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DISEASE IMAGERY IN AISCHYLOS AND SOPHOKLES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * *

The Ohio State University

1974

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I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to Professor Robert J. Lenardon, who has guided me with patient advice over the years, as a sage Mentor might prod a timid Telemachos. Φάμμος ἀριθμὸν περιπέφευγεν, / καὶ κεῖνος ὅσα χάρματ' ἄλλοις ἔθηκεν (P. 01. 2). Professors David E. Hahm and Charles L. Babcock also have very generously given the final draft a kind reading and much useful criticism. My sincere thanks are due to Ms. Judy L. Moore, who typed this manuscript so beautifully under such pressure from its author. Finally, I express my loving appreciation to my wife, Connie, for her tolerance and quiet encouragement; and to my son Matthew Ezra, who, when he comes to read these words, should know that his boundless humor and grace saw them through their most exasperating moments.
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INTRODUCTION

Discussing the relationship between foreknowledge and deeds in Poetics (1453b 35), Aristotle uses an agreeable metaphor for tragic action. In certain tragedies, he says, a character discovers the nature of his deed "while on the verge of doing something incurable" (τι τῶν ἅμα κόψτων). The close reader of Greek tragedy is indeed struck by the frequency with which the image of an incurable disease is evoked to comment upon tragic action. This dissertation will examine the image of disease (signalled in the text by the word νοσος and its cognates) and the related themes of healing and the healer in the extant tragedies of Aischylos and Sophokles. I have limited the inquiry to these two tragedians to allow greater space for the analysis of the relationships between the image and the tragic action in each of the plays in which it occurs. The extensive use of the image by Euripides warrants a separate study.

My particular interest in this analysis lies in understanding the range of the disease image in these two dramatists and the modes through which the image reveals latent meanings within tragic action. I do not attempt to determine the relationship between medical science
and the workings of a literary image, though I have occasionally used the Hippokratic material as analogous to particular passages. When technical vocabulary intrudes into the workings of imagery, I assume the purpose to be literary; in such cases, the poet has added a clinical color to the image to stress its significance within the drama.

In Chapter 1, the general nature of imagery and its function within drama will be briefly explored, as well as three dimensions of the concept of disease—pathetic, moral, and dynamic—which are the major stresses of the image within tragedy. I shall draw upon some selected material from non-tragic poetic and intellectual sources which illustrate each of these three major thrusts of the concept.

Chapters 2 and 3 will present a discussion of six plays of Aischylos and six of Sophokles where the image occurs. In my analysis, I shall concentrate particularly on the pattern which emerges through repeated evocations of disease and cure in dramatically significant contexts. I shall then attempt in each play to relate the disease imagery to the meaning of the action. The conclusions to each chapter will summarize what seems to me the characteristic uses of the image by each of the poets. The conclusion to the dissertation will consist of comparative remarks on the handling of the image by each.

The English translations throughout are of my own devising. Their rather inelegant literalness is an attempt to keep them as close to the Greek as possible without rendering them unintelligible.
The texts of Aischylos and Sophokles are the Oxford texts of Denys Page (1972) and A. C. Pearson (corrected edition, 1928). I have noted the few places where alternate readings have been preferred or suggested as interesting possibilities.
CHAPTER 1

DISEASE AS A TRAGIC IMAGE

The meanings which a tragedy presents to its audience are conveyed through sounds and sights, words and movements, as players enact the roles of characters within a plot. Greek tragedy is both poetic (in its use of words) and dramatic (in its handling of action). The poetic uses of words enhance the significance of the action. Imagery--the arrangement of sensory images within a consistent pattern--functions poetically in relation to the action: something within the concrete experience of the audience is evoked in words as comparable in meaning with the action. Thus, in the sense that imagery relates the meaning of the action to some experienced thing, it concretizes, gives a focus, to responses of emotion and insight toward which the poet is guiding the audience. In the sense that imagery reveals a relationship in meaning between itself and the

action, it generalizes and clarifies what is meant by events on stage.

Imagery, though carefully structured by the playwright, is not fully unravelled by the tragic spectator. Rather, it works as a mode of poetic communication which is partly subjective in the emotional responses it stimulates, and partly objective in the conscious connections of meaning which it conveys. The process is a complex one, which Wheelwright has called "plurisignation," through which a wide range of connotative possibilities are brought to bear by the association of image and event. The cumulative impact of repeated images adds a level of complexity to the action. Since its content is partially emotional and partially cognitive, imagery remains, in a sense, "open-ended"; the more literary analysis discovers to be signified by the image, the more meaningful it can be shown to be within a play.

Since dramatic poetry has "actuality" (stage reality) as well as the poetic dimension of words, an image may pass into the literal realm of action. Klytaiestra's net, to use Lattimore's famous

2 The generalizing thrust of imagery is emphasized in Philip W. Harsh, "Implicit and Explicit in the Oedipus Tyrannus," AJPh LXXIX (1958), pp. 243-258.

example,⁴ is a direct and physical part of the action; yet it carries
the burden of significance woven about the imagery of the snare and
the theme of entrapment throughout Agamemnon. This transference
from verbal imagery to actual stage presence, or literal significance
in the plot, is what is here meant by "symbol." In the case of the
disease image, the playwright may propose an actual disease
(e.g. Philoktetes' wound, the plague in Thebes) and exploit its
symbolic value through its relationship with the meaning of the
imagery, elaborated in the poetic texture of the words used.

The poetic and intellectual tradition of the Greeks concerned
itself with numerous aspects of the disease concept. Three of its
dimensions--the pathetic, the moral, and the dynamic--stress
particularly the connection between disease and action in ways that
are relevant to the analysis of a tragic image. The following discussion
of these three dimensions, with examples drawn from non-tragic
sources, attempts to establish a poetic framework through which to
view the functions of the disease image in the workings of tragic drama.

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⁴Richmond Lattimore, "Introduction to the Oresteia," The
Complete Greek Tragedies, Vol. I: Aeschylus, edited by David
Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: The University of
The Pathetic Dimension

Tragedy concentrates on human pain and the actions which have caused it. Whether such pain exists physically (as Philoktetes' suppurating foot or the sting of Io's gadfly) or expresses great mental anguish (as Kassandra's tormented visions or Aias' shame), the tragic spectator must confront and react to agonies which verge on the unendurable. The production of pathos, the awareness in human terms of the emotional cost of the action, elicits responses of sympathy, an emotional entanglement with the suffering of the characters. Greek tragedy is prone to emphasize the pathetic not only by formal cries of pain, but by the selection of imagery which lends color to the feelings expressed and invites the audience to identify emotionally with the action. Disease is such an image. In its pathetic dimension, disease is evoked to guide the emotional responses of the audience and to stress the painful atmosphere in which the action is being worked.

This relationship between disease and human emotions is used in a striking simile in the Odyssey to convey the feelings which Odysseus experiences on first sight of Phaiakia:

δὲ δὲ ὅτ' ἂν ἀσπάσιος βίωτος παιδεσσει φανή πατρός, δὲ ἐν νοῦσῳ κῆται ματέρ', ἀλγεῖα πάσχων, δήρον τηρόμενος, στυγερός δὲ οἱ ἔχραι δαίμων, ἀσπάσιον δ᾿ ἄρα τὸν γε θεοὶ κατότητος ἐλυσαν, δὲ Ὡδυσσεί ἄσπαστον ἐς ἵσατο γαῖα καὶ ἐλη.
as when a father's life would appear welcome to his
children, when he has lain in disease, suffering strong pain,
wasting a long time, while a loathsome spirit harasses him,
but then, a welcome thing, the gods release him from his evil,
such a welcome thing did the land and woods seem to Odysseus.

(5. 394-398)

The simile compares Odysseus' reactions to the sight of land with those
of children who watch their father's sudden recovery from a lingering
sickness. In both cases, the action of the gods have saved a man from
disaster beyond his control (disease; shipwreck). At another level,
however, the simile organizes the reader's responses by suggesting
that the reader is like a child watching his father's recovery. In this
sense, Odysseus' safety is like the father's cure. The relief, then,
which the children experience is both descriptive of Odysseus' joy
and prescriptive of the reader's feelings about Odysseus' salvation.
The use of the image of release of the father from his disease and the
relaxation of tension in his children is a guide to the emotional force
of the narrative.

The Homeric simile of the sick father suggests through the
repetition of the word "welcome" (δοκασιος) the feelings which it
intends to elicit. In Sappho's poem "He seems to me like the gods"
(2 Edmonds), the effect on the reader's sensibilities is achieved by
dwelling on a description of physical changes, seen from within the
poet herself as she examines the impact of a painful experience
(watching her lover in happy conversation with a man). Sappho does not make the analogy with sickness an explicit one, but evokes a stream of purely sensory images. She enumerates physical changes in her sight, hearing, touch, skin color, heartbeat, and speech which are the indices of something deeply felt. From this confusion of the "normal," expressed as bodily symptoms, she communicates her emotional state to the reader in a way which is all the more moving for its indirectness. "I seem to have died a little" (τεθνάκην δ' ὁλίγω πιδεύην/ φαινομαι 15-16) gathers together the physical imagery into which the reader has been drawn and summarizes the complex emotional state in a manner which avoids explicit metaphor. Yet it is understood that her partial death, the failing of her senses, signals a deeper and less expressible level of suffering.

Among the Greek myths of great healers, two in particular demonstrate an aspect of the pathetic dimension which is germane to the disease image in tragedy. The first is the wounded centaur Cheiron; the other, the suffering Asklepios. Cheiron is traditionally

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a great sage and gentle craftsman who taught the art of healing to numerous heroes, among them Achilleus and Asklepios. Yet for all his knowledge of cure, he himself was wounded incurably by the arrows of Herakles. The suffering of Cheiron is not simply pathetic, as it draws sympathy to the pain of the gentle artist, but ironic as well, stressing the paradox of the healer who cannot treat his own affliction. This pathetic irony is present also in the myth of Asklepios as related both by Hesiod in the Eoiai and Pindar in his third Pythian Ode. Not only is the birth of the hero connected with the fiery destruction of his mother by the god Apollo, but the hero himself is later destroyed by the thunderbolts of Zeus for having brought a man to life. Asklepios, the son of Apollo and later a healing god especially at Epidauros, is born into the world through the death of his mother, then is himself killed for the act of giving life. In certain cult statues of the god-hero, this pathetic aspect of dying to give life is particularly emphasized.\(^8\) It is partially the pathos which it evokes that led Pindar to relate the sufferings of Cheiron and Asklepios in his third Pythian

\[^8\]Perhaps the most famous is the "Asklepios of Munychia" in the National Archaeological Museum at Athens (cat. no. 258). S. Karouzou, National Archaeological Museum, Collection of Sculpture: A Catalogue, translated by Helen Wace, (Athens: General Direction of Antiquities and Restoration, 1968) p. 145, describes it thus: "...the expression of the face shows suffering and pathos which are not rhetorical... The sculptor has given a pathetic expression to the classical type of the god."
Ode, both as a sympathetic consolation to the dying Hieron, his patron, and for the sake of the wider audience to whom the ode was delivered. The myths of Cheiron and Asklepios, and Pindar's wistful longings for a cure which cannot be, arouse in the reader a sense of irony and pathos, and channel these feelings rather tenderly toward the incurably ill tyrant of Syracuse. Pindar, however, does not omit the moral dimension in his ode, imputing a serious moral flaw which underlay Asklepios' death (greed) and exhorting Hieron to read therein the lessons of the human condition. Yet this conscious moralizing, another important facet of the disease image, does not undercut the pathetic implications of the wounded healer, the slain life-giver, or even the strong man of affairs, wasting away from disease, dying in the prime of his powers.

Each of these three examples stresses the emotional context of bodily suffering. In the Homeric simile, the tension of the father's mortal sickness is broken by cure from the gods, giving through the image of disease and cure a poetic expression to the climactic sight of land which dissolves the suspense of Odysseus' shipwreck. Sappho leads the reader into the pathos of her inner suffering by concentrating on the outer signs of bodily affliction. By recalling the healers

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Cheiron and Asklepios who cannot cure themselves from pain and death, Pindar focuses compassion on the pathetic irony of Hieron and of men in general. This process of evoking emotion through the image of disease as intense human suffering will be seen as a major facet of its function in tragedy. The pathetic dimension of the disease image will not only signal the severity and tension involved in the torment of tragic characters, but in those plays where the agony of physical pain is enacted, the spectator (or reader) will be even more strongly affected by the sight of the disease.

The Moral Dimension

Tragedy is not simply concerned with emotional response to the pathos of its characters, but in a larger sense explores the nature of actions. The evils which beset men by causing them grief become emblematic of evils in the moral sense, of violations of boundaries, cruelty, injustice, and actions which should not have been undertaken. In its moral dimension, the disease image views good and evil, in Wheelwright's words, "from a radically organic standpoint. Good is life, vitality, propagation, health; evil is death, impotence, disease." In the moral sense, disease is understood as the

extreme opposite of health, as evil is the opposite of good, or death is the opposite of life. The disease image, then, signals some wrong; and as disease can lead to death or cure, the wrongs explored by tragedy can lead to ruin or solution.

The opening of the Iliad describes the "evil disease" (νοῦ σου... οὐκ ἔχει 1.10) which the god Apollo visits upon the Greek army and their animals. The emphasis is especially on the moral dilemma symbolized by the plague which activates the moral dilemma of Achilleus' wrath. Apollo's action has been prompted by the violation of the priestess Chryseis by Agamemnon. Thus the king's servicing of his own pleasure in capturing a woman sacred to the gods results in the devastation of the men over whom Agamemnon has charge. The plague stresses the impiety of the king and its social consequences. The "evil" of his action has led to the "evil" disease. The plague is solved only when elaborate recompense has been made to assuage the god's wrath. The gripping image of the god showering arrows upon the host and the glow of funeral pyres in the darkness of night captures in a few strokes the complex moral dilemma paralleled in the theme of Achilleus' wrath. The appeasement of the god leads Agamemnon to violate the privileges of men by his seizure of Briseis, Achilleus' concubine. The devastation of the Greek army which follows the hero's withdrawal to his tent is consequent upon the destruction of
the army by the plague god. The image, then, of Apollo's "evil disease" connotes the moral framework through which the wrath is to be viewed. 11

For Hesiod and Semonides of Amorgos, disease is seen as one of a number of negative factors in the life of man. Hesiod (Works and Days 102-104) emphasizes it among the evils which are released from Pandora's jar, the result of the gods' wish to keep mankind within his own menacing world and the retribution for Prometheus' philanthropy. Semonides (1 Edmonds) lists disease with old age, war, natural disaster, and suicide as events which expose the vanity of human hope. Neither poet stresses, as does Homer, the connection between wrong action and disease. But both emphasize the significance of disease for describing the human condition and the limitations of human choice in overcoming threats to security. In this sense, they view disease as descriptive of a certain moral impotence in the nature of man.

Solon's "Hymn to the Muses" (13 Edmonds) expands on the notion of limited human control over disasters which threaten life. Here, healers (ηρτοί 58) are seen as sometimes successful in relieving the sufferings which afflict men. They, as all who attempt to exercise skills for the well-being of others, can achieve their end only through the will of Zeus and Fate. Disease, an evil in human affairs, 11

can be dealt with only through an association of human art with the moral order. The analogy between disease in the body which causes pain and injustice in society which throws the city into chaos underlies Solon's association of the healing art with the moral order. Elsewhere in his political poems (4 Edmonds), he speaks of the "many pains" which violence brings (8), and the vengeance of Justice for acts of greed, which "comes on the city as a wound which cannot be thwarted" (Ελκος ἀφυκτον 17), and plunges the people into all sorts of evil and suffering.

Solon sees the work of the moral healer in curing disease as an image of the moral citizen combatting injustice in the city. The philosopher-physician Alkmaion of Kroton (summarized by the doxographer Aetius 5.30.1) uses the analogy of legal equality (ἰσονομία) versus sole rule (μοναρχία) to explain the nature of disease:

"Ἀλκμαῖων τῆς μὲν ὑγείας εἶναι συνεκτικὴν τήν ἱσονομίαν τῶν δυνάμεων...τῆν δ' ἐν αὐτοῖς μοναρχίαν νόσου ποιητικῆν φθοροποιοῦν γὰρ ἐπατέρου μοναρχίαν. ...τὴν δ' ὑγείαν τῆν συμμετρὸν τῶν ποιῶν κράσιν.

Alkmaion holds that the bond of health is the legal equality of the powers... while sole rule by one of them is the cause of disease; the supremacy of either is destructive. ... Health is the proportionate admixture of the qualities."
The social analogy, then, for the concept of disease reinforces the moral thrust of the disease image. Disease signals disproportion, a violation of one element by another, an injustice. Health is the paradigm of right relationships and of harmonious social interaction.

Tragedy frequently inquires into the nature of conflict, of abrasions between men, of vicious motives, and of dilemmas so severe within a single individual that they lead to ruin. In its moral dimension, the disease image evaluates the quality of human behavior and choice, seeks to define the cause of tragic suffering in terms of its morbid source. Attempts to heal tragic conflict will be measured by the moral norm of health itself.

The Dynamic Dimension

Viewed morally, the disease image is diametrically opposed to the ideal of health. Seen, however, in terms of the opposites life and death, disease connotes a process. It is an active condition whose thrust is to bring the living man to his death. Disease, as a negative factor in conflict with the will to live, expresses tragic dilemma, while the attempts to cure it signal the struggle in tragedy to solve a ruinous situation. The disease image, in its dynamic aspect,

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12 For a careful discussion of ἴσονομία in democratic terms of justice, see Gregory Vlastos, "Isonomia," AJPh LXXIV (1953), pp. 337-366.
parallels tragic action, exploring the progress of the plot in terms of the course of a disease and the attempts at its cure.

In Iliad 11, the focus of the narrative is particularly on the wounds which the Greeks are receiving on the battlefield. The cause of distress among the Greeks is the absence of the hero Achilleus. The physician Machaon, son of Asklepios, is of enormous importance to the army, since he can apply his art to preserve the life of men who otherwise might die from their wounds. When the healer himself is wounded and unable to treat the afflictions of others, the tension of the situation is obvious: without the healer, there is little chance of overcoming the menace to life which the wound represents. When Eurypylos is subsequently wounded, it is Patroklos, not Machaon, who treats him with skills Achilleus had learned from Cheiron. The binding of Eurypylos' wound by Patroklos, in fact, is described in greater detail than any other healing narrative within the poem. In terms of the major theme of the wrath, the wounding of the hero Machaon and his removal from battle parallels the insult to Achilleus which led to his withdrawal. The cure of Eurypylos by Patroklos, using the medicines of Achilleus, directs attention once again to the camp of the Myrmidons as the source of hope for the Greek cause, foreshadowing the action which will later be undertaken by Patroklos to stem the carnage among the Greeks. The theme of the wounded
healer thus supports the meaning of the major action, the wrath of the hero.  

The format of the wounding of the healer as symbolic of the heroic action to be undertaken by Achilleus is a rather simple narrative parallel. The possibilities in drama for a suspenseful rendering of the active component of the disease image are illuminated in the medical writings which study the dynamic of disease. Of these, *Epidemics I* and *III* focus on the observation of factors which lead up to and follow "crisis" (κρίσις). Crisis is the point in the course of the disease where the outcome is decided. The close observation of a wide array of factors--the nature and regimen of the patient, the peculiarities of the disease, and physical symptoms--permit the physician to form a prognosis of crisis and its outcome. The author of *Epidemics I* comments:

πρὸς δὲ δεῖ διαλογιζόμενον δοκιμάζειν καὶ σκοπεῖσθαι, τίνι τούτων δὲ καὶ θανάτῳς ἡ περιεστικόν καὶ τίνι μακρὸν καὶ θανάτῳς ἡ περιεστικόν καὶ τίνι προσαρτέον ἡ οἷ καὶ πότε καὶ πόσον καὶ τὶ τὸ προσφέρόμενον ἔσται.

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These are the things which must be scrutinized and observed by a person describing who has a severe and fatal disease or one which will remit, who has a chronic and fatal disease or one which will remit, and who has a disease for which something may or may not be prescribed and when, how much, and what shall be prescribed.

(25)

The doctor is the "ideal spectator" to the course of the disease, who comes to understand its outcome through the scrutiny of general factors (ματάστασις 23) as well as the particular nature of the sick man (τῆς ἰδίης ἐκάστου 23). The individual case-studies of Epidemics I and III are schematizations of particular diseases on the model: external environment, individual symptoms, crisis, outcome. The possible outcomes include: death, total remission of the disease, partial remission, and transformation into some other disease. The case-studies are brief scenarios of diseases in which the individual nature interacts with its environment, reaches a climax, and the result is either death, health, or a changed predicament. The diseases recorded in Epidemics I and III may be seen to have a fundamentally dramatic movement, with the spectator's attention drawn to the critical moment through which the consequences come to be known.

Epidemics concentrates in a scientific way on the dynamic of disease, recording its precondition, its assaults upon the body, critical times within its progress, and the nature of the outcome.
Disease, in this sense, is not viewed as pathos or as evidence of moral evil, but as active, changing, and suspenseful. Seen in terms of its dynamic dimension, the disease image within tragedy—elaborated through significant repetition—parallels, forecasts, and reflects upon the action. In tragic drama, humans are examined as their personal natures interact with painful events, reach a point of critical decisiveness, and resolve into ruin, release, or transformed agony. In this sense, the disease image is intrinsically dramatic.

The experience of disease is a universal human phenomenon. Painful and often grotesque, an evil to be avoided, a contagious menace to the community, disease frequently leads to death itself. The poignancy of the disease image derives from the frightful tension which it signifies: the threatening presence of death in the midst of life. The tension of those basic human polarities—life and death—is the concern of tragedy, where it is expressed in great personal and communal suffering, in moral and physical ruin, in conflicts among and within men, and in the irrepressible struggle to survive. The three dominant aspects of disease—the pathos, moral evaluation, and rhythmic course of its threat to life—are evoked severally or in combination by the poet to underscore the harsh complexities of the
tragic action and to relate that action to the fears and sensitivities of
the audience. In the next two chapters, disease imagery will be
examined play by play as a powerful poetic tool in the structuring of
the meaning of tragedy.
CHAPTER 2

AISCHYLOS: DISEASE AND THE JUST ORDER

Persians

Disease imagery in Persians is restricted to the scene of the invocation and apparition of Dareios' ghost. The Queen, laden with gifts, prepares to call forth the spirit of her dead husband, who is now a daimon (620, 641) and powerful among the gods under the earth (691-692). She is completely terrified; her eyes see all things as visitations from the gods, and in her ears "there cries a sound that is not \( \pi\alpha\iota\varphi\nu\iota\varsigma\varsigma\) " (605). \( \pi\alpha\iota\varphi\nu\iota\varsigma\varsigma\) is a suddenly jarring word. Atossa seems to be saying that she hears a noise "not like a paian," recalling the paian with which the Greeks attacked at Salamis (393), and foreshadowing "the lament with which the Choros will shortly indulge with Xerxes." Elsewhere in Aischylos, however, \( \pi\alpha\iota\varphi\nu\iota\varsigma\varsigma\) means "healing" (Suppliants 1066, Agamemnon 512, 848, 1199, Frag-

\[1\] Atossa's distorted senses recall the statement of the Hippokratic treatise Sacred Disease (4) that the common view of such disorders is that they are caused by the assaults of Hekate or dead heroes.

The Queen hears "no healing sound," a sound that might indicate some possible remedy for the catastrophe which has been revealed through the Herald. The word is double-entendre, introducing a new image (healing), while recalling a previously recurrent one (sound).

At the command from the Queen, the Persian elders invoke Earth and Hermes Escorter to lead up Dareios' spirit:

εἰ γὰρ τι κακῶν ἄκος οἶδε πλέον,
μόνος δὲν θυητών πέρας εἶποι.

for if he knows some further remedy for evils, only he, of mortals, would speak the outcome.

(631-632)

Dareios' raising, occurring dramatically between the cruel historical realities of the Herald's report and the appearance of a defeated

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4 There is some difficulty in interpreting these lines. I agree with Broadhead, *The Persae*, pp. 164-165, in construing "outcome" to mean "outcome of evils" rather than "outcome of some further remedy."
Xerxes, is the most awesome scene in *Persians*. The slender thread of disease imagery, together with the more obvious features of the dead King's status, increases the awesomeness of the scene. Dareios is not only a daimon, but powerful among the chthonic deities (*χολ κατὰ θεονὸς θεοὶ 689*). He is prophetic, not simply forecasting the future (the defeat at Plataia), but also interpreting the past (759-786), and the present (823-838). If he knows some remedy to release them from their evils, he will speak it (the "healing sound" which Atossa longs to hear).

The dead Dareios, then, has undergone some special transformation from mortal king to an extraordinarily powerful spirit beneath the earth. As with the general religious context of *Persians*, Dareios' epiphany and powers are familiar to the cultic experience of the Greeks. This necromancy is Greek ritual, soliciting the help of the chthonic daimon. It contrasts with Odysseus' raising of the dead in *Odyssey 11*, in that this scene is set at the tomb of the dead king, not at some sacrificial trench. It also contrasts with the cult which Orestes and Elektra offer at their father's tomb in *Libation Bearers*, for there the wrathful spirit of Agamemnon does not appear.

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Dareios' ghost is reminiscent of oracular gods, such as Amphiaraus or Asklepios, whose prophetic powers are connected with powers of healing. With his prophetic insight and potential to know the "cure" of the evils which inflict his devotees, Dareios is cast as a Greek \( \lambda \alpha \tau \rho \omega \mu \alpha \nu \tau i \zeta \), the oracular healing daimon.\(^6\)

After his epiphany, Dareios listens to the tale of the evils (the destruction of the Persian host) which the Choros hopes he might remedy. The destruction, however, was not the result of "the lightening-bolt of some plague"\(^7\), but, as Dareios realizes, it was the product of "a disease of mind" \( (\nu \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicr

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\(^6\) See Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (2nd ed.; Oxford at the University Press, 1952), pp. 130-131 for the frequent association of healer and seer. The word \( \lambda \alpha \tau \rho \omega \mu \alpha \nu \tau i \zeta \) is not used of Dareios in Persians; but elsewhere Aischylos applies it to the daimon Apis (Suppl. 263), to Apollo (Eum. 62), and metaphorically to starvation and chains with which Aigisthos threatens the Elders of Argos (Ag. 1623).

\(^7\) "Some Psychological Terms in Greek Tragedy," *JHS* LXXVII (1957), pp. 149-154.
blasphemous shackling of the Hellespont, the destruction of temples, his arrogant misjudgment of his enemy, his youthful boldness—indicate that he is afflicted with hybris. The disease has been fatal for Persia.

As the Queen has remarked, the past cannot be undone (525-526).

Dareios' spirit has no remedy for the current ills of Persia, but in the future man must be on his guard against such a diseased mind:

οὐχ ὑπέρφευ θυντὸν ἀντα χρή φρονεῖν·

Perhaps γὰρ ἔξανθος ἐκάρπωσε στάχυν ἀτης.

A mortal ought not to have thoughts too high. Pride in flower produces the tassled fruit of destruction.

(820-822)

In portraying Dareios on the model of Greek λατρόμαντις, Aischylos has added to the grandeur of the scene. As seer, Dareios interprets for the Queen and Choros the meaning of the past, present, and future. As healer, he can diagnose the disease which has gripped his son and predict its fatal outcome. Though the Choros hoped there might be some remedy for the ills of Persia, Dareios, like his later Hippokratic counterpart, knows that in the nature of things there is no remedy for the incurable. His advice to the Persian Choros (and

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8 The Art argues that doctors are right in not undertaking hopeless cases, since one cannot expect either art of nature to accomplish what is not within its power.
the victorious Greeks in the audience) is to take prophylactic measures against a recurrence. 9

Suppliants

The story of Io, ancestress of the suppliant Danaids, dominates the imagery of Suppliants. 10 Her afflictions—the gadfly, horns, wandering, and madness—were "diseases (νόσους) plotted by Hera" (587) in resentment of Zeus' advances toward this unfortunate mortal woman. Her pain was physical (δυνατός 563). The Danaids, both Choros and protagonist in this play, interpret the more internal pain of their flight in terms of the Io-motif and a strong undercurrent of disease imagery runs throughout the theme of pursuit. As Zeus eventually delivered Io from her pain "by his healing hand" (1064) and his "kind-minded force" (1067), 11 so the daughters of Danaus pray that Zeus Rescuer will free them of their present pain, for Zeus is a "cure-all" (τὸ πᾶν μηχαρ 594; cf. 394).


11It is possible to see "kind-minded force" (εὐμενὴ βίαν) as a euphemism for drastic medical treatment of the sort which must hurt in order to cure. Cf. the "kind-minded surgery" of Ag. 849.
The healing touch of Zeus' hand produced Epaphos (= "Touch") as it cured Io from her affliction (17, 45-47, 312, 536). And so touching is first seen in the play as symbolic of a gentle cure and fruitful progeny. It progressively acquires a sinister connotation, however, in its association with "seized things" (ῥυσίων 412), when the Choros proclaims that the Nile is "untouched by diseases" (561), with the Choros' oath that their male adversaries shall not "touch" them (790), and with the King's warning of the consequences of having "touched" the suppliants (925). This destructive meaning of touch passes from imagery to symbolic action when the Egyptian Herald seizes the Danaids and attempts to drag them off. Since both disease and cure can come from touch, Zeus, who is "Io's Toucher" (ἐφαρμόχι Ἰός 535; cf. 310), bears the ambiguous burden of being cause of Io's affliction through his male force and healer of that same affliction through that same force which has become "kind-minded."

