

# Cultivated blindness

By Klaus Schlagmann, Diploma-Psychologist & Psychotherapist, Puriscal, Costa Rica

## Content

Introduction.....	2
Trauma, Catharsis and Psych-Analysis.....	2
Human and Social "Organism".....	4
Raising Public Awareness.....	4
Memorable Deaths.....	5
The Women of Trachis.....	6
Caught in a Lie.....	6
Cunning Interrogation Technique.....	7
The Love Spell.....	8
Admonition to Caution.....	9
Instructions to Lichas.....	9
Real Feeling of Guilt or Acting?.....	10
Deianeira's Suicide.....	12
Mortally Wounded Heracles.....	12
Intrigue of Deianira.....	12
Counter Perspective.....	14
Tragical Figures.....	16
Theory.....	16
Heracles.....	16
Deianeira.....	16
The Choir of Trachinian Women.....	17
Political Message.....	17
Message to the Audience.....	18
Problems of Classical Philology.....	19
Fell in.....	21

2,500 years ago, Greek tragedies were meant to make people think. Today, the same pieces are used to train the ability to overlook contradictions – and thereby foster blindness to truthful connections.

## Introduction

Not everyone is familiar with the dramas of Sophocles. However, they have – rightly so – been part of education for centuries. In Germany, to this day, they are often offered to the young intellectual elite in grammar schools as part of their teaching material. Contradictions – deliberately formulated – come to light in these pieces, which should give the Attic audience food for thought. In specialist commentaries from the past to the present day, however, these contradictions are regularly missed and ignored. The effect: the young elite is trained to overlook obvious inconsistencies. This practiced non-perception then also determines how to deal with current contradictions.

The author has already pointed out and interpreted the contradictions contained in the dramas "King Oedipus" and "Antigone" on the Rubicon/MANOVA<sup>1</sup>, which have so far been "overlooked" by specialist commentaries. Here is an additional look at Sophocles' play "The Women of Trachis". It tells about the death of the ancient superhero Heracles.

The same applies here: Whoever does not perceive the contradictions built into this piece does not understand what is happening. Without looking for these discrepancies one will then see in the death of Heracles the result of a tragic to negligent attempt by his wife to set a love spell in motion. This interpretation is – as I will show with numerous examples – cultivated in the professional world to this day.

The opposite can be made plausible: This is undoubtedly the act of retaliation by a betrayed wife who, at the last possible moment, wants to avenge at lightning speed an abysmal betrayal in a targeted manner.

## Trauma, Catharsis and Psych-Analysis

The ancient author Sophocles lived in Athens 2,500 years ago, approximately from 497 to 405 BC (BC). During this period of the emergence of Attic democracy, he wrote plays, seven of which have survived to this day. In doing so, he brought grandiose political parables to the Athenian stage, which were intended to educate his compatriots in a democratic consciousness.

All people who let such dramas affect them can put into words and express which emotional impulses are triggered in the novel characters – and thus possibly also in themselves. The Greek philosopher and doctor Aristotle – 384 to 322 BC., about a century af-

---

1 <https://www.manova.news/artikel/schuldlos-unschuldig>; <https://www.manova.news/artikel/absage-antyrannie>

ter Sophocles – claims that this allows the viewers to free themselves from trepidation. He calls this process “catharsis”.

In the years 1880 to 1882, the Viennese doctor Josef Breuer, together with his patient Bertha Pappenheim, pseudonym "Anna O", developed a psychotherapy procedure which he called Psych-Analysis<sup>2</sup>. When naming it, he oriented himself to a statement by Friedrich Schiller about the play “King Oedipus”, which he described as a “tragic analysis”<sup>3</sup>. "Analysis" is derived from the Greek "ana" (back, backwards) and "lyein" (solve). Looking backwards Oedipus, the king of Thebes, resolves his own destiny and at the end of his investigations arrives at his early childhood trauma<sup>4</sup>: he was to be left to die by a servant in the wilderness at the age of three days, with his heels pierced and his feet bound together. From this mistreatment he gets his name "Oedipus" (swollen foot). By this deed of the person who had ordered this, he is permanently estranged from his parents. At the end, the truth about these happenings must be recognized and spoken out – only by this the rampant plague can disappear in Thebes and the community can recover.

This backward-looking clarification of trauma corresponds exactly to Breuer's approach. He had recognized that mental or physical reactions that have taken place in traumatic situations, with appropriate stimuli that are reminiscent of the trauma – so called "triggers" – reflexively start again. It is basically the mechanism that Ivan Pavlov later received the Nobel Prize for describing in 1904, which is called "classical conditioning". Breuer was able to make such problematic conditioned reaction patterns, that hinder self-realization, disappear. He encouraged his patient Bertha Pappenheim to evoke the triggering situation again in a trance. Then he asked her to express the associated feelings corresponding to a "healthy" instinct, which would have been appropriate at the time but then had to be repressed. So, looking backward, she was able to express her authentic feelings – for example anger, fear, sadness, dislike or disgust. In this state, Breuer's patient also spontaneously invented stories and acted out good solutions in them like a daydream. Breuer also called this form of treatment the “cathartic method”<sup>5</sup>.

---

2 To distinguish it from Freud's completely contrary approach, I refer to Breuer's coherent and successful procedure as "psychanalysis" – in fact without the "o". In an essay from 1896 – "L'hérédité et l'étiologie des neuroses", GW, 1, p. 416 – Freud himself speaks of "psychanalysis" as "Josef Breuer's subtle research method". The Swiss Ludwig Frank based his work on Breuer and published "Die Psychanalyse" in 1910 with Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, Munich. In 1927 he published "The psychocathartic treatment of nervous disorders", Georg Thieme Verlag, Leipzig. Breuer's psychoanalysis is pretty much the opposite of what Sigmund Freud made known and marketed as "psychoanalysis."

3 Schiller in a letter to Goethe dated October 2, 1797

4 Klaus Schlagmann: Schuldlos unschuldig, Mai 2020. <https://www.manova.news/artikel/schuldlos-unschuldig>

Such a catharsis clarifies the view of one's own situation. One is able to free oneself from old beliefs, convictions or behavioral patterns that have developed and become ingrained in traumatic moments. While these reactions may have been useful in the initial situation, their automatic activation later on can be annoying and cumbersome. If experienced traumas remain unresolved, then "wrong" or unhealthy beliefs and behaviors can remain. This, in turn, can lead to incorrect assessments and unfavorable life decisions.

## **Human and Social "Organism"**

Josef Breuer wanted to free a human individual from his symptoms and enable him to achieve healthy self-realization. Sophocles, on the other hand, had a kind of collective "organism" in front of him: his audience. He wanted to dissuade his fellows from problematic mental attitudes and thus from harmful political decisions. His allegorical plays should lead to a truly democratic, healthy self-realization of this community.

