ τότ’ ἀολλεῖς
ἴσαν ἐς μέσον ἱέμενοι λεχέων·
μόνα δ’ εὔλεκτρος ἐν μέσῳ Κύπρις
ῥαβδονόμει ξυνοῦσα.

τότ’ ἦν χερός, ἦν δὲ τό-
ξων πάταγος,
ταυρείων τ’ ἀνάμιγδα κεράτων·
ἦν δ’ ἀμφίπλεκτοι κλίμακες, ἦν δὲ μετώ-
πων ὀλόεντα
πλήγματα καὶ στόνος ἀμφοῖν.
ἁ δ’ εὐῶπις ἁβρὰ
τηλαυγεῖ παρ’ ὄχθῳ
ἧστο τὸν ὃν προσμένουσ’ ἀκοίταν.
†ἐγὼ δὲ μάτηρ μὲν οἷα φράζω·†
τὸ δ’ ἀμφινείκητον ὄμμα νύμφας
ἐλεινὸν ἀμμένει <τέλος>·
κἀπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβαχ’,
ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα.

<div align="center">S. <em>Trach.</em> 497-530</div>

‘The Cyprian is a great power. She always carries off victories. I pass over the stories of the gods, and I do not tell how she deceived the son of Cronos, or Hades enveloped in night, or Poseidon who shakes the earth. But when this woman was to be wed, who were the mighty antagonists that entered the contest, who was it that stepped forward

to the contest of battle, full of blows and dust? One was the strength of a river, in the form of a bull, high-horned and four-legged, Achelous from Oeniadae. The other came from Bacchic Thebes, brandishing his springing bow, his spears, and his club, the son of Zeus. Then they came together in battle, yearning for her bed; Aphrodite, blesser of marriages was alone in the middle as umpire. There was a clatter of fists and arrows, and mixed with it the sound of the bull's horns. There were close grapplings, deadly blows of the forehead, and groans came from both. But she, delicate in her beauty, sat beside a distant hill, waiting for the one who would become her bridegroom. †I am telling the story as a mother would.† The face of the bride, the object of the quarrel, waits pitifully. And suddenly she has left her mother like a calf which is abandoned.'

The opening line of the stasimon makes it clear that we are meant to be thinking of the struggle in terms of athletic success: Aphrodite's power is described as an ability to 'win victories' (ἐκφέρεται νίκας, 497); when we find Deianeira called an athletic prize (ἄεθλ' ἀγώνων, 506) it becomes still clearer what type of victories are meant. The antagonists' preparations are described with the verb καταβαίνω (504), used to indicate the athlete's entry into the arena, while Aphrodite is described as the umpire deciding the outcome between the two contestants (515-16).[7] Moreover, the ode does not simply use athletic imagery but has specifically epinician overtones. Its function is a praise song, and the praise is focused upon commemorating a specific victory. As is common in *epinikia*, the contestants are identified by their home cities (Ἀχελῷος ἀπ' Οἰνιαδᾶν, ὁ δὲ Βακχίας ἄπο / ἦλθε παλίντονα Θήβας, 510-11), reflecting the poetry's focus on the community as well as the individual, and its attempt to present it as a triumph for the city too. Heracles' home city Thebes is described with the adjective Βάκχιος, reflecting an important local myth: the birth of Dionysus and his special link to Thebes. Surviving *epinikia* frequently glorify the community by incorporating elements from local myth and aetiology: for example Pindar praises the Rhodians by telling the story of the creation of the island of Rhodes (*Ol.* 7.54-69), and the Cyreneans by telling the story of their city's divine descent from Apollo, via his seduction of the maiden Cyrene (*Pyth.* 9.6-70).

The contest itself is described in ornate language, using compound adjectives, flowery syntax, and poetic periphrasis (for example ἀμφίπλεκτοι κλίμακες (520) to describe the intertwined limbs of the two contestants). The ornate language creates a decorative impression of the contest, rather than providing us with a blow-by-blow account of the action. Again, this is reminiscent of the way Pindar and Bacchylides describe their victories, providing a snapshot of the victory rather than a detailed description of how it was achieved.[8] Line 526 is corrupt, but its basic sense seems to be that the Chorus is commenting on its status as narrator, and as such its control over the audience's understanding of the events described. This too is an epinician feature:

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[7] For καταβαίνω as an athletic term, see. eg. Pind. *Pyth.* 11.49; *Nem.* 3.42; Hdt.5.22.
[8] Eg. Pind. *Ol.* 9.88-94, *Pyth.* 5.45-53, *Nem.* 6.35-9.

the poet self-consciously highlights his ownership of the praise, and thus his role in preserving the victory.[9]

When we read the ode through the codes of epinician song, however, we might also be struck by the shifting status of the *laudandus*. Invoking a god is a common device to open an epinician ode.[10] However, the first stasimon makes it clear that the song is directed to Aphrodite: her power is described in terms of physical strength (σθένος, 497), and she is explicitly named as a victor (ἐκφέρεται νίκας). The Chorus then go on to refer to her previous achievements (499-502) in order to increase the status of the victory described, just as epinician poets frequently allude to their patron's previous victories in order to increase his glory.[11] It is therefore made clear that the reason for mentioning the struggle is to glorify Aphrodite rather than to praise Heracles' prowess.

As the ode describes the contest, however, the perspective shifts. By describing Deianeira as ἄεθλ᾽ ἀγώνων and portraying her suitors as athletic competitors, Sophocles encourages us to understand the victor of the contest (and her future husband) as the focus of attention. Indeed, presenting Aphrodite as a neutral umpire (515-16) makes this shift in focus more explicit. The epinician overtones enhance this conflict, for it is through the conventions of the genre that we are guided firstly to focus on Aphrodite and then on Heracles.