The Danaids themselves recapitulate in their action in this first play of the trilogy these features of the Io story. Fleeing in disgust from marriage with their rapacious Egyptian cousins, they see a solution in the kind-minded male force which Zeus, in his healing aspect, represents. The Argive polis has "just strength from Zeus" (436) and it is also "kind-minded" (488, 518). As Zeus'

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healing hand released Io from her pain, so the citizens of Argos, by a hand-vote, extend the "strong hand of the people" (604) over the Danaids and offer them refuge.

The preparation for seeing in the political action of the Argive people an attempt at curing the desperate ills of the Danaids, as Zeus cured Io, was made in the first exchange between King Pelasgos and the Choros. The land, the King explains, is called Apia (a fact the Choros seems to have known, cf. 118, 128):

Solon (13 Edmonds), using the art of healing as an image of the restoration of justice in the state, casts it in terms of the healing touch of the hand:

someone who is in agony from wasting afflictions can be suddenly healed by a simple touch of the hand.

(59-60)
. . . because of a man who was a doctor.
Apis came from the shore of Naupaktos,
a prophet-doctor, son of Apollo.
He purged this land of man-destroying snakes
which Earth placed here, smeared with pollutions
of ancient blood, wrathful monsters, a
miserable, horrifying brood. Blamelessly he
made cut remedies for the Argive land
to release it from them, and he found, as his pay,
a remembrance in our prayers.

(261-270)

This passage is not a matter of "extraneous interest," as Kitto
suggests. 14 Aischylos introduces it at this early point in the play to
reveal some of the human bombast of Pelasgos, but more importantly
to weave together some strands of imagery and to underscore that
Argos' name in this play is Apia, after a famous  latróμαυτις.
Apis "purged" the land of snakes and their pollution. Snakes
throughout signify the Egyptians: the sacred grove may shield them
from birds, but the Danaids fear the "heartless snakes" (512); the
Egyptian Herald is characterized as "a snake on two feet, a viper"
(895-896). Pollution (μίασμα) is a word which Aischylos has used
more in this play than in any other that survives; it refers both to the
Egyptians (225) and to the consequences of rejecting the plea of
suppliants (366, 473, 619, 650). Responsibility for pollution, in
fact, is a reason Pelasgos advances for referring the decision to
assist the Danaids to the vote of the people:

14 Greek Tragedy, p. 7.
τὸ κοινὸν  δ'   εἰ  μιαίνεται  πόλις,
ξυνῇ  μελέσθω  λαὸς  ἑκπονεῖν  ἀκή.

If the polis pollutes its common interest,
let the people together work out cures.

(366-367)

The "cut remedies" (ἄκη τομαῖα) with which Apis cured the land
should in its usual sense mean "drugs prepared by cutting," but
probably refers here to a cutting of the snakes with a sword, fore­
casting the murderous swords with which the Danaids will cut down
their spouses on their wedding night. 15  The shedding of kindred
blood, however, is something for which only the gods can find "cures
for the pain" (πημονῆς ἀκη 451).

Thus, the eponymous healing ancestor of the land of Apia and his
myth is connected with some other imagery of the play and adds
further legitimacy to the Argive attempt at a political cure of the
Danaids' ills. But in the broader sweep of the trilogy, some signifi­
cance may be attached to Herodotos' remark that Apis is the Egyptian
version of the Greek Epaphos. 16  If the transfer of Argive rule from

15 The murder of the Egyptians occurred in a later play of the
trilogy which is no longer extant. Whether the imagery was extended
in that play, is uncertain, but the phrase "cut remedies" occurs again
in Libation-Bearers 539, and can be connected with the recurrent
imagery of cutting (τέμυελυ) throughout the Oresteia. See below.

16 Herodotos II,153. Cf. J. T., Sheppard, "The First Scene of
Pelagkos to Danaos was emphasized in the imagery of Egyptians and Danaids, the sequels to Suppliants, then an Apis-motif may have been connected with the Epaphos-motif to indicate that the final resolution of the disease which gripped Io and her descendants was accomplished when the Greek healer from Egypt (Epaphos) supplants the Egyptian healer in Greece (Apis).

In the trilogy in which Suppliants stands first, the attempt by the "people's strong hand" to cure the plight of the Danaids was unsuccessful, however closely it was modelled on the cure of Io by Zeus' "healing hand." The Egyptians became temporarily victorious until forty-nine of them were slain by their wives on their wedding night. It was only through the virtue of Hypermestra and Lynkeus, who reflect the harmony which Aphrodite describes in Danaids, that the conflict between male aggression and female resistance was solved. As long as the conflict remains, as it does at the close of Suppliants, the natural bounty of which Aphrodite speaks cannot be achieved. So the benedictions which the Danaids pronounce upon the people of Argos in Suppliants are as false as the political cure which will fail. They are, moreover, in light of the disease imagery of the play, ironic:

μῆποτε λοιμὸς ἀνδρῶν
tάνθε πόλιν νεκώσαι.

17Fragment 44 (Nauck).
May a plague never 
empty this polis of its men.

(659-660)

νούσων δ' ἔσμος ἀπ' ἀσταύν
 ἡζοι κρατός ἀτερπής.

May the swarm of diseases, painful
in its might, settle away from the people.

(684-685)

"Swarm" (ἔσμος) is used by Aischylos only in Suppliants, where it
is found three times. Here the Choros pray that Argos be free of a
swarm of diseases, both in the literal sense and with reference to
their pursuers whom they have previously called "the violent swarm
(ἔσμος) born of Aigyptos" (30). But their plea that it "settle away"
from the people more directly recalls Danaos' instructions that the
Choros "be seated like a swarm (ἔσμος) of doves" (223). The
irony of the benediction is that the "swarm" is not sitting away from
the people, but is, in literal fact, seated on stage in front of the
sacred images of the Argive gods. They have brought upon their
hosts a "plague" that soon will indeed empty the polis of its men.

Disease and cure in Suppliants is a major element in the complex
symbolism of the play. Through the imagery of touching, it deepens
the political theme of democracy. Connected with the Io-motif, it
underlies the conflict of sexes. It introduces an element of foreboding
in its intimation that the Danaids, who are generally cast in a sympa-
thetic light, may not only be suffering the pains of a disease caused from without (male pursuit) like Io, but they may themselves be diseases who will bring pain and destruction to those who thought to cure them.

Oresteia

(a) Agamemnon

Close to the climactic moment when Kassandra enters the doors of the palace to share her lordly captor's fate, she reveals to the apprehensive Choros a bitter truth: "No healing god (οστὶ παλῶν) attends in this story" (1248). Within this drama's massive scope, this is the truth toward which the disease imagery progressively builds. The situation at Argos, festering for so long, is "nearly incurable" (δυσίατον) and help is far off (1101-1104). The Choros and each of the characters sense this infection in the house of Atreus; each seeks some cure for it. But in Agamemnon, suffering has not yet perfected

18 "Attends" (ἐπιστατεῖ) is a word used in the Hippokratic writings to describe the bedside ministrations of a doctor, cf. Precepts 6. It recalls the words of the Watchman that no kind dreams "watch over" (ἐπισκοπούμενον) or "attend" (παραστατεῖ) his sleep, but only fear; cf. George Thomson, The Oresteia of Aeschylus (rev. ed; Prague: Academia, 1966), II, p. 11. The true help of the house, Orestes, "is not in attendance" (ἀποστατεῖ 1104). In the light of this association of compounds of στατέω with medical practice, the Watchman's statement that the beacon light signals "the constitution (κατάστασις) of many choruses in Argos, thanks to this event" may contain some of the force of the Hippokratic κατάστασις (cf. Epidemics I, 1-26), the total environment in which disease breaks out.
awareness into knowledge. Each attempt at cure brings not a release from pain, but a fresh outbreak.

The Watchman, who initiates much of the sustained imagery of the trilogy, opens the play with a prayer for "release from pain" (ἀπαλλαγῆν πόνων 1, 10). Only fear attends at his bedside, bringing him no rest (12-14: cf. note 18). He must "produce a remedy by incision, a song against sleep" (ὕπνου τόδ᾿ ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος 17). Just as the Watchman sings to allay his nightmares and grief and as he finds his joy at the beacon-light mixed with some apprehensiveness, so too the Choros knows the "Persuasion of song" (106) and is puzzled by the fires of the beacon and Klytaimestra's sacrifice. They ask the Queen to "be healer (παλών) to this perplexity" (99), for they do not understand the strangeness of her sacrificial fire:

φαρμασσομένη χρίματος ἀγνοῦ
μαλακάς ἀδύλοις παρηγορίαίς
πελανῷ μυχόθεν βασιλείψ.

drugged by soft uncrafty
palliatives of precious ointment,
by kingly oil from deep within.

(94-96)


20 "Palliatives" (παρηγορίαίς) is a word which connotes both rhetorical persuasiveness and medical sedation (Hipp. Diet in Acute...
When Klytai'mestra fails to answer, the Choros' reveries carry them back to that other sacrifice--at Aulis--and the story of Iphigeneia. They pray to Apollo as Healer (Παύλονα 146) that this omen signal no fresh sacrifice of life. The terror has "sprung up again" (παλίνορτος 154), for there was but one remedy (μηχαρ 199) which worked at Aulis--the sacrifice of kindred blood.

The persuasion song of the Choros, intended to soothe their anxiety, intensifies it instead. Persuasion in Agamemnon is no palliative, but the persistent and forceful daughter of destruction (άτη) against whom "every remedy is in vain" (άκος δε παν ματαιον 387). Persuasion, employed skillfully by Klytai'mestra, entraps the King into an overt act of arrogance. There is no remedy for Agamemnon against the fate which Persuasion prepares.

When the Herald from the Argive army appears, he echoes the hopes of the Choros that the troubled events of the Trojan War find no recurrence in Agamemnon's home-coming. He prays that Apollo "no longer shower arrows from his bow upon us" (510), recalling the plague portrayed in Iliad 1, for which Agamemnon himself was

Diseases 53, 58; cf. Eum. 506-507 where it is used with άκη, remedies). The word connects the imagery of drugging and the imagery of persuading throughout the trilogy. "Kingly oil" (πελανψ...βασιλεψ ) is sinister in its meaning of a thick, clotted liquid; the word recurs as "libation" in Libation Bearers 92 and "clotted blood" in Eumenides 265. "Soft" and "uncrafty" are massively ironic, considering Klytai'mestra's secret plans at this point.
responsible. Let Apollo, the Herald continues, come now as "savior and healing god" (σωτήρ...καὶ παίωνιος 512). At Troy, the Herald was convinced he would never see his home again and he prayed for death (539); now, the Choros says, he is stricken with "a disease that brings delight" (τερπνὴς...τῆς...νὸσου 542), home-sickness ended in a tearful reunion with loved ones who loved and longed for him in his absence. The Herald's "disease that brings delight" stands in sharp contrast with Agamemnon's impending arrival, for the Choros say that only their silence was a "drug (φάρμακον) against harm" (548) and they, like the Herald in his loneliness at Troy, would have considered death a great favor (550). Even the Herald's attempt to cheer the Choros is ominous: "Why must a living man be troubled at a relapse of fortune?" (571). The reunion of the King with his household is such a "relapse" and will bring only pain.

Agamemnon's speech at his triumphant entry contains the most striking and concentrated disease imagery of the play. He expects

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21 Lattimore, "Introduction to the Oresteia," The Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 19, n. 12: "The word παλίνορτος might signify a sickness or poisoning which lies hidden in the system, seemingly gone, then recurs..." In "Hippokrates," Articulations 19, παλίνοταινω and παλίνκότησις are used of a recrudescent wound. Klytaimestra used it of rumors (Ag. 863, 874). At 1.1211, Apollo's ὅτος against Cassandra resulted in her words not being believed, i.e., her true prophecy was construed by her hearers as rumors, as in the scene with the Choros (esp. 1105). All of these meanings—recurrent sickness, a wound that will not heal, a fresh outbreak of rumors which prove true—are at work throughout Agamemnon.
that there may be trouble in the city from which he has been absent for ten years. Resentful people naturally begrudge the conquering hero:

(resentment's) malevolent poison, sitting upon the heart, doubles the burden of the man who has caught the disease; he weighs himself down with his own pains and moans at the sight of another's blessedness.

(834-837)

That Agamemnon should refer to himself as "blessed" (ὀλβον) is ominous indeed, the prelude to disaster; it is Agamemnon himself who later voices the proverb:

... one must only call blessed the man who has ended his life in a state of well-being.

(928-929)

The returned King is intent upon taking the necessary measures to cure what is diseased and preserve what is healthy within his kingdom:

...
We shall see what is well
and what plans need be made to keep it well.
But whatever needs healing drugs,
then by cautery or kind-minded surgery
we shall try to turn the disease's pain around.

(846-850)

Drugs, cautery, and surgery are measures taken when foresight has
not managed to prevent the outbreak of disease. Cautery and surgery
are drastic, since to stem the pain of disease, they must themselves
inflict pain. Aischylos is here playing with the ambiguities of all
three manners of treatment, increasing the irony of Agamemnon's
statement and adding some new twists to the imagery of the play.
Each is a mechanism for cure, but each carries a sinister connotation
of destruction. Drugs call to mind that Klytaiestra has "drugged"
the beacon-flame with the oil (or, ambiguously, the clotted blood,
cf. note 20) of the king (94-96). In her plots, Kassandra later says,
Klytaiestra is "like a woman preparing a drug" (1260). The Queen's
drugs are not for cure, but for destruction. Its power to heal or
destroy is what distinguishes a drug from a poison. So Agamemnon's
former words about "resentment's malevolent poison (lóç)" are
unwittingly allusion on his part to the resentful Klytaiestra. So too,
with cautery--it is distinguished from a consuming fire only in its
results. Klytaiestra is obsessed with the fire which she fed to

22 Cf. Herakleitos, 58 DK.
forewarn her of the King's return (281-316); in the end, however, she reveals that it is Aigisthos who "makes the fire blaze upon my hearth" (1435). Surgery is simply a wounding which cures. But Klytaiemestra is "sharpening the knife for her man" (1263). Thus all the instruments of healing--drugs, fire, the knife--whereby Agamemnon hoped "kind-mindedly" (εὐφρόνως 849) to root out disease at home, the "malevolent" (οὐσφρων 834) poison of Klytaiemestra's resentment has turned to his destruction.

When Agamemnon, beguiled by Persuasion into treading the fateful carpet, passes into the palace with Klytaiemestra, the Choros re-examines its persistent fear, picking up the tread of disease imagery and applying it to the wider sweep of things. They sense some hidden law of recurrence will bring disaster:

\[
\text{μᾶλα τῷ ταῖς πολλάς ύγιείας ἀκόρεστον τέρμα: νόσος γὰρ γείτων ὀμότοιχος ἔρειδε.}
\]

Health has an insatiable boundary, while Disease, its next-door neighbor, presses against their common wall.

(1002-1004)

Health is here equated with that blessedness which Agamemnon claimed for himself. By some inscrutable law of balance, Disease counteracts the drive to extend beyond what is right, one's state of well-being. It is patterned on the cycle whereby Zeus provides an annual bounty
of crops to off-set the "starving disease" (νῆστεν...νόσου 1017).

When the death of a man breaks that cycle for him, no charms will
sing back his dark blood. Asklepios once led up the dead, but Zeus
stopped him, so that the prerogative of Moira might remain unharmed
(1018-1024).

Though the mantic powers of the Choros have permitted them to
sense the universality of recurrent disease, they do not yet know
what particular form it will take in this case. Though it is doomed not
to be understood by the Choros, the extent of the present disease
within the house of Atreus is revealed by Kassandra. Klytaimestra
is within the house, she says, planning an evil which is "nearly
incurable" (δυσίατον 1103). Just as Troy lies in ashes and there
is "no remedy" (ἀκος δ' οὐδὲν) to save it, so Kassandra sees that
she herself is destroyed (1169-1172). She imagines Klytaimestra:

like a woman preparing a drug
shall put into the drink my requital;
sharpening the knife for her man, she boasts
she will repay my transport here with carnage.

(1260-1264)

The drink which Klytaimestra prepares shall be tasted by the Erinyes
(1188-1190); Agamemnon shall drink it to the dregs (1398).
Kassandra's fate—to speak truths but never be believed—is incurable as well. She begs the Choros to swear that they believe her; they refuse, saying that an oath "would not heal" her sickness (1198-1199). Apollo was the cause of Kassandra's affliction. He has come not as the healer invoked earlier by the Choros and the Herald, but as Destroyer (1080-1081, 1085-1086). Death alone releases men from pain in Agamemnon. The dead are beyond curing; even Asklepios may not call them back. Nor is there hope for those about to die. The drugs, cautery, and surgery which Agamemnon hopes will cure are the instruments which seal his destruction. The murder of her husband will not be Klytaimnstra's "remedy by incision" for her dreams, as the Watchman's song had been for his. Kassandra is resourceless and doomed; no oath can heal the burden of her prophecies. The truth of Agamemnon is that "no healing god attends in this story" (1248). As if to underscore the diseased ματάστασις of Argos and emphasize its abandonment by the god of healing, Aigisthos, in the closing scene of the play, blasphemously applies the sacred healing epithet of Apollo, λατρόμαντις, to the chains and starvation with which he threatens the Choros (1621-1623).

(b) Libation Bearers

After the luxuriant and complex poetry of Agamemnon, the imagery of Libation Bearers and Eumenides seems spare. But the theme of
disease and cure is carried through, developed, and changed to reflect the shifting moral situation in the last plays of the trilogy.

In the parados, the Choros recall that, though years have passed, the sickness which seethes in Argos has not. The Earth has been glutted with blood—a fact which recalls the drink into which Klytaimestra cut her drugs in _Agamemnon_ and contrasts with the drink-offerings carried by the Choros whereby the Queen seeks to heal her present pain. The Choros know that her cause is hopeless:

\[
\text{τδιαλγής} \delta\text{α διαφέρει των α'τιον} \\
\text{τπαναρμέτας} \nu\text{όσου βρέειν.} \\
\thetaιγόντι δ' οστί νυμφικών ἑδωλίων} \\
\text{άκος, πόροι τε πάντες ἐκ μιᾶς ὅδου} \\
\text{διαίνοντες τὸν χερομυσῆ φόνον καθαίρεσιν τε ἥθυσαν μάταν.}
\]

Pain-ridden destruction carries off the guilty. A powerful disease seethes. No cure at all for he who touches virginal chambers; all streams running in a single course rush in vain to purge carnage from the blood stained hand.

(68-74)

Purging is here for the first time introduced into the imagery of the trilogy. No purging and no cure can stop the powerful disease from resulting in the destruction of the guilty.

Orestes has returned to Argos at Apollo's bidding. His failure to avenge his father's murder will result in morbid punishments:
... diseases,
ulcers that ride upon the flesh, their
wild teeth eating at one's former nature,
and on this disease shall grow a leprous fur.

(279-282)

Disease and pain pursue the guilty, bringing his destruction. If
Orestes incurs guilt by disobeying the god's command, his flesh
will bear the external sign of his guilt.

What was foreshadowed in Agamemnon is fulfilled in Libation
Bearers. Orestes has returned to become healer to a "pain grown
into the race" (πόνος ἐγγενής 466) and an "affliction difficult to
halt" (δυσκατάπαυστον ἀλγος470). The Choros sing:

δῶμαισιν ἐμμετον
τῶνδ' ἄμοις οὕν ἀπ' ἄλλων
ἐκτοθέν, ἄλλ' ἀπ' ἄτον,
δι' ὑμῖν ἔριν αἰματηράν.

A cure for this lies within the house
not applied by others
from outside, but by themselves,
through raw and bloody strife.

(471-474)

Klytai'mestra has realized too late her "incurable ill" (ἀνήμεστον
πάθος 516). In hope that its symptoms, fearful nightmares (523-525),
might be made to abate, she has sent libations to be "a cut remedy for her pains" (ἐκος τομαίον...πημάτων 539), recalling once again the knife and cut drugs of Agamemnon. In hearing the false report of Orestes' death, Klytaimnestra rises to her former level of deceit and concealed purpose in exclaiming that the "hope which was doctor (λατρός) to his house" is gone (698-699). But in fact the "hope" and "doctor" of the pains within the house is standing close by. With the knife and under the command of an ambiguous Healer-Destroyer, Apollo, Orestes slays his mother.

Cast in terms of the disease imagery, Orestes' slaughter of his mother is either a renewed outbreak of the violent sickness which has before brought ruin to this family, or a "surgery" which has cut the source of infection from where it has become ingrained. This troubling question must be resolved before it is known whether the stroke of his sword will bring yet more pain upon the house of Atreus, or whether it has cured the seething disease. Though the Choros sees that Orestes has need of Purging, his oncoming condition

\[\text{23Klytaimnestra's malady resembles that which Sacred Disease 4 said was thought to be caused by the assaults of Hekate and dead heroes. Oneiromancy as a diagnostic technique was legitimatized in the Hippokratic On Diet 4. It is significant here that Terror has been called ὀνειρόμαντις at line 32. Klytaimnestra divines through the terror of her dreams her incurable sickness. Her libations, bitterly reminiscent of her destructive use of drugs in Agamemnon, are a desperate attempt on her part to cure the incurable.}\]
at the end of Libation Bearers is not the incurable ill that Klytaimestra's terror at night represented. He is dispatched to Delphoi to seek the healing touch of the god:

εἰς σοι καθαρμός· Λοξίας δὲ προσθιγών ἐλευθερόν σε τῶν ἔπιματων κτίσει.

There is one purification for you. Loxias shall touch you and make you free from your pain.

(1059-1060)

(c) Eumenides ("The Kind-Minded Ones")

At the opening of this final play of the trilogy, Apollo is represented under his aspects of Prophet-Doctor (латроμαντις 62) and Purger (καθάρσιος 63). The purging which is promised Orestes at the close of Libation Bearers takes place at Delphoi (282-283, 578), but Apollo tells his supplicant that the long sought-after "release from pains" (ἀπαλλάξαι πόνων) must await his vindication at Athens where he shall find "dikasts who have soothing (θελητηρίους) words" (81-83).

Orestes' vengeful act has spared him the disease which Apollo threatened (466; cf. Libation Bearers 279-282), but the Erinyes now menace him. There is danger that Attika, Orestes' new refuge, will suffer a punitive infection. Athene warns:
They have a portion not easily dismissed. If they fail to achieve victory in this action, the poison of their intentions will flow back, an unbearable, deadly disease falling on the land.

(476-479)

To mena with disease not only the body of the guilty man, but the land which affronts their rights, is a prerogative (μοντραν) of the Erinyes. Should their wrath go unappeased, no true cure for the evils of the house of Atreus will have been achieved; like so many other attempts at release from pain, this too will end in a fresh outbreak and a widened circle of infection--not merely will men fall sick, but the land itself. To the Erinyes, this is justice. They explain its workings in a song which Thomson says "is written as though from experience of plague."  

24  

Orestesia II, pp. 210-211. Thomson sees it especially similar in thought, though not in language, to Thucydides ii.51. There, as here, the people knew the course of the disease from experience, but were powerless to cure it. The lawlessness and injustice that followed in the city was unprecedented. Apposite to the Erinyes' argument is Thucydides' observation that in consequence of the plague "No fear of gods or law of men restrained them" (ii.53.4). For a further discussion of the connection of this passage with the image of incurable sickness throughout the trilogy, see Anne Lebeck, The Orestesia: A Study in Language and Structure (Washington: The Center for Hellenic Studies, 1971), pp. 162-163.
One man shall learn from another's experience
to foretell the evils of his neighbors,
the abatement of torment, then the opposite.
The sufferer in vain provides a palliative.
There are no permanent remedies.

Then let no man wail
who has obtained misfortune
crying these words:
'Justice!
Thrones of Erinyes!'
Perhaps it is some father
or newly stricken mother
crying this pitiful cry.
But the house of Justice lies fallen.

(503-516)

If Orestes is cured, the Erinyes say, the order of retributive Justice
is violated; morality will become random and unpredictable. No
remedies for injustice will be permanent (βέβαιω), but it will abate
(λήξειν), only to give way again (ὑπόδοσιν) in relapse. Fear "looks
after" (ἐπίσκοπον 518, cf. note 18) the health of one's mind (φρένες).
Arrogance (ὡρις 533) is the child of impiety (δυσσεβίας 533) toward
this law. Happiness results only from soundness of mind:

ἐκ δ' ὡγιείας
φρενῶν ὁ πᾶσιν φίλος
καὶ πολύευκτος ὀλβος.

from a healthy state
of mind results that blessedness
beloved by all and much prayed for.
(535-537)

In the view of the Erinyes, fear is the mind's physician, maintaining
its health, and preventing it from succumbing to injustice. 25 If the
moral plague of injustice should break out, then the natural course
of retribution which they represent must follow. Otherwise no remedies
will remain secure, but the infection will spread. The acquittal of
Orestes would violate this restorative process.

In the course of the trial, Apollo is tricked into admitting that
Zeus had a "remedy" (ἐνος 645) whereby he could release his father
Kronos, whereas blood spilled is without remedy (645-651). The
admission only strengthens the position of the Erinyes: the fact of
matricide is without remedy, it must bring harm to the guilty (652).
Though Apollo insists that they shall be made to void their "poison" to

25 The social significance of fear is discussed by Jacqueline
de Romilly, La crainte et l'angoisse dans le théâtre d'Eschyle
no man's harm (730), the acquittal of Orestes leads the Erinyes to act on their massive threat: if Justice is diseased, so will be the land:

Poison poison pain for pain I send from my heart
to drip upon the ground
blist, leafless, childless, (oh Justice!)
dragging on the plain
throws man-killing blotches on the country-side.

(782-787, 812-817)

To counteract this sickening of her land, Athene uses Persuasion to a new purpose (885, 971)—as a true palliative for grievances—and induces the Erinyes to change their hurtful charms (831) into beneficient spells (902), to accept a new and kindly status as Eumenides, "the Kind-Minded Ones" (cf. the "kind-minded surgery" of Ag. 849).

Placated, the Eumenides change their threats of blight upon the land to prayers for its health and prosperity:

Let no barren and deadly disease come creeping.

(941-942)
In their redefined role in the order which Zeus inaugurated, these ancient goddesses must still counsel the balance which they sought to enforce before. The city over which they shall exercise vigilant and benevolent care will find in their advice the remedy for pain which many throughout the trilogy sought in vain:

χάρματα δ’ ἀντιδίδοιεν
κοινοφιλεῖ διανοῖς
καὶ συμγεῖν μιᾷ φρενί.
pολλῶν γὰρ τὸδ’ ἐν βροτοῖς ἀνοι.

Let them return delight for delight.
Let them love with common intent
and hate with one mind.
For this, among mortals, is a cure for much.

(984-987)

(d) The Trilogy

Throughout the Oresteia, Aischylos used and developed disease imagery with singular appropriateness. Disease symbolizes the massive pain from which the men and women of the drama seek release. The trilogy records the relapse and recurrence of an infection in the house of Atreus that is both moral and actual: guilt breeds guilt and pain brings pain. Health exists in the well minds of individuals, the order of the state, and the fecundity of Nature. There is free transition in the imagery from the individual to the social and natural levels, for they are all bound by the rule of δίκη, a Justice in which the balanced forces of Nature are the pattern for the
moral balance of man and society. In Nature, the season of sickness implies a season of bounty; that is the law of Zeus. But the pain grown into the house of Atreus has produced season after season of sickness until it threatens the very bounty of Nature. The drugs of resentment, the cautery of passion, and the surgery of vengeance cannot heal the disease. Only a healthy mind is provident and balanced enough to discover a remedy for pain. In the Oresteia, the individual who is morally diseased and in pain because of it must look beyond himself or his blood-line to find genuine and permanent recovery. Such a cure is to be discovered only in the dispassionate and healthy social order which is patterned upon the healthy order of Zeus' universe.

A progress of the image is revealed through the trilogy: from the absence of the healing god and the ever-widening destruction of Agamemnon, to the ambiguous and drastic Healer-Destroyer of Libation Bearers, until finally, the very goddesses of disease (Erinyes) are transformed into deities who ensure that the moral health or sickness of both individuals and their societies is reflected in the bountiful health or menacing decay of Nature herself. Even Persuasion, the deadening "palliative" of Agamemnon, becomes in

26 The progressive disease imagery--from sinister and destructive to healthful and bounteous--follows the pattern which is noticed in the Nature imagery by John J. Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the Oresteia," AJPh LXXXV (1964), pp. 378-393.
the Eumenides a true medicine in the balanced social harmony of Zeus, god of the agora (ἀγορατός 973), who guides men's interactions through secure moral norms.