There is no doubt that one of the shortcomings of the democracy in Athens at the time was that participation in political decision-making was not regulated on an equal footing. However, those who were able to participate in politics were much more directly and extensively involved than is the case in today's parliamentary or representative democracies. All (male) Attic citizens entitled to vote were required to think about what was going on around them and to directly discuss and vote on pending questions: Should the treasury of the Attic Maritime Union be placed entirely under the care of Athens? Could this lead to conflicts? Is it okay, out of fear of the Persians, to use military power to force the allies of the Delian League to remain members there and to make the corresponding high financial contributions? Was taking a position against long-time ally Samos justified in the conflict between Samos and Miletus? Could one invade the island of Melos, kill the male inhabitants and sell the women and children into slavery in order to fill the war chest with this expropriation? Was such a measure suitable for improving the chances of success in the war?

## **Raising Public Awareness**

What are certain social conflicts really about? What is at the heart of disastrous developments? Which claims are justified, which are harmful? Sophocles wove such puzzles

---

5 In the imaginative procedures that work in a similar way today – self-organizational hypnosis or Imagery Rescripting and Reprocessing Therapy (IRRT) – one gives the healthy impulses a lot of space in retrospect, in a safe framework, in order to extensively play through appropriate coping options for these situations. In this way, the patients should be able to clearly experience how the respective traumatizing events – which cannot be changed – should have happened at the time while protecting the legitimate claims of those affected.

into his dramas. They only become apparent when you notice subtleties in his texts, which often turn out to be contradictions. Perceiving and solving these puzzles is actually not that difficult.

However – as shown in other contributions<sup>1</sup> – a blindness to contradictions is traditionally cultivated. Sophocles plays are played in the theater or read at school, but the comments for experts or students hide the contradictions, ignore them or specify that they don't exist. A conscious confrontation with it is literally prevented. As a result, something like "truth" does not come into its own. Oddities are ignored. Falsehoods are spread. The audience is trained to be fooled.

### **Memorable Deaths**

There are numerous deaths from modern times that seem unexplained to me, for example that of John F. Kennedy in 1963. How can Lee Harvey Oswald be responsible for the fatal shooting of JFK when he must have been behind the President at the time of the shooting? The available footage – for example the Zapruder-Film – clearly shows how Kennedy's head at the moment of his assassination first sags, apparently after a first bullet hit him in the front of the neck, and then is thrown to the left and back by a second shot. The shots of different calibers came from the front. Who were the killers? In my view, the actual truth should definitely be revealed and those responsible should be held accountable.<sup>6</sup>

Or: Several witnesses to the murder of the German Attorney General Siegfried Buback and his two companions in 1977 claim to have seen a small, petite person, possibly a woman, as the shooter. About six weeks after this assassination, a small, petite woman was involved in a shootout with police officers, in which two officers were seriously injured. The "terrorist" can be caught at the end. With her, Verena Becker, is the weapon with which the Federal Public Prosecutor and his two companions were shot – but she was not even charged with it. Why?<sup>7</sup>

For me many questions arise here: Are there backers? Are they still up to mischief? Why do experts, such as police officers, who should have a special understanding of investigative requirements, allow themselves to be so quickly sworn into certain narratives instead of getting to the bottom of strange contradictions and pushing for their resolution? What role does the media have to play here, especially the public service ones? How are

---

6 Mathias Bröckers: JFK. Staatsstreich in Amerika. Westend Verlag, 2013

7 Michael Buback: Der zweite Tod meines Vaters. Knaur Verlag, 2009; Michael & Elisabeth Buback: „Der General muss weg!“ Siegfried Buback, die RAF und der Staat. Osburg Verlag, 2019

we to draw appropriate conclusions from such tragedies when we may not even have understood their backgrounds?

## **The Women of Trachis**

The death of Heracles also seems to be unsolved. The play "The Women of Trachis" deals with it. In his life Heracles had to deal with numerous monsters, fiends or almost impossible tasks. But what brings him down in the end? Was it a love spell gone wrong? Or was it murder? This ingenious piece of Sophocles still offers material for discussion today.

Deianeira, the wife of Heracles, lives with her son Hyllos in Trachis and awaits the return of her husband, who – to atone for a crime – had to carry out various tasks away from her for fifteen months. Now he is currently besieging the city of King Eurytos. Deianeira knows of an oracle: If her husband returns safely from this campaign, he will enjoy the rest of his life unscathed – or else he will die before his return. In the beginning of the scene, she is really worried about his life, is also aware that he is currently in danger. And – conversely – he will live on unharmed if he now comes home safely, which she apparently sincerely desires in the opening scene.

So she willingly follows the advice of a servant to send her son Hyllos to meet his father with reference to this prophecy so that he can support and protect him if necessary. Hyllos says that he would have done this long ago if someone had told him about this prophecy. The young man sets off immediately.

In this first scene, Sophocles conveys various messages to the audience. 1.) Deianira is definitely able to listen to her entourage. (She will expressly not do this later.) 2.) She is genuinely worried about her husband, which is why she sends their son to meet him. 3.) The son of Hyllos is a grown young man – so the relationship between Deianira and Heracles has been going on for quite a long time. 4.) If Deianira had ever made a vow that her husband would wear a shirt specially made by her after completing his final task in the sacrificial acts, she would have given it to her son at that moment. The fact that she does not do this at this point strongly indicates that this vow – of which she speaks later – did not exist.

### **Caught in a Lie**

A man from the people now brings the news to Deianira that Heracles is about to return victorious to his homeland. He had heard this from Lichas, a herald of Heracles, who was just announcing it to the numerous people present in the market place of Trachis.

Heracles is currently still busy preparing and offering the necessary sacrifices on site. Shortly thereafter, Lichas himself appears before Deianira. He leads with him a group of female slaves: spoils of Heracles' last campaign. Heracles had decreed that they should henceforth serve in his house.

Lichas recapitulates how the war came about: During a banquet, Heracles was insulted by the host Eurytos, who said that his sons could handle bows and arrows better than Heracles. Heracles was deeply offended by this, because he possessed a wonderful bow that never missed its mark. In addition, in the course of the evening Heracles was thrown out of the door by Eurytos in a drunken state. Heracles retaliated by throwing the king's son, Iphitos, from the battlements of a fortress into the abyss on another occasion. Because of the insidiousness of this deed, Heracles was punished by Zeus: he had to serve as a slave to Queen Omphale of Lydia for a year. In revenge for this disgrace of slavery, Heracles, after the punishment had expired, conquered the fortress of Eurytos, killed the king and enslaved his people.

Among the slaves brought in, Heracles' wife particularly catches the eye of a noble young woman, in whom she suspects a daughter of Eurytos. She questions the Herald, who denies knowing anything about her identity. Deianeira shows pity for the abducted women and decides that they should definitely be received with hospitality.

