



C21st Adaptations & (Re)creating Meaning

Dr Eleanor OKell

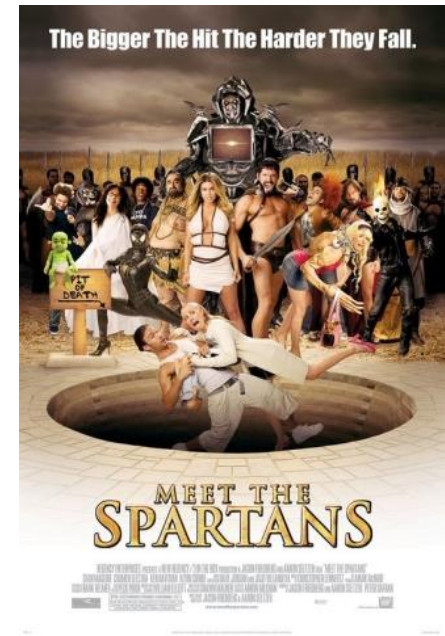
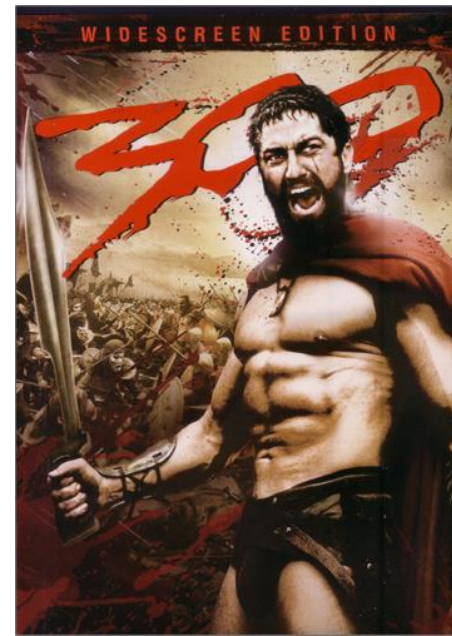
Classics Honorary Research Associate

Sophocles, *Trachiniae*
/ *Women of Trachis* (462-413BC)

No getting away from... Hyllus and Iole

They marry and become the ancestors of the Heraclidae (Herodotus 9.28; Thucydides 1.9) and the great-grandparents of Aristodemus, under whose rule the Spartans settle in Sparta (Herodotus 6.52).

No Hyllus & Iole,
no Sparta.
No Sparta –
no Helen of Troy,
no 300!



Sophocles, *Trachiniae* **/ *Women of Trachis* (462-413BC)**

‘has not had anywhere near the popularity, as measured either by re-performance or adaptation, of the other extant works of Sophocles’

(B. Levett, *Women of Trachis*, London, 2004: 116)

Why?

12/15-strong singing and dancing chorus
of Women of Trachis.