Prometheus Bound

Nowhere among the surviving plays of Aischylos is disease imagery so apparent as in Prometheus Bound. This is appropriate, for in the view of the play, the Titanic benefactor of mankind instructed the wretched race of mortals in the art of medicine:

τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, εἰ τις ἐς νόσου πέσοι, οὐκ ἦν ἀλέξημ’ οὐδὲν, οὔτε βρώσιμον οὐ χριστὸν οὐδὲ πιστῶν, ἄλλα φαρμάκων χρεία κατεσκέλοντο, πρὶν γ' ἐγὼ σφισίν ἔδειξα κράσεις ἢπιων ἀκεσμάτων, αἷς τὰς ἀπάσας ἔξαμύνονται νόσους.

My greatest gift: before, if anyone should fall into disease, there would be nothing to protect him—no food, no ointment, no drink—and through this lack

27 Barbora H. Fowler's excellent article "The Imagery of the Prometheus Bound," AJP LXXVIII (1957), pp. 173-189, treats the disease imagery at considerable length, showing it is patterned in a tradition which views health as harmony, or ἱσονομία in Alkmaion's words, and disease as μοναρχία, an appropriate description of the new reign of Zeus as portrayed in the play. I here attempt to avoid duplicating the main lines of her argument. Since much of what I say may be considered as supplementary to her view (with which I substantially agree), the reader is referred to her article.
of drugs, men wasted away, until I showed them
the blendings of gentle medicines, whereby
they might ward diseases off from themselves. 28

(478-483)

The arts which Prometheus gave mankind turn to symbols of his own
torment. 29 So, too, with medicine, for Prometheus is like the sick
doctor:

καὶ δὲς ἃτρος ὡς τις ἐς νόσον
πεσὼν δύναντας, καὶ σεαυτὸν οὐκ ἔχεις
εὑρεῖν ὁποῖος φάρμακος λάσιμος.

like some bad doctor
fallen into disease, you are spiritless and have no way
to find with what drugs you might heal yourself.

(473-475)

28 It should be noticed that the art which Prometheus bestowed on
mankind was "orthodox" and "rational'' in the sense that it uses diet
and gentle medicines to cure disease, rather than drastic measures
like surgery or magical treatment like incantation. This sets the tone
for a "rational" cast to the disease imagery of Prometheus Bound which
was not the case with that of Oresteia. The concept of "blendings"
(κράδεις 482) fits the Pythagorian tradition of Alkmaion, where
health is a blending (Aetius 5.30.1; cf. Aristotle, On the Soul 407b 27),
and the rational dietetics of the Hippokratics, e.g. On Ancient Medicine
5-10, The Nature of Man 1-6. "Gentle medicines" (ἡπίων ἀκακαλῶν
482) recalls the "gentle drugs" (ἡπία φάρμακα) which physicians
in Homer learned from Cheiron through Asklepios of Achilleus (Iliad
4.213-219; 11.844-848) and the "gentle drugs" with which physicians
in Solon's day relieved their patients' pain, preventing it from growing
into a larger illness--all within the plan of Zeus--and which provide
the Athenian legislator with a striking metaphor for his gentle reform
measures (13 Edmonds).

29 For example, his chains are the product of metallurgy (500-503);
seer-craft (484-499), ensures he shall see all his future suffering,
adding to his torment by removing any "blind hopes."
Like the wounded healers Machaon and Cheiron, Prometheus is thematically portrayed as the healer who cannot heal himself. He went "beyond Justice" (πέρα δίκης) in helping mankind relieve their pain, now, he complains, he must suffer unjustly (ἐνδικα 1093), though he is a god. Because he is immortal, Prometheus' pain cannot be resolved as can that of man, through death. His options are limited: the pain will be eternal, or will end in his eventual release.

For the moment, however, Prometheus is resourceless to find release; at the close of the play, his pain is intensified by new torments in Tartaros, the ravaging eagle of Zeus tearing away at his liver. Those who visit his crag in Skythia are also powerless to heal his pain. Hephaistos can find "no remedy (ἐκος...οδὲν) in dirges" (43). Okeanos advises verbal conformity to Zeus' harsh rule, for "words are doctors for the sick temper" (ὁργῆς νοσούσης...λατροὶ) 378). Prometheus rejects Okeanos' duplicity, causing Okeanos to retort, "let me be sick with his sickness, since it is profitable..." (ἐα με τῇδε τῇ νόσῳ νοσεῖν, ἐπεὶ/νέρβιστον 384-385). It is just this sort of diseased falsehood, Prometheus...
realizes, cultivated by simulators and sycophants seeking their own advantage, which has fed Zeus' disease:

\[
\varepsilon\nu\varepsilon\sigma\tau\iota \gamma\acute{a}\rho \pi\omicron\varsigma \tau\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron \tau\omicron \nu\rho\alpha\nu\nu\dot{\iota}d\iota
\varepsilon\omicron\sigma\mu\acute{a}, \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma \phi\ildefont{ilo}\varsigma\iota \mu\eta \pi\epsilon\pi\omicron\upsilon\theta\acute{e}n\acute{a}i.
\]

This is a disease which abides within the tyranny--mistrust of friends.

(224-225)

Even a mortal in such desperate need of healing as Io knows that "lying words are the most shameful sickness" (\(\nu\omicron\sigma\eta\mu\alpha\.\alpha\lambda\sigma\chi\iota\sigma\omicron\nu\) 685-686). And the Okeanids, in marked contrast with their collaborating father, come to hate such treachery, finding that "there is no disease (\(\nu\omicron\sigma\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\) I spit on more than this" (1069-1070).

Prometheus rejects complaint words as a possible remedy for his pain. An equally impossible cure are the "blind hopes" which he gave mankind as a "drug" (\(\phi\acute{a}\rho\mu\alpha\kappa\omicron\nu\) ) against foreseeing his doom and living in fear (248-250), since his very name (Prometheus = "Fore-sight") indicates that he knows the sufferings he must bear. Though powerless to effect a remedy for his situation, Prometheus knows what will be the final outcome in the fated course of things. "Necessity" (\(\acute{a}\nu\acute{a}\gamma\nu\acute{e}\varsigma\) 514, 515), which is an order of Nature above even Zeus, \footnote{Lattimore argues convincingly in The Poetry of Greek Tragedy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), p. 48, n. 25, that \(\acute{a}\nu\acute{a}\gamma\nu\acute{e}\) is equivalent to Nature functioning as force, whereas \(\phi\acute{u}\varsigma\iota\varsigma\) emphasizes Nature as growth. In this sense, Prometheus understands the forces of nature which will lead to Zeus' eventual overthrow unless Zeus can adapt his behavior to conform with them.}
is a process which Prometheus understands. The new king of the gods will have need of his prognostic skills to prevent his diseased tyranny from ending in disaster.

The physical pain of Prometheus, caused by his excessive philanthropy, has ripened into a wider and worsening disease:

Ερ. κλύω σ' ἐγὼ μεμηνότ' οὐ σμικρὸν νόσουν.
Πρ. νοσοῖμ' ἢν, εἶ νόσημα τοὺς ἐχεροὺς στυγεῖν.

HERMES. What I hear is madness, your large disease.
PROMETHEUS. Yes, if it is disease to despise enemies, then I am diseased.

(977-978)

His enmity toward his tormentor is the brooding disease of a god unjustly suffering under the diseased oppression of a divine tyrant.

The disease which infects the minds of the divine antagonists of Prometheus Bound underscores a moral and (since they are gods) a cosmic disproportion, a lack of "blending" that produces harmony.

Prometheus' stubborn philanthropy has caused him pain on the rocks of Skythia; his enmity produces torment in Tartaros. Zeus' sick

32Medical prognosis is simply a "knowing beforehand" of the course of natural forces and the outcome (death or recovery) of a disease within the natural course of events; see the Hippokratic treatise Prognostic 1, 25. This is a skill which Prometheus obviously has, while Zeus does not. In terms of the disease imagery, προμηθεύς can be taken as equivalent to προγνώστικός. Zeus represents knowing (μαθεῖν) which comes through suffering (παθεῖν); whereas Prometheus is skilled to know beforehand what suffering is to come.
tyranny threatens his shaky rule; his mistrust of his former ally has
cost him the knowledge of a vital secret.

In counterpoint to the diseased enmity and pain which exists
among the gods, a mortal woman's painful career crosses the paths
of both Prometheus and Zeus in significant ways. Io is afflicted
with a "disease sent by the gods" (θεόσυντον...νόσον 596). As
Prometheus' unjust love for man brought his pain, so Zeus' unjust
love for this mortal woman brought disease upon Io. Io stands as a
living, pathetic symbol of the disproportion among the gods. She
prevails upon Prometheus' prognostic skills:

άλλα μοι τορώς τέμπρον ὦ τί μ' ἐπαμένει

παθεῖν' τί μὴχαρ ἢ τί φάρμακον νόσου;

Tell me clearly what remains for me
to suffer. What cure, what drug for my disease?

(605-606)

At the Choros' request ("let us research this sickness of hers"

ιστορὴσωμεν νόσου 632), Io details the symptoms of her disease

and its causes. Prometheus provides no remedy, but only prognosis.

As the Choros say:

τοῦς νοσοῦσι τοι γλυκῷ
to λοιπὸν ἅλγος προνεπιστασθαι τορώς.

For sick people it is sweet
to have clear knowledge beforehand of the pain that is left.

(698-699)
Io's cure shall come, as in *Suppliants*, from the healing touch of Zeus (848). But in the wider sweep of things, Io's offspring will cure Prometheus himself (871-3), setting in motion a process of recovery for the diseased conflict of the gods themselves.

It is tempting to speculate on the extension of the disease imagery in the last two plays of the trilogy. With only a handful of scattered fragments from *Prometheus Unbound* and virtually nothing from *Prometheus Fire-Bringer*, perhaps all that can be done is exclaim with Jaeger "... we can neither overlook the symbolism nor complete it ..." From a Latin translation of a speech from *Prometheus Unbound* that Cicero preserves (*Tusculan Disputations* 2.23-25) it is clear that Prometheus still sees his sufferings as a "disease" (*pestis* 22) and that he longs for death. Herakles is certainly the agent whereby Prometheus is released from his pain; Cheiron, who was similar to Prometheus in that he was a physician

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33This assumes, of course, that *Prometheus Bound* stands first in a trilogy. Scholars are divided on the question. See A. D. Fitton-Brown "Prometheia," *JHS* LXXIX (1959), pp. 52-60.

who could not cure himself (cf. n. 30 above) may also be involved.  

The most that can be securely assumed is that harmony, the healthy blending of opposites, was restored among the gods and that Prometheus, with his prognostic skill, healed the dangerous situation in which Zeus found himself by preventing a marriage with Thetis. It is not unlikely that a reintegration of Prometheus into the kosmos of Zeus was symbolic of a reintegration of mankind, the recipient of a bountiful natural harmony and a manipulator of nature through the reasoned application of human art. The view, in fact, even of the Prometheus Bound is that art evolves and improves man's lot. As in the Hippokratic On Ancient Medicine, human art (especially the art of medicine) is a reasoned imitation of Natural processes, not a subversion of them.

In the Oresteia, the progress of man's physical, social, and moral lot is reflected in the imagery of nature: the disease within the house of Atreus was purged through the process of Nature and society, until a balance within society was mirrored in the bounty of Nature. In Prometheus Bound, the disease imagery is patterned on an evolving human art, the gift to man from a divine technician, which parallels through foresight the progress of an evolving Zeus-order.

35The most ingenious attempt to place Cheiron in the Prometheia is that of D. S. Robertson, "Prometheus and Cheiron," JHS LXXI (1951), pp. 150-155. But the testimony of Apollodoros is difficult to interpret. Cheiron's presence in the trilogy might signal an elaborate extension of disease imagery in the subsequent play(s). But its exact connotation and whether it involves the concept of healthful harmony as in the Oresteia is impossible to know.
Conclusion

Disease imagery is integrated into the movement and meaning of tragic action in six Aischylean dramas. Only Seven Against Thebes does not draw upon the image.

In Persians, the disease of proud thoughts which led Xerxes to bring his nation to ruin at Salamis is diagnosed as catastrophic and justly deserved by the dead Dareios, now become an oracular healer. The stress of the image falls upon the pathetic nature of the Queen's anxieties and the lamentations of the broken Xerxes, all precipitated by the transgression of moral boundaries.

In Suppliants, the vulnerability of the Danaids is thematically contrasted with the suffering of their ancestress Io. Io's disease is the assault of Zeus as male aggressor and her cure comes from his eventual soothing touch. The reception of the suppliants by the Argive democracy suggests the social possibilities of cure for those who are helplessly afflicted. But in this first play of the Danaid trilogy, the grateful benedictions of the suppliants are an ironical prelude to a subsequent recurrence of pain. The political cure has failed to account for the just integration of male and female which reflects the harmony of Nature, symbolized in the goddess Aphrodite.

The Oresteia is the single surviving Aischylean trilogy and it evidences the complex range that the imagery gathers as it parallels the long series of actions and reversals which eventually result in a
healthy outcome. In *Agamemnon*, disease imagery strengthens the ominous forebodings of the Choros that a latent evil is about to erupt to burst the illusion of the king's happy homecoming. The moral infection, expressed through the painful actions and emotions of various individuals, is suggested as a single evil, a crime grown into the house and the city. The remedies undertaken by individuals to solve their own personal agonies are not sufficient to turn back the course of this vast sickness. Instead they aggravate it and its polluting infection spreads. Health and disease are seen in tension, pressed against a common wall, just as success and disaster are in fragile balance in the world of men. The slightest moral pressure brings the festering evils to the surface again. *Libation Bearers* uses this tensive aspect of the disease imagery to underscore the fierceness of Orestes' dilemma. Here, Apollo assumes his double function of healer and destroyer to threaten with sickness the man who is reluctant to take the drastic medicines required to eradicate the moral blight. The imagery culminates in *Eumenides*, where the spheres of the individual, society, and Nature are shown to be interdependent. All are part of the moral ecology of the kosmos. The eruption of disease in one element violates the harmony of the whole. So, as the violence enlarges from personal to public actions, the Furies embody the threat of the diseased moral order for the realm of Nature itself. For Aischylos, democratic society, functioning by the
integration of diverse elements into a healthy order, is at last the sole cure for the disease which so cruelly afflicted generations of men in the house of Atreus. Though the disease has been fatal for Agamemnon, Cassandra, Aigisthos, and Klytaiemestra, it is ultimately curable in the healthy order which is Justice, particularly embodied in the just society.

In _Prometheus Bound_, the rational cast of the disease imagery stresses the paradigmatic role of Prometheus' sufferings in exploring the proper place of man as artist in a menacing world. Again, the pain is caused by a disproportion between the grand refusal of the Titanic benefactor to yield to the authority of Zeus, and the tyrannical paranoia of the new king of the gods against the accommodation of the Promethean nature into his kosmos. Io's disease and the story of the brutality worked against her pathetically stresses the disastrous nature of such conflict. The cure, which must eventually come, will result from a recognition of the mutual dependency of Prometheus and Zeus in a kosmos which is evolving into just harmony.

The disease imagery of Aischylos is principally related to his characteristic tragic vision: the vast movements of Justice, through time, to eventual harmony. For Aischylos, the kosmos is ultimately rational and moral, an architectonic world in which the divisiveness and absurdity of the moment is dissolved through assimilation into a just pattern. Tragedy explores those moments of aberration and
criminality which work at cross-purposes to the evolution of the kosmos. The disease image suggests the ruinous clash of human evil with the transcendent world order. Disease is discoverable through the diverse actions and motives of individuals who have crossed proper bounds. Ultimately, Disease is a univocal and abstract force, a disproportion which fragments the creative unity of opposing elements within an organic Justice. Through his use of disease imagery, Aischylos projects the concrete actions of human beings into this larger dimension of moral evaluation.
CHAPTER 3

SOPHOKLES: DISEASE AND THE HEROIC WILL

Aias

In the Aias, it is the hero himself who is preeminently and fatally sick. As Aias' dilemma unfolds and is resolved, a remarkably beautiful and subtle pattern of disease and madness imagery is developed. With his death, the pattern is completed, and, though the play is not yet ended, images are sought elsewhere.

Criticism on the Aias is beset by the problem of the apparent disunity of the play, the so-called "diptych" form which here somewhat unevenly divides the drama into two sorts of action: Aias' conflict-resolution through suicide, and the argument over the disposition of his body. More will be said later on the discontinuity of the imagery and what it might mean for the dramatic point of this two-fold structure. It needs to be mentioned here that many critics see a thematic unity in imagining that the Aias is about the "rehabilitation" of the hero to make him a daimon acceptable to the fifth-century Athenian religious (or ethical) scruples. (This is, more or less, the view of Bowra, Adams, Jebb, Kamerbeek, and Kirkwood.) Another view is that the play is a single drama which explores "two themes" (Kitto), and that the more objective insights of Odysseus link the two parts of the play (Kitto and Kirkwood). But the critics remain uneasy about the end-piece of the play, the agon around Aias' body. Some largely disregard it (Whitman and Knox); others simply pronounce it a "failure" (Waldock). In my judgment, none of the above satisfactorily discusses the relation of the ending to the dramatic flow of the Aias. Disregard for structural niceties do not
Whatever Athene's relationship to Aias in the prologue, whether she be a Fury exacting vengeance for a wrong or a goddess of redemptive but violent grace, the dominant image that emerges in her exchange with Odysseus and again echoed in the entrance of Aias is that of the hunt. Odysseus is "hunting a beast" (2), "chasing with dogs and tracing the footprints" (5-6), "on a course as keen-scented as a Spartan dog's" (8), "tracking" (20), "leaping on the track" (32); Athene tells him that she has guarded him "in your chase" (37). Aias is the prey, implicitly bestial and moreover "rabid" (explicitly stated

necessarily disable a play, but may in fact enhance its effect in unusual and heterodox ways. The first part of the Aias, which has so justifiably engaged the critics, is itself unusual in the variety of means by which it shocks our sense of the predictable in Greek tragedy (e.g. the wild vacillations of mood and tone, the use of the ekkyklema, the prologue of Athene, the on-stage suicide). It is not necessary to assume that because the final part of the play portrays disagreeable and shallow men doing tedious things, Sophokles has lost control of what promised to be first rate theater.

Contrast the discussion of S. M. Adams, Sophocles the Playwright (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 27, with the remarks of Cedric H. Whitman, Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 63. To spare the discussion from reaching an impasse concerning the workings of divine and human will, it is useful to accept Whitman's observation that, in Sophoklean tragedy, the gods "are modes of characterization and are only meaningful as such," ibid., p. 69. How Athene's presence serves to characterize Aias is explained by Bernard M. W. Knox, "The Ajax of Sophocles," HSCPPh LXI (1961), pp. 34-35, as the divine embodiment of Aias' human ethic to do evil to one's enemies; the difference, of course, is that Aias exists in time, whereas Athene is immortal.
later at 452: λυσσωδὴ νόσον). The "disease" (νόσοις, 59, νόσου 66) with which Athene has afflicted him is specifically "the hard-to-bear delusions of destructive joy" (51-52) which led Aias to slaughter animals, believing that he saw before him Odysseus and the Atreidai. Athene has entrapped him; she has "urged him on and snared him in the evil nets" (60). Like a rabid animal, Aias is "ranging in mad diseases" (φοιτῶντι μακιόσιν νόσοις 59), and the disease has distorted his vision; quite literally, his "eyes" 4

3 J. C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles, Part I: The Ajax (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), p. 30, notes that φοιτῶ is elsewhere (Ph. 808) used to describe disease and implies "to come on at regular times." More relevant, perhaps, is his citation of Iliad 3.449 where "the son of Atreus was ranging like a beast" (Ἀτρείδης ... ἐφοίτα τῇρ έστινως), thus emphasizing the caged and nervous quality of Aias' bestiality.

4 M. Simpson; "Sophocles' Ajax. His Madness and Transformation," Arethusa II (1969), pp. 88-103, emphasizes the connection between mental processes and visual perception in Greek thought. But it seems to me that Sophokles is distinguishing carefully between the externally manifest madness with its observable symptoms and some more inscrutable internal malignancy. The references to the eye, a physical organ, which perhaps might be depicted on the mask with exaggerated fierceness, mirrors what is going on in Aias' mind, but is not purely metaphor. Rather, it takes on a symbolic validity. Hence the Choros (191-192) implores Aias to show his eye, as if by examining its condition, they might know if the godsent madness has passed. Penelope Biggs, "The Disease Theme in Sophocles' Ajax, Philoctetes, and Trachiniae," CPh LXI (1966), p. 224, suggests that Aias' ability to see Athene, while Odysseus cannot, is symptomatic of Aias' physical disease; but also see W. M. Calder, "The Entrance of Athena in Ajax," CPh LX (1965), pp. 114-115, where this is explained by the staging of the first scene.
are affected (ἐπ' ὀμμασ εἰ ὀμμάτων 69). He is dangerous; it is only Athene's promise to distort his eyesight that allays Odysseus' nervousness about seeing him (74-87).

"Seeing" Aias is in fact the point of what follows. He does not so much appear, as he is displayed, perhaps dramatically emphasized by the use of ekkyklema. This display is much like the observation of a caged animal; it has been Athene's purpose to bring Aias' disease "into open view" (τὴνδὲ περιφανὴ νόσου 66, περιφανῶς...δεῖν 81). The Athene-Odysseus exchanges which bracket Aias' mad scene heighten the contrast between the "real" world of clear sight and reasoned discourse and the blurred and illusory state of Aias' frantic mind. His clouded vision distorts the "help in the hunt" theme which underlies Athene and Odysseus' relationship. Athene calls herself his "ally," a word that Aias accept and echoes (συμμάχο 90; σύμμαχο 117). He too has been on a "hunt" (ἄγρας 93) and has

5 The use of the ekkyklema, or any other piece of wheeled stagecraft in the fifth-century, is problematic, even in the Acharnians where internal evidence is strongest. Cf. Arthur W. Pickard-Cambridge, The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 100-122. It is evident that Aias in this scene is visible to the audience and to Athene and Odysseus, otherwise the visual emphasis of the prologue is strained beyond credulity. That Aias is on display is the mood of the scene, whether he enters wildly and madly, or is brought into view through stage machinery. His "lucid" appearance at line 348 is emphatically more passive, with explicit reference to opening and closing the doors (346, 593) which represent access to his tent.
captured his quarry, the "fox" (κιναδος 103), Odysseus. He means to torture him before he kills him. The mad scene does more than simply provide visual evidence of Aias' disease so that we might contrast his behavior with his lucid action on his next appearance in the play. It is at this point that a second dimension to Aias' sickness is suggested. The disease for which Athene was responsible is explicitly limited to blurring his eyesight in such a way that he mistakes animals for the "real" objects of his wrath. Such madness does not account for his rage in the first place; it has simply frustrated his murderous intent, itself presumably formed by the "normal" Aias. This frenzied aggression and desire to punish cruelly those who have "slighted" (ἀτιμάσουσι) 98 the hero is evocative of the type of madness familiar from Homer. Odysseus' reaction is a somber generalization on something more internal in the human condition. Athene has simply "thrown shade" (85) on Aias' sight, but having seen the madness displayed, Odysseus "sees" (ὀρῶ 125) that all men are "nothing but phantoms or weightless shadows, while we live" (125-126).

See the first chapter of E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 1-18. Of particular relevance is the berserk Hektor of Iliad 15, described as foaming at the mouth and blazing in his eyes. The Trojans are like lions "who eat raw flesh." The hero's fiery eyes lead into a simile of fire ranging on the mountain thickets; the foam from his mouth is echoed in the simile of the wind-swollen wave enveloping a ship in its foam.
Rather than producing mockery, the sight of Aias has evoked pity. Athene herself concludes the scene by focusing on moral behavior. Her evaluation of the lessons of the mad scene broadens the prior notions of madness and disease, pointing to some distortion in Aias' personal moral view, more than an externally caused and fleeting confusion of his eyesight, which has led to his humiliation.

The parodos (134-200) presents Aias' Salaminian sailors meditating on the rumors that have been ranging through the Greek camp. Their interests are closely bound to the personal success of their leader, rejoicing when his fortune is fair; but when his luck has turned, their fear is like that in the "eye of a dove in flight" (140). If Odysseus in the prior scene took no delight in Aias' shame, there are others in the Greek camp who are gloating. At this point, the Choros do not yet know the truth of the rumors; but their expectancy and apotropaic prayers to Zeus and Apollo underscore the likeliness of the truth. Such envy creeps upon the great (157); those who do not

7G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 187, points out how the Choros is drawn to the person of Aias not merely by sympathy, but by sharing in his fortune. The affect achieved differs from that of (say) Oidipous *Tyrannos*; among other things, this intimate Choral identification makes them a ready barometer for Aias' fluctuating mood. They tend to intensify his unique heroism by associating their own survival and well-being with his personal struggle. This differs from a Choral treatment which is a foil to the heroic will by opposing its rashness with well-socialized moralizing.
know this truth are "out of their minds" (τοὺς ἄνοιχτος 162). It is clear that the Choros consider Aias' frenzy to consist of his mistaking the flocks for men; there is no mention of the rage that formed his murderous intent. If Aias is in fact sick, they reason, such sickness is from god (θεία νόσος 185); "of his own mind" (φρενόθεν 182) he would not have slaughtered cattle. They call on Aias to dispel the rumors, or at least to avenge the insolence of the mocking Greeks, and no longer "keep your eye in the tents by the sea" (191-192).

Tekmessa's entrance (201) continues the Choral song and confirms the rumors. Their grief is justified, for Aias, though a great and terrible man of raw power, "fell sick in a troubling tempest and now lies within" (206-207). Pressed for further information, Tekmessa reveals "a suffering like death" (215), an event "in the night" (217), the result of "madness" (μανία 216). It is the gruesome carnage in the tent to which this madness here refers; again, Tekmessa suggests a god is responsible (243-244). The affliction was as violent and short-lived as the tempest:

οὐχέτι λαμπρᾶς γὰρ ἄτερ στεροπᾶς
ζεῖς δὲ ὑς νότος δὲ λήγει,
καὶ νῦν φρονίμως νέον ἄλγος ἔχει·
tὸ γὰρ ἐσείσεσθεν οἵκετα πάθη,
μηδενὸς ἄλλου παραπράξαντος,
μεγάλας ὀάνας ὑποτείνει.

It has passed. No more lightening flashes, but like the south wind, after a sharp outbreak, it abates. Now in his
right mind, he has fresh pain: to look on sufferings that are his own, that no one else has helped him make, this lays massive pains within him.

(257-262)

Aias' disease which was characterized by frenzy and compared to the storm, the disease which darkened his eyes and which Odysseus saw, has passed. But strangely his pain is renewed. The Choros cannot understand why, "if it has stopped" (263), the situation is not better. Tekmessa, linking their plight to Aias' misfortunes, remarks "though no longer sick (δυ νοσοῦντες), we are now worse off" (269). And for Aias, surely it is worse for him to be in pain while

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This accepts the manuscript reading νοσοῦντες in preference to Hermann's reconstruction νοσοῦντος, a somewhat awkward genitive absolute meaning "since (Aias) is not now sick." Both Jebb and Kamerbeek have accepted the manuscript reading; Pearson's Oxford text prefers Hermann's emendation. If I am correct in trusting the manuscripts here, this is the single instance of the disease image being applied to persons other than Aias. This seems appropriate to the closeness with which both Tekmessa and the Choros see themselves as bound to Aias' condition. They are his φίλοι, and share in the good and evil which he experiences. While he is sick, so are they; when his pain is doubled, they too are worse off. Much is made of the loneliness of Aias (see Knox, for example) both in this play and in the literary tradition, but here and in the subsequent exchange between Tekmessa and Aias another facet of the heroic condition is evidenced: the heroic dilemma, however singular and isolated it may be within the mind and will of Aias, is also social in that it implicates humans of lesser stature in its tragic outcome. In Antigone, for example, a similar social import is differently conveyed through the suicide of Haimon and (perhaps even more shockingly) through that of Eurydike.
causing sorrow to his friends, than to do so with pleasure. His disease had distorted his emotions; when he was "in the sickness" (ἐν τῇ νόσῳ 271) he took pleasure, but now that "it has abated and he breathes free of the sickness" (νὰνέπνευσε τῆς νόσου 274) his pain is doubled. To the Choros, this is a sign that some new stroke of the gods has befallen Aias; it could hardly be otherwise, they reason, "if he feels no better now that the disease has stopped than when he was sick" (πῶς γὰρ, εἶ πεπαυμένος/ μηδὲν τι μᾶλλον ἥ νοσῶν εὐφραίνεται 279-280). The matter is not here resolved. As fearful and interesting (the Choros press Tekmessa for details and she obliges them with a lengthy and graphic description) as Aias' madness in the night may be, there is something ominous and abnormal about his present calm. Tekmessa describes his slow return to sanity, 9

9N. E. Collinge, "Medical Terms and Clinical Attitudes in the Tragedians," Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London IX (1962), pp. 50-52, views the character of Aias through a psychopathological analysis of the manic-depressive personality. Sophokles is, of course, not so much interested in clinical accuracy as credibility in characterization. That the symptoms of what we might call manic-depressiveness are explored with surprising precision in the development of Aias' personality is not so much a sign of the playwright's psychoanalytic acumen, as the thoroughness which he employs in constructing the powerful dramatic illusion of a non-"normal" human being. In Aristotle's words, a certain "consistent inconsistency" of character must be observed to keep the drama credible. Aias' dilemma, then, is not "explained" by psychosis, nor should it be seen as a "case history" on the model of the Hippokratic Epidemics; rather, this close portrayal of psychotic behavior serves the overriding purpose in the drama of further delineating the hero's unique personality. It is one among many 'modes of characterization.'
his brooding silences, his demands to know the facts, and then his
long wails of shattering pain, "which I have never before heard
from him" (318). When the Choros themselves hear his groans from
within, they resort to disease to describe it:

\[ \text{άνηρ ξοικεύτ} \, \text{η νοσεῖν, η τοῖς πάλαι}
\text{νοσήμασι ξυνούσι λυπεῖσθαι παρῶν.} \]

The man seems either to be sick, or to be in pain from
being close to those effects of his recent sickness.