While Lichas brings the slaves into the house, the man of the people approaches Deianeira again. He says in advance that one cannot say whether Lichas lied on the market place or in front of Deianira. In any case, the herald gave a very different testimony to witnesses in the marketplace: the strikingly noble young woman was – as Deianeira had already suspected – a daughter of Eurytos, Iole. Heracles had urged Eurytos to marry him to Iole in secret. Since Eurytos had rejected this request, Heracles conquered his fortress under a pretext, killed Eurytos and took possession of Iole.

### **Cunning Interrogation Technique**

Deianira is shaken. The chorus is furious at the herald's mendacity. The choir leader gives Deianeira the advice to question Lichas again. So, Deianeira confronts him once more. (Here, too, Deianeira follows the advice of her entourage, which she expressly does not do later.) Lichas claims again that he does not know who the young woman is. The man of the people then accuses the herald of being unfaithful to his mistress. On the market square, he had just publicly revealed what was about this young woman. Lichas blocks further conversation and declares the witness to be a fool.

Apparently the herald cannot be dealt with by direct confrontation. So Deianira switches to a different strategy. She affirms that she has great empathy for Heracles. It would be

impossible and pointless to fight Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Even gods would have been powerless against her. She herself had felt it in her own body. The displayed tolerant attitude of Deianeira combined with her request to tell the truth sincerely let Lichas now expressly confirm what the man from the people had reported. He also emphasizes that he told the untruth of his own accord – and not at the behest of Heracles.

By this it is now proven beyond a doubt that Deianeira's husband sent her a much younger concubine or chief wife into the house. What a terrible and almost completely hopeless situation. Most likely she would be on her own if she wanted to counter this insolence of her superhero husband. After all, who would openly oppose a Heracles?

### **The Love Spell**

Deianeira seems to be very composed and tolerant. She invites the herald into the house: After he has brought so many gifts, she does not want to let him return to Heracles empty-handed. But "secretly," as she says herself, she steps in front of the gate once more to confess to the chorus of women how much she is suffering because of her husband's intention. Although she had often been offended by his affairs before, he now even expected her to live under the same roof with her much younger rival. It is foreseeable that he will turn more and more to the new woman. After all, Deianeira's understanding of the power of love is – with good reasons – limited here.

She initiates the Trachinians into a ruse: When she was newly married to Heracles, Nessos – a centaur, half horse, half human – had ferried her across the river Euenos. In the middle of the river he wanted to tamper with her. At her cry, Heracles killed Nessos with an arrow prepared with the venom of the Lernaean serpent. The dying centaur advised her to keep the blood leaking from his wound as an infallible love spell for Heracles. Deianeira quotes the – alleged – words of the centaur<sup>8</sup>: "If you take the clotted blood from my wound with your hands, where the serpents of Lerna once dyed the arrow black with bile, it will serve as a magic potion for Heracles' heart, so that he never sees any other woman he loves more than you."

She has now used this remedy. Considering all that Nessos said to her, she soaked a robe for Heracles with it. The hero's wife expressly asks the chorus of Trachinian women for advice. If the plan seemed too risky to them, she would – of course (!) – refrain from it: "(...) and now it's done. I would neither know nor learn of bad arts: I hate women who dare to do so. But if I stole the victory over that woman through love spells and magic

---

8 Sophokles, Tragödien und Fragmente. Griechisch und deutsch, übersetzt von Wilhelm Willige, überarbeitet von Karl Bayer. Ernst Heimeran Verlag, München, 1966, V. 604 ff; V. 581 ff; V. 588 ff; V. 705 ff; V. 719 f; V. 734 ff; (Translation by the author.)



on Heracles – the work is prepared – if my actions do not appear as folly; otherwise I will not do it.”

### **Admonition to Caution**

The admonition of the Women of Trachis that follows is clear: only when a certain remedy has already been tried can one be sure of its effect. Otherwise, anything could happen.

Choir:           If one can have confidence in the matter,  
                    then the decision you have made does not seem bad to us.

Deianeira:      It's like this with trust: You can believe in it,  
                    but I haven't tested it.

Choir:           You come to knowledge only through action.  
                    Vain is your belief in knowledge which you do not try.

Deianira:       Soon we will know; for there I can already see the man at the gate,  
                    and he's coming down here in a hurry. Just keep this secret for me!  
                    Even those who do shameful things in the dark do not fall into shame.

So, the Women of Trachis clearly advise caution and recommend that Deianeira would carry out a test first. Contrary to her promise to take objections seriously, Deianeira ends the discussion of the concerns in the next moment. She refers to Lichas, who is just leaving, to whom she absolutely wants to give the prepared robe for Heracles. Her answer to the clear skepticism of the chorus sounds downright cynical – in view of the outcome of the whole story: “We will soon know.” The astonishing effect of the miracle cure will soon be observed using the example of Heracles. The mistress quickly obliges the entourage to secrecy.

### **Instructions to Lichas**

Deianeira now gives Lichas the "gift" for her husband with precise instructions: Lichas is to hand over the robe to his master in a sealed box with the note that Deianeira has vowed that Heracles will offer a sacrifice in a new robe after victorious completion of his tasks. (We know from the first scene that this “vow” must be an ad hoc invention.) It is important that no one else puts on the robe and that it does not come into contact with sunlight or a hearth fire before Heracles dons it for the sacrifice. Lichas should ensure that these instructions are followed. She emphasizes once again how lovingly she accepted the foreign slaves, whereupon Lichas confessed how much he was pleasantly surprised.

Deianira's answer to this last sentence of Lichas sounds ambiguous to me: she fears that Lichas could tell Heracles too soon about her longing for him, before it would be really clear whether he would also have this longing for her. On the one hand, she may indicate her fear that in the future she will receive little attention alongside the younger Iole. In this way, she puts Lichas under a little moral pressure to make Heracles believe her longing for love: After all, the husband has to be motivated to actually put on the Nessus Shirt that was sent to him. On the other hand, she can possibly foresee that at the end Heracles will not like this gift of love very much. Deianeira would be right with both predictions. Although Heracles will be inflamed – but not in love with his wife.

### **Real Feeling of Guilt or Acting?**

After Lichas has departed, Deianeira reappears in front of the choir. She seems quite contrite when she admits that she may have "created great mischief out of good hope": she has just seen how a cotton ball with which she had soaked Heracles' robe with the blood of Nessus, heating up in the sunlight had caught fire and crumbled simmering.<sup>9</sup> Only now does she tell the women in detail about Nessus' instruction not to expose the blood to heat or a ray of light under any circumstances<sup>10</sup>. Now it suddenly occurs to her that Nessos, who was mortally wounded by Heracles, could hardly have meant well with her and her husband. And she laments: "Now, poor me, I don't know how to guess. But I see well: I have committed terrible things. Why, for what, should the dying animal show benevolence to me, who brought its death! No, it wanted to destroy the one who shot, and I let myself be deceived!"