## Heracles and Eros as athletes

The language of the stasimon therefore encourages us to perceive both Heracles and Aphrodite as athletic contestants. In doing so, it also evokes conventional associations, for both the motif of Heracles' athletic prowess and that of love as an athletic contest are familiar poetic *topoi*. Heracles was often claimed as the founder of the Olympic Games, and his labours were the subject of the sculptures on the temple at Zeus at Olympia, a site associated above all others with athleticism and praise poetry.[12] The tradition of referring to the labours as ἄθλα dates back to Homer, and is found in both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[13] Conversely, erotic poetry frequently presents love as a form of athletic contest, with Eros himself taking on the role of the successful athlete. Thus Anacreon fr. 396 *PMG* assimilates the trappings of the symposium with the preparations for a boxing match, with the narrator and Eros as contestants (φέρ᾽ ὕδωρ φέρ᾽ οἶνον ὦ παῖ φέρε <δ᾽> ἀνθεμόεντας ἡμὶν / στεφάνους ἔνεικον, ὡς δὴ πρὸς Ἔρωτα πυκταλίζω). He uses the same imagery at fr. 346,4, where the poet gives thanks for having escaped the harsh boxing match with Love ([χα]λεπῶι

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[9] E.g. *Ol.* 2.1-6; *Ol.* 3.1-9; *Ol.* 4.1-5; *Ol.* 7.1-10; *Ol.* 9.21-7; *Ol.* 10.1-6; *Ol.* 11.8-15; *Ol.* 13.11-12; *Pyth.* 2.1-6; *Pyth.* 9.1-4; *Pyth.* 10.4-7; *Nem.* 1.7; *Nem.* 3.9-17; *Nem.* 4.9-13; *Nem.* 5.1-5; *Nem.* 10.19-22; *Isth.* 1.1-12; *Isth.* 8.5-7.

[10] E.g. Pind. *Ol.* 3, 4, 14; *Pyth.* 6, 11; *Nem.* 7, 11; *Isth.* 3; Bacch. 3, 14B.

[11] E.g. Pind. *Ol.* 2.48-51; *Ol.* 7.83-8; *Ol.* 9.86-99; *Pyth.* 9.97-103.

[12] Heracles as Olympic founder: Pind. *Ol.* 2.3, 3.11-15,6.68-71, 10.43-63

[13] For the labours as ἄθλα: *Il.* 8.363, 19.133; *Od* 19.133. See also Mouratidis 1984; Emmanuel-Rebuffat 1985; Golden 1998: 146-57, and for the iconographic evidence Boardman in *LIMC*: 796-7.

δεπυκτάλιζ). Similarly, the Theognidea presents love as a running race (1299-1304), and as sporting activity in general (1335-6), while Ibycus presents Eros as a charioteer, with the poet as his unwilling horse (fr. 287 *PMGF*).[14]

Moreover, Sophocles has already triggered our awareness of both these motifs by using imagery which evokes them earlier in the play. The opening of the play engages with the tradition of Heracles as athletic victor, thus encouraging the audience to regard him in those terms. Deianeira begins the prologue by describing the unwanted advances of the river-god Achelous, and the battle between him and Heracles, which she calls an ἀγών (20), and which is said to have been settled by Zeus ἀγώνιος (26). The play also taps into the association between Heracles and athleticism in more general terms: for example at 36 his labours are called ἆθλα, while at 185 he is described as πολύζηλος and νικηφόρος. Whilst the latter word could refer to any form of victory, coming in the context of a clustering of athletic language its athletic associations become more apparent. The former word links into the common epinician idea of the potential envy incurred by an athletic victory, whether for good or for bad.[15] However, the presentation of the battle for Deianeira's hand as an athletic contest also reminds the audience of the imagery linking erotic and athletic pursuits. The *topos* is brought out still more strongly when Deianeira herself uses it to affirm the supremacy of Eros over mortals:

Ἔρωτι μέν νυν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται
πύκτης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ.
οὗτος γὰρ ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν ὅπως θέλει,
κἀμοῦ γε· πῶς δ' οὐ χἀτέρας οἵας γ' ἐμοῦ;
<div align="center">S. <em>Trach.</em> 441-4</div>

'Whoever stands up to box with Eros is out of his mind. Eros rules the gods as he wishes, and he certainly rules me. Why shouldn't he rule another woman as he does me?'

When the image first occurs in *Trachiniae*, we might simply interpret it as a conventional piece of imagery associated with Eros, emphasising the violent and potentially devastating effects of love.[16] However, the epinician flavouring of the first stasimon recalls this imagery, and reminds us of its moral. Deianeira had previously claimed that Heracles was simply a pawn of Eros, and hence that his lust for Iole was forgiveable (445-8). Here too we see the emphasis moved from Heracles to Aphrodite. Whereas Deianeira at the play's opening perceived Heracles' victory over

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[14] The imagery of love as charioteering or horse-riding is also found focused on the relationship between the poet and beloved rather than poet and Eros: cf. Anacr. frr 346,1, 360, 417 *PMG*.

[15] Pindar tends not to use compounds of ζῆλος, preferring to use φθόνος (or derivatives). However, Bacchylides uses πολύζηλος or πολυζήλωτος of his victors (1.184; 7.10; 10.48), thus emphasising the positive envy which an athletic victor incurs.

[16] Similar imagery is found throughout early Greek lyric poetry: for example, Eros as a blacksmith while the poet is the piece of metal being hammered (Anacr. fr. 413 *PMG*); Eros as a hunter and the poet as prey (Ibyc. fr. 287 *PMGF*); Eros as a violent storm (Sapph. fr. 47 V).