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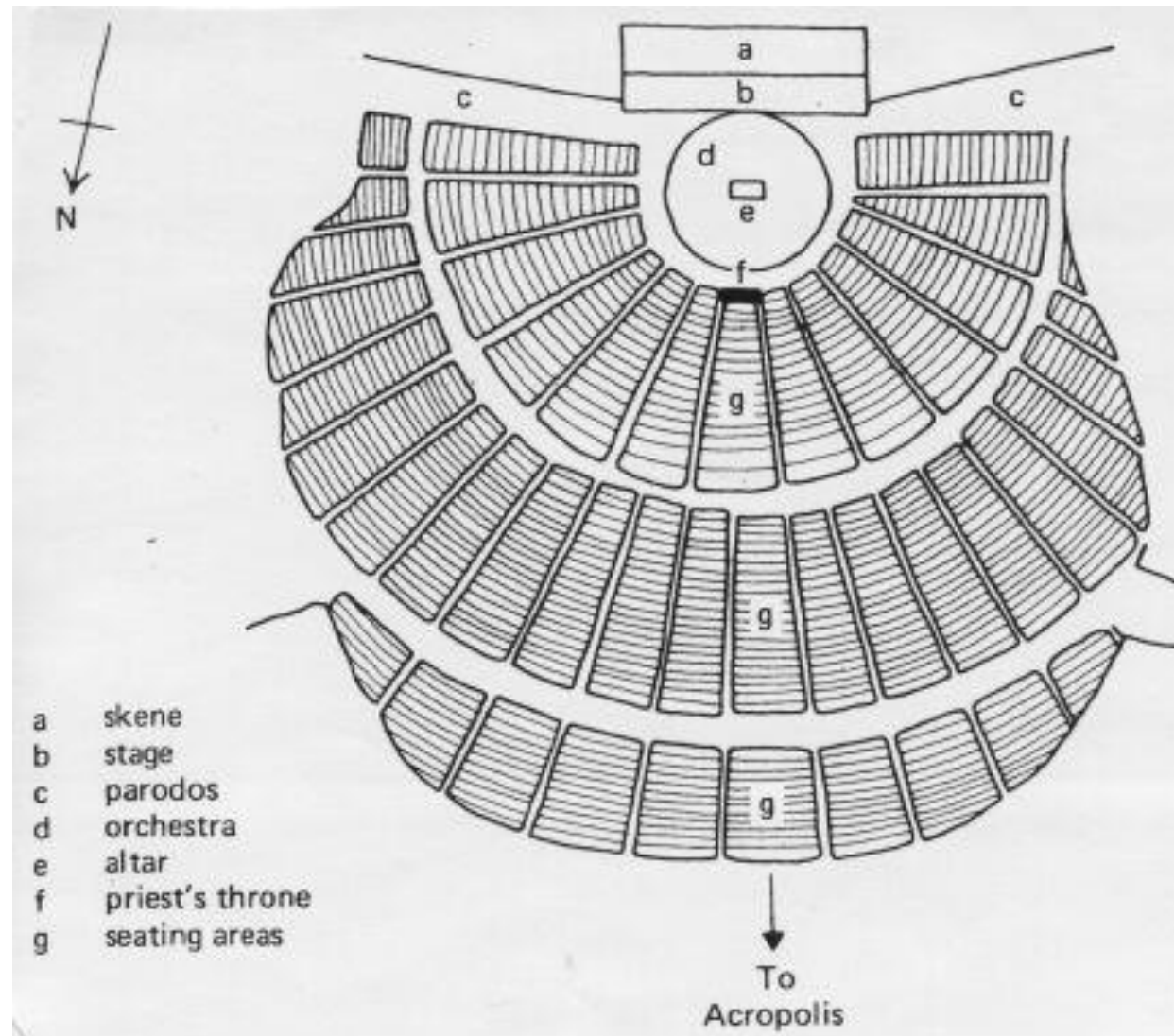
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Plan