Deianeira appears genuinely sad as she makes her confession. In doing so, she puts herself in the foreground of what is happening: She herself is the one who "brought death" to the animal, so that it could not have shown any goodwill towards her either. She herself was the one who allowed herself to be deceived by Nessos<sup>11</sup>. Deianeira announces that she no longer wants to live if her husband has died through her: "But it has been decided: If he [Heracles] should now perish, I too will die at the same time and through the same fate." We will have to measure Deianeira's further behavior against exactly this suicide announcement. In any case, the almost predictable reaction of the chorus consists in

---

9 Of course, there is no need for an actual event to have taken place here. Part of the world of intrigue is that you impress and manipulate your audience with appropriate "narratives".

10 Chemists might question whether the alleged centaur blood might have been a red phosphorus solution made by Deianira herself.

11 Sophoclean Jocasta presents herself in a very similar way as a mourner and laments: "Enough, I'm ill!" The brutal Creon at the end of "Antigone" is very similar. So complacent, scheming criminals of this world always like to present themselves as victims when they get in trouble. Bystanders then tend to feel sorry for the whiners instead of outright criticizing them.

consoling the “poor woman”: She didn't act badly on purpose. That would mitigate any anger against her if things went badly. "But milder anger falls on the one who transgresses unintentionally, and that must also apply to you."

We must recognize that the chorus is almost forced to take this understanding position, since in this situation it has already become abundantly clear – through Deianeira's account of what happened around the cotton ball – that the deed of Deianeira will have a fatal end and that the choir himself has become her accomplice. For when Lichas was instructed by Deianira to deliver a "gift" to Heracles, albeit an alleged "love spell" that had not been verified, the chorus was silent. He did nothing to prevent this risky venture, about which he was broadly informed – and at the outset – rightly – had clear and reasonable concerns.

At that moment, the son Hyllos comes home and curses his mother, saying that his father Heracles was mortally wounded by her. It is significant that the mother, who just had conveyed to the women standing around her of her conviction that the love spell would have a fatal effect on Heracles, now feigns complete ignorance to her son:

Hyllos:           O mother, I wish one of three things for you:  
                          that you were no longer alive, that, although alive,  
                          you were called someone else's mother,  
                          or that you were in better spirits than you really are!

Deianira:        What is it, my son, that you must hate so much about me?

Hyllos:           The man, yours, know, my father, I tell you, you murdered that day.

Deianira:        Woe to me, my child, what a word you utter!

Hyllos:           It cannot be undone: what is once done, who undoes it?

Deianira:        What are you saying, child? From which people did you hear  
                          that you may accuse me of such abominable misdeeds?

The mother obviously switches at lightning speed. Not that she would say, "Oh my God! How terrible! So it really happened!" No! The fear of the foreseeable consequences of her "love spell" that she – toward her entourage – had just been put on display is completely withdrawn. She acts completely naive and ignorant towards her son – a great actress.

Hyllos reports how the robe Heracles wore for the sacrifice suddenly burst into flames during the rite and burned into the father's skin. He collapsed in terrible agony. With the last of his strength he smashed Lichas, the bearer of the robe, against a rock. The son accuses his mother of deliberately devising and executing this plan. Shocked by the death of his father, he wishes her a just punishment again.

## **Deianeira's Suicide**

Deianeira then withdraws into the palace without a word. The nurse, who emerges shortly afterwards, reports how much Deianeira was grieved by the anger of Hyllos<sup>12</sup>: "[she] then threw herself in front of the altars, cried that she would be lonely, (...) and wept miserably, as she herself she recalled her fate, the childless existence that was left to her." Eventually she stabbed a sword in her side. When the son saw the dead mother, he regretted accusing her.

The motive cited here for Deianeira's suicide – which, according to the witness, she named herself – is remarkable. Because, contrary to what was previously announced, she apparently does not kill herself because she is responsible for the death of Heracles, to which she does not refer with a syllable (see above), but because she is aware that her son will leave her because of her deed. This alone drives Deianeira to commit suicide.

## **Mortally Wounded Heracles**

Heracles, who suffered life-threatening injuries from severe burns, is still unconscious when he is carried to Trachis on a stretcher. When he wakes up, he lists – interrupted by cries of pain – all the deeds with which he has freed his fellow human beings from various plagues. But what no monster has been able to accomplish up to now, his wife has managed to do entirely without weapons. In anger he wants to kill Deianeira with his last strength. Hyllos reports hesitantly that she has already forestalled her husband. At this point Hyllos himself is convinced that she sent the robe to Heracles in good faith. Heracles does not respond to attempts to convince him of Deianeira's "good intentions".

However, when he hears about the "magic blood" of Nessus, Heracles realizes completely that his end has come. He sees as fulfilled what Zeus once prophesied to him: that he would suffer death through a dead – that is, Nessos. He demands one last service from his son: he should burn him on a pyre and take Iole as his wife. Hyllos reluctantly agrees. However, he only wants to pile up the wood, but not set it on fire. The play ends with the procession marching off to the Zeus sanctuary on Mount Oeta, where Heracles wants to be cremated.

## **Intrigue of Deianeira**

This drama focuses on a female character capable of subtle intrigue. She acts so skillfully that in the end the bystanders – except for Heracles – honestly believe her. But Deianeira proves on stage how cunning she can be:

---

<sup>12</sup> Sophocles: Die Trachinierinnen. Übersetzung und Nachwort von Walter Kraus. Reclam Verlag, Stuttgart, 1989, V. 903 ff (Translation by the author.)

– Clearly against her conviction, she is able to effectively show Lichas her understanding of the temptations of love.

– Deianeira first promises her entourage that she would refrain from using the alleged love spell if there were any objections to her plan. Shortly before, she willingly follows the advice of her entourage twice: 1) when she sends her son to meet his father and 2) when she subjects the herald to a second questioning. Why is she so quick to disregard her entourage's serious warning not to use the untried remedy? From the end of the story we know how justified these warnings were.

– The haste with which Deianira goes to work is treacherous: Deianira believes in the oracle that Heracles will either come home safely and live in safety forever, or something terrible will happen to him before. If we don't want that in this story the laws of logic are completely overturned, then, if Deianeira is genuinely concerned for her husband's well-being, it is imperative that she awaits his return before she uses any untried magic on him. However, since she – instead – makes a conspicuous effort to send the fatal gift to Heracles as quickly as possible, so that it reaches him before he returns, there is only one way to understand her motivation to do so: She knows that once he returns, there is nothing she can do against him. To avenge the insult inflicted on her and really harm him, she must act immediately.