Achelous as a mighty triumph, the Chorus suggest that the only true victor is the goddess. This is further confirmed by the statement that the outcome of the contest was decided by Aphrodite, rather than Zeus as in Deianeira's speech.[17]

Thus, we see two conventional *topoi* of Greek thought presented as though in conflict: we are reminded of Heracles' athletic associations only to perceive him as crushed, like any other mortal lover, by the supreme power of Eros. Sophocles raises the possibility of Heracles as powerful hero only to overturn it: Heracles here is simply a mortal pawn of divine fate, as we will see from the remainder of the play. Indeed, this point is made explicit as Lichas goes on to draw the two motifs together:

ὡς τἄλλ᾽ ἐκεῖνος πάντ᾽ ἀριστεύων χεροῖν
τοῦ τῆσδ᾽ ἔρωτος εἰς ἅπανθ᾽ ἥσσων ἔφυ.
S. *Trach.* 488-9

'He excelled in everything else with the power of his hands, but he has been utterly defeated by his lust for this girl.'

The verb used of Heracles' previous victories (ἀριστεύω) is Homeric, and hence associated with traditional concepts of male heroism and *aretē*, an important subject for epinician song. More specifically, Pindar uses the verb to describe athletic prowess.[18] Again, Heracles is evoked as victor only to emphasise the totality of his defeat before Eros.

## II: Heracles in *epinikion*

Before we go on to examine the ramifications of this strand of imagery for the play more generally, we should not overlook the significance of Heracles himself as a target for epinician language. Epinician imagery occurs in tragedies with reference to various figures: for example in Euripides' *Electra*, the victorious Orestes and Pylades are praised in epinician terms after they kill Aegisthus (859-79), while in *Andromache*, the elderly Peleus is praised in similar language after his victory in debate over Menelaus (766-801).[19] In the case of *Trachiniae*, however, the epinician allusions take on particular depth and significance because of Heracles' own status in epinician poetry. By depicting Heracles in a tragedy, but with epinician overtones, Sophocles therefore encourages his audience to compare Heracles' presentation in each genre, and to consider the contrast between the two in their broader interpretation of the play.

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[17] For views on the role of *eros* in the play, see Winnington-Ingram 1980 78-81. Easterling 1982: 5 and Conacher 1997: 29-30 distinguish between Deianeira's (reasonable) desire to keep Heracles and other forms of *eros* in the play.
[18] Pind. *Ol.* 10.64; *Ol.* 13.43; *Pyth.* 3.74; *Nem.* 11.14; *Isth.* fr.6b line e (of athletic success); *Ol.* 1.3.42 (of water, used analogously to a victory in the Olympic Games).
[19] For a discussion of the epinician flavouring of the language in these examples, see Cropp 1988 *ad loc.*; Arnott 1981: 188-9; Swift 2010: 156-65 (on *Electra*); Allan 2000: 217-21 (on *Andromache*); Carey forthcoming (on both).

Heracles features frequently in the surviving epinician odes, unsurprisingly given the tradition that he founded the Olympic Games: eleven of Pindar's *epinikia* mention Heracles; he is also the focus of an extended mythological narrative in Bacchylides 5, and mentioned in Bacchylides 9.[20] While some of these references are brief, in most cases Heracles is mentioned in order to elucidate or support an important element in the ode. Thus, for example in *Isthmian* 6 Heracles prophesies the future birth of Aeas, ancestral hero of the Aeacidae in whose honour the song is composed (52-4). Including Heracles in the myth emphasises the future greatness of the unborn child, and also assimilates his own athletic prowess to the family's story. Similarly, *Isthmian* 7, composed for a Theban victor, mentions Heracles as the glory of Thebes (5-7) and hence alludes to the long tradition of athletic success in the city.

*Epinikion* thus uses Heracles in a fairly consistent manner (with the exception of Bacchylides 5, discussed below). While tragedy emphasises the negative aspects of myth, *epinikion* tends to focus on the positive.[21] The two surviving tragedies in which Heracles is the central character deal with the darkest moments in his life: his madness and child-killing (Eur. *Her.*) and his death at the hands of his wife (Soph. *Trach.*). Conversely, Pindar selects Heracles' most admirable acts and presents him as a source of glory for his city (*Isth.* 1.12-13 *Isth.* 7.5-7). Heracles is a founding figure and a slayer of monsters (*Ol.* 10.24-50; *Nem.* 1.62-6 ). His more questionable actions are explicitly suppressed: Pindar rejects the tradition that Heracles fought Apollo for the Delphic tripod (*Ol.* 9.30-6), and presents the deaths of his children not as a horrific murder but as a source of cult worship (*Isth.* 4.63-4). Heracles' status as future demigod and cult hero thus stand in contrast with his presentation as a flawed and suffering figure in *Trachiniae*.[22]

Heracles' status as civiliser, cult hero, and Olympic founder is presented by Pindar as indistinguishable from his future immortality. Thus, for example, when the infant Heracles strangles Hera's monstrous snakes in *Nemean* 1, Tiresias prophesies his future divine status as well as his greatness:

ὁ δέ οἱ
  φράζε καὶ παντὶ στρατῷ, ποίαις ὁμιλήσει τύχαις,
ὅσσους μὲν ἐν χέρσῳ κτανών,
ὅσσους δὲ πόντῳ θῆρας ἀϊδροδίκας·
καί τινα σὺν πλαγίῳ
ἀνδρῶν κόρῳ στείχοντα τὸν ἐχθρότατον
φᾶ ἑ δαώσειν μόρον.
καὶ γὰρ ὅταν θεοὶ ἐν
  πεδίῳ Φλέγρας Γιγάντεσσιν μάχαν
ἀντιάζωσιν, βελέων ὑπὸ ῥι-

[20] Heracles features in Pind. *Ol.* 3, 6, 9, 10; *Nem.* 1, 7, 10; *Isth.* 1, 4, 6, 7.
[21] Cf. Rutherford 2007: 8-9.
[22] An exception is Pind. fr. 169 (Snell), which presents Heracles as behaving violently in stealing the cattle of Geryon: see Ostwald 1965: 118-20.