(337-338)

A few lines further on, when they hear Aias calling for Teukros and
exclaiming that he has been destroyed, they echo this remark, "the
man seems to be sane" (344). Tekmessa opens the doors, and once
again Aias is displayed. What follows is "Aias' song," a series of
three pairs of strophes and antistrophes, with each followed by a
comment in the dialogue meter, by the Choros or Tekmessa, with an
occasional one line rejoinder by Aias himself. Aias salutes his ship-
mates and invites them to see "what a wave from the storm of carnage
engulfs and circles around me" (351-352). The Choros are appalled
by the sight and again assess what "seems" to them, that Tekmessa
gave true witness, the deed is clearly insane ( \[ \alphaπροντιστως \, \varepsilonχει \]
355), or perhaps, as Jebb suggests, "the deed shows that he is
insane."\(^{10}\) Aias sees the Choros as a defense in his misery, and begs

them to "slay me too" (361). The Choros respond that this would be an "evil cure (ἁποτ) for evil" (362-363). And so, ominously, death enters the disease imagery as the "cure" for Aias' pain. Just as Odysseus and Athene in the prologue scene moved from describing Aias' sickness as the distortion of his physical vision to suggest some deeper moral disturbance which can infect all men, so this second display of the hero, now supposedly lucid, moves beyond the Choros' more literal understanding of Aias' disease to the recognition of some internal and fatal pain. Odysseus, Tekmessa, and the Choros have been led to suspect this more inward dimension of heroic pain; in the scenes which follow, particularly in the series of magnificent speeches, Aias himself will make the same discovery. But here, in his song, his mood is vindictive, perhaps ruthless. His experience of madness has not so much caused him to have fresh insight into himself, as to pique his resentment toward Odysseus and the Atreidai.

11 On the basis of numerous variations of this theme in literature, Kamerbeek, The Ajax, p. 85, suggests "a proverb from the medical sphere underlies this phrase." Perhaps Plato in Protagoras 340E expresses the theme most fully: "If in curing the pain of ruin I should make the disease still worse, then I am an absurd physician."

12 This notion that death itself is a cure for the pain of the living is most explicitly found in a fragment from Sophokles' lost Philoktetes at Troy (626 Nauck): "Death is the ultimate physician of our sicknesses" (ἄλλ' ἐσθ' ὁ θάνατος λοισθος λατρός νόσου). Recall also Aiskhylos (250 Nauck): "Oh death, healer!" (ὁ θάνατε παιάν).
At this point, the fatal resolution of his shame is not manifestly suicidal: Aias will kill his enemies and then "find death" (391). It is important to stress that, at this point in the play, such a remark would most likely suggest that his end will be from the Greek army itself in punishment for an impetuous slaughter of the Atreidai. The Choros had already expressed the fear that Aias' humiliation would result in his being "done to death" (229) by envious men. In fact, as Aias pursues the theme of death as his release from shame, he himself suggests that "all the army, with sword in both hands, would slaughter me" (408-409). He is Athene's victim, no longer worthy of divine support or human aid. He invokes the Trojan landscape to witness that he shall never again "catch his breath" (416-417). In his first speech (430-480), Aias meditates on how to resolve his predicament, while salvaging his dignity. His thoughts are not suicidal. He is frustrated and unwavering in his bitterness. His very name shows him to be a man of lamentation, made to lament his own misfortune and to cause others to lament. He measures the shameful effect that flight would have upon his father Telamon and rejects it as a dishonorable solution. He sees himself as like Achilleus; the death of Achilleus and the inevitable death of Aias signal a disappearance of heroic morality from the Greek leadership. When he mentions his disease, it is the "rabid disease" (λυσσώδης νόσον 452) by which the goddess Athene frustrated his attempt at
revenge. He will undertake some action that will give no comfort to the Atreidai. It is likely to bring about his death, and he has accepted it in advance. The Choros remark that this is Aias' genuine feeling, something which comes from his very own mind (481-482).

The speech is followed by a debate between Tekmessa and Aias on the immediate consequences to her and to their child of any rash action which Aias might undertake. The Choros cautiously supports Tekmessa's cause. As Tekmessa had previously seen her own situation as sick so long as Aias was mad, so here she confirms that his destruction is not simply personal, but carries with it the responsibility for the destruction as well of those who depend upon him. But Aias seems unmoved. His tender instruction to his child is heavily reminiscent of Hektor's farewell to Astyanax, and as such is a clear prelude to a great and heroic death. His envy of Eurysakes' happy ignorance, the observation that one "comes to learn of joy and sorrow" (555), recalls the sanity theme of the prior scene. (In fact, line 554 could well be rendered "the sweetest life lies in not being sane at all." ) The speech is Aias' testament before death: Teukros

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13 The tragic career of Hektor is in striking counterpoint to Aias'. Though enemies, they exchanged gifts and their ends are elaborately parallel and yet contrasting. See particularly, W. Edward Brown, "Sophocles Ajax and Homer's Hector," C.J LXI (1965), pp. 118-121.
must be summoned, Eurysakes is to receive his great shield,
Tekmessa must not wail in womanly fashion, and the rest of Aias' armor is to be put into his grave. It ends with the poignant image:

οὗ πρὸς λατροῦ σοφοῦ
θρηνεῖν ἐπιθαμὸς πρὸς τομῶντι πῆματι.

No good doctor whines incantations over an infection that wants cutting.

(581-582)

This is strong language, provoked by his injunction to Tekmessa not to wail. It is a striking symbol of the urgency and strength of his resolve to act. The mention of cutting is evocative literally both of Aias' frenzied slaughter of cattle whose debris is visible on the stage, and of the menacing Greek army, bent on punishing the hero. More suggestively, however, the image turns upon Aias himself. So the Choros, when they are displeased by "your sharpened tongue" (584), reinforce in scarcely veiled language an emerging focus on that powerful instrument of cutting, Aias' sword. On the surface, Aias' statement need not be taken as more than a striking expression to undertake the deed that will solve his problem. In light of the speech which the sentence caps, it would seem to mean an assault on

14 "Wants cutting" (τομῶντι) is a rare "desiderative" formation, which makes the phrase so much more impressive for its strangeness. The commentators refer to Lucian for the closest parallel (cf. Jebb, p. 94 and Kamerbeek, p. 25).
his enemies, the arrogant Atreidai; but an underlying irony is implied by the return to disease imagery. It is not the other Greeks who have been said to be in pain, but Aias himself. It is his pain which the knife must excise; he is the sick man needing surgery; and he will undertake to be doctor to the disease. While ostensibly and consciously expressing his will to act and to lament no longer, Aias is implicitly raising the possibility of suicide.

A stasimon (596-645) follows the exit of Aias and Tekmessa, in which the Choros introduces the themes of distances and time, recalling the hiatus between their first departure from Salamis and the bleak present. Their fate is tentative, bound with that of Aias. The antistrophe explains their cause for dismay: Aias is "hard to cure" (δυσθεράπευτος 609); he still "lives with the godsent madness" (θεία μανία ζύναυλος 611). But, as if to stress that the disease is an inward thing, whereas before he had brooded over the slaughtered cattle of the Greeks, now the Choros observe that "alone, he pastures his mind" (φρενὸς οἶοβώτας 614). The second strophe imagines the effect upon his mother when she learns that Aias is "sick in the regions of his mind" (νοσοῦντα φρενομόρως 625-626). And its antistrophe judges that it is "better for him to be hidden with Hades, he who is sick and a madman" (δ᾽ νοσῶν μάταυ 635). This choral interpretation of the foregoing scene is unequivocal and grave.
The Aias of the prior scene, who resolved to act, who considered himself the last of the noble Greeks, and whose words the Choros found "genuine," is still critically ill. His disease is no longer the distorted eyesight of the previous night, but lies within his mind. Sinisterly, Hades is twice mentioned in the stasimon; shall the Choros' "homecoming" be to Hades who is "out of sight" (δινηλον 607), and that a madman is better off hidden with Hades (634-5). The Choros is despondently preparing themselves for Aias' death, and, with it, for their own ruin.

The dramatic momentum of impending catastrophe is suspended with Aias' entrance and the third of his speeches (646-692). The

I would particularly have liked to have called this speech of Aias a "soliloquy" to connote what seems to me to be its feeling: a voicing of his most intimate thoughts as he weighs options and explores the meaning of his dilemma. The problem is that he is "overheard" by Tekmessa and the Choros who later indicate that they have been deceived by his words. The interpretations of the speech have principally focused on whether or not Aias intends to mislead them, or whether, as suggested by Knox, the first part is spoken as soliloquy, unaware or unconcerned by their presence, and only the last seven lines are addressed to others. The first interpretation makes rather too much of what we would have to assume is an uncharacteristic shrewishness on Aias' part and, in fact, would be without sufficient motivation in the play at this point; the second somewhat begs the question by changing the label without confronting the problem that, intended or not, his words do create a false impression in the minds of the hearers. My judgment is that the broad ironies of themes and images which provide the framework of this speech are part of a progressive development of Aias' character and a suspenseful unravelling of the inevitable solution. It is not so much evidence of the hero's "mental fluctuation," as if his personality were unstable, as it is the point at which the potentially suicidal close
specific allusion to disease ends, and the focus is, quite literally, on the physical symbol of surgery, the knife. This "real" object brings to strong and natural fulfillment the image patterns which surround the person of Aias. He is never again seen without the sword; he speaks of it and to it; he compares his resolve and condition to its edge, its hardness, its enmity, and its burial in the ground. His soliloquy begins with the theme of time which the Choros presented in the preceding stasimon. Time measures change: darkness to light, mood to mood, relationship to relationship, season to season, storm to calm, and ultimately life to death. It is this rhythm which defines the boundaries of a human being in the course of his days.

He has become womanishly weak, whereas once he was strong like the iron of a sword in the dipping. He shall bathe himself of impurity, and bury his sword in the ground so that Hades and night might "keep it safe" (σφέζοντων 660). The language is clearly ambiguous, but it is hardly contrived to deceive Tekmessa and the Choros. Aias intends of the prior speech is intensified as the wider dimensions of change and salvation are probed to reveal the quality of Aias' "yielding." The truth underlying the irony is not apparent until the suicide speech which is properly a soliloquy. In my view, the play operates by a series of reversals only with respect to the mood and tone of specific scenes and Choral stasima; the development of character and plot, particularly the persistent narrowing of possible solutions, is progressive and linear. This is, I feel, reinforced by the imagery,
to "refine" himself and recover his strength. That Hades is mentioned recalls the Choros' words of a few moments before, that it would be better for the sick Aias to be hidden with Hades. The plan to bury his sword is evocative of his instruction to the Choros in his "testament" scene, that all of his armor, except his shield, was to be placed in his grave with him. It is as if the sword objectifies some part of Aias which he tenderly and carefully is trying to preserve. Perhaps it is Aias externalizing his hard and durable essence which will remain when Aias the creature of time has passed:

εγώ γὰρ εἶμ' ἐκεῖσ' ὅποι πορευτέον·
ὑμεῖς δ' ἡ φράξω δράτε, καὶ τάχ' ἄν μ' ἱσως
πύθοισθε, καὶ νῦν δυστυχῶ, σεσωμένων.

I am going where my way must lead.
But do all that I say, and perhaps soon you would learn, though now my fate is hard, that I have been kept safe.

(690-692)

Throughout the speech, Aias' tone is meditative and somber. If the sword itself is seen as the projection of a sort of stubborn durability, it is no contradiction that the Aias who is so meticulously planning its burial can speak of yielding. His acquiescence to the will and power of the Atreidai is not a reversal of his heroic resolve, but a refinement upon it. It implies no humiliating submission and begging for pardon, but is rather Aias' determination to relinquish his place among the living to them, as Winter gives way to Summer, night to
day, the tempest to the calm, and sleep to wakefulness. Aias' nature is like that of winter, night, storm, and sleep; he is hard, stubborn, violent, and tenacious. But now the stern rule of alternation and change which is simply nature-in-time, demands that he, in turn, pass on, allowing his enemies to have their day. Hektor, who gave him this sword, was once his enemy and his gift should bring no good. But even enmity bends to change. So this sword is perhaps a strange benefaction, the instrument of death, hidden in the ground and kept safe by Hades, by which Aias, when he too is hidden with Hades, will be saved.

If this is the underlying thrust of Aias' speech, the Choros has mistaken it. They suppose that the dilemma has been happily resolved by a decision to compromise, to adjust to the social realities of power and privilege. Their song (693-718) is accompanied by jubilant dancing; Pan and Apollo of Delos are invoked in their celebration, Ares is said to have "dissolved the dread anguish from our eyes" (706) and Zeus has made the day bright. Aias has "forgotten his pain" (λαθίπονος, 711), a fact which the Choros has earlier indicated is a sure sign of cure. They assume that Great Time has had its healing effect on the dread resistance of the hero.

Their mood is again abruptly altered by the arrival of a messenger. The Greek host has greeted Teukros hostilely; not even the calm words of the Greek leadership can quiet them. Moreover, this day
is not like the day-upon-day in the procession of Time toward death and change, but is a special day. In the Hippokratic sense, it could be called a "critical day," one in which the course of Aias' disease will play itself out or worsen, perhaps fatally.  

The seer Kalchas has divined that if Aias should survive this day in his tent, an old grievance of the goddess Athene against an idle boast would abate. It is in this sense that Tekmessa hopes desperately to "save" (σώζειν 812) Aias as she dispatches the Choros to the West and to the East to find the man who is "hurrying to die" (812).

Aias' suicide soliloquy (815-865) is set on a stage where he is alone with the dominating presence of the sword; "my slayer stands so as to be at its cutting best" (τομώτατος 815). The hero has some few moments of "leisure to reason things out" (λογίζεσθαι σχολή 816). The sword is newly sharpened on stone, recalling Aias' former "sharpened" words, and the momentary blunting of his resolve. It stands "firmly fixed in the hostile soil of Troy" (819), "the gift of Hektor the most hated and hateful of foreigners for me to see" (817-818), recalling the interchangeability of friend and enemy

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16 Sophokles never uses the phrase "critical day" in any surviving play, though the analogy with the Hippokratic concept is striking. Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 227, remarks that it is perhaps Time's quality of healing that Aias recognizes and which makes his suicide so urgent. He is, in Tekmessa's words, "hurrying to die."
in the world of time. He invokes successively Zeus, Hermes, the avenging Furies, and Helios. And then he exclaims:

\[
\text{άλλ' οὔδὲν ἔργον ταῦτα θηρνεῖσθαι μάτην'}
\text{άλλ' ἄρκτέον τὸ πράγμα σὺν τάχει τινὶ.}
\]

There is no use in whining over these things like a madman, but the deed must be accomplished with some quickness.

(852-853)

This calls to mind again the striking injunction to the good doctor to dispense with incantation and use the knife where required. He bids farewell to the places that are meaningful to him, referring to himself in both the third and the first persons:

\[
\text{τοῦθ' ὑμίν Αἰας τοῦπος ὑστατον θροεῖ,}
\text{τὰ δ' ἀλλ' ἐν Ἠμου τοῖς κάτω μυθῆσομαι.}
\]

This is the last word which Aias speaks to you; the rest I shall utter among those below, with Hades.

(864-865)

This transference of person subtly underscores some transference of Aias' self, from the "he" of the living shape to the "I" of the "saved" Aias who shall live hidden with Hades. And then the suicide, the surgery on the pain, is enacted.

The search, discovery, and lamentations which follow (866-1039) are naturally no longer concerned with a cure for Aias' sickness, for that has been achieved by his death. Themes are recapitulated (e.g. the desertion of Tekmessa and Eurysakes, the complicity of Athene,
the mockery of the Atreidai) and ironies are further developed (e.g. Aias' fateful name, the intertwined ruin of Aias and Hektor through their mutual gifts). Inevitably, since the imagery which surrounded Aias was so tightly drawn to illumine his specific character and his unique dilemma, a poetic and a dramatic problem results when the conflict is resolved and the images completed, but the action is not yet at an end. Teukros, Menelaos, and Agamemnon are designedly and predictably not of the stature of Aias. The final scenes of the play, concerned with the disposition of Aias' body, are, as others have rightly pointed out, argumentative.

Though there are occasional echoes of imagery so forcefully presented in the first two-thirds of the play, their point is directed not to the emergence of a meaningful pattern of images, but to their quick and effective utility in the clever argument. For example, "storm at sea" becomes Menelaos' well-rounded parable of the idle boaster.

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So too, with the single recurrence of disease imagery; it is simply Agamemnon's threat to give Teukros some of the "medicine" (φάρμακον 1255) that he deserves if he would refuse to observe the absolute mandate of life in a social group: give way to those in power.

What then might be said about this strange and disconcertingly awkward end-piece in the play? Is it simply Sophokles' difficulty in making the transition from trilogy to single play that is showing a seam? Can it be explained by assuming that the Athenian audience had a taste for the agon that is not shared by modern critics? The problem cannot be satisfactorily solved here. What is certain is that a complex and internally consistent pattern of disease imagery was meticulously developed and intertwined with other image patterns so long as Aias was a living persona on the stage. Throughout, the assertion is made that Aias is the last of a breed of hero which included Achilleus and Hektor; it is the swan song not simply of a great man, but of a great age. With his death, the world of change is bequeathed to the petulant and envious men of expediency. Their moral environment is that of sophrosyne, not self-sufficiency and heroic excess. The debates which dominate the closing scenes evaluate, by the striking contrast of language, thoughts, and values, what the world has lost with the death of Aias. If these enlightened Greek leaders pervert Aias' luxuriant poetry to serve the cheap and
legalistic wordiness of their rhetoric, it is because Sophokles intends to portray them as practical "moderns" with little use and less sympathy for poetic malingering. Admittedly, the problem of credibly (and perhaps even movingly) rehabilitating the play's ending is the work more of direction and production than of analysis of the text of the drama. But how else is one to cope honestly with the fact that the ending is "flat" than to assume that the flatness is purposeful, and that Sophokles chose to alienate the Athenian audience from Menelaos and Agamemnon in the same way that their bombast alienates today's reader. Or so it seems to me. The fact remains that part of the flatness is achieved by terminating the imagery of disease with the death of Aias. He is the poetic focus of the drama. His disease, at first physical with external symptoms, grows inward to include all that he considers his "self." He is not simply sick, but becomes increasingly and totally "the infection." Death is for Aias the tragic cure.

Antigone

In the Aias, the disease imagery was intimately concerned with the character of the hero and his progress toward tragic choice. The resolution of Aias' dilemma followed the course of a fatal disease, blighting his senses, threatening infection to those near him, building
to a dangerous crisis, and at last demanding drastic surgery on his very person. As the image develops in *Antigone*, no such character reinforcement is achieved. The other, perhaps more noticeable, images of marriage and money support the quality of Antigone's individual heroism. Disease is explored rather in the thematic context of the irony and contrareity of human behavior, when obligations to Justice (δίκη, symbolized by the gods) conflict with the proper relationships among men (symbolized by the polis). In Goheen's words, the image relates the action to "the larger tragic perspective." 18 It is a technique of value-assessment. It is used in this way by the characters themselves (sometimes with transparent irony); and ultimately, as a pattern, it evaluates the moral environment in which the whole action is set.

Disease is introduced in the first Choral stasimon, the Ode on Man (332-375). The Choros is unaware of Antigone's resolve to bury

18 Robert F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone: A Study of Poetic Language and Structure* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 41-44. Goheen sees evil as the traditional cosmic and moral burden of disease and cure images. In *Antigone*, "the sequence recurrently relates evil to the early religious or cosmic conception of disease, and from this it points up a more genuinely tragic conception of infectious moral evil and resultant suffering" (p. 41). His view strikes me as a sound one, and I have considerably expanded the notion here, particularly in the way it mediates between the bold humanism of the Ode on Man and the larger controls and limits which cosmic δίκη imposes upon human action.
her brother in spite of an edict to the contrary and without support from others. They have, however, witnessed the promulgation of the decree, reacted coolly but passively to it, and listened to Kreon's claim that it was prompted by a need to preserve order in the state. Kreon has shown himself to be an artful governor, undoubtedly partisan and temperamentally authoritarian, but nonetheless capable of imposing a certain stability on the long-troubled city. When he hears that Polyneikes' body has received token burial, he responds as the stern politician: it is the work of sedition and bribery and demands the harsh reprisals set forth in the edict. It is here that the Choros begin their song on human achievement: "Many awesome things exist, but none more awesome than man" (332-333). Segal is correct in pointing to the Promethean tenor of the ode. 19 Man's resources, it proclaims, are vast in meeting the natural threats to his well-being. His self-sufficiency expresses itself in the arts: navigation, farming, hunting and fishing, domestication of animals, language, construction of shelter, and "ways to escape diseases once beyond his contrivance" (νόσων ἄμακουν 363). Hades alone is inevitable. In Nature, man is a

19Charles Paul Segal, "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the Antigone," Arion III (1964), pp. 46-66. Yet, as Segal argues, there are vast differences between Aiskhylos' heroic view of human progress, and the Sophoklean attitude here expressed. Sophokles sees these same human endowments as ambiguous, a measure of human limitation, and as the play develops, the prelude to tragic conflict.
disadvantaged species; his crafts are safe only within that most peculiar of human inventions, the polis. The polis itself is secure insofar as individuals respect "the laws of the land and Justice sworn by the gods" (368-369). The man who violates this arrangement is apolis; fire, the traditional symbol of human accomplishment, would be denied him. So it is that human flourishing depends on the social group and this group derives its potential from adherence to conventions of proper behavior (νόμοι) and a Justice which is beyond human tampering because it is sanctioned by the gods (δίκη). This optimistic humanism reflects the best wisdom of the Sophists, that culture raises men above the vulnerability of animals in nature. Yet it also reflects a hierarchy of values wherein human sufficiency is possible only on the condition that Justice is preserved. The problem is one of maintaining proper perspective, or as the Choros put it, "having a balanced mind" (τὸν προνοοῦν 374). On the vague boundaries between right socialization and the proper observance of Justice, values can conflict and expose men as vulnerable still. So it is that the Choros are puzzled on seeing Antigone in chains, assuming in her case that correct order has not been confused. Significantly they ask her not if she has transgressed the "laws of the land" (νόμους...χθονὸς 368), but rather

20 Prometheus' speech in Prometeus Bound 436-471 and 476-506 explores similar territory. But perhaps the most striking formulation of this outlook is Protagoras' myth in Plato, Protagoras 320c-323a.
if she has "broken faith with the laws of the king" (τοῖς βασιλείοισιν
...νόμοις 382).

In the Ode on Man, the reference to disease is muted in the sense that its control is one among many demonstrations of human potential through art. Man can contrive devices to avoid illness; his healing art is μηχανική. But the juxtaposition of escape from disease with inevitable Hades within the ode stresses that human resources are bounded by at least that one absolute, death. Thus the natural foundation of this art is to provide that death, when it must come, is timely and due. There is a rightness to the use of artful resources in the avoidance of premature destruction. Herein lies its tragic potential, for art itself is amoral. It becomes good or evil to the extent that it can be measured by the good of the polis and the right boundaries of Justice. The implicit irony unfolds into one of the major themes of the play: the governance of the polis is itself a human art, good when it supports the life of its citizens and recognizes the just and true limits of death, evil when it fails in this task. In an extended sense, each of the human arts enumerated in the Ode display some aspect of governing; 21 but it is the control of

21 For example, the art of sailing has a long literary tradition reaching back to Alkaios as an extended metaphor for right management in the state. So here in Antigone, the patterns of nautical imagery weave about the ability to survive the storm which threatens the polis. So also the arts of hunting and domestication
disease which most emphatically asserts this mandate to support life and recognize death. The political metaphor for understanding disease underlies the imagery throughout this most political play of Sophokles. As the theme of the dead lying unburied while the living are hidden in the ground increases in focus, so Kreon is exposed as the worthless physician who brings disease upon the polis through his foolish use of the art.

In the ensuing scene, however, the image is turned again to reveal yet another meaning. The guard explains the bizarre circumstances of Antigone's capture: a strange storm arose which the garrison endured because it was a "disease sent by the gods" (θειαν νόσον 421). When the dust cleared, Antigone was caught

of animals are images of controlling and civilizing the wild. Language is the human endowment which facilitates persuasion and reasoned compromise; sheltering is again a metaphor for the duty to protect the people from dangers.

The most evident formulation of a theory of disease postulated on the political model is that of Almaion of Kroton. Disease is a despotism (μοναρχία) of one element over the rest, while true health is described as "legal equity" (ταυνομία) among them. For a discussion of the highly political tone of the Antigone, see W. M. Calder, "Sophocles' Political Tragedy, Antigone," GRBS IX (1968), pp. 389-407.

This phrase is identical to that which twice occurs in Aias, referring to Athene's disruption of Aias' physical eyesight. It was an event over which he had no means of control and contrasted with the more inward sickness against which the hero took drastic measures. Here too, this disease (the storm) is waited out and affects the vision of the garrison so that they are resourceless to take action.
in the act of performing the rites for the dead. This stresses the "special" quality of Antigone's action, taking it from the context of rational planning and suggesting its connection with "other-worldly" considerations. The artful handling of disease is a human talent in the Ode on Man, yet here is a disease over which the typical human resources might own no control. Some critics have questioned the significance of this second burial description and have approached it as basically the solution of a problem of dramatic structure. Yet a new feature is introduced with respect to the treatment of Polyneikes' body. The original edict forbade its burial; that having been symbolically contravened, the garrison return to unbury. Admittedly the Greeks and most other peoples enjoin the proper tendance of the dead and would be uncomfortable enough with the original edict of Kreon. But the seriousness of the offense is here intensified, since the fact

24 See, for example, Waldock, Sophocles the Dramatist, pp. 127-128 and Ivan M. Linforth, Antigone and Creon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), p. 201. Adams, Sophocles the Playwright, pp 47-50, claims that the first burial ought to be considered as having been performed by the gods; but see J. S. Margon, "The First Burial of Polyneices," CJ LXIV (1969), pp. 289-295, for a refutation based on dramatic considerations (the characterization of the guard). J. L. Rose, "The Problem of the Second Burial in Sophocles' Antigone," CJ XLVII (1952), pp. 219-221 & 251, speaks also of "dramatic propriety," attempting to argue (against Wilamowitz) that the second burial is truly motivated by claiming that it stresses Antigone's great love. More germane to my view is the interpretation of Herbert Musurillo, S. J., The Light and the Darkness: Studies in the Dramatic Poetry of Sophocles (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), pp. 54-55, that the vivid description of putrefaction is the "focal point" of the disease imagery in that it graphically embodies the sickness which is infesting Thebes.
of death is not merely ignored, it is assaulted. It is at this point that this god-sent disease intrudes into the life of men, throwing doubt on human ability to cope with the problems they have actively created for themselves.

In the subsequent confrontation it becomes apparent that Antigone has behaved willfully and with a rightness that resists the neat categories of political control. Among other effects, Kreon sees himself loosing his grip on the citizen body and his authority over his son. Kreon attempts to evaluate the disruption in the familiar terms of disease:

Kp. ἔργον γάρ ἐστι τοὺς ἄκοσμοντας σέβειν;
At. οδὸν δὲν κελεύσαμέν εὐσεβείν ἐς τοὺς μακόντες.
Kp. οὐκ ἂνε γάρ τοιῷ ἐπείληπται νόσου;

KREON. Is it your business to respect disorderly people?

HAIMON. I would advise no reverence toward evil men.

KREON. But is not she caught up by such a disease?