– Deianeira initially conceals from her entourage the well-known condition that the alleged blood of Nessos must be protected from light and heat. She probably doesn't want to arouse too much suspicion at first. However, she does not fail to carefully inculcate the observance of this condition in Lichas. Later, in her mock confession of guilt, she also mentions it to her entourage.

– The lie runs smoothly over her lips when she tells the herald about an alleged vow under which she would like to send Heracles the new sacrificial robe. But obviously it is the result of a very spontaneous decision. Otherwise she would have handed it over to her son in the first scene or had announced it at her first contact with Lichas.

– With feigned surprise, she breaks out in incredulous amazement to her son, as he brings her the news of Heracles' misery. Shortly before, she had clearly foreseen the result of her "love spell" in her talk with the Trachinian women.

– Contrary to her announcement that she would take her own life because of her responsibility for the death of Heracles, she only commits suicide because she realizes that her son despises her and will leave her because of her deed.

These details reveal Deianeira as a master intriguer who, one must assume, bestowed the fateful gift on her husband in full knowledge of the effects of centaur blood – which she

may have produced herself with the help of certain chemical knowledge<sup>13</sup>. It is unlikely that she could have been so naive as to mistake the blood spurting from a wound inflicted by a poison-soaked arrow on one of her husband's enemies for a love spell. But Deianeira has good reasons to display her wonder at the actual effect of the blood-soaked wool in front of her entourage – calculating that the women of Trachis will actively protect her since she displays so much "sincerity": She only meant well after all! This calculation also works. She quickly has the bystanders on her side. Only her son is initially full of contempt for her, which then drives her to commit suicide.

Deianira is a masterful portrayal of country innocence. However, her actions reveal the complete opposite. They turn out to be a premeditated assassination attempt. To Hyllos, who is mostly absent, one might concede the naivety, to certify his mother's good intentions in the end. But the Women of Trachis, that are present in all the scenes, should be able to clearly judge Deianeira's ruse. They would have had the opportunity to recognize and prevent the disaster. That the entourage has let themselves be fooled negligently, should dawn on a critical audience at the end of the piece. Perhaps that is why the women of Trachis give the play its name: so that the audience pays special attention to them – and so realizes their failures.

## Counter Perspective

It seems to me necessary to look at this story also from a quite different perspective. Because I also have sympathy for Deianeira and am impressed by her sophistication. She was probably always a self-confident woman who didn't need a strong man at her side to go her way<sup>14</sup>: "From her name, she must have been a male-hostile, not just warlike maiden. She must have refused for a long time to take a husband." Elsewhere it says on the etymology of the name<sup>15</sup>: "Deianeira means 'hostile to men' and 'the destroyer of her husband'".

However, as a woman of her time in an increasingly patriarchal society, she is subject to male dominance. We are told of the battle of her suitors, where Heracles defeats Ache-  
loos, the bull-headed river god. Deianira is exposed for the duel between the two as a victory bonus – without apparently having a say in the choice of the partner. The fact

---

13 Here the comparison with Medea comes to mind, who also very consciously takes revenge on her unfaithful husband Jason with an easily inflammable dress by sending her rival and her father Creon to their deaths.

14 Karl Kerényi: Die Mythologie der Griechen. Bd. 2: Die Heroen-Geschichten. dtv, Stuttgart, 1960, 1998, S. 159. (Translation by the author.)

15 <https://charlies-names.com/de/deianeira/>

that the winner is often unfaithful to her in the marriage and only rarely shows up at home anyway must soon have increased her dislike of this marriage even more.

And now this too: This powerful guy Heracles expects her to tolerate a much younger, attractive rival in the common household. Deianeira mentally must have run amok at this idea. And she's doing something most respectable: she's using her brain! She knows she has to hurry. Because, according to the oracle she trusts, she has only one last, brief moment to put an end to this villain. She must succeed in what no monster in the world had ever achieved before her. She quickly develops a concept of how to hunt down the traitor. With unsurpassable skill, she weaves a fine web in which the smug musclemans gets fatally entangled.

Deianeira sells the story of the "love spell" to the stupid entourage. She can quickly put aside their clear concerns. And she immediately instrumentalizes the herald, who had believed that she was so naive that he could – unnoticed – let slip her husband's new mistress into her nest: She makes use of him to bring Heracles the receipt for his unfaithfulness. One will soon see how the old man will burn with love to her. Part of her plan is to get almost all sympathies entirely on her side by means of a supposedly open "confession of guilt". Her shock about the burning wool is set on scene magnificently.

With a bit of luck, she might even had been able to convince her own son of her innocence. However, his disgusted turning away gives her the opportunity to kill herself. Suicide seems to be an effective means of concealing one's own intrigue<sup>16</sup>. This is how she celebrates her last triumph. Son, entourage and a whole squad of international classics misinterpret her act as a desperate effort to keep her husband's love: She just only had made a negligent, fatal mishap.

So once again: hats off to this intelligent woman, who ultimately follows a healthy instinct when she uses subtle means to defend herself against the presumption of self-important masculinity – where nobody would have stood aside her against this super hero! She is clearly superior to Heracles, however respected he may be. Of course, it would be desirable if the two had managed to resolve their conflict more openly and clearly, without involving innocent bystanders.

---

16 The situation is similar with Phaedra in Euripides' "Hippolytos" and Jocasta in Sophocles' "Oedipus the King": They are considered innocent, not least because of their suicide.

# Tragical Figures

## Theory

There is already an attempt by Aristotle – about a century after Sophocles – to define on a theoretical level what constitutes a "tragic hero". According to him, the following elements are found around such a figure: 1) a mistake that causes the hero's downfall (hamartia), 2) excessive pride or disrespect for the natural order (hybris), 3) a reversal of happiness (peripetia), 4) the moment when the hero makes a critical discovery (anagnorisis), 5) a fate that cannot be avoided (nemesis) and 6) the sense of pity or fear experienced by the audience following the hero's fall (Catharsis).

## Heracles

If I transfer Aristotle's thoughts to "the Trachinian women", then Herakles could be described as such a tragic hero: 1) It is his mistake to believe that he could smuggle a young concubine into his household without having to expose himself to the wrath of his since years faithfully devoted wife. 2) This immediately names his disrespect. 3) Now he has captured this young concubine and his herald also manages to deliver her to his house undamaged, but in doing so he has earned Deianeira's wrath, who quickly seeks revenge for this betrayal. 4) The hero makes this discovery at the moment when his beautiful sacrificial shirt sets him on fire. 5) It's all too late now – his end is inevitable. The burns can't be healed. Only burning brings him salvation. 6) It's only good if the Attic audience is shocked, if they can empathize with how disloyalty in alliances can have fatal effects on the traitor.