παῖσι κείνου φαιδίμαν γαίᾳ πεφύρσεσθαι κόμαν
ἔνεπεν· αὐτὸν μὰν ἐν εἰρή-
   νᾳ τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνου <ἐν> σχερῷ
ἡσυχίαν καμάτων μεγάλων
   ποινὰν λαχόντ᾽ ἐξαίρετον
ὀλβίοις ἐν δώμασι, δεξάμενον
   θαλερὰν Ἥβαν ἄκοιτιν καὶ γάμον
δαίσαντα πὰρ Δὶ Κρονίδᾳ,
   σεμνὸν αἰνήσειν νόμον.
                    Pind. *Nem.* 1.61-72

'And [Tiresias] told him and the whole band what fortunes the child would meet with, how many lawless monsters he would kill on land and how many on the sea, and he said that the boy would lay low a certain man, the most hateful of all, who walked with crooked arrogance towards men. For when the gods and giants met in battle on the plain of Phlegra the shining hair of the giants would be defiled with earth by his speeding missiles. And as the choicest recompense for his vast labours he would have allotted to him tranquillity for all of time, in continual peace, in a happy home, and he would receive blossoming Hebe as his bride and would celebrate his wedding with Zeus son of Cronus and praise his holy rule.'

Thus Heracles' struggles on earth are contrasted with his tranquillity in heaven, and the latter is the reward for undertaking the former. Moreover, Pindar claims to tell the story of Heracles' life and subsequent deification while failing to mention his death at the hands of Deianeira. Heracles is described simply as ascending to heaven as a result of his glory on earth: an apparently painless process without the need for death and suffering. Similarly, *Olympian* 3 refers to Heracles' apotheosis as part of the story of his foundation of the Olympic Games. *Isthmian* 4 also depicts Heracles' ascent to Olympus as following his killing of the murderous giant Antaeus (52-54b), presented as an act to protect mankind (κρανίοις ὄφρα ξένων ναὸν Ποσειδάωνος ἐρέφοντα σχέθοι, 59-60). The potentially problematic aspects of Heracles' life on earth are smoothed over after his death: his dead children are presented as a focus of cult (and it is not made explicit that he himself killed them) (63-4), while Hera's former hostility to him has become reconciled through marriage (γαμβρὸς Ἥρας, 78).

Heracles therefore has a particular persona in epinician poetry, and one which stands in contrast to his presentation in tragedy. This should not in itself be surprising, for whereas tragedy tends to focus on the crises in heroes' lives, epinician song prefers to emphasise their positive qualities. Thus for example, while Euripides' *Medea* focuses on Medea as a murderess and child-killer, Pindar's *Pythian* 4 acknowledges her destructive potential (for example her murder of Pelias, 250) but also stresses her power to act for good (her prophetic powers and her assistance of Jason, 13-58, 218-23). Both tragedy and epinician poetry engage with the theme of the relationship between the powerful individual and the wider group: a theme of importance to any

Greek *polis*. However, while tragedy shows the flaws of these aristocratic heroes, their excessive nature and inability to fit in with ordinary values, epinician poets focus on the positive resolution of this same theme, exploring the potential dangers of *phthonos* but also presenting the *laudandus* in a beneficial relationship with his community.

The differences between tragic and epinician world views can be explained as resulting from the performance context and function of each genre: whereas tragedy uses heroes to explore painful issues of contemporary (or perennial) relevance, *epinikion* sets them up as mythological foils to the *laudandus'* own achievements. What is particularly interesting about *Trachiniae*, however, is that the play presents Heracles as a tragic character, but in doing so deliberately evokes his epinician persona. Thus, rather than being able to attribute the variations in presentation of Heracles to the demands of different genres, the audience is forced to set the two versions of Heracles side by side and to compare them.

## Bacchylides 5: a tragic Heracles?

The portrayal of Heracles in epinician poetry is not entirely uniform, however, for Bacchylides 5 presents us with an instructive counter-example. The poem contains a prolonged narrative describing Heracles' visit to the underworld and his conversation with the ghost of Meleager. The reason for Heracles' visit to Hades is a typical piece of heroic action: to take Cerberus (60). However, the poem fails to describe this act, and instead focuses on the dialogue between the two heroes. Thus, Heracles is presented not as a model for physical prowess, but in the context of a moral lesson about the impossibility of achieving total happiness (50-55). The most obvious paradigm is Meleager, whose fate prompts Heracles to weep for the only time in his life (155-7) but the mythological section concludes with an ostentatious foreshadowing of Heracles' own death at the hands of Deianeira (165-75), introduced with the ironic twist that Heracles brings his fate upon himself, by seeking out Deianeira's hand in marriage because of his pity and admiration for Meleager (165-9). The poet thus manipulates the audience's awareness of the myth to achieve irony, playing their knowledge against Heracles' ignorance, a strategy familiar from tragedy.[23] Indeed, Meleager's statement that Deianeira is 'still without experience of golden Aphrodite, the enchantress of mortals' (νῆϊν ἔτι χρυσέας / Κύπριδος θελξιμβρότου, 174-5) alludes to the disastrous power that Aphrodite will wield over Heracles and Deianeira, and Deianeira's murder of her husband because of the love she feels for him.[24]

Bacchylides 5 thus explores the Heracles myth from a rather different angle to what we find in other extant *epinikia*. A natural conclusion might simply be that the conventions of epinician poetry were rather more flexible than we tend to assume. In