(730-732)

There is some problem concerning Kreon's meaning. If his question

25 Goheen, Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone, p. 42, assumes that Kreon means her νόσος is a reverence (εὐσεβεία) for evil persons. Certainly Antigone's moral worth is elsewhere summarized in her εὐσεβεία (11. 924 and 943 both proclaim that her suffering and the charge of δυσεβεία brought against her are the result of this reverence). Jebb, The Antigone, p. 136, n. to line 732, interprets Kreon to mean that Antigone is "evil" (κακή) and so Haimon ought not to reverence her. The fact that both ἄκοσμοντας and κακοῦς are accusative plurals creates a certain ambiguity in that they could
implies that "reverence for evil" is her illness, then the king is eager
to insist on his partisan testing of citizen purity: good citizens are
measured in Kreon's mind by the demonstrable hatred they bear
toward enemies of the state, living or dead. But Kreon also wishes
to associate Antigone with the "disorderly" (ἀκοσμούντας); this is,
at any rate, why he objects to Haimon's sympathetic attitude toward
her. If Antigone's disease can be shown to be the creation of disorder,
then her disposal is justified in Kreon's mind by the practical morality
of statesmanship. Society is κόσμος, an order. Hence it participates
in the moral integrity of the κόσμος represented by the gods,
specifically Zeus. If Antigone is one of the ἀκοσμούντες then she
is not simply ἀπολικ ("without polis"), but also isolated from the
κόσμος and consequently unjustified before the gods who sanction
the order. Disease is the particularly appropriate metaphor for this

refer to Polyneikes and Antigone as members of a "type" of citizen,
namely the anarchic. Though a double-entendre may indeed be
intended, I favor Jebb's analysis as the dominant impression an
audience would be likely to get from the exchange, since Haimon and
Kreon are both talking theoretically and categorically about per-
sonality types, rather than testing the value of Antigone's specific
action toward her brother's body. To Kreon, her deed shows the
"sort" of person she is.

26 Elsewhere in the play, the notion of κόσμος demonstrates two
meanings. At 11. 396 and 901, it pertains to the proper actions
undertaken for the dead. In Kreon's mouth, here and at 11. 660 and
677 it refers to a pyramid of authority in family and state to the
figure of father and ruler. Those who are "in order" (κοσμουμένοις
677) are in a condition of "rule by obedience" (πελάρχα).
situation, since it is an analogous suspension of the proper order within the human body. The smooth functioning of all such order depends principally on the just concord of the parts. Haimon's response to his father's question goes immediately to this very point:

οὐ φησὶ Θῆβης τὴσον ὁμότολος λεύς.

The city in unison, the people of Thebes, say no.

(733)

Kreon, then, searching for an image to shake the very moral basis of Antigone's action, instead condemns his own disharmony with the body politic. His governance of Thebes is indeed a despotism (μοναρχία 736-738, 1163), the diametric opposite to healthy political consensus.

The conflict between Kreon and Haimon has further eroded the king's control. His relationship with city and kin having disintegrated, he next proclaims Antigone's punishment: burial while alive. To be alive in the house of Hades, to "marry" death, is the theme of the kommos between Antigone and Choros. It is a massive inversion of the human potential explored so hopefully in the Ode on Man. Human planning has not been used for the preservation of the living; moreover, the more typical causes of premature union with Hades--disease and wounding--are not the circumstances of Antigone's doom. She
alone must visit Hades alive. The Choral meditation underscores the abnormality of the event:

οὐκοῦν κλεινὴ καὶ ἔπαινον ἐχουσ'
ἐς τοῦ ἀπέρχη κεθὸς νεκύων,
οὗτε φθινᾶσιν πληγεῖσα νόσους
οὗτε ξιφέων ἐπίχειρα λαχουσ',
ἀλλ' αὐτόνομος ζῶσα μόνη δὴ
θνατῶν Ἀδαν καταβήσῃ.

So then in glory and having praise
You go off into a vault of dead bodies,
Not stricken with wasting diseases
Nor getting what comes from swords
But by your own rules, alive,
The only human being, you shall descend to Hades.

(817-822)

This autonomous character of Antigone's fate, the fact that it is singular and incomparable, echoes again her resistance to a political νόμος --the edict against burial--which she saw as a hideous contravention of just order. The divine law (Θεῶν νόμωμα 454-455) which Antigone upholds is expressed in the specific injunction to bury one's kin, because in the basic structure of the just κόσμος, activity and life are properly delineated from inaction and death. Just as disease and slaughter are evils which right behavior attempts to avoid, so death is only good when it is timely. The singularity of Antigone's fate transcends these more typical threats to well-being in that it constitutes the most disturbed confusion of the two realms and shatters the sacred boundaries between life and death. It is a denial
of the highest aspiration of human art and destructive of the most fundamental limits upon which society depends. Though Kreon has intended that her punishment cleverly suit her crime, serve as an object lesson for disruptive citizens, and technically avoid the strict letter of pollution, nevertheless such large scale tampering with absolutes cannot fail to bring some disaster of grand proportions.

Teiresias' appearance is an immediate signal of the enormity of the offense and the precariousness of the situation, not simply for Kreon, but for all persons connected with him. The auguries have been sinister. The polis itself is diseased (νοσεῖτε), the infection caused by Kreon's mind. A "cure" is possible by a man of sense before the disaster strikes (1027). In the stichomythia, Kreon's hard politics of money is shaken by a demand to "think":

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ. How much more potent is right counsel than possessions?
ΚΡΕΟΝ. By as much, I suggest, that not thinking produces greater harm.
ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ. Indeed this is the very disease with which you are infested.

(1050-1052)

Kreon's lack of intelligence (μὴ φρονεῖτι) has caused him to confuse the worlds above and below by burying the living and exposing the dead. The Choros react to his wisdom with a verbal echo from the
Ode on Man, proclaiming "he has prophesied awesome things!" (1091). Kreon's change of mind sends him off to bury the dead and rescind, if he can, his judgment against Antigone. In the stasimon, the Choros heighten the expectancy of the situation by exploring the danger that exists to the polis itself. They invoke their native god, Dionysos, to come "with cleansing feet" (1144):

\[ \text{o} \quad \text{\textgreek{w} } \text{\textgreek{b}ia\textgreek{i}a\textgreek{s} } \text{\textgreek{e}xetai} \\
\text{\textgreek{p}a\textgreek{v}dh\textgreek{a}m\textgreek{o}s } \text{\textgreek{p}ol\textgreek{i}e } \text{\textgreek{e}p}i \quad \text{\textgreek{v}o\textgreek{s}o}u. \]

The polis and all its people
Is gripped by a violent sickness.

(1140-1141)

The city is seemingly exonerated by turning the punishment to the personal downfall of Kreon. The crisis evidently passes with the successive strong recriminations which befall the foolish politician. Antigone is dead, Haimon after a last defiant gesture of hatred has killed himself, and even Queen Eurydike has silently fallen on her sword. The twisted irony now rests squarely on an absurd and broken Kreon; he is, in the Messenger's words, "a dead body that breathes" (1167).

The pattern of disease imagery in Antigone reinforces her personal integrity only indirectly. It serves principally to link her tragic decision to the larger dimension of the moral model which controls human actions. Kreon's worth is severely measured by
this greater plan. The broad humanistic assertions of the Ode on Man explore an ideal world where, guided by right relations with Justice and the obligations of living in the polis, humans have resources to avoid death until it is due. Disease is a strong index of the smooth workings of right human planning and choice; its avoidance is posited on a firm regard for man's special talents and responsibilities. Lulled into a foolish sense of self-reliance, man's art will soon run to evil and expose the precariousness of his nature. The unburying of Polyneikes and the burying of the living Antigone on the pretext of maintaining social order, is such a strong defiance of the larger order upon which society is modelled that it jeopardizes the continued existence of man's special status as artist and threatens to return him to the vulnerability of his position in Nature.

In the final analysis, the drama moves about the tragedy of Antigone's private choice, the imperatives of her love and kinship, and the needless violence enacted against her by a strong and insensitive tyrant. But the disease imagery enlarges the setting of her heroism by suggesting that more is at stake than a powerful conflict of individual human wills. It projects the action into the deep arena of the workings of the νόσμος, the ultimate and dependable measure of human greatness and villainy.
Women of Trachis

In Women of Trachis, the disease imagery narrows progressively in scope from the malignancy of love, to a desperate attempt to relieve the pain, to the physical torment of Herakles on Mt. Oite, and finally to the inevitable release which is Death. The movement is from a powerful figurative assessment of distorted human relationships to their visible conclusion, the cruel reality of the disintegration of a great human frame. The contrast with Aias is striking; in that play, the outward marks of physical disease led grimly inward to the deep calamity of the heroic personality. The Herakles of this play is no such inward hero. The problematic heroic personality puzzles and confounds others as they are forced to react to it; for Herakles, the pain is unendurably physical and external, the last of a chain of bodily trials.

The "diptych" structure as used in this play produces an effect unique among the extant plays of Sophokles. Though the characters (and, one must presume, the audience) are kept in suspenseful anticipation of Herakles' arrival, yet by delaying that arrival until the exodos, Sophokles has made the dilemmas of the "lesser" characters a matter of gripping and poignant interest. Without a doubt it is Deianeira's play, seen principally from her viewpoint. This is not necessarily to claim that she is a "tragic heroine," but
simply to notice that she dominates audience interest in such a way that Herakles' single scene on stage (971-1278) is refracted through the light of her own personal and complicated catastrophe.

The Deianeira portion of the play consists of the prologue and all four episodes. The disproportionately large amount of time permitted to the development of her reactions allows room for ample memories, anxieties, ironical reversals in her awareness, plotting, and reportage. In contrast, Herakles' death scene, while it recapitulates and completes thematic material and imagery, is tautly  

27 The problem is that, though Herakles may possess certain character traits which mark the Sophoklean hero, his presence is mostly felt through his absence, filtered through the testimony of those who have a vested interest in him. On one level, the play in fact explores the distance between these remembrances, hopes, partisan good will, filial devotion and the stark egocentricity of the real Herakles. Whitman, *Sophocles*, pp. 103-121, argues most convincingly that Deianeira possesses a certain sort of ἀποκτή which makes the play her tragedy. Yet it is evident that her downfall is the fatal consequence of Herakles' ruin. Marsh McCall, Jr., "The Trachiniae: Structure, Focus, and Heracles," *AJPh* XCIII, pp. 142-163, argues against Whitman on the basis of Deianeira's dependency on Heracles' fate. T. F. Hoey, "The Trachiniae and Unity of Hero," *Arethusa* III (1970), pp. 1-22, argues for two heroes. Acknowledging the problem of the heroic focus of the play, perhaps it is best to use the word "hero" in its mythological rather than dramatic sense. But it must be admitted that Herakles is not the central human factor in the play. The action principally engaged Deianeira's tragic choice, probing the effects of Herakles' heroism on others. This moving story dwells on how a great but insensitive man died because of the love he inspired in a woman. It is unique among the plays of Sophokles in this regard. For an approximate parallel, one would have to imagine Oidipous Tyrannos retold as the personal calamity of Iokaste.
concentrated on his agonized person. The disease image is affected by this dramatic double structure; predictably, it demonstrates two well-delineated, yet interconnected patterns. The first, woven about Deianeira's perception of her own situation and of Herakles' personality, is concerned with the discovery of a disease which is connected with Love (Eros and Aphrodite) and drastic actions to "remedy" it. The second, fixed on Herakles' pain-ridden body, is intensely pathetic in that it invites reaction to the fact of a powerful human helplessly reduced to physical torment; accepted as real and fatal, the disease is remedied only by Death. Let us examine these two patterns in greater detail.

Deianeira's anxiety in the prologue and first episode concerns whether or not Herakles is still alive. There have been indications—the time has been prophesied as a critical one, Herakles' written testament was set in language "as though he were no longer living" (160)—that the great hero is on his last adventure, one that for him is the crucial edge between Life and Death. Deianeira is panicked because her entire existence is dependent upon his salvation:

ως ἡ τελευτὴν τοῦ βίου μέλλει τελεῖν, ἡ τούτον ἄρας ἀθλον ἐς τὸ γ' ὑστερον τὸν λοιπὸν ἡ βίοτον εὐαίων' ἔχειν. ἐν οὖν ῥοπῇ τοιχὶ κειμένη, τέκνον, οὐκ ἐὰν ξύνερξον, ἡνίκ' ἡ σεσώμεθα κείνυν βίον σώσαντος, ἡ οἰχόμεσθ' ἡμα;
Either he is about to close the end of his life
or, taking up this labor, for the rest of time
hereafter, have a long and happy life.
So, my son, it lies in such a balance.
Will you not go help him? Since either we are saved
by his saving his life, or we perish with him.

(79-85)

When the Messenger announces the news that Herakles lives, it is a
signal to Deianeira and the Choros that the danger has passed. The
mood of the Choros shifts to celebration and joy, giving thanks to
Dionysos under his aspect as Παλάν, the Healer (221). Whether
Herakles is truly alive is the measure of Deianeira's hope for safety,
a promise of release from the pain which she has suffered over years
of insecurity and displacement. She probes the herald Lichas
carefully:

Δη. ἡ φίλτατ' ἄνδρων, πρὸθ' ἡ πρώτα βουλομαι
dιδαξοῦν, εἰ ζωή 'Ἡρακλῆς προσθέξομαι.
Λι. Ἐγωγε τοῖς σφ' ἔλειπον λοχύντα τε
καὶ ζωύντα καὶ βάλλοντα οὔῳ νόσῳ βαρύν.

DEIANEIRA. Dear man, instruct me first in what I
first wish to know: shall I get Herakles
back alive?

LICHAS. I personally left him both strong and
alive, in flower and not heavy with
disease.

(232-235)

Lichas' response evades the question of whether Deianeira shall
"have him back" and is implicitly ironical for that. Moreover, it is
an expansive, almost too assertive response: Herakles is not simply living, he is superbly alive. The description contrasts sharply with Deianeira's condition: the "bloom" of her youth is faded (144-150; later, 545-551); her life has been a heavy burden and painful (βαρύν 5; βαρύνομαι 152). Later, which Lichas is exposed to have delivered a false report, this assertion of Herakles' exuberant health shall by hindsight come into question. Deianeira herself, much in keeping with her characteristic anxiety, gives voice to the proverbial suspicion of success:

δέως 5’ ένεοτί τοις εὐ σκοπουμένοις
tαρβείν τὸν εὖ πράσσοντα, μὴ σφαλῇ ποτε.

By the same token, it is possible for those who examine it carefully, to be nervous about a man who does well, lest he fall.

(296-297)

The presence of the captive women, particularly Iole, disturbs her and moves her compassion. The girl's fate is reminiscent of her own cruel maidenhood. Iole has felt the "heaviness of chance" (325) and

28 It is not unusual to find catastrophe and disease described as heavy or burdensome. Cf. Philoktetes 1330, τὴνδε νόσου βαρείας. But the emphasis on weight and heaviness in this play is strikingly described as increasing in proportion to the seriousness of the situation. It is underscored in the image of Herakles weighed in the balance (83) and climaxes in the weight of his helpless body, borne on the stage in processional. As with disease imagery, the heaviness of the calamity becomes, in the end, a physical symbol.
has greeted it with silent weeping. The "evil luck" (τύχη κακὴ 327-328) of Iole is the inverse of Deianeira's apparent "good fortune" (εὐτυχῆ 293). The strange reciprocity and parallelism of their conditions, outgrowths of their similar dependencies upon Herakles, is stressed.

This vignette of pathetic maidenhood and compassionate (and momentarily happy) womanhood is suddenly interrupted by the Messenger who reveals to Deianeira the falsehood of Lichas' report. It was not servitude or insult that led Herakles to assault the city of King Eurytos, but Love "charmed" (θέλειεν 355) him and he is "radiant with hot desire" (ἐκπεπερμανται πόθψ 368). This news and Lichas' exposure is the turning point in Deianeira's realization of a more serious threat to her future. Lichas begs her to pay no attention to the Messenger:

"Ἄνθρωπος, ὡ δέσποιν', ἀποστήτω τὸ γὰρ νοσοῦντι ληρεῖν ἄνδρος οὐχὶ σῶφρονος.

Mistress, have this man leave. For to waste time with a sick man does not become a person of wisdom.

(434-435)

29 Cf. Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 230: "This juxtaposition (of Deianeira and Iole) points up the relentless continuity of the hero's existence. Deianeira and Iole are taken out of biographical time: instead of successive events in Heracles' life, they become parentheses enclosing the statement of his disease."
The request is suggestive in contrasting a sort of practical wisdom with what Lichas considers a hurtful inquisitiveness (cf. 481-482: "I was fearful of/ causing pain within your breast with my words"). But Deianeira sees it differently. It is not wise to spar with Love (441-442) and Love is the very sickness with which Herakles has been seized:

\[\text{ληφθέντι μεμπτός εἰμι, κάρτα μαίνομαι.}\]

And so, if I blame my husband who has been seized by this sickness, I am very foolish.

(445-446)

The passive \(\text{ληφθέντι}\) "having been seized" stresses the helplessness of Herakles' affliction; it is disease from without, the cruel burden of an unpredictable Eros. She is equally conciliatory with Iole (447-448) because "her beauty has destroyed her life" (465), just as so many years before Deianeira had felt the strain of her own lovely maidenhood ("lest my beauty in the end find pain for me" 25).

Deianeira's speech emphasizes the exterior quality of the circumstances which have led to this uncomfortable moment. It is quite within her character and present intent, of course, to play down her personal reactions and present her arguments "objectively" so that she might have the truth from Lichas. But she is not dissembling. Lichas remarks on the humanity of her thoughts and her willingness
to "make allowances" (473). When he has confirmed the true causes of Herakles' assault on Oichalia, Deianeira receives the news as philosophically as she had promised:

\[
\text{ἀλλ’ ὅδε καὶ φρονούμεν ὅστε ταῦτα δρᾶν,}
\]

\[
κοῦτοι νόσσον γ' ἐπακτὸν ἔξαρούμεθα,}
\]

\[
θεοῖς δυσμαχοῦντες.
\]

And so I think I should act accordingly. I shall not take up the burden of disease in a vain fight with gods.

(490-492)

Speaking through the disease image, Deianeira has managed to speak circuitously about Love. But the image has defined the situation strongly: Herakles' love for Iole is a disease over which he exercises no control. It is blameless, but it causes pain. Should Deianeira fight with the workings of this love, she would herself incur disease and her life would thereby become even more heavy to bear.

Like a disease, Love has sapped Herakles' great strength. Once a champion in the deeds of his hands, now "he is less in all things than this Love" (489). The irony of the powerful-become-weak through the agency of Love is further drawn out in the stasimon (497-530), "A great strength does Kypris weild." Through memory, the Choros indicate that this overpowering strength which now holds Herakles in thrall is the same as that which moved him to conquer Acheloos in the famous contest for Deianeira's hand. Absent from the stage during this stasimon, Deianeira has come to a fearful realization: though
Herakles is blamelessly sick, yet the pain which threatens her life is so severe, that she contemplates a cure. The disease which has affected her life is strangely beyond the control of human influence and the cure that presents itself is proportionately other-worldly. Here the imagery takes a turn toward the magical, not the rational application of healing measures. The remedial salve is described ambiguously: it is a philtre (φίλτρον 584, 1142), a spell (χηλητήριον 575), a charm (θέλητροισι 585), and a drug (φάρμακον 685); but more darkly, it is also described as:

...ἀμφίθρεπτον αἷμα τῶν ἐμῶν σφαγῶν...τῇ μελαγχόλους ἐβαφέν ίοὺς θρέμμα Λερναίας ὑδρας...

... the blood clotting around my wounds ... where the growth of the Lernaian Hydra dipped poisons of black bile ...

(572-574)

Deianeira herself has reservations about its use, but is encouraged by the Choros' advice that "one must come to know by doing" (592). The deed is intricate and esoteric as her instructions to Lichas indicate (600-609). The robe dispatched, the following Choral stasimon (633-662) is perceptibly more nervous. It recalls Deianeira's silent and incessant wailing, and voices the hope that the magic salve will bring him back "full of desire." But those hopes are made suspect when Deianeira reenters with her tale of an awesome happening: the
piece of wool she used to anoint the robe disintegrated in the warmth of the sun and a strange liquid boiled up from the ground.

Hyllos returns to report the "heavy misfortune" (βαρετὰν ξυμφοράν 746) which has befallen Herakles. As he was celebrating his Euboian triumph, his robe burst into flames from the fires of sacrifice and now his body is being bitten and consumed. The sudden helplessness of his situation is evocative of the "hot desire" which led him to Euboia. In his anguish, he grasped Lichas by the ankle and flung him against the rock, dashing out his brains. So too had Herakles dashed Iphitos against the rocks in his passion for Iole. This new violence and uncontrollable fire is an extension of the other. The sickness of Love has now erupted with vivid savagery into an unendurable pain that tears at his tormented body. The crowd's reaction is noted:

ἀπας δ' ἀνευφήμησεν οἰμώγῃ λέως,
του μὲν νοσοῦντος, του δὲ διαπεπραγμένου.

All the people cried out in wailing for the one man sick, the other slain.

(783-784)

Next to the horrible description of Lichas' death, this "sickness" takes on wider meaning than the pain of the Hydra's venom working through his body. It signals some further level of infection, a subtle and inscrutable disease which Deianeira had hoped to heal. The moral
undercurrent of this sickness is signalled by the people's reaction; ἀν-εὐφήμησεν οἶμωγηθ', "they broke religious silence with a wailing."

The Choral stasimon which follows Hyllos' curse (821-870) explores the theme of pain, attempts at cure, and the resultant worse disease. It was prophecy and dark forces that brought Herakles to this end. Deianeira did not know:

μεγάλαν προσορώσα δόμοις βλάβαν νέων
ἀσσόντων γάμων τὰ μὲν αὖτὰ
προσέβαλεν.

but she foresaw a large hurt hastening upon her house from new betrothals, so she applied her remedies.

(842-844)

But in attempting to remove this great harm, she unwittingly set in motion the forces of a great ἔτη, Destruction:

κέχυται νόσος, ὦ πόποι, οἷον ἀναροίν
( الجهات) οὕτω.......
ἀγαλείτον
ἐπέμολεν πάθος οὐκίσαι.

Now is poured over him, alas! such pain for us to pity as never came upon that valiant man from enemies . . .

(852-855)

In the end, Kypris is to blame (860-861); it was she who moved Herakles to Deianeira in the first place; inflamed the lustful mind of the centaur Nessos; crazed Herakles with passion for Iole; and now moved Deianeira to do the worst in trying to prevent harm.
The Choral stasimon is followed by a cry within and the arrival of the Nurse with the news that Deianeira, after a last rehearsal of her long household routine, has killed herself. The Choros ask "what rage (θυμός), what sicknesses" (882) led her to this desperate action. The Nurse responds simply that she died by the slashing of a sword. Yet somehow the "sicknesses" of Deianeira are revealed in the description of her last moments. She returns to the bridal bed and stabs herself to the heart. Deianeira, in her own quiet and anxious manner, was in thrall to Love also. Her feeling toward Herakles was πόθος, desire (631), the same infectious Love-sickness that moved Herakles to destroy Oichalia.

The entrance of Herakles in the exodos recalls the theme of "keeping silent." Iole stood mutely because she suffered the weight of her misfortune (322-328). Deianeira moved silently toward her suicide (814). Silence is a buffer against impending ominous revelations (731). In silence, the pain of heavy grief is somehow more bearable. But also, Aphrodite is the goddess who "ministers in silence" (ἀ δ' ἀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἀναύδος 860). So it is that Herakles is carried in "silent" (ἀναύδατος 968), the crushing weight of his torment momentarily lightened. The Old Man warns Hyllos:

οὐ μὴ ἔχεγερεις τὸν ὑπνηκότοχον κάκινησεις κάναστήσεις
Do not wake him, held down in sleep.
Do not set moving or arouse the awful, rambling sickness, boy.

(978-981)

Sleep can for the time control Herakles, just as Deianeira sometimes found "pleasant" sleep only to awaken to a renewal of her anguish (30, 149, 175). But Hyllos by not keeping silent awakens him (989-991), and Herakles' agony is revealed in a pathetic series of lamentations culminating in a long speech which traces his former exploits and contrasts them with his present misery (1046-1111).

It is Zeus, rather than Aphrodite, who sets the divine backdrop to this final scene, as if to signal that some further purpose is set to these sufferings than the mysterious workings of Eros:

τίς γὰρ ἀοίδος, τίς ὁ χειροτέχνης
λατορίας, δὲ τὴν ἀτην
χωρίς Ζηνὸς κατακηλήσει;

What charmer is there, what professional healer who shall soothe with charms this destruction, except only Zeus?

(1000-1002)

30 Cf. Musurillo, The Light and the Darkness, p. 79: "Though it is human passion that has been delineated in the drama, it seems clear that Zeus and Cypris are somehow at war in the person of Heracles: the divine element and the pathetically human."
It was Deianeira most immediately who had attempted to "charm" away Herakles' sickness, itself a "charm" worked by Eros and Kyprian Aphrodite. In the end, it led to ἄτη; this is visibly the worse sickness Deianeira feared when she disclaimed any intent to "fight vainly with gods" (492).

During this scene of torment and agony, which lasts until the pain remits (the "silence" which Hyllos mentions at 1115), the "disease" is personified within Herakles' mind; it is a monster which threatens him as so many others have in the past, but against which he feels himself resourceless:

πόθεν ἔστ', ὦ
πάντων Ἑλλάνων ἀδικώτατοι ἄνερες, οἷς δὴ
pollα μὲν ἐν πόντῃ, κατὰ τε ἰρία πάντα καθαλρων, ἀλεκόμαν ὁ τάλας, καὶ νῶν ἐπὶ τῷδε νοσοῦντι
ἢ πῷ, οὐκ ἔγχος τις ἄνησιμον οὐκέτι τρέφει;

Where are you, you most unjust of all the Greek whom I purged of many monsters on sea and in all your forests and wasted my wretched life? Now I am sick. Will no one turn the saving fire or sword on me?

(1010-1013)

The pain is so unendurable that to rid him of it implies his very destruction. The disease is like a wild beast harrassing and challenging him:

θρύσσει δ' αὖ, θρύσσει δειλαία
dιολούσ' ἥμᾶς
. ἀποτίβατος ἀγρία νόσος.
It thrusts again, the loathsome thing thrusts, it destroys me, a wild, unapproachable sickness.

(1028-1030)

He begs Pallas Athene for help, and then calls upon Hyllos to draw his sword and "heal the pain" (1035). It will allow him no rest, but relentlessly draws him to the struggle:

εἴθαλφε μ' ἀτης σπασμὸς ἀρτίως ὅδ' αὖ, διῆξε πλευρῶν, οὔδ' ἀγμναστόν μ' εὖν ἐοικεν ἡ τάλαινα διάβορος νόσος.

The spasm of destruction now has seared me, pierced through my sides; it forces me to wrestle, this savage, gnawing sickness.

(1082-1084)

Herakles has met the monster whom he cannot purge; it tears through his body and leaves him helpless. He invites Hades to receive him and curses Deianeira through whose agony he has been so reduced.

As the pain seems to remit and Herakles lapses into momentary silence, Hyllos attempts to respond, though his father is sick (νοσῶν ζῆμας 1115). Herakles is impatient:

εἰπὼν οἱ χρήζεις λήξον, ὡς ἔγὼ νοσῶν οὐδὲν ἕξυνίμι μ' ὑπ' σὺ ποικίλλεις πάλαι.

Say what you have to and leave off. I am too sick to understand any words which you've over-embroidered.

(1120-1121)
The hero is a man of great accomplishment and little love of words, but there is one fact which suddenly makes his fate intelligible. When he learns that Deianeira employed a love-charm, he asks "Who in Trachis is such an expert on drugs (φαρμακεύς)?" (1140). On learning that it was the dead centaur Nessos, he realizes that oracles have been fulfilled and his end is at hand. It is the turning point in his reactions to his pain; through the remainder of the scene, his attention is focused on the manner of his death and instructions to those around him. Death shall be for him a sort of cure and he enjoins Hyllos to act as physician in the deed:

ΥΛ. στυμοι μαλ' αὔθες, σιά μ' ἐνκαλῆ, πάτερ, φονέα γενέσθαι καὶ παλαμναντον σέθεν.

ΗΡ. οὐ δὴ τ' ἔγωγ', ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχω παιώνιον καὶ μοῦνον λατήρα τῶν ἐμῶν κακῶν.

ΥΛ. καὶ πῶς ἦπαινων σῶμ' ἐν ὕψην τὸ σῶν;

HYLLOS. Ah! What deeds you are inviting me to do, father, to become your murderer and defiled with your blood.

HERAKLES. I do not, but rather to be healer of my pain and the only doctor to my ills.

HYLLOS. And how should I cure your body by setting it aflame?

(1206-1210)

Herakles relents in this demand, respecting his son's conscience.

But in the second demand, again phrased in disease imagery, Herakles
requires unswerving obedience. Hyllos is to take Iole as his wife.

Hyllos naturally resists, seeing Iole as a proximate cause of his father's doom. This strange command must be the product of his sickness, now affecting his mind:

{oimoi. to men vosoyni thumosethai kakhon, to de mo' drav fironvyni ti' pot' an pheroi;

Ah! To lose one's temper at a sick man is evil, but who could bear to see him in such a state of mind?

(1230-1231)

In this context then, the disease imagery begins to regain some of his former meaning; the sickness which has often recurred throughout the hero's life and is now embodied in the last object of his desire, the captive Iole. Hyllos regards union with Iole as like a sickness come from the avenging Furies:

tie taut' an, oistis mi' e aistrosouv vosoi, eolito;

Who would choose such things, unless he be sick from the avengers?

(1235-1236)

This insistence on marriage is the final demonstration of the double meaning still latent within Herakles' last agonies. Hyllos recognizes it:

{oi'moi, tax', de eioiws, de vosesw phsseiws.
Ah! Soon you will show by your words, it seems, how you are sick.