## Deianeira

We could also try to consider Deianeira as such a tragic heroine. 1) Her mistake is to think that she would be able to stage her plan of revenge against Heracles so skillfully that she herself could not be harmed. 2) Also in her reaction one can see excessive pride or disrespect that she believes that she is allowed to carry out an assassination attempt on such a respected hero as Herakles out of her slight. (It would certainly have been wiser to file for divorce and rely on her adult son. Hyllos would certainly have felt sorry for her.) 3) She succeeds in the assassination attempt on Herakles – together with the revenge on Lichas, who had lied to her so insidiously. And she is able to successfully convey to her entourage that she only acted with the best of intentions. 4) But then Hyllos returns and expresses all his contempt for her. Despite her feigned ignorance, he is not at all interested in her – alleged – intentions. 5) Since she now sees "childless existence"



ahead of her, her only option is suicide as the "best" way out: at least she convinces the Trachinians and Hyllos of her belief in love magic and her honorable motives to love her husband again to burn to her. 6) She also "fell" with it – and at this point the audience might even feel something like pity for her.

### **The Choir of Trachinian Women**

It is also possible – and maybe this should be the main perspective, as the play is named "Trachinian Women" – to see them as a troupe of tragic heroines. 1) In the end they perish because they have greatly shamed and blamed themselves. 2) First, they agree to remain silent about Deianeira's plan, although this love spell – rightly so! – appears very suspicious to them. As Lichas prepares to leave, they are privy to the fact that an untried love spell is to be – through him – presented to Heracles by Deianira, which she has obtained in a rather strange way: from the blood of one of Heracles' opponents, which escaped from the wound of a poisoned arrow was. But the chorus is silent to Lichas – Deianeira had so kindly asked them to keep it secret. 3) The naive hope of being able to rejoice with Deianeira about the rescue of her love happiness already dissolves in smoke and ashes for the chorus with Deianeira's story of the burning cotton ball. 4) Here the troop is now confronted with their complicity. They stood by and did nothing when the – completely untried! – Nessus shirt was sent towards Heracles. Now the chorus is almost forced, in order to reduce its own feelings of guilt, to make plausible its own good faith in the "positive effect" of this magic, which originally expressly did not exist. The Chorus later transfers this false belief to Hyllos, who was initially so angry. 5) The downfall of Heracles – and with it the complicity of this troop of Trachinian women, which was inducted into the plan in broad terms – is already inevitable here. 6) If the audience really puts themselves in the Trachinian's shoes, they may feel the desperate effort to free themselves from their own complicity.

### **Political Message**

The "Women of Trachis" were premiered around 438 B.C. The year before, a conflict between Miletus and Samos, into which Miletus had let Athens get involved, had ended: the island of Samos lies just off the coast of present-day Turkey. Miletus is opposite this island on the mainland and at that time wanted to occupy the city of Priene, which bordered on Samian mainland territory. The Samians obviously perceived this as a threat to their property. Miletus was defeated by Samos in the military conflict. The Milesians then complained to the Athenians<sup>17</sup>, who in turn asked Samos to wait for the decision of

17 Karl-Wilhelm Welwei: *Das klassische Athen. Demokratie und Machtpolitik im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert.* Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1999, S. 133; something different at: Donald Kagan:

an Athenian arbitral tribunal. Samos refused to do so. Athens then occupied Samos with a small force. This force was overwhelmed in a first resistance by the Samians and handed over to the Persian governor Pissuthnes – an archenemy of Athens and Greece. In response, Samos was militarily subdued and humiliated by Athens with the help of the fleet of the Delian League.

Ancient sources claim that Aspasia, who came from Miletus, influenced Athens' siding with Miletus: She was the partner of Pericles, a central statesman of the time, who also – incidentally alongside Sophocles – led the fleet of the Delian League as a strategist against Samos. But in the play the desire for Iole is an issue emanating from Heracles alone. Sophocles may be criticizing the fact that Athens (Heracles) so easily sided with Miletus (Iole). The Attic poet probably wanted to recapitulate how a fatal development for Athens had resulted from this careless action. After all, Samos (Deianeira), which had been loyal to the alliance for many years and was one of the founding members of the Delian League, felt compelled to mercilessly stab Athens (Heracles) in the back, after they had probably done everything they could to ensure a common well-being.

Perhaps the haste with which Deianira acts reflects the way the Samians acted, hoping that they might be able to forestall fate with quick action and – possibly with the support of a powerful adversary to Athens, the Persians (Nessos) – gain the upper hand keep.

The Samian War was an important milestone on the eve of the Peloponnesian War, which ultimately brought Athens to its brink of decline. It seems to me that Sophocles wanted to remind his compatriots of such a fate through the figure of Heracles.

Already in Lichas' story about the origin of the conflict between Heracles and Eurytos, a parallel to the real political situation mentioned can be heard: Heracles smugly insists on the superiority of his miracle weapon. The lack of recognition by Eurytos then tempts him to act rashly. Similarly, Athens has always reacted very sensitively when members of the Delian League intended to withdraw from membership. Very quickly, with all the might of the fleet, they were "convinced" otherwise. Samos, too, had not petrified in respect of the superiority of Athens' miracle weapon, had not uncritically submitted to Athens' orders. In fact, the Samians even dared to hand over the captured occupying forces to the Persians.

### **Message to the Audience**

In the "Women of Trachis" both parties – Heracles and Deianeira – end up as losers. Similarly, both Athens and Samos emerge from the Miletus conflict with severe injuries.

---

Perikles, S. 183 ff

The empathy is of course with Heracles, but Deianeira's position is understandable as well. In the play, both the women of Trachis and the son Hyllos have sympathy for her at the end. Of course, Sophocles is probably on the side of his hometown. A pact with the Persians must have been repugnant to him. Presumably, however, he also had empathy for a Samos that long ago had no interest in submission to a powerful Persia (Acheloos), but also could not fully sympathize with Athens (Heracles), which proved to be stronger in the end. It's logical that Deianeira didn't want to be betrayed by the stormy, victorious applicant. And so Sophocles may have seen this reprehensible counter-treason by the Samians as an almost excusable reaction in view of Athens' disrespectful disloyalty – the pact with Miletus and the demonstration of military power.

As a psychotherapist, I often said to people who came to me and complained about their suffering: "It's good that you're feeling bad!" Those who heard it from me for the first time often looked amazed. I have always said, "If you weren't feeling bad, you wouldn't be suffering – so you wouldn't be trying to change anything in your life."

It's similar to empathizing with others' bad feelings. The empathy with the Trachinians' feeling for guilt might make the Attic audience wonder what this troupe could have done better: if one witnesses bad decisions, one should protest consistently and vigorously. And an emotionally troubled party to the conflict like Deianira should have been assisted and offered an alternative to using an untried love spell: For example, the Trachinians could have offered to voice their joint protest against Heracles' massive infidelity in order to persuade him to take back his concubine. They could have supported Deaneira in a divorce as well.