of the fifth century Theatre of Dionysus in Athens



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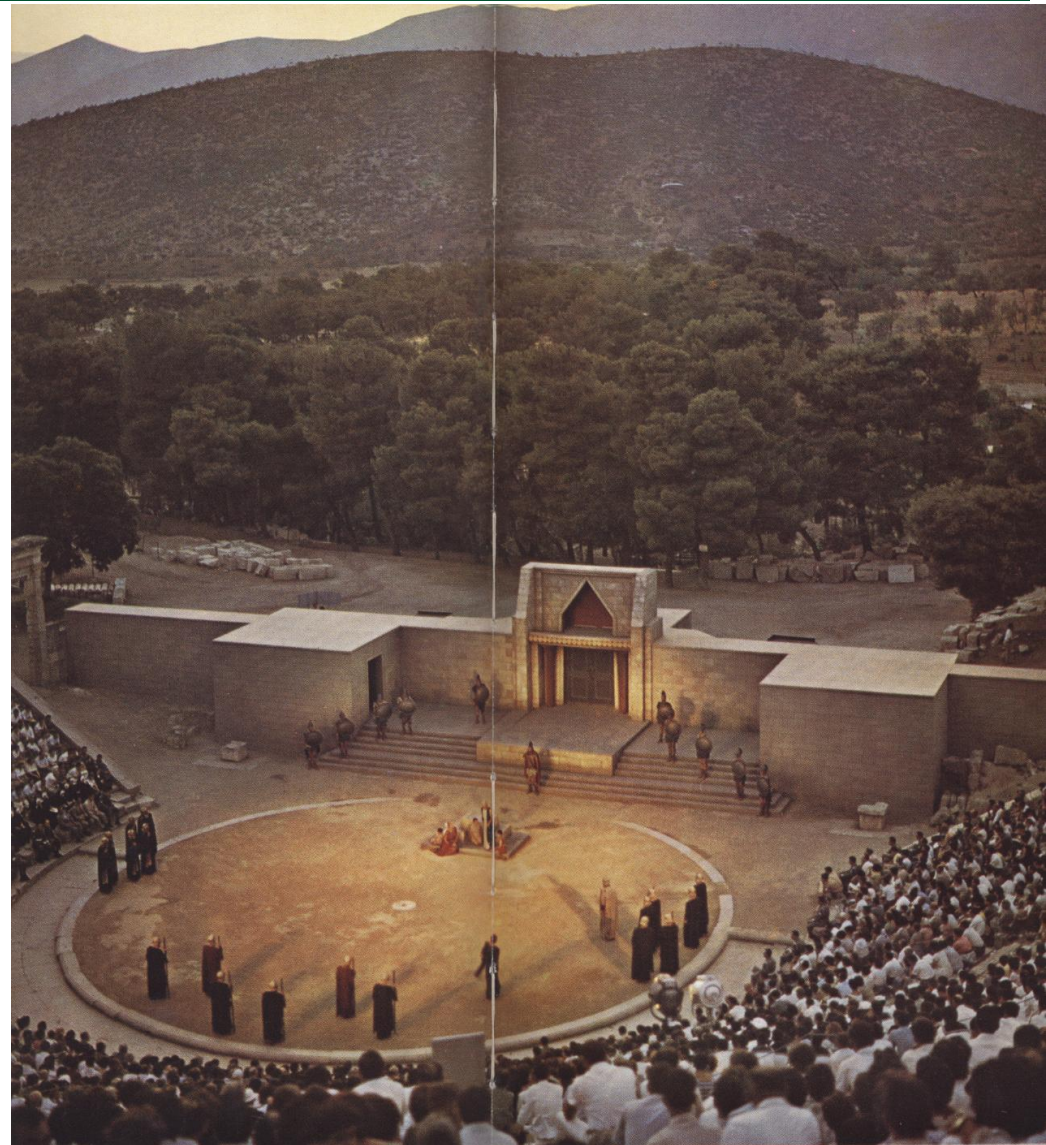