(1241)

It would seem that within the torment of Herakles' last agony, the disease which racks his body and is somehow part of the will of Zeus, there remains this residue of his former sickness which has, in the movement of this play, led him to his end on Mt. Oite. So the imagery of the sickness of Eros which bites and burns at the human body (368, 476) is linked inextricably with the pain that now gnaws at his flesh and will be purged only by the flames of the pyre. From the winning of Deianeira to the rape of Iole, this Love-sickness has characterized Herakles' human personality. It is not of the same realm as those exploits which gained him fame and glory and were in keeping with his filial bond to Zeus, except insofar as they mirror his Olympian father's own strong eroticism. His last words then address his soul to steel itself with silence and meet this final deed of his death:

δε γε νῦν, πρὶν τήν θεών άνακινήσαι νόσσον, ὡς φυχὴ σκληρά, χάλυβος λιθοκόλλητον στόμιον παρέχουσ', ἀνάπαυε βοὴν, ὡς ἐπίχαρτον τελέουσ' ἀεικούσιον ἔργον.

Come now, before this sickness again stirs up, oh my hard soul, put a curb of steel, set like stones, upon my lips, stop your shouting, for though unwilling you accomplish a deed for rejoicing.

(1259-1263)
When Hyllos commands that Herakles' body be carried from the stage, the remarks on the "great unforgiveness" of the gods (1266), to contrast with the "forgiveness" he asks of the Choros; it is a remark that harkens back to Deianeira who "forgives" (473). In this are the gods set apart from man, and this is sufficient justification for Herakles' harsh treatment of her memory. The gods "beget, are called/ fathers yet look upon such suffering" (1268-1269) and in this Herakles also resembles them (31-33). The apotheosis of the hero is not mentioned in this play; if it looms distantly in the audience's awareness and is hinted at in the "deed for rejoicing" of line 1263, the tragedy itself offers little to illuminate its meaning or celebrate its rightness. The final lines of Hyllos close the action with somber sadness:

λείποι μηδὲ σὺ, παρθέν', ἐπ' οἴκων,
μεγάλους μὲν ἱδοθα νέους θανάτους,
pολλὰ δὲ πήματα (καὶ) ναῦνοναγη,
κοιθὴν τοῦτων ὃ τι μὴ Ἰεὺς.

Maiden, depart and stay not by the house. You have seen great and recent deaths, many pains and novel sufferings. There is nothing in this but Zeus.

(1275-1279)

The double course of the sickness imagery through this tragedy especially highlights the fact that greatness and love are outside the boundaries of human control. Like the monsters Akheloos and Nessos
who threatened vulnerable Deianeira, Love imposes from without a sickness that human planning cannot cure. Though her life seemed to her a heavy burden, Deianeira was inextricably involved in the man she loved and hoped to bind to her. Like the monstrous Hydra and the other huge beasts that challenged his strength, some power beyond him drove Herakles to wander in pursuit of this final sickness. In the person of the hero, the two sicknesses merge. The healer in the end is simply Death and the meaning of a person’s life is only judged in hindsight. If Herakles gains any insight in the final scene, it is that what has happened was meant to happen and this knowledge seems to have satisfied his momentary tendency toward self-pity. For Deianeira, there is not even that slight glimmer of truth; she had been used to play her part in an inevitable chain of events meant to bring about Herakles’ appropriately grand death. Her very unawareness and disastrous good intent are the sources of the pathos which makes her character so memorable and moving. But the sickness which she hoped to counteract in order to make her life less painful, was but a small portion of a larger sickness. The heroic personality is always disproportionate, extreme, and unencumbered by the more harmonious moralities of ordinary men. In the language of the image, the hero is "sick" and attempts by others to impose a cure will only bring to them a share of unendurable pain.
The Oidipous Tyrannos is a tragedy of knowledge and terrible self-discovery. This theme, its single most dominant focus, is rooted within the character of Oidipous himself, activated but not constrained by the motion of exterior circumstances. Strictly speaking, there are no true antagonists in the play, no foils who compel or hinder the hero as he seeks an answer to his birth, his past, and his identity in the scheme of things. It is Oidipous who contends against himself, whose mind and will penetrate the terrible secrets of his origins and history and bring upon his own head a curse which he himself has devised. A series of elaborate ironies, in both the plot and the texture of the imagery, is sustained until it "reverses," revealing its latent meaning to a ruined Oidipous. Ostensibly attempting to solve social problems (why the city suffers and who killed Laios), Oidipous finds his figures of speech turn on themselves.

On this large, compelling theme of human knowledge and planning, modern criticism is dominated by Whitman, Sophocles, pp. 122-146, where evil is seen as portrayed as so irrational as to outwit the most enlightened intellect; and B. M. W. Knox, Oedipus at Thebes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) where Oidipous is seen as the paradigm of mankind and mankind's greatest achievement, the city, attaining a dignity and victory through the purity of reason and self-awareness. Both interpretations depend upon underplaying the role of fate as an issue within this tragedy; see particularly Whitman, op. cit., pp. 3-41, and Knox, op cit., pp. 3-52. An essay constructed around the complexities of self-knowledge, and much indebted to Knox, is Laszlo Versényi, "Oedipus: Tragedy of Self-Knowledge," Arion I (1962), pp. 20-30.
to expose the intensely personal calamity that he is the unendurable and death-dealing contagion that infests the innocent around him.

Disease dominates the prologue, not as a metaphor but as an endemic reality in Thebes, wasting the city and countryside, threatening the very existence of the polis. The city, in massive supplication, presents itself to Oidipous with intermingled cries for healing and groans of pain (παίλανων τε καὶ στεναγμάτων). The Priest describes the manifestations of the sickness:

πόλις γάρ, ὡσπερ καθτὸς εἰσορᾷ, ἄγαν ἢδη σαλεύει κάνακουφίσαι κάρα βυθῶν ἐτ' οὐχ οίᾳ τε φοινίου σάλου, θέινουσα μὲν κάλυξιν ἐγκάρπους χθονός, θέινουσα δ' ἀγέλαις βουνόμοις, τόκοισι τε ἀγόνως γυναῖκῶν· ἐν δ' ὁ πυρφόρος θεὸς σιήφας ἐλαύνει, λοιμὸς ἔχθιστος, πόλιν, ωφ' οὖ πενθοῦτα δῆμα Καδμείου· μέλας δ' "Ἄιδης στεναγμοῖς καὶ γόοις πλουτίζεται.

For the city, as you yourself observe, too much already tosses and is not yet able to lift her head above the depths of this bloody tossing, wasting in the seed-casings of the earth, wasting in the pasture herds, and in the sterile births of women. In all, the divine fire-bringer has swooped and harasses the city, a most hateful plague, from which the house of Kadmos is emptied, while black Hades is enriched with groans and cries.

(22-30)

The public nature of the disease is immediately obvious. The city, as the collective mother of her citizens, is wasting; her fertility and nourishment threatened. The consequence of this blight is also
stressed as social—an empty house, the polis ceases to exist (cf. 56-57). Furthermore, as Musurillo points out, this assault upon the
fecundity of women, of animals, and of crops is ominously significant
of some terrible root cause. The characterization of the plague as
"the divine fire-bringer" (ὁ πυρφόρος θεὸς) is strangely dissonant,
since it evokes a reminiscence of Prometheus, mankind's great
artist-benefactor, only to negate the allusion in the next line by por-
traying this god as a great enemy, a plague (λοιμὸς ἔχθιστος
28), who by surprise assault is annihilating the people. The martial
image of the plague is later recalled by the Choros (169-171), but
perhaps the false evocation of Prometheus is meant to prepare the
scene for Oidipous' reactions. For the Priest, as representative of
the people's hope in their leader, finds in Oidipous' past salvation of

32 Musurillo, The Light and the Darkness, p. 81: "... the
characteristic of the plague is to attack all living things, human,
animal, and plant, and to destroy the very sources of human life,
that is, the processes of procreation. For, as we shall see, Oedipus
by his crime, however indeliberate, has attacked the basic laws of
human life by slaying his father and taking his own mother to wife."
See also the discussion by Seth Benardete, "Sophocles' Oedipus
pp. 105-121, particularly p. 107, where defective birth is shown to
be a sign of incest, with reference to Xenophon, Memorabilia IV.
iv. 20-23.

33 Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, pp. 9-10, emphasizes that the more
typical avenging gods (especially Apollo) are not responsible for this
plague as Sophocles describes it. It is not caused by the exterior
operations of some divine δίκη, and definitely not Apolline inter-
fERENCE as in the first book of the Iliad.
the city (against the Sphinx) evidence of superior human intelligence in dangerous times.

Oidipous, in fact, in his response to the Priest and suppliants, stresses both his awareness of their predicament ("known and not unknown to me are your needs for which you have come," γνωτὰ κοῦν ἀγνωτά μοι 58) and the collective social burden which he assumes as the leader in distress:

εὐ γὰρ ὁδ' ἢτι νοσεῖτε πάντες, καὶ νοσοῦντες, ὡς ἐγὼ οὐκ ἔστιν ὑμῶν ὡστὶς ἐξ ἱσού νοσεῖ.

τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑμῶν ἄλγος εἰς ἐν' ἐρχεται μόνον καθ' αὐτόν, κοῳδέν' ἄλλον, ἢ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πόλιν τε καὶ καὶ σ' ὄμοι στένει.

... for well I know that you are all sick, and though you are sick, that there is none among you whose sickness equals mine. For your suffering comes upon you singly, alone to each, and not upon any other man, while my soul cries at once for the city, for me, and for you.

(59-64)

His condition, as he sees it, is utterly public; its shape, emotions, and responsibilities equal the sum of the city and all those within it. Oidipous' assertion of his onerous care for his "pitiable children" (παῖδες οἰκτροὶ 58), of the non-existence of any boundary between his private person and the public concern, is in enormous tension with the irony latent in his very words: he has singled himself out as the sick man par excellence, the patient who perfectly embodies the whole
of the blight scattered throughout the city. But if Oidipous is the para-
digm of the city-as-patient, he is also cast as the doctor to the disease.
It was for healing that a suppliant city came to him, as the Priest
indicated:

\[\text{ικετεύομέν σε πάντες ούδε πρόστροποι}
\text{άλκην τίν' εὐφέρειν ἡμίν, εἴτε τοι θεῶν}
\text{φήμην ἀκούσας εἴτ' ἀπ' ἄνδρος οἴσθα που.}\]

All we who turn to you, supplicate you
to find us some relief, whether by listening
to the voice of some god, or whether you know
from a man.

(41-44)

And Oidipous' granting of their plea is a product of scrutiny of the
situation, a determination that the only remedy is to seek the advice
of Apollo ( ἔσον μόνην 68) and, so informed, to personally relieve
the city by appropriate words or deeds "... so I might learn what
to do or say that I might relieve this city" (71-72). As he is the
true patient, so too with a sign from Apollo he will be the true healer
of the disease.

Oidipous, interrogating Kreon, searches for some signal from
Apollo so that he might enact the healing word or deed:

\[\text{Κρ. λέγομ' ἄν οἴ' ἡκουσα τοῦ θεοῦ πάρα}
\text{ἀνωγεν ἡμᾶς θοῖβος ἐμφανῶς ἀναξ}
\text{μάσσα μάρας, δι' τεθραμμένον χθονὶ}
\text{ἐν τῇδ', ἐλαύνειν μηδ' ἀνήκεστον τρέφειν.}
\text{Οἰ. ποίψ καθαρμῆ; τίς ὁ τρόπος τῆς ξυμφορᾶς;}\]
KREON. I would tell such things as I heard from the god. Lord Phoibos plainly commands us to drive out a pollution which he alleges has been nourished in this land, and not to nourish what is incurable.

OIDIPOUS. By what sort of purging? What manner is our trouble?

KREON. By driving out a man or by shedding blood for blood, since this blood brings the storm upon the city.

OIDIPOUS. Of what sort of man does he reveal this fate?

(95-102)

The nurturing of pollution suggests that it is something (or someone) intimate within the city, some diseased thing not visible as such to those who feed it. It must be cast out and not fed, ominously suggesting the deformed child who must be abandoned in the wilds.

Driving out the pollution, reports Kreon, is the same as driving out a man, or killing him in vengeance. So it is revealed that the μίασμα is a person, with a name. Oidipous' further question asks not who the man is, but what sort of man he is (ποίου...ανδρός 102) and the response is that he is the sort who killed Laios. The cause of the city's affliction is now known to be somebody, the disease is personified; but Apollo does not name him. Oidipous, as the self-proclaimed healer, must undertake the search: "Once again (as with
the Sphinx' riddle) shall I make the unclear clear" (132). And in doing so, Oidipous, as the perfect patient in the city, will be working in his own self-interest: "But I myself shall scatter this polluted thing for my own sake" (138); "In helping that man (Laios), I shall bring myself aid" (141).

At Oidipous' exit, the Priest invites the suppliants to form a Choros and pray that Phoibos Apollo "may come as savior and stayer of the disease" (150). The Choros, in a series of invocations which array Zeus, Athene, Artemis, Apollo and even Dionysos against Ares who personifies to them the savagery of the assault on the city, picture the virulence of the disease upon them. The martial imagery of the Priest's prologue (27-29) is intensified:

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ψόποι, ἀνάριθμα γὰρ φέρω
πῆματα· νοσεὶ δὲ μοι πρόπας
στόλος, οὐδ' ἐνι φροντίδος ἔγχος
ἡ τις ἀλέξεται.
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Ah! for I bear pains with no number. All my army is sick, nor in a single thought is there a spear whereby a man might defend himself.

(167-171)

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34It is usual to suppose that the Choros is present on stage from the beginning of the play, though this presents some difficulty in production. One critic assumes that Oidipous' prologue is addressed to the audience, inviting them to represent the plague-ridden people of Thebes, and that the Choros proper enters at the parodos in the usual fashion (151); cf. William Calder, "The Staging of the Prologue of the Oedipus Tyrannus," Phoenix XIII (1959), pp. 121-129.
The city is like an army suffering assault which cannot be counted. It stands weaponless, and no device of human thought can provide for its defense. The song continues with a recollection of the barrenness of nature and of human women and the bold image of one life after another flying like a bird and with the speed of fire to the grim shore of Hades at the West (171-178). The destruction of the city is uncountable; the dead lie unpitied, spreading the deadly infection (θανατοφόρα 181); the paian-song for healing is mixed with laments for those past healing (179-189). It is Ares, they suggest, who wears the fire of the fever in place of his bronze shields; Zeus' fiery thunderbolt, Apollo's golden arrows, Artemis' fire-bearing torches, and the flaming brands of golden-haired Dionysos must drive this man-destroying god away (190-215). This unparalleled depiction of Ares as the pestilential god is appropriate, for it stresses the panic and ruin that has fallen upon the social order and the unjustifiable nature of its cause: the senseless and brutal murder of Laios on the road to Delphi.

Reentering, Oidipous is prepared through his words to take the first steps against the plague. He invites the cooperation of the Choros:

αλτεῖς· καὶ δ' αλτεῖς, τάμ' ἐὰν θέλης ἐπη κλῦων δέχεσθαι τῇ νόσῳ θ' ὑπηρετεῖν, ἀλκήν λάβοις ἡν κάνακούφισιν κακῶν.
You pray, and what you pray for—if you wish to listen to me and accept my words and do what the disease requires, you would have relief and a lightening of your sorrows.

(216-218)

"To do what the disease requires (τού νόσου θ' ὑπηρετεῖν 217)" is an odd and unparalleled phrase. ὑπηρετεῖν is a metaphor from seamanship, to row under the command of a captain, and comes to mean to serve as a subordinate. Surely Oidipous is not inviting the Choros "do the disease's bidding," for this would undermine his claim to be their helmsman in the storm. The commentators

35 The distinction between θεραπεύειν and ὑπηρετεῖν is very clearly made in Euthyphro 13c-e. θεραπεία is a service which improves the person being serviced, while a ὑπηρετικὴ θεραπεία supports the intentions of the person toward whom the service is directed but does not form a goal by itself. It is like the service which slaves render to masters or men to gods. The context in Euthyphro, interestingly enough, remarks that the doctor performs a θεραπεία for the achievement of health in his patient, and in turn the subordinate services of his staff (ὑπηρετικὴ) become, under his control, also directed toward his goal. Oidipous is ostensibly asking the Choros to support his goal—which is for the improvement of the popular condition—by giving obedient service to his controlling commands.

36 The metaphor of the plague as the storm is introduced by the priest (21-24) as well as the analogy between the physical city and a ship (οὕτε πύργος οὕτε ναῦς 56). Kreon reiterates the metaphor (χειμάζον πόλιν 101), as well as introducing the image of the king who keeps his city on the straight course (ἀπευθύνειν πόλιν 104). Perhaps the most poignant use of the figure is Iokaste's remark, much later on, that the city fears when it sees the helmsman afraid (μυθερπήτην νεώς 923). For a discussion of the helmsman image, see Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, pp. 112-113; Musurillo, The Light and the Darkness, pp. 83-85; and Philip W. Harsh, "Implicit and Explicit in the Oedipus Tyrannus," AJPh LXXIX (1958), pp. 243-258.
suggest "to submit to the treatment required," surely a connotation which would be appropriate, but not its literal meaning. As I see it, Oidipous is purposefully mixing metaphors to emphasize two points: (1) whereas the Choros has been appealing to the gods to rebuke that Olympian who best embodies their torment (Ares), Oidipous wishes to recall them to a more rational consideration of their present predicament -- "give your service to (the matter of) the disease"; and (2) he wishes to stress his control over the service they must render by reminding them that they are subject rowers to his captaining -- "heeding my words, give supportive service." But the literal level of his words is also a level of momentous irony, for without intending to do so, Oidipous indicates that he, the helmsman, is also the disease which brings the storm on the state. "Row under the control of the Disease (me)."

The commands which follow are intensely ironic: all are bound by oath to reveal what they know of the death of Laios. The matter may not be left unpurged (ἀκάθαρτον 256). Oidipous will uphold his

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37 The translation is that of Kamerbeek, The Oedipus Tyrannus, p. 69, n. to line 217. Jebb, The Oedipus Tyrannus, p. 40, n. to line 217, equates the phrase with θεραπεύειν τὴν νόσου and translates "to do that which the disease requires (for its cure)." Both commentators cite Sophocles, Elektra 1306 ὑπηρετοῖην τῷ παρόντι δαίμονι "I would do the god's bidding" as a parallel passage, but the meaning and context is entirely different: Elektra is stressing her loyalty to her brother by claiming that if she were to grieve him, she would not be giving proper service to the god. The use in the Elektra is quite normal; here in the Oidipous Tyrannos it is, if anything, paradoxical.
cause "as if he were my own father" (264). Even if the guilty man "should with my knowledge share my hearth within my house" (250), then Oidipous would suffer the sanctions of his oath. And the sanctions are terrifying: the blighting of earth and womb which marks the current plague, or a plague "which is still more an enemy than this" (269-272).

The sanctions fixed by decree, all that remains is to discover the identity of the killer, "Whoever might have worked the deed" (279). As Teiresias is asked to use his inner sight to reveal "with what sort of disease the city associates" (303), Oidipous speaks yet another fearful ambiguity:

ρύσαι σεσυντὸν καὶ πόλιν, ρύσαι δ' ἐμέ,
ρύσαι δὲ πᾶν μίασμα τοῦ τεθνημότος.

Take care of yourself and the city, take care of me, take care of the entire pollution of the dead man.

(312-313)

ρύσαι, "take care," carries the same ambiguous force as English (i.e. "to care for" and "to dispatch") and the triple anaphora stresses its double meaning. The weight of the ambiguity falls upon the middle element, Oidipous himself, who in wishing to reiterate his collective embodiment of the city's welfare, unwittingly associates himself with the pollution which infests it. As he taunts the

38See Benardete, "Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus," pp. 108-109, on this passage and on the themes of public and private in the play.
reluctant Teiresias to reveal the identity of the guilty, he hears "that
you are the unholy polluter of this land" (353) and moreover that he
has been living intimately with kin (366-367). Oidipous had expected
words of public import, a solution to communal disaster which he
might enact with ruthless righteousness; instead the words are toward
his private origins, his nature, his fateful parentage. He cannot
recognize his private depth; it is an unknown quantity. His response
is political: Kreon must be engaged in subversion. To this the seer
responds, "Kreon is no cause of pain (πημ' οὐδέν ) to you, but you
are your own cause of pain" (379). Oidipous, the collective patient,
is here exposed as both the private sufferer and the very disease
which causes him pain. It will take the remainder of the play, the
tracking down of clues and the ferreting out of evidence to convince
him of the truth, to complete the latent equation: Oidipous, the
public patient and authoritarian doctor, is really society's disease;
and at the more starkly tragic level of personal struggle and private
anguish, he is the disease who infests himself and who cries out for
drastic and self-inflicted remedies for the incurable.

It is not immediately obvious to Oidipous that his person is
separable from the political body. Conversely, an assumed sub-
version of his civic control is interpreted as an assault on his body.
He cannot yet distinguish his public dilemma from what will be
demonstrated as his intensely private ruin. Iokaste, overhearing
the harsh words between Oidipous and Kreon, interrupts them:

οὐδ᾿ ἐπαλεχύνεσθε γῆς
οὕτω νοσούσης ίδια κινοῦντες κακά;

Are you not ashamed, when the land
is so sick, to agitate about your private difficulties?

(635-636)

But these "private ills" (ίδια...κακά) are precisely those, Oidipous
assumes, which led to the infection of the state--the assault against the
person of the ruler, first Laios, now himself. "I caught him, wife,
working evil on my body (τοψμὸν σῶμα) with his evil art" (642-643).

Iokaste's interruption, however, has checked his impulse to enact
the sanctions of the oath, pending the gathering of information. When
he knows the truth in detail, he will know who is the disease. As the
evidence accumulates, and apparent contradictions are gradually
removed, he moves with the caution and zeal of a Hippokratic physician,
organizing bits and pieces of fact, interrogating witnesses, comparing
their testimony with his experience, and reasoning coolly.

The Hippokratic physician must pay careful attention not only
to empirically verifiable symptoms and facts, but hidden factors as
well. So Airs, Waters, Places commends the careful analysis of
geography, meteorology, and astronomy as pertinent and the fourth
book On Diet talks of the interpretation of dreams and omens. So
Oldipous the Scientist must take into account not only the appearance
of things (symptoms), and empirically verifiable facts, but also
the evidence of oracles as germane to his researches. Against
this, Iokaste's scientific attitude is more narrow and sceptical.
Iokaste is discomfited by Oidipous' aggressive inquiries; they are too spirited, eager to hear fearful things, and not comparative enough to make sense (911-917). For this reason, she greets enthusiastically the Messenger from Corinth who bears news of the death of Polybos. It is precisely the evidence needed to jog Oidipous into her sort of rational analysis—a dismissal of oracular pronouncements as irrelevant to the case. Polybos is dead and the death was natural:

ΜΕΣΣΕΝΓΕΡ. If I must first report this information clearly, then know the man has died and is gone.

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ. Was it by treachery or a stroke of sickness?

ΜΕΣΣΕΝΓΕΡ. A thing of little weight brings old bodies to rest.

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ. So it seems the poor man wasted away from diseases.

ΜΕΣΣΕΝΓΕΡ. And by living out the full measure of a long life.

(958-963)
This elaboration on the manner of Polybos' death stresses its utter naturalness, its intelligibility as a scientific and uncomplicated event. The disease in Thebes, by contrast, strikes irrationally where it should not (fertile youth) and is accompanied by the ominous markings of pollution and crime. The old body, with a long life completed, wasting until some slight pressure tips the scale toward death--this figure is moral, appropriate, and even happy. This intrusion of tranquil death and the proper place of disease in human life momentarily lulls Oidipous to Iokaste's point of view: sickness and death are ordinary experiences within the life of man; the oracles do not make sense and should not be trusted. The second stipulation of the oracle, regarding mother-incest, still troubles Oidipous; Iokaste's attempt to cheer him is the very occasion which leads the Messenger to expose a terrible truth: Merope is not his mother, nor was old Polybos, the

40 Solon (27 Edmonds), on the ages of a man's life, says:

If any man should come full measure to the tenth age he would not unseasonably have the fate of death.

(70-71)

Herodotos, in the famous tale of Solon and Kroisos on the nature of human happiness, remarks that Tellos of Athens died in defense of his city "after a life which by our standards was a good one" (I. 31). In Republic 556e, Plato seems to have this very passage from Sophocles in mind when he compares the sick body to the sick state: "Just as a sick body needs only a thing of little weight from without to bring it to rest, so a state falls sick from slight circumstances without . . . ."
man who has happily died, his true father. The revelation shatters the optimism of death-in-nature presented by the description of Polybos' passing and the old doubts surface more strongly. The disease within Thebes is almost revealed; Iokaste now knows its name. She pleads with Oidipous to stop his search for the knowledge will prove fatal and she recognizes the sickness in herself:

In the name of the gods, if you have the slightest care for your life, do not search this thing. I am sick enough.

(I060-1061)

Iokaste is using the disease figure in precisely the meaning which has unfolded throughout the play, but Oidipous assumes that she is afraid he might be discovered to be of ignoble parentage. It is in fact in the hideous relationship of patricide and incest that Oidipous is marked as the Disease. The final revelation comes quickly in the following scene.

The suicide of Iokaste ends her suffering; Oidipous will endure his pains the remainder of his life. As the Messenger prepares the Choros for the entry of the blinded Oidipous, he warns that the sight will be a mixture of loathing and pity. "The Disease is greater than
one can bear” (1293). τὸ νόσημα, the Disease, is specific and nameable. It is, to be sure, the horrible fate which shall torment him and give him no peace from his sorrow (1286). But it is in the full sense Oidipous himself, whose very person agonizes him, and who affronts and brings pain to those who see him. He is the μίασμα with a name who must be driven off and not fed. And now that he is revealed to exist as the Disease itself τὸ νόσημα, he is beyond destruction by disease (νόσος):

καίτοι τοσούτον γ’ οἶδα, μήτε μ’ ἄν νόσον μήτ’ ἄλλο πέρσαι μηδέν’ οὗ γὰρ ἄν ποτε θνήσκων ἐσώθην, μὴ ’πί τῇ δεινῷ κακῇ.

Yet this much do I know, that neither disease nor any other thing shall destroy me; for never would I have been saved from dying, except for some terrible evil.

(1455 - 1457)

Oidipous is a pariah; asocial but a public sight (θέαμα 1295), unholy and sacred, unnatural and elemental, incurable and unkillable, the self-blinded seer.

41 Denys Page, "Thucydides' Description of the Great Plague," CQ XL (1953), pp. 97-119 notes that νόσημα is more specific than νόσος and connotes a particular disease. It is only of the Great Plague which Thucydides uses the word. An example of νόσημα in a specifically metaphorical context, is Aischylos, Prometheus Bound 224-225, where it is used of Zeus' tyrannical mistrust of his friends. Here it refers both to the catastrophic ruin of Oidipous, the abnormal nature of his incest and patricide, and in the sense which completes the pattern of imagery throughout the play, Oidipous the Disease.
The disease imagery of the Oidipous Tyrannos moves with the plot from the exterior social problem that confronts the gifted ruler to the dark contradictions of his most hidden nature. In the end the signs of the disease, inflicted by the hero himself, identify him as the true pollutant with a nature so out of joint that the tenuous harmony which a man embodies from his birth-mystery (the union of opposites in male and female) is exposed as fragile and terrifying. Moreover, the image lends to this drama a strong paradigm of the vagaries of human intelligence. The scientist-physician examines the course of the disease with his inductive reason, first as it appears endemic in the polis, and then as it displays its symptoms on his own body. He must know before he acts. But the knowledge is terrible, for this disease is not some independent quality which temporarily has swooped to infest the realm of men, an enemy to battle, but is the physician himself. As the physician becomes the Disease, he achieves a sort of static permanence, an escape from the fluxes of ordinary living; and the price is unrelenting, irremediable, and unredemptive pain. "I have been saved... for some terrible evil."
Philoktetes

In two plays which have been examined up to this point, Sophokles has used the dramatic presentation of physical disease infesting the body of the hero to signal some destructive quality of the heroic personality, causing him to collide with those about him in morally ambiguous ways. The mad Aias' disturbed vision externalizes those dimensions of pride and enmity which are not fit for the unheroic world of statesmen. Herakles' broken body evidences his grand insensitivity toward faithful love, his scarcely controlled whimsy, and his enormous vulnerability to the consequences of his appetites. In Oidipous Tyrannos, the figure of disease is first transported to the people, whose fearsome suffering is the consequence of the physical aberrations of their ruler (incest and patricide); Oidipous' physical deformity suggests the symbol through which the true source of the plague will be discovered. These moral ambiguities --the painful self-identity of the hero and the suffering of the innocent--are all but obliterated in the concept of the disease image which Sophokles employs in Philoktetes. Here, the hero, who has not yet achieved fame (κλέος 251, 1347) among his peers but has been hindered wrongfully from doing so, is the chance victim of non-human accident and the abused innocent who suffers cruelly from the all-too-human ambition of others. If we were to search for some
darker side of Philoktetes' personality to account for the virulence of his physical and mental torment, we should be hard put to define it. Yet nowhere among the extant tragedies of Sophokles has the disease image been more elaborately or terrifyingly portrayed. Within the action of the play itself, rather than in distant events or suppositions about the abrasive nature of heroism, the full thematic significance of Philoktetes' disease is exposed.