As the Trachinian women give the play its name, it is perhaps because Sophocles particularly wanted the audience to study their role in the play. Based on the analysis just outlined, the community of the Delian League could have asked itself what it could have done to prevent fatal decisions in the Sami war, to better support the "betrayed" party and thereby defuse the conflict.

## **Problems of Classical Philology**

Without classical philology I would have not been able to read the great texts of Sophocles myself. That's why I'm infinitely grateful to this guild. However, an interdisciplinary exchange between classical philology and psychology could also prove fruitful: My own discipline, which has developed over the last few decades, deals intensively and in depth with the analysis of the dynamics of human conflicts.

Since the Sophocles texts have not changed for 2,500 years, it seems to be common practice in classical studies to go back with relative ease to the views of earlier interpretations. However, if you really want to understand the dynamics of these subtly woven stories by Sophocles, you have to consciously free yourself from old traditions of interpretation. Because in earlier centuries, when kings ruled more or less absolutistically, it was simply impossible to present certain things clearly.

It would have been incomprehensible to recognize the democratic behavior of King Oedipus, who insists on discussing important matters of state in public and who is always open to listening to and critically examining the opinions of those around him. Indeed, Oedipus is capable of giving up his existence as king's son of Corinth and contemplating his abdication as king of Thebes if the well-being of loved ones or the community so requires. Which director of a theater at an absolutist royal court would have dared to emphasize this as a respectable trait of an Oedipus?

And vice versa: who in earlier centuries would have allowed himself to work out in a staging how a brutal, self-satisfied autocrat Creon became the undoing of his state? At that time, who would have dared to write a commentary on "Antigone", according to which a king is shown who, through his unjust, egocentric, incorrigible actions, has plunged his kingdom and his people into misery? Who could have openly lamented that, in the end, Creon didn't take a single step in the right direction: take his own life, or at least abdicate immediately? Who would have dared to show that in the end this incorrigible Lord of Darkness would not draw any personal conclusions and would use hollow phrases to shift all responsibility onto an ominous fate?

The contents of Sophocles' dramas, which are animated by a democratic spirit, have been systematically misinterpreted on such points. The actual dynamics of the pieces were made unrecognizable. That had already happened about 500 years after their formation. A propaganda minister at the tyrant court of Agrippina and Nero named Seneca had – under the pretext of translating the Greek plays into Latin – completely turned the plot of the originals upside down<sup>18</sup>. This has shaped the further reception of the pieces – for two thousand years. To this day, questions about the perpetrators and guilt raised in these plays remain unresolved. They lie hidden under the rubbish of undemocratic, rule-loyal patterns of interpretation.

To this day, it serves powerful interests that no clarification takes place here. Because otherwise there would be a great opportunity to train a critical awareness – especially among the maturing intellectual elite learning at schools and universities. These options

---

18 Klaus Schlagmann: Ödipus – komplex betrachtet. Published by the author, Saarbrücken, 2005

are not used. Appropriate commentaries on the plays of Sophocles are not published. Rather, traditional and utterly absurd views persistently assert their position.

## Fell in

The abundance of literature on the play shows that Deianeira's masterful deception has tempted people to fall in her until recently. Already **Friedrich Schiller** misunderstood in 1797<sup>19</sup>: "How excellent is the whole condition, the feeling, the existence of Dejanira. How completely she is the housewife of Heracles, how individual, how appropriate this painting is for this single case, and yet how deeply human, how eternally true and general."

Or **Friedrich Nietzsche**, 1922<sup>20</sup>: "They also wanted to find Dejanira guilty; but she SHALL be innocent by the will of Sophocles".

In the Sophocles commentary by **Karl Reinhardt**, 1933, it says quite screwed<sup>21</sup>: "Thus stands in the midst of the tragedy, as the 'Daemon's' work, Deianeira's error. Taken in isolation, this error should seem like a pitiful, unfortunate coincidence. But by fitting into her curve of destiny, just as she began to rise swayingly in front of us with the prologue and steer towards her fall, he becomes the necessary completion of her being. Because the error, its haste, its immoderateness comes from nothing else than from the will to keep within moderation, not to lose oneself, not to seek revenge, not to rebel, not to overstep the bounds of their circle: precisely because of this, too her, not unlike Ajax, to the ecce of human entanglement and limitation."

In **Heinrich Weinstock**, 1937, we read<sup>22</sup>: "Here in Sophocles we have to do with the agonizing end of the great adventurer [Heracles], brought about by the loving, unsuspecting hands of his own wife. In jealous fear for his loyalty, she had sent the long-awaited returnee a festive robe as a welcome, which she had previously soaked in a love magic juice; (...)".

---

19 Friedrich Schiller: Letter to Goethe of April 4th 1797. In: Beutler, Ernst (Ed.): Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche. Vol. 20: Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Schiller. Artemis Verlag, Zürich, 1950 (Translation by the author.)

20 Friedrich Nietzsche: Geschichte der griechischen Literatur, in: Gesammelte Werke (Musarionausgabe), V, München, 1922, p. 117 (Translation by the author.)

21 Karl Reinhardt: Sophokles. Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M., 1933, 1976 (Translation by the author.)

22 Heinrich Weinstock: Sophokles. Verlag Die Runde, Berlin. Umgearbeitete Neuauflage, 1937 (Translation by the author.)

In the case of the myth collector **Karl Kerényi**, 1960, the following is found<sup>23</sup>: Heracles accepted “the poisoned magnificent robe that the unsuspecting Deianeira sent him (...)”.

Similarly his colleague **Robert von Ranke-Graves**, 1960<sup>24</sup>: "Deianeira (...) decided to use the alleged love spell of Nessus in order to keep her husband's love".

In 1969, **Ursula Parlavantza-Friedrich** explicitly examined scenes of deception in the plays of Sophocles. In the "Women of Trachis" she devotes herself solely to the deceit of Lichas – not a syllable to that of Deianeira. She says in all seriousness that Sophocles wanted to "demonstrate impressively Deianeira's noble humanity" with Deianeira's cordiality towards the slaves. Her skilful, hypocritical intervention in the interrogation of Lichas was "in no way a fallacy"<sup>25</sup>.

**Eckard Lefèvre** can be heard in 1990<sup>26</sup>: "But Deianeira does not speak in excitement, but argues crystal clear. She simply states the appalling consequences of her actions, for which she alone is responsible: (...) Sophocles could hardly formulate it more clearly to show Deianeira's delusion in the act. (...) If Deianeira's action is τόλμα (tolma = foolhardiness), then it is culpable – not in the sense of intent, but negligence. She pays for that. (...) This is a consistent conception: Deianeira is consistently determined by fear and consistently fails to make the right decision.”