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[23] Burnett 1985: 141 also notes that the mythological section structurally resembles a tragic messenger scene.
[24] Cf. Lefkowitz 1969: 42.

particular, one might argue that Bacchylides' style and tone is different from that of Pindar, that he is more influenced by the tragic vision of the Athenian dramatists, and that he therefore uses heroes in a different way: for example, one could compare Croesus' speech in poem 3 where he criticises the gods for their ingratitude (37-47). Croesus is saved because of his piety, and so his criticisms of the gods turn out to be unfounded; nevertheless the concerns raised are ones which Pindar tends to avoid, as he tends to express more faith in divine beneficence.[25] In fact, however, poem 3 ostentatiously draws attention to its own breaking of conventions, when the poet warns his Muse off the theme and diverts her to more appropriate topics for epinician song:[26]

Λευκώλενε Καλλιόπα,
  στᾶσον εὐποίητον ἅρμα
αὐτοῦ· Δία τε Κρονίδαν
  ὕμνησον Ὀλύμπιον ἀρχαγὸν θεῶν,
τόν τ' ἀκαμαντορόαν
  Ἀλφεόν, Πέλοπός τε βίαν,
καὶ Πίσαν ἔνθ' ὁ κλεεννὸς
  πο]σσὶ νικάσας δρόμῳ
ἦλθ]εν Φερένικος <ἐς> εὐπύργους Συρακόσ-
  σας Ἱέρωνι φέρων
εὐδ]αιμονίας πέταλον.
                Bacch. 5.176-86

'White-armed Calliope, stop your well-wrought chariot here. Sing of Zeus the son of Cronus, and of the tireless stream of Alpheus, and the might of Pelops, and Pisa, where famous Pherenicus sped on his feet to victory in the race and brought back the leaf of good fortune back to Syracuse of the fine towers.'

We thus find the poet suggesting that his treatment of the myth is not in line with the norms of *epinikion*; indeed that the story needs to be stopped before the further ramifications of Heracles' encounter with Meleager can be described. The abrupt transition is prompted by the mention of Deianeira; hence the implication is that Heracles' ultimate fate should not be mentioned in an epinician ode. This idea is presented through the image of the Muse's chariot (177), thus reminding us of the athletic function of the song and of the bond between athletic achievement and poetic

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[25] Note, however, that Heracles is mentioned for his killing of the Nemean lion in Bacch. 9.6-10, a presentation more in line with what we have already examined. For Bacchylides' compassionate tone and ambivalent presentation of his characters, see Carey 1999.

[26] Carey 1999: 22 takes the fact that the decision to change topic is presented as an injunction to the Muse rather than grounded in the poet's own attitudes indicates a less emotional approach. However, one could equally well take the injunction as representing the poet's shock that the Muse has got this far: involving a third party can increase rather than decrease the intensity of the statement, and any form of apostrophe automatically involves the narrator as much as a first person statement does. This authorial break-off or 'Abbruchsformel' is a common epinician feature: for a recent discussion of the technique see Mackie (2003) ch. 1.

reward. The poet then goes on to suggest more suitable topics, building up a dense cluster of themes related to Olympia, which again highlights the poem's diversion from the norms of praise-song. Thus, Bacchylides draws attention to the norms of how Heracles is presented in epinician song even as he manipulates them. Bacchylides presents his treatment of the Heracles myth as a piece of poetic innovation; something that strains the conventions of the genre so much that abrupt authorial intervention is required to get the song back on track.

Poem 5, then, in fact serves to confirm the conventions of how the heroes, and Heracles in particular, are usually presented in epinician poetry. Moreover, whilst the poem's treatment of Heracles may be unusual, it still stops short of what we find in tragedy. By contrast, Bacchylides 16, a dithyramb, is much closer in both narrative and style to the tragic portrayal of Heracles, as here Bacchylides explicitly deals with Heracles' death and suffering at the hands of Deianeira. [27] In poem 5, the poet may allude to Heracles' fate, but he stops short of actually depicting it; we do not see Heracles suffering and mortal, as we do in Bacchylides' dithyrambic treatment of the myth, or in *Trachiniae* or Euripides' *Heracles*. Heracles' death needs to be supplied by the audience, for within the context of the poem itself we see him as a great and powerful hero, in a position to pity those less fortunate than himself (155-8). Even the moral that Heracles draws from what he has heard contains optimism as well as pessimism, for while Heracles utters the tragic *topos* that it is best never to have been born (160-2) the conclusion he draws from this is of the necessity for heroic action (162-4).[28] Indeed, once the audience has supplied Heracles' fate at the hands of Deianeira, they may equally well supply the story of his subsequent deification, a standard part of the Heracles myth. Heracles' persona in epinician song, then, even at its most unconventional, is still significantly more optimistic than his treatment by the tragedians, or even by Bacchylides himself composing for a different genre.

## III: Epinician and tragic worlds

We have seen, therefore, that *Trachiniae* deliberately evokes epinician language in its portrayal of Heracles and the contest for Deianeira's hand, and that in doing so it draws on a set of assumptions about Heracles which are very different to his presentation in the play. The final part of this article will explore the wider implications of this use of epinician language, and how it might affect our interpretation of *Trachiniae*. Alluding to *epinikion* not only evokes a certain characterisation of Heracles himself, but also has more far-reaching consequences in terms of the world-view and sets of values bound up in the genre. Portraying Heracles in a way which suggests his status as an epinician hero therefore also involves raising the cultural assumptions bound up in *epinikion*. Doing so in the context of a tragedy, where different values and assumptions apply, creates a mismatch in the audience's expectations, and provokes them to view the play through the lens of the lyric genre.