The prologue provides background to the play's action: the description of Philoktetes' abandonment many years before and of his present dismal circumstances; the reasons for which the Greek embassy has arrived on Lemnos. Moreover, the characters of Philoktetes' antagonists, Odysseus and Neoptolemos, are portrayed through their respective reactions to the hero's suffering and two connotations are suggested to the disease image itself: isolation and vulnerability. Odysseus moves cautiously, as he describes to Neoptolemos the place he is to look for (a "two-mouthed cave" 16) and

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42 Nor is the physical intensity of disease more strikingly portrayed elsewhere. Musurillo, *The Light and the Darkness*, p. 119, n. 1, elaborates on the realism of the effects of snake-bite, particularly the bite of the hydra, and on the fact that for dramatic reasons, Sophokles invites us to imagine that they have extended over an "improbable ten-year period." Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 231, suggests that this "aggressive realism" dwells upon the "less heroic" physical details to signal that the hero is somehow "on top of his disease, no mere blind struggler in the coils of the divine doom." It is certainly true that the festering wound of the hero and his bow are fully elaborated symbols within the play, having a concrete dramatic reality as well as a highly developed poetic connotation.
the reasons for abandonment: Philoktetes' cries of agony were violations of religious silence (δυσφημίας) which prevented the Greek host from proper drink- and food-sacrifices to the gods. The source of his wild cries is "his foot afflicted with a devouring sickness" (νόσψ...διαβόρψ πόδα). It was, Odysseus suggests, this violation of group rituals through his pained wildness which forced the abandonment on this island "untrod by mortals and uninhabited". Nothing in what Odysseus first says could account for his caution and the fact that he dispatches Neoptolemos to reconnoiter the cave, discovering the pathetic poverty in which Philoktetes lives, while Odysseus himself draws back. Odysseus' nervousness, in fact, is prompted by the knowledge that the man cannot be far off and that he is still alive; the evidence are the rags, still damp from his sore, left to dry in the air:

Ne. Λού λού' καὶ ταύτα γ' ἄλλα θάλπηται ῥάκη, βαρεῖας τοῦ νοσηλείας πλέα.
Od. ἀνὴρ κατοικεῖ τούσδε τοὺς τόπους σαφῶς, καὶ τὸν οὐχ ἐκάς που. πῶς γὰρ ἄν νοσῶν ἀνὴρ κῶλον παλαιῷ υπηρεσβαίη μακράν;

NEOPTOLEMOS. Ah! Here are some rags drying, full of heavy diseased matter.

ODYSSEUS. Then clearly the man lives in these places and is not far away. For how could a sick man go far on a foot maimed with an old affliction?

(38-42)
To Neoptolemos these horrible signs of human affliction are causes for pity. But to Odysseus, they justify his caution—the man is nearby and "he would rather/ take me than all the Argives" (46-47).

It is evident that an old enmity exists between Odysseus and Philoktetes which prompted Odysseus to resort to guile (δόλῳ 101, 102, 107) and lies (ψευδῇ 100, 108, 109). Though Neoptolemos experiences pain ἀλγός 86) at hearing Odysseus' plan, he succumbs to the argument. Odysseus retires to a position of safety with the fleet, promising to send a man disguised as a merchant if the deception seems to be taking too long.

The prologue, then, analyzes the sickness of Philoktetes before the hero enters the stage. His disease caused him to act wildly and his social group could not bear his company; the solution was to abandon him in the desolation of Lemnos where he would have no human contact at all. This utter isolation, suggests Odysseus, will make him an easy prey to stratagem, while his wildness prevents him from being susceptible to the winning ways of persuasion and, together with his bow, makes him too formidable for the exercise of force. While Odysseus is negligent of the human misery which Philoktetes suffers, and in fact underplays it ("perhaps he has found some herb to soothe his pain" 44), Neoptolemos has been moved sufficiently by what he has seen to understand the shame of his promised deception (120). Underlying the scene is a deep-rooted
enmity which Philoktetes must have for those who deserted him, under circumstances (witness the cold and suspicious way in which Odysseus treats the subject) which were less than honorable. Moreover, the plan surrounds the acquisition of the bow (the source of Philoktetes' strength and his desirability to the Greek belligerents at Troy), not the recovery of Philoktetes' person from his tormented isolation. He is the unknown human factor.

It is the generalized and suffering humanity of Philoktetes which is the subject of the parodos, an intricate recitative between Neoptolemos and the Choros of sailors. Here the meager effects which Neoptolemos discovered in the hero's cave suggest to him the misery of his daily existence. With painful steps he hunts his food with his bow, and there is none to draw near him and heal his woes (παιδώνα νακών 168) He is pitiable and fierce (ολητήρω 169; δεινός 147), and he suffers a wild sickness (νοσεῖ...νόσου ἄγριαν 173). He is isolated, surrounded by wild beasts, pitiable in his physical pains and hunger, beset by incurable torments (180-186). The only voice he hears is Echo, who answers his sharp cries in kind (187-188). The sole justification for this torment which Neoptolemos can suggest is that some god does not wish Troy to fall too soon under the pressure of Philoktetes' bow. Then, offstage, the first sounds of Philoktetes' agonies are heard--and they are terrible
This complex parodos stresses almost exclusively the excruciating pathos of Philoktetes' torment. If the disease is wild, so also is the threatening natural setting of his isolation. Nature is not bucolically uncomplicated, but mocking and hostile, an enemy to be assaulted with weapons in order to eke out the most miserable of existences. Yet, all this misery had no underlying cause, is due to no shameful crime. In this frame of mind, the entrance of Philoktetes himself is anticipated. It is essential to the ruse of Odysseus that Philoktetes should react with predictable trust to his first contact in many years with humans who sympathize with his travail and are prepared to admire his flinty endurance in such a menacing landscape.

This is precisely the sort of Philoktetes who enters in the first episode. His first words extend guest friendship to the men he sees and that pledge of a bond between men is accepted by Neoptolemos in his first words to the hero. Philoktetes is eager to hear their voices, and quick to excuse his wild looks. He first emphasizes his solitude and appeals to their pity, which they had given in advance through the sympathetic song of the parodos. The conversation quickly turns to the purpose of the visit, as Philoktetes inquires the reason for their arrival on this island without good port and uninhabited. Neoptolemos' lie that he had never heard of Philoktetes has two effects: it plays upon the worst fears of the
lonely man, that his enemies have deprived him even of remembrance of his name, and so makes him more malleable to the elaborate deception which Neoptolemos is constructing; and it occasions a description from the hero's point of view of the suffering which he has experienced and the wrongs done him. The theme of bitter resentment becomes associated with the imagery of his sickness, as Philoktetes reacts to the information that he has become anonymous among the Greeks:

\[
\text{άλλ' οί μὲν ἐνβαλόντες ἄνοσίως ἐμὲ γελῶσι σιγ' ἔχοντες, ἢ δ' ἐμὴ νόσος ἀεὶ τέθηλε κατί μεῖζον ἔρχεται.}
\]

But they who cast me off in an unholy manner mock me with their silence, while my disease forever grows and goes to greater intensity.

(257-9)

The growth of his disease is not independent, but commensurate with the continued abuse which his enemies have heaped upon him with their silent and gloating disregard. This vaguely foreshadows the prophecy later to emerge that Philoktetes' sickness will be cured when he recovered the rightful fame due to him. For the moment, the counterpoint is between a disease which was thrust upon him guiltlessly, in its savagery isolating him from human concourse, and the shameful

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43 Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 231, puts it well: "It is easy to correlate the rankling wound with the festering grudge against the Greek chiefs . . . ."
assault upon Philoktetes by godless men while he was reduced to helplessness. It is a bitter counterpoint:

\[
\text{o}i \\
\text{δισσοι στρατηγοὶ χῶ Κεφαλλήνων ἄναξ} \\
\text{ἐρριφαν αἰσχρῶς δῶ' ἔρημον, ἄγριῳ νόσῳ} \\
\text{καταφθίνοντα, τῆς ἀνδροφθόρου} \\
\text{πληγέντ' ἐξίδυνης φοινίῳ χαράγματι.}
\]

These two generals, and the leader of the Kephallenians shamefully cast me out into this loneliness, while I was being wasted by this wild sickness, stricken by the wild tearing wound of a snake who kills men.

(264-267)

He describes his feelings as he awoke from his seizure to discover the fleet was gone:

\[
\text{σὺ δὴ, τέκνον, ποίαν μ' ἀνάστασιν δοκεῖς} \\
\text{αὐτῶν βεβώτων ἔξ' ὑπνοῦ στήναι τότε;} \\
\text{ποὶ' ἐκδακρῶσαι, ποὶ' ἀπομᾶκαί κακά;} \\
\text{ὁρῶντα μὲν ναῦς, ὥς ἔχων ἐναυστόλουν,} \\
\text{πάσας βεβώσας, ἀνόρα δ' οὐδὲν' ἕντοπον,} \\
\text{οὐχ οὔσις ἄρκεσειν, οὔδ' οὔσις νόσου} \\
\text{kάμνοντι συλλάβοιτο' πάντα δὲ σκοπῶν} \\
\text{ηὔρισκον οὐδὲν πλὴν ἀνιᾶσθαι παρὸν,} \\
\text{τούτου δὲ πολλὴν εὐμάρειαν, ὡ τέκνον.}
\]

You, son, imagine what a wakening it was when I awoke from sleep and they were gone. What tears I cried, what evils I bewailed when I saw ships which I had once commanded were all gone, not one man in the place, none who could help me, no one who might give relief when I am worn down with sickness. Looking about, I found nothing at hand except for grief, and of that I have a bountiful harvest, son.

(276-284)
His sickness comes with such fits of pain that others found it unbearable. Then it wears him down, so that he collapses into helplessness and coma. The cowardice of the Greeks seized upon the moment of his greatest vulnerability and marooned him in this desolate place. They virtually consigned Philoktetes to death, not by the triumph of heroic force, but through stealth by snatching upon his helplessness and leaving him without food, clothing, shelter, or companion to tend him in his misery. His wound is a memorial to the vast callousness of the Greeks, to their moral degeneracy, and to their underhanded opportunism. But beyond this remembrance of past disgrace, it evokes the present hidden purposes of Neoptolemos and Odysseus and suggests the shamefulness of the means which they have agreed upon: again the victimization of the helpless sufferer, again the crafty self-service of ambition, again cowardice and cruelty. Against this picture of the brutal society which cast him off, Philoktetes takes obvious pride in his own particular "self-service" (μόνον/ διακονεῖσθαι286-287), a precarious survival through the painful acquisition of the semblance of civilization: shelter, food,

44 Michael Jameson, "Politics and the Philoctetes," CPh LI (1956), p. 225, n. 25, documents the political metaphor of a sick society plagued by faction, treachery, and moral corruption. Philoctetes' sickness, he suggests, is the irreconcilable bitterness of a heroic individual trying to maintain his integrity in such a degenerated polis (cf. especially, pp. 220-221).
and fire. In one thing only is his self-sufficiency wanting: "that I be not sick" (πλὴν τὸ μὴ νοσεῖν ἐμέ 299). This exception is significant, for it is the most obvious symbol of his lonely segregation from human relationships. The sickness has caused men to reject him, has given them the opportunity to do so, and grows progressively more vicious the longer he is separated. The disease repulses even the casual mariners who have landed on Lemnos. In isolation, the disease cannot be controlled; in fact, it destroys the triumph of his survival by feeding upon his very life:

\[
\text{δὲλλ' ἀπόλλυμαι τάλας}
\]
\[
\text{ἐτος τὸδ' ἡδὴ δέκατον ἐν λιμῷ τε καὶ}
\]
\[
\text{κακοῖσι βόσκων τὴν ἀδηφάγον νόσου.}
\]

This is now the tenth year

that I am being miserably destroyed, in hunger and evils feeding the insatiable disease.

(311-313)

As Philoktetes with his bow preserves his life by preying on the island's birds, this disease feeds upon his life in turn. The insatiability of the disease, feeding upon his flesh, is the measure of his determination to live. The underlying reason for these

\[45\] This, I think, is the meaning of the image. But Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 233, suggests otherwise, namely that such "fostering" is self-pity, derived from the interaction of the hero's personality with his hostile environment. I prefer to see the ugliness of the disease as accentuating the enormous price which Philoctetes
evils is not Philoktetes' willful choice, but the violence of Odysseus and the Atreidai.

The mention of Odysseus and the Atreidai gives Neoptolemos the opening which he needs to begin an elaborate series of lies, mixed with truths, designed to convince Philoktetes that he has similarly been victimized and that he is to be trusted as a true companion. He describes his being lured to Troy and his failure to acquire the arms of his dead father. An interrupted Choral ode brackets the next stage of the deception. Neoptolemos reports true events: the deaths of Aias and Antilochos, the survival of Thersites and Odysseus. This reportage confirms Philoktetes' suspicions that men of worth perish while all scoundrels survive. Then Neoptolemos moves to the action which he hopes will ensnare the hero—he pretends to take his leave, making particular reference to Philoktetes' sickness: "May the gods give you/ recovery from your sickness, as you wish./ But we must go" (462-464). And this threat of yet another lonely abandonment to feed his disease, causes Philoktetes to pray for sympathy: "As suppliant I supplicate, do not leave me alone,/ isolated among such evils as you see" (470-471). He appeals to Neoptolemos' pity by stressing his infirmity and weakness (485-486). The Choros sing the antistrophe of their interrupted ode as a plea to Neoptolemos to have pity and grant the crippled hero passage to his homeland. To

must pay to maintain his self-identity against assault. Thus, later in the play, the Choros will challenge his resolve by evoking the same image of "feeding the sickness," (cf. 1165-1169) as an attempt to persuade him to embark for Troy.
which Neoptolemos, in a masterful stroke of pretense, responds by soliciting an oath from them that they will not regret their plea when the sickness becomes loathsome:

οὐ δὲ πλησθῆς τῆς νόσου ξυνούσις,
τὸτ' οὐκέθα αὐτὸς τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις φανῇς.

Take care that you are not just an eager by-stander but when you have had enough of contact with the disease then you will no longer be found true to your words.

(519-521)

This is shocking duplicity from the son of Achilleus, but the plan succeeds. Philoktetes, deceived, has with his own mouth begged to embark on Greek ships.

But suddenly the ship captain, disguised as a merchant, whom Odysseus has promised to send if the trick seemed to take too much time, arrives. His arrival signals a new stage of the action for the hero. Up to this point, the major thrust of Philoktetes' disease has been the isolation, grief, laborious survival—a triumph of refusing to succumb to desperate circumstances which long ago would have broken a lesser man. The messenger reveals two important pieces of information, known to Neoptolemos but not to Philoktetes: Odysseus is on a mission to Lemnos, and the object of his search is the bow which a Trojan prophet, Helenos, has said will be the instrument of Troy's destruction. Odysseus' purpose in sending the false merchant
can only be surmised, but evidently he understands Philoktetes' likely reaction. Odysseus knows that to deceive the hero into boarding the ship is foolhardy unless he has first been disarmed of his frightful weapon (recall his nervousness in the prologue). He is hoping, by focusing attention through the false merchant's report on the bow and on the old enmity between himself and Philoktetes, to play upon the hero's weakness (specifically his physical infirmities) until an occasion might arise for disarming him without risk. This in fact is what soon happens. But Philoktetes' first reactions are predictably adamant, treating with contempt Odysseus' arrogance, and comparing him in enmity with the snake who caused his wound:

οὐ ἐὰν τῆς πλείστης ἐχθρίστης ἐμοὶ κλύουμ' ἐχίδνης, ἢ μ' ἔθηκεν ὃδ' ἀπουν.

No! Sooner would I listen to that very worse of enemies, the snake, she who made me thus a cripple.

(631-632)

Odysseus and the snake were both the causes of his evils, of all the wound represents—not simply the agony of its seizures, but the maddening resourceless of being alone, unhelped, and uncomforted. If the snake caused the gash in his leg, it was Odysseus who gave it cruel meaning by his exploitation of the helpless man. In this conspiracy of a chance of Nature and the planned brutality of civilized
men, it is Odysseus who shows himself more hateful. Nature, not men, renders Philoktetes temporary abatement of his physical torment:

φύλλον τι μοι πάρεστιν, ὑμάλιος ἀεὶ κοιμῶ τὸ ἥλιος, ἵστε πραίνειν πάνυ.

I have a certain plant, by which I put to rest this wound, so that it calms totally.

(649-640)

Nature's ambiguities comprise both menace (the snake, the hostile island environment) and comfort (the plant, the cave); but the world of men from which he has been rejected, has dealt the hero only evil. Unless, of course, Neoptolemos prove true and be the helpmate which his disease so requires. Philoktetes in friendship offers to let the young warrior touch his bow, indeed he promises that it will one day be his, and then invites him to see the cave:

tὸ γὰρ νοσῶν ποθέω σὲ ξυμπαραστάτην λαβεῖν.

for this disease in me longs to have you stand beside and comfort.

(674-675)

Neoptolemos' companionship is valued as a measure for causing his less physical hurt and bitterness to abate. This bond of comforter-in-sickness is emphasized by a promise of access to the bow, the source of the hero's life in isolation. But it is all part of the canny deceit
perpetrated by Odysseus—the dramatic tension is poised for some further event which will spring the trap and once again abuse Philoktetes.

When Neoptolemos and Philoktetes enter the cave to gather the herb, the Choros use the opportunity to commemorate the hero's triumph of survival. No man but Ixion had ever suffered as cruelly; but Ixion was guilty of a heinous crime, whereas Philoktetes has done evil to no man. They stress first his isolation, how there was no one to support him in the throes of his sickness; and then, the painful reality of the sickness in the hero's own experience. They pray that his journey home to Oite will at last bring him happiness.

Though this Choral ode completes the themes of innocent suffering, isolation, helplessness in disease, and longing for escape which dominated the first part of the play, it hardly prepares us for the forcefulness of what follows: an actual attack of the disease, with all the hideous moans that before had been only alluded to. The attack, enacted and described in great detail, is both the true climax of what went before it, and the first major twist in the plot: Neoptolemos experiences as eye-witness the torment which he had felt sympathy toward, and he has the sought-for bow thrust upon him. It begins immediately upon the reemergence of the two from the cave. Philoktetes groans, and dissembles that anything is wrong. Neoptolemos persists: "Do you feel the pain of your long-standing
sickness? " (734). Philoktetes demures, then calls upon the gods.

Questioned further, and obviously in great pain, he admits he calls upon them "to come as gentle saviors" (738). Pressed further, his speech becomes broken and tortured. (I have in the following translation simply transliterated the formal cries of agony.)

\[ \text{ἀπόλωλα, τέκνον, κοῦ δυνήσομαι κακὸν κρύψαι παρ' ὑμῖν, ἀτταταί} \deltaιέρχεται διέρχεται δύστηνος, ὡ τάλας ἕγερ. \]
\[ \text{ἀπόλωλα, τέκνον} \betaρύκομαι, τέκνον pαpαt, } \]
\[ \text{ἀπαππαται, pαpα} pαpα pαpα pαpα. } \]
\[ \text{πρὸς θεῶν, πρόχειρον ε} \text{ι} \text{τι} \text{ς} \text{ou, τέκνον, πάρα} \]
\[ \text{ξίφος} \chiεροίν, πάταξον ε} \text{ι} \text{ς} \text{όκρου} \text{πόδα} \]
\[ \text{ἀπόμησον ὡς τάχιστα} \; \mu \text{η φείση} \text{ βίον. } \]
\[ \text{θ', ὡ pαt. } \]

I am dying, my son, and I shall not be able to hide my trouble from you. attatai. It runs through, it runs through. Ah miserable, wretched me!

I am dying, my son. I am consumed, my son. papai, apappapai, papappappappappapai. For god's sake, if you have anything at hand, my son, a sword in your hands, strike the foot from the end of my leg. Cut it off quickly, quickly. Don't spare my life. Please, my son, (742-750)

The virulence of the attack has shocked and puzzled even Neoptolemos who is brought at last to a recognition of its terror:

\[ 46 \text{The brokenness of his speech underscores the logos theme of the play, where human words fail dismally to communicate because they are used at cross-purposes. On this, see Anthony J. Podlecki, "The Power of the Word in Sophocles' Philoctetes," GRBS VII (1966), pp. 233-250.} \]
Ne. δεινόν γε τούπισιγμα τοῦ νοσήματος.
Φι. δεινόν γὰρ οὐδὲ βητὸν ἀλλ' ὀξιτρέ με.

NEOPTOLEMOS. Terrible is the heavy burden of your sickness.

PHILOKTETES. Terrible beyond telling. So pity me!

(755-756)

Neoptolemos asks what he might do to help, and the answer is poignant:

μὴ δήτα τούτο γ' ἀλλὰ μοι τὰ τὸξ' ἐλὼν
τάδ', ἐστερὲ ςτοῦ μ' ἀρτίως, ἐως ἀνή
tὸ πῆμα τούτο τῆς νόσου τὸ νῦν παρόν,
σφξ' αὐτὰ καὶ φύλασσε. λαμβάνει γὰρ οὖν
ὕπνος μ', ὅταν περ τὸ κακὸν ἔξειρ τὸδε·
κοῦν ἔστι λῆξαι πρότερον ἀλλ' ἐὰν χρεὼν
ἐκηλον ἐυδειν.

Take this bow of mine
just as you asked a moment ago, until the pain
of the disease which is on me now, shall go away;
keep it safe and guard it. For sleep takes hold
of me whenever the evil starts to pass, and
it shall not abate before. And you must allow me
to lie undisturbed.

(763-769)

The onslaught of the disease has caused the handing over of the bow.

But the responsibility which Neoptolemos has assumed is not simple:
he has obligated himself to its safekeeping through his very cooperation
in the deception of its possessor. Evidently, Neoptolemos imagines
that since he now has physical possession of the weapon, he can move
the hero toward the fulfillment of his personal destiny at Troy, once
the ferociousness of the attack is over. His language is just so
ambiguous:

ω θεοί, γένοιτο ταῦτα νῦν' γένοιτο δὲ
πλοῦς οὐρίδος τε κευσταλής ὅποι ποτὲ
θεὸς δικαιοὶ χῶ στόλος ποροῦνεται.

Oh gods, may this happen for both we two (safety from further
grief).
May a favorable and prosperous voyage occur, to whatever place
the god deems just and our intent leads the way.

(779-781)

In counterpoint to this prayer and its tacit intent, yet another attack
of the sickness wracks Philoktetes' body:

δέδοικα δ’, ὡ ταῖ, μὴ ἀτελής εὐχή (τύχη)
στάζει γὰρ αὖ μοι φοίνιον τὸδ’ ἐκ βυθοῦ
κηρίων αἷμα, καὶ τι προσδοκῶ νέον.
papai, feu.
papai μάλ’, ὡ ποὺς, οἳ μ’ ἐργάσῃ κακά.
προσέρπει,
προσέρχεται τὸδ’ ἐγγὺς. οἴμοι μοι τάλας.
ἔχετε τὸ πράγμα· μὴ φύγητε μηδαμῇ.
ἀπταταί.
ὡ ξένε Κεφαλλήν, εἶθε σοῦ διαμπερὲς
στέρνων ἵκοιτ' ἀλγῆσις ἡδε. feu, papai.
papai μάλ' αὔεις. ὡ διπλοὶ στρατηλάται,
Ἀγάμεμνον, ὡ Μενέλαε, πῶς ἂν ἄντ' ἔμοι
τὸν ἵππον χρόνον τρέφοιτε τήνδε τὴν νόσον;
ὦμοι μοι.
I fear, my boy, you pray for what will not be,
for again this blood drips, a clotted oozing
from my depths, and I expect some new torment.
papai, pheu.
papai, ah my foot, what evils you work on me.
It creeps over,
it creeps over me, it is near. Ah me, the pain.
Know what do to! Do not run off from me.
attatai.
My Kephallenian friend, if only this paining,
piercing through the chest, might get you, pheu, papai.
papai, ah again! You two commanders-in-chief,
Agamemnon, Menelaos, I wish that instead of me,
you would nourish this disease for as long a time.
Ah me!
O death, death, why, when you are called forever,
each day this way, why do you never come?
My boy, my noble boy, take me and
burn me in that fire called the
Lemnian, my noble boy. I too once
thought such a deed was worthy to do to the son of Zeus
for which I got this weapon, which you are keeping safe.
What do you say, my son?
What do you say? Why are you silent? What are you thinking
of, my boy?

(782-805)

This fitful speech, in its poignant theatricality, is visible confirmation
of all that has been said about the hero's sickness. It powerfully
demonstrates the association in Philoktetes' mind between the pain of his wound and the fierce enmity which he feels toward the Greeks who have left him to suffer it alone. His insistence on calling Neoptolemos "son" or "boy" (τέκνον, παις), interspersing these terms of endearment among his groans and fragmented sentences, reveals the bond which he assumes to exist between them: he is to fill the moral vacuum left in the youth's life by the death of Akhilleus and Neoptolemos is to render to him the filial tendance he was not able to give to his father. His plea to be cast in the fire consciously evokes the figure of Herakles: in such service of terminating the agonies of a hero, he won his bow.

The impact of the scene is not lost upon Neoptolemos. The long sufferings which he pitied and which the Choros admired, the remembrance of a departed heroic generation to which he is akin (Philoktetes reminds him of his nobility, γενναῖος 799), the cruelty of Odysseus and the Atreidai in whose hands he has become so pliant, and finally the duty inherent in the possessor of the bow—all these themes cause Neoptolemos to pause, to be unable to find an answer to Philoktetes' probing. When he does manage to respond, the sympathy which he so simply expresses, hints at the first turning point in his resolve:

47 Cf. Knox, The Heroic Temper, pp. 125-126, on the central meaning of the word γενναῖος for Neoptolemos' dilemma.
"I am in pain for a long time at the evils which afflict your heart" (805). The "evils" (μαχά) are more than the shooting pains of the wound; they embrace as well the shameless behavior of the Greeks toward the wounded Philoktetes, a shame in which Neoptolomos has participated. The youth pledges that he will remain while the disease passes in Philoktetes' sleep, restrains the hero who is about to do something drastic, and when the coma finally overtakes him, instructs the Choros to allow him to rest undisturbed.

The ensuing Choral Ode begins as a παιαν to Hypnos, the god of sleep, but soon turns to the temptation of Neoptolomos. They urge Neoptolomos to act quickly while the sleep has rendered Philoktetes helpless and insensate. They emphasize, despite the obvious passiveness of the sleeping hero, the need for stealth (λαθραίως 805) because "the sleepless sleep of all sick men/ is keen of sight" (847-848). Neoptolomos refuses on moral grounds: the bow is useless without the hero, as the gods have indicated; it is shameful to succeed through lies. So the sight of Philoktetes' sickness and the sympathy

48Here, as elsewhere, "evils" (μαχά), though specifically connected with the physical pains of his wound, carries the expanded connotations of all the torments, both physical and mental, which plague him. So, for example in 1.251; cf. Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 233.

which it inspires has revealed the latent nobility of Neoptolemos' character and undermined the evil stratagem of Odysseus.

Though Neoptolemos has come to realize that the hero must participate in the victory which the bow will bring, and though he recognizes the shame of succeeding in this task through deception, he has discovered no alternate avenue for achieving his goal. Committed to an attempt at salvaging his honor, Neoptolemos nervously faces the awakening Philoktetes, now jubilant that the young man has proved faithful to his promise. Neoptolemos' anxious attitude suggests that perhaps the bout of sickness has destroyed his resolve to bring the hero home, as it had discouraged others in the past:

οὐ δὴ σε δυσχέρεια τοῦ νοσήματος ἔπεισεν ὄστε μὴ μ’ ἀγείν ναῦτην ἔτη;

It isn't that the loathsomeness of my sickness has convinced you not to take me abord your ship?

(900-901)

But the loathing which Neoptolemos feels, is due to his abandonment of his true nature by complicity in Odysseus' lies. It is past the point where the suffering hero might respond to the true purpose of the visit, to cooperate in breaking the Trojan stalemate. His response to the revelation of the truth is vehement, carrying with it all the weight of a man who has been too many times betrayed and used. But
this time the abuse is different. It not only violates the sacred bonds
which have duplicitously been established and plunges the hero again into
desolation, but by depriving him of his bow—the instrument of his
crude conquest of his environment—it also wills his death. Philoktetes
does not allow Neoptolemos to escape this awareness: "Taking my bow,
you have robbed me of my life" (931); "... do not take away my life"
(933). Without the bow, his cave is no shelter, but a tomb; the birds
of the island are not his food, but his predators. The wound has once
again made him the victim of ruthless men with no shame; this time it
is all the more grievous because treachery masqueraded as an
innocent youth. Philoktetes begs Neoptolemos to reconsider. He is
not truly of the same evil nature as his seductive commanders, but
if he should choose to align himself with them, then may he feel the
same curse as they. The youth wavers, for he has felt compassion
for the hero:

embrèn oikos deinon empeptwne tis
ton d' andros ou vun prōton, allà kai palaì.