**Leif Bergson**, 1993<sup>27</sup>: “Apart from a few dissenting voices, there is fairly broad consensus among scholars about the figure of Deianeira (...). Deianeira has remained the faithful and patient wife who only longs to finally be able to lead a quiet life with her husband. For no other reason than love for Heracles, she acts, resorts to magic and becomes innocently the murderess of her husband. (...) Deianeira acts out of thoroughly noble motives, but in doing so violates divine law. Her αμαρτία [= transgression] can be compared to that of Antigone. She can be described as αιτία [= cause] in a double sense, and her complicity in what happened may put Heracles in a slightly more favorable light.”

---

23 Karl Kerényi: Die Mythologie der Griechen. Bd. 2: Die Heroen-Geschichten. dtv, Stuttgart, 1960, 1998 (Translation by the author.)

24 Ranke-Graves, Robert von: Griechische Mythologie, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek, 1960, 1990 (Translation by the author.)

25 Ursula Parlavantza-Friedrich: Täuschungsszenen in den Tragödien des Sophokles. Walter de Gruyter & Co. Berlin, 1969, here p. 30 f (Translation by the author.)

26 Eckard Lefèvre: Die Unfähigkeit, sich zu erkennen. Sophokles' Trachiniai. In: Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft N.F. 16, 1990, p. 43-62, here p. 47 f & p. 52 (Translation by the author.)

27 Leif Bergson: Heracles, Deianeira und Iole. 1993, here p. 104 f & p. 108 (Translation by the author.)

And **Heinz-Günther Nesselrath**, 1997<sup>28</sup>: "In order to avert such an unbearable future and to win back the love of Heracles, she [Deianeira] smears a magnificent robe with the poisoned blood of the centaur Nessos, who was once killed by Heracles, and sends the robe prepared in this way to Heracles; But it soon turns out that Deianeira did not bring her husband the love spell she had hoped for (which the centaur had promised her), but death."

**Karl-Heinz Pridik**, 1998<sup>29</sup>: "So my first question is: Who is this Deianeira according to Sophocles' own description? What is typical for her? What characterizes her? And I will show you in a few passages that Sophocles portrays this person as an anxious woman filled with fear, almost programmatically in the prologue in which Deianeira presents her situation: (...)"

**Peter Riemer**, 1997<sup>30</sup>: "(...) the certainty that Heracles had brought a concubine with Iole into the house generates Deianeira's understandable desire to win back the husband in some way".

**Hellmut Flashar**, 2000<sup>31</sup>: "She [Deianeira] endured the many adventures with other women; now that the beloved is in her own house, there is no other way. (...) The older woman wants to chain the man who has a young lover to herself. She does this with clear deliberation, but with uncertainty about the success of her plan."

**Wilfried Kuckartz**, 2013<sup>32</sup>: "She [Deianeira] turns to the trusted women of the choir for advice: She is willing to try: 'If / my actions do not appear as folly, otherwise I will refrain (586 following). As such, she appears willing to act reasonably prudently, even willing to abandon the plan if advised against it. In truth, her fear of losing the man she loves and with it the meaning of her life has long since gained the upper hand. It drives her irresistibly to her doom, and she is undoubtedly guilty in the process. She cannot be

---

28 Heinz-Günther Nesselrath: Heracles als tragischer Held in und seit der Antike, in: H. Flashar (Ed.): Tragödie – Idee und Transformation. Colloquium Rauricum 5, Stuttgart – Leipzig, 1997, p. 307–331, here p. 319 (Translation by the author.)

29 Karl-Heinz Pridik: Das Tragische in den Tragödien des Aischylos, Sophokles und Euripides I-III. Vorlesung im WS 1997/8 und SoSe 1998. Manuscript, here p. 40 (Translation by the author.)

30 Peter Riemer: Chor und Handlung in den Tragödien des Sophokles. In: Peter Riemer & Bernhard Zimmermann: Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama. Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 1998 (Translation by the author.)

31 Hellmut Flashar: Sophokles. Dichter im demokratischen Athen. Verlag C.H. Beck, München, 2000 (Translation by the author.)

32 Wilfried Kuckartz: Das Bild des Menschen im Spiegel der Kunst. Bd. 2: Antikes Griechenland. Berlin, Pro BUSINESS, 2013 (Translation by the author.)

spared the accusation of unreasonable recklessness and negligence, she could have known better, should have known better. And in the end she knows that better than some interpreters who protest their innocence too much. Of course, she is not like the vengeful Clytemnestra, who murdered in cold blood her husband and his concubine, which he dragged into the house. (...) Deianeira wants, at least as far as she is aware of it – her name means, according to Pauly (page 1423): 'destroying the man', but in my opinion there are no indications in the play that unconscious hatred resonates in her –, do no harm to her husband, just as little as Iole. She struggles tensely for her little happiness in life and in the process gets unhappily caught up in herself and in her natural self-assertion, which no one should blame her for because it is human, all too human.”

To supplement the clumsy version of *(German) Wikipedia*, 2021: The "(...) dying centaur advised Deianeira to catch his blood filled with love for her, as a means that would secure Heracles' fidelity to her. Deianeira believed him, but in reality his blood was poisoned by the arrow. Only years later did Deianeira doubt her husband's fidelity and smeared his undergarment with Nessus blood (the proverbial Nessus shirt). It could no longer be dismissed and caused Heracles unbearable pain. When Deianeira found out about this unexpected turn of events, she took her own life in terror.”

In all my studies I found only one dissenting voice – from 1956 – from the psychiatrist and author *Alfred Döblin*<sup>33</sup>: “(...) or that Dejanira, the sweet, insidious wife of Heracles, who, in order to avenge his infidelity, sent him the deadly robe.”

In the specialist comments cited here, the view is consistently taken that Deianeira wanted to win back Heracles in her action. Ratings of her character vary from "noble humanity," "loyal and patient," "good housewife," "innocent," "unknowing," to "negligent but unintentional," "fear-driven," or "failing to make the right decision”. This fails to recognize that Sophocles' Deianira uses a sophisticated plan to hunt down her husband, one of the most indestructible heroes of antiquity, precisely and deliberately at the last possible moment, daringly, energetically and purposefully – and with the best of reasons. And this dynamic must be understood in order to unlock the substance of this political parable.

To this day, however, a broadly cultivated blindness to contradictions determines people's thinking. The most obvious anomalies are not taken as an opportunity to conclude

---

33 Alfred Döblin: *Hamlet oder Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende*. Rütten & Loening. Berlin, 1956, p. 364 f (Translation by the author.)



what – as explained in detail – is obvious. This does not bode well for dealing with further intrigues and conspiracies in this world.

Author:

Diploma-Psychologist

Psychotherapist

Klaus Schlagmann

Puriscal, Costa Rica

Further material:

<https://oedipus-online.de>

<https://narzissmus-diskussion.de>

Contact:

[klausschlagmann@t-online.de](mailto:klausschlagmann@t-online.de)