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Annual
Hellenic
Festival of
ancient
drama at
Epidauros.

Sophocles'
Trachiniae
last
performed
here in
modern
Greek in
2004.



Why?

In performance Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is half Deianeira (Heracles' wife) and half Heracles (Levett, 2004: 36).

King's College London Department of Classics

SOPHOCLES
TRACHINIAE
In the original Greek

LOVERS HEROES MURDER



GREEK PLAY 2007
DIRECTED BY CAROLINE FRIES

7 FEB	3PM/7.30PM
8 FEB	7.30PM
9 FEB	3PM/7.30PM

GREENWOOD THEATRE
55 WESTON STREET
SE1 3RA, LONDON BRIDGE

TICKETS: £8/concessions £5
GREEKPLAY@KCL.AC.UK/020 7848 2399

London Festival of Greek Drama 2007

Trachiniae presents a fusion of Sophocles Greek tragedy with works of English literature to bring the ancient play and its language alive for a modern audience. Heracles, returning from his heroic adventures, has brought home a new wife — Iole. His first wife, Deianeira, sees her position endangered, and decides to win him back with a potion which she erroneously considers to be a love charm... Deianeira's struggle for love and self-identity collides with the egocentric and remote nature of her hero-husband, and their marriage eventually spirals into a mutually destructive relationship. Both separately fight against the inevitable while their world collapses around them.

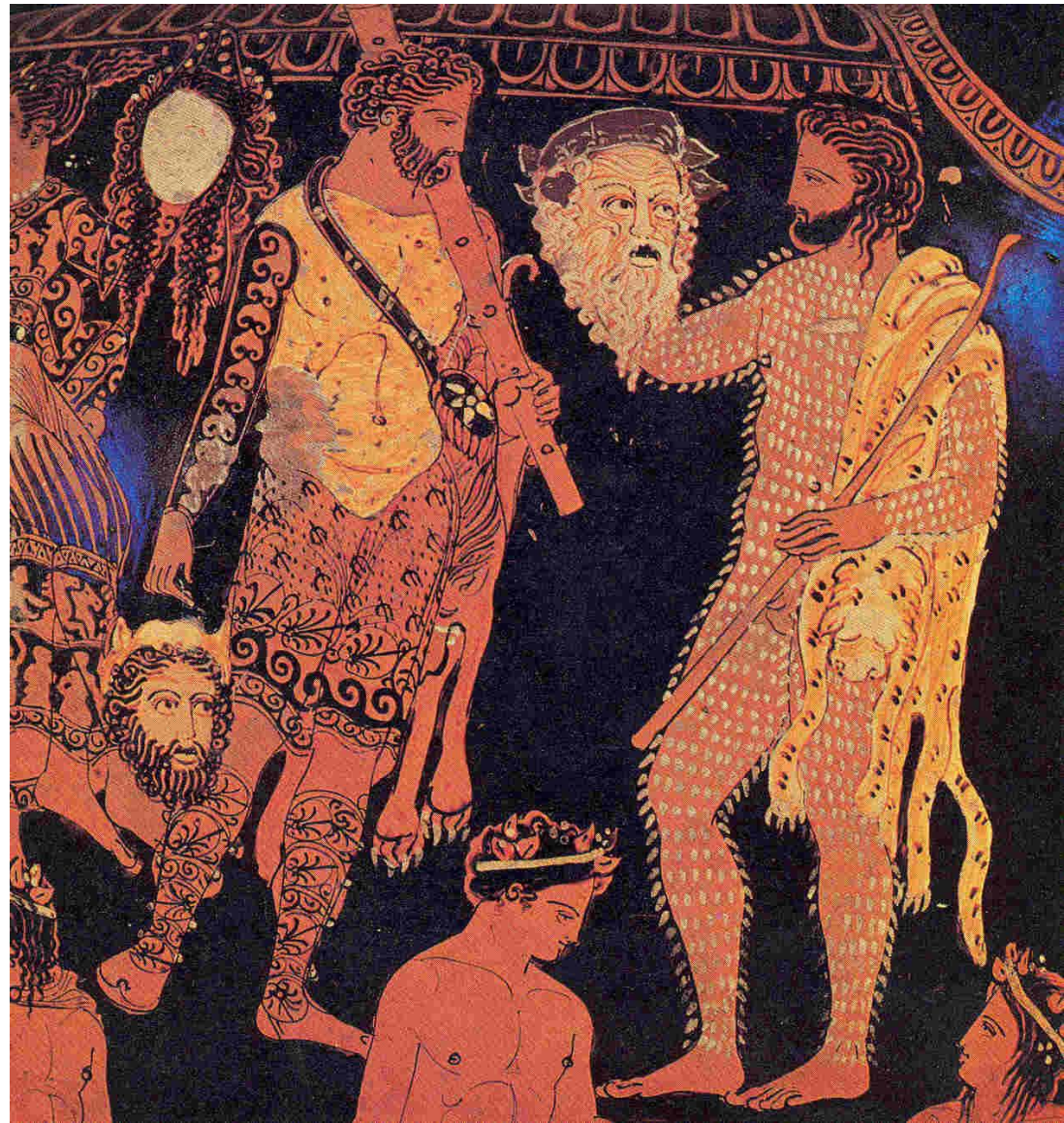
The two leads are fascinating and rich with substance, complexity and conflicts. The set up of these two great titans consequently creates a promise that in the climax we will see them meet face to face. It's what you want to see - the titans bouncing off each other, then put in a bag with the strings tied up, to see who comes out on top. But this never happens...