A terrible pity has fallen over me for this man
not just now, but a long time since.

(965–966)

Neoptolemos is not left to waver in his indecision, nor to decide
the matter on the basis of his honorable feeling, for Odysseus,
triumphant in the success of his masterplan, arrives to add insult
to injury. His haughty manner provokes a torrent of accusations from Philoktetes: Odysseus is a coward, a corrupter of decent youth, a villain who has come to refine his first abandonment by stealing his bow and therefore his life. This is Odysseus' true nature: "a man who has never had a healthy or free thought" (1006). This crucial accusation expands the latent irony of the entire dramatic situation. Odysseus (truly noble men having all died, he is the paragon of the Greek scoundrels who survive at Troy, cf. 398-460) has never had a healthy thought, but his sickness has aggravated the Philoktetes' sickness. Odysseus has never had a free thought, yet he has reduced Philoktetes to the condition of a slave (Philoktetes: "My father clearly begot me/ as a slave, not a free man." 995-996). This sickness and servitude is a sign of enormous moral contradiction: Odysseus whose mind is incapable of healthy thought, lives and prospers; while Philoktetes, unjustly used, finds his life is pain (1021), and a form of living death (1018). If the physical reality, by the god's grace, should ever reflect the moral corruption of his tormentors, then, says Philoktetes, "I could imagine that I had escaped my disease" (1044).

Odysseus' intervention and resumption of control over Neoptolemos' more noble instincts results in the abandonment of Philoktetes. The Choros is to keep him company for a last few moments before departure of the fleet. In a long series of exchanges between hero
and Choros, the contrasting positions of Philoktetes' inflexible will to meet his death in the isolation of the island and the Choros' verbalization of how he might pursue his own self-interest and be vindicated by changing his mind, are explored in counterpoint. Philoktetes does not answer their challenges, but offsets them with brooding on his own worsened condition. To the Choral assertions that Philoktetes' stubbornness is hampering his success (1095-1100), that they are not responsible for his treatment (1116-1121), and that perhaps Odysseus was simply following instructions from his superiors (1140-1145), Philoktetes meditates rather lyrically on his troubles. He renews and modifies the old themes of nature, abandonment, resentment, sickness, and death. The birds shall fly free, unthreatened by the bow; he shall waste in loneliness, without resource for sustenance; his vile deceiver now possesses a bow which before had been a sign of heroic righteousness; perhaps his former prey, the birds, shall exact vengeance on him by feeding on his helpless body. Finally, the Choros, taking the cue from the image of birds feeding on flesh, evoke a former image of the disease which has fed upon Philoktetes for nine years (cf. 311-313):

\begin{verbatim}
ἐλλὰ γνῶθι’, εὖ γνῶθι’ ἐπὶ σοὶ
κῆρα τάνδ’ ἀποφεύγειν.
οὐκτρὰ γὰρ βόσκειν, ἀδανὸς δ’
ἐχειν μυρίον ἀχθος ὑ ἔνυνοικεί.
\end{verbatim}
Know this and know it well, you have the means to escape this blight, which pitifully feeds on you, ignorant of how to check ten thousand agonies that dwell with it.

(1165-1169)

The Choros' remark sparks the old pains within the hero (1170), as he sees that their persuasion is geared to bring him to Troy, the very thought of which he loathes. This renewal of the pain of trickery which he had just experienced from Neoptolemos—though in the end it was spurred by honorable interests—triggers the physical torment of the wound in his foot, and the tormented pleas for the Choros not to abandon him in his suffering. The pain is so extreme that he begs them to hack his body to pieces, for he is bent on death (1207-1209). In his stormy speech, he intertwines these twin grievances of his pain-ridden body and the attempt to bear him off to Troy. They are the old evils, surfacing again, to render him passive and to prey upon his helplessness. To the hero, the only resolution of his dilemma is to seek death.

The scene is interrupted by the reappearance of Odysseus and Neoptolemos in the midst of an argument on the morality of their acquisition of the bow. When the impasse reaches the point of violence, Odysseus backs off with a contemptuous threat to return with an avenging army and exits. Face to face with the hero whom he has shamefully deceived, Neoptolemos attempts to repair the
damage by dealing honestly with him. A prerequisite of honest talk, however, is the restoration of the bow; a quick action scene follows in which Odysseus shows himself again as a coward and Neoptolemos prevents Philoktetes from rash action. The son of Akhilleus still hopes to be able to persuade the hero that he should come to Troy and be the instrument of its destruction. To that purpose, he stresses two things: the cure of his disease which awaits him at the hands of the Asklepiadai; and the remedy of his isolated obscurity by the achievement of heroic glory. With regard to the first claim, Neoptolemos asserts that the wound was the result of some divine chance, an inadvertent violation of the goddess Chryse's temple precinct. But if the disease was the result of chance, its cure must

50 Whether or not cure was explicit in the prophecy of Helenos is not definitely stated within the play. If is, of course, implicit in the deeds which Philoktetes is destined to perform. What is significant here, is the dramatic choice of Neoptolemos to stress cure as the most persuasive argument for coming to Troy willingly. On this point, cf. Knox, The Heroic Temper, p. 136. Conflicting interpretations of the prophecy of Helenos itself are offered by A. E. Hinds, "The Prophecy of Helenos in Sophocles' Philoktetes," CO XVII (1966), pp. 233-250 and David B. Robinson, CO XIX (1969), 34-56.

51 The phrase ἐν θείαις τύχης (1326), "by divine chance," is given far too much weight by Musurillo, The Light and the Darkness, p. 120: "Thus the snake-bite in the play is truly a preternatural wound . . . a divine visitation, and the serpent, the 'deadly foe' that has crippled him (631-632), represents the power of the gods." If anything, it indicates the disinterest of the gods, the fact that Philoktetes' affliction is not deserved. The inadvertent violation of a precinct of Chryse does not "explain" the action, but rather signals that no explanation is to be found in a past divine grievance against the hero. In any case, Philoktetes himself discounts this divine backdrop to his wound, as others have pointed out; cf. Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 233, and Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 303.
proceed from conscious choice—he must will it (ἐξων 1332) by coming to Troy. This information, continues Neoptolemos, was related by the seer Helenos under forfeit of his life; and it is to happen within the year. The glory which awaits him in Troy is enhanced by the promise of cure:

καλὴ γὰρ ἡ πίντησις, Ἡλλήνων ἕνα κριθέντ' ἄριστον, τούτο μὲν παϊωνίας ἐς χείρας ἐλθεῖν, εἶτα τὴν πολύστονον Τροίαν ἐλόντα κλέος ὑπέρτατον λαβεῖν.

For this is further noble gain, that judged alone of the Greeks to be best, you come into healing hands, then, capturing Troy the lamentable, you get a towering fame.

(1344-1347)

Philoktetes' dilemma is enormous, for this is the promise of solving both his evils: the excruciating pain of his wound, and the cruel oblivion of his Lemnian isolation. As he sees it, however, he risks future exploitation by those who have shown him callous treatment in the past (1358-1361). On this very point, a lie of Neoptolemos comes to the surface to reinforce Philoktetes' stubbornness: Had not the Greeks abused the youth in the matter of his father's armor? So Philoktetes insists that the promise to convey him home be fulfilled. He is suspicious of leaving himself open to yet another entrapment, to give unwilling cause for triumph to the Atreidai. Neoptolemos is incredulous that he would reject the invitation to come to "those
who shall stop the pain/ of your ulcerous foot and save you from your sickness" (1378-1379). But Philoktetes is so hardened that he will not accept such healing, assuming that it be real, if its precondition is that he come to Troy. He will not be made the means for the further triumph of those who discarded him so long ago. If the alternative is agony and anonymity, so be it: "Let me suffer what I must suffer" (1397). In accepting his wound, he accepts as well responsibility for the young man who has at last shown true nobility; should Odysseus attempt to punish him, Philoktetes says, "I shall be there" (1405). These are the first words in the play where Philoktetes is allowed a measure of control over and obligation for others. They are the self-confident words of a man who, at last, has won the moral triumph.

In terms of heroic psychology, the play is over with this agreement to depart, not for Troy, but for home. The hero has endured his trials, resisted the assaults of deceit, persuasion, and force. His resolve not to allow himself to be further abused, but to accept death if he must, is the severe logic of tragic victory. He has chosen the suffering of his disease and the obscurity of his homeland in order to preserve his dignity. His choice is natural, reasonable, and proud. 52 But it is also useless in the wider sense, a sense

52Others have seen culpability in Philoktetes' refusal to embark for Troy. Biggs, "The Disease Theme," p. 234, stresses that the refusal of cure is a kind of "ego-centric 'escapism.'" Philip
that the audience who knows of the eventual downfall of Troy and the
glorious achievements of Philoktetes would recognize. The prophecy
of Helenos is true forecast of the hero's future potential. He must
will it, however, and for him to will it, it is necessary that it be
removed from the tainted context of the cowardly self-interests of the
Greek leadership. Stripped of the villainy of petty men, the will to
health and fame is right for Philoktetes: he should be cured, for he
has suffered innocently and fouly; he should gain glory, for he is a
man of proven nobility and tenacity. The appearance of Herakles is
appropriate in this regard, for it gives Philoktetes an ideal against
which to measure himself; 53 Odysseus, the paragon of shamelessness,

Whaley Harsh, "The Role of the Bow in the Philoctetes of Sophocles,"
AJPh LXXX (1960), pp. 408-414, calls it "irrational and perverse"
in the light of the engagement as a champion of civilized society which
the bow symbolizes. This view has greater validity if the refusal is
seen as the prelude to Herakles' appearance. If, however, the
refusal is the logical climax of the play, a supreme test of the heroic
will in opposition to the evil values of the Greeks at Troy, then
Sophocles has crafted a paradox of almost unbearable tension: to
maintain his heroic identity, Philoktetes must refuse his heroic
potential. His wound, in this case, is not escapism, but the
opposite--a commitment to endure rather than win health and fame

53Whitman, Sophocles, p. 188, remarks "The appearance of
Heracles symbolizes the heroic essence at liberty to act for itself
and its friend; it is the epiphany of arete." Psychologically,
Herakles is an extension of Philoktetes' heroism, purchased at the
price of great πΟΔΟΣ (cf. 1419), and now free to will his own glory
before men.
and Neoptolemos, the confused and raw recruit, had only served as examples of lesser probity and accomplishment, against which Philoktetes could contrast his own high standards and his considerable self-awareness. Herakles embodies the challenges implicit in the bow, the very symbol of Philoktetes' survival and life. The bow is for great deeds and reputation among men. Herakles' instructions add nothing new to the promises which others have given to Philoktetes to

ελθὼν δὲ σὺν τῇδ' ἀνδρὶ πρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν
πόλισμα πρῶτον μὲν νόσου παύσῃ λυγρᾶς,
ἀρετῇ τε πρῶτος ἐκκριθεὶς στρατεύματος, ὅν
Πάριν μὲν, δὲ τῶνδ' ἄρτιος κακῶν ἔφυ, ὅς,
tοξόσι τοῖς ἐμοὶ σι νοσφεῖς βίου,
πέρσεις τε Τροίαν...
tοξόσι τοῖς ἐμοὶ σι νοσφεῖς βίου,
πέρσεις τε Τροίαν...

Going with this man to the citadel of Troy, you shall be relieved of your dread sickness, then, chosen as first among the army in prowess, you shall slay with my bow, Paris who was the cause of these evils, you shall sack Troy . . .

(1423-1428)

ἕγω δ' Ἀσκληπιὸν
παυστῆρα πέμψω σης νόσου πρὸς "Ἰλιον.

. . . I shall send Asklepios to Troy to be the reliever of your disease.

(1437-1438)
The cure of his physical sickness is inextricably bound to the resolution of his obscurity among men. No longer victim, but vanquisher, Philoktetes is the only Sophoklean hero to find a solution to his tragic predicament. His future glory and cure belong not to the realm of ordinary men, but the preternatural greatness of demi-gods. Herakles and Asklepios symbolize possibilities of righteous men winning through to the transcendency of a superhuman grandeur. Philoktetes readily accepts the personal challenge of activating these promises. The play has demonstrated that during his severest testing, the hero did not abandon a sort of moral health and victory which confounded the ambition of his tormentors.

The disease imagery of the Philoktetes is straightforward and powerful. From the beginning to the end of the drama, it never loses its direct, literal connection with the agony of the hero's wound. Two full scenes are built about the excruciating pain which drives Philoktetes close to the brink of destruction. In the poetic handling of the imagery, it acquires much larger scope that the purely pathetic suffering of a man crushed by pain. First, the wound presents such a drastic predicament because it is associated with loneliness and helplessness. The sick man, left alone, is the poignant figure not only of what he must personally endure, but of the callousness of those who have deserted him. The wound, then, represents a moral judgment of his would-be abductors, rather than some inherent failure.
of the hero himself. In fact, the entire problem of Philoktetes' "responsibility" for his wound is ignored as non-existent. Second, within his Lemnian isolation, the disease is placed in counterbalance with the bow: One works to consume him, the other to sustain his life. The hero is in equilibrium between these forces of death and life, and it is at the cost of great personal torment that he is able to maintain such a precarious stalemate. What springs the action is the sudden desirability of the bow to break the stand-off at Troy. Third, even the pathetic nature of Philoktetes' sickness is effective, since it works upon Neoptolemos' noble instincts of pity and sympathy, assisting him in his personal moral struggle. Finally, the disease is a complex symbol of the quality of Philoktetes' success. The same obdurate force of will which kept him alive on Lemnos, leads him to prefer his sickness to the triumph of those who aggravated it. This acceptance of the personal meaning of the disease—that which measures his moral superiority over his unheroic enemies—is paradoxically the pre-condition of his will to be cured. His final choice of cure, and of vindication of his grievances, is possible only in the light of his preservation of his inviolable self at the expense of his often violated body. His refusal to act for his cure when Neoptolemos suggests it, signals the most extreme formulation of his heroism. His ready acquiescence to Herakles' commands is an assertion of his rightful claim to both physical health and glory among
men. The disease is the vehicle through which Philoktetes attains a consciousness of his own heroism. Once that has happened, Philoktetes, alone of the Sophoklean heroes, finds also a cure.

Oidipous at Kolonos

The Oidipous at Kolonos not only completes the implicit prophecies of the close of Oidipous Tyrannos, but in Knox's words:

The play is a last will and testament. All the great themes of the earlier plays recur; it is as if Sophocles were summing up a lifetime of thought and feeling in this demonic work of his old age.

In its evocation of images, Sophocles retraces the familiar tragic language not to build an independent image pattern within the play, but as a postscript to its prior elaboration. Thus Shields, in exploring sight and blindness imagery, finds the Oidipous at Kolonos to be "imaginatively and conceptually" of a piece with Antigone and Oidipous Tyrannos. This accounts for the presence of the disease image within the play. It is not artistically independent; it is not "patterned" to support the movement of the plot. Rather, it is a poetic reminiscence of its use in Oidipous Tyrannos, a vehicle for conjuring up the severe ethical and cosmic associations that it gathered there.

54 The Heroic Temper, p. 144.

In the earlier Theban play, Oidipous, blind but "seeing" that he is in fact the Disease from which he suffers as well as the only doctor to his disease, forecasts that no disease shall destroy him, that he is "saved" for something terrible (O. T. 1455-1457). The Oidipous at Kolonos fulfills that self-prophecy by examining the circumstances whereby the hero eludes disease at the end and achieves a powerful, awesome apotheosis.

The first instance in which the disease image is recalled is in the connotation which was exposed as its radical meaning in Oidipous Tyrannos--incest and patricide. As the Choros probe the old man for details of his story, first about his incest with his mother, and then of the murder of Laios, Oidipous exclaims: "Ah! You have struck/ a second blow, disease upon disease" (543-544). Though he had in fact brought upon himself weakness, pain, and a shameful reputation for these actions--"disease" in a moral sense which evokes guilt and agonizing retribution--he is convinced in this play of the innocence of his deeds. He has revised his self-condemnation through years of sightless exile. "I have come," he says, "pure (καθαρός) before the law (548)." For Oidipous to die without disease, he must demonstrate unequivocally that he bears no moral blight for his notorious past, but that his present terrible circumstances are the prelude to a death which will transform his existence to something greater, not simply terminate an unendurable sickness. This demon-
stration--of a strange righteousness, a confident self-awareness, and a powerful command over those who seek to use him for their private purposes--is the heroic thesis of the play. In this first reference to the imagery of disease, Oidipous reverses its former emphasis: the weight of the image falls upon patricide, rather than incest. This reversal is of great significance, for shortly thereafter, in his first exchange with Theseus, Oidipous points out that his misery now is not grounded in any former crimes, but in the abuse which his own sons now heap upon him:

Θη. τί γὰρ τὸ μεῖζον ἢ κατ' ἀνθρωπον νοσεῖς; 
Οἰ. οὔτως ἔχει μοι· γῆς ἐμῆς ἀπελάθην πρὸς τῶν ἐμαυτοῦ ὁπερμάτων· ἔστιν δέ μοι πάλιν κατελθεῖν μήποθ', ὡς πατροκτόνῳ.

THESEUS. What then is this disease, beyond the human norm?

OIDIPOUS. Thus it is with me--I have been driven from my land at the hands of my very own offspring. I am not allowed ever again to return, as being a patricide.

(598-601)

ὡς πατροκτόνῳ, "as being a patricide" shifts emphasis by suggesting that this is the allegation of his sons, not an admission of guilt on his part. Oidipous does not deny the fact that he killed his father, but rather claims that it ought not to be regarded as a disease which he culpably incurred. Instead, the sickness from which he suffers now, in the twilight of his life, is the torment of exile imposed upon him by his own sons. In exiling their father by conscious choice, their
crime is a vicious assault against their father, something which far exceeds in reprehensibility his unwitting slaying of Laios in a lonely act of self-defense. Oidipous transfers to his sons the guilt which he refuses any longer to bear for himself. They have caused the disease of their father's exile.

In his confrontation with Kreon, Oidipous returns to the disease image to characterize his past. Kreon makes a specious appeal to Oidipous' public nature to return as a token of good fortune to Eteokles' cause, not actually to Theban soil, but to the control of a Theban faction. Oidipous, who while tyrannos had stressed his own public side only to be foiled by the mystery of his private self, reacts with a taunt:

πρόσθεν τε γάρ με τοῖς οικείοις κακοῖς νοσοῦν, ὅτι ἂν μοι τέρψις ἔκπεσεῖν χθονός, οὐκ ἦθελες θέλοντι προσθέσθαι χάριν.

Before, when I was so very sick with my personal troubles, when it would have been a pleasure to leave the land, you did not wish to give the favor I wished to have.

(765-767)

As Oidipous' political dilemma years before led straight to the paradox of his birth, so now his refusal to attempt to solve the social ills over which he feels no responsibility is based on the utter privacy of the sickness rooted in his very nature (his disturbed relationship with his parents).
It was in the nature of Oidipous, while he was the self-discovering tyrannos, to come to recognize the irremediable conflicts of his inner self. He could not "solve" himself, because he was himself the Disease.

Now at Kolonos, the struggle of brother against brother is played against the patricidal struggle for the possession of the father. Polyneikes' plea that "there are cures (ἀνηρ) for our mistakes" (1269-1270) is met with curses from the father.

The strange apotheosis of Oidipous from the man who was more than a man because of his peculiarly polluted being fulfills that mysterious self-prophecy with which the Oidipous Tyrannos had concluded: he shall pass on in some terrifying event, untouched by disease. The Messenger echoes and confirms that prophecy:

\[
\text{άνήρ γὰρ οὗ στενακτὸς οὐδὲ σὺν νόσοις}
\text{ἀλγεινὸς ἔξεπέμπτ', ἄλλ' εἰ τις βροτῶν}
\text{θαυμαστός.}
\]

For the man passed away, not lamented, not pained with disease, but as wonderfully as any man ever has passed on.

(1663-1665)

The potent complexity of the disease imagery within the Oidipous Tyrannos, the bitter trauma of self-discovery and remorse for involuntary crimes, has led the blind wayfarer years later to the grove of the Furies at Kolonos. There, his passage from this earth
is "without sicknesses" for unlike Polybos, Iokaste, or any of his children, his nature is "beyond the human norm."

The final "cure" of Oidipous' long sufferings and his painful exile, the release which he finally attains, is far beyond that of Philoktetes. Philoktetes was, in the end, restored to the activity and esteem so long denied him; his disease passed to allow his latent heroic self to emerge and assert his right to live. But Oidipous is not simply cured—for at the root of his sickness were the twisted facts of his birth, incest, and paternity—rather, he is transformed. He is relieved of his great torments not through choosing his rightful place in the society of men, as does Philoktetes, but through the strange and awesome grace of the gods who summon him to their presence.

In Oidipous at Kolonos, the last will and testament of Sophokles' career, the playwright seems to have found at last a solution to the incurable heroic will which he so terrifyingly exposed in Oidipous Tyrannos and came within a hair's breadth of resolving in Philoktetes. Ultimately the cure for agonized heroic existence lies in a redemptive transformation of indescribable mystery and power.

Conclusion

Disease imagery is significant in six of the extant Sophoklean tragedies. There is no pattern of the image in Elektra, only a single metaphor of "healing" (νασις) at line 876. But in the other
plays of Sophokles, the development of the image is powerful and complex.

Disease imagery within _Aias_ surrounds the dilemma of the shamed hero. Disease is expressed physically in his wild madness which is itself the symbol of the interior torment of his distressed personality. The symptomatic exposure of his disease (the slaughter of animals), the recognition of its critical nature, the incurability of his clash with the humans about him, lead to his suicide as the single satisfactory remedy for his ills. His death is a cool and deliberate surgery, and through it he achieves a health of sorts, an inviolability from a world grown unendurable. The image reflects the tragic action of heroic will in desperate plight.

In _Antigone_, disease signals the moral vacuum of Kreon's rule which violates just boundaries of life and death. The corpse of Polyneikes embodies an infectious corrosion within civilized society when human art fails to abide by higher norms. The disproportion of Kreon's despotism is morally evaluated through the disease image as death-dealing and perverse. Against this environment of a disturbed moral order, Antigone's actions are judged--for all their unbending severity--as profoundly righteous.

The Herakles of _Women of Trachis_ is presented as an extraordinarily physical hero, emphasized by the memories of his massive works of
strength and his great appetite for love. The disease image which runs through the play expresses the disproportionate nature of Herakles' heroism, as it sets in motion an inexorable and unforeseen chain of disastrous actions. Deianeira's irony—that in attempting a cure, she brings about the death of her man and herself—pathetically parallels the struggle with the gnawing sickness that wrecks the hero's body on Mt. Oite. The morbid processes set loose to work their ruin in Women of Trachis are ultimately seen as reflections of forces beyond human control or sympathy, symbolized in the seductive Aphrodite and the errant Zeus. Death for both Herakles and Deianeira is a negative and despondent cure; it stops the pain, as it saps the life.

In Oidipous Tyrannos, disease, externalized in the plague at Thebes, is a dominant image through which the complex irony of Oidipous' true self emerges. As patient, the hero is the perfect sufferer of the collective grief of his people; as doctor, he is relentless in his inquiry into the nature, symptoms, and causes of such suffering. This tension between the unendurable pain and the healer who must root it out, leads Oidipous from the responsibilities of his public side, to the recognition of his terrifying personal depth. His nature is blighted, infectious, an evil and polluted thing. He is himself the disease from which he suffers and sickness which he
seeks to cure. This irony is the tragic equation itself, and through it are merged the pathos, moral force, and inexorable momentum of the image of the incurable disease.

In Philoktetes, both the symbolic wound of the hero, movingly enacted in two scenes of violent pain, and the language of disease imagery explore the complex workings of heroic dilemma. Philoktetes' physical sufferings emphasize the vicious nature of his tormentors; his will to survive stands in forceful counterpoint to their plot to abuse and destroy. The virulence of the disease, its loneliness and helplessness, strike a respondent chord of sympathy in the inexperienced nobility of Neoptolemos. The hero's will to be cured, the event upon which his health and future fame depend, is undercut by contamination of amoral men who seek to abuse his heroism for their self advantage. Thus, Philoktetes' resistance to cure becomes ironically the measure of his strength of will to be heroic. In the end, Herakles provides the model for action which can transcend the taint of non-heroic men, allowing Philoktetes to act to his own advantage. The health which he shall attain at Troy is none other than the recognition among men of his true heroic nature, symbolized in the cure of bitter sickness.

The Oidipous at Kolonos echoes the disease imagery of Oidipous Tyrannos. The hero's ultimate release from the long sickness of
his blighted nature is found not among the company of men, but by winning through to some grandeur beyond human norms. The resistance of the old Oidipous to assaults from friends, enemies, and children reveals, through the grace of the gods, a final justification for the tormented endurance of the heroic nature.

Sophokles portrays the tragic predicament at the moment when the full burden of the tension between moral choice and annihilation confronts the consciousness of a single human being. The interaction of environment (the tragic event, the wills of others) with particular nature (the character of the hero) gives Sophoklean drama its severe focus: an essential heroism, a triumphant dignity of sorts, achieved through the assertion of an individual's identity in the face of his imminent destruction. To strengthen the poignancy of this irreducible conflict, Sophokles makes frequent use of symbolic pain, the workings of disease enacted with bitter pathos. Disease imagery functions as supportive not only of the vast moral ambiguities of heroic action, but also as a model of the strangely self-destructive process of the heroic will in conflict with the world about it.
CONCLUSION

The patterns of disease imagery which have been examined in this dissertation have been found to have complex significance for the meaning of tragic action in each play in which the image is developed. It is important to recognize that disease imagery, and imagery in general, is but one part of the overall structuring of words and events which comprise a tragic drama. This study has focused on a component of compelling interest because of its prominence in the extant plays of Aischylos and Sophokles. Though the analysis of an image tends of necessity toward overemphasis, such a study can enhance our understanding of the workings of drama, if placed in the perspective of the play as a whole.

In my exploration of the disease image, I have suggested three dimensions--the pathetic, the moral, and the dynamic--through which it connects the concept and experience of human sickness with the meaning of events on stage.

The pathetic dimension is employed by both playwrights to evoke the emotional context in which the action is being worked. The emotional effects vary among the plays, from the terrifying suddenness
and suspense of recurrent disease which lurks ominously in the Oresteia, to the cruel loneliness and stubborn survival implicit in the symbol of Philoktetes' diseased foot. Aischylos repeats the image in progressively more sinister contexts to build a general backdrop of fear of some terrible outcome, and sympathy for those human entrapped in the expanding mesh of disease. Sophokles exploits the symbolic possibilities of the image to a greater extent, expressing the moral and psychological anguish of the hero through physical pain and sickness.

Both playwrights explore the moral dimension of the disease image. Disease evaluates the action, locating the causes of conflict in wrongs done. The struggle for health is an attempt to find purgation from such wrongs, to attain a moral rectitude which will relieve the pain. In Aischylos, the moral aspect of disease causes it to be imagined as a function of Justice, a bitter symbol of fragmentation, disproportion, and disharmony. Disease is the presence of evil, objectively existing. In Aischylean terms, the only possible cure is that which comes from a right order in a community of men which mirrors the larger order of the kosmos. Sophokles, on the other hand, presents the heroic personality as by nature disproportionate. The disease image evaluates the moral ambiguities inherent in the heroic will. The social realm is more likely to be the cause of the hero's
sickness than the context in which he might find a cure. The
restoration of the hero to health is rarely achieved in Sophoklean
drama; the hero often sees the moral implications of disease and
health differently from the more conventional wisdom of those people
about him. Death and ruin are more likely the outcome of this
sickness; cure comes only in the few instances where the heroic
will can align itself with some higher power.

The dynamic tension of the disease image is fundamentally
dramatic, seeing in the course of human sickness a parallel for the
progress of tragic action. In Aischylos' only extant trilogy, the
Oresteia, the image is developed through all three plays. The
alternation of release from and recurrence of the disease is
patterned against the widening cycle of violence, until the social
order is established as a secure foundation for healthy existence.
In Sophokles, the image reflects the interaction of the heroic nature
with the tragic event. In this deadly conflict, symptoms are described
in detail as evidence of the nature of the dilemma, the crisis is
awaited, and death or health is the eventual outcome.

Each playwright employs the disease image to support a
characteristic vision. For Aischylos, disease is rooted in the
nature of things and is resolved only through the emergence of a
just order. For Sophokles, disease is rooted in the nature of the
hero; its resolution is far more problematic. In his earlier plays,
death gives a certain stability to the unconquered heroic will and is a release of sorts from the pain of the hero's existence. But in Philoktetes and Oidipous at Kolonos, Sophokles seems finally to have discovered a formula for cure in the affinity of the heroic personality with a realm beyond the human norm. Aristotle's metaphor of the incurability of tragic action (Poetics 1453b 35) seems to reflect the problem with which both Aischylos and Sophokles struggled and which each attempted to resolve through the image of disease.

All men in their own time and way have experienced disease and the threat which it poses to their continued existence. The pain, anxiety, and fear of human sickness stir the most fundamental emotions and awareness. The frequency and care with which Aischylos and Sophokles developed the image in their poetry suggests a radical similarity between the nature of disease and the very nature of tragic action.
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