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[27] For the tragic vision of dithyramb, see Burnett 1985 ch. 8.
[28] Cf. Lefkowitz 1969: 85 'his faith in the material world has not really been shaken'.

Analysing the epinician imagery in *Trachiniae* enriches our reading of several aspects of the play. Firstly, Heracles' epinician persona is closely linked with his apotheosis, and as such can cast light on the vexed question of whether or not the play overtly foreshadows Heracles' future deification. Heracles' portrayal in epinician poetry is in general terms more upbeat than in *Trachiniae*, and this therefore feeds into the discussion of Heracles' character, and the degree to which we sympathise with his fate. Secondly, the epinician motifs feed into the play's theme of heroic *nostos*, for *epinikia* are poems designed to facilitate and celebrate a successful *nostos*, an eventuality which the play fails to confer.

## Apotheosis and heroism

One of the most disputed aspects of *Trachiniae* is whether the play's ending encourages the audience to infer Heracles' future apotheosis, or whether it rather attempts to omit it, suggesting that Heracles will suffer and die like any other mortal.[29] Heracles' apotheosis is not so embedded into the myth as to be impossible to remove: famously Achilles in the *Iliad* uses Heracles as an example of the impossibility of escaping death (18.115-9), while the *Odyssey* presents Heracles' ghost (εἴδωλον) in Hades even while the hero himself feasts on Olympus (11.601-19). Nevertheless, the apotheosis became a standard part of the myth both in literature and in art, and is attested as early as Hesiod (*Theogony* 954-5); scholars who argue for the apotheosis in *Trachiniae* also emphasise the significance of the pyre Heracles is placed on at the end of the play and its links to his ascension.[30] The question is not simply one of mythological tradition, but rather affects how we should understand the tone and themes of the play: those who favour a mortal Heracles argue that the focus on his death fits in better with the play's sombre tone and tend to see Heracles as a flawed and in many respects unpleasant figure.[31]

The play's use of material from *epinikion* is relevant to this question, for as we have already seen, epinician portrayals of Heracles place particular emphasis on his future apotheosis. Whilst epinician poems frequently allude to the cult honours paid to ordinary heroes after their death, Heracles is singled out for the unique privilege of true immortality, and Pindar's odes frequently present this as a reward for his exceptional heroism while on earth (as discussed above). Presenting Heracles in this light therefore reminds the audience of the traditions associated with the hero in his 'epinician mode'. It therefore becomes rather harder to claim that Sophocles suppresses the apotheosis myth as much as possible, when the Chorus praise Heracles

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[29] The literature on this question is extensive; for a full bibliography of scholarship in each camp see Stinton 1986: 480 n.89 and Liapis 2006: 56 n. 23, 24. Some scholars reject the polarity and instead take a variety of intermediate positions: e.g. Hoey 1977; Easterling 1981; Liapis 2006.

[30] E.g. Holt 1989: 73-4; Finkelberg 1996, though see Stinton 1987 for the opposite view. Attic vases present Heracles on the pyre, or soaring above it to Olympus: see Beazley 1947: 103-4; Clairmont 1953: 85-9; Boardman 1986: 128 on the iconography.

[31] Cf. e.g. Murray 1946: 106-26; Galinsky 1972: 46-52. Conversely, Holt 1989, who argues for the apotheosis, also seeks to mitigate the attack on Heracles' character (77).

in language which would surely have directed the audience's attention to the Heracles they knew of from other genres: a divine recipient of cult and a force for civilisation.[32] The use of epinician material thus highlights the sophistication of tragedy's handling of mythological associations from other sources. When the play alludes to conventions from epinician song, the effect is not to make the audience think that the Heracles they see on stage must therefore be equated with the Heracles they know of from other traditions, but to create a mismatch in values and expectations. Evoking multiple world views forces the audience to consider and question the values of each: it is a deliberately provocative strategy. Thus, rather than simply adopting one or other version of the myth, Sophocles deliberately confronts the conflicts between them, and the varying presentations of Heracles which they offer.

Upon examination, this emerges as a fairly common strategy in Sophoclean drama: the poet frequently presents snippets of information which jar with the overall tone of the play, and thus serve to complicate our response.[33] For example, in the *O.T.*, it is frequently observed that Sophocles suppresses the causal chain within the Labdacid house that leads to Oedipus' fate, thus making the oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother appear particularly baffling, and so heightening the sense of divine cruelty. Yet when Jocasta mentions the oracle within the play, her phrasing suggests that the prophecy was still a conditional one (ὅστις γένοιτ᾽ ἐμοῦ τε κἀκείνου πάρα, 714): the use of the optative suggests that Oedipus has not yet been conceived, and hence reminds us of the tradition that Laius was forbidden from begetting a child but ignored the divine warning. Similarly, while the main focus of *Antigone* is on the eponymous heroine's freely-willed action, the Chorus raise the possibility that she is suffering from a family curse (856), and Antigone agrees with their suggestion rather than asserting her own autonomy, thus raising this possibility in the audience's minds (857-71).[34] To give an example more directly related to lyric norms, the *parodos* of the *O.T.* contains echoes of the *paian*, a genre which presents Apollo as a beneficent protector, a convention which stands in stark contrast with the play's much more ambiguous portrayal of the god.[35]

The epinician portrayal of Heracles therefore draws the audience's attention to versions of the Heracles myth where the hero is deified. However, it also reminds the audience of Heracles' usual presentation in those versions: his status as a civiliser and an upholder of the moral order. By contrast, Heracles in *Trachiniae* is a typical example of a tragic hero: an extreme figure whose greatness is at odds with social norms.[36] Moreover, though we are alerted to Heracles' admirable qualities through the Chorus' praise and longing for him, it is his selfish and violent qualities that the play

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[32] Indeed, as Silk 1985: 4 notes, Heracles is more usually a saviour and civiliser in tragedy than a suffering hero, thus making his portrayal in *Trach.* (and in Eur. *Her.*) particularly striking.