Two dots crying out to each other in the night, from the opposite halves of the play, with minor characters carrying messages back and forth. But without the direct connection of the obligatory scene, or at least the haunting memory of an evocative death scene; without either of these or anything else of equal power, it makes you feel cheated. It makes you wonder if they had fixed the fundamental flaws, just how good the play could have been. **(Konrad McCarthy, April 2005 for *vibewire*)**

Heracles (actor in full tragic costume, holding a club and a mask with Heracles' iconic lion skin headgear) among the cast of a satyr play.

Detail from Attic red-figure volute krater ('The Pronomos Vase'); end of 5th century BC;

Naples 81673 (H3240)





The Lion



The Hydra



The Hind



The Boar



The Stables



The Birds



The Bull



The Horses



The Belt



The Cattle



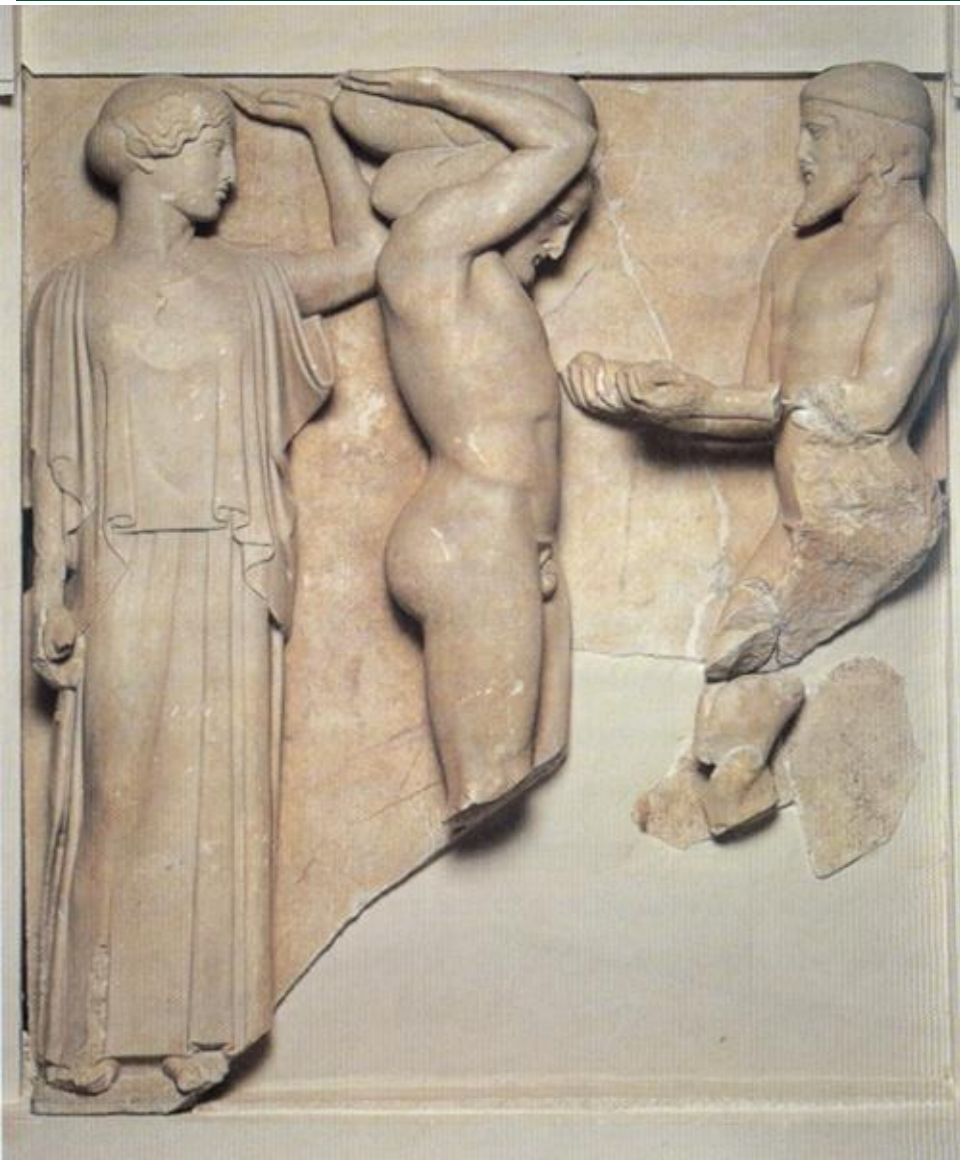
The Apples



Cerberus



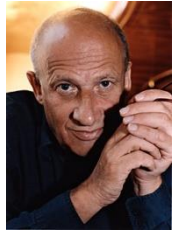
**Heracles’
‘Twelve’ Labours
span the known
Greek world**



Heracles holding the world on his shoulders, while Atlas (relieved of the duty) fetches him the Golden Apples of the Hesperides.

Metope from the temple of Zeus at Olympia,
c. 460 BC

George Frederick **Handel**, *Hercules* (1744)
with libretto by Rev. Thomas Broughton



Directed by Luc Bondy (April and December 2004)

Martin **Crimp**, *Cruel and Tender* (2004)



First directed by Luc Bondy (May-December 2004)

The Wife of Heracles (2010)



First directed by George **Rodosthenous** (May 2010)

Three Aspects

1) The Titles

2) The Substance given to Heracles that wounds him horribly

3) A Sophoclean theme identified by adapters

Titles

[Sophocles'] Trachiniae

[Sophocles'] Women of Trachis

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Titles

Hercules

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Handel's *Hercules* at the
Opéra Garnier.

Dir. Luc Bondy, 2004

Photos: Eric Mahoudeau
and Elisabeth Carecchio



No. 31. – Recitative.

Iöle Soprano

Whence this unjust suspicion?

Dejanira Soprano

Fame of thy beauty (so report informs me),

First brought Alcides to Oechalia's court.

He saw, he lov'd, he ask'd you of your father;

His suit rejected, in revenge he levell'd the haughty town, and bore
away the spoil;

But the rich prize for which he fought and conquer'd was Iöle.

Iöle Soprano

Ah no! it was ambition, not slighted love

That laid Oechalia low, and made the wretched Iöle a captive.

Report, that in the garb of truth disguises the blackest falsehood,

Has abused your ear with a forged tale;

But oh! let me conjure you, for your dear peace of mind,

Beware of jealousy.

No. 46. – Recitative.

Hercules *Bass*

You are deceived! some villain has belied
My ever-faithful love and constancy.

...

Dejanira *Soprano*

Dissembling, false, perfidious Hercules;
Did he not swear, when first he woo'd my love,
The sun should cease to dawn,
The silver moon be blotted from her orb,
Ere he prov'd false?



Titles

Cruel and Tender

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Richard Peduzzi's
set for Martin
Crimp's *Cruel and
Tender*.

Dir. Luc Bondy,
2004.

Théâtre des
Bouffes du Nord,
Paris.

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Left:

James
(Hyllus) and
Amelia
(Deianeira)

Photo:
Ruth Waltz

Right:

James
(Hyllus) and
The General
(Heracles)

Photo:
Tristram
Kenton



By the time the general returns - swaddled in blood soaked bandages and attached to a catheter - Amelia has killed herself in despair. The general protests his righteousness with a singularity that eerily echoes both fundamentalist and neocon pronouncements: 'I have purified the world for you,' he growls. 'I have burnt terror out of the world for people like you.' But the government has performed a *volte face* - 'There were moments when I even started to believe indiscriminate murder had been my own policy,' deadpans the minister, before having his former acolyte arrested and paraded before the flash bulbs.