[33] For a discussion of the ambiguity of Sophocles' endings, see Roberts 1988.

[34] The importance of these features are overlooked by Knox 1964 who argues (5) that Sophoclean heroes act in a vacuum from external influences or causalities.

[35] For paeanic influences in the *parodos*, see Burton 1980: 142; Stehle 2004: 144-8. I examine this ode and its ramifications in detail in Swift 2010: 77-81.

[36] Cf. Easterling 1968: 66-7; Easterling 1981: 60-1; Holt 1989: 78.

foregrounds: his undermining of Deianeira's position; his murder of Lichas; his harsh treatment of Hyllus.[37] Thus, *Trachiniae* encourages its audience to compare the 'epinician' and the 'tragic' Heracles, and to observe the play's focus on his more negative aspects. Similarly, the epinician Heracles is above all associated with physical strength and vigour, whilst it is Heracles' physical suffering which *Trachiniae* dwells on in gruesome detail.[38] Within the context of *Trachiniae*, the epinician echoes are therefore ironic, since they highlight the extent to which Heracles falls short of our expectations of him in that genre. Yet the allusion to the epinician Heracles reminds us of the positive role that the hero can ultimately fulfil, and thus help to bridge the gap between the two versions of Heracles that the play presents or alludes to: suffering hero and demi-god.

Moreover, the epinician references remind us of the double-edged nature of traditional heroism. Heroes in tragedy are frequently selfish, unreasonable and excessive, and bring suffering upon their friends and family as well as upon themselves. Nevertheless, it is their excessive and individualistic nature which also makes them powerful and admirable figures, and it is their individual brilliance which makes them suitable *comparanda* for athletic victors. Thus, by portraying Heracles as athletic victor, the play not only draws a stark contrast with the selfish figure at the end of the play, but also reminds us of the positive aspects that these negative qualities can also confer.

## Heracles' homecoming and the failure of *nostos*

The use of epinician language is particularly relevant in a play which centers around a hero's *nostos*, for one of the functions of an epinician ode is to facilitate the smooth reintegration of the returning victor into his community.[39] The Greeks perceived the act of winning at the Games to be an alienating as well as a glorious one. Athletic victors are felt to be different to other mortals: hence the potential for their heroization.[40] This sense that they are somehow more than mortal is also expressed by traditions such as the breaking down of a section of city wall in order to allow them in. Athletes were able to use their new status for political means, for example the story that Glaucus of Carystus became governor of Camarina because of his renown as a boxer.[41] Nevertheless, stories such as Cylon's attempted tyranny at Athens also demonstrate the double-edged nature of athletic success in Greek eyes.[42]

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[37] Segal 1981: 61 and Silk 1985: 6 note that Heracles as a figure always contains this inherent ambiguity, as he represents both the best and the worst of mankind.

[38] Cf. Bowra 1944: 137-9 on the irony of Heracles being reduced to a peculiarly painful form of physical suffering.

[39] See Crotty 1982: 108-38 and Kurke 1991: 15-34 on the significance of *nostos* in *epinikion*.

[40] On heroization, see Currie 2005, who explores the significance of hero-cult for *epinikion*.

[41] Schol. Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 190; Bekker *Anecd. Gr.* 1.232.

[42] Hdt. 5.71; Thuc. 1.126. Another example is Alcibiades, who claimed political eminence through his athletic display and prowess (Thuc. 6.16), but was regarded with suspicion by the Athenians, who believed he was aiming at tyranny (Thuc. 6.15.3-4).

An athlete's reintegration into his community is therefore an occasion of great rejoicing, but also one fraught with hazards: both the potential threat he now poses to the wider group, and the potential envy that he faces from less fortunate citizens.

The choral odes of *Trachiniae* explore Heracles' *nostos* from a variety of angles. The parodos highlights the importance of Heracles' return, emphasising the desperate situation of his *oikos* and Deianeira's grief (103-111). The first stasimon then interprets the *nostos* through the filter of three separate choral forms: *hymenaios* (205-7), *paian* (207-15, 221), and Dionysiac song (216-20).[43] By evoking these separate choral forms, the Chorus explores the significance of Heracles' return as though from a variety of perspectives, and alludes to different elements of the community affected.[44] Each form also evokes a specific sense of celebration, thus assimilating the *nostos* to the most significant and joyful moments in individual or religious life. Heracles is thus depicted as a bridegroom (μελλόνυμφος, 207), and the ode emphasises the importance of the marital house (ἀνολολυξάτω δόμος / ἐφεστίοις ἀλαλαγαῖς, 205-6) thus drawing our attention to Heracles' role as head of the household, and the restitution of the fortunes of his family. The hymeneal motif thus alludes to the importance of Heracles' return from Deianeira's perspective: marriage is felt to be the *telos* of a Greek woman's life, yet we are reminded of her statement at the start of the play that her sexual maturity symbolised the end of her happiness rather than a transition to a new and positive role (144-52). Presenting Heracles' *nostos* as though in a wedding song therefore suggests a second attempt at facilitating Deianeira's passage from girl to woman; it is as though her past suffering can be undone. Similarly, the paeanic language evokes a sense of divine salvation from a potential disaster, alluding to the function of the *paian* in warding off disaster, or in celebrating victory, while the Dionysiac imagery suggests the religious release found in the god's worship.[45] Similarly, the third stasimon anticipates Heracles' return once more, portraying it as an occasion of future music (640) and a transformation from grief to joy (640-2). This ode reiterates previous themes: thus Heracles' physical prowess and *arete* are again mentioned (ὁ γὰρ Διὸς Ἀλκμήνας κόρος / σοῦται πάσας ἀρετᾶς λάφυρ' ἔχων ἐπ' οἴκους, 644-5), as is Deianeira's grief (650-2). After reviewing the various meanings of the *nostos*, the Chorus conclude with a passionate expression of their hope for Heracles' arrival (655-62), in a string of optatives beginning with the simple repetition ἀφίκοιτ' ἀφίκοιτο ('may he come, may he come').

Moreover, Sophocles increases the emphasis on Heracles' *nostos* by delaying Heracles' actual entrance for as long as possible. Indeed, when the messenger first announces Heracles' imminent return, Deianeira asks why he has yet not arrived if he could do so (αὐτὸς δὲ πῶς ἄπεστιν, εἴπερ εὐτυχεῖ; 192). By making Deianeira raise

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[43] Finkelberg 1996: 135-6 sees the religious elements of the ode as integral to the *nostos* theme, and suggests a connection with Heracles' festival on Mount Oeta.
[44] Cf. Burton 1980: 51-3.
[45] On the functions of the *paian*, see Rutherford 2001: 6-7. For Dionysiac worship as release, cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 64-166, 402-16, 862-76, and see Seaford 1996: 30-5.

this 'logical' objection, Sophocles draws attention to the deliberate delaying of Heracles' arrival; the fact that the Messenger misunderstands her question and thinks she is referring to Lichas rather than Heracles (193-9) also creates a jarring effect, leaving the reason for Heracles' absence unclear. *Trachiniae* thus flags the 'logical' oddity in the time taken for Heracles to appear, and by doing so invites its audience to consider the dramatic purpose of his absence. Heracles' *nostos* is discussed by both characters and Chorus, building it up into the play's central event, and its treatment in the choral odes encourages us to link it to other occasions of ritual or personal importance. Thus, when Heracles' *nostos* fails, and he arrives on-stage not as triumphant victor but as a fallen and suffering figure, this creates a powerful emotional effect.[46]

The *nostos* theme thus engages with the play's epinician imagery, presenting a reversal of the normal expectations of the epinician ode. Epinician singers engage with the fears that surround an athletic *nostos*, and recognise the possibility that reintegration may not be satisfactory, yet the purpose of the ode is to facilitate that reintegration, and to celebrate a successful *nostos*. In *Trachiniae*, the epinician language foreshadows a *nostos* which turns out to be a failure: the hero's own behaviour and actions while away have made it impossible for him to fit smoothly back into his community. The first stasimon's presentation of Aphrodite as *laudanda* thus hints at the reasons for the failure of Heracles' reintegration, reminding us of Heracles' weakness before the power of Eros. Indeed, the strongest cluster of epinician imagery surrounds the event which will ultimately doom Heracles' *nostos*, his battle to secure Deianeira's hand in marriage.

## Conclusion

The epinician language of the first stasimon, then, should be understood not simply as an isolated poetic feature, but as something integral to the play's wider concerns. The use of such language encourages the audience to consider the features of epinician poetry in more general terms, and this is faciliated by Heracles' status as the hero most closely connected with the genre, and as patron of athletic prowess. On the most immediate level, the epinician allusions enrich our interpretation of the first stasimon. Presenting the contest for Deianeira as an athletic competition, but with Aphrodite rather than Heracles as *laudanda*, highlights one of the play's central themes: the humbling of the almighty Heracles before the power of Eros. In addition, however, the use of epinician song has further ramifications. Because of Heracles' role in *epinikion*, this language, when associated with him, encourages the audience to consider the discontinuities in his portrayal. Whereas *Trachiniae* focuses on Heracles' moment of crisis, and presents this disaster as arising from his problematic heroism, *epinikia* are more reflective of Heracles' portrayal in Greek culture, portraying him as a civiliser, an athletic patron, and a model for heroic behaviour. These discontinuities

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[46] Silk 1985: 3 also notes how striking it is that Heracles and Deianeira fail to meet, and observes that even in *nostos* dramas where the returning hero is destroyed, he is usually allowed to meet his family beforehand.

then feed into the play's handling of other issues. For example, Heracles' apotheosis is a central part of his portrayal in *epinikion*, and thus the epinician allusions raise the prospect of deification, making it harder to claim that Sophocles tries to suppress his audience's awareness of this tradition. Equally, the epinician references heighten the poignancy of the play's *nostos* theme, for we see the language which is usually associated with facilitating a *nostos* used in a context where the *nostos* is about to end in the hero's painful death.

In more general terms, this paper has also aimed to highlight the richness of lyric allusion as a poetic device for the tragedians. Scholars have regularly observed allusions to lyric genres in tragedy, and have been able to identify particular odes as being paeanic, hymenaeal or epinician in flavour. However, if we stop our analysis there, we fail to notice the function this language and themes can have. Lyric allusion can not only assist our reading of individual stasima, but can play a more substantive structural or poetic role, by giving the audience a filter through which to view the rest of the play. We should remember too that, while identifying epinician or hymenaeal features may be a difficult task for us, these songs were a central part of education and of social life for an educated Athenian, and he would have been far more atuned to the *topoi* of such poetry than we can ever hope to become. It is only in relatively recent years that scholars of tragedy have recognised the importance of performance context to understanding the plays, yet scholarship of this kind still focuses on the political and historical angle: the Dionysia, Athenian democracy, the Peloponnesian War. Yet since we are dealing with a society who attributed so much importance to poetry and choral song as an educational and moral tool, it is now time for us to realise that the musical, poetic, and cultural contexts of tragedy are just as central to a reading of these texts.[47]

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[47] For a detailed study of tragedy's engagement with a variety of lyric genres, see Swift 2010.

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