'I am not the criminal, but the sacrifice,' chants the general as he is led away, and the waters have been so muddied that conclusive judgement is impossible to pass.

A timely reminder - if one were needed - that the first casualty of war is truth.

James Grieve

Titles

The Wife of Heracles

Right:

Production Poster image.



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Substance Use and Abuse...

- **The Substance used by the Deianeira (Heracles' Wife) character**
- **Its origin**
- **Its administration**
- **The question of Deianeira's guilt**



Arnold Böcklin, *Nessus and Deianeira*, 1898.

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Jules-Elie
Delaunay,
*Nessus (with
Dianeira)
and
Heracles*
(c.1860)



Deianeira (or a maidservant) gives Heracles the poisoned robe.

Attic red-figure pelike from Athens (c. 440-430 BC)

British Museum.

Marisa Berenson plays tag with Herculon II*



When you want to make fashion news
it's the only tag to play with.

Substances must be:

- believably capable of restoring Heracles' love
- believably capable of killing Heracles

Substances can be:

- used in all innocence by Deianeira
- used in full knowledge of their toxic capabilities by Deianeira
- suspected of toxicity by Deianeira and the audience

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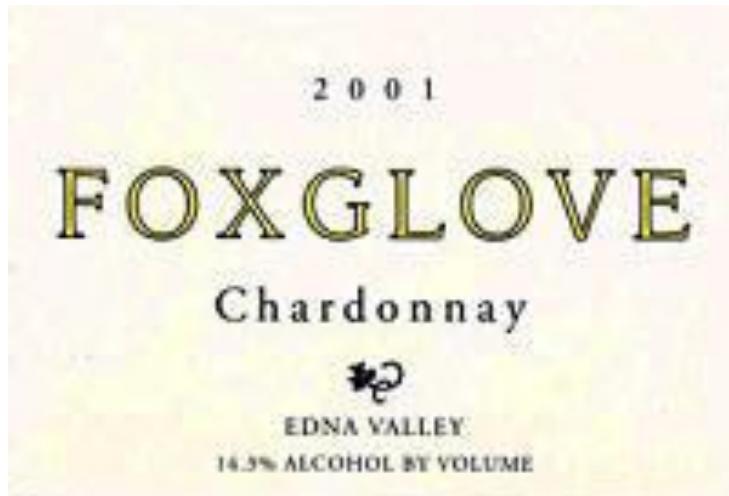
Symptoms of digitalis poisoning are: nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, wild hallucinations, delirium, and severe headache. The victim may later suffer irregular and/or slow pulse, shaking, various cerebral disturbances (especially of a visual nature – objects appearing yellowish-green and blue halos around lights) and convulsions.

Digitalis is used as a heart medicine and administered as a tincture.

Tinctures have a minimum ethanol (alcohol) content of 40-60% (80-120 proof); maximum 90% (180 proof).



Edna Valley Wineries (California) sell 'Foxglove' Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel...



News and truth/falsehood is a Sophoclean theme

Deianeira has long been awaiting news of Heracles' return (40-45, 65-66) and the community has gathered for news (94-102)

- Hyllus already knows some (67-75)

Hyllus: Why, I know, if we can believe what people say!

Deianeira: And where in the world do they say he is, my son?

Hyllus: As for the past year, they say that he was long a slave to a Lydian woman.

Deianeira: 'Then one might hear anything, if he put up even with that!'

Hyllus: But he is released from that condition, as I hear.

Deianeira: Then where is he reported to be, alive or dead?

Hyllus: They say he is marching against a place in Euboea, the city of Eurytus, or is about to do so.

The Unofficial Messenger

Repeats the salient points of Lichas' announcement:
Heracles is alive, victorious and on his way (181-83,
185-6, 234-5, 236-7, 287-8)

Deianeira: 'And from which citizen or which stranger
have you learned the story that you tell me?' (187)

NB This can only be proved for her by Heracles'
return (192)

Heralds

- Can tell bad news (the truth) without fear of punishment

- But are punished severely for lying.

Their tongues are cut out and dedicated to Hermes (Ar. *Pl.* 1110); for other punishments for deviation from truth, see *Pl. Leg.* 941a and *Athen. Deipn.* 1.16b.



The Herald - Lichas

Heracles' official Herald (189, 227, 757) delivers Iole to Deianeira and conceals her status as the woman Heracles wishes to make his wife from Deianeira.

His loyalty to Heracles means he lies to Deianeira to enable him to fulfil his orders – to get Iole into Heracles' household.

His loyalty to Deianeira means he lies to Deianeira in an attempt not to hurt her feelings.

Unofficial Messenger vs. Herald

Messenger: What penalty do you think that you should pay if you are caught being disloyal to her? (410)

Lichas: Yes... I said that I had heard it; but it is not the same thing to say what you think is true and to give a definite account. (424-6)

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Sophocles	Handel
Deianeira	Dejanira
Heracles	Hercules
Hyllus	Hyllus
Messenger	
Lichas (a herald)	Lichas
Deianeira's Nurse	
Chorus of Trachinian Women	Chorus of Trachinians
Iole	Iole
Oechalian captives (female)	Oechalian captives (First Oechalian, <i>Tenor</i> , sings two lines)
Old Man	
	Priest of Jupiter

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Sophocles	Crimp
Deianeira	Amelia (40s)
Heracles	The General (40s, her husband)
Hyllus	James (late teens, their son)
Messenger	Richard (50s, a journalist)
Lichas (a herald)	Jonathan (30s, a government minister)
Deianeira's Nurse	Rachel (Housekeeper)
Chorus of Trachinian Women	Cathy (Physiotherapist) Nicola (Beautician)
Iole	Laela (18)
Oechalian captives (female)	A Boy (6) [Laela's brother / Laela & The General's son]
Old Man	Iolaos (a friend of the General)

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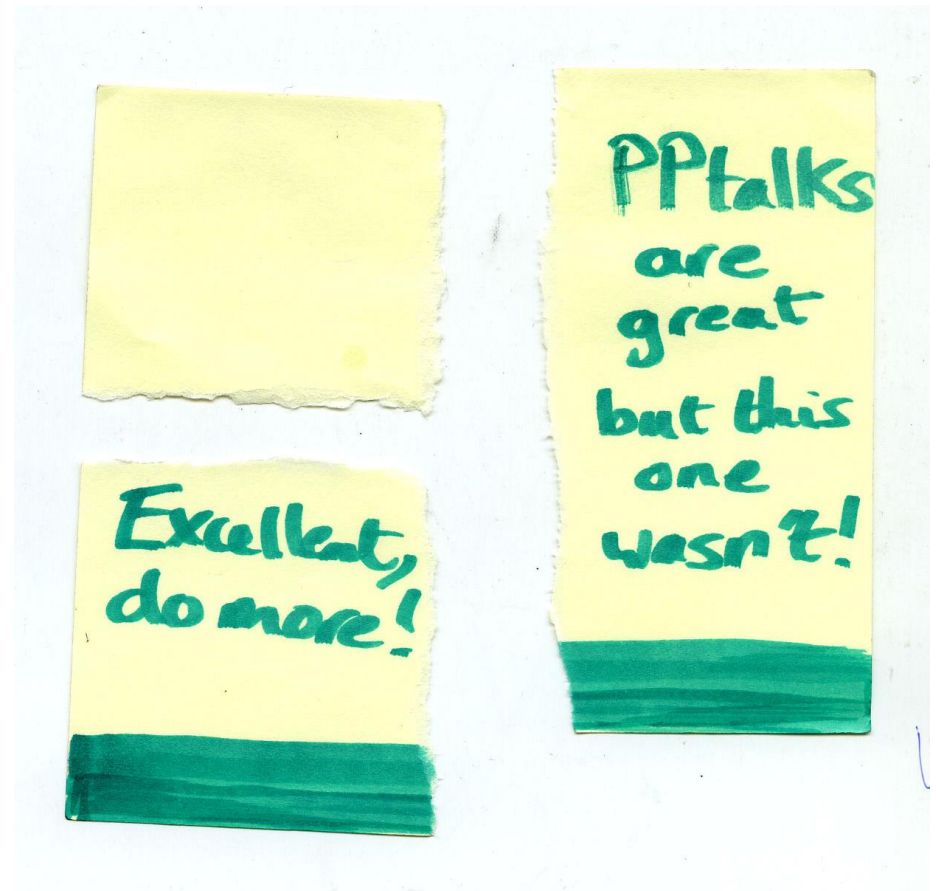
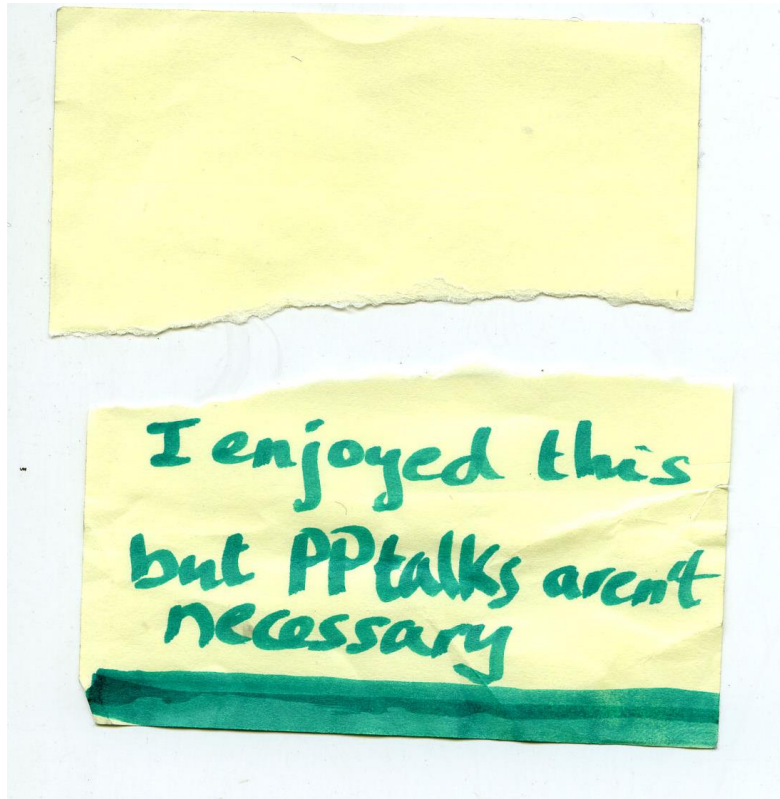
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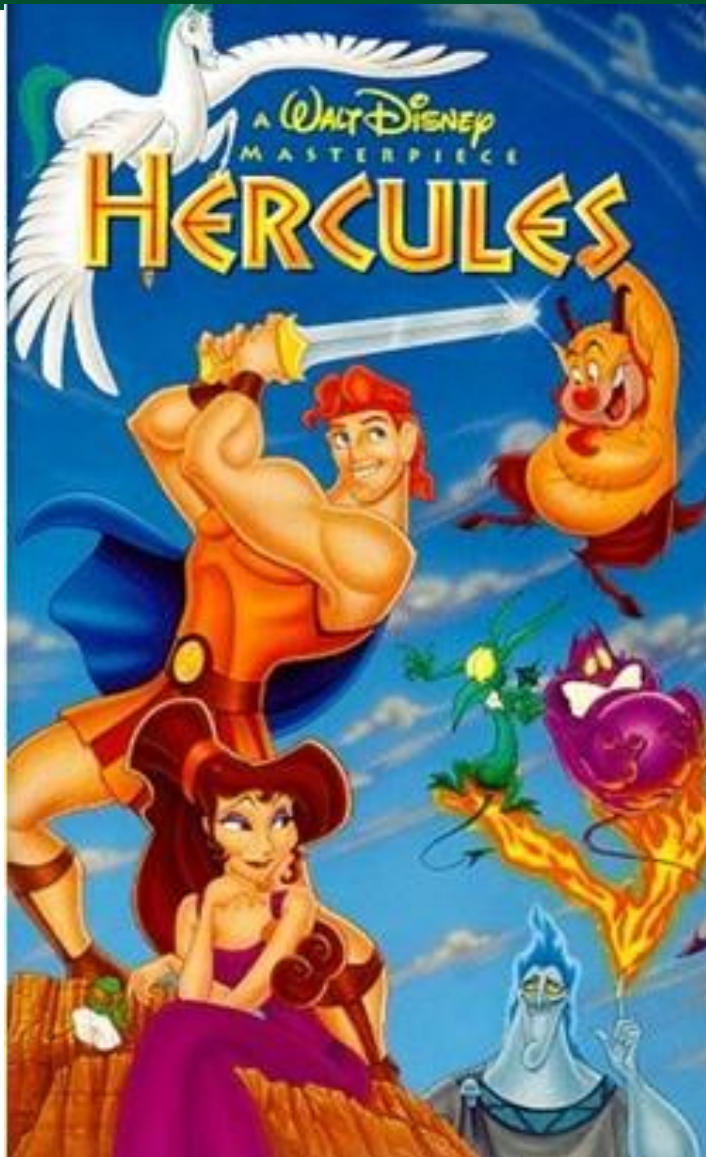


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Sophocles	Rodosthenous
Deianeira	Deianira (a Salon owner and footballer's wife)
Heracles	Thomas Heracles (a footballer)
Hyllus	Hyllus (16, their son)
Messenger	Alicia (a journalist)
Lichas (a herald)	Ria (Thomas Heracles' PA/PR)
Deianeira's Nurse	Helen (the Salon Manager)
Chorus of Trachinian Women	Salon Girls Waitresses/Dancers
Iole	Iole (the former-team-sponsor's daughter)
Oechalian captives (female)	Waitresses/Dancers
Old Man	Adam (a footballer and Heracles' friend/lover)

POST-IT FEEDBACK:





Walt Disney's *Hercules* (1997)

Featuring Megara (Heracles' first wife), who tries to recruit **Nessus** (right)!

(more later...)

